Paint yourself a lucrative career path

As the UK’s creative industries blossom, talented people are finding there’s money to be made from doing what they love

Antonia Windsor

At the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) the finishing touches are being made to a brand new BSc in immersive systems design, which will start in September 2018. “Widespread adoption of virtual reality technologies means people have a variety of means of expression through sound, film and interactive applications,” says Dr Paul Chapman, head of the school of simulation and visualisation at the GSA. “This new BSc aims to provide students with expertise in 3D modelling and interactive application development for virtual reality.”

Rapid growth and development in UK art and design have made its universities a breeding ground for the creative industries - now worth £8.7bn a year, according to the Creative Industries Federation. In fact, the sector is growing at almost twice the rate of the wider UK economy; gone are the days when students excelling in art and design were enticed on to more academic subjects to secure their future. “Our sixth-form art students go on to study a variety of art and design BAs, all of which have good job prospects,” says Clare Newton, programme manager of art and design at Leyton sixth-form college. This covers everything from the more unusual subjects, such as automotive design and jewellery design, to popular courses such as architecture, photography, graphics, animation, fashion, textiles, illustration, interiors and fine art, she adds.

London’s colleges and courses are some of the best in the world. The University of the Arts London (UAL) is a powerhouse of six colleges - Camberwell College of Arts, Central St Martins, Chelsea College of Arts, London College of Communication, London College of Fashion and Wimbledon College of Art - formed 30 years ago. “Each college retains the character and prestigious history associated with being a specialist, creative college, but all are stronger together - financially and academically,” says Nigel Carrington, vice-chancellor of UAL. “Our students work within an intimate college community, but benefit from being part of a global creative university.” The courses on offer are tailored to meet the contemporary concerns of the industry; you can study for a BA in 3D design, in design for art direction or design for branded spaces. You can also study BAs in fashion design technology for either womenswear or menswear, game design and industrial design, alongside the more traditional courses, such as fine art and theatre design. Over half of all Turner prize winners and nominees studied at UAL, as well as more than half of the recipients of British designer of the year.

At the Slade School of Fine Art, part of University College London, however, only one subject is on offer. “Other colleges offer fashion or graphics,” says final-year student, Charlotte Cook, “but it’s the fact the Slade is specifically a fine art college that made me choose it.”

Meanwhile, the Royal College of Art (RCA) - the world’s leading art and design university, according to QS World University Rankings - is collaborating with international research centres to break new ground. At Tokyo Design Lab, a joint venture with the Institute of Industrial Science at the University of Tokyo, a number of projects that fuse design and science are being worked on - from clothes that choreograph our movements to computers that interpret and respond to facial movements.

If it is product and industrial design that sparks your creativity, then Bournemouth University’s department of design and engineering could be the place to go. With courses accredited by the Institution of Engineering Designers and the Engineering Council, Bournemouth University has modern laboratories and workshops, featuring industry-standard facilities and the latest rapid 3D printing, prototyping and manufacturing equipment.

If you can’t study full-time, then you could take a look at the Interactive
Design Institute (IDI), a partner of the University of Hertfordshire. “The course content is essentially the same as campus-based courses but adapted for delivery online,” says Michael Stewart, director of communications at the IDI. “Studying online enables students to work towards a degree without giving up on their other commitments; 88% of our students choose to work and study at the same time.” Courses on offer include BAs in fine art, photography, interior design, illustration and graphic design, with start dates in January, June and September.

And if you don't feel ready to begin a degree course right away, an art foundation is a good place to start. “An art foundation programme provides an essential grounding in a wide range of practical and theoretical skills that are needed at BA level, but are not usually taught at school,” says Paula Gamble-Schwarz, foundation studies programme director, school of the arts, English and drama, Loughborough University, one of the country’s leading art and design institutions. “As well as encountering a variety of different mediums, students are challenged to question their existing ideas about art and design, and to begin to develop a unique artistic personality.”

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Brush with fortune: artists and designers are finding fulfilling careers across the creative industries
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