

Document Title: Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy
Owner: Head of Teaching, Head of Learning
Author: Mike Aling
Date Approved: 26/11/2025
Approved by: Academic Board
Cycle for Review: Annual
Date for Next Review: November 2026
Location of Publication: AA Website



Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

1. Objectives
2. Core Strategies
3. Academic Levels
4. Learning and Teaching Parameters
5. Outputs
6. Process of Assessment
7. Monitoring and Review
8. Related Publications and Information
9. Review of Last Year's Action Plan
10. 2025-26 Action Plan

1. Objectives

The AA School is committed to the education of architects delivered to the highest standards. Students of the AA School are supported through all levels of their architectural education by teachers and staff with appropriate experience, ambition and creativity. The flexible and largely self-directed curricula constantly challenges teachers and students alike to discover, communicate and disseminate new and innovative architectural ideas and projects, all contained within the prescriptions, criteria and regulations of the required professional bodies and regulators. This strategy document presents the context for the unique educational environment that is the AA School. It seeks to make all students, teachers and staff aware of their position and role within this environment and the context for the range of activities, materials and documents which comprise a supportive, integrated whole.

An exploration of a diversity of approaches and agendas within the discipline is the fundamental pedagogic approach of the AA School. The range of issues taught and explored within the courses, studios, units and programmes aims to empower students to shape architecture through their own highly focused, dedicated and personal approach. The AA School promotes architectural teaching beyond the known, understood and expected forms, to raise valuable questions and engage open minds in anticipating, speculating and documenting methods and modes of working that raise valuable questions and propose relevant and speculative forms of architecture.

Learning, teaching and assessment develops understanding, produces knowledge and deepens awareness to equip all students with a breadth of relevant skills, and to empower students to be accountable for their study. Each student is supported in order to be able to demonstrate personal responsibility and initiative in making judgements, identifying problems and communicating why and how decisions have been made in visual, written and verbal formats.

The AA School's learning, teaching and assessment activities extend beyond the Bedford Square premises that it has occupied since 1917: the 350-acre woodland campus at Hooke Park, Dorset provides extensive workshop and fabrication spaces for the construction of models and 1:1 prototypes; the AA Visiting School offers a worldwide network of short courses, research and design workshops delivered across five continents; and the AA Public Programme presents lectures, exhibitions, symposia and publications to an extensive audience with a shared interest in architectural ideas, discourse and practice.

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2. Core Strategies 2025-26

2.1 Climate Awareness Teaching

Climate Matters Week will be hosted again in Term 1 of 2025-26, having been a success in bringing the school together in both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 cycles. The AA is committed to providing an educational environment for all students that enables climate awareness to be a core concern through effective teaching across the courses and programmes. Climate Matters is a week-long series of symposia with invited experts, staff and students, that supports and encourages this ongoing strategy across the entire school. During this event, students are afforded a heightened awareness of issues around the climate crisis, are taught the interrelated cultural and social impacts of climate changes across a range of spatial and temporal scales, and provided with opportunities to share their work with the AA community.

2.2 Intersectionality of Social and Environmental Justice

External Examiners for the Intermediate and Diploma Programmes have reflected how design work can benefit from the further integration of findings from both Environmental and Technical Studies (ETS) and History and Theory Studies (HTS) components of the syllabus, studied alongside the student's design unit. The aim this year is to increase the focus of teaching across the units on the intersectionality of both social and environmental justice, through the integration of ideas explored in core studies being more explicitly synthesized in design portfolio work late in the academic cycle (typically term 3).

2.3 Cross Studio Interactions

In previous cycles, design units have grouped together for informal cross-units events. The External Examiners for the Intermediate and Diploma Programmes have noted that students would benefit from increased opportunities such as this to interact with tutors and students from other units. With a wide range of units on offer, students can only ever interact with a small number of the teaching staff at the school, and it will be positive to extend these interactions. Teaching and Learning will be promoting cross studio interactions, particularly with new units at the school, through the academic cycle. A review of this at the end of the cycle will facilitate a conversation about formalising any cross-jury events in future academic calendars.

2.4 Continuity of Assessors

In order to guarantee a consistency of student feedback at final assessment events through the academic cycle (specifically student progress from March previews to June Final Tables) in the Intermediate and Diploma programmes, the Teaching and Learning team and School Registrar will be updating the system through which assessment panels are allocated members. The aim is to guarantee that all panels have half of the members having already reviewed work at the previous assessment, therefore having a continuity of assessors and a continuity of feedback. This will improve the consistency of feedback to all Intermediate and Diploma students.

