



Programme Specification

1. General Information

Programme title:	MRes RCA [Full Time]
Award:	MRes
Qualification Framework level:	Level 7
School/Department or equivalent:	Academic Development Office
Campus location(s):	Kensington
Total UK credits:	180
Date valid from/to	2024-25

2. Programme Philosophy

The Master of Research (MRes) RCA is a dynamic, interdisciplinary degree that fosters innovative thinking and equips you for PhD-level study or professional industry research roles. By teaching processes and methods that are informed by art and design thinking, you will be introduced to and develop practice-led and experimental research skills. The MRes curriculum offers a transformational experience and gives you the opportunity to construct your own area of expertise within defined specialisms.

As a student on the MRes RCA programme you will develop your understanding and practice of research within an Art and Design context. You will be introduced to theories, methods, and practices across a range of contexts and from varying perspectives, to enable you to devise and shape your own independent research projects confidently and effectively. By sharing and learning from methods across art and design practice, you will develop a creative and critically engaged independent research project, either thesis-based, or practice-based.

One of the key strengths of this course is interdisciplinary exchange, working in dialogue across the discipline specialisms of Architecture, Communication, Design, Fine Art and Experimental Humanities. At application you will elect a specialism, which will be your central discipline and you will be assigned an expert supervisor for closer supervision of your research project.

Throughout the programme, we encourage and promote experimentation, flexibility, and collaboration. We will work with you in developing your confidence and ability to work independently and in collaboration with communities across different research cultures. It is this adaptability which will provide you with the tools to thrive as researchers in your chosen career, innovating and redefining your research subject and discipline through dialogue with others.

Through the Research Methods units, you will develop a rigorous personal research project proposal, framing your key research questions, methods, context, and bibliography. In additional units, you will develop your practice or thesis-based research project in dialogue with the proposal, developing and applying your own original methods. The specialist MRes team deliver these units together with invited guest speakers through a series of lectures, seminars, workshops, critiques, and supervision tutorials.

You will also select three or four further units from a series of College-wide electives, allowing you to choose from a menu of units delivered across all the RCA Schools that align to your specialism. Drawing upon the learning and work established in these units, the MRes culminates in the development of your independent research project, with theory and practice in dialogue with one another.

3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

Programme aims

The MRes RCA aims to:

- Equip you with critical and reflective thinking for PhD-level study or professional industry research roles;
- Give you the skills to apply practice-led and experimental research methods across art and design disciplines;
- Enable you to create a rigorous personal research project proposal, framing your key research questions, methods and context;
- Support you in the advancement and completion of an innovative and independent research project;
- Provide an interdisciplinary research framework, with the ability for you to collaborate and work in dialogue with art and design and other disciplines.

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 MRes RCA, you should be able to:

- Independently produce an original, innovative research project, that is located at the forefront of your chosen discipline;

- Interrogate your understanding of your own and other disciplines and the research methods drawn upon within art and design research;
- Locate and demonstrate advanced understanding of the cultural and professional context, and impact of your research;
- Define and apply appropriate methods for collaboration and/or dialogue across art and design disciplines;
- Critically reflect on the impact of your research and your responsibilities as a researcher;
- Demonstrate your ability to work in interdisciplinary and multicultural research settings.

4. What will I learn?

Curriculum Map

MRes RCA Full-Time		
Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Research Methods Part 1 - Developing Research Questions (15 Credits)	Research Methods Part 2 - Developing a Research Proposal (15 Credits)	Independent Research Project (60 credits)
Research in Practice Part 1 (15 Credits)	Research in Practice Part 2 (15 Credits)	
College-wide Elective (15 Credits) Options: AcrossRCA (30 Credit)* Electives from other Schools	College-wide Elective (15 Credits) Options: AcrossRCA (30 Credit)* Electives from other Schools	
College-wide Elective (15 Credits)	College-wide Elective (15 Credits)	

**Students may not repeat a unit that they have already taken, either during this programme or during a previous programme of study. 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
Research Methods Part 1 - Developing Research Questions	1	15
Research in Practice Part 1: Testing and Experimenting	1	15
College-wide Elective (AcrossRCA or elective from other Schools)	1	15
College-wide Elective	1	15
Research Methods Part 2 - Developing a Research Proposal	2	15
Research in Practice Part 2: Defining and Developing	2	15
College-wide Elective (AcrossRCA or elective from other Schools)	2	15
College-wide Elective	2	15
Independent Research Project	3	60

Please note, there are three **Independent Study** weeks included in your programme (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.

