



Equality Impact Assessment for Academic Programmes (EqIA)

As a public sector organisation, GSA has a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to assess the impact all of its academic programmes may have on protected groups (as defined by the Act).

The purpose of this assessment is to use relevant evidence and critical thinking to identify any impact (positive, negative or neutral) the programme that is being assessed may have on the students and staff members it applies to.

The EqIA is a tool which helps mainstream equality into everything GSA does. It requires us to consider how we can mitigate or eliminate negative impact and, in turn, advance positive outcomes. Therefore, it must be undertaken during the development / review of the programme and not after it has been finalised. Ideally, EqIAs should be a team effort of relevant parties to ensure a variety of perspectives have been consulted. All finalised EqIAs must be signed off by a senior lead, the Education Committee, and either the Head of Student Support and Development or GSA's Equality Officer. Support from the Equality Officer is available at any stage of completion.

Further guidance on how to complete an EqIA can be found on GSA's website and the Equality and Diversity section on the staff intranet. If you have any additional questions, please contact equality@gsa.ac.uk.

Name of Equality Impact Assessment (E.g. Title of Programme)	Master of Design in Communication Design
New or reviewed	New
Owner/Review Lead and role	Brian Cairns, Programme Leader
School	School of Design
Date of assessment	September 2024

1. Programme Outline and Characteristics

Programme Outline (please provide a brief outline of the programme)	The Masters of Design in Communication Design is a two-year, full-time programme. The programme focuses on practice-led research and experimentation in developing critically reflective makers within an inclusive and interdisciplinary studio context that challenges presumptions of Communication Design practice.
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	<p>Students choose to focus their study within existing disciplines, such as graphic design, illustration, and photography/lens-based practices, or explore interdisciplinary and emerging practices. The programme allows students to develop as design practitioners from diverse prior studies or for existing practitioners to reassess their practice through a focused period of making and reflection.</p> <p>Students engage with complex ethical, societal, political and environmental questions to explore the designer's role in society in relation to relevant socio-political, environmental, cultural and ethical contexts. Through informed research methods, students learn to interpret visual and textual materials to form meaning and communicate their ideas effectively. The programme engages with contemporary and historical practice underpinned by theory and research. Students engage in self-directed learning, peer learning, research, and critical reflection to inform and develop their practice.</p> <p>The programme aims to develop students' criticality evidenced through practice-led research, skills that graduates can apply as</p>
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	<p>critically reflective practitioners in Communication Design practice or further study at PhD level placing an emphasis on self-reliance and personal academic development.</p> <p>Throughout the programme students are required to produce a series of critical reflective reports that support student self-directed learning and contextualise practice. In stage 2 this is an embedded critical reflective journal of 3000 words assessed holistically as part of the studio submission. In Stage 3 this is a 6000-word written component assessed as a separate course.</p>
Modes of Study	Full-Time

2. Evidence used when undertaking this assessment – please make a reference to your programme-specific EDI data and any other relevant evidence

please **ensure all data is either presented in percentages only, or that any numbers smaller than five are presented as '<5'** to allow for adequate data analysis and trend review without breaching any Data Protection Regulations

Note: provisions for protected groups must be made regardless of current numbers, however, data is still used to inform action and measure progress

The updating of this EqIA is contextualised within Programme Monitoring Annual Reporting (PMAR) and ongoing curriculum review and development relating to the Common Academic Framework (CAF), Major Programme Amendments, and new programme and course specification documents.

We have drawn upon a range of data to inform the current reconceptualisation of the Master of Design in Communication Design and this EqIA, focusing on key approaches towards positive impacts, as outlined in section 3, namely:

- PMAR equality data with broad trends from period of last 5 years circa (note: 2023-24 HESA data outstanding at time of writing)
- External examiner reports and consultation activities from 2023-24
- Student feedback and consultation activities, including student consultation during 2023-24, student surveys, and SSCCs

We focus on actions emerging from the data to inform our thinking towards positive impacts that can be related to protected characteristics and learning methodologies and positive actions or mitigations to address direct or indirect negative impacts.