2.5 AA Transfer

In October 2025 the AA opened applications to the recently validated AA Transfer Programme. AA Transfer is the world's first architecture conversion programme, designed to facilitate access to architectural education to graduates from non-cognate disciplines. This form of expedited route to registration is informed by the ARB's consultation of 'Tomorrow's Architect' in which consulted students and professionals reflected on the need for alternative, and faster, routes to becoming an architect. Ahead of the first cohort joining in September 2026, the Programme team will be making final developments in the 2025-26 academic cycle.

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3. Academic Levels

Learning, teaching and assessment takes place at four distinct levels:

3.1 A one-year Foundation Programme for students contemplating a career in architecture or related arts subjects. The Foundation Award in Architecture, Art and Design is separate to and does not form part of the Intermediate and Diploma Programmes. This is a full-time, studio-based delivery providing hands-on instruction in creative design and thinking, giving students the means to develop skills in drawing, digital video, photography, installation and a variety of media. The studio setting provides a learning environment in which to develop and experiment individually and collectively with new ideas, skills and techniques. Peer assessment is an essential part in helping students to develop a sense of constructive critique in relation to their own and each other's work, supporting the assembly of a portfolio that clearly represents individual interests, experiences and intellectual ambitions. Students engage in weekly tutorials, discussions and presentations with course staff and visiting practitioners.

3.2 The Intermediate and Diploma Programmes offering the full-time course in architecture:

- The AA Intermediate Programme leading to the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and providing exemption from ARB/RIBA Part 1 after 3 years of full-time study;
- The AA Diploma Programme leading to the Master of Architecture (MArch) providing exemption from ARB/RIBA Part 2 after 2 years of full-time study.

Each year of study in the Intermediate and Diploma Programmes consists of a one year-long design unit/studio resulting in the production of a design portfolio plus the completion of required core studies courses; all the required course submissions must be passed in order to successfully complete a year of study. The Core Studies courses are an essential and mandatory component of the Intermediate and Diploma Programmes. Delivered in term-long cycles, the provision enables opportunities for students to come together in shared seminar and lecture settings. History and Theory Studies offers courses that develop historical and theoretical knowledge and writing related to architectural discourses, concepts and ways of thinking. Media Studies enables students to develop skills in traditional forms of architectural representation as well as experimental forms of information and communication technology. Environmental and Technical Studies offers surveys, as well as in-depth instruction, in particular material, structural, environmental and other architectural systems, leading to technical projects and Theses that build upon the ideas and ambitions of projects related to work within the studio and units. The provision is enhanced at Third and Fifth Year levels by Professional Practice that introduces a wide range of subjects delivered by practitioners. Students gain an insight into practice and develop critical awareness of the profession and the associated skills needed to carry out the role of the contemporary architect. Seminar themes include professionalism, ethical practice, the regulatory framework and practice management.

3.2.1 First Year of the AA Intermediate Programme

The First Year of study (FHEQ level 5) is a studio-based teaching environment. It offers a broad introduction to the study of architecture and develops the conceptual abilities, knowledge base and skills for students, in preparation for entering the unit based Second and Third Years of study. Core Studies courses are integral to the First Year design studio: History and Theory Studies, Environmental and Technical Studies and Media Studies.

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In a single shared studio, students are immersed in an intellectual environment that fosters their interests and explorations in architecture. They learn how to acquire the practical and theoretical knowledge that will enable them to relate design to theory and discourse. Short projects extensively explore architecture as a creative way of thinking; a focused response towards current and speculative conditions. The portfolio is organised around the combination of these projects and required courses and submissions in the Core Studies courses.

3.2.2 **Second and Third Years of AA Intermediate Programme**

The Second and Third Years of study (FHEQ level 6) provide the basis for experimentation and project development within the structure of the unit system. There are 17 units at this level, each of which emphasises specific architectural issues. All learning is documented in the form of individual portfolios compiled by students throughout the year, based upon tutorials and guidance by Unit Tutors. Integral to the Intermediate Design unit are the Core Studies courses: History and Theory Studies, Environmental and Technical Studies, Media Studies and Professional Practice (Third Year only). Design projects form the core of all unit-based work, supported by lectures, seminars, juries, presentations, workshops and reviews arranged within the studio or Unit.

