



**1. General Information**

<b>Award</b>	<b>Programme Title</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Mode of Study</b>
MA (RCA)	Visual Communication	2 Years	Full-time

<b>Awarding Institution</b>	Royal College of Art
<b>Teaching Institution</b>	Royal College of Art
<b>Professional Accreditation</b>	N/A
<b>Qualifications Framework Level</b>	M
<b>Date of most recent validation</b>	2014/15
<b>Programme Specification Date</b>	2016/17

**2. Philosophy of the Programme**

The Visual Communication programme at the Royal College of Art has a long history and vision that has radically examined the place and importance of visual communication in relation to culture and society whilst highlighting the significance of an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. As noted by our students, the necessary critical discourse around what it means to be a ‘visual communicator’ today opens up possibilities about the process and contexts of communication; and in doing so shows that the designer and artist’s skill set is transferable beyond the confines of the purely visual.

The practice of visual communication in a diverse global context is a fundamental principle of our programme. We expect students to draw upon a wide range of material from the fields of art and design culture to support, develop and advance their practice. These include the histories and theories of art and design, artists’ and designers’ writings, cultural, literary and social theory, film, literature, philosophy and politics.



### 3. Educational Aims of the Programme

The Visual Communication programme aims to:

- be the leading programme of its kind in the world by building on our past legacy while actively contributing to contemporary creative contexts and the futures of visual communication practice
- provide a rich, broad and supportive working community within which students who have demonstrated outstanding ability in the field of communications can advance their career goals in a unique and stimulating academic context
- create a challenging environment within which those students can develop a deeper insight into the varied and complex issues that permeate the discipline, to enable them to match their personal interests, qualities and ambitions to professional practice
- maintain a working ethos 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;
- encourage students to explore the broader cultural context of their discipline; to understand and be responsive to the close inter-relationship between the fine and applied arts; and to make full use of the unique interdisciplinary potential of the College;
- promote the consideration of social, political or environmental issues and the potential of design to inform and raise awareness of such issues through soundly-conceived and innovative practice;
- 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; to encourage collaboration, and to be articulate and engaging in the presentation of their work and ideas;
- 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:	<b>A. Intellectual Engagement</b>
A1	Develop innovative responses to projects that question, challenge and further your understanding of creative practice
A2	Demonstrate an advanced understanding of the functional, aesthetic, historical and critical perspectives that inform and shape your work
A3	Evidence and articulate the intellectual processes involved in the production of your work
A4	Demonstrate relevance and depth in your practice in relation to contemporary contexts

Able to:	<b>B. Technical Skills</b>
B1	Produce work at an advanced level that integrates form and content whilst accommodating complexity, iteration and nuance
B2	Experiment with materials, media, processes and environments in an informed and innovative way
B3	Display a high level of the technical skill in the production, presentation and documentation of your work

Able to:	<b>C. Professionalism</b>
C1	Articulate your identity as a creative practitioner through reflecting on your practice in relationship to professional contexts
C2	Participate thoughtfully and professionally when working and collaborating with others
C3	Take a personal responsibility for your education by setting goals and managing your time and resources effectively



5. Programme Structure and Curriculum

First Year

In the first year, students undertake a two-term elective chosen from a range of electives offered by the three programmes in the School of Communication. Within Visual Communication, these electives form **practice frameworks** for thinking through creative practices in communication. These 'frameworks' are: Collaborate, Dismantle, Engage, Experience, Intuit and Narrate.

The electives are designed to focus on particular ways of working within communication practice. They are taught and delivered in small groups to enable a deeper level of debate and peer critique. Each elective is experienced through a series of integrated projects, events and talks delivered using interdisciplinary ideologies, and also make use of the programme's professional contacts. Hands-on workshops provide support with the methods and skills required for translating ideas into practice. Each elective has a 'published' end in the last week of the spring term – this takes the form of an exhibition, symposium, book launch or other appropriate output.

Alongside the electives, students choose **expanded practice** projects offered by each of the three pathways within the programme. Here you are expected to explore and advance their own individual practice through self-initiated and set projects, lectures and individual tutorials, supported by subject-specific and interdisciplinary workshops. This begins with a **Critical Position** presentation to fellow students and tutors during the first weeks of the autumn term where students outline their practice and identify goals for their two-years of study. This is supported by **visual research** sessions, which are a dynamic series of visualisation projects that explore materials/subject matter/working methods and platforms, while reconsidering the art of looking.

