



## Programme Specification

Please note that this specification is subject to change, in line with the national guidance on the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 1. General information

<b>Awarding institution:</b>	Royal College of Art
<b>Programme title:</b>	MA Visual Communication
<b>Award:</b>	Masters
<b>Qualification framework level:</b>	Level 7
<b>School/Department or equivalent:</b>	School of Communication
<b>Programme duration:</b>	2-years
<b>Total UK credits:</b>	240 credits
<b>Mode of study:</b>	Full time
<b>Date valid from/to:</b>	2020-21

### 2. Programme Philosophy

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. Critical thinking around what it means to be a 'visual communicator' questions the histories, processes and contexts of communication, and in doing so urges designers and artists to go beyond accepted norms. Visual Communication students are infamous for producing work that does not always fit into the expected parameters of their discipline. The world and the ways that we understand, inhabit and navigate it are changing faster than ever. The very nature of the subject involves us constantly challenging, questioning and rethinking the purpose visual communication serves in society. To enable this, the programme encourages expansive and imaginative approaches that move beyond past orthodoxies and assumptions to include sound, code, text, space, event and experience. Situating these practices within contemporary global contexts and debates is an essential aspect of the programme.

Within the programme are three pathways: Experimental Communication, Graphic Design and Illustration. These enable students to balance specialism with collaboration and interdisciplinarity. By advocating an inclusive and diverse exploration and critique of the practices and concepts of art, design, cultural, literary and social theory, film, literature, philosophy, politics, and technology, we encourage students to develop and advance the subject as well as their practice.

### 3. Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

## **Programme Aims**

The MA Visual Communication programme aims to:

- create a rich, broad and supportive working community within which you can further explore, develop and reflect on the processes and contexts that inform the production your work
- develop a deeper insight into the varied issues that permeate the discipline, to enable you to develop an advanced understanding of the functional and critical perspectives that inform your work.
- enable you to experiment, innovate and provoke; to question existing practice, but to do so from the position of being well-informed
- help you to develop an understanding of the value of informed of methods of practice and enquiry
- further develop and refine your understanding of and engagement with contexts and or audiences
- enable you to find strategies to engagingly and articulately communicate your work and ideas
- promote the consideration of social, political or environmental issues and the potential of art and design to inform and raise awareness
- prepare you for professional life by ensuring that you are fully acquainted with the processes of generation, reproduction and distribution

## **What will I be expected to achieve?**

Students on the Visual Communication programme are diverse, with wide-ranging strengths and abilities. They come to the programme with different aspirations, motivations, learning needs and personal circumstances. You will achieve in-depth and advanced knowledge and understanding of their subject and/or profession, informed by current practice, scholarship and research. This will include a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject and/or profession; critical skills; knowledge of professional responsibility, integrity and ethics; and the ability to reflect on your own progress as a learner. Graduates are likely to be further characterised by their ability to study independently in the subject, and to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to advanced scholarship in the subject.

## **Programme-Specific Learning Outcomes**

Able to:	<b>A. Intellectual Engagement</b>
A1.	Evidence and articulate the processes of enquiry involved in your practice
A2.	Evidence and articulate the intellectual processes involved in the production and communication of your work
A3.	Articulate an advanced understanding of the functional and critical perspectives that inform your work.
A4.	Articulate in-depth and advanced knowledge and understanding of your practice, informed by current practice, scholarship and research
Able to:	<b>B. Technical Skills</b>

B1.	Evidence an expanded and informed experimentation with materials, media, and contexts
B2.	Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary contexts and or audiences.
B3.	Demonstrate an understanding of appropriate contexts and situate your work in relation to them
B4.	Produce work that evidences an understanding of critical perspectives professional situations, both practical and theoretical, and to use a range of techniques and research methods applicable to your practice
Able to:	<b>C. Professional Development</b>
C1.	Demonstrate personal responsibility for your education by setting goals, managing your time and resources effectively and by meeting deadlines.
C2.	Communicate and present your work using traditional or contemporary media, and/or public-facing events to a relevant audience outside of the College environment
C3.	Evidence an engaged approach to your situating practice in relation to your discipline and wider critical frameworks.
C4.	Demonstrate an advanced understanding of and ability to position your work in relation to relevant contemporary audiences and or contexts.

#### 4. What will I learn?

##### **Programme Units and Credit Weightings**

- Unit 1: Expanded Practice, 40 credits
- Unit 2A & 2B: School Elective I & II, 40 credits
- Unit 3: Critical and Historical Studies [CHS], 40 credits
- Unit 4: Situated Practice, 60 credits
- Unit 5: Critical Practice [Independent Research Project], 60 credits

##### **Critical and Historical Studies**

Critical & Historical Studies is the cross-College platform that delivers teaching and activities aimed at enabling critical engagement to take place within, and between, the different disciplines at the RCA.

