



Programme Specification

A statement of the knowledge, understanding and skills that underpin a taught programme of study leading to an award from The University of Sheffield

1	Programme Title	Urban and Regional Planning
2	Programme Code	TRPT106
3	JACS Code	K400
4	Level of Study	Postgraduate
5a	Final Qualification	Master of Science (MSc)
5b	QAA FHEQ Level	Masters
6	Intermediate Qualifications	Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert), Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)
7	Teaching Institution (if not Sheffield)	Not applicable
8	Faculty	Social Sciences
9	Department	Geography and Planning
10	Other Departments involved in teaching the programme	None
11	Mode of Attendance	Full-time
12	Duration of the Programme	1 year
13	Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body	Royal Town Planning Institute, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors
14	Date of production/revision	March 2016, March 2019, February 2020, March 2021, January 2022, December 2022, September 2024

15. Background to the programme and subject area

The MSc in Urban and Regional Planning provides students with a professionally focused education in planning. The programme was developed in 2006 to embody a new approach to planning education, reflecting the changing demand for different skills and knowledge of practising planners and the increasing need for creative and adaptable practitioners. This approach was acclaimed by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) as one of the first of a new 'breed' of one-year accredited Masters, and subsequent RTPI partnership boards and External Examiners' comments have confirmed its position as helping to set the standard for postgraduate planning education in the UK. From 2025-26 onwards the programme will be dual accredited by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors' Planning and Development pathway (RICS).

The programme provides the opportunity to view planning in its broad context and to engage with the increasingly globalised nature of spatial planning as a professional activity responding to key societal challenges. Reflecting this, the programme aims to develop knowledge and skills which can be used in the diverse settings in which planners work. As such, the programme does not solely focus its attention on the physical production of the built environment or provide training in how this might be accomplished, although this is an element of the programme. Instead, it views planning as an activity deeply embedded in diverse political, economic, social, cultural and physical contexts. It is oriented to the broad focus of 'spatial planning', with its concerns for understanding the diverse social, political, economic, cultural and environmental impacts of the mediation of land-use change. A key focus of the programme is the development of knowledge of the political, economic, social and environmental consequences of managing spatial change. In developing this knowledge, this programme aims to engender a critical understanding of the diverse processes which make places and the different spaces in which this is done. The MSc will therefore provide students with a broad range of skills and sets of knowledge which will allow them to become creative, adaptable, critical professionals, who will be able to work in diverse contexts and make balanced, informed planning decisions.

The School of Geography and Planning is well placed to provide a programme of this nature. The University of Sheffield has been at the forefront of planning education, particularly at postgraduate level since the 1960s. The Department of Town and Regional Planning was established in 1965, and an MA programme started in 1967. The Department rapidly established a reputation for excellence in both teaching and research and was rated one of the UK's top planning schools in the Research Assessment Exercises in 2008 and Research Excellence Framework in 2014 and 2021. The Royal Town Planning Institute has accredited Masters' level provision offered

by the Department since 1980, and the Department has therefore built-up strong links with the Institute.

Distinctive features of the one-year Masters' in Urban and Regional Planning include:

- Structured progression of learning from initial understanding of core knowledge and skills, towards a greater emphasis on their application and onto specialist study.
- Integration of learning between modules to develop understanding of linkages between fields of knowledge and how they might be drawn together in practice.
- Education oriented towards a broad understanding of planning practice as the mediation not only of physical change in the built environment, but also mediating and operating in diverse social, political, economic and cultural contexts.
- Continuous assessment is the only form of assessment during the year, thus allowing students' progress to be structured and monitored closely throughout the whole programme.
- A variety of teaching techniques, with seminars, workshops, project-work and site visits an essential part of the teaching and learning strategy.
- An optional placement with a planning office, a system pioneered by this Department in the 1980s and since copied elsewhere.
- Understanding of actual planning problems and how they might be solved through the use of real-life cases and work with planners.
- Option to study abroad in Europe in the spring semester.

16. Programme aims

The overall aims of the MSc in Urban and Regional Planning reflect the School's overall teaching and learning aims:

1. To use teaching informed by research to provide a stimulating culture of learning, enthusiasm for the subject and opportunities for students to develop research skills.
2. To educate able and well-motivated students from a wide range of backgrounds.
3. To support students in developing intellectual curiosity, critical thinking and independent judgement.
4. To prepare students for professional planning practice by offering a course which meets accreditation requirements, and which provides teaching informed by professional experience.
5. To maximise student employability by progressively developing competencies in a wide range of transferable and professional skills.
6. To instil an appreciation of the diversity of cultures and values in society and develop a commitment to self-improvement and the development of life skills.
7. To emphasise informed applicant choice and equal opportunities in the admission process.
8. To provide a supportive environment for students and to involve them in quality assurance.

