

Foundation Diploma in Tapestry Weaving: Developing Skills and Creative Language

Programme Specification and Unit Descriptors

Awarded by West Dean
2 years, part-time



Programme Specification

This West Dean College Foundation Diploma in Tapestry Weaving 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, and a final 1500 word essay. It aims to offer tapestry weavers a broad insight into the technical and creative techniques of tapestry weaving, necessary for developing skills and building your own creative language.

It is aimed at weavers who have completed a beginners' course at West Dean College or elsewhere, who are looking to commit to an extended and intensive programme of study.

Each unit will be based in the unique environment of West Dean Tapestry Studio, one of the UK's only professional tapestry studios specialising in contemporary design and weaving using traditional techniques. The Studio has worked with a wide range of contemporary artists and designers, such as Henry Moore, Tracey Emin and Eva Rothschild, as well as re-creating an important series of medieval tapestries.

Self-directed study

Between each unit you will be asked to develop your own line of research in response to the course focus. This includes the production of small woven sample pieces as a way of developing and experimenting with images, brought to the start of the following unit for discussion and dissemination. A tutorial session will be planned with the programme tutor between each course.

By the end of the first year, you will have a greater understanding of tapestry weaving and a larger knowledge base that will provide you with the ability to understand all stages of the production process at both technical and aesthetic level.

Essay

It is expected that students keep a journal of their studies and weaving for the duration of the Tapestry Foundation programme and submit an essay following the successful completion of the requisite six units of study. The essay must be completed within two months after completing all six courses.

The final essay will consist of a 1500 word reflective account that demonstrates the link between the candidate's overall experience gained from the Tapestry Foundation and their intended future pathway with evidence of historical and cultural research relevant to the candidate's own practice.

Detailed specifications relating to the presentation of this written work may be obtained from the Programme Tutor.



Course tutor

Philip Sanderson Studio Leader of the West Dean Tapestry Studio and is a subject tutor on the MFA in Fine Art. He is also the tutor for the Tapestry Foundation Diploma, a short course tutor at the College and a visiting lecturer at the Royal College of Art.

Philip trained at Middlesex Polytechnic and The Royal College of Art before joining the West Dean Tapestry Studio in 1993. During his time at West Dean College, Philip has translated the work of several artists into large-scale tapestries, including Marta Rogoyska, John Hubbard, Tracy Emin and Eva Rothschild. He has also designed and woven tapestries for a variety of spaces, including The Surrey History Centre, Woking, Portcullis House, Chelmsford Cathedral and Mercers Hall.

Philip also has his own studio practice. Recent exhibitions have included Here and Now in 2017/18 – the first major curated exhibition of contemporary tapestry in England for over 20 years, and he has been shortlisted three times for the Cordis Trust Prize for Tapestry at the Scottish Royal Academy and Inverleith House, Edinburgh.

Exhibition

An exhibition of the finished tapestries, supporting material, sketches and samples will be planned within the college on completion of the programme.

Completion

The Foundation Diploma in Tapestry Weaving will be presented to students who have successfully attended all units of study, submitted the 1500 word essay on time and contributed work for the exhibition of work held in the College after the final unit. Essay submission date 22 March 2027.

The Foundation Diploma 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.

Entry requirements

The following qualifications will be considered for entry to the Foundation Diploma in Tapestry Weaving:

- Examples of woven tapestry, alongside evidence work in other media, textiles or other media, this could include development work and finished work
- A commitment to attending all six units



Course fees

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

Year 1: Course fee: £1,503 (non-residential, covering all three units – payable by 23 September 2025). This includes the interim tutorial between each unit and yarns used for set projects during each course.

Year 2: Course fee: £1,503 (non-residential, covering all three units – payable by 2 June 2026). This includes the interim tutorial between each unit and yarns used for set projects during each course.

Accommodation is available at an extra cost at our Sussex campus. Find out more about our accommodation options and costs on our website.

We may routinely increase our course fees from year to year for one-year courses as well as courses lasting two or more years and may review and change such course fees without notice.

How to apply

Students must complete and return the Application Form and the Questionnaire by 14 July 2025

An informal telephone interview with the Programme Tutor will follow in July before places are confirmed before the first fee instalment is due. 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.

For standard Terms and Conditions please refer to our online Short Course brochure, specific Terms and Conditions in respect of this course will be sent to successful applicants, this includes a commitment to attend all course dates offered, as it is not possible to offer alternative dates.

Any questions?

