



Foundation Diploma in Ceramics

Award: College Award

Duration: 2 years, part-time

Course tutor: Tanya Gomez, RCA Trained Ceramicist

This West Dean Foundation Diploma in Ceramics is awarded in recognition of the successful completion of the two-year, part-time programme of six, three-day units, self-directed study and making, with a final 1500 word essay. It aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the material and will enable you to gain a wide variety of clay techniques from hand-building to throwing, decorating and glazing work, that will develop your skills and build up your own creative language. You will be supported throughout the course, enabling you to create work based around your own research and interests.

The West Dean Foundation Diploma in Ceramics is suitable for potters who have had some experience with working with clay, either at West Dean or elsewhere, and are looking to commit to an extended programme of study and develop confidence within their own personal approach and inspirations.

Within each unit, an in-depth practical process will be introduced by the tutor, as a springboard to exploring techniques with individual direction to aid your development. The importance of health and safety and the running of a studio will be introduced alongside these units. There will also be talks on historical and contemporary issues in ceramics. Each unit will be held in the College's fully equipped pottery studio that offers regular short courses with well-known makers of ceramics throughout the year.

SELF-DIRECTED STUDY

Between each unit you will be expected to develop techniques through the set projects, interpreting and developing your work in response to experimentation. You will bring this work to the start of the following unit for discussion and dissemination. This can be in two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. Therefore, between courses you will need access to a pottery workshop and be able to spend several days a week evolving your own work – this will need to include somewhere to fire your work. This maybe a home studio, evening classes or a community pottery studio. A tutorial session will be planned with the programme tutor between each course on the published date.

It is expected that students also keep a journal of their studies alongside a sketchbook, visual research and technical journal for your own records and interests for the duration of the Ceramics Diploma programme.

By the end of the first three units, you will have built your proficiency and confidence in hand-building and throwing methods, with an introduction to surface decoration and glazing. This work will inform your own pathway in units 4-6, where the work will evolve through self-directed development, progressing into glazing and intermediate techniques.

ESSAY

You will also be required to submit an essay following the successful completion of the requisite six units of study. The essay must be completed within two months of completing all six courses, for submission on 29 April 2026.

The essay will consist of a 1500 word reflective account that underpins your own development and research, and demonstrates the link between your overall experience of the Ceramics Diploma and your future pathway, with evidence of historical and cultural research relevant to your own practice.

The Programme Tutor will discuss how this written work may be presented.

COURSE TUTOR

Tanya Gomez has been working with clay for the last twenty years, having teaching experience in various institutes. After graduating with an MA in Ceramics and Glass from the Royal College of Art in 2010, Tanya has specialised in throwing and creating decorative vessels in porcelain. These have been exhibited in the UK and worldwide. Tanya has experience in a wide variety of techniques in clay and spreads her time between the University of Brighton as technical demonstrator, teaching and continuously developing her own practice at her studio in the South East of England. She has taught on regular short courses in ceramics at West Dean College since 2016.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

Year 1

Unit 1: HAND BUILDING TECHNIQUES – Pinching, coiling and slabbing
24-27 November 2024 | 3-days | Beginners/Intermediate | S3D32631

This unit will support a foundation of knowledge, with focus on the attributes of different clays and how to hand-build with them. Learning and implementing techniques from pinching, coiling and slab work.

Throughout there will be a series of demonstrations that will provide hands-on experience working with clay, understanding its material properties and how it can be shaped and manipulated. You will gain an understanding of health and safety within the studio and how to implement it into your practice.

A brief will be set to guide you through the processes, which in conjunction with your own interests, will begin to inform your creative ideas. These skills will be adapted to beginner and intermediate levels guided by individual students' needs and personal achievements.

A short one-to-one tutorial is designed to mentor your ideas, to help time manage your self-directed study and to develop a framework for your research and making over the intervening weeks to bring to the next unit. This tutorial will be held during the time at West Dean College. In between each unit, an interim tutorial on a set date will be allocated to have a 40 minute virtual tutorial on Zoom with the tutor.

Interim virtual tutorial for Unit 1: Wednesday 5th January 2025

Unit 2: THROWING and TURNING

23-26 February 2025 | 3-days | Beginners/Intermediate | S3D32632

The second unit will begin with a group discussion on one piece of work brought in by each student which they have made in the intervening weeks. This is an opportunity to discuss and share ideas, and any technical hurdles or achievements.

Step-by-step practical demonstrations in throwing will follow, covering the skills required to throw a variety of forms and sizes. Repetition of forms and becoming intuitive with the pieces will be practised. Pieces will be progressed by turning and refining the shape.

A focus on form, grouping of works and their relationship with each other will be the main investigation. Function will be the grounding of this unit, which can have practical or sculptural outcomes.

