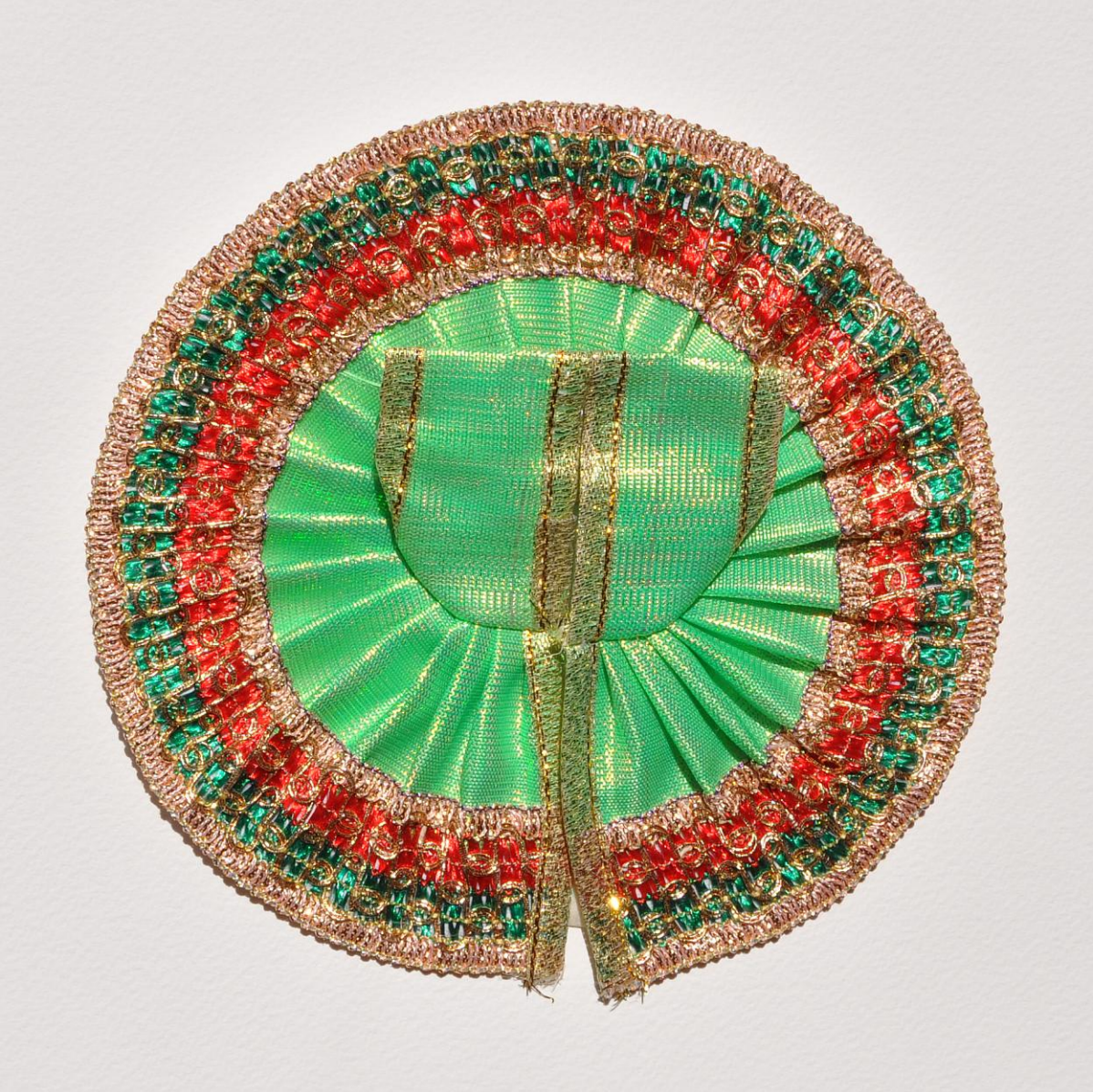
THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART

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



Shweta Mistry, MRes

Please note that this 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
		2027-28

Course Title	Independent Research Project
Course Contact	Professor Duncan MacLeod, Head of Postgraduate Research

Credits	120
SCQF Level	11
When Taught	Semesters 1, 2 and 3

Associated Programmes	Master of Research (MRes)
Lead School	Research
Other Schools	Mackintosh School of Architecture School of Design School of Fine Art School of Innovation and Technology
Date of Approval	Programme Approval October 2026

Course Introduction

The Independent Research Project (IRP) forms the core of the Master of Research (MRes), providing students with the opportunity to undertake, contextualise and communicate a substantial independent research enquiry.

