

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	Landscape Architecture
2	Programme Code	ALAT011
3	JACS Code	K310
4	Level of Study	Postgraduate
5a	Final Qualification	Diploma (240 credits), MA (300 credits)
5b	Position in the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications	Masters
6	Intermediate Qualification(s)	Not applicable
7	Teaching Institution (if not Sheffield)	Not applicable
8	Faculty	Social Sciences
9	Department	Landscape Architecture
10	Other Department(s) involved in teaching the programme	Not applicable
11	Mode(s) of Attendance	Full-time
12	Duration of the Programme	2 years
13	Accrediting Professional or Statutory Body	Landscape Institute
14	Date of production/revision	February 2022, March 2026

15. Background to the programme and subject area

Landscape Architecture embraces all aspects of the science, planning, design, creation and management of landscape, in both urban and rural environments, and at all scales, from the smallest garden to the greatest wilderness. It may be concerned with creating new landscapes, or with sustaining existing ones. The emphasis is on promoting landscapes that are aesthetically pleasing, functionally appropriate and ecologically healthy, while at the same time being able to accommodate the diverse and changing needs of society within an overall context of sustainability. It is, therefore, a rich and diverse subject which is both interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary in nature, and which draws on the traditions of both the arts and sciences. The MA in Landscape Architecture reflects this diversity of purpose and in particular the broader meaning which is now attached to landscape architecture – not only as a design based subject, but also one which addresses management, planning and science. Similarly, the profession seeks graduates who may have pursued a relatively ‘generalist’ education, as well as those who have specialised to a greater degree in one of these constituent areas.

The University of Sheffield established one of the earliest Landscape programmes in the country in the late 1960s and is now at the forefront of Landscape education in the country, with an international reputation. It has the most diverse range of programmes in Landscape Architecture in the UK and the largest student body, with its undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes together accommodating some 380 students. It also has a reputation for excellence in both teaching and research.

Many people do not discover Landscape Architecture until after they have graduated. Sheffield’s long established (1968) two year postgraduate conversion course recognises this and offers the opportunity for people who have a degree in another subject to take a two-year postgraduate vocational and academic ‘conversion’ programme in landscape architecture and to enter the profession through this route. Since its inception, the programme has focused on landscape design and, whilst this is still crucially important, it has evolved to reflect both the broadening of the landscape profession and the growing range of expertise in the Department. Consequently, the MA in Landscape Architecture offers a balance of modules aimed at preparing graduates for practice and research in landscape design, management and planning. The course continues to be **fully accredited** by the Landscape Institute. Completion of an accredited programme such as this allows students to enter the Landscape Institute as a Licentiate Member.

After graduation from the programme, a mentored period of work in the profession and successful completion of the Landscape Institute's Pathway to Chartership lead to the professional qualification as a Chartered member of the Institute and use of the title Chartered Landscape Architect.

This postgraduate programme can lead to many diverse employment opportunities - in private practice, in the public sector and in non-governmental organisations. Work can range from urban design schemes in city centres and working with communities on the design and improvement of urban green space, to preparing environmental impact assessments for different forms of new development and undertaking landscape character assessments for local government districts, to give just a few examples.

Further information is available at the Departmental web site: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/landscape>.

16. Programme aims

1. The overall teaching and learning aims of the Department of Landscape Architecture, which also reflect the mission and aim of the University of Sheffield, include: to provide a range of courses that meets the evolving needs of the landscape profession, nationally and internationally.

2. to deliver courses in ways that achieve excellent levels of student satisfaction, especially by innovative and enthusiastic teaching and learning strategies, and 'seamless' management of class contact and assignments.

3. to ensure that quality assurance procedures are robust and lead to continuous improvement.

4. to enable all staff in the Department to play a full role in the overall student experience.

More specifically the **MA in Landscape Architecture** has the following aims:

5. to provide a route into the landscape profession for those who have a degree in another subject and who have not previously studied landscape architecture.

6. to provide a programme which is relevant to professional practice and which meets professional accreditation requirements.

7. to provide a curriculum that:

- Develops students' knowledge, understanding and skills in landscape design, planning and management and, in particular, emphasises holistic knowledge and solutions; creativity and imagination; the progressive development of design skills.

- Develops students' sensitivity to the needs of people and communities, and awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability.

