



1. General Information

Award	Programme Title	Duration	Mode of Study
MA (RCA)	Information Experience Design	2 Years	Full-time

Awarding Institution	Royal College of Art
Teaching Institution	Royal College of Art
Professional Accreditation	n/a
Qualifications Framework Level	Level 07
Credit Value	240 UK credits
Date of most recent validation	2015/16
Programme Specification Date	2016/2017

2. Philosophy of the Programme

“Design is about devising actions aimed at changing present situations into preferred situations” – Herb Simon, Nobel Laureate

The way we construct, access and interpret information is changing beyond recognition, from real-world wayfinding to augmented environments and the navigation of digital systems. A thorough understanding of the new communications landscape has never been more essential. We receive and transmit information through multiple devices and sources – sometimes simultaneously. The new communications designer must be able to understand, navigate, create and curate these experiences to bring meaning, clarity and understanding to an intended audience. The delivery of information is entirely integrated into where, how, why, when and with whom we experience it. IED graduates will be the directors, designers and architects of these new frontiers. Students will be supported in developing personal research interests through investigation and enquiry into projects that are well informed, culturally meaningful and relevant to the needs of society and industry.



Research is a core component of IED, and we explore established empirical forms of research, as well as innovating new methodologies. IED, like all programmes in the RCA, provides a balanced learning experience by placing equal emphasis on studio practice, theory and history. The programme curriculum is structured around practice, critique, history/theory, technical instruction/teaching and formal projects.

The ambition of the programme is that it becomes a global focal point for research and the place where the key ideas and future forms of the discipline are imagined. This is not an MA whose only function is to stand as a single discipline with a focus limited to predictable patterns or methodologies, nor is it designed to promote ambitions that are solely commercially prescribed.

3. Educational Aims of the Programme

IED has established aims that are at the heart of all its activity – the greater philosophical goals. Related to these are a range of skills and knowledge which we think you need to have to achieve these aims – these are the objectives. The objectives are the yardstick by which your work is judged as you progress through the programme. You may also have some of your own aims which the programme should help you define and, we hope, achieve.

Overall, the programme aims to develop your powers of analysis and critical judgement, so that you are able to make technological and/or aesthetic innovations. Underpinning this will be a well-developed philosophical understanding of the subject, your work and its context. You should be able to articulate your ideas and intentions, carrying them, with cultural sensitivity, to a wide audience.

Specifically, the programme aims to:

- Be the leading programme of its kind in the world;
- Produce confident practitioners with expert understanding of contemporary design practice relevant to the needs of society and industry, with a holistic understanding of the social and environmental implications of their actions;
- Create new academic relationships with others undertaking similar work, research and study;
- Maintain an atmosphere within which students feel free to experiment, to be innovative and provocative – to question existing practice, but to do so from the position of being well-informed;
- Help students develop an understanding of the fundamental importance of research and its relation to practice, and to make judgments that are critically informed both aesthetically and professionally;
- Encourage students to develop the social skills which are increasingly necessary in



- the contemporary communications industry;
- Prepare students technically for professional life by ensuring that they are fully acquainted with the processes of generation, reproduction and distribution; and to retain a balance between new and traditional media and processes.



4. Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programme

Able to:	A. Intellectual Engagement
A1.	Identify principles and methodologies - drawing from storytelling, problem solving, and technological innovation - that enhance how you meet contemporary information experience design challenges.
A2.	Demonstrate a clear understanding of how to create meaning across an experience through channels, movements and degrees of engagement.
A3.	Translate abstract issues into tangible design proposals, grounding projects with real-world social, cultural, technological, and economic issues.
A4.	Engage in intellectual and creative research in order to develop self-awareness, and to contextualise your work.
A5.	Demonstrate knowledge of current and previous work related to your approach, and where your work is positioned within a larger design context.
A6.	Demonstrate sensitivity to the social, cultural and ethical impact of different technologies on human behaviour and relationships.

Able to:	B. Technical Skills
B1.	Engage with emerging technologies from functional, aesthetic, commercial and critical perspectives.
B2.	Employ the necessary skills for communicating and testing ideas through appropriate media.
B3.	Identify and exploit the aesthetic and functional possibilities of different technologies.

Able to:	C. Professionalism
C1.	Develop an individual design approach that relates to the context (industry design studio, public service, research laboratory etc.) within which you wish to practice.
C2.	Develop imaginative and meaningful ways of involving people in the design process.



Able to:	C. Professionalism
C3.	Present work clearly and engagingly, in ways that are appropriate to the audience.
C4.	Demonstrate an ability to work as part of a team in different roles and contexts.
C5.	Synthesise your intellectual understanding with technical skills, so that you are articulate - both visually and verbally - in presenting this understanding.
C6.	Contribute new developments, confidently and imaginatively, in information experience design



5. Programme Structure and Curriculum

First Year

The first year will ground students in core theories and methods, Students are introduced to the philosophy and ethos of the programme through a series of seminars and presentations by staff and visiting speakers. Initial curricular project work is designed to enable students to benefit from the wide range of approaches and backgrounds represented within the programme; students also make presentations of their own work to each other and to tutors.

