

Johanna Allen

Design Team Leader



Acting Head of Visual Design
British Council

2020–Today

Introduction

Hi, I'm Jo, a designer of engaging digital systems, brand and product experiences. I bring people together to form high-performing teams. I follow human-centred design principles focusing on empathy, creativity and continuous improvement.

Experience

As Acting Head of Visual Design I ensure the quality and timely delivery of a range of design services. I manage a multi-disciplinary team allocating resource to the highest impact opportunities. I work with stakeholders and suppliers to align projects with strategic business priorities.

My role supports the organisation's aspiration to adopt a digital-first operating model. I raise awareness and understanding of the value of data-driven design decisions and how user research can inform digital transformation.

My responsibilities include overseeing the unification of the organisation's inconsistent design identity. I set standards of compliance and promote best practice in accessible interaction design.

I have a thorough understanding of our products, audiences and technology. I share my knowledge through the maintenance of digital playbooks and pattern libraries. I contribute to working groups, a Community of Kind Leaders and the Brand Champions network.

I create an open and inclusive working environment for my team. I motivate, empower and endorse the conditions in which my team can thrive. I have fostered a culture that encourages and values ideas, questions and feedback.

As a practitioner, I'm embedded in an agile delivery team developing a product-agnostic identity service. Our aim is to reconcile siloed data through SSO and profile management. We're working toward an aggressive target to integrate seven products in 18 months.

I'm also consulting on the design of an innovative AI-driven speaking assessment. The challenge is to deliver a dynamic and competitive UI to pilot with language learners in 12 weeks.

Previously, I led the design of a component library for a new headless content publisher. This React-based framework was intended to replace a Bootstrap / Drupal 8 CMS in 2023. I delivered the second site in partnership with a design agency for UK Government's GREAT Campaign.

Lead Visual Designer
British Council

2014–2020

As Lead Visual Designer I managed a small team of accomplished individuals. I sought opportunities for us to become specialists and expand our design remit. Together we broadened our knowledge of emerging technology and design trends.

I was the design lead for a large portfolio of themes serving 140 multi-lingual websites and a diverse range of programme and partnership sites. These included the LGBTQIA+ film festival BFI Flare, Aardman Animation's Learning Time with Timmy and Women of the World (WOW) Global.

I gathered business requirements, validated them and translated them into user needs. I managed the integrations of Campaign Monitor, Salesforce and Stripe payments. Alongside other user-led feature requests and performance enhancements.

Following a brand refresh in 2018, I redesigned the visual language of our websites. I managed the development backlog and release schedule and communicated the rationale for the design updates through a series of global webinars.

I also led the design of UK Government's pilot Secure English Language Test registration and payment system.

Visual Designer
British Council

2012–2014

As part of the Visual Design team I helped deliver the responsive theme of a new Drupal CMS. I supported the development of 30 content-types for English learners in Korea. Which, following extensive user testing, were adopted Asia-wide.

We met a two-year roll-out plan to launch 90 websites in more than 40 languages and migrate 30,000 pages – with the help of 200 editors – from Obtree and WordPress onto Drupal.

We ran eight-week engagements with country teams to refine their global-to-local product offer. I collaborated with stakeholders, business analysts, engineers, content and UX designers. We followed an agile methodology, agreeing an MVP and iterating to deliver at scale and pace.

Designer
Other Creative Ltd

2009–2012

My responsibilities included designing websites, apps and social media pages. I produced creative content for digital campaigns and visualised concepts for pitches.

Clients included Unilever, Expedia, Turner Broadcasting, Network Rail, Smart Technologies, Jones Lang LaSalle, RBS and NatWest. And charities Refugee Council, Freedom from Torture and the League Against Cruel Sports.

I established relationships with copywriters, art directors and digital strategists. I became Brand Guardian for several Unilever products. I managed their online guidelines and approved the creative intended for their audiences.

Designer
Hamiltons Architects

2007–2009

I created advertising for press, events, awards ceremonies and exhibitions. As well as collating pre-qualification questionnaires, tenders and planning submissions. I standardised design documentation and delivered Adobe training. I updated the company website, Asset Management System and intranet.

Skills

- Designing compelling, usable and inclusive cross-platform digital experiences.
- Developing design strategies, conducting design and accessibility reviews, writing technical specifications and assessment criteria.
- Advocating for user-centricity (UCD) and evidence-based progressive enhancements.
- Managing sustainable projects, problem solving and effective decision making.
- Building trust, establishing credibility and influencing through creative facilitation.

Tools

Figma, FigJam, Miro, Sketch, Adobe XD, Zeplin, Jira, Confluence, Trello, Notion, Slack.

Qualifications

IDEO U
2022

Certificate
Advanced Design Thinking

UAL, London College of Communication
2003–2006

BA (Hons)
Information Design

UAL, Camberwell College of Art
2002–2003

Foundation Diploma
Art, Communication and Design

I'm a trained Mental Health First-Aider with MHFA England and I'm studying for my British Sign Language Level 1 qualification with Signature.