Subject Benchmark Statement

Architecture

Draft Version for Consultation

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Contents

About this Statement

This QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Architecture defines what can be expected of a graduate in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies. Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education, but not a regulatory requirement. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular discipline or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement, which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
    - equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)
    - accessibility and the needs of disabled students
    - education for sustainable development (ESD)
    - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education (EEE)
    - Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI)

- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes, including course design and content in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards

- new threshold benchmark standards in response to changes in Professional and Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.

How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are not intended to prescribe any particular approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Rather, they provide a framework, agreed by the subject community, that forms the basis on which those responsible for curriculum design, approval and update can reflect upon a course, and its component modules. This allows for flexibility and innovation in course design while providing a broadly accepted external reference point for that discipline.

They may also be used as a reference point by external examiners when considering whether the design of a course and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. Furthermore, statements can support PSRBs with their definitions and interpretations of academic standards.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Architecture

- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Architecture

- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Architecture graduates.

This statement does not repeat the learning outcomes specified by professional accreditation bodies but, rather, seeks to provide a broad context for the standards of architecture studies in higher education. The statement addresses Architecture courses at

both undergraduate and taught postgraduate levels, as well as helping to inform those designing other degree courses including apprenticeship degrees, which have a substantial architectural content or are a cognate discipline.

This Statement introduces in Sections 3 and 4 a structured taxonomy of literacies to articulate the core knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes developed through the study of Architecture. The term 'literacies' is used to communicate with diverse, non-specialist audiences and support interdisciplinary collaboration. The framing of literacies draws upon existing pedagogical practices, particularly the widespread integration of climate literacy within architecture education. The literacies reflect the evolving demands of the discipline and aligns with the expectations of PSRBs, as detailed within Section 3.

In this statement, 'provider' is used to refer to any organisation involved in the provision of higher education to students and apprentices and 'school' is used to refer to an organisational group that includes multiple courses. The use of 'school' may be equivalent to other terms preferred by individual providers – for example 'department' or 'programme' or 'subject'. The use of the term 'course' refers to an approved pathway of study made up from multiple modules leading towards a qualification, either undergraduate or postgraduate.

Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The status of the Statement will differ depending on the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not sector-recognised standards as set out under the Office for Students' regulatory framework. However, Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as a tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

Through the Architects Act 1997, the Architects Registration Board (ARB) is named as the statutory regulator of the profession, giving it the legal mandate to regulate the use of the title 'architect', maintain the register of architects and accredit educational courses. The accreditation of programmes by the ARB recognises them as compliant with the conditions that can lead to registration under the Architects Act 1997.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) is a global, professional membership body that validates architecture qualifications throughout the world at Parts 1, 2 and 3, requiring individuals to hold all parts to qualify for RIBA Chartered Membership. Chartered Membership is separate to being a titled Architect. It is recognised and respected globally but it is not obligatory or a legal requirement.

See section 2.22-2.25 for further details on professional body and regulatory requirements, including those of RIBA.

Additional sector reference points

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement when designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. In 2024 QAA published an update to the Quality Code, which will be helpful when using this Statement.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in QAA's Glossary. Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

1 Context and purposes of an Architecture Degree

Purposes and characteristics of an Architecture Degree

1.1 Architecture sits at the intersection of the arts, sciences and humanities, integrating both creative and analytical approaches. It is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing from these multiple fields of knowledge to address the complexity of our built and natural environment challenges. Consequently, architects have a wide range of knowledge, understanding, and attributes. They act as communicators, coordinators, visionaries and advocates for exemplary design.

1.2 Design is the architect's defining skill. It underpins the capacity to imagine, create, refine and communicate spaces and places that meet user needs and values, inspiring aesthetic and intellectual engagement, and contributing to the creation of resilient and regenerative environments. At its heart, architecture education values design in all its forms – as a method, a creative act, a technical discipline, a cultural practice, and a means of contributing positively to the built and natural environment. It recognises the potential of design to shape more equitable, resilient, and sustainable futures, and to support the well-being of current and future generations.

1.3 The inherently contested nature of design advances the discipline through critical debate and discourse. This teaches students to consider multiple perspectives, question assumptions, and develop more thoughtful, responsive solutions. These discussions ensure that architectural design remains dynamic and relevant, requiring students to become comfortable with the unknown, the incomplete and the intangible over the pursuit of definitive solutions.

1.4 Design in the built environment is often a collaborative activity, requiring the application of interpersonal skills in a variety of contexts. Architecture education therefore supports students to develop the emotional and social skills to be able to work within and lead cross-disciplinary teams. This teaches students to understand how collaboration champions an architect's responsibility to wider global societies and our planet, nurturing students to become comfortable with shared authorship.

1.5 Architecture education is professionally oriented, with most courses being validated or accredited by PRSBs, providing a recognised pathway to chartered status or to registration and the title of Architect. Many students who choose to study architecture do so with the intention of becoming a professional architect. However, the knowledge, understanding, skills and attributes gained through an architecture education are transferable to a wide range of other occupations and students often choose to go on to pursue a related career, or work in different fields. This reflects the success of the broad learning opportunities that architectural education can offer, which may also inform the design of a course. Architecture is a global and mobile profession whilst architecture education in the UK takes place in an internationalised context. To support architecture students in preparing for this, elements of architectural education reflect global, national and devolved governance structures. Courses should take account of differences in governance, law, policy and practice as appropriate for their focus.

Equity, diversity and inclusion

1.6 The profession of architecture relies on building a graduate community that is diverse, inclusive and representative of the wider society it designs for and with. A sustained and reflective commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) should be meaningfully embedded within the culture and practice of architecture education and professional engagement.

1.7 Courses should equip students with the appropriate knowledge, skills, attributes and behaviours needed to foster diverse, inclusive and socially responsive forms of practice.

1.8 Equitable, diverse and inclusive learning environments promote fairness, acceptance and respect. They recognise that each individual brings unique lived experiences and acknowledge the strength that comes from diversity, individual differences, and the varied knowledge and practices that emerge from these. Schools of Architecture should establish ongoing reflective processes to address emerging equity and diversity challenges and collaborate with students to develop more inclusive curricula and pedagogies. Providers have a responsibility to continuously advance equitable access and opportunities for students from all backgrounds to ensure students can progress successfully through their studies.

1.9 Embedding inclusivity and diversity into curricula, studio pedagogies, reading materials and assessments helps students develop broad cultural, social, and critical awareness. This is essential for studying Architecture and for developing ethical frameworks and value systems, helping graduates maintain fair and inclusive approaches throughout their professional careers. Schools ensure an inclusive, supportive and respectful learning environment which promotes opportunities to engage in and inform critical discourse, exploring, challenging, critiquing, deconstructing and building on established approaches and established worldviews within the discipline. They can wherever possible expose students to diverse voices and perspectives. This may include staff, but also guest speakers, reviewers and consultants who can share viewpoints from across and outside the field. This variety of voices broadens and enriches the educational experience by giving students access to a wide range of ideas and approaches.

