



Royal College of Art

Programme Specification

1. General Information

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

Awarding Institution	Royal College of Art
Teaching Institution	Royal College of Art
Professional Accreditation	N/A
Qualifications Framework Level	7
Date of most recent validation	2017
Programme Specification Date	2018/19

2. Philosophy of the Programme

The Visual Communication programme at the Royal College of Art has a long history of critically examining the place and importance of visual communication in relation to culture and society within an interdisciplinary environment. As noted by our students, 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 sole confines of the visual and also includes sound, code, text, space, event and experience.

Situating practice within a global context is a guiding principle of our programme across the three pathways of Experimental Communication, Graphic Design and Illustration. We expect our 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, politics, and technology.

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 legacy while actively contributing to contemporary creative contexts and the futures of 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 students can develop a deeper insight into the varied 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;
- sustain a learning environment that rewards experimentation, and that encourages students to situate their innovations and provocations within an intellectual and cultural context;
- 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 context of the College;
- 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; understand and anticipate the needs of their intended audience;
- 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.
- 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

4. Intended Learning Outcomes of the Programme

Able to:	A. Intellectual Engagement
A1.	Evidence and articulate the intellectual processes involved in the production and articulation of your work
A2.	Demonstrate an advanced understanding of the functional, aesthetic, historical and critical perspectives that inform and shape your work
A3.	Demonstrate relevance and depth in your practice in relation to contemporary contexts and audiences
A4.	Develop innovative responses to projects that question, challenge and further your understanding of creative practice

Able to:	B. Technical Skills
B1.	Critically reflect on and evidence a working knowledge of pre-production and production methods relevant to the development of your work
B2.	Experiment with materials, media, processes and environments in an informed and innovative way
B3.	Produce work that demonstrates an understanding of materials and aesthetic judgment in relation to audience and context
B4.	Display a high level of the technical skill in the production, presentation and documentation of your work
B5.	Produce work at an advanced level that integrates form and content whilst accommodating complexity, iteration and nuance

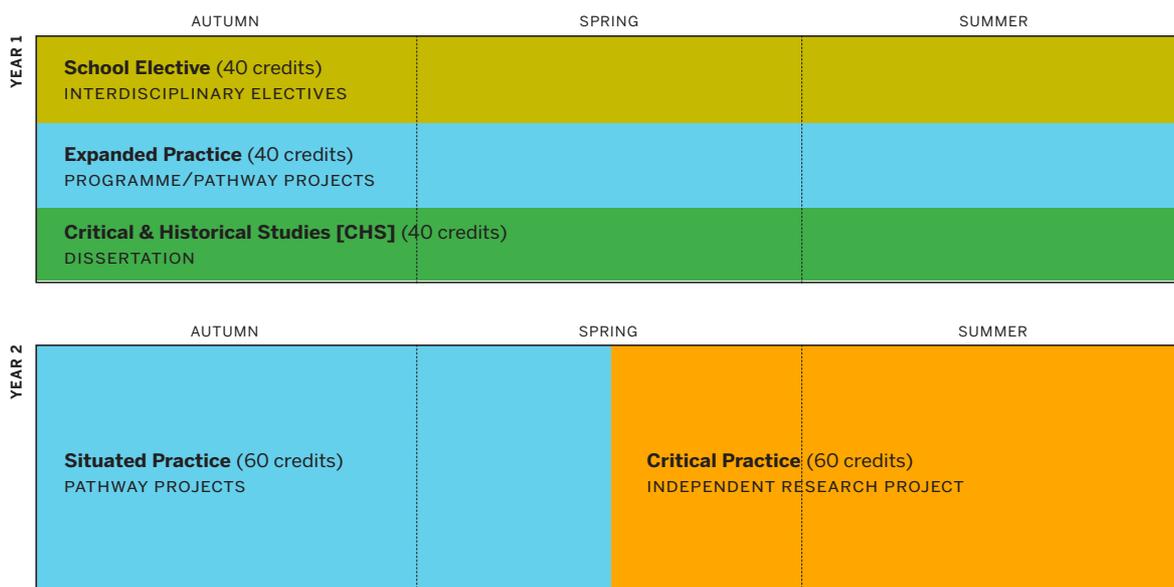
Able to:	C. Professional Development
C1.	Participate thoughtfully and professionally when working and collaborating with others
C2.	Demonstrate an ability to critically reflect on your own and other's work and be able to accept and give constructive criticism
C3.	Articulate your identity as a creative practitioner through reflecting on your practice in relationship to appropriate professional contexts
C4.	Take a personal responsibility for your education by setting goals, managing your time and resources effectively and by meeting deadlines
C5.	Develop an ethical, imaginative and proactive approach to your practice including working with clients, on commissions and in collaborative partnerships
C6.	Communicate and present your work using traditional or contemporary media, and/or public facing events to a relevant audience outside of the College environment

5. Programme Structure and Curriculum

Programme Units and Credit Ratings

- School Elective, 40 credits
- Expanded Practice, 40 credits
- Critical and Historical Studies (CHS), 40 credits
- Situated Practice, 60 credits
- Critical Practice (Independent Research Project), 60 credits

Programme Curriculum Map



6. Learning and Teaching Methods

Projects

Projects are the core learning and teaching element of the programme around which tutorials, workshops, crits, group debates and technical instruction take place. Projects can vary in length and outcome they can explore a range of issues related to the ideas and debates surfacing from within the student group.

In the first year, projects in all three Visual Communication pathways are strongly focused on expanded modes of creative practice, experimentation with materials and techniques and the production of work in relation to an intended audience and context. Conscious of the diverse perspectives within our subject, the projects represent a pluralistic and expanded approach to Visual Communication subject areas.

