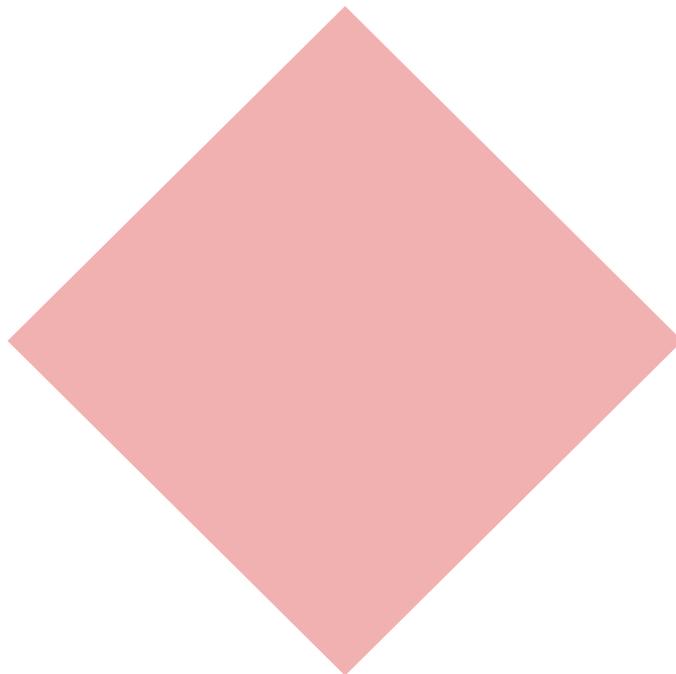


**Architectural Association
School of Architecture**



AA PROGRAMME GUIDE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (PhD)

2025–2026

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SECTION 1: THE SCHOOL

ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

1.1 THIS GUIDE / WHERE WE ARE

The purpose of this Programme Guide is to provide information regarding the way in which the School and its programmes are organised. It also provides an introduction to terms and definitions, common principles of content and assessment, the way that the programmes are structured, how each Course is organised, credited, and regulated, and what you will be expected to do.

Other documents you will find essential in orienting yourself within the School include the following:

- [The AA School Academic Regulations](#)
- [The AA School Quality Manual](#)
- The Programme Handbook

Our principal buildings, where most of the academic programmes are based, are at 32-39 Bedford Square, 4 and 16 Morwell Street and 1 and 1A Montague Street in Bloomsbury, Central London. The Design and Make Programme is located in AA's Hooke Park, in Dorset.

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1.2 ACADEMIC ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Overall Academic Organisation

The AA School of Architecture is an independent school governed by the Architectural Association (Inc.). It consists of c. 900 full-time students, who study in the Foundation, Intermediate, Diploma and Postgraduate programmes. The AA School is made-up of four distinct parts:

- 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 5-year full-time course in architecture.
- The Intermediate and Diploma Programmes offering the 5-year 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 (please note that students that complete the programme after June 2027 will receive RIBA Part 1 only);
 - The AA Diploma Programme leading to the Master of Architecture (MArch) and providing exemption from ARB/RIBA Part 2 after 2 years of full-time study.
- The postgraduate programmes comprising 11 distinct programmes of advanced full-time and part-time studies:
 - 10 taught Master level programmes (PGDip/MA/MSc/MArch/MFA/Taught MPhil)
 - A PhD degree. The AA is an Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) of the OU for the delivery and validation of the PhD degree.
- The AA Professional Practice and Practical Experience Examination leading 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.

Enhancing Quality of Learning: Reviews and Monitoring

All programmes 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 Board (see details below), annual monitoring and periodic review for each programme, annual feedback from External Examiners, student feedback as well as annual and periodic review from the School's professional bodies and validation partners the Open University, ARB and RIBA.

