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	2025-26

2.   Programme Philosophy

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

Working both individually and with your peers you will explore the ways in which research, design and futures methods and strategies can support more resilient and ethical futures. This will include consideration of complex systems and methods for envisioning future opportunities to create strategies that innovate commercial, environmental and social entrepreneurial initiatives and enterprises.

On the programme, you will have the opportunity to choose from college-wide electives. . These include, for example, units from the MDes (Master of Design), such as Design Resilience, Design Ethics, and Design Innovation, as well as units in teaching and learning from the MEd (Master of Education) and research methods units from the MRes (Master of Research). The electives are subject to availability.

The programme culminates in the design, planning and implementation of an independent research project. This project draws on the knowledge and skills you have developed on the programme, and it is expected that the outcomes of your independent research 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 reflect on the role of design within interdisciplinary contexts to address global environmental and societal challenges;
- To apply design and futures methods and strategies to develop resilient and ethical futures;
- To develop strategies and futures that identify the conditions for tackling wicked problems at different scales;
- To create design futures outcomes that innovate commercial, environmental 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 in an interdisciplinary context that addresses global environmental and societal challenges;

- Apply design, research, and futures methodologies and strategies to complex systems in order to support resilient and ethical futures;

- Apply design strategies and future thinking to tackle wicked problems;

- Propose design-led strategies that foster commercial, environmental 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 (one-year programme, 180 credits)

Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
Research Methodologies 15 credits	Envisioning Futures 15 credits	Independent Research Project: Realisation 60 credits
Complex Systems 15 credits	Independent Research Project: Proposal 15 credits	
College-wide Elective 15 credits	College-wide Elective 15 credits	
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. 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
Research Methodologies	1	15
Complex Systems	1	15
College-wide Electives	1	15
College-wide Electives	1	15
Envisioning Futures	2	15
College-wide Electives	2	15
College-wide Electives	2	15
Independent Research Project: Proposal	2	15
Independent Research Project: Realisation	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.

Research Methodologies

Introduces research and futures methodologies to support the imagination and realisation of alternative futures by engaging with diverse forms of knowledge, stakeholders and perspectives.

Complex Systems

Introduces the behaviour of systems, how elements interact and disrupt outcomes, and explores how designers can drive and manage change across complexity. .

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

College-wide 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 independent research project is broken down into one 15 credit unit and a final 60 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. Your project will be supported through 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. Some units require intense on-campus activity in blocks while others are delivered over several months. On-campus activity, 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 engage in collaboration in ways that are informed by your existing experiences of industry and practice. By participating in different activities, you will receive constructive feedback and learn to evaluate your work more effectively.

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 units 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 the choice of electives, managing the demands of multiple concurrent units, and working towards deadlines.

Throughout the programme there are opportunities to network with your peers from across the College.

The programme will include a publicly accessible output that will take the form of an exhibition, publication or event. This is where you will work with your peers to collaboratively present the work in progress of your independent research 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 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.