

# Artist or Artisan?



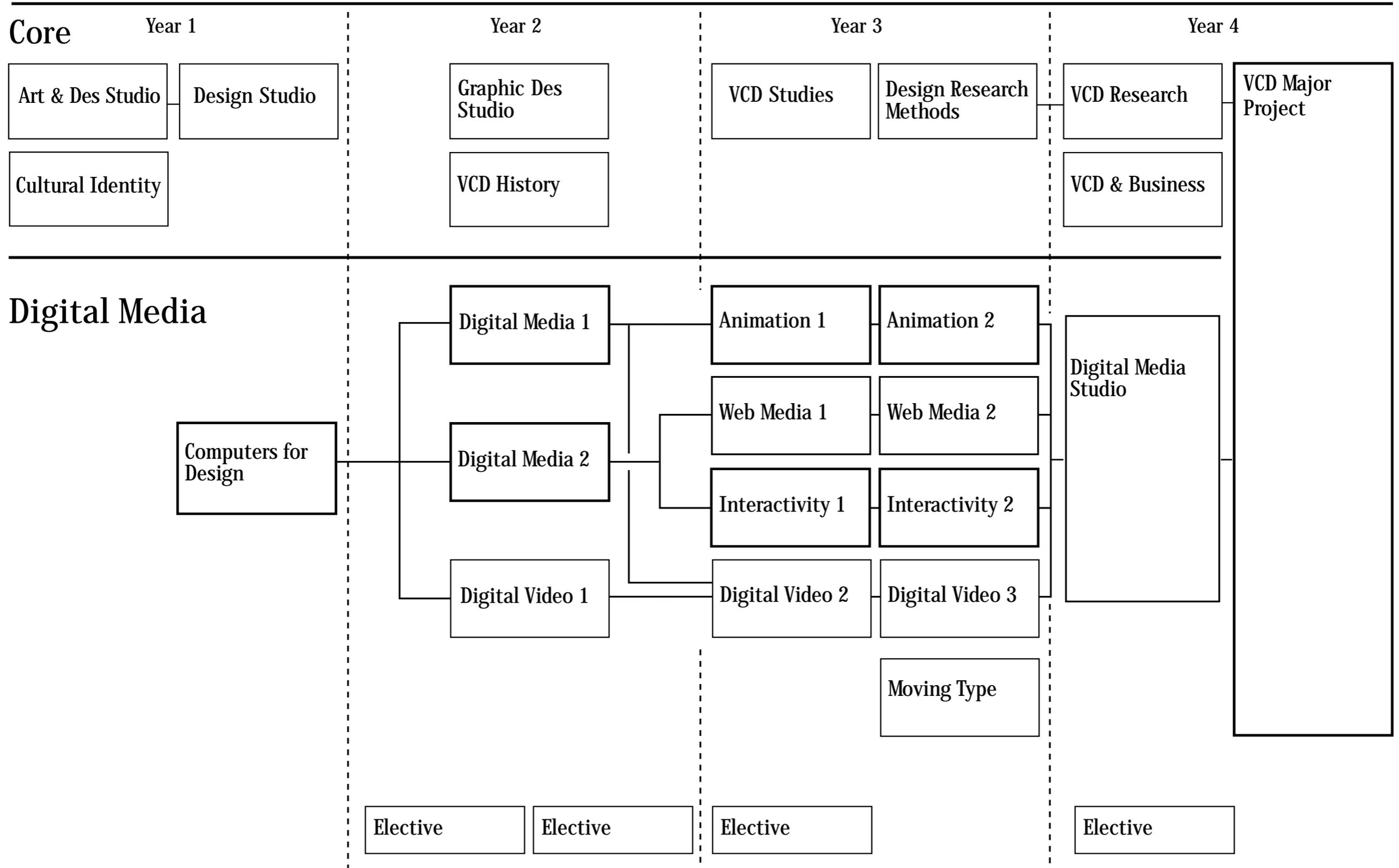
Preparing students for a career in the computer animation industry  
... a New Zealand experience