Note: Statistics provided for several years conflated the data for two programmes – MDes Communication Design and MDes Graphics/Illustration/Photography – as one source. The information provided is based on the available statistics provided by GSA.

PMAR Equality Data: Broad Trends by Protected Characteristic

Age

Data for session 2023/24 is consistent with previous data. The programme has a majority of students in the 22-24 age category (58.6%) which aligns with other programmes in the School of Design (SofD). There is a natural variation over each year with certain years peaking higher than others in certain ages. Over a 4-year period there is an overall decline in students aged 25-39 from 49.6% in 2018/19 to 25.3% in session 2021/22. A lesser dip in session 2019/20 to 29.5% and an increase in session 2020/21 to 40.2%. With an international cohort there are various factors that impact the variation in age. A recent rise in Indian students who typically are older than other nationalities and a decline in European applicants following Brexit who are typically older than home applicants. This is a natural variation

impacted by economic and political factors as an international cohort and this is not unusual given the subject area or sector.

Sex

In academic session 2023/24 the cohort for MDes Communication Design (Years 1 and 2) was comprised of 28% male and 72% female. This is a slightly higher percentage of male students than the previous 4 years. On average the percentage of female students typically forms approximately 80% of the cohort. The cohort includes transgender students.

Domicile

Over the 4-year period the programmes in PGT Communication Design consistently recruit more RUK and EU applicants than the SofD) average. This is more notable in earlier sessions in 2018/19 with 24.1% Scottish (+3.2%), 8.8% RUK (+3.2%), EU 13.8% (+2.6%). In session 2018/19 overseas was 53.2% (-9% on SofD average). Overseas has grown to 84.4% of students with reductions across Scotland (1.7%), RUK (5%) and EU (8.9%). These figures are still higher than SofD averages across other departments but show a notable increase in overseas applicants. As the external examiners have noted in their reports there is a notable number of students from one geographic region that limits the benefits of a truly international experience for students in the latter cohorts. The impact of Covid and Brexit cannot be isolated from the statistics in recent years to draw any conclusions, but the statistics do suggest that pro-active support at SofD level such as the re-introduction of scholarships to grow the home and EU student numbers could result in a more culturally diverse cohort that addresses the reduction in these areas.

Ethnicity

Regarding specifically the PGT programmes in Communication Design there is a notable increase in the percentage of Chinese students from 33.2% (-14.7% on SofD average) in session 2018/19 to 76.3% (+5.8%) in session 2021/22. This is due to increased targets set for recruitment for these programmes and an increase in overall applications received with a large percentage originating from one geographic region (China). A culturally diverse cohort benefits all students and consideration of alternative markets to attract applicants from could be considered by marketing to ensure diversity of cohorts and minimise any risk associated with becoming over reliant on one geographic region for recruitment. The current exchange rates suggest study in the UK may be an attractive option for North American applicants.

Disability

The reported disability statistics for the PGT programmes in Communication Design is slightly lower at 5.2% than the SofD average over 4 years of 8.2%. Over the course of the 4 years the reported disabilities remain consistently lower than SofD average reported disability.

Religion

Students on the PGT Communication Design programmes largely align with the average for the SofD over a 4-year period with notable exceptions being no religion at 84.9% (6.2% higher than SofD average), Hindu at 0% compared with SofD average of 2.4%, though there is a significant increase in session 2022/23 in Indian students that would suggest this is more related changes to the graduate visa scheme that allows graduates to stay in the UK following study than specific programme related issues. This trend is documented specific to Indian students and the perceived greater opportunity for internships and placements following study. A noted decline in Indian students in the UK was recorded when the period of stay was previously reduced, as documented in HESA statistical reports. The other statistics are within a percent of SofD norms/averages.

Session 2021/22 had a decline in all identified religion/belief groups with a notable increase in those identifying with no religion at 90.7% (8% higher than the SofD average for that session). Based on the 4-year statistics Muslim students and Hindu students are underrepresented compared to SofD averages of Hindu (2.4%) and Muslim (1.6%). *Note: while these averages are influenced by three programmes in the SofD, the overall numbers are too low to report on.* All other programmes also have 0% Hindu students and 0% Muslim students in the SofD. The percentages are influenced by relatively small numbers of students and impacts on data thresholds.

