

# MA Games and Playful Design

## Programme Specification

**Awarding Institution:**

University of London (Interim Exit Awards made by Goldsmiths' College)

**Teaching Institution:** Goldsmiths, University of London

**Name of Final Award and Programme Title:**

MA Games and Playful Design

**Name of Interim Exit Award(s):**

Postgraduate Certificate in Games and Playful Design

Postgraduate Diploma in Games and Playful Design

**Duration of Programme:** 1 year full-time or 2 years part-time

**UCAS Code(s):** Not applicable

**HECoS Code(s):** (101268) Computer Games Design

**QAA Benchmark Group:** Computing

**FHEQ Level of Award:** Level 7

**Programme accredited by:** Not applicable

**Date Programme Specification last updated/approved:** February 2023

**Home Department:** Computing

## Programme overview

Digital games have evolved past consoles and into the fabric of everyday experiences. This evolution has been married to a leap forward in the sophistication of content in game experiences. No longer are games a facile form of entertainment but a complex landscape for groundbreaking narratives, immersive experiences and creative expression. The result has been the rise of the integration of games and game elements into a vast range of experiences with media such as advertising, museums, medical training, psychology, education and theatre.

As new opportunities emerge both technologically and conceptually, new markets grow. According to the UK Interactive Entertainment report for 2015, the UK has the sixth largest games market globally. It grew by 7.4% in 2014 to £4.2 billion. Significantly for this programme, less traditional platforms now control a large proportion of the market. Mobile gaming controls 21.2%, and PC Games control 25%. These two platforms are critical for small developers. There are 1,902 video game companies in the UK. The number of small companies grew by 22% between 2011 and 2013.

To serve this new interactive landscape, this MA programme focuses on developing a new form hybrid creator well suited to take or create a role for themselves in games and experience design.

This is different from a more traditional game programme as it offers students a more game design-oriented approach, with transferable skills that are applicable not only in the videogame market but also everywhere a game design perspective is needed, from interactive theatre to escape the room design, from playful installations to alternative controllers.

Potential graduates are well suited to start a job either in the game industry, both at independent and AAA level or in many neighbouring markets. The ideal career path will see the student work their way to become creative directors for games and interactive playful experiences. As for the industry output, students will be able to start small companies or join a vast array of companies such as W+K, Punchdrunk, Nexus, Media Molecule, Frontiers, The Science Museum, Electric Square, Ubisoft and similar ventures.

This programme seeks to provide relevant skills to reflect recent and rapid changes in the games industry which have been driven by the burgeoning independent and alternative sectors over the past decade. Appealing to wider audiences than the traditional console market, indie games employ broader ranges of visual aesthetics and narrative development often critically engaging with contemporary themes. The scene has attracted diverse players through the rise of casual gaming platforms which use mobile and online platforms. Through cutting edge physical technologies and virtual reality, the industry has expanded further into neighbouring sectors and forms such as advertising, museums, medical training, psychology, education and theatre. The result has been the rise of the integration of games and game elements into a vast range of experiences with media. With their broad audiences, technologies, and themes, independent games contrast strongly with the console sector which narrowly focus on predominantly male markets. The MA, with its peculiar design first approach, will provide students with all the tool to access this new thriving markets as well as the more traditional AAA environment with the long-term aim of becoming a creative director in the interactive entertainment and experience design field.

In these small and mid-sized businesses, which make up 95% of the UK games industry according to Nesta, there is a need for a new kind of practitioner - an interdisciplinarian, who can develop, prototypes and sell compelling experiences by themselves or within small teams. In order to serve this new interactive landscape, this programme focuses on developing aesthetic awareness, creating compelling mechanics and the ability to craft innovative narratives in games and physical experiences.

We have existing links with many of these companies, games festivals and press venues which will help facilitate job placement and the exhibition and promotion of student work.

These connections are complementary to our strong links within large scale games development and will help facilitate employability, promote student work, and empower students to have a national and international presence.

