

**Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
Studio 2 - Transformation Design**



Image credit: Mike Chai

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 2026-27 Academic Year.

Course Code	HECOS Code	Academic Session
PDIN252		2026-27

Course Title	Studio 2 – Transformation Design
Course Contact	Dr. Marianne McAra

Credits	40
SCQF Level	11
When Taught	Semester 2

Associated Programmes	M.Des in Design Innovation and Transformation Design
Lead School	School of Innovation and Technology
Other Schools	N/A
Date of Approval	PACAAG April 2025

Course Introduction

Transformation Design focuses on change-oriented approaches, which engage with complex social or systemic issues. This course looks at ways to understand complexity and work with stakeholders using participatory processes that trigger transformation. Research and teaching feeds into projects that combine strategic thinking with hands-on exploration to shape future concepts in areas such as healthcare, education, housing and politics. As a material practice, design brings form to and contextualises transformation within wider ecosystems at various scales; exploring person and place in parallel to people and planet. The co-creation of knowledge artefacts will play a key role in navigating and socialising this complexity in order to map strategic pathways towards meaningful change. This course responds to the increased complexity of contemporary design, its context and the interactions and experiences it affords. It does so by offering an introduction to Transformation Design practices, techniques, engagement tools and design-research approaches to identify key insights, opportunities and drivers to support creative capacity-building and collective future visioning.

Course Aims

This course aims:

1. Develop students' critical understanding and sustained engagement with the theory and practice of design innovation, in the context of Transformation Design practice, as an approach to contemporary issues related to people and planet, through a design project. In preparation to Stage 3 Masters Research Project, this course provides a platform to increase the students' ability to contribute to the contemporary debates related to industry and research in the context of the Transformation Design;
2. Expand students' skills to conceive, manage, and deliver a collaborative design project in the context of the Transformation Design; and demonstrate the value of the methods and approaches of Design Innovation applied for societal transformation within specified project context(s);
3. Extend the students understanding of contemporary design practice to encompass non-object-based activities, and creatively explore Transformation Design innovation of artefacts, systems, services, strategies and the experiences these deliver to people.

4. Provide opportunities for students to develop reflective and collaborative dialogue with a variety of stakeholders, including cross-discipline work and collaborations or interactions with contextual partners (i.e. experts, communities, organisations and other relevant parties) to explore domain-specific professional practices.
5. Equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to deliver and critically discuss design-led innovation using the professional standards, and the verbal and visual language of Transformation Design, through inclusive and appropriate media to project contexts and audiences

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a critical understanding of relevant theories, global and local debates, and their application to project opportunities, demands, and constraints afforded by a given context, through the lens of Transformation Design.
2. Plan and critically apply appropriate research tools and methods relevant to Transformation Design innovation to explore and interpret project contexts and themes, and support project development.
3. Develop, iterate and test innovative Transformation Design proposals informed by insights gathered from project collaborations and research to address demands, constraints, opportunities or challenges within a given context.
4. Critically reflect on individual and collaborative processes and interactions, their ethics, and the potential impact of a design-led innovation and Transformation Design proposal in a given context.
5. Communicate to professional standards and with supporting evidence, a Transformation Design proposal and its potential impact in a given context, using appropriate media for a variety of audiences.

Indicative Content

- Engage with the theoretical underpinnings and the language of Transformation Design through lectures, seminars, viewings and project work;
- Develop an understanding of the contextual and historical evolution of Transformation Design practices and techniques and relate these to current philosophies and best practice in the field;
- Investigate the conceptual and aesthetic basis of current and Transformation Design methodologies through the evolution and realization of original work, both individual and group-based;
- Develop and demonstrate an understanding of research methodologies and realisation processes within the field of Transformation Design;
- Expand the existing disciplinary boundaries of design practice through the application of design led innovations in technology, social interaction and industrial practice through the development and realisation of challenging, concept-driven research projects;
- Develop a research project that allows exploration of individual research interests, theoretical debates and professional models of contemporary design activity;

- Acquire and demonstrate an understanding of professional practice within the field of Transformation Design.