More specifically, the MSc in Urban and Regional Planning aims to:

9. Develop students' critical understanding of the nature of planning and its practice, including its administrative, institutional and legal framework.
10. Develop students' critical skills in understanding the different contexts and environments relevant to the practice of planning, including the political and economic environments in which planners work.
11. Provide students with research skills, the ability to analyse and synthesise knowledge and an understanding of the role of research in planning practice.
12. Develop professional and policy making skills needed to analyse complex planning problems, recommend appropriate courses of action, take decisions and communicate effectively to diverse audiences.
13. Develop through specialised studies, a deeper knowledge of a selected aspect or aspects of planning.

17. Programme learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding - Students achieving the award of either PG Dip or Master's will have developed:	
K1	Critical understanding of the theoretical and conceptual justifications for planning, intervention, the role and ethical obligations of the professional within this field and an awareness of the interdisciplinary dimensions to this work.
K2	Knowledge of the economic, social, historic and environmental factors which shape places and an ability to identify the links between these factors.
K3	Detailed understanding of the political basis for planning and the surrounding administrative, institutional and legal framework.
K4	Understanding of plans and policies, the techniques, methodologies and forms of research which inform policy and plan making.
K5	Critical understanding of the concept of sustainability and how it might shape responses to planning problems.
K6	Substantive knowledge of specialised areas of planning, including urban design and real estate development.
In addition, students achieving the award of Masters' will have developed:	
K6a	Detailed research-based knowledge of specialised areas of planning.
Students achieving the award of PG Cert will have developed well-grounded knowledge and understanding defined by that combination of K1 – K6 above matching the open selection of modules to the value of 60 credits to which they relate.	

Skills and other attributes - Students achieving the award of either PG Dip or Masters' will have developed:	
S1	Ability to make links between theoretical positions and planning problems and to learn how theory may inform planning practice.
S2	Ability to analyse and evaluate the economic, social, historic and environmental factors which shape places and influence planning responses.
S3	Ability to identify the impact of planning decisions at different scales.
S4	Ability to formulate policy responses to defined problems in a creative manner through the use of different sources of information and the employment of different techniques.
S5	Ability to communicate policy and planning decisions through the development of oral, written and graphic skills.
S6	Skills in teamwork, including team leadership as well as the ability of the student to gain knowledge for themselves, critically assess this knowledge and relate this knowledge to practical action.
S7	Skills in a specialist area of planning and relate specialist knowledge to the wider contexts in which knowledge and skills sit.
In addition, students achieving the award of Masters' will have developed:	
S8	Ability to identify a research problem or problems, design research, carry it out and reflect on the effectiveness of research.
Students achieving the award of PG Cert will have developed to a high degree the skills and attributes defined by that combination of S1 – S7 above matching the open selection of modules to the value of 60 credits to which they relate.	

18. Teaching, learning and assessment

Development of the learning outcomes is promoted through the following teaching and learning methods:

The development of learning outcomes is structured through a variety of methods, which are designed to be complementary.

Lectures will be largely used for imparting essential knowledge (K1 to K5). They are an important means of efficiently ensuring that students from a wide range of backgrounds develop core knowledge of planning and its contexts. However, no module is solely taught through lectures.

Seminars are an important means of developing students' critical understanding of core issues in planning, developing theoretical knowledge and exploring relationships between seemingly discrete bodies of knowledge. They are particularly important in developing learning outcomes K1, K2, K5, K6, S1 and S5. Seminar groups contain small numbers of students providing an effective environment for students to get involved in discussing core issues, themes and linkages in planning.

Project work and **group work** forms an important part of the programme. Project work is used throughout the first two semesters as an important means for students to develop their core knowledge and skills and apply it to particular situations. This form of working is particularly important in planning education, as many of the skills of analysis, team-working, decision-making and communication used in planning practice are developed through project work. Project work will be used to develop theoretical understanding and practical application of core knowledge, these will develop students' understanding of economic, social, historic and environmental factors which shape places and potential planning responses in these places. As such this project work will be important in developing learning outcomes K2, S2, S3 and S6. The module Plan-making will particularly focus on the application of core knowledge and skills in the first semester. This work will develop theoretical knowledge (K1 to K5) and enhance skills to apply this knowledge to particular situations (often where complete information is not available). The learning outcomes S2, S3 and S4 are most importantly developed through this project work. Project work undertaken with the aid of outside professionals will develop awareness of the role of professionals within planning practice and their relationship with other professions (K1).