- Enables students to develop skills and abilities in both creative thinking and visual communication and in independent research, analysis and written/verbal communication.

- Enables students to pursue specialist interests in contemporary issues related to landscape architecture through research aligned with the interests and expertise of their chosen supervisor.

8. to encourage progressive development of the range of knowledge and skills required by a landscape architect, including through contact with practitioners on the programme, and by involvement in projects that simulate professional work.

9. to encourage active learning through practical projects involving both independent study and the achievement of collective goals through teamwork.

10. to incorporate a diversity of assessment methods designed to test a wide range of competencies and skills.

17. Programme learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding - Students who have successfully completed the MA in Landscape Architecture will have developed the following areas of knowledge and understanding:	
K1	Knowledge and understanding of the principles, processes, media, and tools necessary for the practice of landscape architecture.
K2	Knowledge and understanding of landscape theories and histories, including design approaches and practices, the philosophies that underpin them and their historical development and modern practice.
K3	Knowledge and understanding of the nature, characteristics and performance of the inorganic and organic elements and processes employed in the creation of landscapes and of their implications for future maintenance and management).
K4	Knowledge and understanding of the principles and practice of landscape planning, landscape ecology and ecological design and their role in landscape practice.
K5	Knowledge and understanding of the social aspects of design, the importance of users and techniques for involving them in design processes.
K6	Basic knowledge and understanding of the nature of professional practice in landscape design, including working in practice, landscape and environmental law and contracts and specifications.
K7	Basic knowledge and understanding of the range of research philosophies and methodologies relevant to landscape research in the contrasting areas of science, social science and humanities.

Students who have successfully completed the MA in Landscape Architecture will have developed the following subject specific and transferable skills:	
Subject specific skills	
S1	An ability to create design proposals for different kinds of landscapes in an innovative and integrated manner which is responsive to people, place and nature.
S2	An ability to manipulate landscape elements through design, planning and management, including exploration and critical evaluation of alternative ideas.
S3	An ability to contribute to strategic and policy thinking about the conservation, creation, restoration and maintenance of landscapes at various scales.
S4	An ability to employ a range of visual, verbal and written media, including digital and non-digital communication methods, to both develop and express landscape architectural ideas.
S5	An ability to appreciate the different qualities of landscape solutions and to both give and receive criticism on these proposals.
S6	An ability to carry out in practice a range of relevant techniques including site survey and analysis, social surveys, preparing briefs, assessing the environmental effects of development and assessing the character of landscapes.
S7	An ability to identify a suitable landscape topic for individual research, formulate a research proposal, develop an appropriate research strategy and implement this to complete a research dissertation.
Transferable skills	
S8	An ability to use a range of relevant computer software, including computer aided design and image manipulation and graphic presentation packages.
S9	An ability to communicate effectively using visual, verbal, and written skills in a variety of media and to employ these skills effectively to present, exchange and review ideas, theories, findings, conclusions and proposals.
S10	Abilities in self-management, time and task management and personal reflection.
S11	An ability to relate to and work with other people including group/team work skills.
S12	An ability to work independently to gather and analyse information and to identify solutions to problems.

18. Teaching, learning and assessment

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

This programme uses a wide range of teaching and learning methods to achieve the learning outcomes listed above. The acquisition of knowledge and understanding relevant to Landscape Architecture (K1 – K6 above), is achieved by **lectures** and **less formal presentations**, designed to convey essential information about key principles, theory and practice. These are supported by a series of **practical projects**, which are designed to reinforce knowledge and understanding (K1 – K6) and to integrate this with the development of subject specific and transferable skills (S1- S7, S8 - S12). This is achieved through a process of 'learning by doing'. Projects usually involve **site visits** to places in and around Sheffield to carry out surveys appropriate to the task. These visits might, for example, include an urban park or a city centre space to be redesigned in Sheffield, or an area of countryside outside the city proposed for development, perhaps as a windfarm or a new area of housing. In addition, **field trips** are built into the programme to allow students to see examples of landscape projects on the ground in a variety of situations. The visits are an invaluable way for students to learn about the realities of landscape architecture, to see the work of both contemporary and historical designers, and to gain inspiration from experience of what can be achieved.