Academic Governance

The Academic Board (AB) is the sovereign academic body charged with responsibility for the academic governance of the AA School and its programmes of study. It is chaired by the Director of the AA School. The Academic Board delegates responsibilities to, and monitors the progress, effectiveness and recommendations of the AA School's Academic Committee (AC). The Academic Board demonstrates its accountability to the AA Council by submission of quarterly reports and an annual report.

SECTION 2: DEGREE SPECIFICATION

2.1 DEGREE SUMMARY INFORMATION		
Awarding body	Open University	
Partner institution(s)	Open University	
Location of Study/campus	36 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3ES	
Award and titles		
	Award	Title
Final award	PhD	PhD
Intermediate award	N/A	
Credits	N/A	
FHEQ Level	8	
Duration of study (standard) / Maximum registration period		
	Duration of study (standard)	Maximum registration period
Full-time	48 months (12 terms)	48 months
Sandwich	N/A	N/A
Part Time	N/A	N/A
Distance	N/A	N/A
Start date for programme	September 2025	
Course codes/categories		
UCAS code	N/A	
CATS points for course	N/A	
QAA Subject Benchmark	Architecture 2020	
Admissions agency		
UCAS	N/A	
Direct to School	No – subject to approval of the Open University	
Admissions criteria		
Requirements	Refer to AA School Academic Regulations	
Language	Refer to AA School Academic Regulations	
Regulations	Refer to AA School Academic Regulations	
Contacts		
School Registrar	Belinda Flaherty	
Programme Head	Maria Shéhérazade Giudici	
Examination and Assessment		
External Examiners 2024-25	N/A	
Examination Board(s)	PhD viva voce examinations include an internal member of staff acting as Chair, a minimum of one external examiner and one internal examiner or two external examiners. Panels are subject to the approval of the Open University.	
Approval/review dates		
	Approval date	Review date
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Validation	Revalidated May 2021	Spring 2026

2.2 PROGRAMME INTRODUCTION

The PhD Programme at the AA supports research on the built environment, architectural theory and its multiple domains of application. The ambition of the programme is to provide a platform to investigate form as an index of social and political processes, while rethinking canonical knowledge rigorous investigation. The programme welcomes diverse approaches to the articulation of a dissertation, from traditional written theses to PhDs-by-design.

The individual research trajectories, discussed in a day-to-day relationship between doctoral candidates and supervisors, are encouraged to intersect in the numerous collective events that bring together the PhD community and invited guests. The directors of studies offer a range of seminars, workshops, and reading groups that aim to provide the candidates a ground for cultural exchange and methodological debate. At the end of every term, PhD candidates have the opportunity to present their in-progress dissertation for discussion with supervisors, peers and invited guests.

While individual research work remains the core of a PhD thesis, the programme fosters co-operation and intellectual exchange between candidates, believing that the specific expertise of each participant can enrich the multidisciplinary character of our collective debate. The overall conviction that underpins the structure of the programme is that architecture represents an ideal terrain in which to reveal and critique social and environmental issues, and that the more thorough and consistent a study is, the more it offers a springboard for radical, risk-taking experimentation.

The theses submitted this year represent a cross-section of the most urgent questions present in the contemporary debate, from the role of architecture in the development of sustainable environments to the ideological construction of ideas of nature, from the agency of social movements in the age of neoliberalism to the roots of the fraught relationship between language and space.

Each research represents a highly personal, long-term investigation; each develops its own methodology, audience, and objectives. However, beyond individual expertise, our community does pursue a shared commitment to reevaluate architecture's agency at the time of an unprecedented crisis of ecological and social care.

2.3 PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

The PhD Programme is a full-time course of studies with a minimum duration of 6 terms (24 months) and a maximum duration of 12 terms (48 terms).

Candidates are expected to spend a minimum of 37 hours a week on their studies.

The work is self-directed; students should attend a minimum of 1 supervision meeting per month, and a total minimum of 12 supervision meetings in a year.

Individual supervision meetings with the first and second supervisors are the key component of the PhD course; however, a range of seminars, events, and reading groups are offered to the students throughout terms 1 and 2.