1.10 Schools should recognise the implications of the additional explicit and hidden costs involved in studying Architecture and the potential for these to disadvantage and exclude potential learners. Expenses incurred for materials, digital resources (hardware and software) and study visits may prevent students from fully participating in their studies and from realising their potential. An expectation to spend long hours working in studio can also place those with external commitments such as caring responsibilities, or those working to support their studies, at a disadvantage. Schools should aim to minimise additional costs incurred by students wherever possible, supporting equitable access to resources, and being mindful of the challenges many students can face. They should also recognise the specific challenges of access to work-based learning and/or professional practice experience faced by some student groups, and the potential for this to exacerbate inequalities.

1.11 Architecture education is centred on ‘the studio’ (as defined in 3.15). Students regularly present and discuss their work in front of others, a format which can be difficult for some students and therefore needs to be carefully managed. Schools should recognise the specific challenges that reviews (as defined in 3.32) may present for some students. Within and beyond established studio pedagogy, programmes can utilise a variety of modes and methods in both the delivery and assessment of courses to support inclusive learning, recognising different learning styles to support individual needs. Programmes may benefit from using inclusive curriculum toolkits or checklists to support their pedagogic and curriculum design.

Accessibility and the needs of disabled students

1.12 Educational institutions are legally required to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Education Act 1996, and the Equality Act 2010, which mandate the provision of ‘reasonable adjustments’ for students, academic staff, and professional services staff.

1.13 Disability is understood as a dynamic interplay between individual characteristics and surrounding environmental or social contexts. This means addressing disabled persons' needs through societal and spatial adjustments rather than placing the onus on individuals to adapt to existing structures. In architecture education, this requires thoughtful adaptation of curriculum delivery, learning environments, and pastoral support. Architecture schools, often engaged at the forefront of research and teaching in accessible design, are uniquely positioned to lead on these issues.

1.14 Institutions should adopt integrated, holistic approaches to meeting disability needs that value and enhance potential for success. This may move beyond basic compliance to creating genuinely inclusive educational environments in which all students and staff can thrive. Given the discipline’s commitment to designing inclusive and equitable spaces, architecture education has a particular responsibility to exemplify these principles in its own educational environments and curriculum.

1.15 While visible mobility needs are typically addressed through physical modifications, less visible neurodivergent conditions require equal attention. Dyslexia, autism, ADHD, and dyspraxia can, for example, present challenges for the use of traditional learning methods - including text-based learning, teamwork, field trips, communication, presentations, assessments, and time management within studio and lecture-based environments.

1.16 Flexible approaches to curriculum design and delivery are essential in accommodating diverse learning needs. This may include adjustments to group-work expectations, studio and lecture formats, the provision of accessible reading materials, varied assessment methods, and adaptable timelines and deadlines. Alternative forms of assessment can be developed to improve accessibility for different neurotypes and support students to develop emotional intelligence.

1.17 Managing individual needs within group settings can create conflicting requirements. Providers should therefore develop clear oversight frameworks to support equitable and transparent decision making in such scenarios, thereby contributing to the teaching of emotional literacy to students of all neurotypes.

1.18 The physical environment also plays a critical role in supporting neurodivergent students. Environmental aspects such as lighting, acoustics, visual clutter and breakout spaces might be particularly disabling for neurodivergent students who spend significant time in studio spaces during their studies. Course teams should take into consideration making reasonable adjustments to physical environments that adversely affect disabled students.

Education for sustainable development

1.19 The interconnected challenges of the climate and ecological crises require rapid and transformative change in architecture education. Architects have a vital role in imagining, creating and adapting environments to meet these challenges. Architects are designers and problem-solvers with the competency, capability, and imagination to create spaces that are adaptable to current and future needs and resilient to climatic and environmental change.

Integrating creativity, technological innovation, cultural awareness and ethical responsibility addresses complex challenges to help build stronger, more resilient communities for generations to come.

1.20 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) aims to provide learners with the core knowledge, skills and attributes and values to create “a just society for present and future generations, while respecting cultural diversity” (UNESCO, 2023). Architecture education may choose to reflect the United Nations sustainable development competences and goals. Providers and schools may also draw on the QAA / Advance HE Education for Sustainable Development guidance for curriculum design, and the planning of pedagogies and content in order to enact sustainable development and contribute meaningfully to solving global challenges.

1.21 Sustainability in Architecture encompasses a broad, complex, and interconnected set of concerns. It is a field that is constantly evolving, and curricula should make space for students to critically engage with the concept of sustainability, its limitations and emergent alternative approaches. Education for Sustainable Development enables learners to think critically and take informed decisions, building confidence with complexity and promoting a culture of ongoing learning. This enables students to question and explore the challenges, complexities and contradictions of sustainability. It invites critical reflection about long-term practices and evolving approaches that meet the needs of current and future life while respecting ecological boundaries.

1.22 Architecture students may engage with diverse themes, including passive design, zero carbon or carbon positive design, regenerative and biomaterials and technologies, adaptive reuse, circular economies, environmental building physics and modelling, climate justice, ecology and biodiversity, and regenerative design. From material circularity to environmental technologies and community-focused design, architecture education empowers graduates to contribute confidently and meaningfully to planetary health at every scale.

1.23 A firm foundation for knowledge about climate literacy, competence and capability will be holistically nurtured across the creative, cultural, technical, and professional dimensions of the discipline. Tailoring pedagogy and course content toward real-world applications through opportunities within the curricula enables holistic integration of regenerative practice and can encourage innovative and experimental approaches. Schools can consider how predictive tools such as environmental or energy modelling, building performance evaluation and whole life carbon assessment can be integrated to test and inform design decision-making.

1.24 Collaboration across disciplines enriches learning and encourages innovative responses to global challenges, mirroring real-world professional practice. Interdisciplinary projects and co-design with peers, communities, stakeholders and industry professionals can promote a holistic understanding of environmental issues and support the development of skills and confidence for addressing complex issues. Integrating ethical considerations into the curriculum encourages students to reflect on the long-term impacts of their architectural designs, to engage with diverse perspectives, and to develop processes and solutions that actively contribute to the health of the planet.

1.25 Providers should strive to lead by example, working with their student bodies to continuously review and refine their ESD practices. By modelling environmental and ethical practices, schools can inspire students to adopt similar applications in their professional and personal lives.

Employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education

1.26 Employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education supports behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on employment destination and future career success of individual students. It prepares students for changing professional environments and provides enhanced impact through placements and activities that build links between academic institutions and external organisations. Beyond employment, entrepreneurship education provides competencies to help students lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life, well placed to add social, cultural and economic value to society through their careers.

1.27 Enterprise education produces graduates with an awareness, mindset and capability for generating original ideas in response to identified needs, opportunities and shortfalls. Furthermore, it develops the ability to act on them, even if the circumstances are changing and ambiguous; in short, having an idea and making it happen. Entrepreneurship education builds on this, focusing on the application of enterprising competencies and extending the learning environment into realistic risk environments - including legal and funding challenges, engaging in start-ups and devising growth strategies.