The **landscape studio** is a vital part of the postgraduate programme. Here students tackle a range of increasingly complex practical projects based on real world problems requiring design, planning and management solutions. Support and guidance is provided through **individual studio tutorials**, conducted over the drawing board, together with **small group tutorials**, and **"reviews"**, in which students present their work, within the student group, for critical appraisal by tutors and also by their peers. Skills are developed progressively, initially through simple projects in the first semester, becoming more complex in semesters two and three and finally culminating in the major independent special design project in semester four. In the **Final Landscape Project** students integrate the knowledge, understanding and skills acquired throughout the programme and demonstrate their readiness to enter the profession. This project requires students to find their own site, develop their own brief and implement their proposals, from site survey and analysis and user investigations, through concepts and strategies, to master plan and detailed design and maintenance. The project culminates with an exhibition of the students' work and presentation to both internal and external examiners.

Workshops and practical sessions play an important role in introducing and developing specific skills. They are particularly important in introducing and developing skills in the use of computer aided design, digital image manipulation and graphics packages which are an essential part of modern Landscape Architecture (S8). They also play an important part in teaching landscape principles and practice (S1 – S6), in exploring research philosophies, methodologies and skills (K7 and S6) and in development of other transferable skills (S7 – S12). Team work skills (S11) for example are introduced through group work within projects. **Independent study** is critical to the successful completion of the programme and contributes to all learning outcomes. It has a central role in all the practical projects, even though some modules may also have a group work component. Students work independently, with the help of studio tutorials, to integrate material from lectures and workshops, to develop their own solutions to specific problems, and to work these up into graphic presentations or reports for submission and assessment. **Independent research skills** are developed through research methods, work on the initial research report, carried out over the summer vacation between the two years of the programme, and through completion of the final MA dissertation. This is supported by individual tutorials with the research supervisor.

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

The emphasis in the programme is on assessment by means of the submission of project work. The overall aims of the Department's assessment strategy are to:

- Tailor assessment to the achievement of overall programme aims and learning outcomes as well as unit aims and learning outcomes.
- Test the progressive development of knowledge and skills.
- Ensure that feedback on assessment is an integral part of student learning.
- Expose students to a diversity of assessment methods, thereby providing opportunities for development of a broad range of skills and abilities.
- Provide clear assessment criteria for individual units so that students have a good idea of what they must do to achieve high standards.

Projects are a key part of the programme and allow students to demonstrate achievement in relation to their knowledge and understanding of landscape theory, process and practice, including manipulation of landscape elements through design, planning and management (K1, K3, K4, K5), as well as the skills they have developed,

both those specific to landscape architecture (S1 to S6) and those transferable to other areas of work (S7 – S11). Submissions for these projects include illustrations of concepts and solutions, portfolios, files showing development of ideas, observational journals of construction details and plant material, models, computer generated materials, and verbal presentations at review sessions. Projects are frequently accompanied by **written reports** to develop students' abilities in communicating their proposals to professional and lay audiences (K4 and S6).

Written assignments are used to test knowledge and understanding in areas relating to: landscape theories and histories, including design approaches and practices and the philosophies that underpin them (K2), the nature of landscape practice (K6), and research philosophies and methodologies (K7).

Project reports, including both written reports and graphic presentation of analysis and solutions, are used in developing knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to landscape planning (K6 and S5).

The **Dissertation** is designed to test students' knowledge and understanding of research methodologies (K8) and skills and abilities in successfully carrying out an in depth piece of independent research on a topic of their choosing (S6 and S11).

In general the **transferable skills** that are developed through the programme (S7 – S11) are not directly assessed but are rather an integral part of the work carried out in completing individual units. Completion of both design projects and project reports, for example, requires demonstration of all the transferable skills listed. Some projects also require group work skills and/or independent research.

Written examinations are not a feature of this postgraduate programme.

19. Reference points

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

External points of reference that have been used in developing the learning outcomes include the following documents:

The relevant requirements of the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), in particular;
Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (2014)

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks.pdf>

Subject Benchmark Statements Landscape Architecture (2019)

The Subject Benchmark Statement explains the nature and scope of landscape architecture as a subject and the diversity of programmes of study that are available. It sets out the knowledge, skills and understanding common to all programmes in landscape architecture, together with those that are specific to programmes in landscape design, landscape management and landscape science.

The Landscape Institute's guidance notes: Criteria for the accreditation of higher education programmes (2012).
<https://www.landscapeinstitute.org/education/university-course-accreditation/>. The Department is subject to annual reaccreditation by the Landscape Institute, that requires review from the Landscape Institute's Professional Review Group which visits the department each year to discuss programme developments with both students and staff.

