Glasgow School of Art Course Specification
Course Title: Independent Research Project – Sustainable Cities
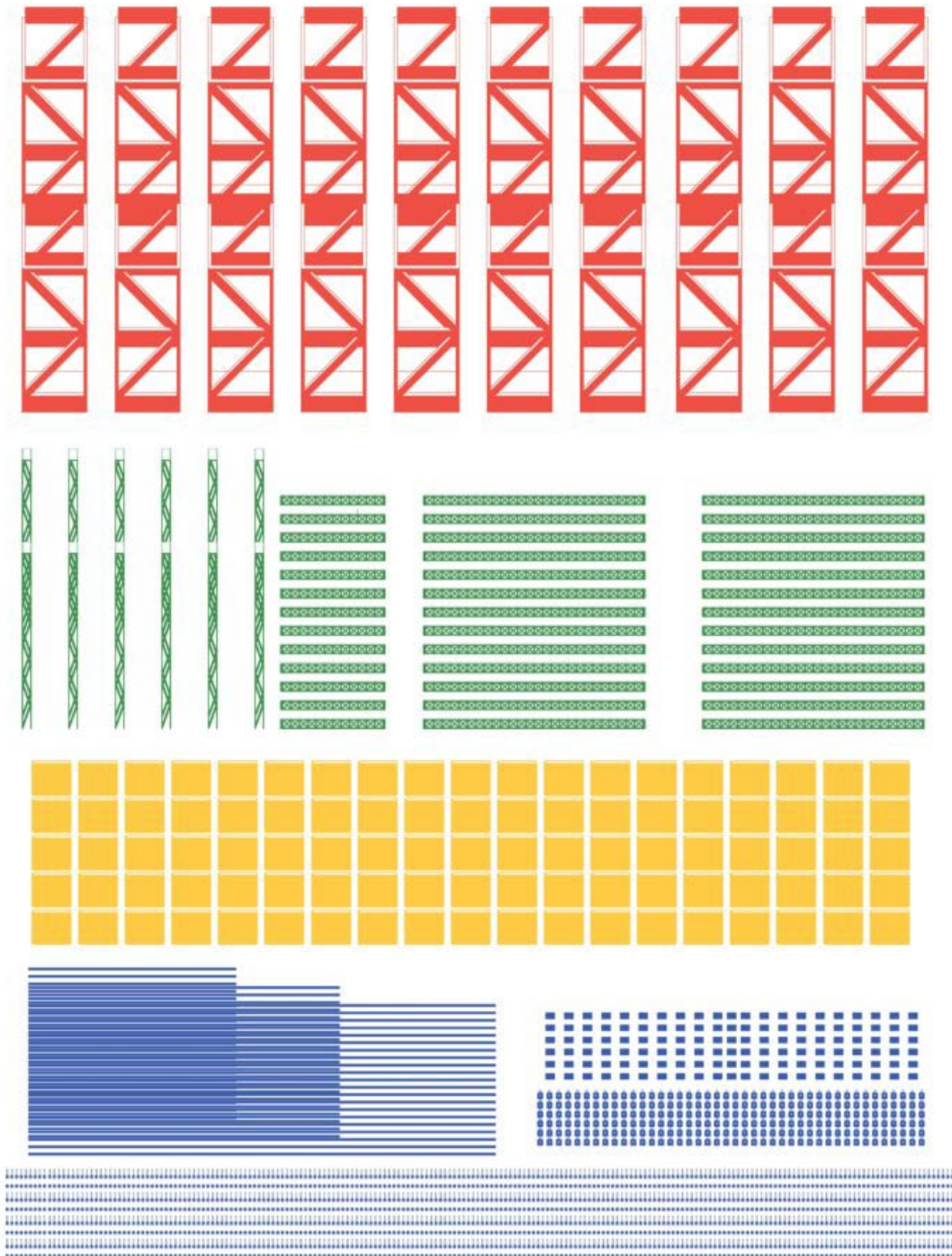

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Course Code	HECOS Code	Academic Session
	100594 (50%); 100962 (50%)	**2026-2027**

Course Title	Independent Research Project- Sustainable Cities
Course Contact	**Isabel Deakin**

Credits	60
SCQF Level	11
When Taught	Stage 3

Associated Programmes	Master of Science in Sustainable Cities
Lead School	Mackintosh School of Architecture
Other Schools	N/A
Date of Approval	Programme Approval September 2025

Course Introduction

The Independent Research Project- Sustainable Cities course supports students in the development and realisation of their Independent Research Project and is intended to build on the knowledge and skills gained in Stages 1 and 2 of the programme.

