

MA COMMUNICATING COMPLEXITY



Dominic Kesterton

MA Communicating Complexity

Awarding Body	University of the Arts London
College	Central Saint Martins
School	S School
Programme	CSM Graphic Communication Design (L031)
Course AOS Code	CSMMACOMX01
FHEQ Level	Level 7 Masters
Course Credits	180
Mode	Extended Full Time
Method	Low Residency
Duration of Course	2 years
Teaching Weeks	60 weeks
Valid From	2025/26
Collaboration	N/A
UAL Subject Classification	Communication and Graphic Design
PSRB	N/A
Course Entry Requirements	<p>The standard entry requirements for this course are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An honours degree in any relevant field of design, humanities, or science • Or an equivalent EU/international qualification <p>AP(E)L – Accreditation of Prior (Experiential) Learning</p> <p>Exceptionally applicants who do not meet these course entry requirements may still be considered. The course team will consider each application that demonstrates</p>

	<p>additional strengths and alternative evidence. This might, for example, be demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related academic or work experience • The quality of the personal statement • A strong academic or other professional reference • Or a combination of these factors. <p>Each application will be considered on its own merit, but we cannot guarantee an offer in each case.</p> <p>English language requirements</p> <p>IELTS level 6.5 or above, with at least 5.5 in reading, writing, listening and speaking (please check our main English language requirements webpage).</p>
Selection Criteria	<p>You may be invited to an interview following our review of your application. We select applicants according to potential and current ability in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal and professional aspirations are compatible with the aims and objectives of MA Communicating Complexity (interview, personal statement) • Awareness of and/or prior engagement with creative possibilities and critical dimensions of communication practice (video, interview, personal statement) • Creative and technical skills, with the potential to develop to an advanced level through coursework (video, interview) • Independence and the capacity to carry out self-directed Master's level projects (interview, personal statement, video) • The ability to engage in critical discussion about your work and the wider contexts of your practice (interview, personal statement) • A commitment to experiment and explore new creative avenues, new schools of thoughts and the ability to engage with a range of learning materials and methods, including online (interview, personal statement)

Awards and Percentage of Scheduled Learning

Year 1

Awards	Credits
Postgraduate Certificate (Exit Only)	60

Year 2

Awards	Credits
Postgraduate Diploma (Exit Only)	120
Master of Arts	180

Scheduled Learning Split by Level

Level 7	9%
Total Scheduled Learning Split	9%

Course Aims and Outcomes

The Aims and Outcomes of this Course are as follows:

Aim/Outcome	Description
Aim	Create new techniques and methods for the communication of complex and interconnected problems.
Aim	Develop new pedagogical approaches to engage with the form and circulation of knowledge, which challenge Eurocentric and default approaches to communication, data and expertise
Aim	Provide an inclusive learning environment to explore the future role of communication design with, and on-behalf of, communities
Aim	Integrate ethical issues within communication practice and learning
Outcome	Engage with the complexity of contemporary, systemic challenges through communication design (Enquiry, referenced to UNESCO ESD Normative and Integrated Problem-Solving competency)
Outcome	Critically re-imagine existing communication practices related to different scales of complexity (Knowledge, referenced to UNESCO ESD Systems thinking competency)
Outcome	The ability to practically experiment with the future of communication through collaboration across a range of disciplinary and professional contexts. (Process, referenced to UNESCO ESDs Strategic and Collaboration competencies)
Outcome	Articulate complexity: bringing self-awareness, context, and criticality to communication through engagement with expert knowledge, audiences, and media. (Communication, referenced to UNESCO ESDs Critical Thinking and Self Awareness competencies)
Outcome	Communicate complexity through a creative and rigorous practice that is reflective and demonstrates an understanding of probable and desirable long-term impacts (Realisation, referenced to UNESCO ESD Anticipatory Competency)

Distinctive Features	
1	Addressing contemporary challenges: Students learn how to harness communication design to increase and improve individual, institutional and public understanding of and engagement in our most pressing complex issues. Course curriculum is underpinned by the role of communication in pursuit of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.
2	Communication as creative and critical practice: Combining an intellectually rigorous, critical and design-based approach to communication, this course equips students to bring clarity, context and criticality to engaging with and communicating complexity.
3	Flexible course structure: Delivered mostly online with intensive residential touch-points, the course is designed to fit around professional and other responsibilities.
4	Drawing on experience: Open to students from a range of design and non-design backgrounds, students are encouraged to bring their prior experience, local context and positioning to defining their projects.
5	Embedded collaborations and applied learning: Embedded collaborative and live projects develop students' communication practice through hands-on experimentation with expert knowledges, audiences and media, providing opportunities to engage with sectors and industries such as media, journalism, non-profits, technology and science, working in partnership to apply learning.