Career readiness

1.28 Architecture education balances academic learning with practical, real-world experience to ensure graduates develop knowledge and skills for future employment. In addition, the curriculum stays current and relevant to industry through the involvement of practicing professionals who teach alongside academic staff, exposing students to real-world applications and a range of career opportunities. Supporting students' career readiness is now a core institutional tenet, with dedicated student support departments focusing on employability skills and job search processes. Architecture courses can collaborate with these services to provide CV writing, application support, interview and professional portfolio preparation, and networking opportunities – all strategically timetabled within the curriculum.

1.29 Activities like mock interviews, portfolio preparation seminars, mentoring, and networking can be organised as dedicated events or embedded within academic advisory sessions. The discipline and study of Architecture is local, national and global in context. Many providers now recognise transnational education as core business; where this is the case, courses are encouraged to see this as an opportunity for international collaboration and exchange. When introduced, mobility and partnerships create a visible culture of literacy in internationalisation. This benefits students, staff and providers through enhancing employability and entrepreneurial skills.

Situated learning

1.30 Where placements are offered, providers’ career teams and services connect students with job opportunities, while Architecture schools value leverage of alumni and practitioner networks for more targeted placements. Where work-based placements are included as a part of an academic course, schools have an ethical responsibility to ensure that students are adequately supported and are not exposed to poor working practices. Additionally, providers should strive to ensure all students receive equal support in finding a placement, to create inclusive practices.

1.31 Since external internships are not accessible to all students, courses may offer alternative pathways to professional experience including extra-curricular project opportunities, curriculum-integrated work-based learning modules and optional placement years. The offer of blended and technology-enhanced learning opportunities is likely to increase with PSRB changes to architecture education. This will allow students to gain both

academic and practice knowledge, behaviours, skills and competencies through less linear pathways. More variety in course structure and delivery will affect the tailoring of a student's roadmap to gaining the professional title of Architect.

1.32 Work placements provide equitable access to professional experiences, allowing students to explore different practice types and work environments. These experiences build crucial confidence as students navigate professional expectations that may differ from academic settings. Work placements improve academic performance by developing transferable skills including time management and teamwork. Engaging with staff research projects, UK wide advocacy groups, leading student societies or becoming a student representative, further enhance specialised capabilities relevant to architecture's expanding field.

1.33 Extracurricular activities that support employability serve as bridges to professional practice. Courses may facilitate opportunities for students to develop professional networks, for example through in-person or on-line events. Alumni are part of this community and can be invited back to present their work to current students and give advice through talks and project reviews. Such engagements enhance students' understanding of practice-based contexts and support a culture of mentorship and peer learning.

1.34 Architecture education is well placed to embed live projects within the core curriculum, grounding student learning in authentic, real-world challenges and scenarios and preparing them for practice. It enables students to develop professional competencies while within education, and bridge academic learning with practical application. Innovation often emerges during these projects through material testing, prototype building, and virtual simulation, all supporting enterprise and entrepreneurship education. Live projects involving field trips and community engagement will need to address risk, ethical implications, and student accessibility concerns. When appropriate, engaging students in these processes supports authentic learning and employment skills.

Generative Artificial Intelligence

1.35 Architecture education needs to adapt dynamically to the rapid technological shifts driven by Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) technologies. The ubiquitous integration of these tools in education and practice continues to influence the behaviours and expectations of clients, designers, and project teams, with significant implications for architectural workflows, core professional competencies, and the evolving role of the architect.

1.36 Architecture education will need to include knowledge and understanding on GenAI use in industry. This should cover the ethical, sustainable, intellectual property (IP) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) implications of its use, the potential for bias and discrimination in models trained on historical or synthetic datasets, and the potential means to mitigate against these issues. In this context, careful consideration should be given by providers to the development of students' critical thinking skills when evaluating the reliability of GenAI outputs, and to clearly articulate the processes, reasoning, and methodologies underpinning the prompting and refinement of the tools that contribute to them.

1.37 Critical and reflective forms of assessment can refocus pedagogic practice and develop student skillsets. These include verbal and non-verbal critical reasoning, integration of technical problem-solving exercises within real-world contexts, and evaluation of experiential learning activities. GenAI may be employed as a facilitative tool within these processes, enabling exploration and iteration rather than serving as an end in itself. Courses should continue to promote speculative, analytical, research-informed and novel working methodologies in studio-based design assessment.

1.38 Creative industries are particularly impacted by GenAI tools that are trained on vast amounts of existing data, for which IP attribution is uncertain. GenAI tool use for image and spatial design generation is becoming particularly common within design studios. The creative process in these contexts is highly influenced by existing precedents and is often collaborative and iterative, making it important to delineate the boundaries of authorship and contribution. It is the responsibility of schools and providers to employ and effectively communicate consistent use control policies (such as a ‘traffic light’ system of permitted use) alongside appropriate GenAI tool referencing. This ensures rigorous assessment that retains academic integrity in the face of the ethical, IP and GDPR challenges as they become more pronounced in the commercial setting of architectural practice.

1.39 Providers should ensure that GenAI technology is implemented to promote inclusivity, rather than amplify privilege, and so careful thought over the teaching of and cost impact for students using specialist GenAI tools for compulsory work need to be considered before establishing briefing requirements.

2 Distinctive features of the Architecture course

Curriculum design

2.1 Curriculum design should remain sufficiently flexible to incorporate emerging knowledge and techniques (such as regulatory changes, digital fabrication, sustainable design methods and artificial intelligence) so that students engage with the dynamic nature of Architecture as both an academic discipline and as a fast-evolving profession.

2.2 An architectural education incorporates lifelong learning and continuous professional development. Whilst many students aim to become registered architects, programmes are typically designed to enable graduates to pursue a range of career paths or further study - course design should therefore instil research and creativity that underpins progression to these routes and emerging career paths.

2.3 Undergraduates studying Architecture courses as part of a combined or joint degree with other subjects (including courses that specify major and minor options) will achieve core elements of the threshold standards outlined in this Statement and will add others according to the areas covered in the other subject(s) of their degree. Additionally, they may explore the overlap between different disciplines, creating further opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.4 In designing Architecture courses, providers should take account of PSRB requirements (notably ARB and RIBA) for minimum expected content within and across modules. Provision should ensure a wide educational experience that encourages experimentation, critical inquiry and intellectual development beyond compliance with threshold regulatory criteria.

Progression

2.5 Over the course of a standard undergraduate degree with honours (FHEQ level 6; FQHEIS level 10) or, if available, an Integrated Master's degree (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11) an Architecture student will progress from one level of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each level would see the attainment of knowledge, expertise and experience that builds towards the final achievement of meeting the threshold (and if specified higher-level) subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. This will usually include successful completion and the award of credit for the full range of learning and assessment, including any practical components.

2.6 Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree, it would be expected that a student who had achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in architecture or a related discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate courses are, however, determined by individual providers and may require specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.7 Any student enrolled in a standard undergraduate honours degree course in architecture, may exit earlier and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education (FHEQ level 4; FQHEIS level 7), a Diploma of Higher Education (FHEQ level 5; FQHEIS level 8), or other awards depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard.

2.8 Providers may encourage or incorporate periods of practical experience (for example, a year out in practice or work placements) or international study opportunities, which can enrich student learning. In all cases, academic progression is designed to build on the

learning of students in a coherent manner, preparing them for successful completion of their degree in readiness for their next stage of training or employment.

