



Programme Specification

1. General Information

Programme title:	MA City Design
Award:	MA
Qualification Framework level:	Level 7
School/Department or equivalent:	School of Architecture
Campus location(s):	Kensington
Total UK credits:	180 credits
Date valid from/to	2025-26

2. Programme Philosophy

The MA City Design envisions new concepts of city and urban life by placing design speculation at the core of social innovation.

City life is undergoing momentous change. New forms of urban development and technologically driven forms of social innovation are transforming the way we live, work, reproduce and take care of the world around us, producing new lines of social solidarity as well as new sites of social conflict. Yet most of the methods used to research and design cities have resisted change, thus limiting our ability to perceive relevant changes and of conceiving radically different futures.

MA City Design believes in the unique capacities of design to conceptualise and propose new and original models of living in cities. It proposes an approach to city design education that unites architectural, social sciences and scientific research. The programme is site-focused and design-led and you will have the potential to engage with NGOs, policy makers, government and industry.

The MA City Design makes use of digital design, analysis and visualisation tools, including moving image, animation, augmented and immersive design, as drivers of speculative innovation. Together with collaborative forms of knowledge production and exchange, the programme argues these are necessary for enabling the designers of cities to creatively imagine the future in just and equitable ways. Through invited guests, collaborators and site visits, you will have access to different stakeholders involved in contemporary urban transformation. These will range from industry and design practitioners to central and local government, or community and grassroots organisations. You will have the opportunity to pursue a degree within a world leading art and design institution, and to access the rich culture of radical and experimental interdisciplinary work at the Royal College of Art. Moreover, the programme will help you to establish a network of colleagues and mentors by offering you the opportunity of connecting to leading figures in City Design both in London and internationally through an innovative practice mentorship scheme.

3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

Programme aims

The City Design programme aims to:

- Define the practice of city design and become a world-leading programme, contributing to the re-invention of contemporary knowledge on city design and research;
- Contribute to ongoing academic and public debates on alternative models of city and urban life, which promote justice and consider climate adaptation at the city scale;
- Provide you with the skills to negotiate between multiple city-making actors and their constituencies;
- Create an outstanding academic platform that provides you with systematic and in-depth knowledge of city design research and practice informed by contemporary debates, scholarship and technological innovations;
- Provide you with a broad range of technical skills, with a particular focus on digital and immersive design tools and collaborative design methods;
- Provide a unique social and working environment that encourages you to develop their research while advancing their professional practice and academic abilities;
- Provide you with critical skills that allow them to pursue independent research and to apply advanced, practice-based knowledge to the field of city design.

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

- Argue the intentions of your work in relation to the most recent scholarship in city design;
- Formulate original research questions that contribute to advancing social innovation within city design scholarship and practice;
- Master the use of digital tools that allow testing spatial transformation and social innovation within complex social and spatial contexts;
- Develop methods to effectively communicate research and practice to non-specialist audiences, making use of a comprehensive range of narrative and visualisation methods;
- Critically assess your responsibilities as a practitioner in light of the challenges posed by changes in urban development across the world;
- Demonstrate the ability to continue learning and practicing independently or in

collaboration within other academic institutions.

4. What will I learn?

Curriculum Map

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Design Studio I: Conditions (15 credits)	Design Studio II: Propositions (15 credits)	Independent Research Project (60 credits)
Seminar I: Positions (15 credits)	Seminar II: Transformations (15 credits)	
Media Studies (15 credits)	School-wide elective (15 credits)	
AcrossRCA (30 credits)		

Programme Structure

Unit Title	Term	Credit Value	Core or Elective?
Design Studio I: Conditions	1	15	Core
Seminar I: Positions	1	15	Core
School-wide elective	2	15	Elective
Design Studio II: Propositions	2	15	Core
Seminar II: Transformations	2	15	Core
Media Studies	1	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.

AcrossRCA

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 creative practices can make to our understanding and experience of the world.

Media Studies I

Situated in the School of Architecture and welcoming a student cohort from across multiple spatial design disciplines, **Media Studies** provides a rigorous and granular examination of historical and contemporary methodologies of media practice and research. Our collective goal is to increase critical engagement with media. We achieve this through lectures, tutorials, and workshops in which new approaches to media are conceptualised, refined, and implemented in innovative proposals and projects.

Independent Research Project

The **Independent Research Project (IRP)** is a continuation of the work previously developed in the Studio units *Conditions* and *Propositions*. This is an opportunity for you to reflect on the theme of the studio while pursuing your own research interests, either in continuity with studio units or in a new direction. The important component of the IRP is a 'Public Presentation of Work' which takes place at the public event before final submission. At public presentation of work you are required to orally and visually present their projects to academic and specialist, and non-academic and non-specialist general audience. You can make use of a variety of media including film, animation, models, drawings or other as adequate – but priority will be given to the use and exploration of digital research, design and visualisation tools.

Teaching consists of studio-based tutorials and seminar sessions. The IRP project can be submitted through project or by thesis. The final submission of work take place at the end of term and includes a portfolio of work which provides a critical context to the IRP, and a design component and a written component of 3,000 for a submission by project and 10,000 words for a submission by thesis.

The IRP is a continuation of the work previously developed in the Studio Units 'Conditions' and 'Propositions'. This is an opportunity to reflect on the theme of the studio while pursuing your own research interests. The IRP includes a public presentation of work and exhibition, in a College space, alongside peers from your programme, and following the conclusion of taught elements of the unit. This activity will help you to orally and visually present the key strategic and design intentions of the work.

