



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 Design and Planning
2	Programme Code	TRPT126
3	JACS Code	K400
4	Level of Study	Postgraduate
5a	Final Qualification	Master of Arts (MA)
5b	QAA FHEQ Level	7
6a	Intermediate Qualification(s)	Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert), Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)
6b	QAA FHEQ Level	7
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(s) of Attendance	Full-time
12	Duration of the Programme	1 year
13	Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body	Royal Town Planning Institute
14	Date of production/revision	June 2018, February 2020, March 2021, November 2021, December 2022, September 2024

15. Background to the programme and subject area

This programme combines spatial planning and urban design and is aimed at students from a wide range of backgrounds seeking to develop careers in this important and growing area of professional practice. The programme integrates design with spatial planning as a means of exploring the challenges of mediating space and making place with a particular emphasis on the imaginative and creative components (the art and science) of design and planning. This also includes an innovative focus on the emerging role of virtual and augmented reality in urban design and planning that anticipates growing interest in the role of immersive technologies in the production of the built environment.

The programme fulfils a need for greater interdisciplinary knowledge and skills amongst those engaged in the planning, development and design of urban areas. Internationally there is a demand for planners, urban designers, and urban managers who are able to deal with complex urban issues, often associated with rapid urbanisation. These challenges include developing sound policy frameworks and plans, identifying appropriate physical and design-led interventions in urban areas and evaluating the economic and financial bases to such development. Governments all over the world have identified the need for greater integration of skills and knowledge across the various fields that are pertinent to managing urban growth and successful place-making. These skills and knowledge, traditionally held in separate fields of planning, architecture, and surveying, are now viewed as inherently interconnected, requiring practitioners to demonstrate broader understandings across these fields.

The programme draws on the strengths of the School of Geography and Planning in educating professional planners, designers, and surveyors as well as conducting research in these fields.

It provides a professionally focused education for practitioners aiming to work on complex urban issues transnationally. It combines knowledge and skills in planning, policy formulation and evaluation, property financing and urban design. These will be brought together through assignments focused on developing interdisciplinary skills, particularly the Planning Place and Design Studio, Masterplanning Studio, and Design Dissertation. The programme seeks to develop professional skills within students' wider appreciation of the

global urban contexts in which they work. This means that students will be equipped with core knowledge of international planning and urban design, applying this knowledge through project work in the Autumn and Spring Semesters. Students are also given the opportunity to specialise their knowledge and skills through the choice of spatial planning and design skills option modules in the spring semester and the Design Dissertation or Dissertation. Alongside training in core planning and urban design principles, techniques and analytical approaches, the course also introduces students to the potential applications of immersive technologies in design visualisation. The programme integrates virtual and augmented reality to create immersive visualisations of designs, viewed through head mounted virtual reality headsets, to accurately simulate solutions for real life planning issues.

The programme will enable students to develop careers in a range of occupations and professional fields including: Urban Planning, Urban Design, Real Estate/Property Development, Public Administration and Management, Policy Making.

Distinctive features of the programme include:

- Interdisciplinary focus to the programme, based on students developing a broad understanding of planning, design and development practice as the mediation of physical change in the built environment, operating in diverse social, political, economic, digital and cultural contexts.
- Structured progression of learning from initial understanding of core knowledge and skills, through their application and onto specialist study.
- Ability to develop understanding of planning and design practice in a variety of global contexts
Integration of learning between modules to develop understanding of linkages between fields of knowledge and how they might be drawn together in practice.
- Continuous assessment throughout the programme conducted through a range of methods (including written work, graphical presentations, oral presentations, and group projects), thus allowing students' progress to be structured and monitored closely throughout the whole programme.
- A variety of teaching techniques, with seminars, studios, workshops, and project work.
- Teaching informed by our faculty members' own research expertise, and involving academics and practitioners from other institutions in the UK and abroad.

16. Programme aims

The overall aims of the MA in Urban Design and Planning reflect the School of Geography and Planning overall teaching and learning aims, and are consonant with the Faculty of Social Sciences Learning and Teaching Strategy and the mission of the University of Sheffield:

A1. 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.

A2. To educate able and well-motivated students from a wide range of backgrounds.

A3. To support students in developing intellectual curiosity, critical thinking and independent judgement.

A4. To prepare students for professional planning and design practice by offering a course which meets accreditation requirements, and which provides teaching informed by professional experience.

A5. To maximise student employability by progressively developing competencies in a wide range of transferable and professional skills.

A6. 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.

More specifically, the MA Urban Design and Planning aims to:

A7. Provide students with an understanding of the interdisciplinary challenges faced in managing and developing urban areas, and the skills necessary to engage with these challenges.

A8. Develop students' critical understanding of the nature of development, design and planning and their practice in a variety of global contexts, including their administrative and institutional frameworks.

