Module Specification

Design Thesis

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Contents

Part 1: Information

Module title: Design Thesis

Module code: UBLL4A-60-M

Level: Level 7

For implementation from: 2026-27

UWE credit rating: 60

ECTS credit rating: 30

College: College of Arts, Technology and Environment

School: CATE School of Architecture and Environment

Partner institutions: None

Field: Architecture and the Built Environment

Module type:

Pre-requisites: Exploratory Design Studio 2025-26, Pathway Studio 2025-26, Practice Studio 2026-27

Excluded combinations: None

Co-requisites: None

Continuing professional development: No

Professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements: None

Part 2: Description

Overview: The Design Thesis is the culminating module of the MArch program, guiding students through a complete design process that begins with rigorous research and culminates in a detailed architectural proposal. The module allows students to frame a unique research question, explore architectural precedents, and engage in site and context analysis to establish a well-defined design proposition.

Students transition from research to design application, developing a comprehensive architectural proposal that incorporates spatial, technical, and environmental solutions. This process emphasises the application of sustainable, inclusive, and responsible design principles, addressing complex architectural challenges across scales—from urban to detailed design. Through collaboration with academic mentors and industry experts, students produce a thesis that synthesises critical thinking, technical proficiency, and ethical responsibility.

At least two general subject options, structured as ‘design units’ will be offered in each academic year. These may vary from year to year and will reflect current significant issues in architectural and/or urban design, faculty research activity and specialisms within the school. Within the agenda there will be a degree of freedom for each student to pursue a thesis of his or her own choosing that develops an individual interest. The module therefore acts as a framework to support the development of each student as an architectural designer exploring a specialism.

Common to all students’ architectural designs will be the requirement to communicate and substantiate the design through technical and intellectual studies and presentations using a variety of media. This will be supported through skills sessions and formative, interim presentations of work.

The module is closely integrated with the Ecological and Regenerative Approaches module which provides technical support and involves the preparation of a technical report on their proposals environmental performance, which can also inform the design decisions they make in the Studio.

The Design Thesis module reflects RIBA’s requirements for design skills (E5) and health and safety (E1). Students develop comprehensive proposals that incorporate principles of safety, social impact, and climate resilience, producing innovative and responsible architectural solutions.

Pre-requisite: Student must have completed UBLL47-30-3 Exploratory Design Studio AND EITHER UBLL4L-30-M Practice Studio OR UBLL46-30-3 Pathway Studio before starting this module.

Features: Integrated Design Research: The first phase emphasises design research, where students define a research question or thesis, conducting critical analysis of precedents, site, and regulatory frameworks to shape their design direction.

Comprehensive Design Proposal: In the second phase, students apply their research findings to develop a detailed architectural proposal, addressing spatial, technical, and contextual requirements at various scales.

Student-Centred Inquiry: Students may focus on a specialisation that aligns with their career aspirations or explore new thematic areas within architecture, creating a thesis that reflects their unique trajectory and professional goals.

Educational aims: The Design Thesis module aims to cultivate students' ability to research, conceptualise, and execute advanced architectural solutions that address complex spatial, environmental, and social needs. By the end of the module, students will:

Formulate and critically investigate a unique design research question, establishing a clear theoretically-informed basis for an innovative design proposal.

Produce a comprehensive design solution that integrates artistic, technical, environmental, and social aspects of architecture.

Communicate design concepts effectively using a variety of media, demonstrating clarity and engagement with a diverse audience.

Employ research and experimentation to develop responsive, responsible architectural solutions aligned with ethical standards and regulatory frameworks.

Outline syllabus: The Design Thesis module is structured into two primary phases: Design Research and Design Development. This progression allows students to move from concept formulation to a fully realised architectural proposal.

1. Design Research Phase

In this initial phase, students identify and develop a research question that frames their design approach. This involves critical exploration of architectural precedents, site-specific analysis, and an examination of historical and contemporary architectural practices relevant to their thesis.

Emphasis is placed on investigating sustainability, inclusivity, and regulatory standards as key components of responsible design. Students engage in methods such as contextual mappings, spatial analysis, and stakeholder studies to establish a well-rounded design proposition.

The research culminates in an Assessment 1: Design Research Report, where students present their findings, critical insights, and preliminary concepts.

2. Transition to Comprehensive Design Development

Building on the research phase, students develop a comprehensive design proposal that responds to their research question. This stage requires the integration of spatial, structural, and environmental strategies to create a solution that meets diverse user needs and technical requirements.

Projects are developed across multiple scales, from urban design down to detailed construction, ensuring that designs reflect considerations of user experience, accessibility, and lifecycle sustainability.

The Assessment 2: Design Portfolio showcases the final design proposal, including detailed drawings, models, and supporting documentation that communicate the integration of research insights into practical design solutions.

3. Media and Communication Skills

Throughout the module, students refine their communication skills, utilising a range of media, including digital models, physical prototypes, visual presentations, and written documentation. The emphasis is on clarity and engagement, ensuring that

complex concepts are accessible to both professional and public audiences.

Alignment to ARB Competency Outcomes

In this module the following ARB Academic Competency Outcomes are met and assessed to passing standard:

CK7: The principles required to ensure that buildings are safe to construct, inhabit, use and maintain, refurbish, re-use and deconstruct.

D1: Prepare and present architectural design projects of diverse scale, complexity, and type in a variety of contexts, using a range of media, responding critically to a brief.

D2: Prepare, appraise, refine and engage with building briefs of diverse scales and types, accounting for client, user, site, environmental and contextual requirements.

D3: Demonstrate a critical and creative approach to architectural design.