Interim virtual tutorial for Unit 2: Wednesday 16 April 2025

Unit 3: COLOUR and TEXTURE - Decorating, relief, slip, sprigs and glazes

8-11 June 2025 | 3-days | Beginners/Intermediate | S3D32633

An exploration in a wide variety of colour and texturing clay. This will be full of technical practices that involve building a collection of tests. These will be documented individually with tiles and journals. There will be a taster of how these applications are applied, which will allow you to do advance research back home in the studio.

These areas will be introduced:

- Colouring clay bodies with stains and oxides
- Making plaster batts and sprigs
- Texture and relief making
- Tile decorating to experiment with ideas and methods
- Decorating slip: sgraffito, mono printing, inlay, sponging, wax relief
- Basic glaze making: earthenware/ stoneware

Interim virtual tutorial for Unit 3: Wednesday, 17 July 2025

Year 2

Unit 4: LARGE WORKS throwing with multiples / slab building

7-10 September 2025 | 3-days | Intermediate | S3D32634

You will expand your technical skills by throwing multiples and adding the pieces together. This will be with larger weights of clay. You will learn how to be aware of the clay consistency, and learn to measure, cut, join and finish the work. Techniques that will be shown include joining pieces together, coiling or using slabs.

This unit will be looking at larger pieces of work. You will be expected to self-direct your ideas and inspirations through your own research and two-dimensional references. You will be guided by your tutor and helped to select the best techniques for you to pursue.

Interim virtual tutorial for Unit 4: Wednesday 22 October 2025

Unit 5: ADVANCE GLAZING - line blends, oxides and stains
7-10 December 2025 | 3-days | Intermediate | S3D32635

Glazing is a lifetime of investigating and research. It will have been touched on in Unit 3. This will be a more advanced course in furthering the glazes into line blends. Colours will be obtained in stains and oxides to investigate colour gradients, and additional raw materials will be tried to create matt and textured glazes. Several firings will be held, so that glazes can be furthered and developed, and you will document tests in your technical books.

You will be given a demonstration on how to glaze pieces of various sizes, along with pouring, dipping and the use of a spray booth. There will be the opportunity to bring your own bisque clay to test glazes and experiment with desired colours or textures.

You will also look at studio practice and the importance of health and safety.

Interim virtual tutorial for Unit 5: Wednesday 28 January 2026

Unit 6: SELF-DIRECTED MAKING with tutorials
8-11 March 2026 | 3-days | Intermediate | S3D32636

This is a chance to have one-to-one tutorials focused on techniques and self-directed study. You can bring in pieces to work on, or make a final piece. It is an opportunity to explore challenging methods and to work in a supported environment. You will have the chance to take part in group discussions to generate further ideas. There will also be a discussion about marketing, establishing your practice and how to present your work outside of the studio.

There will be an assessment of the research and technical journals that you will have worked on throughout the two years.

The final essay must be submitted following the successful completion of the six units of study. The essay must be completed within two months after completing the final unit.

EXHIBITION

An exhibition of selected completed work will be planned within the college foyer to celebrate your achievements.

COMPLETION

The Foundation Diploma in Ceramics while not nationally validated, nevertheless aims to provide students with the ability to identify themes within their practice and to identify the kind of work they are looking to produce and be able to communicate this confidently. Candidates will be awarded the Diploma on completion of all units of the programme on the dates listed, submitted the 1500 word essay on time and contributed work for the exhibition of work held in the College after the final unit.

APPLYING FOR A PLACE

ENTRY REQUIRMENTS

The diploma is open to beginners who have had relevant experience in making ceramics and are familiar with the terminology, or those with some experience who require a structured course. You must also have:

- Access to a home or community pottery studio and firing facilities, to develop your work between courses
- A commitment to attending all six units at West Dean College on the dates published for this enrolment, since it is not possible to offer alternative dates.
- Apply with evidence of your current work, skills and interests in ceramics

There is a selection process for this course. Students must complete and return the Application Form by **11 June 2024**

An informal interview on Zoom with the Programme Tutor will follow on 9 July 2024 before places are confirmed soon after this date. Following confirmation of your place, the Bookings Team will contact you to arrange for payment of the course fees for the first year of study.

A specific condition of enrolment is a commitment to attend and pay for all six units, by the due date.

COURSE FEES:

The course fees are payable in advance for each year of study

Year 1: Course fee: £1710 (non-residential, covering all three units – payable by 14 October 2024)

Year 2: Course fee: £1710 (non-residential, covering all three units – payable by 4 August 2025).

The course fee (£3420 in total) includes clay/glaze materials supplied for use during each three-day unit held at the College, and the virtual interim tutorials. It will be anticipated that as you have access to firing facilities elsewhere, that you will take most of your work made on the courses home for firing.

Accommodation for a three-day course, including dinner and breakfast, is currently available from £357 (standard room/single occupancy). Please see accommodation costs on our website – specific to the timing of each unit.

For further queries about the course, please contact:

admissions@westdean.ac.uk

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