Sexual Orientation

Over the 4-year period the statics for sexual orientation align closely with the rest of the SofD with the main differences being a significantly higher number 12% (+5.8% on SofD average) identifying as bisexual. In session 2021/22 the discrepancy is larger with 16.8% (+9.5% on SofD average) of students identifying as bisexual. Typically, around 20% refuse information and a majority of students identify as

heterosexual in the region of 63.1% (-6.2% on SofD average). There is some local variation over year groups.

3. a) Major changes introduced to the programme since the most recent EqIA (where applicable) – please provide an overview and make reference to how those changes have affected EDI issues (either positively or negatively)

if the changes are substantive to the programme structure, please insert (or attach) two diagrams which illustrate:

- i) the programme structure before amendment
and
- ii) the programme structure after amendments

Structural and Curriculum Amendments

Since the most recent EqIA, and at the time of this review, MDes Communication Design is going through Major Programme Amendments within the process of implementing the Common Academic Framework (CAF), bringing it into alignment with other SofD MDes programmes that undertook revalidation in 2023-24. We are carrying out this work through the lens of the competencies and core themes informing the CAF student learning journey, such as GSA's cross-cutting Graduate Attributes, climate literacy, and EDI.

MDes Communication Design has a minor amendment to its credit structure to ensure alignment to the CAF maximum credit blocks, which ensure safe, flexible and fair assessment of student learning and banking of credits.

CAF has also supported us in refreshing and streamlining programme aims and intended learning outcomes (ILOs), reducing them in number and ensuring student-friendly language. In the SofD, we have aligned our programme ILOs to the Graduate Attributes and broader SofD and GSA educational priorities to balance discipline-specific clarity with consistency across MDes SofD programmes. We have also enacted substantive changes to course-level aims and ILOs to ensure alignment with programme aims and ILOs and the delivery of the

Graduate Attributes within the Common Academic Framework. Throughout this process, we have endeavoured to implement a student-centred approach that strives to support inclusivity and clarity for the diverse needs of student learners.

Student consultations supported our drive to give further clarity to student learners regarding the curriculum's intents and expectations, particularly by streamlining and refreshing programme and course narratives, aims, and ILOs through the lens of inclusive learning methodologies. In 2022-23, a student consultant for curriculum enhancement worked in partnership with SofD staff towards consultative conversations around proposed amendments across SofD programmes. Across the portfolio, our refreshed programme and course specifications capitalise on this work and aim to deliver an explicit, clear, and accessible narrative that speaks to a growth mindset towards graduate attributes, opportunities for shared learning spaces to broaden perspectives, and the value of flexible, creative, and speculative approaches.

Note: In 2023-24, as part of the curriculum review across PGT MDes programmes, the nested course Core Research Methods had an approved name change to Design Research Methods.

Impacts

Our proposed major amendments root our programmes and courses within GSA's revised semester structure that defines contact teaching and assessment weeks across undergraduate and postgraduate taught provisions. The programme and course specifications have moved to new proformas introduced across GSA to make programme and course specifications more user-centred and accessible for students and staff.

Like all other programmes in the SofD MDes portfolio, the MDes Communication Design programme, its studio courses, and its shared cross-programme courses use a range of learning and teaching methods to support students' learning and development. While the proposed amendments streamline credit blocks and enhance the clarity of the learning experience, they do not alter the overall teaching approach. Furthermore, the impact of changes on students should be minimal outside of the positive refreshing of modes of assessment and curriculum, with all students benefiting from the clarity of the curricular provision towards graduate attributes and outcomes.

Accordingly, the negative impacts of changes should be minimal, although we make value of how the major amendments process necessitates iterative consideration and review. At the programme level, we also consider our progress in attaining previous EqIA goals as connected to the continuous evaluation within Programme Monitoring Annual Review (PMAR), and we will continue to use PMAR as a lens through which to review our curriculum development work, including advancing the intended positive impacts from and within the CAF implementation process.

