



Royal College of Art

Postgraduate Art & Design

Programme Specification

1. General Information

Programme title:	Design Futures (Full-Time)
Award:	MDes
Qualification Framework level:	7
School/Department or equivalent:	School of Design
Campus location(s):	Battersea
Total UK credits:	180
Date valid from/to	2024-25

2. Programme Philosophy

Welcome to the MDes Design Futures programme. As a student on the programme, you will develop the role of Design within an interdisciplinary context to address global environmental, cultural and societal challenges. Whilst on the programme you will reflect on and develop your knowledge and skills to address these large-scale complex problems.

Key to the MDes Design Futures is your professional development. This is built into all units which seek to establish and develop your professional identity and entrepreneurial skills in relation to real contexts. This is supported continuously on the programme where you are required to reflect and plan for current and future professional opportunities.

Working both individually and with your peers you will explore the ways in which new design methods and strategies can develop more resilience, safer and ethical futures. This will include consideration of the role of complex systems and methods for envisaging future opportunities to create strategies that innovate professional, commercial, industrial and social entrepreneurial initiatives and enterprises.

On the programme you will have the opportunity to choose from electives on the future of Design in areas such as Design Resilience, Design Ethics, Design Innovation, Design Safety.

The programme also offers the opportunity to further extend your research and practice through selecting units from the Cross-College Electives. These include, for example, units in teaching and learning from the MEd (Master of Education) Programme and Research Methods units from the MRes (Master of Research). The Design Electives and Cross-College Elective are subject to availability.

The programme culminates in the design, planning and implementation of a major project. This project draws on the knowledge and skills you have developed on the programme, particularly those related to entrepreneurship, and it is expected that the outcomes of your final major project will take a form related to a professional context, be this a report, conference paper, presentation or prototype.

3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

Programme aims

- To develop the role of Design within an interdisciplinary context that addresses global environmental, cultural and societal challenges;
- To generate design methods and strategies that develop resilience, safer and ethical futures;
- To use design strategies and futures that identify the conditions for tackling wicked problems at scale;
- To develop design futures principles that allow for sustainable solutions that support a holistic perspective of nature and our environment;
- To create design futures strategies that innovate professional, commercial, industrial and social entrepreneurial initiatives and enterprises.

What will I be expected to achieve?

Upon successful completion of the programme, you will be expected to meet the requirements of both the College-wide Learning Outcomes and your programme-specific Learning Outcomes.

College-Wide Learning Outcomes

You should be able to:

- Interrogate and articulate the intentions of your work in relation to the critical and conceptual context of your field(s) of study;
- Independently plan and produce work that is informed by developments at the forefront of your field(s) of study;
- Evaluate and critique the principles and methods of research in your field(s) of study, and apply these principles to your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice;
- Demonstrate originality in how you translate knowledge into practice;
- Communicate your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice to a non-specialist audience;
- Critically reflect on the likely public impact of your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice, and on your responsibilities as a practitioner;
- Define your professional ambitions and identify the challenges involved in meeting them.

Programme-Specific Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the programme, you should be able to:

- To articulate and apply Design within an interdisciplinary context that address global environmental, cultural and societal challenges;
- Develop design research methodologies and strategies, and complex systems that support resilience, safety and ethical futures;
- Envisage, demonstrate and apply design strategies and future thinking that envisage and seek to tackle wicked problems;

- Develop, innovate and test design futures principles that provide sustainable solutions that support a holistic perspective of nature and our environment;
- Propose design-led strategies that foster professional, commercial, industrial and social entrepreneurial initiatives and enterprises;
- Develop a body of work in a specific field or context of professional, research or personal activity.

4. What will I learn?

Curriculum Map

MDes Design Futures Full-Time Year 1

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Interdisciplinary Research Methodologies 15 credits	Envisioning Futures 15 credits	Entrepreneurship 15 credits
Complex Systems 15 credits	Independent Research Project: Proposal 15 credits	Independent Research Project: Development 15 credits
School of Design Electives 15 credits	School of Design Electives 15 credits	Independent Research Project: Realisation 30 credits
College-wide Electives 15 credits	College-wide Electives 15 credits	

*** Students may not repeat a unit that they have already taken, either during this programme or during a previous programme of study. The College-wide elective, AcrossRCA, will only be available to external entrants who have not previously studied these units at the College.*

Programme Structure

Unit Title	Term	Credit Value
Interdisciplinary Research Methodologies	1	15
Complex Systems	1	15
School of Design Electives	1	15

College-wide Electives	1	15
Envisioning Futures	2	15
School of Design Electives	2	15
College-wide Electives	2	15
Independent Research Project: Proposal	2	15
Entrepreneurship	3	15
Independent Research Project: Development and Reflection	3	15
Independent Research Project: Realisation	3	30

Please note, there are three **Independent Study** weeks per year (one per term). During these weeks there will be no scheduled teaching or assessment, and limited access to Technical Services. Self-service will be available for inducted users, and you may independently use computing and technology zones, bench spaces, and the resources store and art shop. These weeks are intended for you to work independently, and technical supervision, fabrication support, or supervision of high-risk activities will not be available.