Course Detail

The proliferation of information and data available today provides both challenges and opportunities for how we understand, navigate and communicate our complex world. It also places communication designers in a potentially influential role as interpreters, facilitators and activators of knowledge, truth and insight.

Communication is at the heart of how we construct and convey power, how we motivate and mobilise, and shape our societies, communities and identities. This course understands communication as deeply intertwined with complexity. It is an increasingly vital skill in empowering responses to our most pressing and complex challenges – without resorting to simplification.

MA Communicating Complexity is a creatively led communication design course in a world-leading graphic design programme. On this course you will be encouraged to advance experimental approaches to communication. Project briefs set in collaboration with a range of industries and sectors, as well as by your student cohort provide a springboard for creative and future-facing approaches. Course Learning Outcomes are referenced to UNESCO's Learning objectives for achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

Innovation in communication design is critical to even the most ambitious ideas and technologies as well as organisations seeking to make an impact at scale. By foregrounding complexity, this course encourages more inclusive, accessible, and culturally resonant inroads into the world's challenges with the ambition to equip you with the ability to bring clarity, context, and criticality to engaging with and communicating complexity.

What to expect:

Collaborative projects: The course is comprised of design challenges drawn from external organisations in different sectors, for example from government and media to healthcare and technology.

Prioritising inclusive and accessible approaches: By welcoming complexity, the course welcomes multiple voices and methods simultaneously.

Engaging with climate, racial and social justice in the Graphic Communication Design Community at Central Saint Martins

The accelerating climate and ecological emergency is exposing the unsustainability and injustice of the political, social, and economic systems that have created them. An overarching goal for our programme community has necessarily become to question how graphic communication design practices can critique and intervene in the systems of extraction and exploitation that have led us to the brink of collapse.

Historically, graphic design has serviced various imbalanced power structures, and in this way, has contributed to perpetuating climate, racial and social injustices. At the same time, our discipline's media and methods provide powerful tools for negotiating and communicating the complexities of the current moment.

The need for high quality and carefully nuanced communication is increasing as the complexity of intersecting crises escalates. In the context of widespread disinformation and cultures of media illiteracy, graphic communication design's capacity for enhancing existing forms of public discourse – and generating new forms – is much needed.

Our programme is distinct in both its scale and its diversity and is well positioned to engage with our present challenges. We will consider these kinds of questions from a range of creative perspectives:

- How might graphic and communication design engage proactively with wider institutions and systems?
- What role might our practices play in envisioning just and sustainable alternatives?
- What is the role of communication in redefining and recreating relations between humanity and nature?

As a community, we will collectively reimagine current and future role(s) for graphic communication design in the face of these urgent crises. We see this as a serious and vital challenge—the future has yet to be designed!

Course Units

Unit 1: Communication & Complexity

This unit develops a shared foundation for the study and practice of communication design in the context of global and local challenges. It unpacks a range of terminology, contexts and methods associated with both contemporary communication practice and notions of complexity.

The starting point for this course is to prioritise the design of more inclusive and accessible discourses around complex matters, beginning with what may be difficult to understand – and therefore to communicate – while questioning the impulse to simplify for the sake of communication.

Unit 2: The Collaborative Unit

This unit addresses the theme of collaboration through co-operation with other postgraduate courses in the College. By working co-operatively with fellow students

from other courses, you will experience at first hand the value of diverse cross-disciplinary thinking and problem-solving that is central to communicating complexity.

Unit 3: Knowledges, Publics & Innovations

This unit features a sequence of context-specific and collaborative projects which experiment creatively and purposefully with contemporary local and global challenges. The ambition to challenge Eurocentric defaults and approaches to communication, information and data runs through all projects in this unit.

Knowledges explores the accessibility, interpretation, and dissemination of knowledge. It asks you to engage with the relationship between the form and circulation of knowledge. **Publics** explores how collaborative and participatory approaches to complex communication problems can achieve positive social, environmental, and economic change. **Innovations** focuses on how techniques, methods and approaches to communicating complexity can be applied to understand and re-imagine existing practices, technologies, networks and institutions.

At the end of the unit, students are supported to reflect on their practice and begin to define and scope their final major projects leading into Unit 4.