Graduating students will have:

- Game Design skills particularly relevant to digital and hybrid games and environmental design.
- The ability to craft compelling physical systems in participatory environments.
- A knowledge of real-time interactive technologies applied across a range of rapidly evolving disciplines such as VR, Physical Computing and Storytelling.
- Experience prototyping creative, interactive environments with a range of modern fabrication technologies.
- Strong transferable skills across the creative sector in particular the ability to rapidly pitch, prototype then critically assess the validity of a concept.
- The ability to take a project from prototype to complete concept within a team or alone within a limited time frame.

## **Programme entry requirements**

A BA or BSc Degree at 2.1 level or above. The BSc or BA can be from a wide range of subjects including Art, Theatre, Design, Literature, Computer Science or Engineering. Outstanding practitioners or individuals with strong creative experience may also be considered. A two-week interactive media and programming boot camp or alternative online resource might be offered before this degree program for students who are transitioning from different fields outside of computing. Non-native English students should normally have a minimum IELTS score of 6.5 or equivalent.

While facilities with state-of-the-art machines are available on campus, students are expected to bring their own laptop to the lab sessions. No strict requirements on the laptop specs are enforced, as long as they can run the software used in class.

## **What you will be expected to achieve**

Students who successfully complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Games and Playful Design (60 credits) will be able to:

## Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	Leverage and use the basic building blocks of playful experiences.	Approaches to Play 1; Games Anatomy.
A2	Analyse the narrative, world building, game mechanics and game aesthetics in games.	Approaches to Play 1; Interactive Narrative and Digital Storytelling.
A3	Critically discuss and criticise attitudes and trends in games and creative technologies.	Approaches to Play 1; Visual Game Design; Games Anatomy.
A4	Apply their understanding of current creative technologies to their own creative practice.	Approaches to Play 1; Visual Game Design; Level Design and Game Feel; Games Anatomy.

## Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Design compelling stories and immersive worlds leveraging game mechanics and game aesthetics.	Approaches to Play 1; Interactive Narrative and Digital Storytelling; Visual Game Design.
B2	Analyse and critique games on a socially relevant level.	Approaches to Play 1; Approaches to Play 2; Games Anatomy.
B3	Critically analyse their own games and digital technologies.	Approaches to Play 1; Approaches to Play 2; Games Anatomy.

## Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	Code as required to make interactive experiences.	Visual Game Design; Level Design and Game Feel.
C2	Prototype small games on paper and with drag and drop or text based game engines.	Approaches to Play 1; Visual Game Design.

## Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Communicate effectively both in writing and presentations to an audience.	Throughout programme.
D2	Plan small group and individual projects.	Throughout programme.

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D3	Research emerging technologies of interest and apply this research to creative output.	Throughout programme.
D4	Develop and prototype design ideas quickly.	Throughout programme.

Students who successfully complete the Postgraduate Diploma in Games and Playful Design (120 credits) will be able to:

### Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	Describe the state-of-the-art in Games and Playful Design.	Approaches to Play 2; Games Anatomy.
A2	Describe the role of playtesting and user experience to evaluate playable experiences.	Approaches to Play 2.
A3	Reproduce, communicate and apply further subject- specific knowledge.	Option modules.

### Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Relate game mechanics to user experience and experience design.	Approaches to Play 2.
B2	Interpret and respond to user feedback data on interactive systems.	Approaches to Play 2; Visual Game Design.
B3	Use and create compelling game spaces.	Level Design and Game Feel; Approaches to Play 2.
B4	Implement specialist knowledge in playable environments.	Level Design and Game Feel; Visual Game Design; Approaches to Play 2.

### Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	Conceptualize and execute multiple original creative projects at a professional level.	Approaches to Play 1 & 2.
C2	Research and plan small creative projects.	Approaches to Play 1.

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C3	Rapidly prototype experiential game spaces.	Level Design and Game Feel; Approaches to Play 2.
C4	Create game experience which leverage emotions.	Visual Game Design; Approaches to Play 2.

## Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Conceptually develop an idea based on research and testing.	Visual Game Design; Approaches to Play 2.
D2	Execute and plan a project on a deadline based on a creative brief.	Approaches to Play 2.