3.2.3 **The AA Diploma Programme**

The Diploma Programme (Fourth and Fifth years of study – FHEQ level 7) provides the tools and environment for the consolidation of individual students' architectural knowledge, skills and experimentation towards presenting an individual architectural thesis. There are 19 units at this level, organised to provide a diversity of architectural interests, agendas, topics and teaching methods. Diploma students are encouraged to challenge their own preconceptions, as well as build upon their existing knowledge and skills. All learning is documented in the form of individual portfolios compiled by students throughout the year based upon tutorials and guidance by Unit Tutors. Integral to the Diploma Unit are the Core Studies courses: History and Theory Studies, Environmental and Technical Studies and Professional Practice (Fifth Year only). Design projects form the core of all studio and unit-based work, supported by lectures, seminars, juries, presentations, workshops and reviews arranged within the studio or unit. Fourth year students are also required to undertake one of the Diploma Electives courses available in Term 1. Electives are specialised courses that extend the range of Core Studies into the broad domains of creative and radical practices in the arts, social politics and philosophies, new technologies and sciences.

- 3.3 **The Postgraduate Programmes** comprising 11 distinct Programmes of advanced full-time studies:
- 10 taught Master level programmes (PGDip/MA/MSc/MArch/MFA/Taught MPhil).
 - The PhD degree. The AA is an Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) of the OU for the delivery and validation of the PhD degree.

The taught provision at postgraduate level is structured subject to the specific degree award:

3.3.1 **PGDip programmes** are 9 months in length and delivered over three terms in full-time mode, or over 21 months in part-time mode. These consist of taught courses with teaching undertaken through lectures, workshops, seminars and writing workshops, with submissions required for each module.

The PGDip consists of 120 credits at FHEQ Level 7, with each credit equating to approximately 10 learning hours split between different courses and submissions.



3.3.2 **MA/MSc programmes** are 12 months in length and delivered over four terms in full-time mode, or 24 months and delivered over eight terms in part-time mode. The first three academic terms consist of taught courses with teaching undertaken through lectures, workshops, seminars and writing workshops, with submissions required for each module. The fourth summer term is devoted to the individual work needed to finalise the dissertation thesis (12,000 – 15,000 words).

3.3.3 **MArch programmes** are 16 months in length and delivered in two Phases. Phase 1 is delivered over three academic terms with teaching undertaken through lectures, design workshops, seminars and writing workshops, with submissions required for each module. There is a break for the summer following term 3, and then Phase 2 (the fourth and final term) is devoted to the individual work needed to finalise the dissertation thesis/main project.

The MA, MSc and MArch awards consist of 180 credits at FHEQ Level 7, with each credit equating to approximately 10 learning hours split between different courses of varying credit values and submissions.

3.3.4 **The Taught MPhil and MFA programmes** are delivered over an 18 month period, made up of two Phases. Phase 1 consists of three taught terms, followed by a summer break, and then 2 further terms (Phase 2) are devoted to individual study (the writing up of the dissertation in the MPhil and the development of the independent project in the MFA).

The MPhil and MFA awards consist of 240 credits at FHEQ Level 7. Each credit equates to approximately 10 learning hours split between different courses of varying credit values and submissions.

3.3.5 **PhD studies** at the AA are full-time for the entire duration. The normal period of full-time study for the PhD is of three calendar years from the date of registration with the OU, and up to a maximum of four years after OU registration. Progress of research students is monitored in regular meetings with their supervisors. The programme of study and skills development are agreed at an early stage and pursued through regular attendance of selected lecture courses, seminars and workshops.

3.4 **The AA Professional Practice and Practical Experience Examination** leads to exemption from the ARB/RIBA Part 3 Examination, the entry requirement to professional registration as an architect. The course and examination are open to anyone who has successfully obtained their Part 1 and Part 2 qualifications (or equivalency from overseas schools of architecture) and also to qualified practitioners for the purpose of Continuing Professional Development.

The taught component of the Professional Practice Course and Examination is provided in seminar format delivered over two weeks in September or one-day-per-week January to March annually. Candidates enrolled on the taught component can elect to sit the examination within a four-year period after having attended the seminars. The examination consists of three open-book, scenario-based written papers. The written examination process concludes with an oral examination after which two professional examiners determine the assessment outcome.