2.4 TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Teaching and Learning Methods

The first 12 months after registration are devoted to the preparation of an Upgrade report; during the Upgrade exam, the student's status as PhD candidate is confirmed. The following two years (terms 4 to 9) are framed as intensive research, and the last 3 terms (terms 10 to 12) are intended to serve as 'write-up' period during which the candidate edits their findings into a final dissertation.

A minimum of 10 monthly formal Supervision Meetings with the Director of Studies and/or Second Supervisor are required in Year 1, 2, and 3, that is to say terms 1 to 9. Second Supervisors must attend a minimum of 3 Supervision Meetings per year; these can be included within, or in addition to, the 10 required meetings. One of the Supervision Meetings in term 2, 5, and 8 must be attended by the full supervision team.

In Year 4, that is to say terms 10 to 12, three termly formal Supervision Meeting with the Director of Studies and/or Second Supervisor are required.

Meetings will be logged by supervisors via Staff Hub or by notifying the Student Attendance Coordinator, and by candidates by keeping a written record to be uploaded to the Open University’s PGR Manager.

Evaluating and Improving Quality/Quality Indicators

AA Academic Committee / Academic Board	Bimonthly Monitoring Reports are submitted to the Academic Committee. The Academic Committee then reports findings to the Academic Board. Biannual Monitoring Reports are submitted to the Open University (next report due August 2024). Refer to AA School Quality Manual for further detail.
Professional Accreditation and Validation	Revalidation for the PhD takes place every 5 years. Last Interim Visit: November 2023 Next revalidation: Spring 2026 Refer to AA School Quality Manual for further detail.

Assessment

Every year, PhD candidates are assessed through a Mid-Year Presentation and a mandatory Annual Progress Review (APR).

Mid-Year Presentations take place in term 2, 4, and 9 during the Collective Presentation Forums organised at the end of each term. They consist in an oral presentation of in-progress research, reviewed by a panel of current Directors of Studies as well as invited guests.

APRs take place in term 3, 6, and 9, and they require the submission of a progress report evaluated by two jurors, followed by a viva-voce discussion of the report’s contents.

The APR of Year 1 also serves as the Upgrade Exam.

As per OU Regulations (RD 15.6), the Upgrade Report should contain:

- i) correct and comprehensive referencing
- ii) a viable research question
- iii) a critical literature review which situates the proposed research
- iv) a research proposal, including an outline and critical justification of the proposed method(s)
- iv) where appropriate, preliminary data/ pilot data and analysis as required by the individual’s project
- v) a detailed, feasible, work plan demonstrating how the student is going to complete on time

Successive APR Reports should contain the above, plus a monitoring report of the following (as per RD16.4):

- a) Academic engagement and attendance
- b) the extent to which a student has achieved performance targets to date
- c) academic progress
- d) research activities
- e) skills development

Thesis submission is permitted between 24 and 48 months of registration; the submitted thesis is evaluated by a panel composed of two respondents, out of which minimum one should be external. The examination is chaired by a suitable internal member of staff.

2.5 AWARD CLASSIFICATION

The Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree is awarded upon successful completion of the programme. There are no grades awarded.

2.6 LEARNING SUPPORT

Every student has continuous access to a design studio with storage space, along with access to all of the AA School's facilities at Bedford Square in London and in Hooke Park, Dorset. Introductory sessions are provided by the relevant academic resources departments at the beginning of the academic year to all students.

On-site resources at Bedford Square include a large wood and metal workshop, a model making workshop for materials such as clay and plastics, a digital prototyping lab, an audio-visual lab, a digital photography studio, an IT lab with both Mac and PCs, a drawing materials and print shop, the AA bookshop, AA library and AA archives. The AA also has its own bar and restaurant at Bedford Square.

Hooke Park in Dorset is the AA's satellite campus that hosts short residential workshops for visiting groups of students from throughout the school. Hooke Park is a 150-hectare working forest inside that provides the primary source of timber for student-led construction projects and also has large workshops, an IT lab, catering facilities and accommodation for students visiting from London.