Programme Structure Before Amendments

	STAGE 1 / Year 1 Semester 1	STAGE 2 / Year 1 Semester 2
60 + 60 Credits SCQF 11	STUDIO PRACTICE 40 Credits	DEVELOPING STUDIO PRACTICE 40 Credits
	CORE RESEARCH METHODS 20 Credits	PGT ELECTIVE 20 Credits
	STAGE 3 / Year 2 Semesters 1 & 2	
120 Credits SCQF 11	CONSOLIDATING STUDIO PRACTICE 100 Credits	
	CRITICAL REFLECTIVE JOURNAL 20 Credits	

Programme Structure After Amendments

STAGE 1 / Year 1 Semester 1	STAGE 2 / Year 1 Semester 2
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60 + 60 Credits SCQF 11	STUDIO 1: INTRODUCING STUDIO PRACTICE 40 Credits	STUDIO 2: DEVELOPING PRACTICE 40 Credits
	DESIGN RESEARCH METHODS 20 Credits	PGT ELECTIVE 20 Credits
STAGE 3 / Year 2 Semesters 1 & 2		
120 Credits SCQF 11	STUDIO 3: CONSOLIDATING PRACTICE 80 Credits	
	STUDIO 3: A CRITICALLY REFLECTIVE PRACTICE 40 Credits	

3. b) Please outline how you have advanced/are advancing the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and how you have addressed any EDI-related issues within the following:

Student Recruitment	The programme's promotion materials (including Graduate Showcase digital portal) and interviews with applicants can include EDI themes. GSA's Pre-Enrolment Gateway, which is regularly updated and contains programme-based information, provides support and accessible guidance for offer holders and reaches diverse audiences, framing and supporting transitions into study. Inclusive and culturally sensitive language is used in promotion materials.
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Programme Academic Induction

The programme's academic induction includes verbal, text-based and visual content communicating to students their educational journey (e.g., timetables, staff introduction, personal tutor scheme, a brief overview of courses, nature of engagement in studio-based learning, and assessment briefings). Cognisance of digital accessibility is taken when developing content. During the programme's induction, the academic activities aim to create a sense of community in the cohort and introduce the students to foundational aspects of the programme using an inclusive mix of in-person, digital, individual and group activities. GSA Welcome and Induction and the GSA Student Handbook support transitions in and onwards learner journeys via resources and consistently sign-posted help and support on Canvas. The GSA Student Handbook contains EDI-themed Inclusive Communities Courses for Students (sexual consent, understanding wellbeing, mental health, bystander intervention, and gender-based violence). The GSA Student Handbook also includes key policies such as the Student Conduct Policy where it states that misconduct includes bullying, harassment, discrimination, gender-based violence, racism and hate crime.

<p>Curriculum (contents, diversification and decolonisation)</p>	<p>The programme and its courses explore contemporary issues of diversification and decolonisation through a renewed focus on curriculum through the lens of equality, diversity and inclusion, with enhancements in this area central to the curriculum development involved in implementing the Common Academic Framework. In the School of Design and at programme level, we have advanced and will continue to develop the diversity of voices delivered into the programme through invited and visiting speakers, including via teaching and talks.</p>
<p>Learning and Teaching Approaches (activities and practices)</p>	<p>Learning activities and media utilised within the programme are designed to be inclusive and accessible and can be provided in alternate formats as reasonable adjustments require. The programme and its courses use various learning and teaching methods to support students in engaging in an explorative and individual approach to learning. Guided activities and digital online learning resources available on Canvas help foster, develop, and support independent learning skills. The programme employs a variety of teaching and learning approaches, including in-person, blended, and online synchronous and asynchronous learning activities and delivery, to support student engagement with the</p>

	curriculum and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.
Assessment and Feedback Methods	<p>The GSA Student Handbook contains student-facing guides to Studio Learning, AI in Learning and Assessment, and Assessment and Feedback, which support clear and accessible information and insights into learning and teaching while remaining agile to GSA-wide and School-based enhancements. The programme conducts assessment and feedback briefings for students at the beginning of each academic session. Using Canvas and briefs aids clarity in setting out assessment tasks. A range of activities with staff and peers, such as workshops, reviews and tutorials, support students' learning and offer ongoing formative feedback as they progress through the course. The programme uses an appropriate range of assessment methods to enable students to develop assessment-related skills and capabilities and demonstrate their learning and achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Within the CAF process, EDI considerations help inform the design of programme and course intended learning outcomes and assessment and feedback methods, with consistent and ongoing consideration and</p>