**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 you 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 you will not be able to submit for the Final Examination until you have passed this assessment.

### **Second Year**

In the second year, students are asked to reflect critically on the threads/themes present in their work, as well as to consider contexts of culture, ethics, history, industry, and society in relation to their practice.

Working with one of the three pathways and building on their expanded notion of practice from Year 1 alongside critical approaches arising from the dissertation, students are asked to develop a substantial body of work evidencing their rationale and priorities as a creative practitioner. Expanding on the threads/themes in their work, students are asked to consider commercial and non-commercial contexts within which they intend to locate their work and to shape it in relation to their intended audiences.

Students are expected to work independently and/or in collaboration with their peers, while setting their own aims, objectives and deadlines. Many students take the opportunity to work in collaboration with others, often from different areas of the College. The final body of work should evidence a considered process of selecting, testing and making use of appropriate materials and technical processes while taking advantage of the facilities available within the School and in the College. At examination points, projects must be concluded in an accessible way; this could be in any publishable form, presentation, performance or installation and/or other appropriate output.

## **6. Learning and Teaching Methods**

### **Personal Tutorials**

Each term you are expected to have a minimum of two in-depth tutorials with your personal tutor. Following these discussions both you and your tutor are required to complete a progress report and action a plan for progress. Your tutor will comment on your current/recent projects and give an overall report on your progress which references the criteria used in assessment. The progress report will then be given to you for your comments and should be completed by the end of each term. In the third term, first year students will complete a progress report after the Interim Examination. In term six, second year students will complete a progress report before their Final Examination. Students also have the opportunity to sign-up for a programme tutorial once a term with other tutors in the programme in addition to their own personal tutor.



**Seminars and Lectures**

The Visual Communication programme lecture series — The Bright Labyrinth Lectures — is a 16-part lecture series that is at the core of the Programme’s teaching delivery. The series is organised around four threads or themes that explore the contexts of visual communication: Channels and Devices; Sounds and Visions; Gestures and Transformations; Sites and Simulations. In practical terms, each lecture explores a situation relevant to communication practice and stresses the importance of research while offering a series of leads (images, a reading list and links to useful online resources) for students to pick up and follow in the contexts of their individual practice.

The Critical & Historical Studies lectures make a valuable contribution to the Visual Communication programme. The work that students undertake with CHS forms an integral and influential part of their studies at the Royal College of Art.

**Critical Forum**

The Critical Forum takes the form of cross-disciplinary tutorial groups for second year students. The Forum is designed to foster and develop the interdisciplinary work in the programme and inform the development and delivery of student-led learning. This initiative allows students to analyse and develop their practice in relation to other disciplines, and uses a student-led teaching strategy to develop a greater capacity for critical, constructive and independent thought. Key to the successful outcome of the forum is that each year students agree (together with staff) a group structure and develop the aims and objectives of the forum meetings.

**Workshops**

The programme offers a range of skills-based and knowledge-based workshops. These include letterpress, programming for apps, programming for the web, risograph, processing and coding workshops. In addition, each pathway offers a chance to sign up for a term-long workshop such as typeface design, graphic narrativity or video stories. Other programmes offer College-wide workshops - examples of the workshops offered in recent years include; Photography - colour printing and lighting workshops; Moving Image Studio - an introduction to moving image production; Printmaking - screen printing, lithography and etching. The College has run short courses at different levels in the major software. You will have to sign up for the workshops that interest you, so keep an eye open for information via email.

**Special Interest Groups (SIGs)**



Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are subject-specific groups offered by each of the pathways, which consist primarily of second year students. These groups meet three times a term and are drawn together by a combined purpose to interrogate and advance an understanding of the subjects of visual communication. This can be through individual projects or group projects.

**Professional Practice**

In an increasingly complex world, it is more pressing than ever that our graduates emerge with an advanced understanding of professional world demands, parameters and opportunities. Professional development within the Visual Communication programme is both an explicit series of events and an embedded activity that explores conventional and non-conventional modes of communication practice.

There is a regular monthly series (called Work/Play) of professional practice workshops, talks, interviews and events that acquaint students with the most current and internationally relevant range of professional options. Additionally, workshops or short seminars focus on a range of skill and knowledge development: e.g. presentation skills, funding and grant applications, portfolio reviews, film festival applications, sound exhibiting, gallery residencies, illustration agents, self-publishing, teaching opportunities, etc.