Unit Descriptions

RESEARCH METHODS PART 1: Developing Research Questions (15 CREDITS):

This unit supports you in developing and articulating research questions, by interrogating the central themes of your practice and what you aim to explore within your independent research projects through interconnected theoretical and practice approaches. The focus of this first research methods unit is on developing concise research questions and supporting your understanding of interdisciplinary research methods that you will build into your own research methods toolkit which will be used in Research Methods Part 2 to write a research proposal that mirrors the form of a PhD application. Through this unit you will develop your conceptual, analytical, technical, and theoretical knowledge base.

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE PART 1: Testing and Experimenting (15 CREDITS):

Within this unit, you will interrogate your research questions through practice approaches, be that a visual practice or a written practice. Experimentation and innovation across practice and theory are encouraged and supported. You will introduce different methods and approaches for you to test and explore.

RESEARCH METHODS PART 2: Developing a Research Proposal (15 CREDITS):

Through an understanding of a wide range of research methods, you will be able to research and develop new, experimental, and effective approaches, engaging with problems and insights at the forefront of your discipline. The detailed research proposal mirrors the form of a PhD application by introducing your research subjects, aims, contexts, and key questions. You will also build a core repository of research references appropriate to your subject as an annotated bibliography, articulating which aspects of each source are of importance to your research.

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE PART 2: Defining and Developing (15 CREDITS):

Within this unit, you will further define and develop your practice. Through planning and investigation, you will begin to determine the methods and approaches that are successful for you, which you will build upon within the final Research Project.

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT (60 CREDITS):

Within this unit, you will apply the skills, knowledge and understanding developed through the

previous units to complete a complex Independent Research Project. This project can be practice- or thesis-based, with practice-based route bringing together an original body of work with a connected thesis, and thesis-based route the completion of a longer textual output. Students will be supervised by MRes staff by discipline specialisms, with group and individual critiques and tutorials.

5. How will I learn?

MRes teaching is delivered in a blended mode with some sessions delivered online and others on campus. Delivery is through lectures, seminars, workshops, group critiques and tutorials. Each unit begins with a clear briefing outlining the schedule, aims, learning outcomes and assessment format.

The intensity of teaching will vary depending on the unit being delivered, with some units taught content delivered more intensely on-campus at the beginning or end of terms. This allows for independent study time around the taught delivery. Between on-campus activity, online seminars, group tutorials and peer-led asynchronous, these activities support and structure your independent study.

Unit descriptors identify the number and type of contact hours you will have in each unit. The majority of programme delivery is academic, taking place in seminar, lecture and Live rooms, and delivered by academic staff. 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.

You will be encouraged to engage with your network of peers across the art and design disciplines 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 own 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 within your specialism. An orientation session and a small number of technical skills workshops will take place for your whole cohort. 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.

The physical location for the MRes will be a 'Live Room'. The room will be the focus for discussion, social interaction, teaching 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.

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. You will be guided to pursue public facing professional

development opportunities as appropriate throughout the programme.

Alongside your taught units, scheduled community events will provide opportunities for you to network with your peers across other programmes and Schools.

6. Assessment and feedback

Regulations

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

Assessment

Formative and Summative Assessment

Assessments are designed to encourage you to critically reflect on your own discipline and its boundaries, within the wider social, cultural, political, and research contexts of art and design. The programme consists of small units that scaffold your learning journey, and this is reflected in the assessments.

Formative assessment takes place in the form of 1:1 and peer-to-peer feedback throughout the programmed series of personal tutorials, group seminars, workshops and critiques that support your development.