A9. Develop students' critical skills in understanding the different contexts and environments relevant to the practice of planning, property development and urban design, including the political and economic environments in which practitioners work.

A10. Provide students with research skills, the ability to analyse and synthesise knowledge and an

understanding of the role of research in design, development and planning practice.

A11. Develop professional and policy making skills needed to analyse complex design, development and planning problems, recommend appropriate courses of action, take decisions and communicate effectively to diverse audiences.

A12. Develop design skills required to analyse complex urban problems and develop effective physical designs which account for the diverse interests affected by physical development, recognising the importance of communicating design to these interests.

A13. Develop through specialised studies, a deeper knowledge of a selected aspect or aspects of planning, property and urban design and their implications.

A14. Develop in students a wide range of transferable skills that will enable them to successfully engage with a variety of work environments.

17. Programme learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding:	
Students achieving an award of either PGDip or Masters' will have developed:	
K1	Knowledge of the economic, social, historic, architectural and environmental factors that shape places and an ability to identify the links between these factors and develop the ability to apply theory to design practice with a detailed understanding of the complexity of creating spaces across different social, economic, environmental, and political layers.
K2	Detailed understanding of the political basis for urban interventions and their surrounding administrative and institutional frameworks across urban design and planning.
K3	Critical understanding of the theoretical and conceptual justifications for planning, property, and design intervention, the role and ethical obligations of the professional within this field and an awareness of the interdisciplinary dimensions to this work.
K4	Understanding of the diverse interests that are affected by urban interventions, and the ways in which they interact, with a view to enhancing participation in planning, property and design processes.
K5	Familiarity with key aspects of property development processes and the broader economic contexts in which such processes sit and develop critical understanding of cutting-edge technological innovations, methods and design theories relating to urban environments.
K6	Detailed understanding of plans and policies and the techniques, methodologies and forms of research which inform policy and plan making.
K7	Knowledge of briefs and critical appraisal techniques, production of design portfolios and how to prepare appropriate responses to these, taking into consideration the physical and social context and factors such as sustainability and budget.
K8	Substantive knowledge of specialised areas of planning, property and urban design.
In addition, students achieving the award of Masters' will have developed:	
K9	Detailed research-based knowledge of a particular urban problem and understanding how to transfer this knowledge into a design/planning proposition.
Students achieving the award of PGCert will have developed well-grounded knowledge and understanding defined by that combination K1-K8 above, matching the selection of modules to the value of 60 credits to which they relate.	

Skills and other attributes:	
Students achieving an award of either PGDip or Masters' will have developed:	
S1	Ability to analyse and evaluate the economic, social, historic, physical and environmental factors which shape places and to identify the links between these factors.
S2	Ability to make links between theoretical positions and planning/development problems and to demonstrate how theory may inform planning and design practice.
S3	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.

S4	Ability to produce and demonstrate coherent and responsive urban designs that integrate knowledge of: the social, political, economic and professional context that influences the production of the built environment.
S5	Ability to analyse and recommend viable strategies for development which take account of financial and economic factors.
S6	Ability to communicate analyses, recommendations, designs, plans, and decisions through the development of written, oral and graphic skills and professional design portfolios.
S7	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 actions.
S8	Skills in a specialist area of planning, property and urban design and an ability to relate specialist knowledge to the wider context in which it sits.
In addition, students achieving the award of Masters' will have developed:	
S9	Ability to identify a research problem or problems, develop a research strategy and associated theoretical programme and develop a project such as a dissertation, independently defining and critically appraising their ideas in relation to a specific urban design project and its participatory approach.
Students achieving the award of PGCert will have developed to a high degree the skills and attributes defined by that combination of S1-S8 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 programme is structured so that *understanding of core knowledge and skills* (K1 to K7, S1 to S5) provides the core rationale in the autumn semester. In the spring semester there is an additional focus on *applying core knowledge and skills* (K6 to K7, S1 to S7), and *specialising study* (K8, K9, S8, S9) is achieved through the spring semester and over the summer. The learning outcomes are therefore developed through a structured progression, which guides students with little substantive knowledge of the field of urban design and planning at the start of the programme towards a substantive and coherent body of knowledge, understandings and skills. 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.

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 K7). 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 K2 to K4, S1, S2 and S6. Seminars will contain small numbers of students and are therefore an effective environment for students to get involved in discussing core issues, themes and linkages in planning.

Studios, project work and **group work** will form an important part of the programme. Project work will be 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 interdisciplinary education, as many of the skills of analysis, team-working, decision-making and communication used in practice are developed through studio and project work. Project work in the autumn semester will be used to develop students' understanding of economic, social, historic and environmental factors which shape places and potential design and planning responses in these places. As such this project work will be important in developing learning outcomes K1, S3 to S7. Project work in the spring semester will focus on the application of core knowledge and skills. This major piece of work will develop knowledge gained in the autumn semester (K1 to K7) and enhance skills to apply this knowledge to particular situations (often where complete information is not available). The learning outcomes S3 to S7 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).