Typically, in the first year, the projects run for six weeks each alongside electives. In the third term there are occasional live projects and commissions in collaboration with other programmes and/or external collaborators. Some projects may be 'real world' projects giving the opportunity to locate work in a specific context. They may be carried out with

commercial and/or non-profit organisations considered 'friends' of the School or College, who contribute their time, expertise or financial support. Projects can of course be structured to suit the ambitions of an individual student or a collaborative group.

In the second year, students have opportunity to author their own projects in consultation with the Head of Programme and their personal tutor.

Tutorials

There are three kinds of tutorials: personal, group and programme.

Each term students have two in-depth 1-hour tutorials with their personal tutor to discuss their current work and development. Several themes underlie most tutorials and will be returned to. 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. The student's relationship with the tutor is based on discussion and collaboration rather than authority. Tutors generally have a great deal of expertise in their field so professional concerns are an area of focus.

In advance of the tutorial, students are expected to fill in a 'self-analysis form', which is a critical self-reflection of their progress and a place to document any challenges or issues they are facing. Following the tutorials both students and tutor are required to complete a progress report and action a plan for progress. The tutor will comment on current projects and give an overall report on the student's progress, which references the criteria used in assessment. The progress report is given to students for their 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.

Once a term, students meet together in a group with their tutor to present work in progress, discuss and support each other. In addition, students also have the opportunity to sign-up for a 45-minute programme tutorial once a term with other tutors in the programme in addition to their own personal tutor.

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 you to pick up and follow in the context of your individual practice.

In addition, the programme organizes occasional expert lectures from leading practitioners in the field.

Workshops

The programme offers a range of skills-based and knowledge-based workshops. These include letterpress, programming for apps and the web, risograph, processing and coding, and bookbinding workshops. In addition, each pathway offers a chance to sign up for a term-long workshop such as digital aesthetics, graphic narrativity and typeface design.

Also on offer are College-wide workshops — examples of the workshops offered in recent years include: Photography - colour printing and lighting workshops; Moving Image - an introduction to moving image production; Printmaking - screen printing, lithography and etching.

The College runs short workshops at different levels in major software such as Adobe CC, Arduino, Cinema 4D, Processing, Rhino, etc.

Critical Forum

The Critical Forum takes the form of inter-disciplinary tutorial groups for second year students in both Situated Practice and Critical Practice units.

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 fortnightly forum meetings.

Special Interest Groups

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are subject-specific groups offered by each of the pathways, which consist of second year students. These groups meet weekly in the Autumn and Spring terms and are drawn together by a combined purpose to interrogate and advance an understanding of the subject expertise of visual communication. This can be through individual projects or group projects and forms a key part of the student's second year.

Current SIGs are: DRAW (Illustration pathway), New Genres (Graphic Design pathway), Material/Media (Experimental Communication pathway).

7. Assessment

General

Regulations for assessment and progression can be found in the College Regulations, sections 2.7 – 2.10.

Interim Examination

At the Interim Examination in the Summer Term, students are asked to present work that they have done during their first year to a panel that consists of the Head of Programme and a Senior Tutor, together with their Personal Tutor. The examination normally takes half an hour and students need to attend in person. A schedule with the appointed examination date, time and location is circulated in advance.

At the exam, students are asked to speak about their work for a minimum of 15 minutes uninterrupted. Further to this the exam panel will ask questions regarding the students' choice of projects, work and process. Students are required to show completed work from the School Elective and Expanded Practice projects. We expect all the work shown at the examination to display a significant depth of enquiry supported by sketchbooks, layouts or similar evidence of work process. Students discuss their plans for the examination with their Personal Tutor and prepare a PDF in advance for their group rehearsal ahead of the exams.

The presentation of this work is in itself an assessable element. Students are required prepare their work, consider how they speak about it, and present a brief written statement in support of the work. Exam rehearsals are conducted a week in advance of the exams within tutor groups. A progress report is required after this examination and a short report is included on the student's performance in the examination form.

Referral

If students fail the Interim Examination, they may have the opportunity to submit new work or they may be required to undertake a set programme of work. This programme – called a referral project – is extremely important; it gives students the opportunity to show that they are capable of progressing to the far more ambitious and demanding work of the second year. If students receive a referral project, they should set aside all other work and concentrate on it; they are required to consult their tutor regularly and make sure that they meet the deadline for completion – in 2017/18 the date for re-submission will be in end June.

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

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

Final Examination

At the Final Examination, students present the work that they have completed during their second year to a panel which consists of the Head of Programme, a Senior Tutor, their Personal Tutor and possibly one other tutor. There are two other members of the Final Examination Board – the External Examiner and the Internal Moderator. External Examiners are chosen by the programme (subject to approval by the College) because they are eminent in the field of visual communication, and understand the standards that should be achieved at this level of study.

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

Generally, students show work completed in their Situated Practice and their Critical Practice units. We expect all the work shown at this examination to display a significant depth of enquiry – and with this in mind, a student may choose to focus on one major piece or series of projects under one theme or thread. The final examination presentation must include any work that will be shown at the final degree show. Students should discuss their examination plans and rehearse their final examination presentation with their Personal Tutor well in advance of the examination.

If s/he fails the Final Examination, s/he 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 s/he will have received adequate warning that it might be a possibility.

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

Refer to the Regulations for more information, or seek advice from the Head of Programme, 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

Students 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.

Our 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, literature, architecture, product 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 invited for an interview, students should bring with a portfolio containing a selection of their online submission in its finished physical form, as well as their 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.