The AA Writing Centre supports students in the development of their written communication skills and helps to strengthen reading, critical research and creative writing capabilities across all programmes and year groups.

AA Wellbeing offers students confidential, one-to-one wellbeing support and workshops. The team is available to explore students concerns, anxieties and emotional difficulties to support their wellbeing and academic progression. Difficulties may include the effects of bereavement, loss, lack of confidence, mood regulation, relationship difficulties or managing mental health.

The AA's London based Public Programme is an extensive series of public events dedicated to contemporary architectural culture: exhibitions, members' events, lectures, seminars and conferences, along with regular book launches hosted by the AA bookshop. Evening lectures are available online to view at Hooke Park. A weekly published school events lists is published through the communications studio.

School-wide facilities and resources are described in more details on the [AA Website](#).

SECTION 3: PROGRAMME COMPONENTS

3.1 DISSERTATION

DISSERTATION			
Level	FHEQ Level 8	Status	Compulsory
Teaching staff	Maria Shéhérazade Giudici (coordinator), Pier Vittorio Aureli, Eleni Axioti, Doreen Bernath, Paula Cadima, Brendon Carlin, Nerma Cridge, Francesca dell’Aglio, Anna Font, Hamed Khosravi, Platon Issaias, Marina Lathouri, Gili Merin, Mark Morris, Clara Oloriz, William Orr, Chris Pierce, Milad Showkathaksh, Nicholas Simcik-Arese, Theodore Spyropoulos, Teresa Stoppani, Michael Weinstock, Ivana Wingham	Terms	1 to 12 (minimum 6 terms, maximum 12 terms)
Learning Methods	Tutorials Self-directed learning	Credits	N/A

Synopsis

The development of an original doctoral dissertation is at the core of the PhD candidates’ work. Each candidate engages in regular tutorials with their Director of Studies and Second Supervisor throughout all three terms. The content, duration, and frequency of the tutorials depend on the needs of the individual student, but regular attendance is required, with a minimum of one formal meeting per month, recorded through a log uploaded to the OU PGR platform.

Aims

Depending on the stage of development of the thesis, the tutorials are aimed at helping candidates refine their work and progress in the completion of the thesis. Meetings provide both methodological guidance, as well as specific expertise on topics touched by each specific research.

Content

Pre-upgrade tutorials (year 1): methodology, definition of research topic, literature review.

Post-upgrade tutorials (year 2-3): development of research material.

Write-up tutorials (year 4): organisation and communication of findings.

Submission

- PhD Dissertation

Assessment Method

Annual Progress Review: Submission of a yearly report (see page 8) and viva-voce discussion of the report with two respondents. Neither the supervisors, nor the candidate’s Third Party Monitor can act as respondents.

Assessment Criteria

Academic rigour

Ability to compile a thorough literature review and position one's work within its scientific and academic field.

Relevance and originality

Ability to produce thought-provoking research that broadens the scope of current knowledge on the chosen subject matter.

Synthesis and communication

Ability to organise the research into accessible, professionally presented material using the media that most suit the topic (text, visual media, code etc.).

Argumentation

Ability to present the research, engage in a debate on the subject matter, and respond to questions.

3.2 COLLECTIVE PRESENTATION FORUM

TITLE COLLECTIVE PRESENTATION FORUM			
Level	FHEQ Level 8	Status	Compulsory
Teaching staff	Maria Shéhérazade Giudici (coordinator), Pier Vittorio Aureli, Eleni Axioti, Doreen Bernath, Paula Cadima, Brendon Carlin, Nerma Cridge, Francesca dell'Aglio, Anna Font, Hamed Khosravi, Platon Issaias, Marina Lathouri, Gili Merin, Mark Morris, Clara Oloriz, William Orr, Chris Pierce, Milad Showkathaksh, Nicholas Simcik-Arese, Theodore Spyropoulos, Teresa Stoppani, Michael Weinstock, Ivana Wingham	Terms	2, 4, 9
		Credits	N/A
Learning Methods	Juries		

Synopsis

Students are asked to present their thesis at least once a year during one of the three Collective Presentation Forums taking place at the end of each term. At the end of term 1, Year 2 students present; at the end of term 2, Year 1 students present; at the end of term 3, Year 3 students present. Limited places are also offered, each term, should candidates from other cohorts want to share their work a second time, outside of their planned Forum participation. Internal supervisors and external guests are invited to discuss the work in progress with the candidates.