Teaching will also be delivered through **workshops**. This form of teaching will be particularly used to develop skills and apply knowledge to practical examples. Workshops will be used to develop place analysis skills (S1), particularly using policy analysis and associated techniques. They will also be used to develop skills in decision and recommendation-making, communication and analytical techniques and will be used in conjunction with project-work to develop skills necessary for the completion of projects.

Independent study is also an important mode of learning on this programme and 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 (S7) and this becomes increasingly important through the programme, culminating in the Design Dissertation or Dissertation.

Studio-based design work forms a significant element of the Planning Place and Design studio and Masterplanning studio modules and the final Design Dissertation for those students opting to take this module. Students will initiate projects themselves. Studio teaching is structured through individual and group tutorial as well as interim and final project crits, presentations and reviews. The design studio is promoted as a place of integration of skills and knowledge; thus, all of these teaching and learning methods combine to develop design understanding and research, analytical and communication skills of the students in order to meet the appropriate objectives listed in K1-9 and S1-9 above. Practical design work will be required of all students during the 'Planning Place and Design studio', 'Masterplanning studio' and/or 'Inclusive and Immersive design studio' (spring option module).

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

The programme will use a wide variety of assessment methods to enable different skills and knowledge to be developed and to be assessed. All assessment on the MA in Urban Design and Planning is continuous and is 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. In addition, whilst assessments will be used to develop all key areas of understanding and skills, there is an expectation that students will also develop their skills and knowledge without sole recourse to assessments. Skills in time management and self-motivation as well as self-development will not be solely fostered through teaching and assessment; instead, students are expected to develop these outside formal assessment mechanisms. The use of personal one-to-one tutorials (with students' personal tutor) and associated *Personal Development Portfolios* will seek to develop the wider skills and understandings which may not be formally assessed.

Essays will be used for some assessments, particularly where there is a need to evaluate the student's basic comprehension of planning mechanisms, systems and their contexts (K1-K4). Essays also help to develop the students' ability to communicate clearly through fluent writing and the construction of well-developed arguments (S6). Essays and papers are also used by some modules in the demonstration of students' specialist knowledge and skills (K8, S8).

Reports will be used to test students' skills in applying their knowledge to particular situations and contexts. They are particularly important in assessing skills in analysis, formulation of responses and making decisions and the ability to communicate findings and recommendations in a clear manner (S3 to S6). They also provide a means of checking students' ability to work as teams as well as independently (S7). Two types of project reports 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.

Oral presentation is seen as an important part of the assessment strategy. Students are required to present project findings and recommendations to peers, outside professionals and members of staff, and such presentation is assessed. Oral presentation particularly allows the assessment of the ability to communicate clearly and effectively (S6). Oral presentation will be used throughout the programme as a means of students presenting their work and reporting back to the teaching group.

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 plans, designs and recommendations in a graphical form (S6). This is an important skill for planners to acquire. It will particularly be developed through Planning Place and Design studio and Masterplanning studio in the spring semester, and through architectural representations in the Design Dissertation and Immersive design studio for those choosing those options.

Presentation of numerical data and analysis will be used to evaluate the students' knowledge and skills in different techniques of analysis (S1, S3, S5). Much of this work will require the application of computer skills which have been developed throughout the programme.

The **Urban Design Dissertation, or Dissertation** is the culmination of the programme. Whilst both assessments allow the expression of core and particularly specialist knowledge and skills to be demonstrated, they are not intended as a summative assessment for the whole programme. Instead they are intended to demonstrate particular understandings and skills. Both assessments require written work, which is seen as a key expression of specialist knowledge and skills (K8, S8). Both assessments develop the ability to identify research problems and formulate and carry out a programme of research (S9) though emphasising these in different ways and with differential focus on policy or design. Both assessments do however also allow other forms of knowledge (K1-K7) and skills (S1 to S6) to be demonstrated, most particularly the interdisciplinary application of knowledge and skills. The option to choose the **Dissertation** allows students who wish to investigate a policy problem in more depth and to develop their research skills in this area in mostly written form. The option to choose the **Urban Design Dissertation** allows students to investigate a design problem, generate a solution, and reflect on the issues at stake, both in written and graphical form (students can choose to present their work in this project in written form or a mix of written and graphical form). Both the Urban Design Dissertation and Dissertation develop the ability to identify research problems and formulate and carry out a programme of research (S9) that informs and supports the final research focused piece of work.