The Independent Research Project is undertaken throughout the prescribed period of study, alongside the programme's taught courses. Students draw upon the research training and researcher development opportunities provided through these courses as they develop and complete their independent enquiry. Supported through academic supervision, peer learning and researcher development activities, the project enables students to consolidate and extend their research capabilities through independent enquiry.

Research may be undertaken through a range of approaches appropriate to the nature of the enquiry and its disciplinary context. Research outputs may take diverse forms, including, but not limited to, written, visual, material, spatial, performative, sonic and digital work. Projects may be situated within disciplinary, interdisciplinary, professional, public and/or community contexts, as appropriate to the research aims and questions. The final submission is presented through either a Thesis route or a Practice route, in accordance with MRes programme regulations.

The development of the research will normally follow the indicative framework outlined below, although the timing, sequencing and emphasis will vary according to the nature of the project, methodological approach and mode of study.

1. **Framing the Research Enquiry:** Development and refinement of the research questions, aims and objectives through critical engagement with relevant literature, theory, practice and contextual debates. This establishes the rationale, scope and significance of the research.
2. **Research Design and Ethical Planning:** Development of an appropriate research design, including the selection and justification of methodological approaches, methods of enquiry

and ethical considerations. This supports the rigour, feasibility and effective planning of the project.

3. **Research Enquiry, Analysis and Knowledge Development:** Undertaking research activity through appropriate methods, including fieldwork, practice-based enquiry, experimentation and other relevant approaches. This involves the generation, analysis, interpretation and synthesis of research materials, practices and findings to develop new insights, understanding and/or knowledge.
4. **Research Output, Contextualisation and Communication:** Development, critical contextualisation and refinement of the final research submission. This includes articulating and communicating the significance of the research outcomes within the relevant field and, where appropriate, preparation for oral examination and dissemination.

Students who successfully complete the Independent Research Project will develop advanced knowledge, understanding and research capabilities relevant to doctoral study and to research-informed professional, creative, cultural and public contexts.

Course Aims

The aims of the course are:

- To support students in undertaking a substantial, sustained and independently managed research project at Master's level, demonstrating autonomy and responsibility for its development and completion.
- To enable students to develop and refine a line of enquiry, informed by critical engagement with relevant scholarship, theory, practice and disciplinary contexts.
- To support the application and critical evaluation of appropriate research methodologies and methods, including informed ethical judgement, in addressing the questions and objectives of the research project.
- To foster independent, critical, original and creative enquiry through the generation, analysis, interpretation and synthesis of research materials, practices and findings.
- To encourage critical reflection on the research process, outcomes and their significance within the relevant field, including consideration of limitations and opportunities for further research.
- To support students in producing, critically contextualising and communicating a coherent body of research through a thesis or practice-based submission, with consideration of appropriate audiences and opportunities for dissemination.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

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

- Design, manage and undertake a significant independent research project within an appropriate disciplinary, interdisciplinary, professional, public or community context.
- Select, justify and apply appropriate research methods and techniques through critical, original and creative approaches, making informed judgements on the ethical issues arising from the research.
- Develop and critically contextualise appropriate research outputs in relation to relevant theories, practices and current developments in the field.
- Effectively communicate in-depth disciplinary research to diverse audiences in intellectual and creative ways, recognising opportunities for knowledge exchange and dissemination.
- Critically evaluate the research design, process and outcomes, identifying the strengths and limitations of the project and potential directions for further research or development.

Indicative Content

The content of the Independent Research Project will be determined by the student's research questions, disciplinary context and methodological approach.

Research activities supported through supervision and seminars may include:

- Development and refinement of research questions, aims and objectives.
- Contextual and literature reviews, including engagement with relevant theory, practice and precedent.
- Research design, methodology, project planning and ethical considerations.
- Fieldwork, experimentation, creative practice and other appropriate forms of research activity.
- Analysis, interpretation and synthesis of research materials and findings.
- Development, documentation and critical contextualisation of research outputs.
- Critical evaluation of research processes, outcomes and contributions to knowledge.
- Communication and dissemination of research findings and outcomes through appropriate academic, professional, creative or public-facing formats.
- Preparation and presentation of the final research submission.

The precise nature and balance of these activities will vary according to the discipline, methodology and individual research project.

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

As appropriate to a research degree, the principal mode of learning for the Independent Research Project is independent enquiry, supported by regular academic supervision and peer learning.

Students will be supported by a Primary Supervisor, with additional supervisory expertise appointed where appropriate. Supervisors will normally be drawn from GSA, although a Co-Supervisor may be appointed from a partner institution in accordance with the relevant regulations.

Students will identify their individual research training and development needs in consultation with their supervisor(s) and/or the Programme Lead, ensuring that relevant knowledge and skills are applied and further developed through their research project.