In addition to the learning outcomes above, students who successfully complete the MA in Games and Playful Design (180 credits) will be able to:

## Knowledge and understanding

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
A1	Describe the stages involved in a medium-scale playable experience project.	Approaches to Play 2; Final Project.
A2	Independently broaden and deepen their understanding of theory and practice of aspects of Games and Playful Design.	Final Project in Game and Playful Design; Games Anatomy.

## Cognitive and thinking skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
B1	Research and critically analyse related work.	Final Project in Game and Playful Design; Games Anatomy.

## Subject specific skills and professional behaviours and attitudes

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
C1	Execute a medium-scale playable experience project plan, adapting it to circumstance if necessary.	Final Project in Game and Playful Design.
C2	Exhibit and present a playable experience to the general public.	Final Project in Game and Playful Design.

## Transferable skills

Code	Learning outcome	Taught by the following module(s)
D1	Communicate (in person and in writing) the execution and outcomes of a medium-scale playable experience project.	Final Project in Game and Playful Design.
D2	Work as a group to plan a presentation of creative work for the general public.	Final Project in Game and Playful Design.

## How the programme is structured

### Full-time mode

#### Academic year of study 1

Module Title	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Status	Term
Approaches To Play 1	IS71077B	15	7	Compulsory	1
Visual Game Design OR Games Programming 1	TBC	15	7	Compulsory	1
Games Anatomy	TBC	15	7	Compulsory	1
Approaches To Play 2	IS71078B	15	7	Compulsory	2
Interactive Narrative and Digital Storytelling	IS71073B	15	7	Compulsory	2
Final Project in Games and Playful Design	IS71079A	60	7	Compulsory	3
A selection of optional 15credit modules to the value of 45 credits from an annual list made available by the department	Various	45	7	Optional	1,2

Students should take Visual Game Design as compulsory module unless they already have a consolidate experience with programming.

### Part-time mode

#### Academic year of study 1

Module Title	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Status	Term
Approaches To Play 1	IS71077B	15	7	Compulsory	1



Visual Game Design OR Games Programming 1	TBC	15	7	Compulsory	1
Approaches To Play 2	IS71078B	15	7	Compulsory	2
A selection of optional 15credit modules to the value of 15 credits from an annual list made available by the department	Various	15	7	Optional	2

Students should take Visual Game Design as compulsory module unless they already have a consolidate experience with programming.

## Academic year of study 2

Module Title	Module Code	Credits	Level	Module Status	Term
Games Anatomy	TBC	15	7	Compulsory	1
Final Project in Games and Playful Design	IS71079A	60	7	Compulsory	3
Interactive Narrative and Digital Storytelling	IS71073B	15	7	Compulsory	2
A selection of optional modules to the value of 30credits from an annual list made available by the department depending on what has been taken in the first year	Various	30	7	Optional	1-2

A different module allocation for part time students can be agreed if necessary.

## Academic support

Support for learning and wellbeing is provided in a number of ways by departments and College support services who work collaboratively to ensure students get the right help to reach their best potential both academically and personally.

All students are allocated a Personal Tutor (one in each department for joint programmes) who has overall responsibility for their individual progress and welfare. Personal Tutors meet with their student at least three a year either face-to-face, as part of a group and/or electronically. The first meeting normally takes place within the first few weeks of the autumn term. Personal Tutors are also available to students throughout the year of study. These meetings aim to discuss progress on modules, discussion of the academic discipline and reports from previous years if available (for continuing students). This provides an



opportunity for progress, attendance and assessment marks to be reviewed and an informed discussion to take place about how to strengthen individual learning and success.

All students also have access to a Senior Tutor to enable them to speak to an experienced academic member of staff about any issues which are negatively impacting their academic study and which are beyond the normal scope of issues handled by Programme Convenors and Personal Tutors.

Students are provided with information about learning resources, the [Library](#) and information available on [Learn.gold \(VLE\)](#) so that they have access to department/ programme handbooks, programme information and support related information and guidance.

