Programme Specification

1.   General Information

Programme title:	Design Practice
Award:	MArch
Qualification Framework level:	7
School/Department or equivalent:	School of Architecture
Campus location(s):	Kensington (+ electives across all campuses)
Total UK credits:	180
Date valid from/to	2025-26

2.   Programme Philosophy

The MArch in Design Practice is a 45-week programme offering research-led training that equips you to make critical, creative and ambitious interventions towards delivering just transition. This programme supports spatial practitioners to critically engage with the complex and global implications of construction and to synthesize informed, rigorous and bold design propositions to transform the world towards sustainable and equitable futures. While climate will be a central focus, you will also consider how economics, politics, and identity intersect with design to produce sites of opportunity and innovation. You will develop spatial practices which can forge flourishing and fair worlds.

The built environment generates 40% of annual global CO2 emissions. A significant amount of energy is consumed not only in the construction of new buildings but also in heating, cooling and powering existing building stock. Just three materials – concrete, steel, and aluminium – are responsible for 23% of total global emissions. Emissions are created in materials sourcing, extraction, refinement, manufacture, transport, use and recycling. They are produced during construction processes. They are embedded in social relations and working conditions reproduced by design practice and design culture, including hierarchies and inequalities of class and categorisations of identity.

Any ambition to address the climate crisis requires spatial practitioners to confront and reimagine the underlying value systems that influence their work within the built environment. You will be introduced to a range of methods and theories drawn from around the world which aim to deliver renewable and equitable futures. You are encouraged to draw on your existing practices and experiences, and to use the skills and exposure of the programme to propose interventions into existing architectural models or develop entirely new forms of practice.

There are five core and four elective units spread across three terms. Elective units can be undertaken within the School of Architecture or chosen from a selection offered by other Schools at the Royal College of Art (RCA). In terms 1 and 2, you will undertake 2 core, and 2 elective units. In term 3, you will undertake the final unit, called the Independent Research Project.

Core units include:

Material Processes: This unit critically engages with the materiality of the built environment. The unit builds on physical, aesthetic and structural understandings of materials toward a deeper examination of their complex climatic, cultural, and political properties. The unit equips you with knowledge of wider implications and potential uses of material in architecture and design.

Carbon Economies: Through this unit, you will examine the role of carbon within a globalised building industry. You will explore methods of carbon modelling and accounting, campaigns for divestment and energy reform, and the potential of alternative, renewable energy sources to radically reconfigure practice. You will learn to analyse energy sources and evaluate the spatial implications of their use, and strategically position your practice at the forefront of technical and social changes.

Detailing Risk: The design detail is a site of connection and mediation between different aesthetic, legal, material, structural and energetic requirements. The failure of the detail creates risks that might imperil life or have adverse impacts on human health and well-being. This unit inverts the normative study of design detailing by turning to breakdowns and catastrophes where details, joints and connections have failed, because those failures illuminate problems that may have otherwise remained obscure or badly formulated. Drawing on forensic methods, you will learn to track the network of relations that radiate out from these moments of failure in order to better understand the role of detailing in the context of communal and social risk. Upending the typical design process, you will begin with final construction details and design through disassembly, 'unbuilding' failed details to understand their yield points and the underlying conditions of their catastrophic undoing.

Just Transition: This unit requires you to project into possible, just futures and rigorously develop the means of realising the transition to those futures. You will be exposed to the imaginaries, strategies and tactics of climate justice movements that contest and project beyond carbon, and consider the spatial implications of the ideologies and methods of these movements. You will critically engage the worlds these movements seek to bring about and consider how the skills and knowledge of spatial practitioners have a role to contribute in facilitating change. You will work across temporalities, producing Design Policy Proposals that can be implemented in the present that contribute towards operationalizing renewable, just futures.

Independent Research Project: The Independent Research Project (IRP) unit comprises a substantial student-led investigation. You will be tutored towards the formulation of a research question, and supported to find appropriate and innovative research methods and documentation. You will be encouraged to draw on their existing contexts and/or develop new sites of practice towards making meaningful contributions to knowledge on climate and the built environment.

The MArch in Design Practice offers you the opportunity to engage the social and political systems underlying the climate crisis by design. You will be equipped to understand, analyse and contend with these systems and supported to develop propositions which seek to creatively and constructively bring about change.

