Fionn Stevenson to head Sheffield school of architecture
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Fionn Stevenson is to replace Flora Samuel as head of the University of Sheffield’s school of architecture

The current professor of sustainable design – who joined the school one year ago – will take over at the helm from 1 September 2013 when Samuel steps down.

Stevenson will become the second ever woman to lead the prestigious faculty. Samuel, who became Sheffield’s first female head when she took over the reins in early 2010, will continue to teach at the university.

In a statement, Stevenson praised the school’s ‘distinctive reputation for agenda-setting social engagement’.

She said: ‘We have extraordinary staff and students who are pioneering new interdisciplinary ways of thinking about architecture and my job will be to enable their creative curiosity and empathy to flourish in the best way possible.’

Stevenson – who co-directed Oxford Brookes’ low carbon building unit from 2007 to 2011 – admitted she had a ‘passion for sustainable design, even though the “S” word is no longer fashionable.’

She said: ‘As architects and educators we need to take a more long-term and holistic view about our use of resources to help to create communities that contribute positively to our planetary ecology.’

Samuel will start a year-long sabbatical next September to complete an AHRC-backed ‘Home Improvements’ knowledge exchange project with housebuilder Taylor Wimpey. She also plans to complete a book on the value of architecture to society and continue working with the RIBA Research and Innovation Group.

Explaining her plan to continue teaching at the school, Samuel said: ‘Sheffield has great, really critical students, and a unique mix of architecture and social science that is just right for my work.

‘I want to enjoy the good things that we’ve put in place over the last few years as they come into fruition.’

She added: ‘Also I want to support Fionn, who has the energy and insight to do real good for the profession, in developing the school’s strategic vision for being a world leader on the interface between architecture and society. The last few years have seen the near “privatisation” of the Higher Education system. There is much work to do to counter the negative results of these changes, particularly in the area of widening participation.’