	monitoring to identify and address potential barriers to participation.
Learning Resources	To support inclusive approaches at programme and course level, we build on and will further enhance our work in partnership with GSA Library to decolonise and diversify resource lists, e.g., by exploring co-creative strategies.
Support for Students (e.g. implementing the Student Pastoral Tutor Scheme; signposting to Student Support services, etc)	Since the most recent EqIA, implementing a GSA-wide Personal Tutor Scheme has supported students by offering an individual point of contact in teaching staff. Students receive guidance on ongoing support options through induction, one-to-one tutorials, meetings, and access to GSA-wide services. Enhanced Canvas resources such as the GSA Student Handbook support signposting of Student Support Services to students. A button on all Canvas homepages links directly to Student Support Services on the Student Intranet, including Report and Support.
Staff Development	Staff who teach on the programme are active participants in a range of communities of practice, ensuring currency in both knowledge and practice. Staff complete a variety of mandatory and optional staff development and training e-modules via LearnUpon on an ongoing basis,

	with themes covered including unconscious bias, student mental health, safeguarding, and disability awareness. As part of recent and ongoing staff development, including in relation to CAF, staff have access to curriculum design resources and toolkits on Canvas. Programme Leaders have participated in PL Forums and Advance HE training with EDI themes such as the inclusive curriculum, supporting graduate attributes and outcomes, inclusive and equitable assessment, and liberating the curriculum.
Any other relevant areas	There is no other relevant information.

4. How have you ensured the programme being assessed is advancing positive impact on the protected characteristics? – please address each protected characteristic individually

Age	The programme does not negatively nor positively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic. We continue to advance inclusive practices in communication, including not excluding students of a particular age group in communication modes and supporting wellbeing aspects in a manner open to students of all ages.
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Disability	In re-framing the programme and the teaching methods and assessment activities, the programme team has been cognisant of ensuring that methods are inclusive and do not create a barrier to participation and achievement. Learning activities, resources, assessment and media utilised within the programme are designed to be inclusive and accessible and can be provided in alternate formats as reasonable adjustments require, with a process in place for addressing reasonable adjustments via the RAR system.
Gender reassignment (covers Trans identities)	Students are able to change their pronouns on Canvas and there is a GSA-wide form for the purpose of changing name that maps to Registry records.
Marriage and Civil Partnership (only applicable to staff)	In lines with EDI in the workplace, this programme does not negatively or positively impact staff as a result of this protected characteristic.

Pregnancy and Maternity	<p>The programme supports leave of absence for any student who requires appropriate reasonable adjustment in the event of pregnancy or maternity leave. Guidance is followed on the pregnancy and maternity policy to ensure appropriate measures are being taken to safeguard and signpost students or staff that this affects.</p>
Race	<p>Within its curriculum and teaching and learning methods this programme addresses the forging of an inclusive curriculum through the regular refreshment of its curriculum and resources. This includes staff development on the themes of decolonisation and diversification. At a smaller scale, the SofD EDI group also lead on identifying and collating further resources, for example Padlets to support new students from diverse backgrounds at entry point into GSA and to celebrate Black History Month.</p>
Religion or Belief	<p>To support and advance positive impacts in relation to diversity of religion or belief, a 'diversity calendar and events' section available in the EDI section of the GSA staff intranet lists religious celebrations and festivals alongside other days, weeks, and months that recognise and raise awareness of EDI themes.</p>