**7. Assessment**

**General**

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

**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.



Students are required to show work from their chosen electives and personal projects either completed or in progress. We expect all the work you show at this examination to display a significant depth of enquiry supported by sketch books, layouts or similar evidence of your work process. **You should discuss your plans for the examination with your Personal Tutor and prepare a PDF in advance for your group rehearsal ahead of the exams.** The presentation of this work is in itself an assessable element, so prepare your work well, and consider how you speak about it. It's a good idea to prepare a brief written statement in support of your work. A progress report will be required after this examination and a short report will be included on your examination performance in the examination document.

### **CHS Dissertation: First Text**

For Interim Examination you are required to submit a piece of written work of no less than 1,000 words (known as a First Text) together with a dissertation bibliography by a date given to you by the CHS programme. Details of this submission will be given to you in the autumn term. You cannot proceed to the second year without completing this submission. If you pass the Interim Examination, you can continue to the second year of the programme.

### **Referral**

If you fail the Interim Examination, you may have the opportunity to submit new work or you may be required to undertake a set programme of work. This programme – called a referral project – is extremely important; it gives you the opportunity to show that you are capable of progressing to the far more ambitious and demanding work of the second year. If you receive a referral project you should set aside all other work and concentrate on it; you should consult your tutor regularly and make sure that you meet the deadline for completion – in 2013/14 the date for re-submission will be at the end of June.

**If you have been ill**, or your work has been affected by some other adverse circumstance, you should let your Head of Programme or Senior Tutor know so that the panel can take this into account. You will need to provide some evidence of your difficulty, for example, a doctor's certificate if the problem has been illness. The examiners may decide to judge the work you have done or ask you to resubmit work.

Refer to the Regulations for more information, or seek advice from the Head of Programme, your Personal Tutor or the Students' Union.

### **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.

The examination normally takes half an hour. You must attend in person and a schedule with your appointed examination date, time and location will be circulated in advance. You will be required to speak about your work for a minimum of 15 minutes un-interrupted and then face questioning from the exam board. You will need to prepare well, and present your work succinctly.

Generally, students show several projects (four to five), but this is not a hard and fast rule. We expect all the work you show at this examination to display a significant depth of enquiry – and with this in mind, a student may choose to concentrate on one major piece or set of work. Your final examination presentation must include any work you aim to show at your final degree show. **You should discuss your examination plans and rehearse your final examination presentation with your Personal Tutor well in advance of the examination.**

**If you fail the Final Examination**, you may be allowed to resubmit (at a time, within a year, according to the decision of the Examination Board). However, failure at this stage is rare, and you will have received adequate warning that it might be a possibility.

**If you have been ill**, or your work has been affected by some other adverse circumstance, you should let your Head of Programme or Personal Tutor know so that the panel can take this into account. You will need to provide some evidence of your difficulty, for example a doctor's certificate if you have been ill.

Refer to the Regulations for more information, or seek advice from the Head of Programme, your Personal Tutor or the Students' Union.



## 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 programme 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

You will normally have a BA, or an equivalent overseas qualification or sufficient work experience to demonstrate the appropriate intellectual, creative and personal qualities to engage with the demands of the programme.

Students come from a wide range of backgrounds. While the majority still come directly from first-degree programmes in graphic design, illustration, moving image and multimedia, students have also joined the course from backgrounds as diverse as fine art, journalism, architecture and textiles.

#### **Portfolio:**

All candidates are required to submit an online portfolio of work to be assessed by the programme's senior staff team and student representatives.

Candidates should create an online portfolio that best reflects their abilities, experience and interests. The portfolio must follow College guidelines for uploading work such as using the College application site and giving a brief description for each piece of work. Links to personal websites or dropbox folders are not acceptable.

Candidates are selected on the basis of a body of work that demonstrates an advanced understanding of the subject and sufficient technical skill to realise intentions, evidence of commitment to the subject, intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, the ability to collaborate, to engage in debate and respond to criticism, and the ability to engage in sustained and consistent study. **If you are invited for an interview:** You should bring with you a portfolio containing a selection of your online submission in its finished physical form, as well as your most recent work or work in progress, together with supporting research material. It is useful to include a combination of self-initiated work as well as



project and professional work. Candidates who do not 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, 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.