4. Learning and Teaching: Parameters

4.1 The AA School sets a challenging and ambitious agenda for its students, in particular encouraging experimentation and innovation satisfying and exceeding professional boundaries. Equally, the AA School recognises the need for students to have a clear sense of security and guidance; each programme and element of study has clear, published expectations and specifications in the relevant Programme Guide that sets the teaching, learning and assessment parameters for staff and students alike.

4.2 The AA School is committed and adheres to a resource-intensive staff-student ratio. The academic and personal support made available to all students at the AA School, including a school-wide open-door policy, provides a safety net in a challenging environment and a rich educational and personal learning experience. Additional student support includes the AA Writing Centre and AA Wellbeing Service.

4.3 The Academic Committee reviews changes to the existing, and development of new, courses and degree programmes in the context of wider higher educational standards, ARB and RIBA where relevant, and architectural education's unique academic profile. The Head of Learning fields students' curricular questions and concerns, with the Head of Teaching liaising with teaching staff when necessary; likewise consulting with teaching staff referrals regarding struggling students.

4.4 Engagement with professional practice is essential to the education of the architect. Many of the School's teaching staff are also active in practice, and the contribution of visiting tutors and critics is invaluable.

4.5 The School Director and Head of Teaching annually review teaching and related research goals where applicable with teaching staff, providing guidance and mentorship, particularly for new appointments. The Head of Teaching and allocated unit tutors provide mentoring for new unit staff. All teaching staff undertake an annual review with their line manager, with new staff (for the first two years of appointment) being in a probation period with regular meetings with their line manager.

5. Outputs

5.1 All students of the Foundation, Intermediate and Diploma Programmes are required to compile a portfolio that comprehensively documents their research and designs, inclusive of historical and theoretical research, precedents, exercises, design tests, studies and projects. The portfolio is seen not only as a final, required submission assessed at the end of the academic year but also as a critical tool in the organisation and mapping of work outputs throughout the year. The portfolios are supported and enhanced by the courses and required submissions provided by Core Studies.

5.2 The course requirements in the taught postgraduate programmes include essays, design exercises, project work and a final dissertation/project. Credits apply for each ten hours of learning time which is inclusive of lectures, seminars, course reading, workshops and tutorials as well as the study time spent on projects, essays and other assigned tasks.



6. Processes of Assessment

A range of formative and summative assessment methods are adopted to test the delivery of teaching and the progress of learning:

6.1 In the Foundation, Intermediate and Diploma Programmes, formative assessment is undertaken by portfolio reviews during the year, with the summative assessment of Pass or Fail undertaken at the end of the academic year. Every student is required to present, explain, justify and argue for their work to a panel of tutors and staff. Review panels pose questions and invite justification, not only of each portfolio but of colleagues' teaching agendas and methodologies. This form of assessment not only tests the learning outcomes but is a regular and intensive peer review of the teaching provision.

6.2 At postgraduate level, all coursework is marked by two internal assessors whose marks are averaged to establish a moderated result. To qualify for the degree award, students must attain the pass mark threshold on both coursework and final dissertation/project output and the overall final mark is calculated as the weighted average of both. The degree award is made 'with Distinction' when the overall final mark is 80% or higher.

6.3 The School commits to providing written feedback to summative assessment in a timely manner, all students should receive written feedback on their assessment no later than the first week of the next term, following submission.

6.4 The role of the external examiner at award years is to confirm that the national threshold standards, the internal academic standards of the award, and the professional criteria (ARB/RIBA Parts 1, 2 and 3) where relevant are being met, and help the School to assure that the level of learning is consistent with that of students from programmes at the same level in different institutions. Examiners also review the extent to which the School's assessment, marking scheme, examining and award making processes have been fairly and consistently implemented.

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 At the core of how we study architecture, strong emphasis is placed on enhancing and assuring high standards and qualities of learning experience. All programmes and courses in the AA School are subject to systematic internal and external review on a regular basis. This includes review by the School's Academic Committee, and the Academic Board chaired by the Director of the AA School. Students hold representative positions on both.

7.2 Review is also informed by internal annual monitoring and periodic review for each programme, annual feedback from the External Examiners, and from student feedback.

7.3 External monitoring, review and recognition are conducted by the relevant regulatory and professional bodies: the Architect's Registration Board (ARB), the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Office for Students (OfS), and the Open University (OU) for the PhD Programme.



