Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

Admissions Policy 2027/28

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Introduction

1. The Royal College of Art ("RCA" or "College") is committed to creating and supporting a community which is diverse, multicultural and inclusive for all

students and staff. Our shared goal is ensuring that the College environment encourages all members of our community to teach, learn, work and practise in a shared spirit of inclusivity and cultural exchange. The Royal College of Art aims to achieve international standards of excellence in the postgraduate and pre- /mid professional education of artists and designers and related practitioners. It aims to achieve these through the quality of its teaching, research and practice and through its relationship with the institutions, industries and technologies associated with the disciplines of art and design.

2. This policy applies for all applications to programmes of postgraduate study at the RCA. It outlines the commitments made by the College in ensuring that its admissions procedures are fair, transparent and equitable.

3. The admission of each student to the RCA shall be based on clearly published criteria for entry. The entry criteria shall be defined with a view to ensuring that there is a reasonable likelihood for each admitted student that they are able to fulfil the objectives of the programme and achieve the standard required for the academic award.

4. Admission to the RCA is based on clearly published entry criteria. Meeting the minimum entry criteria does not guarantee an offer of a place. Where the number of suitable applicants exceeds the number of places available, offers will be made in accordance with the selection and allocation arrangements set out in this Policy.

5. In addition to its legal obligations under the Equality Act 2010, the RCA is committed to the recruitment of students with suitable academic ability and potential, irrespective of their social, cultural and economic background.

6. The RCA is committed to equity of treatment for all of its applicants, and applications are considered on their individual merits. Admission to a programme of study offered by the RCA is based solely on information provided to the College during the application process.

7. The RCA is committed to fair, transparent and consistent admissions practices and aims to offer clear advice and guidance to prospective applicants to enable them to make informed choices.

8. This policy is consistent with good admissions practice in higher education, as defined in the Office for Students' guidance on fair admissions and recruitment 2020.

9. Applicants should be aware that, under the Data Protection Act, the RCA is only able to speak directly with the applicant themselves, unless the College has been provided with verifiable, written permission from the applicant that they give permission for the College to speak to a representative.

Roles and Responsibilities

10. For each programme of study, Admissions Tutors shall have delegated authority (from the Dean of School, or equivalent) to make recommendations on the suitability of applications to their programme. Admissions Tutors may further delegate that responsibility to Heads of Programme or other appropriately trained staff within the School or relevant academic department. Authorised staff will assess each candidate's suitability for a programme of study, in accordance with the published admissions criteria for that Programme, and make recommendations to the Registry Operations team on offers to be made to applicants. For research programmes, the Head of Research Programmes shall also be responsible for making final recommendations to the Registry Operations team on whether appropriate facilities and supervision are available to enable the student to satisfactorily complete their intended programme of research.

11. The Registry team shall communicate all admission decisions to applicants; Heads of Programmes and other academic colleagues shall not notify applicants of their decisions.

12. It is the responsibility of the Admissions Tutors to ensure that members of Programme Teams with authority to assess applicants are aware of their rights and responsibilities. The Admissions Tutors shall have the final say in the selection of candidates to be recommended to Registry Operations for the offer of a place.

13. Admissions Tutors, Heads of Programme, and all colleagues with delegated authority to review and assess applications, shall be provided with regular training to ensure decisions comply with this Policy and other related policies.

Academic Entry Criteria

14. The RCA publishes entry criteria on its website. These may be reproduced in external sources of information, advice and guidance.

15. The RCA aims to ensure that its published information on admissions and any available scholarships is accurate, clear and unambiguous, and is published within a timeframe to enable applicants to make a considered decision on whether to apply to study on a programme offered by the College. The College commits to complying with the Competition and Markets Authority Consumer Law Advice for Providers and Students of Higher Education. As such, the College commits to avoiding altering admissions criteria during the course of the application cycle.

16. The published entry requirements reflect a typical offer; however, meeting or being predicted to meet these requirements does not guarantee an offer.

17. Applicants considering postgraduate taught programmes are expected to have obtained an undergraduate degree at the point of enrolment to the programme at the RCA; the typical minimum entry requirement is a lower second class degree (2:2) or equivalent, or alternatively relevant, equivalent professional practice. Individual programmes may specify higher entry requirements with the approval of the Academic Standards Committee (ASC); these will be published on the College's website. The College recognises as an equivalent qualification any degree, diploma, certificate or other evidence of formal qualification awarded by a university or other higher education establishment, where the award is made following the successful completion of a programme of at least three years study, the programme of study being open as a general rule, only to persons holding a certificate awarded on the successful completion of a full course of upper secondary education. Where an equivalency is not clear, enquiries should be directed to the RCA Registry using the applicant portal.