3.   Educational Aims and Outcomes of the Programme

<u>Programme aims</u>

The programme aims to:

- provide you with the means to critically assess and evaluate carbon-dominant design practices in the built environment;
- support your ability to develop equitable work practices across cultural and geographic borders;
- enable you to develop forms of practice and design-led research which support just transition;
- support the development of innovative spatial practitioners able to further climate justice through practice-based and academic careers;
- provide an environment in which you can determine areas of interdisciplinary specialisation

<u>What will I be expected to achieve?</u>

Upon successful completion of the programme, you will be expected to meet the requirements of both the College-wide Learning Outcomes and your programme-specific Learning Outcomes.

<u>College-Wide Learning Outcomes</u>

You should be able to:

- Interrogate and articulate the intentions of your work in relation to the critical and conceptual context of your field(s) of study;
- Independently plan and produce work that is informed by developments at the forefront of your field(s) of study;
- Evaluate and critique the principles and methods of research in your field(s) of study, and apply these principles to your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice;
- Demonstrate originality in how you translate knowledge into practice;
- Communicate your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice to a non-specialist audience;
- Critically reflect on the likely public impact of your creative, professional and/or scholarly practice, and on your responsibilities as a practitioner;
- Define your professional ambitions and identify the challenges involved in meeting them.

<u>Programme-Specific Learning Outcomes</u>

Upon successful completion of the programme, you should be able to:

- Evaluate globalised relations of labour and materials in construction supply chains and critically engage systems and tools towards ethical specification;
- Assess different economies and their relationship to coloniality, racial capitalism and the built environment;

- Critically analyse existing and emergent forms of accounting and intervention into construction and associated processes, and demonstrate ability to apply these to spatial projects;
- Analyse the relationship between law, finance and design to critically evaluate the built environment, revealing the influence of these various fields in architectural projects;
- Locate policy as a site of design practice where just transition can be facilitated through conjoined political and spatial interventions;
- Independently produce innovative research driven by a clear research question and appropriate design-led methods.

4.   What will I learn?

Full time:
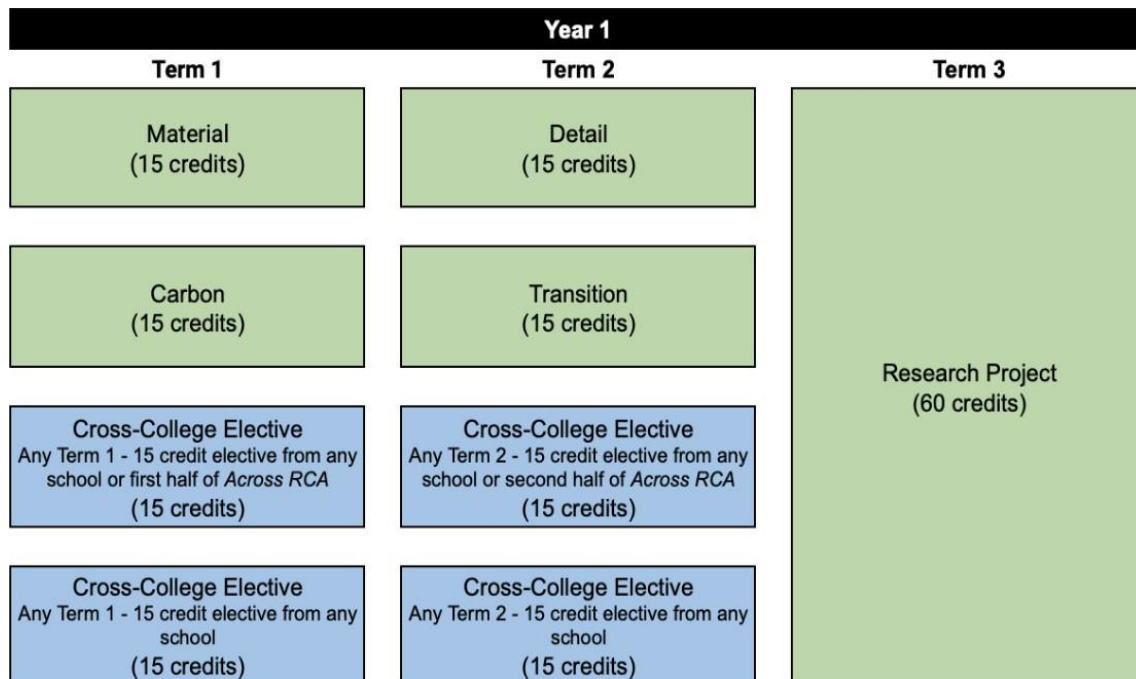
Programme Structure

Unit Title	Term	Credit Value
Material Processes	1	15
Carbon Economies	1	15
Cross-College elective (x2)	1	30 (15 credits per unit)
Detailing Risk	2	15
Cross-College elective (x2)	2	30 (15 credits per unit)
Just Transition	2	15
Independent Research Project	3	60

Please note, there are three **Independent Study** weeks included in your programme (one per term). During these weeks there will be no scheduled teaching or assessment, and limited access to Technical Services. Self-service will be available for inducted users, and you may independently use computing and technology zones, bench spaces, and the resources store and art shop. These weeks are intended for you

to work independently, and technical supervision, fabrication support, or supervision of high-risk activities will not be available.