Interdisciplinary Research Methodologies

Provides a research methods toolkit for tackling diverse and challenging issues delivered through a series of 'methods sprints' that connect theory to professional creative practice.

Complex Systems

Introduces a range of concepts allowing designers to build familiarity with cybernetics, leverage points, wicked problems, causal loops, theories of change and entanglement.

Envisioning Futures

Combines futures methods with advanced digital and analogue envisioning methods bringing to life near and deep futures prospecting from a multi species perspective.

Entrepreneurship

This unit examines the business, management, enterprise and entrepreneurial skills required to transform an innovative design or communication concept into a compelling value proposition. It is shared with the School of Communication, so you meet peers from another School.

School of Design Electives

These are four sets of electives divided into A (term 1) and B (term 2). There is no prerequisite for B electives. These are themed around Design Safety, Design Resilience, Design Ethics, Design Innovation. Additionally, this will include an elective in Design-Led Robotics (term 2).

RCA Cross-College Electives

These will comprise electives from all RCA Schools (including the School of Design).

Independent Research Project

The Independent Research Project (IRP) is the conclusion of your studies on the MDes Design Futures. The IRP is broken down into two 15-credit units and a final 30-credit unit. The IRP is an opportunity for you to propose and realise a body of work that addresses the key ambitions of your research and professional practice. You will draw on what you have learnt on the programme to

devise a project which might be individual or collaborative. You will also be encouraged and supported to identify opportunities for the professional public dissemination of your work, and to exploit your project for career progression in the Design field. These opportunities will be specific to you and the nature of the professional practice area that you engage with during the unit. Your project will be supported through individual and group tutorials and opportunities to share your research developments through seminars and forums.

5. How will I learn?

Units are delivered through a combination of lectures, seminars, and group tutorials, including in-person and online delivery. Concurrent units will be delivered through burst learning, with intense on-campus activity in blocks to provide a more sequential experience of the units. Between on-campus activity, online seminars, group tutorials and peer-led asynchronous activities support and structure your independent study.

You will be encouraged to engage with your network of peers and to collectively contribute to common learning resources, student-led seminars, and peer critique. You are encouraged to treat your peers as critical friends, and to engage in critique in ways that are informed by their existing experiences of industry and practice. By participating in peer critiques, you will receive constructive feedback and learn to critique your work more effectively.

Opportunities for formative feedback are used to support and structure your learning. Peer and tutor critiques form an important part of the teaching, and occur in every unit.

You are expected to begin the programme with existing technical expertise in the field in which you intend to practise. Any new technical expertise that you wish to acquire in order to realise your proposed projects will be mostly gained through independent access to Technical Services that take place outside of the unit structure on a first come first served basis, and subject to availability. Some electives may offer specific access to technical activities.

You are expected to take a professional and independent approach to the programme, including determining your journey through choice of units, managing the demands of multiple concurrent units, and working towards deadlines.

The physical location for the Design Futures programme will be a 'Live-Room'. The room will be the focus for discussion, social interaction and tutorial contact as well as being a space for making and a place to host events. The Live Room will be a workspace that supports practice, discussion, documentation, learning and broadcast. The Live-Room will act as a focus for engaging audiences and inviting interaction with the extended RCA community.

Throughout the programme there are opportunities to network with your peers from across the College. Two or three networking events will be held to provide opportunities to make connections and share ideas with peers from other programmes and Schools.

The programme will include a publicly accessible output that will take the form of an event. This is where you will work with your peers to collaboratively present the work in progress of your final major project. The ways in which you contribute to these events will be dependent on the form of your intended outcomes. It is also intended that these events will be additional opportunities to engage interested parties, such as employers or funders.

In this programme, some units have a number of technical contact hours included, such as technical and library orientations & inductions into the use of equipment, spaces and processes required during the unit. If you wish to access other specialist technical equipment, spaces or processes or acquire additional technical or library skills outside of your timetabled unit contact time, you will be required to make independent bookings, which are available on a first-come-first-serve basis from Technical Services and the Library.