# Short course or long course? Specialist or generalist?

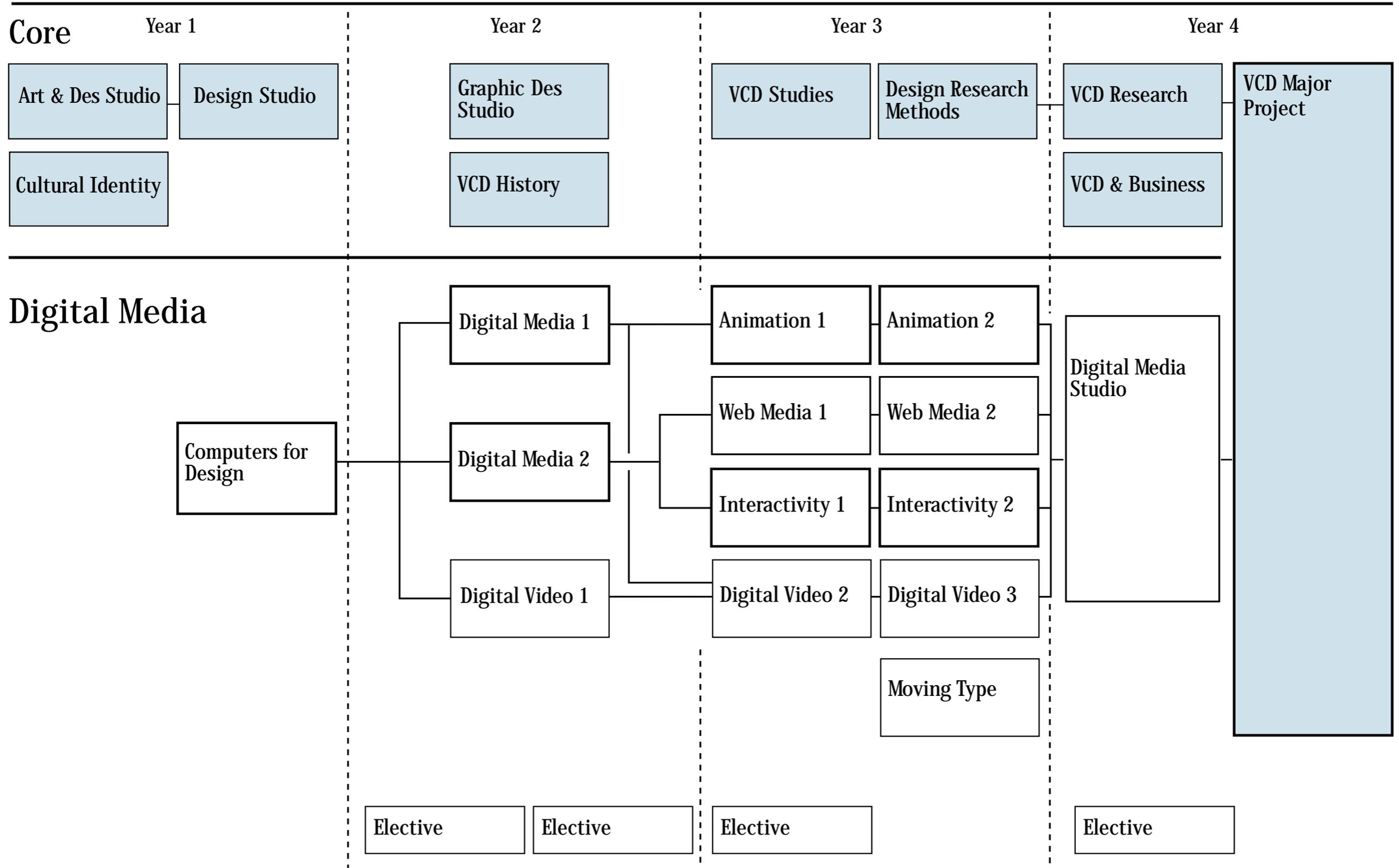
The education provided by degree based University courses continue to provide well rounded and highly skilled graduates that are sought after by employers in the computer animation industry.