Following these first communal assignments, students are required to choose from a series of project options – electives – which cover a range of issues and approaches, managed and critiqued by specialist tutors. Each project will have been set for specific reasons, which will be clearly stated in the briefing document accompanying them and will provide the criteria by which your work on the project is assessed.

This first round of electives will normally occupy the whole of the first term, culminating in a series of crits and discussions early in the spring term. Following this, students will again be asked to choose from another series of projects, in consultation with their Personal Tutor.

This pattern of presentations, practical work and critiques leads to the formal Interim Examination in early May, which students must pass in order to enter the second year of the programme. Students are expected to begin planning the second phase of their programme immediately after the Examination, and to continue researching and writing their dissertation in Critical & Historical Studies – a College requirement – which must be submitted at the beginning of the second year (see below for details). Students in IED are encouraged to view this as an opportunity to research some aspect of information experience design in preparation for their studio work in Year Two.

Critical & Historical Studies

The RCA provides a unique environment for postgraduate art and design students to reflect upon their own practice, and to engage with students from their own and other disciplines. The role of Critical & Historical Studies (CHS) is to support the studio programmes in enabling these critical engagements to take place. The courses offered by CHS to first year studio-based MA students propose an intellectual framework within which they can begin to establish a coherent relationship between theory and practice.

In the autumn and spring terms there are a series of College-wide seminars and lectures. The autumn term series will relate to your particular discipline (though it is possible to



elect to join a series being offered to students on other programmes) whereas the spring term series will be more broad-based and cross-disciplinary in nature.

In the Spring and Summer terms, a CHS tutor will give individual tutorials to support the development of a dissertation which is submitted at the start of the second year. The dissertation should be between 6,000 – 10,000 words in length – this is a major piece of work and students will not be able to submit for the Final Examination until this is passed.

Second Year

During the second year students will continue to work on individual projects, which may include projects arising from first-year work or which make use of competitions and commissions. Many students also take the opportunity to work in collaboration with others, often from other areas of the College. These projects conclude with a publication and/or other output, and form the basis for the Work-in-Progress shows at the end of the Autumn term. Students will also be expected to take a full part in seminars, discussions and debates which will address issues relating to contemporary culture.

6. Learning and Teaching Methods

Tutorials

Students should expect to have an average of two in-depth tutorials each term, in which discussion will encompass all the student's current work and development. The tutorial is an opportunity to talk at length with the Personal Tutor, in private if necessary. The student is expected to talk about the work being done or planned, and the tutor will criticise or advise according to the nature of the work.

Several themes underlie most tutorials and will be returned to again and again, regardless of the nature of the work. The first relates to the intention of the work as a piece of communication – it's one of the tutor's concerns that the student's professional future is considered; they will relate the student's work to their own professional experience, and will criticise and advise based on that experience.

The student's relationship with the tutor is based on discussion and collaboration rather than authority. The tutor doesn't expect the student to follow their advice slavishly, or even expect the student to agree with their criticism. But tutors generally have a great deal of professional experience in their own fields so professional concerns will surface time after



time.

Tutors are also very familiar with the way in which personal work plays a valuable part in developing professional work – they too keep personal projects going in the background – so they encourage students to maintain this, and this work will be a part of tutorial discussions. Discussions here centre around whether the student’s individual interests and obsessions are being engaged – possibly a contentious issue when the purpose of applied work is to speak to an intended audience and not to be a soliloquy.

In our opinion, the individual vision of each student and the intensity with which it can be focused on a given problem without becoming over-indulgent, is very important – it is an essential ingredient, in our view, of work as a way of life rather than simply as an occupation.

Whilst a student might decide not to follow specific aspects of their tutor’s advice, the tutor will expect continuing progress from the student regarding the quantity and quality of the work produced. One thing we don’t accept is lack of commitment.

Projects

The first IED projects are designed to perform a specific function, and/or to focus on specific issues, and are usually set during the first two or three weeks of the Autumn term. In addition to providing debate on relevant issues, they are seen as an important opportunity to introduce new students to each other, and to begin to familiarise them with the culture and ethos of the College.

Projects will encourage students to work closely with current affairs, exploring political, environmental and inclusive design agendas by engaging in areas such as:

- Data analytics and visualisation;
- Visual ethnography and digital curation;
- Exhibition and media design for museums & galleries;
- Physical computing and computational thinking;
- Rapid prototyping of ideas, things and experiences;
- Technology-enhanced learning in the post-digital age;
- Research methods from journalism, design research and the sciences;
- Practice-based research in thinking-through-making; and
- A theoretical grounding in cognitive science, social science and information theory.