2.9 Practical experience or study abroad opportunities that take place in the duration of a course should be suitably monitored by the provider. Progression pathways should consider individual student needs. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments should be put in place to align student's experience and learning with equitable, diverse and inclusive measures (as noted in paragraphs 1.12-18).

2.10 Increasingly, alternative pathways such as L6 Architectural Assistant (Integrated Degree) Apprenticeships offer an integrated route to studying a RIBA validated Part 1 Undergraduate course. Providers should refer to requirements from the relevant national apprenticeship trailblazer groups to explore these routes.

Flexibility

2.11 In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the duration of a full-time course leading to a bachelor's degree is typically three years and is set at Level 6 of the FHEQ. Degrees involving a year abroad or a placement year can take up to four years.

2.12 In Scotland, a bachelor's/ordinary degree is set at three years at Level 9 on the SCQF/FQHEIS, and is commonly aligned with RIBA part 1 accreditation. A bachelor's degree with honours, which is the most typical route for students, is designed to include four years of study, and is set at Level 10 of the SCQF/FQHEIS. In addition, a number of Scottish universities have a long tradition of labelling certain undergraduate academic degrees as a Master of Arts (MA). This title reflects historic Scottish custom and practice with an MA/ordinary degree at Level 9 and MA with Honours at Level 10 on the SCQF/FQHEIS.

2.13 Integrated master's degree courses typically include study equivalent to at least four full-time academic years in England, Wales and Northern Ireland; and five in Scotland, of which study equivalent to at least one full-time academic year is at Level 7 of the FHEQ and Level 11 on the SCQF/FQHEIS. The courses are designed to meet the qualification descriptors in full (FHEQ Level 6 and SCQF/FQHEIS Level 10 and FHEQ Level 7 and SCQF/FQHEIS Level 11).

2.14 Students following part-time routes accumulate academic credit in proportion to the intensity of their study, and their total study time and credit value would be the equivalent to those achieved on full-time routes.

2.15 Courses should be designed with inclusivity and accessibility in mind. Institutions may offer a range of delivery modes and pathways to suit different student circumstances. Courses that are offered full-time or part-time, in-person through campus-based studio teaching, or via blended and online learning components can improve access for students.

2.16 Architecture has a strong studio culture that relies on in-person and collaborative working. Courses may be enhanced by digital collaboration platforms, remote reviews and hybrid teaching methods to support inclusivity. Emerging modes of study include block release or day-release structures, which are particularly relevant in a L6 apprenticeship course where learners alternate between academic study and work in practice (as referenced in paragraph 2.10).

2.17 Courses may offer elective modules or optional pathways that introduce an element of choice and personalisation, enabling students to tailor part of their education towards their individual areas of interest. When introducing flexible structures, it is important that Architecture programmes remain coherent and continue to meet the academic threshold

standards outlined in this statement.

Partnerships

2.18 Degree-awarding bodies may deliver courses in partnership with other providers through validation and franchising arrangements. Others may work with partners who deliver specific elements of the course through placement learning or as part of a degree apprenticeship. Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, play an important role in helping partners design provision that contributes to threshold standards being met in a specific subject area.

2.19 Providers may engage in national or International strategic partnerships for delivering their courses. This can include franchised or validated provision, where Architecture is delivered at a partner institution under the oversight of the degree-awarding body. Partnerships can be accompanied by articulation agreements that allow students from another institution (in the UK or abroad) advanced entry into a specified programme. They can also be characterised by transnational education arrangements - such as offshore campuses, exchanges, placements or joint degrees with international higher education providers. In developing such partnership models, providers must ensure that the quality and standards of an Architecture degree remain consistent and that students, regardless of location or context, achieve the benchmarks set out in this Statement. Providers may benefit from consulting the Quality Code Advice and Guidance on Partnerships for further detail.

2.20 Partnerships can take several forms – from formal collaborative delivery of a course (for example another academic institution, community organisation or industry), through to less formal arrangements (that bring in placement opportunities and external expertise for reciprocal learning). In all cases, this Statement and its standards should be applied to ensure that a qualification involving partnerships is designed and managed such that the benchmark academic outcomes are achieved across the entire programme.

2.21 External partners may collaborate with architecture schools on live design projects to support authentic learning and assessment. This experiential learning can enrich the student experience of participatory processes that connect academic study with real-world projects and stakeholders. These partnerships can lead to a variety of activities including industry-led competitions, design charrettes sponsored by firms, site visits and building tours hosted by construction companies, guest lectures or workshops by leading practitioners and volunteering projects. Whilst these activities are often outside the formal credit-bearing curriculum, they contextualise student learning.

2.22 Partnership activities can enhance student experience by enriching widening participation and diversity initiatives. Examples include sponsorships or scholarships funded by industry to support students from underrepresented backgrounds, mentoring schemes pairing students with practitioners, or foundation courses and summer schools aimed at school leavers who might not traditionally enter the profession.

Monitoring and review

2.23 Degree-awarding bodies, and their collaborative partnerships, routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. They draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation are a periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning, including progression and retention statistics, graduate outcomes, and feedback from external

examiners and professional bodies. The student voice will be taken into consideration through this process via module evaluations, student-staff liaison committees and surveys.

2.24 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Providers will use external reviewers as part of periodic review to gain an independent perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved, and content is appropriate for the subject. Periodic reviews and annual monitoring reports support an in-depth evaluation of the course, often involving external panel members and independent advisers to provide objective perspectives. Outcomes are used to inform future planning to ensure that programmes continue to deliver positive outcomes aligned with benchmark standards.

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

2.25 The ARB and RIBA are considered important partners in the design and delivery of validated and accredited architecture programmes. Courses can be aligned to meet PSRB requirements for recognition, and representatives from these bodies may be involved in activities including curriculum advisory panels, visiting boards, or mentorship programmes.

2.26 As of 2025, RIBA validates qualifications throughout the world at Parts 1, 2 and 3, requiring individuals to hold all parts to qualify for RIBA Chartered Membership. A detailed account of RIBA procedures for course validation may be found at their website: https://www.architecture.com/education-cpd-and-careers/riba-validation.

2.27 From January 2028, the ARB will only accredit UK-based masters-level qualifications (encompassing the Academic Outcomes) and a practice qualification (encompassing the Practice Outcomes), or a combined qualification (encompassing both the Academic and Practice Outcomes). A detailed account of ARB procedures for course accreditation may be found at their website: https://arb.org.uk/information-for-schools-of-architecture/accreditation-handbook/accreditation-process-for-new-qualifications/.

2.28 Architecture degrees that lead to professional qualifications undergo annual monitoring and periodic review by professional bodies. RIBA validation visits or ARB accreditation reviews typically occur in cycles and can involve inspection of student work (design portfolios, drawings, reports), meetings with staff and students, and assessment of resources to ensure the course continues to meet PSRB requirements. These visits and associated reports complement the institution's internal review processes by providing specialised feedback aligned with industry standards.