All studio-based first year MA students have a CHS unit as a core part of their programme of study, designed to enable this critical dialogue and enhance each student's development. Led by a team of dedicated, highly skilled and deeply engaged staff, CHS delivers a programme of lectures, seminars, workshops and tutorials (both small group and one-to-one). Students will be encouraged to engage with vital and challenging ideas that relate to their practices. This both enriches and provides a broader intellectual framework within which to establish a coherent inter-relationship between theoretical and practice-based approaches to art and design.

As a team, our disciplinary interests span the fine and applied arts, architecture, design (including fashion, graphics, interior and product design), craft, communication, film, humanities, photography, digital media, science and technology.

CHS provides:

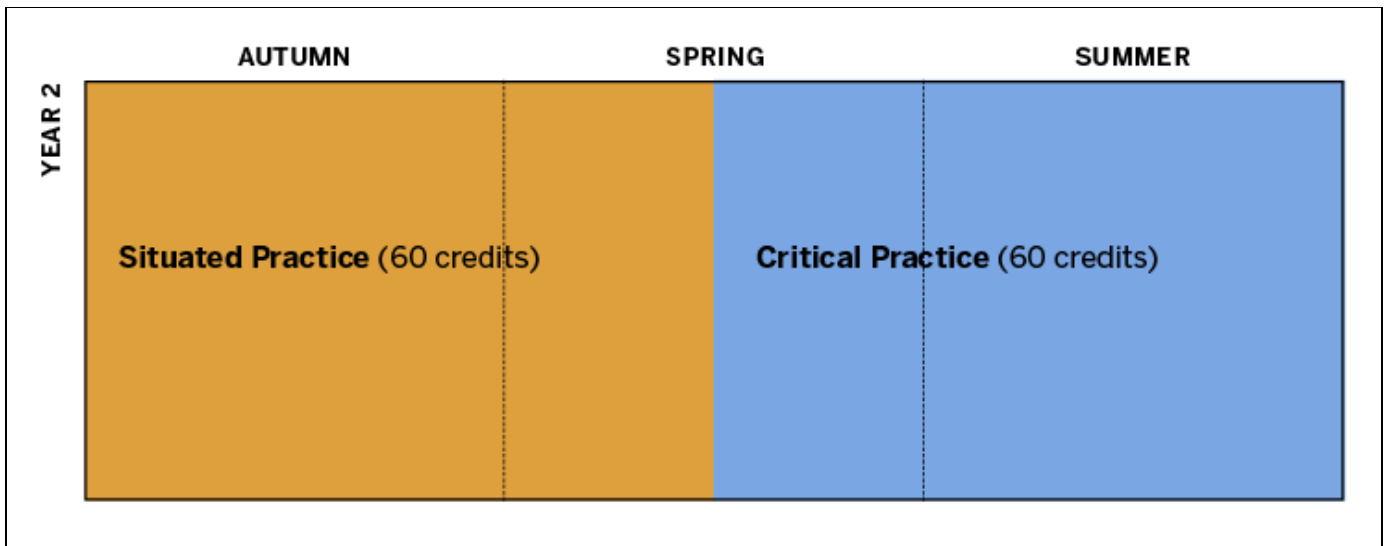
- contemporary, thought-provoking lectures by CHS staff and visiting tutors
- the opportunity for students to explore the theoretical background of their chosen discipline through a taught dissertation process
- individual and group tutorial support from our Programme's team of expert tutors

The CHS Handbook sets out the broad principles of CHS at the RCA. It outlines what you can expect of us and what we require of you to engage and produce work to your best ability. On the Moodle pages you will find details of the scheduled programme and the broad areas to be covered in each term, details about the tuition and assessment of your CHS dissertation, and information on resources that will help you during your studies.

Your main points of contact for CHS will be your group tutor and your School Liaison Tutor for your School. You will be assigned your group tutor at start of the Autumn Term.

### Curriculum Map

	AUTUMN	SPRING	SUMMER
YEAR 1		School Elective I (20 credits)	School Elective II (20 credits)
	Expanded Practice (40 credits)		
	Critical and Historical Studies – CHS (40 credits) DISSERTATION		



## 5. How will I learn?

Please note that these are subject to change, in line with the national guidance on the Covid-19 response.

The kind of teaching activities on the programme includes lectures, personal and group tutorials, seminars, collaborative and peer learning activities. Students are also required to be self-directed and autonomous learners, full-engaged in the programme, exploring opportunities for across programme learning with in the School of Communication and wider RCA community.

Throughout the year this will delivered through the appropriate methods of synchronous and asynchronous methods, in a mixture of online and on-site as is safely permitted.

### 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 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.

Some projects may afford the opportunity to locate work in a specific context. They may be carried out with commercial and/or non-profit organisations associated with the School or College, who contribute their time, expertise or financial support.

In the second year, students have the 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 tutor to discuss their current work and development.

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 complete a critical self-reflection of their progress and a place to document any challenges or issues they are facing. Once a term both students and tutor are required to complete a progress report and action 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.

Students might also meet together in a groups with their tutor to present work in progress, discuss and support each other.

Programme tutorials give students the opportunity to sign up for tutorial with other tutors in the programme in addition to their personal tutor.