Independent Research Project

Through the Independent Research Project, you will build on learning and exposure developed through the core and elective units in previous terms. You are encouraged to reflect on your existing contexts of practice and/or forms of practice you wish to enter or build, and use your research project to help leverage changes you wish to make in your professional and academic careers.

An overarching theme will be set for the Independent Research Project unit each year. This will provide a prompt and provocation for you in defining your own research questions and briefs. Themes will draw from research agendas in the School, enabling you to benefit from direct access to academics, their research and expertise.

You will identify an individual research question and methodology, developing a clear student-led brief which you will respond to. You are welcome to work collaboratively with partners within the course or externally, but must clearly define the parameters of your own work in the collective project.
You will be supported to engage the ethical considerations of your work, identify relevant literature and design research, and develop and test your research and methods. You will be asked to clearly identify the potential impact of your work — what change it seeks to bring about — and how this is to be achieved.

The Independent Research Project culminates in a public event, the Colloquium Presentation, at the end of the programme, where you will deliver an oral presentation of your work. You must carefully consider forms of documentation, media and presentation most appropriate to your research and clearly define the parameters for this. In addition to the oral presentation, all research projects are to include a document which can be publicly disseminated, and which will be hosted on the Programme's Research Repository, an open-access archive of graduate work.

5.   How will I learn?

The programme consists of small units designed to 'scaffold' your learning journey. This is reflected in the teaching, delivered through discrete units of study each with their own summative assessment point, worth 100% of the unit and testing all unit Learning Outcomes. Summative assessment normally takes place at the end of each unit. Formative assessment will take place in the form of peer and tutor critique of proposals and work-in-progress.

You will learn through:

Lectures
Lectures will be delivered by faculty and invited guest experts. These are complemented by activities offered by the School and cross-disciplinary lectures organised by the College. These lectures will be delivered in a blended mode of teaching, primarily online with some in person. You will have opportunities to engage reading materials prior to the lecture and to ask questions following.

Tutorials
You will be supported by individual and group tutorials. The frequency and number of these will vary by unit. The tutorials will support the development of work. You must come prepared with work to review with staff and peers. Tutorials will be delivered in a blended mode of teaching. You will receive formative feedback from tutors and peers during tutorials.

Seminars
Seminars will involve themed group discussions between staff and students focused on specific materials and reading. Guest experts may be invited to lead on specialist material where required. Seminars will be staff-led and student-led, and delivered in a blended mode of teaching. Seminars may also be used to workshop student projects and provide formative feedback from tutors and peers on student work-in-progress.

Workshops
Workshops will involve scheduled teaching on technical skills focusing on a particular process or skill. These may be led by staff or guest experts, and will be delivered in a blended mode of teaching.

Briefings
You will receive briefings on assessments and other aspects of the programme. These may be given verbally in the form of short lectures, or during seminars and group tutorials, or disseminated in written form. You will be given the opportunity to ask questions during and after these briefings.

Offsite Study
Some units may include scheduled learning that takes place externally, including site and studio visits, and trips to galleries or relevant exhibitions. These will be communicated at the start of the unit. Any costs associated with this will be at student expense.

Critique
The Independent Research Project unit will include a mid-term review. This will involve the presentation of work-in-progress to peers and faculty to receive constructive feedback and criticism towards the development of the project. Guests may also be invited by staff to participate. Reviews may be delivered online or in person, as required.

Online Resources
You will have access to online course material available through Moodle.

Live-Room
You will also have access to a 'Live-Room' on campus. The Live Room will be a focus for discussion, social interaction and tutorial contact as well as being a space for making and a place to host events. The Live Room will be a workspace that supports practice, discussion, documentation, learning and broadcast. The Live-Room will act as a focus for engaging audiences and inviting interaction with the extended RCA community.

Alongside your taught units, scheduled community events will provide opportunities for you to network with your peers across other programmes and schools.