Unit 4: Major Project

The course culminates in a self-directed design project which significantly elaborates on your learning in prior units and supports your future ambitions. You will demonstrate how communication design can be harnessed to positively impact individual, institutional and public understanding of and engagement in pressing complex issues. You are encouraged to bring your own prior experience, local context and positioning to defining and developing this project. You will also be asked to project the legacy of your project beyond the end of the course in a way that demonstrates you have considered its long-term impact.

Important note concerning academic progression through your course:

If you are required to retake a unit you will need to cease further study on the course until you have passed the unit concerned. Once you have successfully passed this unit, you will be able to proceed onto the next unit. Retaking a unit might require you to take time out of study, which could affect other things such as student loans or the visa status for international students.

CSM Academic Support is delivered by a team of academics and practitioners working alongside your course to help you progress and achieve your maximum potential as a student. Academic Support can help you to develop your skills in different areas, including critical thinking, research and writing, time management, presentations and working independently and collaboratively. These may be

offered as part of your timetabled classes or as bookable tutorials and workshops.

Mode of study

The course is delivered extended full-time over 60 weeks across two years. MA Communicating Complexity is designed to allow students to study while also undertaking employment, independent creative and professional practice or caring responsibilities.

Credit and award requirements

The course is credit-rated at 180 credits. On successfully completing the course, you will gain a Master of Arts (MA degree).

Under the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications, an MA is Level 7. All units must be passed to achieve the Masters but the classification of the award is derived from the mark for the final unit only.

If you are unable to continue the course, a Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) will normally be offered following the successful completion of 60 credits, or a Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip) following the successful completion of 120 credits.

Learning and Teaching Methods

- Formal teaching delivered in asynchronous online lectures and workshops, with synchronous seminars, discussion groups and group critiques.
- There is a 2-week in-person intensive in weeks 9-10 each academic year where the course community gather and work together at Central Saint Martin's campus in London.
- Learning is designed so that taught content and self-directed independent study can be balanced alongside existing commitments. Carefully structured synchronous and asynchronous taught activities are provided.
- An applied and practical environment supported by workshop-based learning around communication methods, production and research.
- Students are encouraged to respond to complexity in specific contexts and will locate the research and self-directed study in a local context for some projects.
- Emphasis on collaboration and community: we will use a range of digital methods and tools to support and sustain continuous online learning and community building.
- As learning will be mostly remote, students will need access to a computer, high-speed internet, and other basic supplies and equipment. Before the course start, minimum specifications will be provided as well as recommendations, academic discounts, free and low-cost software options

and other suggestions to help keep costs down.

Assessment Methods

The course will integrate continuous (formative) and end of unit (summative) assessments.

- Formative assessment will include individual tutorials, group critiques, peer assessment and self-assessment.
- Summative assessment evidence will be submitted online with submission deadlines published in GMT or BST time.
- An assessed presentation will be delivered in-person as part of the residential intensive at the end of Unit 3.
- Assessment information will be introduced at the beginning of each unit, and again at assessment briefings.

Reference Points

This course is designed to fit higher education qualification, level 7 on the FHEQ and will cross reference UN SDGs.

The course aims and unit learning outcomes will be informed by the recommended benchmark descriptors as quoted below:

(See p.28, FHEQ https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf?sfvrsn=170af781_14;)

UAL Framework for Embedding the Principles for Climate, Racial and Social Justice

Masters degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship | originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline

- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
 - to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
 - to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
 - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.'

Course Diagram

MA Communicating Complexity – PLEASE NOTE DUE TO VACATION DATES, SPECIFIC DELIVERY WEEKS MAY CHANGE

S=summative assessment

R= Residential

LEVEL 7 - Year 1																															
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Unit 1: Communication & Complexity (40 credits)												S	Unit 2: The Collaborative Unit (20 credits)							S	Unit 3: Knowledges, Publics & Innovations (60 credits)										S1
									R	R																					
LEVEL 7 - Year 2																															
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30		
Unit 3 continued									S2	Unit 4: Major Project (60 credits)																				S	
									R	R																					

The University will use all reasonable endeavours to provide the Course and the services described in this Output. There may be occasions whereby the University needs to add, remove or alter content in relation to your Course as may be appropriate for example the latest requirements of a commissioning or accrediting body, or in response to student feedback, or to comply with applicable law or due to circumstances beyond its control. The University aim to inform you of any changes as soon as is reasonably practicable