The course is designed to give students the skills to create, develop, deliver and communicate the outcomes of their Independent Research Project. The investigative studies, design strategies and outputs undertaken in Stages 1 and 2 offer a foundation for the realisation and communication of the final output, and completion of the Independent Research Project.

Students will be required to evidence their critical understanding of the key theories and practices and are challenged to synthesise, speculate and articulate their skills and practices for developing solutions.

As this is a supervised independent research project, students are expected to operate with professionalism, self-direction and manage their own time.

All students will be expected to complete a research proposal prior to embarking on their research project and will be taught through a combination of supervision tutorials and peer sessions.

Through this self-directed project students highlight their command at a Post Graduate Level within their specialism in anticipation of their future professional or academic career path.

Course Aims

The aims of the course are to:

professionalism: facilitate a student's ethical awareness and critical reflection evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

design/create: facilitate a student's innovative, critically informed urban design practice evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

research: facilitate a student's ability to demonstrate advanced research skills evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

communication: facilitate a student's command of complex urban challenges, research findings and design proposals to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

skills: facilitate a student's command of applied digital, analytical and reflective skills to communicate structured thinking to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

knowledge: facilitate a student's critical and contextual knowledge and understanding of the city, sustainable theory and practice evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to **synthesise, speculate and articulate:**

professionalism: an ethical awareness and critical reflection evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

design/create: innovative, critically informed urban design practice evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

research: advanced research skills evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

communication: complex urban challenges, research findings and design proposals to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

skills: applied digital, analytical and reflective skills to communicate structured thinking to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

knowledge: a critical and contextual knowledge and understanding of the city, sustainable theory and practice evidenced through a response to a refined research-based problem which addresses a complex urban sustainability challenge.

Indicative Content

The Independent Research Project course is designed to give students the opportunity to advance their individual architectural interests in the context of the Sustainable Cities programme. Students prepare either a written textual thesis or a comprehensive design proposal. The work is undertaken on an individual basis.

During the course students will be supported to either:

- Produce a written textual thesis which addresses and responds to the refined research-based problem.
  Or
Produce a comprehensive design project which addresses and responds to the refined -research-based problem.

Description of Learning and Teaching Methods

Pedagogy:
The course is intended to develop students' mastery of iterative and reflective research practices while deploying their critical, ethical and professional position.

Delivery:
The course is delivered through regular supervision tutorials and peer sessions.

Timetable:
The course is delivered over 12 weeks, through 7 supervision tutorials, a series of peer sessions and design reviews which offer the opportunity for critical discourse around issues raised by the Independent Research Projects, enabling staff and students to enter into a dialogue around contemporary architectural issues.

Canvas:
The virtual learning environmental tool Canvas is used for the dissemination, discussion, and access to relevant course information, and to signpost students to other relevant teaching and learning platforms used by GSA.

Indicative Contact Hours	Notional Learning Hours
14	600

Description of Formative Assessment and Feedback Methods

Formative feedback is delivered through supervision meetings. Students will meet their supervisor regularly to discuss their progress. The supervisor will give advice and feedback as the project develops. Feedback will be mainly verbal and will include written feedback on progress at the mid-point of the course.

As such formative feedback provided fosters reflective learning while supporting the summative graded assessment and feedback process, which generally happens at the end of the course.

Description of Summative Assessment arrangements

Summative assessment is undertaken at the end of the course and is designed and delivered to support student learning. Students' work is assessed against the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) for each course.

Summative assessment in this course is undertaken through a coursework assignment in the form of either a written thesis or design led submission. Coursework assignment submissions involve visual and text-based submissions utilising both digital and physical tools and formats. Written feedback is provided on all summative assessments.

All submissions will be assessed and moderated in line with the GSA Code of Assessment. Reassessment opportunities where a student has not passed the course are outlined in the GSA Code of Assessment.

Description of Summative Assessment Method	Weight %	Submission week
Written Submission Students are required to submit a written dissertation (10,000 words).	100	Semester 3, week 12
OR		
Design Led Submission Students are required to submit a Portfolio of Work which will be holistically assessed. The Portfolio will incorporate the presentation of the Independent Research Project supported by a contextualising statement (500 words) and illustrated Design Report (2000 words).	100	Semester 3, week 12

Exchange/Study Abroad	
Can this course be taken by Exchange/Study Abroad students?	No
Are all the students on the course taught wholly by distance learning?	No
Does this course represent a work placement or a year of study abroad?	No
Is this course collaborative with any other institutions?	No
If yes, then please provide the names of the other teaching institutions	

Reading and On-line Resources
Supporting the course, an indicative reading and on-line resource list is accessible via Resource Lists. This list will be reviewed and updated annually. Supervisors, tutors and peers will provide further recommendations appropriate to student's chosen research subject.