18. Applicants considering postgraduate research (PGR) programmes are typically expected to have obtained an undergraduate degree (typically a 2:1). In addition, they will typically be expected to have achieved a taught Masters degree in a relevant subject, typically at Merit or higher, or equivalent.

19. Exceptionally, other qualifications may be approved, providing that the Academic Board for Concessions & Discipline ("ABCD") is satisfied that the applicant has the ability to pursue the programme of study successfully.

20. The Quality Assurance Agency for the UK is responsible for safeguarding the quality and standards of degree programmes across the UK. The RCA does not explicitly discriminate between UK degrees awarded a similar classification. However, where similar regulatory institutional standards are not in place for other countries, the College reserves the right to differentiate between different institutions of that country. The College may do this through the use of research, market intelligence and/or the performance of existing students.

Subject Specific Requirements

21. Subject specific requirements for each programme are clearly listed on the College website. If a degree in a specific subject or field is listed as required, an application will not be considered if the student has not completed, and is not pending completion of, that award. The RCA reserves the right to make final decisions regarding subject-specific requirements.

English Language Requirements

22. Applicants shall be expected to demonstrate that they have a reasonable level of proficiency in the English language. The College website lists the

specific English language requirement for each programme and what is accepted as meeting this requirement.

23. Candidates who are not nationals of majority English-speaking countries will be required to provide evidence that, within the two years prior to enrolment, they have achieved the required English language level with an accepted English language test, such as IELTS. Selected alternative tests with equivalent scores are accepted; these are published on the College website.

24. Candidates who are nationals of English-speaking countries, as defined by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI), are exempt from providing evidence of English language proficiency.

25. Applicants who have been awarded a UK degree with a classification of 2:1 or above within the last five years are also exempt from submitting an English language test. Applicants who have obtained a classification below a 2:1 are required to provide evidence of English language proficiency.

26. Applicants who have completed a degree with a UK university outside the UK are exempt from providing an English language test if:
    a. the language of instruction is evidenced as English;
    b. the degree certificate is issued by the UK awarding body and;
    c. the classification achieved is a 2:1 or above.

27. Applicants who have studied outside the UK in a non-English-speaking country, including those enrolled in joint programmes with non-UK English speaking universities, will be required to provide evidence of English language proficiency, even where the course was delivered in English.

28. The Admissions and Enrolment Manager may consider concessions to the above requirements where applicants make a clear case that they have the knowledge of English language required to successfully complete the programme. All concessions relating to English language ability shall be reported to the Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline. No concessions shall be applied where doing so would breach UK student visa regulations. The RCA is required to comply with UKVI requirements when issuing Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) documentation. Should the English language requirements change as a result of UK Government or UKVI policy updates, the RCA will implement those changes accordingly. This may result in applicants being required to provide additional documentation or evidence to demonstrate that they meet the relevant English language requirements before a CAS can be issued.

Application Procedure

29. Applications to all degree programmes of the RCA must be submitted via the

College's online admissions portal. The application process includes completion of an online application form and submission of a digital portfolio where applicable.

30. Applicants may register on the portal only once. The creation of multiple accounts is strictly prohibited and may result in the rejection of all applications submitted by the applicant.

31. Applicants may not apply for the same programme more than once within a single admissions cycle. A maximum of two applications for different programmes may be submitted per admissions cycle.

32. A separate portfolio submission is required for each programme application.

33. Where an application is unsuccessful, the College reserves the right to refer the application for consideration to an alternative suitable programme.

34. The RCA normally permits applications to be submitted only in the admissions cycle immediately preceding the intended date of entry. The College publishes annually the deadlines ("application deadline dates") by which applications should be submitted to ensure consideration for that cycle. Following these deadlines, the College reserves the right to determine that individual programmes are full, to continue accepting applications up until the first day of term.

35. Applicants should be aware that, in addition to general application deadlines, there may be additional funding deadlines for both RCA and external grants, scholarships and other funding options.