19. Reference points

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

External Reference Points

The programme reflects wider demands for developing practitioners in urban development with interdisciplinary skills. It also reflects wider concerns to develop more broad-based education for professionals working in a variety of global context on issues of rapid urbanisation. Particular importance has been placed on the need to develop skills for planners and other urban professionals in an international context, reflecting calls for a new paradigm for managing human settlements (Vancouver Declaration) and the key priorities of the Global Planners' Network. Points of reference include:

Academy for Sustainable Communities (2007) *Mind the Skills Gap: The skills we need for sustainable communities*, Leeds: Academy for Sustainable Communities.

French, W. and Natarajan, L. (2008) *Self-diagnostic Assessments for the Capacity of Planning Worldwide*, London: RTPI.

Global Planners' Network (2006) *Vancouver Declaration*, Global Planners' Network.

Homes and Communities Agency (2009) *UK Government Action Plan 'Developing Better Skills for Better Places'*, London: HCA.

ODPM (2004) *The Egan Review: Skills for Sustainable Communities*, London: ODPM.

Black, P., Martin, M., Phillips, B. and Sonbli, T. (2024) *Applied Urban Design: A Contextually Responsive Approach*, New York: Routledge.

Finally, the generic requirements of the QAA for Masters' level education have been borne in mind. The MA has been designed to ensure that students' learning is informed by leading-edge research and provides the opportunity for them to make their own contribution, and to learn in an environment which encourages creative and rigorous thinking. The QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Town and Country Planning (2015) has also been consulted.

Internal Reference Points

The University's emphasis on developing a Programme Level Approach (PLA), My skills and Sheffield Graduate Attributes has informed the development of the learning outcomes with the prioritisation of flexible, critical and analytical thinking, the ability to work independently and in teams and demonstrating competency in applying their knowledge and skills to solve problems.

The Faculty Learning and Teaching Strategy has also informed the development of the learning outcomes, particularly the emphasis on an international perspective to the programme, the significance of inquiry-based learning and developing professional skills.

The School of Geography and Planning 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 emphasises a number of principles upon which their approach to education is founded, and which have helped influence the learning outcomes detailed above:

- 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.
- Professional practice is seen as concerned with fitting action to circumstances, not routinely fitting rules to standard situations.
- Theory, and a commitment to participatory practice, is viewed as critical to the conduct and development of architecture and 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:

The RTPI Partnership board and external examiners are/will be consulted.

The School of Geography and Planning'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 and understanding in the autumn semester, the application and start of specialised study in the spring semester, and the development and culmination of specialised study over the summer. In the autumn semester, students will study three core modules: *Perspectives on Spatial Planning and Development*, Planning Place and Design Studio (30 credits) and Spatial Planning Systems. The modules will develop student's contextual knowledge in Urban Design and Planning. In the spring semester, students will take Masterplanning studio and Planning and the Development Process. In order to develop specialist knowledge and skills, students choose one 'spatial planning option module' and one urban design skills option module from a list of specialist provision delivered by both the School of Geography and Planning and School of Architecture. The Urban Design Dissertation or Dissertation completes the programme and accounts for 60 credits.

The Programme is a Postgraduate Masters Course with **180 Credits** in total of which all have to be taken at FHEQ Level 7. The Masters' course runs over one full academic year with the taught units predominantly in the autumn and spring semester and a continuation over the summer in which the student works on their Design Dissertation or Dissertation. The Programme also offers the option of a Postgraduate Diploma with **120 Credits** of which all have to be taken at Level M. Students taking the Postgraduate Diploma route will finish their studies after the spring semester.

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

21. Student development over the course of study

There are three definable stages in the programme. The autumn semester largely develops understanding of *core knowledge and skills*. The spring semester contains an additional focus on application of some of *this core knowledge and skills*. During the spring semester, students also start developing their *specialist skills and knowledge* and this is further developed over the summer. This model views the development of specialised knowledge, not as a discrete activity, but one which is intimately connected to core understandings and skills in design and planning. This indicates the general progression of developing core knowledge and skills at the start of the programme and then the development of more specific skills and knowledge further through the programme. Core knowledge (learning outcomes K1-K4) is largely developed through the autumn semester, but this knowledge is also developed in the spring semester and over the summer. Key skills (S1-S7) are fully developed in the spring semester; however, many are initially introduced in the autumn semester. Specialist knowledge and skills are developed through the spring semester and during study on Design Dissertation or Dissertation.

22. Criteria for admission to the programme

Detailed information on criteria for admission to the programme is set out in the School Brochure which is available online.

Detailed information regarding admission to the programme is available in the University's On-Line Prospectus at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/courses/2025/urban-design-and-planning-ma>

23. Additional information

Further information on the programme can be found at: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/usp>

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 department(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.shef.ac.uk/ssid>.