

SAUL School of Architecture at the University of Limerick

Frequently Asked Questions

...about the course

Is the course accredited by the RIAI?

Yes. The programme at SAUL has full accreditation (without condition) by the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (RIAI). Since the architecture programme at UL was established in 2005, the RIAI has closely monitored the progress of the school, its curriculum and students. As with all accredited schools of architecture in the Republic of Ireland the RIAI will continue to periodically monitor the School of Architecture at UL.

How does the course at UL compare with other Irish courses in architecture?

The course at UL is a five-year undergraduate course, with successful students achieving a Bachelor (Honours) Degree at Level 8 in the National Framework of Qualifications. Thus the UL course is the same level as all other Level 8 undergraduate Architecture degrees in Ireland.

Design Studio is at the heart of architecture education at UL. It is the place where all 'subjects' are taught, from structural theory to architectural history. This happens in studio through individual design projects carried out by each student and is supplemented by seminars and lectures. All of this work in design studio is further supported by site visits, field trips, visiting lecturers and one study trip abroad per year.

What is 'Design Studio'?

As well as the physical place where all subjects are taught, 'Design Studio' is a creative laboratory where learning is developed through experimentation and reflection. Woven into the design studio are courses in structures and construction, history and theory, environmental science, cultural studies and professional practice. Training as an architect engages the student in a process of 'learning by doing' and problem-based learning with the course curriculum structured around the Design Studio.

Do students spend much time in the architecture school?

The teaching day in Design Studio runs continuously from 9 to 6, five days a week. Students will also need to develop their project work outside of these hours.

Architecture is a highly challenging endeavour, and it requires a student to be creative as well as achieving a high academic standing. The study of architecture is rigorous and thus demands that students are firmly committed to the discipline.

Do I have to stay the whole five years?

Yes. To achieve a Bachelor (Honours) Level 8 degree in architecture the student must stay and successfully complete the full five years of study.

However, after the third year of study, taking a 'year-out' from formal study is encouraged, where the student has an opportunity to gain professional experience and to travel, i.e. to deepen their architectural studies in a self-directed year away from the university. – At this juncture at the end of third year, studying abroad in a linked recommended university is also possible, as is transferring into another comparable architecture programme to complete the degree.

Are there many exams at the end of each semester?

Design Studio work is reviewed on a periodical basis throughout the semester. Students are expected to synthesise all material produced over the course of the semester into a portfolio for formal assessment at the end of each semester. All other classes are graded through coursework (presentations, essays, tests, drawings, study assignments etc.). Thus, instead of having one exam at the end of the semester, continuous feedback on module work throughout the semester is the norm.

How many students are in one class?

Class sizes average 20-35 students with a reasonable balance between male and female students.

Does SAUL offer placements in architectural practices?

No, SAUL cannot offer formal placements in architectural practices. We encourage students to work in the profession – with architects, engineers, builders – and with many faculty members well rooted in the profession in Ireland we offer help and advice in finding suitable employment. Work experience prior to studying might be useful, yet is not required. The academic schedule allows for extended periods of work experience over the summer. A year-out after third year is another option to gain the desired professional exposure, possibly through a combination of work and travel abroad.

...about admission

What are the minimum entry requirements for the architecture course?

Applicants are required to hold at the time of enrolment the established Leaving Certificate (or an approved equivalent) with a minimum of six subjects which must include: Two H5 (Higher Level) grades and Four O6 (Ordinary Level) grades or four H7 (Higher Level) grades. Subjects must include Mathematics, Irish or another language, and English.

- **Portfolio**

All applicants to the architecture programme **MUST** submit a portfolio of creative work. For further information on the portfolio requirement, please refer to the Portfolio and Statement guidelines (available for download on the www.ul.ie/architecture website).

- **Special Mathematics Entrance Examination**

Foundation Maths is acceptable to meet the Minimum Maths requirements.

The University holds a special mathematics entrance examination in August each year for students who achieve sufficient CAO entry points and satisfy all other entrance requirements, but who do not achieve the requisite grade in Mathematics in the Leaving Certificate for Faculty of Science and Engineering undergraduate degrees. Candidates who pass this special examination are deemed to have satisfied the Mathematics entry requirement for all programmes run by the Faculty of Science & Engineering. Further information is available on the Faculty of Science and Engineering website:

http://scieng.ul.ie/students/prospective_students/special-mathematics-entrance-examination or contact Admissions for information and an application form <http://ulsites.ul.ie/admissions/>

What are the required Leaving Cert points? Are they likely to go up or down?