8. Related Publications and Information

8.1 The AA Prospectus is updated and published annually, available at the outset of the academic year: <https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/prospectus> provides extensive detail on the AA School, structure, teaching provision and academic endeavours.

8.2 The annual schedule of business, learning, teaching and assessment activities of the AA School are presented in the detailed AA Academic Calendar widely circulated to all students and teachers and staff in hard, on-line subscription and downloadable formats: <https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/calendar>

The School Registrar is responsible for the planning and co-ordination of the calendar in consultation with the academic governance structure for annual approval by the Academic Board. The structure allows for ongoing review and debrief, facilitating the presentation of an annual schedule of business, teaching, learning and assessment in a form that underpins student and staff induction in the activities therein.

8.3 The AA School Academic Regulations presents the academic regulatory framework applicable to all courses and programmes of study and to all students registered thereon for the duration of the academic year. The definitive information is provided to students and staff alike to ensure that all have an equal basis for their interaction. The document seeks to define the regulatory context in which learning, teaching and assessment take place, leading to the approval of awards: <https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/students>

The Academic Regulations should be read in conjunction with individual Programme Guides issued at the outset of the academic year.

8.4 Recruitment, selection and admission is guided by clear and rigorous procedures made available to all prospective applicants: <https://www.aaschool.ac.uk/admissions>

9. Review of last year's Action Plan 2024-25

ACTION	AIM	STATUS
Head of Learning role introduced at the start of the 2024-25 cycle	Role to provides dedicated and enhanced mentoring support, advice, and guidance for all students across the School	Completed
Teaching & Learning to encourage Intermediate and Diploma students to become less reliant on scripted presentations, reinforced by Unit tutors and supported by AA Writing Centre	Intermediate and Diploma students to become less reliant on scripted presentations through 2024-25 cycle	Completed – positive feedback from external examiners June 2025. Teaching and Learning to work with students directly who struggle with presentation skills.
Climate Matters Week, Term 1 week 6, 28th October – 1st November 2024	Second annual school wide event to provide focus and expertise on the Climate Crisis, as well as enabling cross-programme debate	Completed



Enhancement of Intermediate and Diploma programme syllabus in line with new ARB framework, with particular focus on Core studies/ETS, with updated Learning Outcomes to be phased in yearly over the lifecycle of programme	Enhancing offering to students, maintaining RIBA validation requirements and meeting ARB accreditation requirements in Diploma. ARB Part 1 prescription for Intermediate ends December 2027	Completed – the AA has now submitted its application to transition to the current ‘ARB Part 2’ to ‘Master’s Level’ in line with new ARB accreditation framework. Annual phasing of learning outcomes in progress.
All staff and students inducted and refreshed on School wide Grading Criteria and Assessment Criteria through cycle	Full transparency and clarity of grading and assessment criteria, to both students and staff – enhanced to student body this cycle and onwards	Completed

10. Action Plan 2025-26

ACTION	AIM	TARGET COMPLETION DATE
Finalise required revisions to Diploma Transition documentation for ARB from Part 2 to Master’s Level, ahead of Sep 2026 commencement of revised syllabus in line with new ARB accreditation framework.	Completion of full documentation for approval of Part 2 transition by ARB	November 2025
Climate Matters Week, Term 1 week 6, 27th October – 31st October 2024	Third annual school wide event to provide focus and expertise on the Climate Crisis, as well as enabling cross-programme debate	October 2025
Focus teaching on the intersectionality of social and environmental justice across Design, ETS and HTS work	Further incorporation of findings from ETS and HTS to feed back into design projects later in academic cycle (Intermediate and Diploma only)	For review at Intermediate and Diploma programmes External Examinations, June 2026



Promote cross studio interaction and the opportunity for students to get feedback from other tutors during the academic cycle	Increase student exposure to work of peers across Intermediate and Diploma programmes	June 2025
Updated assessment panel member allocation system to be implemented for continuity of assessors between March and June assessments	Continuity of assessors in assessment events held across Intermediate and Diploma programmes to secure consistency of feedback	June 2025
AA Transfer Programme to undergo final developments ahead of Sep 2026 with first cohort expected.	Successful commencement of the world's first architecture conversion programme	Transfer Programme teaching starts September 2026

This Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is subject to annual review by the Academic Committee for its continuing appropriateness and effectiveness, with the approval of changes from the Academic Board.