Workshops are particularly used to develop skills and apply knowledge to practical examples as well as research and analysis skills (S4), particularly using quantitative methodologies and design techniques. They are also used to develop skills in making decisions and recommendations as well as communication and analytical techniques and are used in conjunction with project-work to develop skills necessary for the completion of projects.

Independent study is seen as an essential part of our postgraduate teaching, especially in developing skills which are essential in professional life. Staff will give guidance on project work and dissertation study, will meet with students in **tutorials** and will be available for more informal consultation. One of the key learning outcomes for the whole programme is development of not only team-working, but also independent working (S6) and this becomes increasingly important through the programme, culminating in the dissertation.

An optional **placement** in a planning office, often undertaken during the Christmas vacation, will also be used to develop students' core knowledge of planning and provide an initial means for students to understand how knowledge is applied in practical situations. The placement will also provide a means by which students will gain a critical understanding of how theoretical knowledge is applied in practical situations (K1, S1).

Site visits in connection with some modules are essential in developing students' understanding of how knowledge might be applied in given situations.

Opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes are provided through the following assessment methods:

The programme uses a wide variety of continuous assessment methods, organised as a structured mechanism by which skills and knowledge are developed by students. The programme has been designed so that assessments required by different modules fit within the overall structure and progression of the programme.

Whilst assessments are used to develop all key areas of understanding and skills, there is an expectation that students will also develop and demonstrate some skills and understanding outside formal assessment mechanisms, for example, skills in time management and self-motivation as well as self-development. Whilst not resulting in any formal assessment, the use of personal one-to-one tutorials (with the year tutor) and associated student reflection on their personal and academic development supports the development of these additional skills and personal attributes.

Essays are used particularly where there is a need to evaluate the student's basic comprehension of planning

mechanisms, systems and their contexts (K1-K3, K5). Essays also help to develop the students' ability to communicate clearly through fluent writing and the construction of well-developed arguments (S5). Essays and papers are also used by some modules in the demonstration of students' specialist knowledge and skills.

Reports are used to test students' skills in applying their knowledge to particular situations and contexts. They are particularly important in assessing skills in analysis (S2, S3), formulation of responses and making decisions (S4) and the ability to communicate findings and recommendations in a clear manner (S5). They also provide a means of checking students' ability to work as teams as well as independently (S6). Two types of project report will be used in this programme. Firstly, group reports will demonstrate the work carried out by groups. Secondly, individual reports will assess work carried out by individuals, as well as allowing individuals to draw on group work.

Graphic presentation will be used as a means of assessment to test the ability of students to communicate the results of analysis, research and make recommendations in a graphical form (S5). This is an important skill for planners to acquire. It will particularly be developed through the Urban Design: Principles and Processes module in the spring semester.

Presentation of numerical data and analysis will be used to evaluate the students' knowledge and skills in different techniques of analysis (S4, S5). Much of this work will require the application of computer skills which have been developed throughout the programme.

For Masters' students, the **dissertation** is the culmination of the programme. Whilst it allows the expression of core and particularly specialist knowledge and skills to be demonstrated, it is not intended as a summative assessment for the whole programme. Instead, the dissertation is intended to demonstrate particular understandings and skills. In particular, the dissertation is seen as a key expression of specialist knowledge and skills (K6a, S7) and the ability to identify research problems and formulate and carry out a programme of research (S8). It does however also allow other forms of knowledge (K1-K5) and skills (S1 to S4) to be demonstrated, including such skills as the ability to formulate policy responses to defined problems (S4).

19. Reference points

The learning outcomes have been developed to reflect the following points of reference:

Learning outcomes have been derived from a combination of factors both external and internal to the School.

Externally there is the need for highly skilled practitioners in the field of planning who have both generic and profession-specific skills. The types of skills and forms and levels of understanding relevant to the current context of planning have been the subject of much discussion within the profession (especially the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)). The School has been actively involved in these discussions. This has included the RTPI's 'A New Vision for Planning' statement (2001) which emphasises the view of planning as 'spatial, sustainable, integrative, inclusive, action-oriented and value-driven'. This reshaped vision of planning has profound consequences for the education of planners and has led to a re-assessment of the forms and types of training and education provided to planners. Key elements of this re-assessment include the Report of the RTPI's Education Commission (in which the School was actively involved) and the RTPI revised Policy Statement on Initial Planning Education (2012). These documents emphasise the need for planners to be adept at critical thinking, have the ability to understand spatial relationships and places and have an orientation to action and intervention.

These needs have informed this programme to a significant extent. The RTPI Policy Statement on Initial Planning Education has also translated these needs into a set of indicative learning outcomes for generic spatial planning education and specialist planning education. These learning outcomes have also been useful in developing this programme, which provides both generic spatial and specialist planning education. Many of these new skills and knowledge required by planners to respond to challenges in cities and rural areas are also reflected in the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Town and Country Planning (2024). In particular, the defining principles set out in the Benchmark Statement reflect the understanding of planning on which this programme was developed.