In 2015 the points for LM099 were 390, and in 2016 the points were 420. Architecture remains an attractive subject for study. The points in a given year are to be used as a guideline only, due to various factors these can go up or down each year.

Most importantly, all prospective applicants **MUST** first pass the portfolio review. Applicants who successfully pass the portfolio review, who meet the minimum entry requirements, and have the required number of points, are eligible applicants and will be admitted to the programme.

At present, no extra points are awarded for passing the portfolio and statement review. UL awards additional points for Higher Level Leaving Certificate Mathematics at grade H6 or above and where it is included as one of the applicant's best six subjects.

Can you transfer into the course?

Yes. There is an opportunity to apply for transfer from other architecture programmes. These architecture courses must be similar Bachelor (Honours) Degree programmes at Level 8 in the National Framework of Qualifications. All applications will be assessed on an individual basis. Please follow the transfer application procedures as stated in the separate SAUL Call for Transfer document.

What is required for mature applicants?

Applications are particularly welcome from mature candidates (at least 23 years of age on or before 1st January of the year of enrolment). Each mature application is considered on an individual basis. Academic qualifications, work and life experience, motivation and overall potential for the programme of study are evaluated.

All mature candidates must apply through the Central Applications Office (CAO) – www.cao.ie. The closing date for CAO applications is 1st February each year.

Mature applicants must also submit a portfolio for assessment. They may subsequently be invited for interview. For details please refer to the www.ul.ie/admissions website and the separate SAUL application guidelines.

Do I need to take Art in secondary school?

No, Art is not a required subject. Note, that the entry requirements to the course include a portfolio submission, the emphasis of which is on creativity. You will need to prove a degree of creative ability in your portfolio. You may include works from your Art classes into your portfolio, but it is not limited to these. Woodworking classes can provide skills useful for model making.

Do I have to take Maths or Physics in secondary school?

Apart from the minimum Maths requirement there is no additional specific requirement for Maths, and Physics is not a required subject. An intuitive understanding of Art, Maths and some science subjects is undeniably helpful. Structures classes as taught to architecture students at UL do not include extensive calculations, but require a clear understanding of the structural logic in a building. Science classes are a valuable preparation in logical reasoning and clarity of thought. UL awards additional points for a H6 or above in Higher Level Leaving Certificate Mathematics.

Are CAD or Tech Drawing an advantage to students when doing the course?

Sketching, architectural drawing and technical drafting is taught immediately in first year, and CAD will be introduced later in the course. Students will concentrate on developing their capacity to make good *architectural* drawings – this is a specific skill, and is neither ‘tech drawing’ nor CAD.

...about the portfolio

What is a portfolio?

The portfolio is your opportunity to showcase your creative sensibility, your ability to observe and record, as well as the scope of your interests, which may span from the domestic to the monumental, from small-scale to large-scale, from the natural to the artificial, from the realistic to the abstract, from the analytical to the imaginary. The portfolio is also proof of your inquisitiveness and the variety of media used to record your observations. Techniques may span from pencil drawing and charcoal to pen, from watercolour and oil painting to print-making or collage.

A portfolio usually takes the shape of a protective folder that safely holds a series of same-sized sheets with one or a number of works mounted on them. The portfolio must not be larger than A1 in size. Please do not submit rolled-up sheets as they are difficult to review. – Please refer to the SAUL Portfolio and Statement Guidelines for details about the portfolio submission. There is a recording of one of our portfolio workshops online: <http://youtu.be/7tO5lqAQyrs>

Shall I take a portfolio preparation course?

A portfolio preparation class may be beneficial, but is neither required nor recommended. While specific portfolio preparation courses may help in keeping a discipline when developing a portfolio, their very nature as a set programme may possibly curtail creative exploration and individual expression. Preferably, you should seek every opportunity to pursue your individual approach. A portfolio from a preparation class is not guaranteed to be successful when applying to SAUL.

What is the statement all about?

The statement is yet another opportunity to prove your sensitivity, your skill to observe and to record your findings in a given medium. Make it a personal account of what you are interested in, not a general statement on architecture. A good text is structured not unlike a piece of architecture.