Application Assessment

36. The RCA considers all aspects of each application in coming to a decision on whether or not to offer the applicant a place on one of its programmes. This may include some or all of the following elements:
    a. Predicted or achieved performance in undergraduate and / or postgraduate qualifications;
    b. A personal statement and application video;
    c. A research proposal;
    d. Up to two references;
    e. Relevant work experience;
    f. Evidence of English language proficiency;
    g. Performance at interview;
    h. Quality of portfolio;
    i. The academic and geo-demographic context in which qualifications have been achieved, or are being completed;
    j. Extenuating circumstances.

37. The RCA may require that applicants supply additional information or participate in an interview as part of the selection process, in addition to their application forms. For programmes where this is a requirement, this will be clearly indicated on the College website.

38. Programmes of the RCA require students to submit a portfolio for consideration as part of the admissions process. Detailed information on what any portfolio should contain, and the criteria which will be used in assessing the portfolio, shall be made available via the College website.

39. As PGR programmes require advanced research into very specific academic fields, successful applicants will be those whose proposed area of research aligns with the stated research expertise and themes of the relevant School or Research Centres and could be appropriately supervised according to the College's current academic expertise and supervisor availability. The appointment of any supervisor is at the College's discretion.

Interviews

40. Programmes of the RCA may use interviews as part of the selection process. Any interview shall normally be conducted using video conferencing with one or two designated nominees of the Admissions Tutor. Any recommendation to offer a place may only be made by a properly authorised and trained member of the School after having reviewed application forms, any interview records and the applicant portfolio. The outcome, including the result of any interview or portfolio review, will be communicated through the applicant portal. Applicants should not rely on verbal discussions or informal indications of an outcome, as only decisions published through the applicant portal constitute an official decision.

41. Some programmes may elect to interview some applicants, while making final admission decisions to others who have not been interviewed. For example, an interview may be needed to enable decisions to be made for applicants who have not demonstrably met all of the criteria for admission from the information submitted as part of the application process. Postgraduate Research programmes shall normally interview any applicant before deciding whether to make an offer of a place.

42. Invitations to interview should give applicants sufficient time to prepare for the interview, shall make clear that the applicant is invited to attend a formal interview as part of the selection process, and shall include clear information on what the applicant should prepare and/or provide ahead of the interview.

Offers

43. Each application is scored against the entry criteria, with an overall

assessment as to whether or not the applicant would be suitable for the programme. Where there are a greater number of suitable applicants than there are places available on a particular programme, places will be awarded to those applicants who achieve the highest score. Where multiple applicants achieve the same score, and there are insufficient places available for all those applicants, the College will apply a consistent and documented approach to resolving the tie, in accordance with the published selection criteria for the programme.

44. Where an offer is made, any conditions associated with that offer shall be spelt out clearly in the offer notification email. Every condition must be met one month prior to the start date of the programme; where any condition of the offer is not met one month prior to the start date of the programme then the offer will normally be withdrawn. In such circumstances the applicant will need to re-apply in order to be considered for a future place on the programme. Applicants are deemed to accept and agree to the specified mode of study (full-time, part-time, online, on-campus, or blended) upon acceptance of their offer. Any subsequent request to change the mode of study will be permitted only in exceptional circumstances and must be approved by both the Head of Programme and the Admissions and Enrolment Manager.

45. The RCA reserves the right to withdraw any offer that it issues in error. In such circumstances, it will write to the applicant to apologise formally and explain the nature of the error and propose appropriate measures to mitigate the impact to the applicant.

46. Successful applicants must meet all of their offer conditions in sufficient time to complete registration by the date published by the RCA. This includes obtaining a Student Route visa where required. International students should be aware that applications submitted less than one month prior to the start date of the programme are unlikely to enable them to complete the necessary steps to obtain a Student Route visa before the registration date and may therefore not be considered. Applicants should allow sufficient time to meet all entry requirements, including receiving their final qualification results and obtaining a visa where required.

Fee Status

47. Applicants whose fee status is listed as “Undetermined” have three weeks from the date of receiving their offer to submit a Fee Status Questionnaire, should they believe they are eligible for Home fee status. Further information is available on the UKCISA website. If the questionnaire is not submitted within this five-week period, the applicant’s fee status will be updated to Overseas, unless the RCA agrees to an extension in appropriate circumstances. The RCA reserves the right to assess and determine an applicant’s fee status and to classify individuals accordingly based on UKCISA guidelines.

48. Fee status assessments will only be undertaken prior to the commencement of a student's programme as part of the admissions and enrolment process. The Royal College of Art will not conduct fee status reassessments after a student has enrolled, during their period of study, or following the completion of enrolment. Once enrolment has been completed, a student's fee status is considered final and will not be reviewed or amended.