Students will receive six hours of individual supervision over the duration of the course, providing disciplinary and methodological guidance, opportunities for critical discussion, formative feedback and review of research progress.

Students will also participate in up to eight hours of group seminars, supporting peer learning, interdisciplinary exchange and discussion of research in progress. These seminars provide opportunities to share knowledge, develop critical and reflective skills, receive peer feedback and foster a sense of community within the MRes cohort.

Students are expected to engage with their agreed programme of research training and development throughout the course. This will be reviewed periodically through supervision and updated as the research progresses, and further development needs emerge.

Students will also be supported to engage with GSA's wider institutional research environment through disciplinary and interdisciplinary research communities, networks and access to appropriate research facilities and resources.

Supervision, group seminars and other course-related activities may be undertaken in person or online, as appropriate to the student's approved mode of attendance and study pattern, including on-campus or distance learning, and full-time or part-time study.

Canvas will provide access to relevant learning resources, guidance and programme information, supporting asynchronous learning alongside scheduled synchronous engagement through supervision and group seminars. Students are expected to participate in these scheduled activities, whether in person or online, as appropriate to their mode of study.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
6 hours individual supervision; up to 8 hours group seminars; additional research training and development as agreed.	1,200 hours, including supervision, seminars, agreed research training and development activities, and independent research.

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Formative activity is embedded throughout the Independent Research Project and supports the progressive development of students' research knowledge, skills, methods and professional practice.

Formative activity may include the development and review of research questions, contextual and literature reviews, research design, methodological approaches, ethical considerations, project planning, analysis and emerging research outputs.

Students will receive feedback from supervisors, tutors and peers at appropriate points in the development of their research. Progress will be monitored through supervision, review of research development and agreed project milestones. The areas of research activity outlined in the Course Introduction provide a flexible framework for formative review and feedback, rather than separately assessed components.

Formative review will also include consideration of the student's engagement with an agreed programme of research training and development, the identification of emerging development needs and reflection on how training activities have informed the development of their independent research project.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

The Independent Research Project submission is designed to constitute a standalone body of work fulfilling the academic requirements of a substantive research project at Master's level.

The project may be submitted by Thesis or by Practice, in accordance with the requirements of the course and the relevant programme regulations.

The form and composition of the Independent Research Project submission will be agreed with the Primary Supervisor and Programme Lead and tailored to best reflect the nature and design of the research project.

The submission may include a wide range of written, visual, material, spatial, performative, sonic, digital and other research outputs as appropriate to the discipline, methodology and mode of submission.

Submission by Thesis

- A submission by Thesis will comprise an extended written research project presenting and critically examining the context, methodology, processes, findings and conclusions of the student's independent research.
- The thesis will normally comprise 18,000–20,000 words, including references, bibliography and appendices, in accordance with the relevant MRes regulations.

Submission by Practice

- A submission by Practice will comprise practice-based research outputs and an accompanying written component. Together, these will present and critically examine the context, methodology, processes, findings and conclusions of the student's independent research. The written component will critically contextualise the practice-based research and articulate its contribution to the overall project.
- The extended written component will normally comprise 8,000–10,000 words, including references, bibliography and appendices, in accordance with the relevant MRes regulations.
- Practice-based outputs and the written component will together constitute a coherent body of research, with the nature and scale of the practice-based outputs determined in consultation with the student's supervisor(s), taking account of the discipline, methodology and academic requirements of the course.

Submission and Examination

The final submission must include appropriate documentation and referencing, together with an abstract and declaration of originality in accordance with the relevant regulations.

The Independent Research Project will be examined in accordance with the MRes Degree Regulations. All submissions will be assessed against the course's Intended Learning Outcomes, with examination outcomes determined in accordance with the regulations.

Arrangements for the appointment of examiners, examination and confirmation of the award will be governed by the MRes Degree Regulations.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
Independent Research Project: submission by Thesis or by Practice	100	Normally September, at the conclusion of the prescribed period of study (12 months full-time or 24 months part-time), subject to the relevant programme regulations and any approved changes to the period of registration.

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
An indicative course reading and online resources lists is accessible via Resource Lists providing a cross-disciplinary foundation in research design, methodologies, practice-based research and critical enquiry. These lists are reviewed and updated annually to reflect current course content and research developments. Given the independent and individual nature of the course, students are expected to identify additional literature, practices, precedents and resources appropriate to their research questions, disciplinary context and methodological approach. Supervisor(s) and peers provide further recommendations appropriate to the student's chosen area of research and focus. Further research guidance and learning resources will be available through Canvas and GSA Library Services.