Studio 2 should be viewed in context within the whole programme. It builds on work in Stage One in which students have been introduced to, and practiced, several key innovation methods and approaches and have worked in groups to explore a range of challenges in different contexts, and to develop and present ideas. In turn, Studio 2 provides a further foundation to Stage Three which takes the form of an independent project.

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

The principal teaching strategies employed in this practice-based course are:

Lectures and seminars - used to disseminate theoretical, methodological, contextual and historical knowledge and address specific issues related to each course which can be used to underpin practical studio work. Lectures also have the broad aim of generating further debate in seminars, tutorials, studio sessions or further enquiry in self-directed learning or research.

Live projects - projects with external partners and/or thematic experts allowing students to gain a proximity with current professional standards and practices associated with design innovation.

Critiques/Presentations - an important learning device used to generate peer debate regarding the generation, development or overall success of concepts, and their practical realisation within the context of a project brief or proposal. Students present work to their peers, tutors and stakeholders or contextual partners through appropriate visual and verbal means (including: models or mock-ups, portfolios, videos, slideshows, etc.). The crit enables the development of key presentation skills, and encourages students to give constructive feedback regarding each other's work, and an opportunity to debate project input. These may be tutor-led, tutor-facilitated, or peer-led allowing students to fully explore all aspects of practical submissions within a reflective discursive framework.

Tutorials - designed to provide academic support through individual or group meetings with staff to discuss the different directions and aspects of projects or course-based activities as well as progress on the programme/course overall.

Self-Directed Learning and Research - in line with other taught postgraduate programmes at GSA, significant emphasis in the Design Innovation programme is placed on self-directed study, from project design and development, to gaining theoretical knowledge through traditional research methods. This emphasises autonomy, reflection upon personal learning and self-directed project work within an individual and a collaborative environment.

Guest Speaker sessions (when relevant) – include input from visiting lecturers/guests from industry and research staff enabling students access to, and understanding of, relevant contemporary practice, research and commercial context. Guests often include professionals from our global alumni community to aid students in developing their own professional practice and prepare for employment, contributing with expert knowledge to the course through the sharing of knowledge, professional paths, case studies, projects, and where practical and applicable will offer critical input to ongoing project work.

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

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
48	400

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Formative feedback is an ongoing process undertaken through reviews and tutorials with staff. As part of studio-based learning, regular contact with tutors provides students continuous and detailed feedback on their work.

Students submit a formal presentation of their work at a mid-way point in the course. Tutors offer oral feedback on how best to improve and build upon existing work to date with the support of peer note-taking to expand upon and consolidate the received feedback.

Due to the nature of the innovation process, formative assessment does not result in a predicted grade. However, students who appear to be at risk of failure will be offered individual tutorials as appropriate to provide targeted support.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

In this course, summative assessment is designed to replicate professional practices associated with design innovation projects. Students are supported in developing skills in a range of appropriate research and development methods, and in a collaborative group work setting.

Summative assessment has two components as set out below: one group submission and one individual submission. The presentation results in a single group grade. The project document results in an individual grade for each student. Students are awarded an aggregate grade based on the weighted grades of the two components, and are not required to pass both separately for the award of credit.

Written feedback will be given.

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

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
Presentation of project Outcome (group): presentation to faculty and peers of a project outcome, it's rationale and expected impact in the explored context, with supporting materials when applicable.	40	12
Project Document (individual): 3,000-4,000 word visual document offering a reflective, evidenced and critical narrative of project process, decisions and outcomes. There should be a clearly identified response to the context within the brief based on research and analysis. This document should include text-based and visual elements including sketchbook-evidence of an iterative creative process.	60	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	N/A

Reading and On-line Resources
The course indicative Reading and on-line resource list is accessible via Resource Lists . This list will be reviewed and updated annually to reflect course content and subject developments.