5. How will I learn?

Studio projects / case-study

The MA City Design main teaching method is the design studio. The programme focuses on case studies and organises your research and projects around site-specific questions and spatial problems within cities. Working in groups, Design Studio 1 will ask you to investigate existing urban 'Conditions' and Design Studio 2 requires you to develop a series in 'Propositions'. Each year the design studio units focus a unique case study. Case studies are chosen according to their capacity to challenge and inspire you, and to allow for critical and skills-based teaching within the studio.

Individual and group tutorials:

A significant teaching method is the weekly individual and group tutorials. For both *Studio* and *Seminar* units, a combination of individual tutorials, together with a mix of small and large group tutorials will be conducted regularly between students and staff. Specialists and invited guests will also contribute depending on research interests and sites.

Technical learning:

Studio teaching is supported by technical workshops delivered by faculty and invited specialists. Technical workshops aim to provide you with analytical and representational skills. Making use of Technical Services, as well as guest experts, you will be taught to explore digital modes of spatial analysis and representation, with a focus on digital detection, big data analytics, moving image, animation tools and VR.

Student-led Roundtables:

This is an essential teaching method that aims to foster autonomy and peer-to-peer learning processes. Student-led roundtables are crucial to both seminar and elective unit teaching methods, providing a model where you are allowed to lead collective discussion and learning processes.

Lectures:

Lectures to the entire cohort will be delivered by programme staff, School of Architecture staff, invited academics and practitioners. Lectures will make use of remote-learning models to allow for a broader range of guests, and to foster inclusivity. Apart from events organised by MA City Design, you will be encouraged to follow the School's public lecture series, across school symposia and interdisciplinary forums organised by the School in collaboration with other academic institutions.

Critiques and reviews:

In the *Studio* units, you will have to present your work to programme staff and invited critics multiple times each term. Panels will include School of Architecture staff, experts and specialists involved in the selected case studies or student project sites, UK-based and international academic and practitioners with a distinguished track record in city design and related fields, as well as the programme's practice mentors. Regular reviews will provide valuable opportunities for students to get feedback and to develop and improve their skills in oral presentation.

Site Visit:

One- or two-day site visits will allow you to engage local stakeholders, be it practitioners, governmental institutions, industry partners or local communities. Site visits are also key opportunities to verify and test site analysis methodologies.

Practice Mentors:

A practice mentorship programme connects you to the workplace through regular meetings taking place in term 3 with prominent professional practice, policy makers and industry members, who will advise on work and career issues. Students and mentors are paired according to intersecting research interests. In doing so we hope professional practices and organizations might have a foundational role in the development of the student and the programme.

In order to realise your work successfully you will be expected to attend:

- Briefing sessions
- Individual and Group Tutorials
- Student-led roundtables
- Lectures
- Technical workshops
- Progress reviews and critiques
- Site visit
- Public presentation of work
- Examinations and assessments

6. Assessment and Feedback

Regulations

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found [here](#). Please familiarise yourself with these.

Unit assessment

The programme makes use of formative and summative assessment.

Assessment may include, but may not be limited to:

- Group or individual submission of project work (written, visual, film, audio etc.)
- Group presentation
- Individual presentation
- Film submission (video, animation, etc.)
- Blog post
- Written research proposal
- Long-form written submission (essays, thesis etc)
- Short-form written submission (briefs, reflections, summaries etc.)
- Research Portfolio
- Viva Voce examination
- Public-facing presentation of work

Formative assessment:

You will receive oral feedback throughout the year. In the *Studio* unit this will be given weekly by the studio tutor, and in the case of the *Seminar* units by the seminar tutors.

Reviews with invited guests will provide valuable opportunities for you to get formative input on your design research, and to develop and improve your skills in oral and visual presentation. Additionally, the 'Public Presentation of Work' component integrated in the IRP Unit, which takes part in the public event will allow you to further expand their skills in oral and visual presentation by considering both specialised and non-specialised audience.

Summative assessment:

Summative assessment takes place at the end of each unit. These are formal examinations of each student's work that evaluates progress part way of their studies. Further details will be included in the unit descriptors, which are delivered to you upon registration.

Design Studio I: project presentation + portfolio;

Seminar I: Film (or intellectual equivalent) + logbook (process documentation);

Design Studio II: project presentation + portfolio + design brief;

Seminar II: Essay 2000 words

IRP:

The End of Term Final submission should include:
Submission by Project:

- 1) Design Components (these can vary in media, format and/or size depending on each project)
- 2) Portfolio of work: provides the critical intellectual and material context to the IRP, documentation of the development of the idea, from the original proposal to the documentation of the public presentation of the work. The portfolio should include relevant documentation of all research developed during the year, including research developed in the project and other units of study, insofar as relevant to the IRP proposal. In case of group submission, the portfolio of work should be individual and reflect individual trajectory as well as group process.
- 3) Written report of 3,000 words included in the Portfolio document. The report word count should be the same for individual and group submissions.

Submission by Thesis:

- 1) Portfolio of work: provides the critical intellectual and material context to the IRP, documentation of the development of the idea, from the original proposal to the documentation of the public presentation of the work. The portfolio should include relevant documentation of all research developed during the year, including research developed in the project and other units of study, insofar as relevant to the IRP proposal. In case of group submission, the portfolio of work should be individual and reflect individual trajectory as well as group process. The portfolio should be printed and submitted digitally in accordance with deadlines communicated by the programme.
- 2) Thesis of 10,000 words, submitted independently from the Portfolio. Thesis word count should be the same for individual and group submissions.

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 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.