Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

Postgraduate Credit Framework for Taught Programmes

For academic year:	2027/2028
Approved by:	Senate – November 2026
Author:	Academic Registrar
Next Review:	March 2027

Postgraduate Credit Framework for Taught Programmes 1
1. Context and Purpose 1
2. Taught Awards and Credit Values 2
3. Credits and Learning Hours 2
4. Units 3
5. Programme Structure 4
6. Study and Delivery Modes 4
7. Progression and Award Conditions 5
8. Variations and Exceptions 5
9. Quality Assurance and Validation 5

1. Context and Purpose

This framework establishes the curriculum rules for all taught postgraduate programmes at the Royal College of Art (RCA). It is informed by the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the QAA Characteristics Statement for Master's Degrees, the QAA Higher Education Credit Framework for England, and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. It supports the RCA's strategic aims for excellence in art and design education, innovation, and socially engaged practice.

The framework provides a common structure across taught academic programmes to deliver curriculum innovation, an excellent student experience and high academic standards. This framework applies to all new and revalidated programmes delivered from 2027–28. Changes to the Credit Framework are agreed by the Academic Standards Committee (ASC) and approved by the Senate.

2. Taught Awards and Credit Values

Award	UK Credits	FHEQ Level	Typical duration	Characteristics
Graduate Diploma (Grad Dip)	120	6	2 Terms (FT)	Typically supports progression towards Masters level study
Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert)	60	7	1 term (FT) 2 terms (PT)	Typically an interim or exit award.
Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip)	120	7	2 terms (FT) 4 terms (PT)	Typically an interim or exit award. At least 90 credits must be at Level 7
Master of Arts (MA)	180	7	3 terms (FT) 6 terms (PT)	Concludes with an Independent Research Project (IRP). At least 150 credits must be at Level 7
MArch Design Practice (MArch)	180	7	3 terms (FT) 6 terms (PT)	Concludes with an Independent Research Project (IRP). At least 150 credits must be at Level 7
MArch Architecture[1] (MArch) Master of Education (MEd)	240	7	3 terms (FT) 6 terms (PT)	Concludes with an IRP. At least 150 credits must be at Level 7.
Master of Research (MRes)	180	7	3 terms (FT) 6 terms (PT)	Concludes with an IRP. At least 150 credits must be at Level 7.
Master of Design (MDes)	300	7	6 terms (FT) 12 terms (PT) 5 terms (FT) 10 terms (PT)	An enhanced Masters degree that provides emphasis on research and professional practice.
Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Animation with Professional Residency	300	7	5 terms (FT) 10 terms (PT) 5 terms (FT) 10 terms (PT)	An enhanced Masters degree that provides emphasis on research and professional practice.
Master of Fine Arts (MFA)	300	77	6 terms (FT) 12 terms (PT)	An enhanced Masters degree that provides emphasis on research and professional practice.

Table 1: Awards and credit values

3. Credits and Learning Hours

[1] Awards that are delivered in partnership with other institutions or that are accredited by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Credit is awarded to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of learning outcomes at a specified level. The number of credits is based on the estimated notional learning hours (where one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning).

Learning hours describes the overall amount of time that students commit to learning as part of a unit or programme of study. This includes:

- **Contact hours:** scheduled staff-led time which encourages interaction and should allow opportunities for feedback.
- **Self-directed learning:** the amount of learning hours in which students work independently towards their learning goals.

Academic Year:

One full-time academic year consists of:

i) 3 x terms, where each term consists of 600 learning hours

ii) 1800 learning hours total across all 3 terms

iii) 180 credits (60 credits per term)

iv) 40 hours learning hours per week

Where an award requires less than or more than 180 credits of study, its length may be determined in terms, at a usual rate of 60 credits per term (F/T) or 30 credits per term (P/T). Alternative rates of study may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

4. Units

A **unit** is a self-contained learning experience with an explicit set of aims, learning outcomes and assessment outcomes:

- **Core Units:** a unit that a student is required to take as part of their programme of study.
- **Elective Units:** a unit that a student can choose to take as one of several options.
- **Independent Research Project (IRP):** A concluding unit in which students engage in an extended period of independent study that results in the production of a major thesis/project that demonstrates intellectual engagement, technical skills and professional development. For part-time programmes, the IRP may be divided into smaller units to enable structuring across multiple terms.