- At Massey University computer animation is but a component of the larger visual communication major.
- Many papers that students take are not specific to computer animation.
- A disadvantage?
- Graduates continue to produce high quality work, and find favourable jobs in the digital media industry.
- Is this proof that a generalist education is better than a specialist one?
- And is the New Zealand animation industry happy with the graduates that result from this type of learning experience.

# Degree Structure

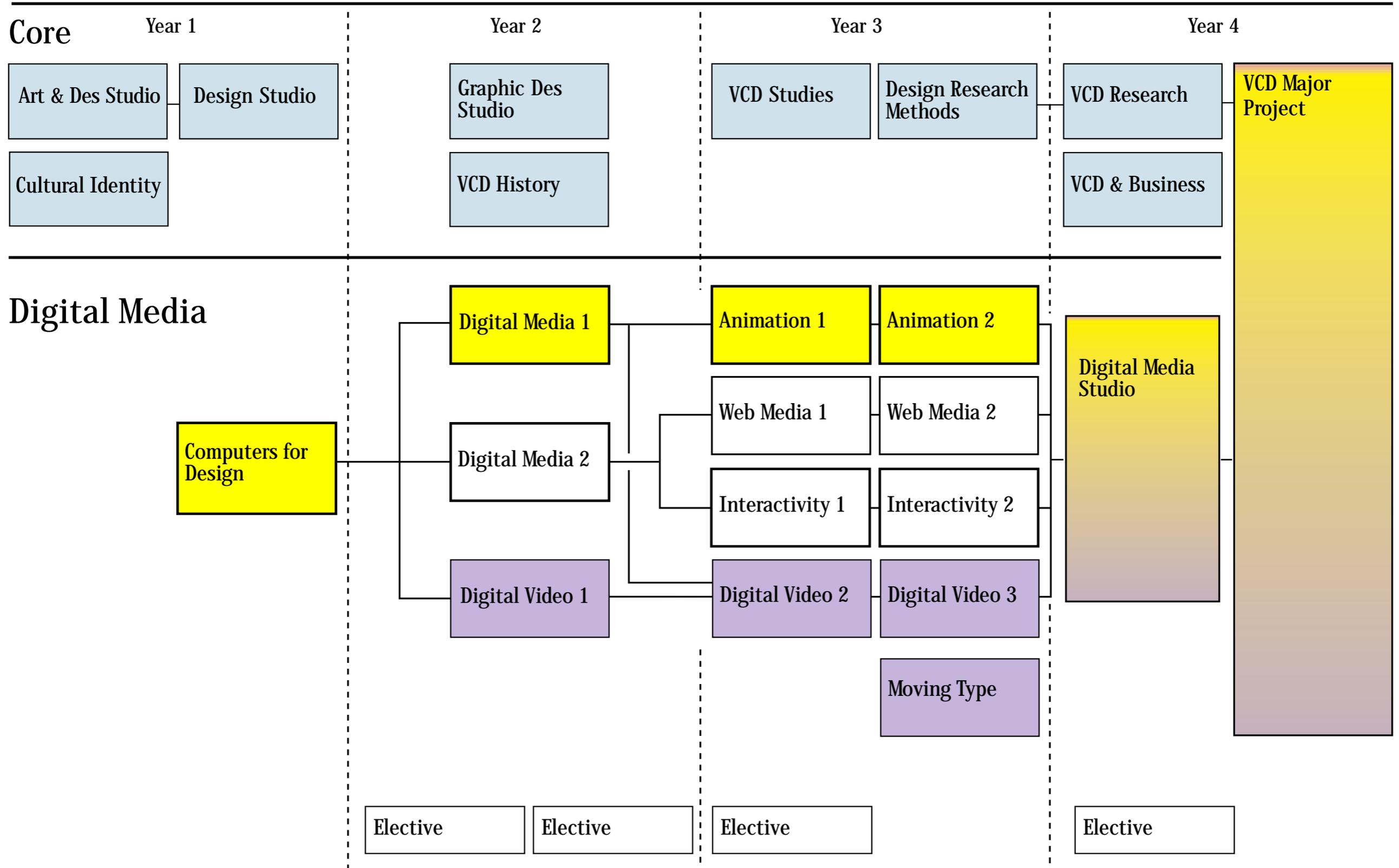


# Cores – non-specialist

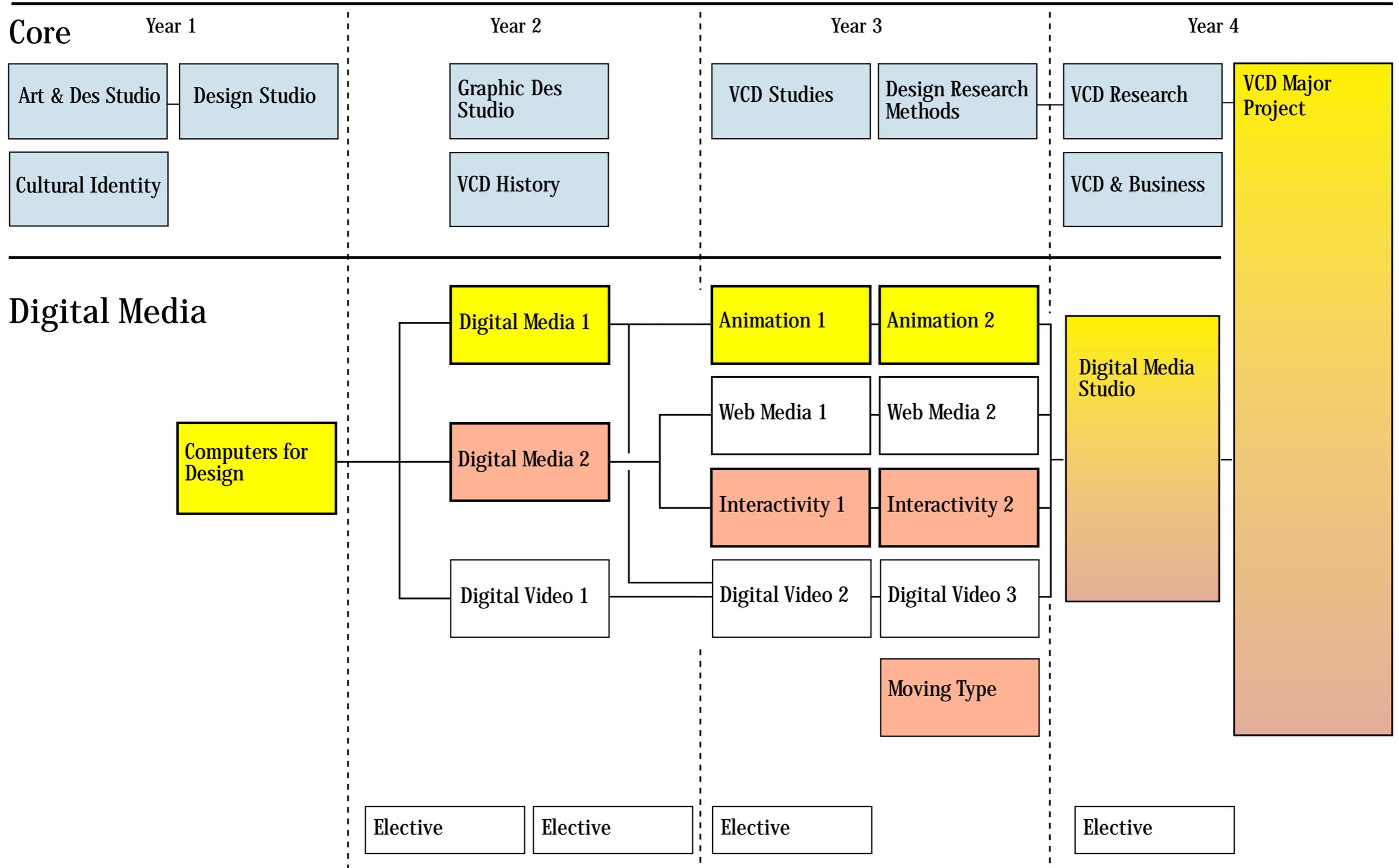




# Specialism – Animation/Digital Video



# Specialism – Animation/Interactivity



To excel academically. To attract an employer.

Key attributes ...

- Identify and develop area of talent to a high level
- Show development and expression of a concept
- Be able to talk articulately about the work and area of interest
- Demonstrate research and independent problem solving ability
- Demonstrate a sound general knowledge about the industry
- Show good team working

While it is true that raw skill is noticed, employers and university lecturers alike look equally hard for the way students work, not just what they produce.