### **Lectures**

The Visual Communication programme lecture series explores contemporary theories, practices and contexts relevant to communication practice and stresses the importance of research to your practice. In addition, the programme organizes occasional expert lectures from leading practitioners in the field.

### **Workshops**

The college enables you to sign up for a wide range of programme based and College-wide skills-based and knowledge-based workshops.

You may get the opportunity to participate in an exhibition of your student work, either during or at the conclusion of your studies. Your Programme Handbook should provide more information on the nature of this participation.

## **6. Assessment and feedback**

### **Assessment**

#### **Continuous Assessment**

Continuous assessment enables the student's performance and progress to be understood and accounted for through a wide variety of academic contact points, recognising that students are able to perform in different ways and through different means and aspects of the curriculum while still achieving the requisite performance standards. This assessment is validated through a structure that ensures that student performance is evaluated from a range of perspectives and by a range of different tutors who are able to triangulate their experience of the student and enable parity of assessment across the cohort.

The School Elective and Expanded Practice units in Year 1 and Situated Practice units in Year 2 are assessed wholly or in part through a process of continuous assessment. This relies on staff who have had experience of the student coming together at the end of the unit in a Unit Assessment Meeting,

chaired by the Head of Programme or a Senior Tutor, to review the student's self-evaluation and to share their experience of the student in relation to the relevant learning outcomes.

### **Final Examination**

At the Final Examination, students present the work that they have completed during their second year. 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.

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 supported with a depth of research. 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.

The process for referrals or illness is outlined in the College Academic Regulations and students can seek advice from the Head of Programme, Personal tutor or the Student's Union.

**Information regarding individual assessments will be included in the unit descriptors, and will be available to students at the beginning of the academic year.**

## **7. What award can I get?**

To be awarded an RCA MA degree you need to gain 240 credits at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will involve successfully completing all units.

If you fail a unit at the first attempt, you will be offered an opportunity to resit the unit. If you are successful you will be awarded the credits for that unit. If you are unsuccessful, you cannot progress further in your programme.

Exit awards:

If you have gained at least 120 credits at level 7 of the FHEQ, you may be eligible for the exit award of Postgraduate Diploma. An exit award is a final award from the College and cannot be rescinded.

For more detailed information about the College's assessment, progression and awards policies see the Regulations.

## **8. Admissions**

**Cross-College requirements**

**Academic Entry Requirements**

Candidates must normally have obtained a good relevant undergraduate degree or an equivalent qualification. 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 course 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.

Other qualifications may be approved, providing that the College's Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD) is satisfied that the applicant has the ability to pursue the programme of study successfully. The ABCD is empowered to make judgements about the extent to which qualifications or experience gained elsewhere may be accepted in partial fulfilment of its requirements.

### **Portfolio**

All applicants are required to submit a portfolio as part of the application process. A portfolio is a showcase of an applicant's work as an artist or designer and can be made up of images, videos or writing examples. The portfolio helps us to better understand the applicant and allows them to show evidence of their ability and motivation to undertake a given programme.

Each programme is looking for different things in a portfolio; each Head of Programme provides specific advice on portfolio requirements in the online application system. We advise prospective students to consider these requirements carefully before submitting their application.

### **Applicant Qualities**

Generally, we are looking for applicants to demonstrate their:

- creativity, imagination and innovation;
- ability to articulate the intentions of the work;
- intellectual engagement in areas relevant to the work;
- technical skills appropriate to the work;
- potential to benefit from the programme and achieve MA standards overall.

### **English Language**

Applicants who are not a national of a majority English-speaking country will need to demonstrate their English language proficiency. The College accepts a range of English language qualifications. The full list can be seen at <https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/entrance-requirements/english-language-requirements/>

Applicants are exempt from this requirement if they have received a 2.1 degree or above from a university in a majority English-speaking nation within the last two years.

If a student would need a Tier 4 visa to study at the RCA, they will also need to meet the Home Office's minimum requirements for entry clearance.

### **Admission Process**

Applications must be made directly to the College through our online application portal: <https://www.rca.ac.uk/studying-at-the-rca/apply/application-process/ma-application-process/>

Upon completion of that first stage of the application process, candidates will be invited to submit a portfolio of their work, a 300-word statement of intent and a video communicating clearly their motivations, personal interests and why they are pursuing a Masters degree at the Royal College of Art. These materials are reviewed by members of the programme team who will communicate an



academic decision to the College Registry, who manage the process of offer-making in line with the College's recruitment targets. In some cases, where the programme team is not able to make an admission decision based solely upon the work submitted by the applicant, we may invite the candidate to undertake an interview with us.

Applications are considered chronologically by date and time of final portfolio submission. Whilst a programme still has vacancies, successful candidates will be made an offer of a place. Once a programme becomes full, subsequent successful applicants will be placed on a waiting list, and may be made a firm offer should a place become available for them.

### **Programme-Specific requirements**

Specific advice on programme portfolio requirements is provided by the Head of Programme in the online application system. Please consult the College website for further information on programme-specific admission and portfolio requirements:

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/study/programme-finder/visual-communication-ma/#requirements>