49. In order to accept an offer, an applicant must complete and return all required acceptance documentation associated with the offer. Offered applicants must also pay a deposit in order to secure their place. The deposit amount will be quoted in the offer notification email and counts towards the student's tuition fee balance. Applicants must complete their acceptance by submitting the required acceptance documents and making the deposit payment within three weeks of the date of the offer. The deposit is non-refundable, unless an applicant exercises their right to cancel within 14 days of accepting their offer.

50. Applicants for any programme at the College shall not be permitted to defer entry. Offered applicants wishing to enrol the following year must decline their offer and reapply the following year. An applicant's success in gaining an offer in one academic year is not a guarantee of successful application in subsequent years.

51. The RCA reserves the right to withdraw or rescind an offer where an applicant is unable to meet the conditions of their offer, provides information that is found to be inaccurate or misleading, fails to satisfy applicable immigration or enrolment requirements, or where a material change in circumstances affects their eligibility for admission. Each case will be considered on its individual merits and in accordance with the RCA's admissions policies and procedures.

Fraud and Plagiarism

52. The portfolio and any other materials submitted as part of an application must be the applicant's own work. The RCA may use similarity-detection software to assess the originality of submitted work.

53. Any suspected irregularities in the personal statement or other materials submitted as part of an application will be investigated by the Registry Operations team. The applicant will be informed of the nature of the concerns and the evidence to be considered as part of the investigation and given a reasonable opportunity to make representations before a decision is reached. Any investigation and subsequent action will be undertaken in accordance with the RCA's relevant policies and procedures.

54. The RCA reserves the right to reject any application, or withdraw an offer, where any part of the application is identified as having been plagiarised or is otherwise fraudulent.

Disclosure of Criminal Convictions

55. The RCA recognises its duty to protect the College community and the communities around it. Information about an applicant's relevant unspent criminal convictions may need to be considered when determining their suitability for admission. Applicants are required to disclose relevant unspent convictions in accordance with the requirements set out in this Policy.

56. For programmes involving activities with children or adults at risk, applicants may be required to undergo an appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check where the programme and associated activities meet the relevant eligibility requirements. Applicants will be informed of any applicable disclosure requirements and provided with guidance by the Registry. Any requirement to disclose criminal convictions or other relevant information must comply with applicable legislation and DBS filtering rules.

57. Applicants with declared criminal convictions are initially assessed on standard academic and non-academic selection criteria. If it is recommended that an offer be made, further investigation of the relevance of the criminal conviction(s) will be carried out before the final decision is made.

Mitigating Circumstances

58. The RCA recognises that circumstances beyond an applicant's control, such as illness or bereavement, may have adversely affected their academic performance. Applicants may provide relevant information about such circumstances as part of their application. Where appropriate, applicants are encouraged to explain any steps taken to address the impact of those circumstances, including any engagement with the relevant examination body.

Disabled Applicants

59. The RCA is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Applications from disabled applicants will be considered on the basis of academic merit and potential for their chosen programme. Any support needs or required adjustments shall be considered independently of the admissions decision. Applicants who wish to explain how a disability has affected their previous academic performance may provide relevant information as part of their application. The Student Success team may provide applicants with information, advice and guidance on disability support available during the admissions process and after registration.

60. The RCA is committed to ensuring fair treatment of all applicants, including disabled applicants. The College shall, in consultation with the applicant,

make reasonable adjustments during the application process to ensure that disabled applicants are treated no less favourably than other applicants. Where there is disagreement between an applicant and the RCA regarding a specific adjustment, the matter shall be reviewed by the Registrar in consultation with the Student Success Team, taking account of the applicant's individual circumstances and the RCA's legal obligations.

61. The RCA is committed to providing an inclusive and accessible environment. For information on how the RCA can support your studies, please visit the Disability Support page on our website. (https://www.rca.ac.uk/study/the-rca-experience/disability-support/)

Age Requirement

62. The minimum age for admission to the RCA is normally 17 years. Applicants must turn 18 by the end of the first term of their programme. Applicants must also meet the published entry requirements for their chosen programme and demonstrate the academic potential required for successful postgraduate study. Applicants who are under 18 at the start of their programme will be subject to the RCA's separate arrangements for under-18 students, including any applicable safeguarding and support measures.

63. Certain programmes may have additional age or eligibility requirements arising from applicable legislation, professional requirements or the nature of the activities involved, including where a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check is required. Details of any such requirements will be published on the RCA website, and further guidance is available from the Registry.