# Interview with Weta Workshop

Three main attributes sought from applicants were skill, knowledge of the production process, and aptitude. Even though the graduates that are employed are seen as trainees, they are expected to fit into a team quickly and solve problems independently, without constantly seeking answers from the senior animators.

Industry seeks artisans or specialists, and is not as interested in examples of story, concept development, and theoretical investigation.

It should be noted that it is the very same process of story, concept and theory education that develops the student into the independent, skilled, problem solving individual industry are seeking.



# Talent

A good student of animation already has a well developed sense for animation.

They are “naturals”.

Rewarding to teach. Can move into concept development and production smoothly.

Informal discussion usually reveals a long held ability in drawing, art, cartooning, and of recent years, computer art and design.

The University's first role is to identify these students when they apply, and then provide the environment in which they can develop.

The extent of a student's success is only governed by the pace at which they can grow.



# Technical directions

Options such as modelling, rigging, lighting, compositing and programming.

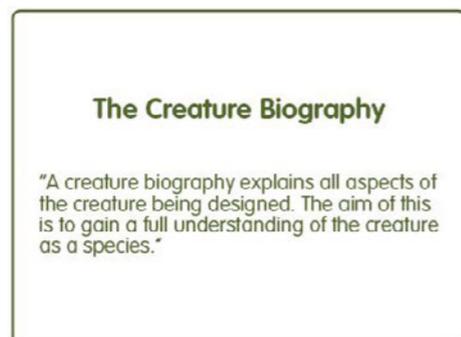
Risk of moving outside the school's area of expertise and experience.

Risk of competing for jobs against highly skilled graduates from computing courses.

However: A computer artist who can also programme may be more appealing to industry than the skilled programmer who is partially artistic.

Artistic ability cannot be learnt in a given space of time, whereas programming can.

Both areas require their own form of creative talent, and demand is also determined by supply.



# How do students become so independent and driven?

Year 1 – class demonstrations, tutorials, practice

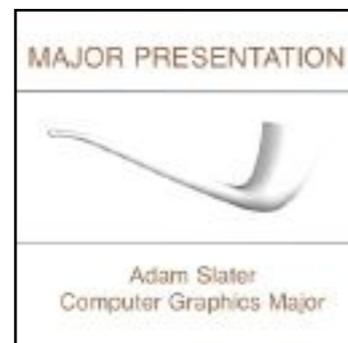
Year 2 – class demonstrations, tutorials, plus independent learning

Year 3 – some class demonstrations, high level of independent learning, strong student groupings. Supported by resources, eg library, online tutorials, student web forums.

Year 4 – 100% independent. Lecturer becomes supervisor and mentor, guiding the student through theory-driven conceptual development with a practical outcome.

This is a time where the “why” of ideas is questioned.

This is also the time where those students who have the ability to enquire and theorise, and adopt a mature attitude to study, can excel to a high level.



