The University of Sheffield

MArch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning

FAQ

This course combines the Sheffield School of Architecture MArch course and the Department of Town and Regional Planning MA course. You are fully integrated into both separate courses. It is a full time course which gives dual accreditation RTPI and RIBA Part 2. The following are answers by a current student on the course to FAQs.

How does it differ from the traditional MArch course?
The Course Handbook, produced by the Department of Town and Regional Planning, sets out the difference in modules between the two routes. As a dual student the following modules are not part of your course:
Architecture: Y5 option module, Y5 & Y6 live projects, Y5 & Y6 dissertation.

The dissertation is co-ordinated by TRP and undertaken in the summer after 6th year (at the same time as the MA Students.) Some tutors may be open to having a tutor within each department and having joint dissertation meetings if you wish.

How much designing is involved?
There are two main design elements to the MArch course, the live projects and the main studio. The Live projects take place in the first 6 weeks of both years. They do not make up part of your credits for the dual course, and as such participation is not obligatory. However, you are encouraged to take part in at least the first year of live projects as they are a chance to bond with your fellow MArch students and are an important introduction to ways of working at SSoA.
To participate in live projects is entirely feasible, despite not being assessed, because during this 6 week period you will only have 4 hours of town planning lectures a week.
You then join a design studio for the rest of the year, therefore completing a minimum of two design projects by the end of the course.
A small element of urban scale design may be incorporated into the Integrated project within the Town Planning side.

What can I expect of the Town Planning side?
The teaching is either in lecture format, or can sometimes take the form of site visits or seminars.
The assignments are largely in the form of written essays and reports. However there are also role-playing assignments. Group work is a key part of some assignments, and many lectures are shared with other related disciplines such as International Development or Commercial Property, bringing students of diverse backgrounds to work together. MA TRP students come from a range of undergraduate disciplines ranging from geography, politics, philosophy, and more.
The core modules are highly structured in comparison to the MArch design studio, which can allow you more license to pursue your own agenda. It focuses on place-making, how the planning system and policy making play a role in this, and what the role of planning is and could be. The planning process is inextricably linked to its political context, and understanding this forms a core part of the course. The research methods prepare you for a dissertation within a social science department, it may be quite different to what you experienced within an Architecture department. It may seem daunting at first, but there are many similarities to the MArch side. Examples of dual course student dissertations are available to be viewed at Western Bank Library.

There is also an opportunity to undertake work experience in a planning department over the Christmas break.

**How well do the two sides of the course relate to each other?**

Both departments have a shared ethos of the production of space with people at the heart. Therefore the two sides complement each other well. Broadly speaking there are strong similarities between the following modules on either side of the course:

- Theory & Research (Architecture) & Research Methods (Planning)
- Design Studio (Architecture) & Perspectives on Spatial Planning/Integrated Project (Planning)
- Live Projects (Architecture) & Spatial Planning Systems (Planning)
- Management, Practice & Law (Architecture) & Spatial Planning Systems (Planning)

Although obviously links can be drawn between all aspects of the course. The relationship of these becomes apparent through reading the module outlines as well as through critical reflection after having taken them! E&T (Environment & Technology) and Values in Planning are both far more specific to architecture and planning respectively.

Pragmatically as with any such course, there can be occasional timetabling clashes. It is up to students to arrange with tutors or other students the ways to work around this. SSoA are normally able to record lectures for which you cannot be present.

**Do you think I should take this course, is it worth it?**

You should be very clear about why it is you want to do the dual course, and ensure that it will offer you what you want. It is a large commitment, and it is best to have very strong reasons for wishing to undertake it. It is not advisable to do it purely to “get an extra qualification.”

You are limited in your ability to spend time on design studio by the extra planning modules and this can be frustrating. Balancing the two sides of the course itself (along with a personal life) can be stressful at times.

You can attend Town Planning lectures in the first few weeks of term to get a feel for the course, before committing to a decision.

To become a qualified town-planner you have to undergo a process similar to gaining your RIBA
Part 3. You have to spend two years in practice and complete an APC (Assessment of Professional Competence.) This could increase the timescale before you are qualified.

The planning side is heavily related to the UK context, which is worthwhile considering if you wish to work abroad in the future, although there are options which allow you to focus more upon planning within the context of the Global South.

Sheffield University is the only UK University to offer this dual accredited course, and once qualified you will be in a fairly unique position of being able to bridge across both professions with an understanding of both sides.

**How much support do the staff provide given the low number of students on the dual course?**

The staff on both sides are incredibly helpful. You can set up a meeting with directors of the course from both departments at the start of the year to discuss concerns. I was also lucky to have excellent support through general meetings talking about progress and concerns throughout the year with a staff member from the Town Planning department. Staff are always willing to take the dual course into account, and to negotiate extensions to deadlines etc.

**In general what are the positives and negatives of the course?**

In my opinion
Pros: An alternative perspective on built environment issues.
Being on a course with students with a wide range of skills from critical thinking, to policy writing.
An urban scale focus on the built environment.

Cons: Not being formally involved in Live Projects.
Less camaraderie with course mates on both sides if deadlines or assignments are changed for you.
Not having enough time sometimes to fully engage in both sides.

**How much time do you spend a week working? How does this compare to students on the MArch only route? Do you feel your time on design is compromised as a result?**

Being effective at time management is crucial as often deadlines come all at once. Time on design is definitely reduced compared to the MArch students. Year 5 is especially difficult as there are many different modules to contend with on both architecture and planning sides. It is difficult to put a number on how many hours weekly, as this varies across the year.

**Useful Information:**
MA TRP Course Structure
More about Planning:
Careers in Planning (from the RTPI)
The Planners (BBC Series) focussed on Development Control
http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00tw844
Example of what Policy Planners might produce

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Thanks to Natalya Palit, MArch Architecture with Town and Regional Planning student, for producing this document.