In your statement you are asked about the particularities of the environment, built and unbuilt, in your locale. It is up to you how you respond to this question; your interpretation of this question is part of the assessment. By submitting your portfolio and statement, we are aware of your interest in studying architecture, thus there is no need to discuss those motivations in the statement. Please concentrate your 500 words on responding to the given task, as outlined above.

What may I include in the portfolio?

Feel free to include what you think is apt to demonstrate your interest and ability in addressing the built environment. Be selective about what you include – quality matters, not quantity. The portfolio is not limited to drawings, watercolours and paintings. Photographs, prints and collages may be part of it.

Please refrain from submitting three-dimensional objects. If you want to show sculptures, pottery, models, installations, furniture etc. include drawings and photographs of these objects. Digital media (CD, DVD) must not be submitted either, since the review process cannot accommodate their assessment.

May I submit my sketchbooks?

Yes. A collection of sketches is a valuable addition to a portfolio. We rely heavily on reviewing original sketchbooks to discern drawing or reflective qualities. Please refrain from submitting printed scans or a ‘selection of best sketches.’

Why are technical drawings excluded from the portfolio?

In the portfolio we look for creative ability, not drafting proficiency. While drafting skills may be beneficial, these skills can and will be learnt in the course. The same applies to computer-generated drawings. Technical drawings, especially CAD drawings when done under the supervision of a professional, are often tainted by the requirements of that specific assignment and do not lend themselves to demonstrate individual ability or the visual sensibility and craft skills required for architectural studies.

However, technical drawings that relate to a design that an applicant has developed in some way are acceptable. For example, technical drawings that conclude the Leaving Certificate Design and Communication Graphics project are acceptable as they demonstrate creative ability.

Can I carry forward a pass in the portfolio review?

A pass in the portfolio review can be carried forward (but for one year only) should you decide to reapply in the following year. However, we expect you to develop your skills further in the meantime. Once accepted into the programme it is possible to defer entry according to the CAO regulations – please see www.cao.ie

May someone else collect my portfolio after the review?

If somebody is collecting your portfolio on your behalf, we need to ask for authorisation and identification. Please send a note or e-mail to Sylvia.Carroll@ul.ie quoting your name, address and CAO number, if applicable, as well as the name of the person collecting the portfolio on your behalf. That person should be prepared to provide some form of identification.

...about career and profession

Are you a fully qualified architect after five years?

The Building Control Act 2007 introduced registration for architects in the Republic of Ireland, The RIAI maintains the professional register – “The best way to qualify as an architect eligible for RIAI Membership and admission to the Register for Architects is to

- get a degree from a recognized school of architecture, followed by
- two years of approved practical experience, and
- an examination in professional practice.

Recognised degree courses in architecture take five years of full-time study. Many students take a year out for practical experience between the third and fourth years. So the whole process, from start to full professional qualification, generally takes seven to nine years.” – Refer to the RIAI website www.riai.ie for further details.

With the building industry in Ireland slowing down will you need that many architects?

Architecture is more than an industry-driven profession. The architectural education at SAUL equips students with knowledge and abilities widely recognised. This enables students to practice in the profession of architecture or even in related fields nationally and internationally as many architects have done successfully in the past. SAUL graduates are currently employed nationally and internationally (in Limerick, Dublin, Cork, UK, Berlin, New York, London, Canada, France).

What jobs can students get after having completed the course?

A SAUL graduate will of course will be in a position to start working in an architect’s office. This is the path followed by most graduates. An architect’s office in private practice can vary in size from a sole practitioner to an office of over 100 employees. Equally an architect’s office in a local authority context can mean that a young graduate is exposed to working across many local authority departments such as planning, transport or policy. A number of recent SAUL graduates have sought out alternate paths to practice, i.e. some have chosen to work solely on self-generated projects and design-build projects. Others have chosen to work directly with communities. Others have been employed as teaching assistants at SAUL. In fact there is a growing and healthy architectural culture of SAUL graduates choosing to stay and find work in both Limerick City and in the Limerick Region. SAUL’s FabLab in Rutland Street is such a case in point.

Architecture studies are broad, encompassing technical skills, design, art, history and presentation skills and some graduates move into other areas including teaching, mentoring at university, policy making or public administration, business or urban design, history, journalism, photography or other arts, furniture or model making, research and writing, or pursue further studies.