Internal points of reference that have influenced the learning outcomes are:

The individual research and professional interests of members of academic staff;

Student input to programme development through module evaluation, end of programme reviews and discussion at year group meetings and staff/student consultative meetings;

Learning and Teaching Strategy (2016-21)

https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.661828!/file/FinalStrategy.pdf

20. Programme structure and regulations

The **MA in Landscape Architecture** is a modularised programme made up of two years of study. Because of the requirements of the Landscape Institute as the professional accrediting body the modules making up the programme are nearly all compulsory although there is some choice in the second year. This is a **coherent programme** that progresses through three parts:

Part 1 is the first year and is an intensive postgraduate conversion year designed to develop the essential knowledge, understanding and skills required in Landscape Architecture. Integrated project-based modules provide a thorough grounding in the creative, social, technical and scientific aspects of the subject over two semesters of study.

There is provision for those who wish to do so to take a year out after this stage to gain practical experience by working in practice before continuing to the second year, but this is not a requirement of the programme.

Part 2 comprises the two semesters of the second year and is designed to prepare students for practice. Successful completion of Part 2 currently leads to the award of the **Postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture**, which is the award accredited by the Landscape Institute for professional purposes (accreditation of the PGDip is to be reviewed by the LI after 2022-23). This is a potential exit route for students unable to undertake/complete their MA dissertation.

Part 3 involves the completion of the *MA Dissertation* which is completed during the three months (July, August and September) of the summer of the second year.

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 <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/calendar>

21. Student development over the course of study

Part 1 approaches to teaching and learning are project, studio and field-based with a high level of support and guidance from tutors, and from theory and methods courses, lectures and seminars. Students encounter Landscape Architectural methods, theories and histories, develop visual and IT skills; and tackle a broad range of landscape architectural projects, applying methods and introducing the scope and range of design, planning and management.

Part 2 has a greater emphasis on developing the range of professional skills needed to work as a landscape architect and students join together to study with those taking the Diploma stage of the undergraduate programmes after returning from their year out. There is a great deal of mutual benefit to both groups of students from their contact and the opportunities for collaborative working. There is an emphasis on student centred learning with both groups learning from each other, helped by a series of team working projects that aim to simulate the experience of working in practice.

The year begins with a choice of specialist modules related to the student's Final Landscape Project (focusing on planning, design and management), together with further development of research skills. In Semester 2 the emphasis is on the Final Landscape Project within a specific studio that they choose linked to the supervisor interests and related to a theme or types of intervention in a specific existing context. This mainly comprises independent work supported by tutorials. In addition, there are modules covering specialist professional knowledge. The submission and presentation of the Final Landscape Project is the culmination of the year's work and the basis for the end of year exhibition attended by both friends and families of the students and employers seeking to find new talent. Students also engage in the preparation for their dissertation.

Part 3 involves the completion of the *MA Dissertation* which is completed during the three months (July, August and September) of the summer of the second year. Completion of the MA is not a compulsory part of the programme and some students opt instead to graduate with the professionally accredited Diploma. Others decide to continue and complete the independent academic research component of the programme.

22. Criteria for admission to the programme

Detailed information regarding admission to the programme is available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/prospective/>. Entry to the programme requires a good undergraduate degree or equivalent qualification in a relevant subject. People join the programme from many different backgrounds and many come from a variety of previous occupations. Relevant degree subjects include Fine Art, Geography, Archaeology, Architecture, and Environmental Science, Biology or Ecology, to name but a few. We do however regularly accept people from less obviously relevant backgrounds who have decided to change direction in their careers. Motivation and enthusiasm to pursue a career in Landscape are vitally important in these circumstances and for this reason we interview all UK candidates. For students whose first language is other than English, proof of a satisfactory standard in English is required. A score of 6.0 in IELTS, 550 in TOEFL (old system) or 213 TOEFL (new system) is the minimum standard although higher standards may be required depending upon background and previous qualifications.

23. Additional information

Students may take part in field trips during and at the end of the first year of the programme. Coach travel for project site visits is provided, but students will need to pay for independent travel e.g. by public transport, for additional and self-directed site visits. Students may expect to spend around £250 in printing and materials during each year.

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 www.shef.ac.uk/ssid.