**Royal College of Art**
Postgraduate Art and Design

# Programme Specification

## 1.    General Information

| | |
|---|---|
| **Programme title:** | Service Design |
| **Award:** | MA |
| **Qualification Framework Level:** | Level 7 |
| **School/Department or equivalent:** | School of Design |
| **Campus location(s):** | Kensington |
| **Total UK credits:** | 180 |
| **Date valid from/to** | 2024-25 |

## 2.    Programme Philosophy

Service Design is evolving fast in a world where we see a historic transformation in how we respond to the uncertainties brought by advanced technologies & AI, the climate crisis, and societal change.

Service Design is the application of a 'designerly' way of thinking and working to respond to these uncertainties and is guided by a set of mindsets, principles and methods that are collaborative, innovative, pragmatic and systematic. As the subject evolves, its fields of inquiry and practice expand to include a spectrum from developing services for human experience to enabling transdisciplinary innovation and social change.

The Service Design programme equips you with cutting-edge thinking and tools to provide human insight, engage with complex systems and create and prototype new futures to become an effective changemaker in the modern world.

The teaching and learning is mostly project-based in that students will develop their practice through working on projects in teams.  This includes collaborations with commercial, public sector or social organisations who bring real issues and opportunities for future disruption or innovation. Collaborating in teams, the students will move through the design process of deep research, issue reframing, creative concept generation, prototyping and user testing. In developing their practice, students are encouraged to take a critical and reflective view of Service Design to develop their confidence in contributing to the development of Service Design as a practice and subject.

## 3.    Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

**Programme aims**

Develop service designers who can:
- Apply service design methods to influence and transform complex systems to deliver positive impact and innovative business and social outcomes;
- Engage and create responses to changes and trends in technological, societal and

business contexts;
- Operate in the culture and systems of organisational change;
- Imagine and deliver new services and experiences;
- Collaborate and lead transformational change.

## 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

You should be able to:

- Articulate the fundamental of a service, assess the ways service design is applied to a specific area of practice, and appraise the value and limitations of service design practice for addressing real world challenges;
- Design and construct a service design project that synthesises the core elements of the practice;
- Critically evaluate and articulate the rationale for your choices of service design tools and methods, and assess how to reformulate or develop them to work in specific contexts to address issues including inclusivity, equity and diversity;
- Develop strategies to engender creativity and imagination in yourself and others, through the development and design of innovative outputs;
- Evaluate and articulate the intended and actual impact of the design outputs of a project, and interpret and articulate the challenges of applying service design practice to specific project contexts, e.g. health, sustainability, AI and policy;
- Synthesise and evaluate the challenges of collaborative working to develop strategies for planning, managing and delivering design projects, based on careful evaluation of design ethics, required resources, potential outcome and measurement of impact;
- Develop a clear narrative for your work that synthesises the new knowledge and outcomes generated by your projects  and that can engage both expert and non- expert audiences.

## 4.    What will I learn?

**Curriculum Map**

| Term 1 | Term 2 | Term 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Service Design Foundation (15 credits) | **Grand Challenge (15 credits)** | **Independent Research Project (60 credits)** |
| Service Design Practice (30 credits) | Service Design in Context (30 credits) | |
| **AcrossRCA (30 credits)** | | |

Programme Structure

| Unit Title | Term | Credit Value | Core or Elective? |
|---|---|---|---|
| Service Design Foundation | 1 | 15 | Core |
| Service Design Practice | 1 | 30 | Core |
| Service Design in Context | 2 | 30 | Core |
| Grand Challenge (School-wide unit) | 2 | 15 | Core |
| AcrossRCA (College-wide unit) | 1 & 2 | 30 | Core |
| Independent Research Project | 3 | 60 | Core |

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.

The first two terms will take you from a foundation of the tools and methodologies through to advanced techniques and management skills which are applied through projects leading to the Independent Research Project in the third term.

**Term 1:** *Service Design Foundation* introduces the theories and concepts underpinning service and service design practice. You will deliver a small-scale and analytically focused project in a team setting.

In *Service Design Practice*, you will apply service design tools and methods to deliver a 'live' project in dialogue with industry partners, to address a selected challenge in an area, e.g. health, sustainability, business innovation and social inclusion.

**Term 2:** In *Service Design in Context*, you will develop a project proposal for the Independent Research Project, by examining the relationship between practice and context, and the impact of service design projects on economic, technological, social, cultural and environmental systems and how these contexts shape the implementation of service ideas.

**Term 3**: The *Independent Research Project* is self-directed, with the aim to develop and establish yourself as a professional service designer in your chosen areas of expertise within the diverse spectrum of service design practice. You will develop strategic visions with practical deliverable design interventions to create new services and systems. This project will be the core of the public output of the programme and contribute powerfully to public discourse on the value and suitability of the services and interactions we experience.

In **term 2** all School of Design students will participate in the **Grand Challenge**, School-wide unit. The aim of this unit is to connect and challenge all students in the School through the introduction of a 'wicked' design problem that requires a cross disciplinary approach to problem solving which may involve external international partners. This unit and lecture series has been hugely successful in connecting and disrupting disciplines, people, philosophies and approaches to design thinking whilst providing our student body with very unique networking opportunities.

Across **terms 1 and 2**, you will participate in **AcrossRCA**. This unit aims to support you to meet the challenges of a complex, uncertain and changing world by bringing you together to work collaboratively in cross-programme interdisciplinary teams. In your team you will develop a self-initiated themed project, informed by expertise within and beyond the College. These projects will challenge you to collectively use your intellect and imagination to address key cultural, social, environmental and economic challenges. In doing so, you will develop and reflect on the abilities required to translate knowledge into action, and help demonstrate the contribution that the creative arts can make to our understanding and experience of the world.

## 5.    How will I learn?

We aim to create a studio-based learning environment where you learn by doing projects in collaboration with your peers, addressing a range of real-world challenges, e.g. health inequality, the green transition, designing for cities, emerging technology and AI.

The project work is guided by regular sessions with tutors who work with you throughout each project. You will have the opportunity to describe relevant research, hypotheses and potential outcomes with tutors as your project develops.

The studio-based learning is complemented with a series of lectures and seminars, covering the theoretical principles, practical examples, and methods of service design.

Topics include the impact and future direction of service design, human and digital interactions, user research and the generation of insight, design ethics, total system design and approaches to prototyping and testing.

A public event is held towards the end of the Independent Research Project

## 6.    Assessment and feedback

| **Regulations** |
| --- |
| Regulations for assessment and progression can be found here. Please familiarise yourself with these. |
| **Unit assessment** |

Project-based learning is an important aspect of the programme. For all units your work will be assessed against the learning outcomes. In your programme units, the assessment will be in a group setting for the project as presentations, and your individual learnings will be assessed through your reflection on the projects. In Unit 3, the assessment will be written work both in group and individually. Both summative and formative assessment is used in all units to support your learning.

## 7.    What award can I get?

To be awarded an RCA MA 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 programme 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 programme 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

All programmes are taught and assessed in English, and a high level of English language proficiency is required.

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.

## 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 and a statement and/or 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.

Whilst there are still spaces available, successful candidates will be made an offer of a place. If there is no vacancy for a subsequent successful applicant, the candidate will be placed on a waiting list, and may be made a firm offer should a place become available.

## Programme-specific requirements

Specific advice on programme portfolio requirements is provided by the Head of Programme in the online application system. Please consult the College website for further information on programme-specific admission and portfolio requirements.