Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
Course Title: The Independent Researcher

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
TBC		2027-28

Course Title	The Independent Researcher
Course Contact	Duncan MacLeod, Head of Postgraduate Research

Credits	20
SCQF Level	11
When Taught	Autumn Semester

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 Researcher supports students in making the transition from taught study to extended independent research. The course provides a cross-disciplinary foundation in the principles, expectations and practical processes that underpin independent research, rather than discipline-specific training in research methods. It supports students in developing the confidence, critical awareness and practical understanding required to begin working as independent researchers within a cross-disciplinary research environment.

Delivered in the autumn semester, the course introduces students to the processes through which independent research projects are framed, planned and communicated. This includes the formation of research questions or areas of enquiry, the development of a viable project rationale, the identification of relevant contexts and sources, and consideration of feasibility, ethics and responsible research conduct. The course complements the accompanying Applied Research Skills course, where students develop discipline-specific methods, methodologies and practices relevant to their field.

Through lectures, seminars, guided activities, and peer exchange, students will develop a research proposal and associated ethics documentation that provide the foundation for the 120-credit Independent Research Project and support progression towards further research, including doctoral study. The course is available to students studying on campus and by distance learning, with shared teaching activities supported through hybrid delivery and complemented by asynchronous online resources.

Course Aims

1. Provide students with a cross-disciplinary foundation in the principles, expectations and practical processes that support independent research.
2. Support students in making the transition from taught study to self-directed research enquiry, with increasing autonomy, critical reflection and responsibility.

3. Develop students' critical understanding of research as an ethical, contextual, reflective and feasible process.
4. Enable students to formulate, refine and justify a viable research topic, question or area of enquiry in relation to appropriate evidence, contexts, feasibility and intended outcomes.
5. Prepare students to produce a coherent research proposal and ethics documentation as the foundation for future independent research projects and professional research contexts.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Formulate and critically justify a viable research topic, question or area of enquiry appropriate to an independent research project.
2. Critically evaluate and justify the research contexts, sources, forms of evidence and broad methodological considerations relevant to their proposed area of enquiry.
3. Apply and critically evaluate ethical, reflective and feasibility considerations to the planning of an independent research project, making informed judgements appropriate to the proposed enquiry.
4. Synthesise relevant literature, practice, precedent, theory and/or contextual materials to develop a coherent research rationale.
5. Communicate a structured research proposal and ethics documentation that evidences critical judgement, feasibility and informed decision-making.

Indicative Content

The course will introduce students to the principles and practices that support the planning of independent research.

Indicative content may include:

- developing a research topic, question, aims and objectives;
- defining project scope, feasibility and intended contribution;
- identifying relevant research contexts, sources, forms of evidence and broad methodological requirements;
- working with literature, practice, precedent, theory and contextual materials;
- understanding thesis-based, practice-based and interdisciplinary modes of enquiry;
- applying principles of research ethics, academic integrity, consent, risk, intellectual property and responsible research conduct; preparing a research proposal and ethics documentation for an independent research project.

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

This course supports an independent, tutor-supported approach to research planning, critical enquiry and research proposal development.

Students will participate in the Research Degree Training Programme, which provides a weekly programme of lectures, workshops, and presentations introducing key research skills, methods, ethics, and approaches to independent research. Scheduled activities will be accessible to both on-campus and distance-learning students through hybrid synchronous delivery, supported by asynchronous online learning resources.

This will be supplemented by course-specific seminars that enable students to apply relevant material from the Research Degree Training Programme to the development of their own research proposals and ethics documentation. Seminars will support group discussion, peer exchange, formative feedback, reflection and the development of coursework assignments. Hybrid delivery will enable students studying on campus and by distance learning to participate in

shared seminar activities and peer exchange. Where discipline-specific methods or methodologies are required, students will be supported in making links to their accompanying Applied Research Skills course and supervisory guidance.

Learning and teaching methods include:

- participation in the Research Degree Training Programme, including lectures, workshops, and presentations delivered through hybrid synchronous activities
- course-specific seminars focused on research proposal development with opportunities for synchronous participation by on-campus and distance-learning students
- guided activities, peer discussion, and formative feedback
- independent study, reflection, and self-evaluation
- use of digital learning resources available on Canvas

Learning and teaching are supported through hybrid synchronous activities, asynchronous online resources and independent study, enabling students studying on campus and by distance learning to engage with the same curriculum and achieve the same Intended Learning Outcomes.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
20	200

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Students will be supported in their learning through a range of formative activities with staff and peers, including seminars, group discussion, work-in-progress activities, and tutorials with research project supervisors.

Formative feedback will support students in developing and refining a research proposal and associated ethics documentation. This will include consideration of the research topic, aims and objectives, research context, literature and/or practice contexts, ethical considerations, feasibility and intended contribution.

Formative feedback will be provided at key stages of development, including proposal planning and draft development. Students will be encouraged to use feedback and feedforward to refine the scope, focus, critical framing, feasibility and ethical dimensions of their proposed independent research project.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

The assessment brief describes and provides guidelines for the summative assessment, which comprises a research proposal completed using the approved course proforma, together with associated documentation.

Summative assessment is designed to support students to consolidate and communicate the research planning undertaken through the course. The research proposal enables students to articulate the focus, context, methodology, feasibility, ethical considerations, and intended contribution of their proposed independent research project.

The ethics documentation supports students to identify and address relevant ethical issues arising from their proposed research, including consent, risk, confidentiality, data management, and responsible research conduct where applicable.

Submissions will be assessed and moderated in line with the Code of Assessment. Written feedback will be provided. The same assessment requirements and academic standards apply to students undertaking the course through on-campus and distance-learning modes.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
A portfolio comprising a research proposal and associated ethics documentation. The research proposal should be completed using the approved course proforma and should focus on the rationale, context, methodology, feasibility, ethical considerations and planned development of the proposed independent research project. Indicative word count: 2,000 words, plus ethics documentation.	100%	Week 12 (Semester 1)

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

Given the self-directed and individual nature of learning in this course, each student will compile their own reading and resource list as their research proposal develops. The course team, research project supervisors, and peers will provide further recommendations appropriate to the student's chosen area of research, methodology, and focus.

Students will also be directed to relevant online learning resources, guidance documents, and research support materials available through Canvas and the library.