Aims

Presentation Forums offer the candidates an opportunity to hone their presentation skills, but also allow them to get feedback from their peers, AA faculty, and academics who are specifically invited for these regular events.

Content

Individual Power-point presentations of 15-20 minutes followed by a discussion.

Submission

- N/A

Assessment Method

Verbal feedback is offered during the jury; should concerns arise, candidates are notified by email and offered further guidance.

3.3 BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND PLAGIARISM

TITLE			
BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH AND PLAGIARISM			
Level	FHEQ Level 8	Status	Compulsory
Teaching staff	AA Librarians	Term	1
Learning Methods	Seminar	Credits	N/A

Synopsis

This induction seminar introduces candidates to the basics of bibliographic research and guides them to understand the difference between referencing and plagiarising. It also helps candidates build a diverse range of research skills through the use of digital and analogical resources, and offers them an overview of resources on campus and in accessible London institutions.

Aims

Understanding what it means to do research is the very basis of PhD studies, and this seminar provides the very first building block in the construction of a path that leads to the development of a literature review first, and proper research later. This library session is a crucial induction to the initial step of any dissertation; after it, the candidates will have the necessary skills to independently access and use a variety of sources.

Content

- Use of library resources
- introduction to digital repositories
- Understanding of plagiarism

Submission

- N/A

3.4 ELECTIVES

TITLE			
WRITING CENTRE SEMINAR			
Level	FHEQ Level 8	Status	Elective
Teaching staff	AA Writing Centre staff	Terms	1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11
Learning Methods	Seminars Tutorials	Credits	N/A

Synopsis

Writing is an essential skill for a PhD candidate; although the AA welcomes multi-media theses engaging with other forms of communication, the text-based component of a dissertation tends to be extremely important in most cases. As such, the acquisition of this skill is tackled in a variety of ways, from individual tutorials with the supervisors to this collective seminar offered by the Writing Centre, which offers general guidance on academic writing, conventions, and strategies, helping candidates to find their specific voice while communicating in a rigorous and effective way the content of their research. The Centre also provides individual feedback to candidates who already have a developed thesis and want to improve the quality of their text.

Aims

The Writing Centre seminars allow the candidates to look at the written material they produced in a purely strategic way, abstracting themselves from the intricacies of the in-progress research to consider as objectively as possible the way they communicate their findings. This is doubly useful. On the one hand, it helps candidates build better writing skills, to be more clear and incisive. On the other hand, it also gives them an opportunity to reconceptualise their work from new perspectives. As such, writing seminars offer more than just a tool, and often provide deep insights in conceptual aspects of the thesis as well.

Content

Introduction to different forms of academic writing and personalised help on ongoing dissertations.

Submission

- N/A

TITLE WHAT, WHERE, WHO, WHEN, HOW – AND WHY. RETHINKING DOCTORAL RESEARCH			
Level	FHEQ Level 8	Status	Elective
Teaching staff	Maria Shéhérazade Giudici	Terms	1, 4, 7, 10
Learning Methods	Seminars	Credits	N/A

Synopsis

This seminar dissects the traditional components of doctoral dissertations, analysing each one in a critical way. It provides both an overview of methodological approaches, and also a practical guide to understanding, producing, and rethinking research. Sessions include an ex-cathedra component as well as a group discussion, and provide extra time for specific individual questions and feedback. It is, on the surface, a course aimed at pre-upgrade candidates, as it offers a cross-section of the main challenges a researcher faces, and a concrete introduction to specific research skills. However, its utility also extends to those who already have a developed body of work, as sessions will also try to question pre-received ideas and help students understand how to hone their own methodology.

