

Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
Course Title: Independent Research Project - Preliminary



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Please note that this course specification is correct on the date of publication but may be subject to amendment prior to the start of the Academic Year.

Course Code	HECOS Code	Academic Session
	100583 (50%); 100962 (50%)	2026-27

Course Title	Independent Research Project - Preliminary
Course Contact	Isabel Deakin

Credits	20
SCQF Level	11
When Taught	Semester 1

Associated Programmes	Master of Architectural Studies in Creative Urban Practices Master of Architectural Studies in Digital Creativity Master of Architectural Studies in Energy and Environment Master of Architectural Studies in History and Theory of the City Master of Architectural Studies in Urban Buildings Master of Architectural Studies in Urban Design
Lead School	Mackintosh School of Architecture
Other Schools	N/A
Date of Approval	Programme Approval October 2025

Course Introduction
<p>The Independent Research Project- Preliminary Course is the first course supporting the student's Independent Research Project which is delivered across Stages 1, 2 and 3 through three interrelated courses:</p> <p>Stage 1: Independent Research Project - Preliminary</p> <p>Stage 2: Independent Research Project - Intermediate</p> <p>Stage 3: Independent Research Project - Advanced</p> <p>This course is designed to give students the skills to research, analyse and define their individual architectural interest and proposed output in an area relating to their chosen specialism. Through investigative studies and design strategies students will identify a focus and develop a body of work which will act as a foundation for further development and testing of a proposed output in PGT Stage 2 and its realisation and communication in PGT Stage 3.</p> <p>As this is a supervised independent research project, students are expected to operate with professionalism, self-direction and manage their own time.</p> <p>Students are taught through a combination of group and individual tutorials, visits, talks and skills workshops. Through formative feedback, peer sessions and interim and final reviews, students apply their learning on the course across the semester.</p> <p>Through this self-directed project students can develop and advance their own research interest and test outputs in anticipation of the final realisation and communication of their Independent Research Project in Semester 3.</p>

Course Aims

The aims of the course are to:

professionalism: facilitate a student's command of knowledge of professional ethics in terms of collaborative, inclusive, sustainable and safe design principles to develop a response to a research-based design problem and evidence this through preliminary independent design led research investigations within their specialist study

design/create: facilitate a student's command of a creative design process in the production of preliminary independent design led research investigations within their chosen specialist study

research: facilitate a student's command of research skills to develop a response to a research-based design problem and evidence this through preliminary independent design led research investigations within their specialist study

communication: facilitate a student's command of the integration of analogue and digital media to communicate structured thinking visually and verbally, to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary independent design led research investigations within their specialist study

skills: facilitate a student's command of critical reflection, communication and a structured methodology, with digital and analogue tools, to develop a response to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary independent design led research investigations within their specialist study

knowledge: facilitate a student's command to creatively use advanced architectural theories, concepts, and techniques to address social, ethical and climate change challenges to develop a response to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary independent design led research investigations within their specialist study

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the Course students will be able to **appraise, integrate and articulate:**

professionalism: knowledge of professional ethics in terms of collaborative, inclusive, sustainable and safe design principles which respond to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary independent design led research investigations in the context of their specialist study

design/create: a creative design process which responds to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary independent design led research investigations in relation to their chosen specialist study

research: research skills to develop a response to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary design led research investigations within their specialist study

communication: the integration of analogue and digital media to visually and verbally communicate structured thinking to develop a response to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary design led research investigations within their specialist study

skills: critical reflection, communication and a structured methodology, with digital and analogue tools, to develop a response to a research-based design problem evidenced through preliminary design led research investigations within their specialist study

knowledge: the creative use of advanced architectural theories, concepts, and techniques to address social, ethical and climate change challenges to develop a response to a research-based

design problem evidenced through preliminary design led research investigations within their specialist study

Indicative Content

The Independent Research Project- Preliminary course is designed to give students the opportunity to explore their individual architectural interests in the context of their chosen specialist study. Students prepare an illustrated Design Report identifying the area of research forming the focus of the student's significant project. The course supports students in the development of a response to a self-directed research-based design problem through a series of core lectures and seminars and regular tutorials with their subject specialist staff.

During the course students will be supported to:

- Identify their own research interest and develop a research question
- Prepare, analyse and present a series of case studies, precedents and theories which include primary and secondary research to test their individual research interest and question
- Undertake a literature review
- Produce a series of preliminary design outputs
- Define their chosen methodology and test and analyse their research and architectural response
- Critically reflect and draw conclusions from their outputs to facilitate PGT Stage 2

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

Pedagogy:

Studio is both a learning space and a form of reflective practice where knowledge, skills and attributes are transformed into design competencies. Integration of the six learning domains enables design work to be grounded in specialist knowledge relating to the student's chosen specialism and enacted through individual research project. The course is intended to develop students' command of and fluency in iterative and reflective design practices while deploying their critical, ethical and professional position. Student learning is developed through the course, supported by staff and student field trips, which enable students to address real-world issues in the context of specific communities and places. Groupwork and collaboration with other students are core to the student learning experience, enabling students to work productively with others while contextualising the role of the architect in relation to other disciplines and practices. Specialist staff, along with visiting guests, offer students insights into the constantly changing world of architectural practice. Independent learning is fostered throughout the year.

Delivery:

The course is delivered through regular studio sessions, using a range of learning and teaching activities, including individual and group tutorials, design reviews, seminars, workshops and lectures by staff and invited guests. Cross-disciplinary Design forums offer the opportunity for critical discourse around issues raised by the studio project, enabling staff and students across the specialisms to enter into a dialogue around contemporary architectural issues. A hybrid approach to learning through in-person sessions and on-line support offers students access to flexible and inclusive learning. Private study consists of both staff-directed study and independent student-directed study.

Timetable: Studio tutorials are delivered on a weekly basis either in groups or individually with pin-up tutorials and cross-disciplinary design reviews at set points throughout the session concluding with a design forum at the end of the project.

Canvas:

The virtual learning environment tool Canvas is used for the dissemination, discussion, and access to relevant course information, and to signpost students to other relevant teaching and learning platforms used by GSA.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
20	200

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Formative activities are provided during studio courses, offering students the opportunity to obtain ongoing staff and peer feedback through discussion and review in relation to the course.

As such Formative feedback provided throughout the course fosters reflective learning while supporting the Summative graded assessment and feedback process, which generally happens at the end of the course.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

Summative assessment is undertaken at the end of the course and is designed and delivered to support student learning. Students' work is assessed against the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for each course. Summative assessment in this course is undertaken through a coursework assignment in the form of a 3,000-word written design report. Coursework assignment submissions involve visual and text-based submissions utilising both digital and physical tools and formats. Written feedback is provided on all summative assessments.

All submissions will be assessed and moderated in line with the GSA Code of Assessment. Reassessment opportunities where a student has not passed the course are outlined in the GSA Code of Assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
Written Design Report Students are required to submit an illustrated Design Report (3000 words) including preliminary design led research investigations and contextual research supported by a bibliography	100%	Semester 1 Week 12

Exchange/Study Abroad

Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students?	No
Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning?	No
Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad?	No
Is this course collaborative with any other institutions?	No
If yes, then please provide the names of the other teaching institutions	

Reading and On-line Resources

Supporting the course, an indicative reading and on-line resource list is accessible via [Resource Lists](#). This list will be reviewed and updated annually. Supervisors, tutors and peers will provide further recommendations appropriate to student's chosen research subject.