External examiners

2.29 External examiners for Architecture programmes are usually a combination of academics and practitioners who can compare the standards of student work and assessment with national expectations. They are asked to comment on the structure and content of the curriculum, the suitability of assessment methods (for example, the range of design projects, examinations, or essays), the rigour and consistency of grading, and the overall achievement of students in relation to the programme's intended outcomes and comparable programmes elsewhere. Providers are advised to refer to PSRB requirements prior to nomination of their external examiners.

2.30 External examiners produce an annual report highlighting strengths and recommending any areas for enhancement by suggesting, for instance, updates to modules or adjustments to assessment strategies. Examiners also comment and provide a statement on the threshold achievement of student work in comparison with student work at other institutions they have experience of. This is important evidence for providers and for PSRBs

as they understand the comparative and commensurate achievement of student work, particularly at the threshold standard. Providers respond to this feedback as part of their continuous improvement cycle.

2.31 In addition to external examination, institutions may form advisory boards or committees as a further form of external guidance and industry input. Members of such advisory boards might include alumni, employers of graduates and other stakeholders in the built environment sector. These boards can advise on the strategic direction of the degree, helping to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant to professional trends.

2.32 Monitoring and review processes can ensure that important cross-cutting themes are embedded throughout the curriculum. Architecture programmes should reflect these themes in design, content and delivery. Programme reviews provide the opportunity to evaluate how successfully themes are interwoven in the student learning experience.

3 Content, structure and delivery

Content

3.1 All degree courses in Architecture include a range of interconnected activities which motivate and inform the structure and content of the curriculum. In this statement they are considered through the lens of literacies – understood as the ability to access, interpret, evaluate and apply information in a particular domain of knowledge or practice.

3.2 The taxonomy of literacies provides a thematic framework through which the diverse subjects and components that make up the curriculum can be organised and understood. This provides a framework connecting professional body requirements to learning, teaching and assessment strategies. The literacies should not be seen as discrete or isolated but as interdependent and overlapping, reflecting the integrative nature of architectural thinking and practice. Literacies can also provide a tool for meaningful engagement with non-specialist audiences to support good communication with diverse voices.

3.3 On completing a course in Architecture, a graduate is expected to have acquired the following literacies:

- design literacy
- visual and spatial literacy
- cultural and contextual literacy
- climate and ecological literacy
- technical and building environment literacy
- digital literacy
- research and enquiry-based literacy
- ethical and professional literacy
- practice and business literacy
- financial and economic literacy
- emotional literacy
- communication literacy

3.4 In RIBA validated qualifications, integrated design studio projects account for at least 50 per cent of the assessed work. Design projects or studios are typically framed around thematic or contextual briefs that challenge students to respond creatively and critically to real-world conditions or scenarios. This is realised primarily through project-based learning, where students are evaluated on their ability to integrate knowledge, demonstrate iterative design thinking, and communicate their proposals through a variety of media.

3.5 Around design, the curriculum is often divided between three core subject areas: technology and environmental science, history and theory and professional practice. While this knowledge may be developed through design studio projects, programmes typically incorporate subject-specific modules or courses of study. These may vary in credit size and emphasis at different stages of study. As students progress through their studies, they build up understanding of the interconnected nature of these knowledge areas and develop a coherent understanding of varied bodies of knowledge. This may be delivered in collaboration with, or shared among, students from related professional and academic fields. Delivery is commonly through a combination of lectures, seminars, workshops, site visits, and use of specialist facilities such as laboratories and workshops. While many subject specific modules and courses are taught in-person they may also make use of online or asynchronous delivery.

3.6 Architecture is grounded in critical engagement with cultural, historical, and

theoretical contexts. Students analyse, interpret and respond to diverse narratives, values, and precedents, drawing from global histories and artistic traditions to inform design decision making. Developing research skills and evidence-based methods supports the development of architectural knowledge through critical, speculative, and theoretically informed approaches. This body of knowledge is often referred to as architectural humanities.

3.7 Technology as a subject area includes construction and deconstruction; structure and structural systems; building and environmental physics; materials, waste and circular systems; environmental technologies and performance; and manufacturing processes. From an understanding of foundational concepts students learn to integrate technical and environmental strategies into design, addressing environmental, fire and life safety, and inclusivity concerns. Digital and hybrid techniques such as Building Information Modelling (BIM), digital fabrication and computational design can equip students with the tools to design, simulate, collaborate and communicate within digital and augmented environments.

3.8 Architecture courses are clearly vocational, many being PSRB accredited, and as such professionalism is innate to all courses. Professional practice as a subject area typically provides a broad understanding of the legal, ethical, business and economic contexts in which the discipline of Architecture operates and collaborates. This may include themes such as ethical awareness, legal and business knowledge; codes of conduct; financial awareness; project management; procurement; planning systems; policy; regulation; and professional collaboration within local and global systems. As the complexities of designing for or with the world around us increase, so the architectural field expands, and the possible roles of architects are changing. It is therefore important for Architecture students to learn about processes and agencies of change.

Structure

3.9 Students come to architecture education from a wide range of backgrounds, bringing with them the very diversity of disciplines and cultural knowledge that an architecture course requires. They may however have little experience of design or other subjects that contribute to architectural study at higher education institutions. In the early stages of architecture education, emphasis is placed on the acquisition of foundational knowledge, principles and new intellectual frameworks that underpin the discipline. Students are introduced to core concepts through structured project work. This is commonly divided into manageable elements with regular assessment and feedback to support incremental learning and develop confidence, proficiency and reflexivity.

3.10 As students advance the level of complexity increases. Project work becomes more holistic and requires a greater degree of synthesis and integration between subject areas within coherent, contextually responsive proposals. Students are expected to engage in deeper research-led inquiry through evidence-based processes to develop, test and evaluate their design decisions. As students progress further, they engage with increasingly complex urban, ecological, and societal challenges, while simultaneously developing their personal and professional voice and architectural identity.

3.11 In addition to the core knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities articulated through the literacies, architecture courses typically provide opportunities for students to pursue specialist in-depth areas of enquiry at the boundaries of the discipline. This may be a feature of undergraduate courses- particularly in later stages- and it is a defining aspect of master's level study. At this level, students are expected to pursue an independent, in-depth investigation, often culminating in a substantial design thesis or research-led project. This enables students to develop advanced knowledge and skills in a chosen area of interest, supporting both academic progression and professional differentiation.

3.12 At postgraduate level, Architecture courses offer opportunities for students to specialise further and undertake design and research at the boundaries of the discipline or through interdisciplinary approaches. These include conservation and heritage, adaptive reuse and retrofit, digital or computational design, environmental, regenerative or net zero design, and housing and urbanism. Study may be research-informed and design-led, encouraging students to interrogate contemporary issues through critical analysis, innovation, and experimentation. The outcomes of specialist study may contribute to the advancement of the discipline, positioning graduates to pursue further academic research or take on specialist or leadership roles within their chosen area of expertise.

Learning and teaching

3.13 Learning and teaching in architecture education involves direct instruction, as well as peer and staff discussion in the form of individual and small group tutorials, and independent study and research.

