Subject Benchmark Statement: Architecture

The Basics

This summary is designed to provide a short and accessible overview of the Subject Benchmark Statement for **Architecture** for students, employers and academics. It is not intended to replace or alter the Statement, which should be referred to in the design and approval of courses and when any further detail is required.

Subject Benchmark Statements describe the nature of study and the benchmark academic standards expected of graduates in specific subject areas, and in respect of particular qualifications. They provide a picture of what graduates in a particular subject might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their course or programme.

Subject Benchmark Statements are presented in four sections. Section 1 outlines the contextual information - providing the operational landscape, and boundaries, of subject discipline. This includes consideration of the ways in which the discipline addresses wider social goals, specifically in relation to: equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI); accessibility and the needs of disabled students; education for sustainable development (ESD); enterprise and entrepreneurship; and the impact of generative artificial intelligence on the subject.

Section 2 covers distinctive features of the course, including curriculum design, partnership arrangements, flexibility of delivery, progression and ongoing monitoring processes. Section 3 explains any features relevant to teaching, learning and assessment activities for the subject. Section 4 describes the benchmark standards of achievement reached by all graduates with a bachelor's degree with honours in the subject, with some subjects also including achievement at master's level.

Why study a degree in Architecture?

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.

Design, in its broadest definition, is the architect's defining skill. It underpins the capacity to imagine, create, refine, communicate and realise spaces and places that meet the needs of diverse users 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 (thinking and process) to shape more equitable, resilient, and sustainable futures, and to support the well-being of current and future generations.

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.

What are the main teaching and learning approaches in Architecture?

Architectural learning takes place in a variety of digital, institutional and external spaces. The primary, and essential 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.

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.

How are students assessed?

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.

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.

It is important for a learner to capture their design process to show their critical thinking and reflection. This will be increasingly important with the increased use of Generative AI. Examples of assessment tasks that support this are iteration logbooks, decision rationales, reflective commentary and critique-response narratives. 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.

Benchmark Standards

The minimum threshold standards (described as literacies in the SBS), that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours and/or Master's degree in Architecture are outlined on **pages 24-27** of the Subject Benchmark Statement. The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold 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.

The full statement was developed by subject experts drawn from across the sector. Details of the Advisory Group can be found on **page 28** of the Statement.

Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector.

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