Sex	There is a 'Menopause at Work' module in LearnUpon e-training for staff, and the Menospace support and advocacy group meets monthly and welcomes students and staff impacted by menstrual and menopausal health issues.
Sexual orientation	The programme does not negatively nor positively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Any other groups (e.g. Care Experienced; Carers; Military Veterans; Low Socioeconomic Status (SES); Asylum Seekers; British Sign Language Users, etc)	If a student/prospective student needs to communicate through a BSL interpreter, accommodations provided align with our legislative responsibility to provide a BSL interpreter when requested. The GSA-wide Digital Inclusion Scheme is in place to offer the long-term loan of GSA laptops to students to enable them to study online, where they may be unable to access this equipment otherwise due to financial hardship, digital exclusion, or other relevant circumstances. The GSA Student Handbook and Canvas homepages signpost GSA Student Support Services, also linking to the Student Welfare intranet area for advice and

	support regarding the range of pressures students might experience concerning finances. Programmes support students in considering costs, methods, materials, and sustainable approaches to developing work and achieving intended learning outcomes.
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5. Have you identified any negative impact on the protected groups? How have you mitigated it? – please address each protected characteristic individually, providing details of any undertaken actions

Age	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Disability	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Gender reassignment (covers Trans identities)	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Marriage and Civil Partnership (only applicable to staff)	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.

Pregnancy and Maternity	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Race	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Religion or Belief	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Sex	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Sexual orientation	The programme does not negatively impact students as a result of this protected characteristic.
Any other groups (e.g. Care Experienced; Carers; Military Veterans; Low Socioeconomic Status (SES); Asylum Seekers; British Sign Language Users, etc)	Whilst no negative impacts are anticipated for students based upon any of their protected characteristics, we recognise that as a result of the programme's design and the learning, teaching and assessment methods employed, there may be unknown and unanticipated barriers to participation and success. As such, the programme will undertake a review of this EqIA

	annually within the PMAR process.
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6. How does the outcome of this assessment and the actions undertaken support GSA's [2021 - 2025 Equality Outcomes](#)

This assessment and the actions undertaken evidence how the programme offers staff and students the opportunity to enhance and develop their awareness of EDI themes in relation to their experience of learning, teaching, and assessment.

Our curriculum development and anticipated impacts will help us to further mainstream opportunities to discuss and enhance inclusive practices and to optimise potential for positive equality impacts in relation to the overarching themes of GSA's Equality Outcomes such as culture and community, environment, and impact and value.

This directly supports the following GSA Equality Outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Actively foster and support an organisational culture in which dignity and respect for self and others is understood and practiced, where confidence is encouraged and promoted, and where ignorance, prejudice and bias is challenged.
- Outcome 2: Continue to evaluate our physical and digital environment, aiming to optimise accessibility and inclusivity by acknowledging and providing for the needs of our students, staff and stakeholders.

7. How does the outcome of this assessment and the actions undertaken support the three main duties GSA has under the Equality Act 2010 [Equality Act 2010](#) to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- advance equality of opportunity;

- **foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not?**

Please see response to Question 6.

8. Action plan for positive impact on protected groups

- please provide details on any outstanding actions for advancing EDI within your programme, which resulted from the above analysis
- please name an action owner and a timescale for completion
- please keep any completed actions from older versions of the EqIA and provide updates on any actions that have not yet been completed

Action	Equality Impact / Protected Group	Person Responsible	Time frame	Updates/ Completion
Programme Monitoring and Evaluation	Given the proposed amendments to the programme, ongoing review will be undertaken to identify and mitigate any	Programme Leader	Annually	November 2025 through PMAR process to ensure currency and relevancy, then annually.

	inadvertent negative equality impacts.			
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<p>Next review date – please consider any outstanding actions outlined above;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the whole EqlA form would need to be revised at Periodic Reviews, when there is a major change introduced to the programme, or at intervals of no more than three years (whichever comes first) nevertheless, EqlAs must also be considered as part of the Programme Monitoring Annual Review (PMAR) process to ensure they are still relevant and the action plan is updated yearly 	<p>In developing this EqlA we recognise the need for regular review in order that any unanticipated barriers to participation and/or success be identified and responded to as we move to deliver the amended programme from September 2025. This will be built into our review processes through PMAR annually as identified within section 8 above.</p>
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<p>Signed off by Owner/Review Lead Brian Cairns, Programme Leader</p>	18.10.24
<p>Signed off by Senior Lead</p>	11/10/2024

Dr Thea Stevens, Academic Development Lead, School of Design	
Signed off by Equality Lead Ceit Mackintosh, Equality Officer	03/10/2024
Signed off by Education Committee	02/04/2025