Some units may be identified as prerequisites for subsequent units. Prerequisites must be listed in unit descriptors.

RCA units must:

v) Be expressed in multiples of 15 credits;

vi) Involve a minimum of 15 credits

vii) Involve a maximum of 90 credits

A student may not be awarded credit for the same unit twice.

5. Programme Structure

Taught Masters programmes must have:

viii) a minimum of 15 elective credits
ix) a maximum of 60 elective credits

Elective units will be delivered in terms 1 and 2 only.

Electives foster student choice, cross-programme interaction, interdisciplinary experience, and research enquiry. Electives are hosted within schools and college-wide schemes (college-wide units, school-wide units or other elective units).

i) For each elective slot, a choice from at least two elective units must be available.

ii) Students should be given a fair opportunity to express their preference for an elective from those available, but will not be guaranteed their preferred choice.

180-credit Masters programmes must conclude with a 60-credit unit of Independent Research Project.

The location of units in the programme structure does not determine the start or end date of those units. Units may be delivered concurrently or sequentially, with start and end dates at any time within the designated term(s), provided those dates permit adequate time for the credits.

6. Study and Delivery Modes

Programmes and units may be validated for the following **study modes**:

i) **Full-time:** normally 60 credits per term

ii) **Part-time:** normally 30 credits per term

iii) **Flexible:** students can enrol on individual units. Minimum and maximum lengths of study are defined in the programme specification.

Programmes and units may be validated for the following **delivery modes**:

i) **Online:** study in shared online spaces where students do not need to be physically present and will not have access to campus facilities

ii) **On-campus:** study in shared physical spaces

iii) **Blended:** study that includes aspects of both online learning and on-campus learning.

iv) **Hybrid:** study that enables students to choose between on-campus or online participation.

v) **Low-residency:** study that is primarily online, with limited periods of on-campus learning.

7. Progression and Award Conditions

The Graduate Diploma may grant graduates automatic progression onto another named programme, where conditions for such progression are stated in the programme specification.

For enhanced awards, students may apply to the MA/MEd/MRes or directly to the MFA/MDes. Progression from MA to enhanced awards is dependent on students meeting the following conditions:

i) Successful completion of all MA-level credits with no referrals or trailing modules;

ii) Formal rescindment of the MA/MEd/MRes award upon enrolment into MFA/MDes.

Students who initially applied to the MA/MEd/MRes but decide, during their first year of study, to continue to the enhanced award, must additionally:

- Notify the college of intention to continue to the enhanced award before the end of Term 2.

For students who declare interest in progression to an enhanced award later than their point of initial application to the MA/MEd/MRes are not guaranteed the opportunity to progress. Progression is subject to approval by the Head of Programme or Academic Lead, and to capacity. Progression decisions are confirmed through the Exam Board and formal re-enrolment.

8. Variations and Exceptions

- Exceptions to that above may be permitted if required by Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).
- Double-degree and joint-institution awards may require negotiated credit articulation.
- Exemptions must be documented at validation.

9. Quality Assurance and Validation

- Validation must confirm programme alignment with this framework and sector expectations.

- Enhanced awards must demonstrate a clear academic rationale for curricula that extend beyond the 180-credit award.
- Programme specifications must define learning outcomes by level and award.
- Unit descriptors must specify unit learning outcomes that are mapped onto the programme learning outcomes, ensuring that all programme learning outcomes are assessed at least once on the programme via those unit learning outcomes.
- Unit credit is awarded only on demonstration of achievement of the learning outcomes, demonstrated through at least one summative assessment per unit.
- Changes to curriculum or structure are subject to the college's modification and review processes.
- Annual Programme Review and Periodic Review provide mechanisms for ensuring adherence to this framework.
- Non-awarding and awarding boards must confirm alignment with relevant programme specification and study mode.

Version	Summary of Changes	Date
001	New document	Dec 2025
002	Added approval log and changes summary. Updated credit table to include 6 terms for enhanced degrees, plus exceptions. Updated elective maxima to 90 credits. Included elective requirements in programme structure. Removed progression details as not relevant for 2027 entry.	October 2026