Taught sessions and lectures provide overviews of themes, which students are encouraged to complement with intensive reading for presentation and discussion with peers at seminars. Assessments build on lectures and seminars so students are expected to attend all taught sessions to build knowledge and their own understanding of their chosen discipline.

All assessed work is accompanied by some form of feedback to ensure that students' work is on the right track. It may come in a variety of forms ranging from written comments on a marked essay to oral and written feedback on developing projects and practice as they attend workshops.

Students may be referred to specialist student services by department staff or they may access support services independently. Information about support services is provided on the [Goldsmiths website](#) and for new students through new starter information and induction/Welcome Week. Any support recommendations that are made are agreed with the student and communicated to the department so that adjustments to learning and teaching are able to be implemented at a department level and students can be reassured that arrangements are in place. Opportunities are provided for students to review their support arrangements should their circumstances change. The [Disability](#) and [Wellbeing](#) Services maintain caseloads of students and provide on-going support.

The [Careers Service](#) provides central support for skills enhancement, running [The Gold Award](#) scheme and other co-curricular activities that are accredited via the Higher Education Achievement Report ([HEAR](#)).

The [Centre for Academic Language and Literacies](#) works with academic departments offering bespoke academic literacy sessions. It also provides a programme of academic skills workshops and one-to-one provision for students throughout the year.

## **Placement opportunities**

Students are able to take a paid placement in place of an academic final project. We have a strong network of Games companies and studios and have succeeded in placing a large number of students, the majority of which have gone on to permanent jobs in the organisation. In addition to paid commercial placement, we offer the option of projects that are sponsored and co-supervised by non-profit organisations or other academic departments or institutions.

We already have existing links with many of these independent companies. These include Niantic, Nexus, Six to Start, PlayLab London, Matheson Marcault, Media Molecule, Punchdrunk, Electric Square, Chorus, Frontier, Ubisoft, Payload Studios, Unit 9, Preloaded. We also have links with London and international games events such as Now Play This, Indiecade, Wild Rumpus, A MAZE, Resonate, Creative Coast, Game City, Control. Finally, we have links to media outlets and industry affiliations including Vice, Motherboard, Kill Screen, Polygon, Gamasutra, Rock, Paper Shotgun, Women in Games, Code Liberation Foundation, Geeks for Equality, Gaymer X, Make Magazine, Hackaday, Facets Conference, Unity 3D, UKIE, V&A, Sony, Microsoft, The Guardian, and The BBC.

These connections are complimentary to our strong links within large scale games development and will help facilitate employability, promote student work, and empower us to have a national and international presence.

## **Employability and potential career opportunities**

The degree aims to prepare students to access the game industry, both in the AAA and in the independent sectors, as game designers. It also gives extensive access to companies working in all sorts of interactive entertainment, as a game designer and professional expert in using interactivity for designing immersive experiences.

In addition, the degree allows students to start their own game studio or related activity with a clear and defined path.

In the mid-long term, students who have successfully taken the degree can aspire to become creative directors, both in games and in other interactive experiences.

Students are supported from the start to the finish of this programme in order to understand the different potential career journeys they can follow and to build a portfolio of work to demonstrate their capability to gain employment or freelance work in that area. Assessment has been designed to facilitate this process through the development of transferable or soft skills listed in the section above. Regular guest lectures from industry support the development of sector knowledge and awareness of different career paths.

The Department's External Advisory Board ensures relevance of all our programmes to the current and future needs of employers. All programmes are designed in consultation with employers to make sure you develop transferable skills to improve your career opportunities and you will be applying your skills to real-world problems through live project briefs and group projects. The board and other employers attend showcase events where you can present your ideas, get feedback and build important connections.

We have dedicated employability resource within the department to build employer relations and manage additional initiatives to support your future career opportunities, including regular communication of external opportunities for mentoring and work experience and an annual Career week (a focussed week of career support every June in the department where you can access alumni panels by programme and a range of industry talks).

## **Programme-specific rules and facts**

Not applicable.

## **Tuition fee costs**

Information on tuition fee costs is available at: <https://www.gold.ac.uk/students/fee-support/>.

## **Specific programme costs**

Not applicable.