3.14 Courses in Architecture are primarily taught through ‘studio’. This term refers not only to the physical space, but also to the methods of teaching commonly used, and to an overall culture - a community of practice which characterises how students engage with learning. While studio remains at the centre of architectural education, innovative teaching formats are expanding the traditional understanding of both the physical studio space and studio pedagogy. Students may be situated outside the studio, sometimes in architecture practice, and engage with remote learning through digital studio platforms and/or block teaching. These formats enable students to combine professional experience with academic learning especially for those students who may not for a variety of reasons be able to participate fully in studio-based learning.

Studio pedagogy

3.15 Architectural learning takes place in a variety of digital, institutional and external spaces. The primary physical workspace - studio - is used by students for drawing, sketching, and modelling their design work as it progresses, and for sharing this with their peers and tutors. Through this process students engage in a form of socialised learning which promotes discourse and the exchange of ideas. Projects and tasks set in studio will often require students to collaborate and sometimes to co-author design projects. The culture of studio also encourages informal peer-to-peer learning which allows students to share their emerging skills and ideas supporting the development of individual project work. An academic studio is not a facsimile of a professional working environment however it does enable students to build transferable skills which will be essential to their future practice.

3.16 Design studio can be a transformative space of integration, experimentation and application, where creative processes and solutions explore healthier relationships between communities, built and natural environments. Engaging in imaginative and reflective practices supports students to develop self-awareness and anticipatory thinking. It creates opportunities to push the boundaries of current knowledge, explore new design approaches and address contemporary challenges.

3.17 The scale and subject matter of studio design projects is varied, but the general pattern is constant. Students respond individually, or in groups, to a brief or proposition. Ideas are developed using a variety of visual and spatial methods supported by discussions with tutors, and fellow students. Projects are the primary vehicle through which students apply and integrate a broad spectrum of knowledge - including spatial thinking, environment, materials and technology, social and cultural contexts, and regulatory frameworks - in response to specific contextual scenarios. Graduates develop a holistic understanding of the field of architecture by synthesising specialised and interdisciplinary knowledge, gained

through both studio-based design projects and subject-based courses.

3.18 Co-authored, group design projects are increasingly used as a means of maximising the potential of studio teaching; students develop skills in team working and collaboration more comparable with the professional practice environment, as described in paragraph 3.43. Studio groups and design briefs may be organised to encourage vertical collaboration across more than one year group, or in some instances across other disciplines in the built environment. Where this occurs it reflects challenges and benefits of interdisciplinary teamwork that graduates will experience in their professional careers.

3.19 Implicit in studio teaching is the very direct relationship between students, and between students and tutors, involving frequent one-to-one and/or small group tutorials. It is resource-intensive in terms of staff-time as well as physical space, but mimics practice. The regular participation of practicing professionals from Architecture and related built-environment professions - both as part-time studio tutors and as visiting reviewers or consultants - presents valuable opportunities to expand students' understanding of the professional context. The interaction of a cohort of student peers, together with academics, professionals, live project clients and consultants, forms a community of practice in the learning and teaching setting that is important to a student's understanding of a design process.

3.20 The studio supports an iterative and reflective process of drawing/sketching and modelling. Students hone their skills through experimentation, testing ideas, risk-taking and failure as part of a design, and a pedagogical, process. Portfolios for assessment should reflect both the process and outcomes of studio design projects as set out in paragraph 3.40.

Resources

3.21 As a space for drawing and making, a studio needs to be well-lit and provide adequate space for students to work on large models. In addition to accessing equipment that supports traditional processes and production, students also require access to the digital tools now integral to design processes and employed across industry. Access to power supply and to WiFi networks are standard in studios, and ideally students should be able to easily access large format printing and specialist making facilities. Students should be able to store their belongings and work-in-progress securely. Ideally, students will be provided with a dedicated space sufficient to allow them to work within the studio environment for the duration of their design projects. Where access to a physical studio is not possible programmes may employ tactics designed to replicate some or all of its characteristics, including the use of digital platforms which enable students to collaborate and share their work with their peers and tutors.

3.22 While the studio is often used for making simple, card models it is not usually appropriate for the construction of more complex artefacts or prototypes. Well-equipped specialist workshops enabling safe, supported access to digital and analogue making are an important resource for architecture education. Specialist workshops may be shared with other disciplines to encourage cross-disciplinary learning but proximity to the studio allows models to be easily transported between the two spaces. Careful consideration needs to be given to the on-going storage of working models on campus (completed models may be required for later exhibition and assessment) and to the recycling of materials.

3.23 Communication, primarily though visual and written methods, but also verbal and non-verbal presentation is fundamental to the study and practice of architecture. Students commonly share their work and receive peer and staff feedback via formal and informal reviews (as defined in paragraph 3.32). To facilitate this, studio spaces have adequate space for the display of student work either as a formal exhibition and/or assessment or as

more informal shared tutorials and reviews of project work-in-progress (see paragraph 3.42). This space also needs to be appropriately equipped for the presentation of digital work and/or the presentation of physical drawings and models.

3.24 Although traditional drawing skills remain important in the development of design abilities, access to high-specification digital hardware and specialist software is increasingly essential to the process of design development and the visual communication of design outcomes. The rapid development of technology in architectural and construction practice means that courses need to appropriately reflect this in the software and facilities they provide, while ensuring that all students have equitable access. A combination of computer laboratories (for direct teaching) and in-studio computers (for self-learning) ensures that all students have access to high-end software and hardware.

3.25 Architecture students require access to a comprehensive collection of technical literature, statutory instruments and standards as well as an up-to-date library of books and journals which may be provided as digital and/or physical resources.

3.26 Architecture education continues to use more traditional teaching spaces - lecture theatres and seminar spaces or classrooms, as required to suit the size of the cohort. This is particularly required for teaching architectural humanities, technologies and professional practice, where lectures are often part of core delivery.

Specialist, research and practice-informed teaching

3.27 Specialist teaching designed to build students' knowledge is usually delivered via lectures, seminars and workshops. A student's ability to apply this knowledge is often developed and tested through studio design projects which may target specific areas of the curriculum or seek to integrate learning from across a spectrum. Specialist teaching staff are commonly also involved in studio teaching.

3.28 Courses are often directly informed, and their currency maintained, by the research, scholarly activity and professional practice of full and part-time staff. A programme may be structured to enable students an element of choice through selecting specific studio groups in order to focus on particular building types, questions or concerns. In so doing, students can tailor parts of their education towards their individual areas of interest. These thematic studios are often related to staff research expertise or practice experience.

3.29 Many architecture courses are PSRB validated and lead directly to registration as an architect, as defined in sections 2.25 – 2.28. Professional practice experience is key to future registration and is hugely valuable for students in developing their understanding of the professional discipline. Schools will typically engage with practice via a variety of methods including visiting lectures, part-time staff who also work in professional contexts, and design projects based around live problems and concerns. They may also include work placements and/or mentorship opportunities designed to offer students the opportunity to engage directly with professional practice experience during the course of their studies (see paragraphs 1.30-1.34).

3.30 Courses may integrate live project work, which enable students to engage directly with clients challenges through developing design solutions to meet their needs. This may sometimes take the form of large scale, physical, fabrication builds which extends students' understanding of the construction process. These projects can allow students to better understand the impact of design decisions, the perspective of users and the constraints or opportunities of practice.