Elective Projects

These projects are designed to focus on particular issues or media, and – by limiting the number of students working on a specific project – to enable a deeper level of debate and critique. These elective projects are also likely to make use of the programme’s industrial/professional and academic contacts; a project may be built around an actual commission, or designed with a specific end use, such as an exhibition or publication.

Contemporary Practice Critical Forums

The curriculum for the first and second years will also include ‘Contemporary Practice Critical Forums’. These are student led discussion groups that will provide students with an opportunity to pursue their own interests as they relate to current environmental, social, political and cultural developments within Information Experience Design. Students are provided with limited financial support to convene the forums. Otherwise, it is left to them to curate and manage the programme.

The forums are designed to encourage students to demonstrate initiative and ambition. The discussions will be open to other RCA programmes and other London Art and Design Colleges. Dissemination is as an integral part of the process. As such, students are required to document each forum.

Workshops

Workshops are run by some of the programmes in the College and are generally meant for first-year students, although second-years are not excluded. Our own programme has offered, for example, information design, physical computing, and programming workshops; others are put on by Photography – for example, colour printing, lighting, and an introduction to moving image through video and film. Printmaking offers courses in screen printing, lithography and etching; and the multimedia studio runs short courses at different levels in all the major software, and this includes an introduction to the sound studio.

You will have to sign up for the courses that interest you, so keep an eye open for information on RCA email.

7. Assessment

General

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found in the College Regulations.

Your progress through the course is reviewed informally through tutorials on a continuous



basis. All MA students in the College have two formal examinations, Interim and Final.

Interim Examination

The Interim Examination is a formal examination of each student's work that evaluates progress part way through his or her studies. Each student will be asked to present and discuss work completed-to-date. Following completion of this examination, the Head of Programme drafts a brief report on the development of each students' work, attendance record, and application to their subject including any other relevant observations. This report goes to the Academic Board for Concessions & Discipline, with the recommendation that a student does or does not progress. If a student's Personal Tutor is not present at the Interim Examination, their report contributes to the overall assessment.

If at Interim Examination a student's work is considered to be a borderline fail, a programme of work may be set for further examination to enable progression. For more information, please see the RCA Regulations.

Final Examination

The Final Examination is the culmination of a MA degree. Each student's work is assessed by a panel of academics, and a sample of a cohort's work is reviewed by an External Examiner. If your Personal Tutor is not present at the Final Examination, their report contributes to the overall assessment.

The Final Examination is in two parts:

- a) A Viva-Voce, which takes place in the final term of a programme of study
- b) A School Examination Board, chaired by the Dean of School, will be held to recommend results to the Academic Board for Concessions & Discipline for ratification.

If at Final Examination a student's work is considered to be a borderline fail, the student may be required to retrieve the work within an academic term, or at a referral examination within 12 months. For more information, please see the RCA Regulations.

8. Admissions



Cross-College Requirements

Refer to the College Prospectus for details of cross-College entrance and portfolio requirements for the MA Entrance Examination.

Candidates for all MA courses are assessed on their existing qualities as demonstrated in their work and in their interview, as well as on their potential to benefit from the course and to achieve MA standards overall. The assessment will consider: creativity, imagination and innovation evident in the work; ability to articulate the intentions of the work; intellectual engagement in relevant areas; appropriate technical skills; overall interview performance, including oral use of English.

Programme-Specific Requirements

No specific technical skills are required by applicants; rather, students come from diverse backgrounds in design, science, fine art, engineering and technology, with a common critical interest in data, research, design and technology. The quality of the student will be demonstrated by the standard of a portfolio of work and qualified by the award of an Honour's degree in the subject or appropriate associated subjects. Candidates who do speak English as their first language are required to produce evidence that within the previous two years they have achieved at least 93 in the TOEFL internet test with an additional writing test score of TWE 24 or an IELTS exam score of 6.5 with 6 in writing.

9. Quality Indicators

Refer to the RCA Quality Handbook for more details of the College's quality and standards procedures.

- All academic programmes at the Royal College of Art are revalidated on a six-yearly cycle. Revalidations involve external subject experts and internal panel members appointed by the College's Academic Standards Committee (ASC).
- Programmes are required to submit an annual Review to ASC, the primary purpose of which is to evaluate the experience of students enrolled on both its MA and MPhil / PhD courses.
- External Examiners are appointed for a maximum of three years to ensure that:
 - the academic standard for each award is set and maintained at an appropriate level and that student performance is properly judged against this;
 - the standards of awards are comparable with those of other UK higher education institutions;
 - the process of assessment and examination is fair and has been fairly conducted.
- An Internal Moderator is appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of ASC to



ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms in place for the objective assessment of student work and to ensure comparability of examination practices between programmes within the College.

- Students have the opportunity to provide feedback through regular programme-level meetings (at least one each year considers the delivery of the MA programme and the External Examiner report); and through an annual College-wide MA student survey. A Student Representative Council brings forward issues from Course Forums and programme-level meetings to the President and Vice-President of the Students' Union who then, where appropriate, present these issues at College committees or to the Senior Management of the College.