As noted above, the programme is subject to regular professional review within the School's annual RTPI partnership board meetings. From 2025-26 onwards the programme will also be accredited by the RICS on their 'Planning and Development' pathway, reflecting the ways programme learning outcomes map onto the required competencies set out by the accrediting body.

Internally, the School has a strong orientation to teaching informed by research and a commitment to providing students with the critical knowledge and skills required to be highly regarded professionals with the ability to work in a variety of contexts. The School has a number of principles upon which its approach to education is founded, and which have helped influence the learning outcomes detailed above:

- **Collegiality:** All staff are expected to be research active and research permeates all teaching.

- Social scientific approach, which nevertheless also has links to the design professions.
- Knowledge and understanding are viewed as transitory and therefore intellectual curiosity, critical thinking and independent judgement are viewed as especially important.
- Theoretical and analytical rigour are emphasised.
- Planning is seen as concerned with fitting action to circumstances, not routinely fitting rules to standard situations.
- Theory is viewed as critical to the practice and development of planning.

The learning outcomes for this programme reflect these principles in their emphasis on critical understanding, the development of theoretical knowledge and practical action. A number of groups have been involved in the formulation of this programme:

- Students (through specific consultation) have had an input into the development of the programme.
- The external examiner has also been consulted and has made a number of comments regarding this programme.
- The School has responded to comments made by the RTPI's special accreditation board, set up to examine one-year Masters' programmes.
- The School's Liaison Committee of practitioners and academics offers another point of reference for the School's teaching and learning strategy.

20. Programme structure and regulations

The programme is structured to provide core knowledge with application of skills in the first semester with four core modules to develop a strong knowledge base and further specialised study in the second semester with increased optionality, and the development and culmination of specialised study over the summer. This is achieved through a combination of compulsory modules, option modules and individual study.

All modules in the first semester develop core knowledge and application of skills. In the spring semester further core knowledge and skills in design and real estate are developed. In the second semester, students also choose two optional modules from a list: the range of these modules is regularly updated to reflect current staffing and cutting-edge issues within the discipline. Students are guided by their year tutor and dissertation tutor in choosing the module which will be of the most relevance to their interests and needs. The option modules form part of a structured progression from core knowledge to the culmination of specialised study in the dissertation. The dissertation is a compulsory and major element of the programme and accounts for 60 credits.

Students successfully completing 60 credits are eligible for the award of the PG Cert in Urban and Regional Planning whilst those successfully completing 120 credits are eligible for the award of the PG Dip in Urban and Regional Planning. Students successfully completing 180 credits are eligible for the award of the MSc in Urban and Regional Planning.

Detailed information about the structure of programmes, regulations concerning assessment and progression, and descriptions of individual modules are published in the University Calendar available on-line at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/calendar/>.

21. Student development over the course of study

The programme is structured so that both semesters provide the scaffolding for developing *understanding of core knowledge and skills* (learning outcomes K1 to K5, S1, S2, S6). which is complemented by a focus on their application to planning problems (K4, S1 to S6). *Specialising study* (K6, K6a, S5 to S8) is achieved through the second semester and over the summer with option modules and dissertation. The learning outcomes are therefore developed through a structured progression, which guides students with substantive knowledge of the field of planning at the start of the programme and this is built in the second semester towards a substantive and coherent body of knowledge, understanding and skills in planning practice.

Whilst specific learning outcomes have been associated with this three-stage process, it is important to note that we view the development of knowledge and skills as continuous rather than separated into discrete stages. Therefore, students are expected to continue developing their core knowledge throughout the programme, and are also expected to develop skills from the start of the programme.

22. Criteria for admission to the programme

Detailed information on criteria for admission to the programme is set out in the School Website <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/geography-planning>

23. Additional information

Students receive weekly emails from the School's dedicated Placements, Employability and External Relations (PEER) team, which highlight placement opportunities that students may be interested in. Students are supported to apply, with placements potentially taking place within both the public and private sectors to reflect the professional experience expected by potential employers. The PEER team can also support students in seeking opportunities for themselves if they have particular interests. The location of the placements depends on the availability of organisations with the capacity to take students, but every effort will be made to ensure that these are in a location convenient to the student. The costs of travel and subsistence required to attend the placement are expected to be met by the student. The School has long experience in arranging student placements both for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

This specification represents a concise statement about the main features of the programme and should be considered alongside other sources of information provided by the teaching School(s) and the University. In addition to programme specific information, further information about studying at The University of Sheffield can be accessed via our Student Services web site at <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid>.