Email study@westdean.ac.uk; call us on: (01243) 818 300 and select option 1



Unit Descriptors

Year 1

Unit 1: Settings, Weaving Technique and Translation

4-7 November 2025 | 3-days | S3D36510

The first unit illustrates how changes in the setting of the warps and the weight of weft can produce differences in the woven surface and impact on the translation of an image. The series of small sample tapestries made will form the basis of a collection of reference material, to aid the decision making process for creating finished works.

Other technical aspects, such as the use of leashes and the correct use of tools, such as bobbins and beaters are covered, alongside identifying and remedying irregularities within the woven surface.

The unit will also focus on design development and an introduction to the process of translation, before you discuss plans with the tutor for self-directed study, research and woven samples to bring to the next unit. This will reference the experiences gained from making the technical samples to inform decisions about materials and the scale of the work.

Unit 2: Cartoons, Scale and the Weaver's Palette

3-6 February 2026 | 3-days | S3D36675

The second unit will begin with a group session to discuss the work produced on the previous unit. This is an opportunity to share experiences and discuss any issues or discoveries that emerged during this stage.

Students can then begin to consider the next part of the process through further sample work, this includes:

- Cartoon production, different kinds and appropriate uses of cartoons.
- Scale; size of tapestry, considering both practical and aesthetic issues.
- Warp setting and weights of weft including selection of materials for warp and weft.
- Availability of materials, sourcing materials and how this might influence choice of yarns used.
- Selecting the palette of yarns for the project.
- Considering final presentation of the work and how this may influence production e.g. using a selvedge will the warps be visible, inclusion of a weaver's mark.

Within the final phase of this unit students can begin to refine their ideas and having worked through the above list of activities begin to make decisions about the production of a final



piece of work, planned in conjunction with the tutor to bring near completion for the beginning of the third unit.

Unit 3: Finishing Processes/Planning a Personal Project 21-24 April 2026 | 3-days | S3D36719

Following the group discussion on the pieces woven following unit 2, highlighting aspects that arose during the weaving, and how the image may have developed or evolved during production. There will also be an opportunity to discuss how the work may progress from this point; if the tapestry woven can be one of an on-going series; or you wish to plan to explore a different style of working; or even if you would like to make the same tapestry again.

Once cut from the frame the tapestries will be used to demonstrate the finishing process, this will involve making decisions relating to the work and how the work is to be hung or displayed.

By the end of the third unit, students will now have a greater understanding of tapestry weaving and knowledge base that will provide them with the ability to more confidently move through all stages of the production process at both technical and aesthetic level. The unit will end with further discussion as you make plans to devise and produce a tapestry project independently over the summer months and look towards finding your own creative voice.

Year 2:

Unit 4: Dyeing, Materials and Weaving 14-17 July 2026 | 3-days | S3D36720

The dyeing of yarn is integral to the making of tapestries; this unit will begin with an overview of the process of dyeing yarns and the construction of a bespoke palette. An introductory session in the dye rooms will show students all aspects of the dyeing system used by the Tapestry Studio and provide the knowledge required to be able to select, prepare and dye yarns. Students will be expected to create their own dye book to document their research.

The system of dyeing in place at West Dean is a chemical system using acid levelling dyes which are specifically used for dyeing wool and silk; we will also examine and discuss alternative methods of dyeing yarns including dyes for cotton and linen and resources required for dyeing without a dye room.

Unit 5: Experimental Weaving Techniques 6-9 October 2026 | 3-days | S3D36722

Unit 5 will introduce additional tapestry techniques such as tufting, wrapping, knotting and how to create shaped and three-dimensional tapestries, as well as considering the possibilities for combining tapestry with other textile processes. Through the production of



sample pieces, you will begin to explore the possibilities of working with differing scales and materials and to deconstruct the conventional process of tapestry weaving and identify which aspects of the process are relevant to your own practice. The samples will also provide an opportunity to produce work that is defined by a particular technique (or combination of techniques) than it is by translating an image.

The unit will also consider the different ways artists have engaged with tapestry in a more experimental way followed by a discussion on the relevance of specific techniques and materials to your practice.

Unit 6: Design and Reflection

19-22 January 2027 | 3-days | S3D36723

The final unit will look at design and developing ideas and strategies for making new work. There will also be an opportunity to reflect on the two years through discussions held at the end of the unit and through the writing of your essay.

We will begin by looking at the different ways of creating designs for tapestry from personal practice to public commissions, collaborative and community-based projects.

Students will be expected to give a short PowerPoint presentation to show the development of one idea from initial research to a finished artwork ready for translation into tapestry. The presentation is an opportunity to put into practice the skills and knowledge gathered over the previous units and should include considerations of scale, materials, finishing etc., common factors that can influence design development.

To conclude the unit, we will end with a group discussion centred on strategies for moving forward including plans for the creation of a future tapestry.

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.