# Story or skill?

## Academia – Industry

Industry at any given time requires certain skill sets, e.g. an animator, a modeller, a shots artist, a technical director, texture painter etc.

The University seeks to develop the potential of a student in a much broader sense.

The student must therefore satisfy both demands. Their work must meet all of the requirements of the University, but also be a great show reel for the job interview.

This is not difficult to do, but it is very easy to overlook.



# The Industry in New Zealand

WETA Digital and WETA Workshop provided exposure and visibility for the computer animation industry in NZ.

Otherwise, employment came mostly by way of advertising, children's TV programs, a few commercial post production companies, small specialist companies and individually funded projects.

Opportunities and productions came and went. There was no consistent employer for graduating students.

Entry points for students were hard to find. Best opportunities came from networking, both personal and through the design schools.

Circa 1998 WETA needed experienced animators. No more trainees.



# Institutes rallied ... some strength through diversity

Very difficult to achieve the high standard required by industry.

Experienced computer artists remained buried in the industry.

Individuals within the institutes began developing papers within their existing degrees, be it graphic design, film, or multimedia.

Limited growth, but provided security.

This evolution may have been beneficial. Computer animation in New Zealand is not a large employment area. It is to the student's advantage that they are exposed to learning in associated areas, and do not risk being the absolute specialist.

In New Zealand it is generally expected that a graduate of the creative arts will have several areas of skill. Certainly in the smaller companies, or an area such as advertising, an individual may perform a variety of roles.



# Jane and the Dragon

## TOP STORY

### Kiwis wanted for Jane and the Dragon

08 February 2005

By SOPHIE NEVILLE

**Wanted: 30 or more talented Kiwis to work with an Oscar-winning special effects creator on his latest project.**

Weta Workshop's Richard Taylor has revealed details of a children's television series being created by the special effects team at Miramar, Wellington. The project will bring to life the pages of children's story book *Jane and the Dragon*, which follows the adventures of a 13-year-old girl and her pet dragon in medieval times.

Its author and illustrator, Martin Baynton, is co-producing the Weta work with Taylor, and the pair are keen to hear from animators or graphic designers who want to work on "an incredibly exciting project".

They have already recruited about 20 technicians to work on the 26-episode series but need at least 30 more. They say the project is a wonderful opportunity for animators to work in New Zealand.

"About 300 students a year are pumped out of animation and digital effects courses with almost no opportunities in our country," Taylor said.

A former icecream factory in Miramar has been transformed into an animation studio for the project, which is being done in partnership with Canadian television company Nelvana.

Visual effects supervisor Trevor Brymer said performers would be used to recreate the animated characters' movement in the same way Gollum was created in *The Lord of the Rings*.

"We have designed the whole universe, right down to the bristles on the queen's hairbrush."

Baynton admits to having been nervous about the transfer of his "creative baby" to the screen. Working with "the best of the best", however, had put his mind at ease. "I couldn't have hoped for anything better. It has been an extraordinary journey working with these energetic and talented designers."

The series has already been sold around the world and will be aired early next year. People interested in jobs should go to [www.janeandthedragon.com](http://www.janeandthedragon.com)



KIWIS WANTED: Author and illustrator Martin Baynton with Jane, his creation. The adventures of the young girl and her pet dragon are coming to life in a children's TV series created by Weta Workshop.  
CRAIG SIMCOX/Dominion Post

# Summary

The computer animation and other digital media industry areas in New Zealand will no doubt continue to fluctuate, and remain a moving target for graduates seeking employment. However, the standard of animation and effects for TV and film in this country is very high, and industry will always welcome talented and skilled graduates.

A good digital media artist is a special type of person – a person who is artistic, but also at ease in the complex computer environment. To be able to create magical and emotional digital imagery is remarkable when one considers the incredible complexity of computer software.

Educational institutes have a very important role in developing and maintaining high educational standards, and ensuring that this medium continues to evolve to its maximum potential.