3.31 An understanding of context, including but not limited to the physical environment, is

fundamental to the study (and production) of Architecture. Learning-in-context through study and site visits - which may be local, within the UK, or further afield - can offer students an invaluable opportunity to experience a wide range of contrasting cultural contexts. This includes observing and studying buildings-in-progress on construction sites, and engagement with broader professional contexts. While study visits are advantageous, programmes should be mindful of both the potential environmental impacts around air transport and EDI impacts where extended study visits may be unaffordable for some and may disadvantage students with external commitments and responsibilities (see paragraph 1.10).

Reviews

3.32 A review is an opportunity for immediate and direct feedback. Students commonly present their design work (finished or ongoing) for wider discussion. This usually takes the form of digital or physical drawings and models accompanied by a verbal, or non-verbal presentation. Students can benefit from the insight of both their peers, tutors and visiting specialists or professional practitioners - a form of critical reflection with others which may enable them to progress their work in new and unexpected directions. The requirement to present work succinctly supports the development of visual as well as verbal communication skills and literacy, ensuring non-visual and non-verbal alternatives are offered as alternative forms of learning and assessment. Reviews can also punctuate what may be an extended design process. This supports stretched feedback and formative assessment at key stages of a project, helping students manage their workload and creating structured opportunities for reflection.

3.33 As reviews rely on the inter-active participation of students, usually within a public or semi-public forum, the format can raise legitimate concerns around the health and well-being of some students. The spatial layout of a review often emphasises the un-equal power dynamics at play and the traditional format of a presentation followed by comments and questions from a panel can appear confrontational. These issues may be particularly evident if external reviewers are not adequately briefed on the purpose of the review and/or the expected academic outcome. In addition, the necessity to present work publicly means that students often place greater expectations on themselves than those imposed by their tutors.

3.34 Best practice case studies include more student-centred review formats which can incorporate methods and procedures which respect diversity and accessibility concerns. These include grouping student presentations; changing the methods used for presentation and for giving feedback to prioritise peer-discourse (supplemented by written feedback) and changing the spatial layout. The use of online platforms for the presentation and discussion of student work can also provide more accessibility for disadvantaged learners, allowing for remote participation and minimising the additional costs usually faced by students. In all these examples the dynamics of interaction may vary whilst the principle of open, constructive discourse centred around students' ideas remains core.

3.35 Where reviews are used as part of a summative assessment, particular care should be taken to ensure that individuals or student groups are not subject to specific disadvantage. A combination of visual and verbal presentation has some parallels in professional practice and may therefore be appropriate in some instances, however students may be disadvantaged by differential conditions and unduly impacted by the stress associated with an in-person presentation for examination. Alternative forms of assessment will need to be considered in these circumstances.

Assessment

3.36 The use of structured and scaffolded assessment strategies helps students

understand how they learn and encourages them to respond meaningfully to briefs. This approach supports deep learning because students must analyse their own thinking, connect concepts, and understand the reasoning behind their design choices. It promotes autonomous learning and self-reflection as vital elements within the overall learning process. Self and peer-evaluation constitute an important part of formative assessment as well as more formal summative assessment processes.

3.37 Formative and summative assessment tasks are regarded as positive pedagogic practice when linked with continual feedback, using a range of formats. Stretched formative feedback (feedback and feedforward) are core to students' learning, offering students clear guidance regarding their academic development. Assessment points are opportunities to close this feedback loop on assessment tasks. Where appropriate, key formative and summative qualitative feedback can be provided in person to allow for it to be discursive rather than conclusive, giving students their voice in understanding or questioning feedback and discussing how to apply the learning to future modules.

3.38 Courses can use multiple types of assessment tasks depending on the learning being assessed. For example, portfolios, presentations, exhibitions, illustrated reports, live builds, physical models, essays and exams. Presentations can take the form of tabletop reviews or open panels. Both can include external panel members from other providers, professional practices, project stakeholders and peers. Care should be taken to ensure that external panel members have been given guidance on appropriate conduct and feedback during reviews to support inclusive learning environments.

3.39 Courses typically culminate in the production of a portfolio, often including a thesis or major project which is either accompanied by or incorporates a substantial written component. Students formulate, plan and execute an independent line of design enquiry, often expanding on a specialism or core area of interest that they have developed through their studies. Through student-led investigation and research-by-design, learners are encouraged to articulate critical positions and personal agendas - key attributes toward intellectual independence and entrepreneurial thinking.

3.40 The portfolio is commonly used as a synoptic assessment providing a holistic representation of integrated knowledge and design reasoning. Given the diversity of student projects, portfolio submissions may vary in size, scope and format. Providers’ assessment conventions, which are typically structured around text-based word count equivalents, may not always align with the visual and iterative nature of architectural outputs. Schools are encouraged to support an ethos of co-creation between students and tutors, using formative assessment points to determine the most appropriate means for students to showcase their learning to suit their individual project trajectories.

3.41 Assessment criteria for design work traditionally accommodates speculative enquiry and provides fair and accurate assessment of individual and group contributions to the overall outcome of projects. The use of visual rubrics against marking criteria is increasingly used and can support a students’ understanding of fair and transparent assessment.

3.42 Consideration of the space and set up of any assessment should be appropriate for the nature of architectural work and suitable for all, whether for an exam or live presentation. Alternative spaces should be offered where required to support students with different learning needs - such as a pre-recorded presentation or quiet classroom. Most courses will require studio space to be set aside for collective assessment practice to allow physical submissions such as model making, hand drawings and exhibition formats.

3.43 Group and team working is an integral part of work within architectural practice and inclusion within the curriculum can offer a valuable teaching and learning experience.

Students should be encouraged to take advantage of group working opportunities when they are made available. Assessment tasks can include collective and individual contributions and offer the chance for each student to reflect or interpret feedback gathered through group work to demonstrate an understanding from collaborative learning.

3.44 Assessment strategies can include innovation in order to support inclusivity and offer students an opportunity to be more experimental with their project work. Rather than offering a limited number of traditional options (such as essay or drawn details), a more flexible scope for formative assessment can be agreed between students in consultation with tutors (for example film work or construction of full-scale building elements).

3.45 Including students within feedback and assessment processes such as peer-to-peer and student-led reviews is good practice and can increase engagement and critical reflection of the discipline. These may include students from across different levels of study. Student self-assessment can be used as part of a learning strategy and within design reviews, enabling students to reflect on their own progress and request further feedback in specific areas.

4 Benchmark standards

Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Architecture and a master's degree in Architecture. For a student to be awarded an integrated master's degree in Architecture they will have met the requirements for an honours degree before completing a year of study or equivalent credit at Level 7 FHEQ/Level 11 FQHEIS in order to fulfil the requirements for an integrated master's award. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in Architecture.

4.2 The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to Annex D in The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies. This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours - 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

4.3 Please note that the minimum standards are not intended to specify universal competence standards for a discipline. If a provider chooses to develop competence standards (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) as part of a programme specification these can be informed by the relevant Benchmark Statement along with any PSRB requirements. In these circumstances providers should follow the most recent guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

4.4 As noted in section 1 and under 'partnerships' in section 2 (paragraphs 2.18 - 2.22) many Architecture degrees are recognised by two UK PSRBs – the Architects Registration Board (ARB) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). For degrees that are recognised by a PSRB, themes, values, attributes and/or outcomes, as defined by the professional bodies to support development of competences required for professional registration, will apply.