D4: Produce designs that integrate the artistic, spatial, environmental, social and experiential aspects of a building with the technical requirements of its construction.

D5: Propose strategies for structure, construction technology, materials, services, ventilation, thermal environment and lighting and acoustics that are appropriate to a project’s brief and context.

D6: Produce the designs that consider the relationship between people and built environment, between buildings and their context, and the need to relate buildings and the spaces between them to human needs, inclusivity, user experience and scale.

D11: Prepare and document designs that demonstrate appropriate consideration of fire safety, life safety and wellbeing and inclusivity of users, the public and building constructors.

D12: Use appropriate digital systems for creating, modelling, processing, presenting, and sharing design, building and project information.

RE1: Use techniques of research, enquiry and experimentation to develop effective solutions to architectural problems and to broaden their knowledge base.

RE3: Critically evaluate a diverse range of architectural precedents in order to inform design thinking.

M11: Communicate effectively with both specialists and non-specialist audiences through a range of media.

PE2: Display a committed approach to equity, diversity and inclusion, including in their approach to designing environments and in their relationships with colleagues, employees, clients and communities.

PE4: Uphold the architect's obligations to the health and safety of the public and building users and building constructors.

PE7: Adopt a reflective approach to their work by identifying individual learning needs required for further development within the profession, ensuring they are up to date with current standards and best practice.

Part 3: Teaching and learning methods

Teaching and learning methods: The module uses a combination of research seminars, studio-based learning, and independent study to support the comprehensive development of a design thesis:

Research Seminars: Initial seminars provide students with methods for developing research questions, analysing precedents, and conducting site and context analysis.

Studio Sessions: Structured studio time allows students to develop their thesis and design proposals with regular feedback from tutors and visiting experts, facilitating iterative improvement.

Individual and Group Tutorials: Tutorials, including in one-to-one format, offer personalised feedback on research progress and design application, supporting each student's unique thesis and design direction.

Reflective Practice: Reflective activities encourage students to assess their professional growth, aligning their work with personal aspirations and industry standards.

Module Learning outcomes: On successful completion of this module students will achieve the following learning outcomes.

MO1 Formulate a research question and develop a research-informed thesis that addresses complex architectural challenges.

MO2 Produce a comprehensive design proposal that integrates artistic, spatial, environmental, social, and technical elements, ensuring alignment with relevant performance, safety, and regulatory standards.

MO3 Communicate complex architectural ideas, research processes, and design solutions across a range of media, engaging diverse audiences and stakeholders while upholding and professional standards.

MO4 Adopt a reflective approach to personal and professional development, continuously aligning with evolving regulatory, ethical, and best-practice standards in architecture.

Hours to be allocated: 600

Contact hours:

Independent study/self-guided study = 456 hours

Face-to-face learning = 144 hours

Reading list: The reading list for this module can be accessed at readinglists.uwe.ac.uk via the following link https://rl.talis.com/3/uwe/lists/A991242F-D5EC-A4E3-E8BC-6F56F073722B.html?lang=en-GB&login=1

Part 4: Assessment

Assessment strategy: Assessment 1: Design Research Exhibition (30%)

Students submit a comprehensive design research report, documenting the formulation of their research question, critical analysis of architectural precedents, site analysis, and initial design explorations. The report should demonstrate a deep understanding of contextual, regulatory, and ethical considerations that inform the design direction.

Objectives: This assessment evaluates students' ability to conduct rigorous research, critically engage with architectural theories, and formulate a well-defined research question to support the subsequent design phase. The assessment will encourage students to demonstrate a critical understanding of the research process, acknowledge ethical and practical issues arising in the conduct of research, and take account of these issues when designing a piece of research.

Assessment 2: Design Portfolio (70%)

Content: The Design Portfolio is a detailed presentation of the final design proposal, showcasing the development of spatial, technical, and experiential aspects of the project. It includes detailed drawings, models, written reports, and digital media that illustrate the integration of research insights and practical design solutions.

Objectives: This assessment measures students' ability to produce a comprehensive architectural design that integrates research findings into a practical, responsible, and innovative solution, demonstrating both technical proficiency and creative vision. The portfolio should demonstrate critical evaluation and apply effective methods of communication of the design proposals using a variety of media (which can include but is not limited to: drawing, three dimensional modelling, both physical and digital, still or moving imagery, reports, technical studies and verbal presentations) in a manner suitable to the intended audience. Students must pass both assessments to

pass the module.

Formative Feedback: Students receive feedback throughout the module during studio critiques, tutorials, and research presentations, allowing for iterative refinement of both the research report and design portfolio.

Resit Assessment: If required, the resit assessment will follow the same brief and submission format as the main assessment, allowing students to develop and submit revised submissions that meets the original assessment objectives.

Assessment tasks:

Exhibition (First Sit)
Description: Design Research Exhibition
Weighting: 30 %
Final assessment: No
Group work: No
Learning outcomes tested: MO1, MO3

Portfolio (First Sit)
Description: Design Portfolio
Weighting: 70 %
Final assessment: Yes
Group work: No
Learning outcomes tested: MO2, MO3, MO4

Exhibition (Resit)
Description: Design Research Exhibition
Weighting: 30 %
Final assessment: No
Group work: No
Learning outcomes tested: MO1, MO3

Portfolio (Resit)

Description: Design Portfolio

Weighting: 70 %

Final assessment: Yes

Group work: No

Learning outcomes tested: MO2, MO3, MO4

Part 5: Contributes towards

This module contributes towards the following programmes of study:

Architecture [Frenchay] MArch 2025-26