Feedback on Unsuccessful Applications

64. The RCA receives high numbers of applications to its programmes and is unable to offer feedback on unsuccessful applications.

Appeals

65. An applicant may appeal a decision to reject an application where they consider that:
    a. Mitigating circumstances have not been taken into account;
    b. The College has made an administrative error;
    c. The provisions of this Policy have not been followed.

66. Appeals against the academic judgement of the College will not be considered.

67. Any appeal must be submitted within 28 days of notification of the decision to reject the application. Appeals must be made in writing via the applicant portal to the Academic Registrar, and should explain the grounds of appeal, with supporting evidence as appropriate.

68. The Admissions and Enrolment Manager will undertake an initial assessment to determine whether the appeal is admissible under this Policy. The assessment will consider whether the appeal has been submitted within the applicable timeframe, falls within one or more of the permitted grounds and contains sufficient information to enable the grounds of appeal to be understood. Where an appeal is not admissible, the applicant will be informed of the reasons

69. Where an appeal is eligible for consideration, the Admissions and Enrolment Manager will arrange for the appeal to be considered by the Academic Registrar alongside an academic member of staff, where relevant, who is sufficiently independent of the original decision and has appropriate knowledge and expertise.

70. An appeal will normally be considered within 20 working days of being accepted for consideration. Where this is not reasonably possible, the applicant will be informed of the reason for the delay and, where possible, given an indication of when the outcome is expected.

71. Following consideration of the appeal, the College may:
    a. Reject the appeal and confirm the original decision;
    b. Uphold the appeal and refer the application back to the relevant admissions decision-maker for reconsideration, with any appropriate guidance;
    c. Where appropriate, refer the application for reconsideration by an alternative authorised decision-maker.

72. The applicant will be informed in writing of the outcome of the appeal and the reasons for its decision. The outcome of the appeal shall be final and there is no further right of appeal.

Complaints about Admissions

73. Applicants may raise a complaint about the administration or delivery of the admissions process, including information provided by the College, communications, application handling, fees or deposits, scholarships, accessibility or other service-related matters.

74. A complaint should normally be raised within one calendar month of the event or communication giving rise to the concern. Where a complaint concerns a continuing matter, the timeframe will normally run from the most recent

occurrence. The College may consider a complaint submitted outside this timeframe where there is reasonable explanation for the delay and it is fair and reasonable to do so having regard to the circumstances of the case.

75. Admissions complaints should be submitted in writing to the Head of Registry Operations via the applicant portal. The complaint should set out the concerns being raised, the relevant dates or circumstances, any supporting information or evidence available and the outcome sought.

76. Admissions complaints will be subject to an initial assessment to determine the most appropriate route for consideration. This will include consideration of whether the matter falls within the scope of the admissions complaints process, whether it has been raised within the applicable timeframe, whether sufficient information has been provided to understand the concerns and whether another College process is more appropriate.

77. Where a complaint cannot be considered, the applicant will be informed of the reason and, where appropriate, directed to the relevant alternative process.

78. Admissions complaints will normally be considered and responded to within 20 working days of receipt. Where this is not reasonably possible, the applicant will be informed of the reason for the delay and, where possible, given an indication of when a response is expected.

79. Complaints about admissions should be distinguished from appeals against an outcome of an application to study at the College. Where an applicant wishes to challenge an admissions decision, the appeal route should be used.

Complaints about RCA-contracted Agents

80. Prospective students, parents and other third parties who wish to raise a complaint about the conduct, activities or practices of an RCA-contracted agent should submit their complaint to recruitment@rca.ac.uk.

81. Complaints should include, where possible, the country in which the agent operates, the name of the agency, details of the concern and the date(s) on which the issue occurred. The College will consider complaints received about its contracted agents and, where appropriate, investigate the concerns raised.

Version	Summary of Changes	Date
001	Added change log, Updated roles and responsibilities throughout document, Removed reference to waiting lists, Added PGR Masters Merit expected, Added substantial detail on English language exemptions and UKVI requirements, Additional detail on interviews, Additional detail on changes to mode of study requests, Additional detail on undetermined fee status at offer, Acceptance deadline reduced to three weeks, Removal of deferrals, Clarification added to criminal disclosures, Updated wording for disability section; Minimum age of 17, turning 18 in term 1, added; Substantial re-write of appeals section and new complaints section added, included Agent-related complaints.	November 2026