6. Assessment and feedback

Regulations

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found here. Please familiarise yourself with these.

Assessment

Assessment is about what you have learnt on the programme and demonstrating what you will be able to do in the future. Assessment is a continuous process that involves you, your peers and your tutors.

Understanding the unit learning outcomes are key to you ensuring that any assessment evidence you submit meets or exceeds the required level.

Formative assessment on the Design Futures programme will include peer-feedback, self-reflective reviews and tutorials.

Summative assessment on the Design Futures programme will include, but will not be limited to, different types of submission including proposals, bid/pitch documents, reports, presentations (including recorded), project prototypes and models, peer reviews, evaluations, and strategic mapping exercises.

Written feedback will be provided for all summative assessment within 3 working weeks of the date of assessment.

Information regarding individual assessments will be included in the unit descriptors, and will be available to students at the beginning of the academic year.

7. What award can I get?

To be awarded an RCA MDes degree you need to gain 180 credits at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will involve successfully completing all units. If you do not pass a unit at the first attempt, you may be offered an opportunity to resit the unit. If you are successful at resit you will be awarded the credits for that unit. If you are unsuccessful, you

cannot progress further in your programme.

Exit awards:

If you have gained at least 120 credits at level 7 of the FHEQ, you may be eligible for the exit award of Postgraduate Diploma. An exit award is a final award from the College and cannot be rescinded.

For more detailed information about the College's assessment, progression and awards policies see the Regulations.

8. Admissions

Cross-College requirements

We welcome applicants from a wide range of backgrounds, and encourage applications from candidates with demonstrable evidence of professional engagement with their chosen discipline area.

Candidates must normally have obtained a good relevant undergraduate degree or an equivalent qualification (usually or Bachelors' degree, or Graduate Diploma). Candidates who already hold a relevant Masters' qualification are also encouraged to apply.

Other qualifications may be approved, providing that the College's Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD) is satisfied that the applicant has the potential to pursue the programme of study successfully. The ABCD is empowered to make judgements about the extent to which qualifications or experience gained elsewhere may be accepted in partial fulfilment of its requirements.

English Language

Applicants who are not a national of a majority English-speaking country will need to demonstrate their English language proficiency. The College accepts a range of English language qualifications. The full list can be seen at <https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/entrance-requirements/english-language-requirements/>

Applicants are exempt from this requirement if they have received a 2.1 degree or above from a university in a majority English-speaking nation within the last two years.

If a student would need a Student Visa to study at the RCA, they will also need to meet the Home Office's minimum requirements for entry clearance.

All applicants will be asked to submit a portfolio, a statement and a short video. Programme-specific requirements for these will apply and are detailed below.

Programme-Specific requirements

Portfolio/Document Submission:

Students on the Design Futures programme will develop the role of Design within an interdisciplinary context to address global environmental, cultural and societal challenges. This means we are looking for students from a very diverse range of backgrounds from either design or any other disciplines or professions.

For your application we want you to compile a single illustrated document (PDF, maximum 20 pages) showing us a diverse range of projects, from previous studies, professional work or self-initiated work. This should show clearly through writing and images of your own work your interest in pursuing Design as an interdisciplinary field that seeks to address current and future challenges.

If you are currently a designer or design student, select a few of your most creative, original and ingenious pieces of work, including your process and decision making, the skills and tools used, as well as its purpose and final outcome. If you're not a designer or come from a different discipline, don't worry - show us how you've achieved excellence in your own field, communicate it in writing and visually, and make it personal, evidencing your unique creativity and how this might be relevant to Design. In both cases we are interested in how you think, what inspires you, your desire to learn new skills, and your ability to build and grow ideas that contribute to the future of design and the planet.

Project Proposal:

The project proposal (550 words) is an indicative statement about what you intend to undertake as a Design Futures issue on the programme. It is recognised that this will change and develop whilst you are studying on the programme. It should follow this structure:

Proposed project title

What issues or areas do you wish to critically appraise as a Design Futures issue? (150 words)

What other research or work has been done to address this area or field? (150 words)

What types of outputs or impact do you hope to produce or envisage on the Programme? (150)

How will a place on the Design Futures programme support this project? (100 words)

Video Introduction:

We would like you to create a short (3 minutes max length) video where you briefly introduce yourself and articulate what knowledge, skills and opportunities you think that a place on the Design Futures programme will offer you to develop.

(Please note, we are not judging you on your technical production skills, but are using the video as an introduction to yourself and your aims for the programme).