There is one summative assessment point for each unit, worth 100% of the unit, and addressing all unit Learning Outcomes. All core MRes units are presented or submitted for assessment at the end of each unit for summative assessment, with feedback in the form of peer feedback, tutor feedback or self-assessment, or a combination of these. Students will normally receive written feedback within 3 working weeks of the date of summative assessment.

In keeping with the MRes emphasis on dialogue and participation, summative assessment for the practice-based units takes place via dialogic assessment tutorials. These are either group tutorials or 1:1, and are overseen by a tutor or senior tutor. This mode of assessment means that you directly participate in assessment as an ongoing dialogue and reflection on the development of your practice.

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 MRes 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

Academic Entry Requirements

Candidates must normally have obtained a good relevant undergraduate degree or an equivalent qualification. The College recognises as an equivalent qualification any degree, diploma, certificate or other evidence of formal qualification awarded by a university or other higher education establishment where the award is made following the successful completion of a course of at least three years' study, the programme of study being open, as a general rule, only to persons holding a certificate awarded on the successful completion of a full course of upper secondary education.

Other qualifications may be approved, providing that the College's Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD) is satisfied that the applicant has the ability 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.

Portfolio

All applicants are required to submit a portfolio as part of the application process. A portfolio is a showcase of an applicant's work as an artist or designer and can be made up of images, videos or writing examples. The portfolio helps us to better understand the applicant and allows them to show evidence of their ability and motivation to undertake a given programme.

Each programme is looking for different things in a portfolio; each Head of Programme provides specific advice on portfolio requirements in the online application system. We advise prospective students to consider these requirements carefully before submitting their application.

Applicant Qualities

Generally, we are looking for applicants to demonstrate their:

- creativity, imagination and innovation;
- ability to articulate the intentions of the work;
- intellectual engagement in areas relevant to the work;
- technical skills appropriate to the work;
- potential to benefit from the programme and achieve MA standards overall.

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 Route visa to study at the RCA, they will also need to meet the Home Office's minimum requirements for entry clearance.

Admission Process

Applications must be made directly to the College through our online application portal:

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/application-process/ma-application-process/>

Upon completion of that first stage of the application process, candidates will be invited to submit a portfolio of their work, a 300-word statement of intent and a video communicating clearly their motivations, personal interests and why they are pursuing a Masters degree at the Royal College of Art. These materials are reviewed by members of the programme team who will communicate an academic decision to the College Registry, who manage the process of offer-making in line with the College's recruitment targets. In some cases, where the programme team is not able to make an admission decision based solely upon the work submitted by the applicant, we may invite the candidate to undertake an interview with us.

Applications are considered chronologically by date and time of final portfolio submission. Whilst a programme still has vacancies, successful candidates will be made an offer of a place. Once a programme becomes full, subsequent successful applicants will be placed on a waiting list, and may be made a firm offer should a place become available for them.

Programme-Specific requirements

I. Portfolio:

We would like you to submit a portfolio of 3 to 4 examples of your work. These can be images, sounds, video or text. The examples should illustrate your skills, experience of research and/or practice and can be in one or multiple forms of media as you feel is most relevant to your research interests. If you are planning to undertake the MRes by our thesis only route, you may want to for example submit only textual samples of work.

We welcome applicants from a broad range of backgrounds and your examples could derive from previous academic courses or from work and professional practice - they can also be propositional and works in progress, whether practice or text based.

II. Research Statement:

Alongside the 3 to 4 examples, please submit a brief statement (300-500 words) that gives further information about the images/files and their context, and the areas and subjects you are interested in developing and interrogating during the MRes. Please indicate which discipline area is your main focus (Architecture, Arts, Communication, Design, Experimental Humanities), and if working across disciplines, which areas you are working in. Please also indicate whether you will pursue the MRes by the thesis only route or the practice based route. You may submit your portfolio as a single file (in PDF Format) or use the four slots available.

III. Video Introduction:

We would like you to create a short (3-5 minutes max length) video where you briefly introduce yourself and identify one project which demonstrates your ability to use research to develop your thinking. Explain the impact this has had on your rationale for applying to this programme at the RCA. (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).