Aims

The basic aim of the course is to give all candidates a clear overview of what is a PhD thesis, what could be a PhD thesis, and how to carry research to completion. It seeks to construct a shared body of knowledge in the PhD cohort, across specific areas of interest. It also means to stimulate debate and encourage more experienced candidates to share their experience and perhaps change the way research is conducted and communicated.

Content

- What is a research question?
- What is a literature review?
- What is an abstract?
- How to prepare for an APR
- How to construct an argument (in writing and oral presentation)

Submission

- N/A

TITLE CLIMATE CARE			
Level	FHEQ Level 8	Status	Elective
Teaching staff	Maria Shéhérazade Giudici	Terms	1, 4, 7, 10
Learning Methods	Seminars	Credits	N/A

Synopsis

It is becoming increasingly evident that ecological and social sustainability are two faces of the same crisis humankind is facing. Beyond the diversity of each candidate's individual thesis, all PhD students seem to share this same concern, which resonates with the school's agenda, and more specifically with Climate Matters Week. During this special week, the PhD programme organises a seminar group to discuss this subject, casting this challenge as a 'Care Crisis': the crisis of an exploitative model that has affected both the way we treat our environment, as well as the way we treat each other. The seminar group focuses on the further development of the Climate Care Reader the programme started to elaborate in 2023-24. In the weeks that precede Climate Matters, candidates can propose suitable readings, that are then collectively discussed during the Climate Care sessions, as a working roundtable that seeks to reconstruct a dialogue between technology and political responsibility.

Aims

Climate Care is meant to provide a debate forum where candidates focused on different niche subjects can exchange knowledge and exit their disciplinary solitude to contribute to a collective agenda. It is also aimed at creating a shareable body of knowledge through the PhD Climate Care reader, which is ultimately meant to benefit the whole school community as it will be shared with all students and staff through the AA library.

Content

The event is a reading group divided in thematic sessions, each grouping key readings proposed by students and staff during the month of October.

Submission

- N/A

TITLE			
READING AND WRITING ARCHITECTURAL THEORY			
Level	FHEQ Level 8	Status	Elective
Teaching staff	Maria Shéhérazade Giudici	Terms	2, 5, 8, 11
Learning Methods	Seminars	Credits	N/A

Synopsis

The course is structured as a reading group where participants analyse in depth one single text per session. Different aspects of each text will be evaluated, from its writing style to its structure, from its research methodology to its implied political position. The seminar leader will help participants contextualise the authors in regard to their historical and disciplinary background and offer a range of other bibliographic resources to those who might be interested in further studies on specific subjects. Each session will also investigate how arguments are built and substantiated, the reason why authors and editors choose a particular writing style, and how visual elements can complement a text. The choice to focus on ‘theory’ is not neutral: it implies, first of all, that not all the chosen texts will focus on history, but it is also meant to somewhat challenge what architectural history is, and its utility in the current historical conjuncture, ultimately encouraging the candidates to use the course as an opportunity to refine their own individual position.

Aims

Reading and writing are understood as basic skills every PhD candidate has mastered long before starting their studies, and yet, acquiring the patience to read and dissect complex texts should not be taking for granted. This seminar is meant to train candidates to read more and more critically, and to therefore write consciously and clearly. It builds up the candidates’ endurance to fully deal with a topic which is not one’s own research; it stimulates intellectual curiosity and generosity, and it fosters debate between candidates as well. It also provides more in-depth training on writing techniques and styles, editorial strategies, and definition of the target audience of the research.

Content

Each monographic session focuses on a single essay which is shared two weeks in advance to allow the group to read it beforehand. The final list of chosen texts will be discussed collectively to allow candidates to guide the debate.

Submission

- N/A