Bachelor's level minimum standards

4.5 This is the minimum requirement that graduates of a bachelor's degree with honours can be expected to reach, and addresses the taxonomy of the 12 literacies introduced within Section 3 of this Statement.

Subject knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities

1. **Design literacy**: the ability to conceive and develop architectural design proposals of moderate complexity that integrate spatial, artistic, aesthetic, environmental and technical considerations. This encompasses critical and creative thinking, theoretical and practical responses and iterative design processes. Design literacy enables students to respond to briefs with contextual sensitivity, and technical coherence.

2. **Visual and spatial literacy:** the ability to conceive, interpret, manipulate and communicate spatial and visual information through drawings and models, to support the evolution of coherent design proposals that encompass spatial relationships and material assemblages.

3. **Cultural and contextual literacy:** the ability to understand and critically engage with

the cultural, historical, theoretical, artistic and social contexts that shape architecture. This includes analysing precedents to inform design thinking and pedagogy. Contextual literacy is underpinned with historical and theoretical knowledge from a mixture of global cultures, places and periods of history.

4. **Climate and ecological literacy:** knowledge of the principles of climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental impact, and regenerative design strategies. This includes knowledge of the importance of responsible material specification, energy efficiency, and ethical sourcing.

5. **Technical and building environment literacy:** knowledge of construction systems, building physics, building pathology, materials, environmental technologies and their application in quantitative and qualitative design processes. Technical literacy includes knowledge of the principles of life safety, fire safety, accessibility, and inclusive design. This enables students to integrate strategies that meet appropriate performance standards. These skills can be applicable to conservation, adaptive reuse and new build projects.

6. **Digital literacy:** the ability to use digital tools and technologies in architectural design, evaluation and communication.

7. **Research and enquiry-based literacy:** an understanding of architectural research methods and their role in supporting innovation informed decision-making and the advancement of architectural knowledge.

8. **Ethical & professional literacy:** knowledge about codes of conduct, and the principles associated with equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility. This includes an understanding of the ethical implications of architectural decisions on society and the environment.

9. **Practice and business literacy:** knowledge of the principles of the professional, legal, and business contexts of architecture. This includes the principles of project management, procurement, contracts, policy, financial planning and cost management. It also includes knowledge of planning systems, building codes and regulatory compliance.

10. **Financial and economic literacy:** understanding of how the design proposals and longevity of a project are influenced and impacted by financial and economic mechanisms, both locally and globally.

11. **Emotional literacy**: the social ability to understand and interpret emotions for the purpose of designing for another person(s) and collaborating with others.

12. **Communication literacy:** the ability to clearly and effectively convey architectural ideas through verbal and/or non-verbal, written, and visual means. This includes presenting concepts to diverse audiences (for example, discussions with stakeholders, collaborators and peers) and producing coherent documentation that supports critical thinking and design intent.

Master's level minimum standards

4.6 This is the minimum requirement that graduates of a master's degree can be expected to reach, and addresses the taxonomy of the 12 literacies introduced within Section 3 of this Statement.

Subject knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities

1. **Design literacy:** the ability to conceive, develop and resolve complex architectural design proposals that integrate spatial, artistic, aesthetic, environmental and technical considerations. This encompasses critical and creative thinking, strategic thinking, theoretical and practical responses, iterative design processes and the synthesis of diverse knowledge domains through studio-based learning. Design literacy enables students to respond to briefs with originality, contextual sensitivity and technical coherence, applying systems thinking to design questions.

2. **Visual and spatial literacy:** the ability to conceive, develop, and articulate sophisticated spatial relationships and material expressions through drawing, modelling, and making. This literacy encompasses the evolution of a considered architectural language which enables students to craft coherent, inhabitable spaces and spatial and material assemblages that demonstrate conceptual rigor and skill.

3. **Cultural and contextual literacy:** the ability to understand and critically engage with the cultural, historical, theoretical, artistic and social contexts that shape architecture. This includes analysing narratives, values and precedents to inform design thinking and pedagogy. Contextual literacy is underpinned with historical and theoretical knowledge from a mixture of global cultures, places and periods of history.

4. **Climate and ecological literacy:** understanding of the principles of climate change, biodiversity loss, global environmental impact and regenerative design strategies. This includes understanding the importance of responsible material specification, energy efficiency, waste reduction, ethical sourcing and the application of these principles to design projects.

5. **Technical and building environment literacy:** understanding of construction systems, building physics, building pathology, materials, environmental technologies and their application in quantitative and qualitative design processes. Technical literacy includes understanding of the principles of life safety, fire safety, accessibility, and inclusive design. This enables students to integrate strategies that meet appropriate performance standards. These skills can be applicable to conservation, adaptive reuse and new build projects.

6. **Digital literacy:** the ability to effectively apply and instrumentalise digital tools and technologies in architectural design, evaluation and communication. This includes knowledge of how BIM, computational design, digital fabrication, virtual reality, data security and generative artificial intelligence can be applied in practice.

7. **Research and enquiry-based literacy:** an understanding of architectural research methods and their role in supporting innovation informed decision-making and the advancement of architectural knowledge. This includes the ability to apply appropriate methods of research or enquiry-based working to projects.

8. **Ethical & professional literacy:** understanding codes of conduct and the principles associated with equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility. This includes the principles of advocacy, civic responsibility, climate justice, community engagement and the ethical implications of architectural decisions on society and the environment.

9. **Practice and business literacy:** understanding of the principles of professional, legal, and business contexts of architecture. This includes the principles of project

management, procurement, contracts, policy, financial planning and cost management. It also includes understanding of planning systems, building codes, and regulatory compliance.

10. **Financial and economic literacy:** understanding of how design proposals and longevity of a project are influenced and impacted by financial and economic mechanisms, both locally and globally. This includes knowledge of core economic principles, and the numeracy skills required to inform decisions on business sustainability and project feasibility.

11. **Emotional literacy:** the social ability to understand and interpret emotions for the purpose of designing for others. It encompasses self-awareness, management of one's own feelings, and skilled responsiveness within a creative process. The intent is to learn to advocate for others, build teams, and improve collective well-being through collaborative community engagement.

12. **Communication literacy:** the ability to clearly and effectively convey complex architectural ideas through verbal and/or non-verbal, written, and visual means. This includes presenting concepts to diverse audiences (for example, discussions with stakeholders, collaborators and peers), and producing coherent and critically informed documentation that supports critical thinking, design intent and professional practice.

5 Membership of the Advisory Group

Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Architecture 2025

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David Porter	Glasgow School of Art
Andy Roberts	The Higher Education Academy Subject

	Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE)
Richard Saxon	Building Design Partnership and Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)

In attendance

Laura Bellingham	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)
Chris Cross	Standing Conference of Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA)
Chris Ellis	SCHOSA
Emma Matthews	Architects Registration Board (ARB)
David Gloster	RIBA
Sarah Lupton	ARB
Mike Starling	ARB

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