Unit descriptors identify the number and type of contact hours you will have in each unit. The majority of programme delivery is academic, taking place in seminar rooms and lecture rooms, and delivered by academic staff. In this programme, some units have a number of technical contact hours included, such as technical and library orientations & inductions into the use of equipment, spaces and processes required during the unit. If you wish to access other specialist technical equipment, spaces or processes or acquire additional technical or library skills outside of your timetabled unit contact time, you will be required to make independent bookings, which are available on a first-come-

first-serve basis from Technical Services and the Library.

6. Assessment and feedback

Regulations
Regulations for assessment and progression can be found here. Please familiarise yourself with these.
Assessment
Assessment on the programme will engage your skills in a variety of areas including, but not limited to, designed and creative outputs, written reports and analyses of construction and design detailing, design experimentation and proposition, and verbal and visual presentations. You will normally receive written feedback within 3 working weeks of the date of assessment. **Material Processes** You will be assessed through contributions to a collective Materials Library. You will be asked to analyse a specific material and produce a piece of work which illuminates qualities of that material and aspects of the social and ecological implications of its use. Successful contributions to the material library will focus on the material's use within building, connecting this to a range of wider considerations, such as the amount of carbon emitted during its transportation, the working conditions of those who facilitate its production or extraction and/or its cultural agency in a given context. **Carbon Economies** You will be assessed through a case study report on a project of their choosing and speculative design proposition. In the case study, you are asked to model carbon use in relation to the project's context, illuminating the relationship between energy, political economy and social relations. The case study forms the precedent research for a design project in which you speculate on future scenarios or strategies informed by their analysis. Successful projects will develop innovative forms of representation through media appropriate to the design research, including film, drawing and image making, prototypes and other immersive narrative strategies. The case study and speculative design project support the development of research, representation and academic writing skills. **Detailing Risk** Taught through a series of case studies, this unit encourages critical reflection on technical details and the underlying socio-economic logics embedded in design. Assessment will comprise of a marked-up Detail Package in which you will critically revisit design proposals illuminating — through

insertions, marginalia and annotation — unwritten, concealed and obfuscated implications of the design. This assessment supports the development of your skills of analysis and critical engagement with given design documentation.

Just Transition
This unit calls on you to make bold and rigorously argued propositions towards delivering just transition. You will be assessed through the submission of a Design Policy Proposal encompassing design experimentation and proposition. You will be encouraged to think critically and creatively, developing skills of engaging policy as a site of spatial intervention, and designing innovative forms of policy documentation suited to the proposals that you make.

Independent Research Project
This unit comprises a substantial student-led research project. Assessment will comprise a research document tailored to the research project, its intentions and desired impacts. This must be wholly open access, or include a publishable component, which will be hosted on the Programme's Research Repository. You will also be assessed on participation in a public event. The Colloquium Presentation takes place at the end of the programme, and you will be assessed through an oral presentation of you work and active engagement with the presentations of your peers.

For the above units, written feedback on submissions will be given within three weeks following assessment completion, unless otherwise stipulated at the start of the unit.

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 MArch degree you need to gain 180 credits at level 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). This will involve successfully completing all units.
If you do not pass a unit at the first attempt, you may be offered an opportunity to resit the unit. If you are successful at resit 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

We welcome applicants from a wide range of backgrounds, and encourage applications from candidates with demonstrable evidence of professional engagement with their chosen discipline area.

Candidates must normally have obtained a good relevant undergraduate degree or an equivalent qualification (usually or Bachelors' degree, or Graduate Diploma). Candidates who already hold a relevant Masters' qualification are also encouraged to apply.

Other qualifications may be approved, providing that the College's Academic Board for Concessions and Discipline (ABCD) is satisfied that the applicant has the potential 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.

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 Student Route Visa to study at the RCA, they will also need to meet the Home Office's minimum requirements for entry clearance.

All applicants will be asked to submit a portfolio, a statement, and a short video. Programme-specific requirements for these will apply and are detailed below.

Programme-Specific requirements

Candidates are selected entirely on merit, and applications are welcomed from all over the world, as well as from mid-career designers and career changers. The selection criteria considers creativity, imagination and innovation as demonstrated in your portfolio or equivalent professional experience, as well as your potential to benefit from the programme and to achieve the MArch standard overall.

The programme welcomes architects, designers and spatial practitioners from a range of backgrounds, including those from other design disciplines such as sound, moving image or performance, with an interest in the built environment. Applicants from other backgrounds are also welcome, such as practitioners involved in local government, NGOs, journalism and activism.