

**AA**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

**2024–29**

# background

The Architectural Association (AA) was established as a student-centred collective in 1847. It aimed to challenge the established ways in which architecture was taught, argued and theorised at the time, and urged its members to reconsider the commonplace social and cultural responsibilities of the profession at large – aspirations that remain at the heart of the school today. It was the first independent school in the UK dedicated to the education and practice of architecture.

Originally occupying a local inn, the AA grew from an occasional night school to a self-governed educational institution with a burgeoning global reputation. By the beginning of the twentieth century, it had become the first full-time, professional day school for architectural study in the country, and provided one of the first specialised diplomas of its kind in Europe. In 1917 the school moved to Bedford Square where it remains to this day, surrounded by some of the most prominent research institutions in the world.

The AA is still self-funded and independent but it has evolved over the last century, and its alumni have made some of the most significant contributions not only to the architectural profession, but to many other cultural and scientific fields as well. The AA continues to foster creative potential, critical freedom and radical cultural enterprise with the same rigour and commitment as when it was founded.

The flexible, self-directed curricula on offer at the school, combined with the independence and truly global nature of the institution, afford the AA a rare degree of awareness in acknowledging and confronting the social, technological and cultural challenges of today. Comprised of approximately 1,000 full-time students, and tutors and administrative staff from all over the world, the association and its membership share ten Georgian houses in the centre of London, as well as a 350-acre woodland site at Hooke Park, in Dorset.

The broad cultural agenda of the AA is structured around its public programme and publications. Our long-standing and world-renowned series of talks and symposia, and a curated programme of exhibitions, provide a free and accessible series of events dedicated to advancing global architectural discourse. Our AA publications enable further public dissemination of the academic research and discussion being conducted throughout the school, and make it available to a wider and more diverse public.

To remain at the forefront of architectural education worldwide, the AA relies on support from individuals, partners and organisations who share its pioneering vision and value its independence. Contributions, whether one-off donations, sponsorships, regular gifts or volunteered time, enable the realisation of the school's ambition to provide the highest quality of architectural education to the most talented students, regardless of their financial means.

As an independent and pioneering higher education charity and membership association, the AA receives no government funding. Philanthropic support from individuals and organisations is therefore essential to the institution's present and future. The AA is committed to ethical fundraising, transparency and professionalism in seeking financial support, and contributions are accepted, managed and disbursed by the Architectural Association Foundation (AAF), an independent charitable trust established in 1989.

**The AA has been at the forefront of testing new approaches to architectural education since its inception in 1847.**

**Our global community of alumni continue to make significant contributions to architecture, science and culture. The AA remains committed to nurturing this global community of students, staff, alumni and members, to extending and continually refreshing the discourse through collaborative works, and to expanding access to the school to an increasingly diverse cohort from a broad range of economic backgrounds via robust financial support and outreach initiatives.**

# foreground

The ongoing independence of the AA is a source of both challenge and opportunity. The unique structure of the association and the significance of its legacy make it a powerful voice in architectural education at a moment when we need to be speaking loudly in the face of growing inequality and the ever-increasing urgency of climate crisis.

The legacy of the school is significant, but the challenges ahead are new and ever-shifting. While the AA is independent from the fluctuations of public funding, we are alert to the volatility of the international political landscape and economic climate.

Our students face a similar level of uncertainty as the characteristics and responsibilities of the architectural profession are called into question in the face of a shrinking building industry, limited material

supply, and an urgent need for dignified housing and civic infrastructure across the globe. As a school we must be at the forefront of responding to these crucial issues, questioning what and how we should build, and using the radical thinking that has always characterised the AA to find new possibilities.

The AA is best placed to do so on an international scale, and to be a hub for sharing knowledge with a wider public. Moreover, the school's history of experimentation and pioneering approaches can enable it to propose real solutions that offer both delight and optimism.

# why architecture?

**Architecture** has the potential and the responsibility to shape the world for the better.

**A degree in architecture** provides a strong comprehensive contemporary interdisciplinary education with the adaptable application best suited to the current academic and professional environment.

**The urgent architectural issues of our time** transcend national boundaries and require global understanding and collaboration.

We believe that we need to sustain an engaged **international and multi-generational community** to support, promote and realise the architectural ideas that have the potential to enact real change.

## what makes us different

The AA is a unique institution that is dedicated to the independent promotion of ideas. We provide a dynamic platform for new voices in the field of architecture and an open environment for discussion. We are an association rather than a university, and our mission and direction is governed by the consent and participation of its membership and the extensive international network who create a deep and multi-generational community. This structure has enabled the AA to remain vibrant and responsive, and to promote young talent across the globe.

**We are small and intend to stay small.**

We operate a horizontal structure that gives everyone a voice and is unencumbered by the mechanisms that partition areas of study or privilege research over teaching in larger institutions. The majority of our funding is from, and for, our students, and we remain committed to the belief that it is our students who shape the debate and drive us all forward.

Our **labyrinth of small spaces** requires us to be in conversation with one another. These rooms enable everyone to be heard. We come together in the bar and the terrace that sit at the turn of the stair of No.36 Bedford Square. There is no bell to ring, lock to turn or log to sign. **The door is open.**

# our values

We are committed to maintaining the **independence** of the association and its freedom from public policy decision-making.

We support a **plurality of voices** from across the field and the globe that represent a **diversity** of positions and outlook.

We fight for the **integrity and accountability** of the profession as a field of practice open to broader engagement with an urgent need to address social equity and climate responsibility.

We are committed to the **equality and inclusion** of our members, students and staff, and to the perpetuation of a dignified working and learning environment, reinforced by a clear and robust ethical direction.

We are dedicated to the **free communication of ideas** within the school and to the inclusion of the wider public and diverse society in this conversation.

We are uncompromising in the pursuit of **excellence** and **pioneering** approaches in the field of architectural education.

# vision

The AA is commencing a new stage of our strategic plan, which will see the school consolidate its international reputation as a leader in the field of architectural education, as well as enhance its resource provision and make it available to a student population who represent a broader spectrum of society. To support this ambition, there will be a need for targeted investment in our academic mission, physical and digital infrastructure, accessibility, and new initiatives to support our longer-term global position.

**We are committed to reinforcing and leading an engaged global and multi-generational community to support, promote and realise the ideas that have the potential to enact real change.**

Our five-year plan reinforces our role in international architectural education and our responsibility to lead conversations in the field.

It describes a path towards broader access to the opportunities the AA offers and the continued development of its provision.

It maintains our original charitable purposes, our commitment to architectural education and to the maintenance of an association that promotes access to a wider understanding of current debates and innovations in the profession.

# mission

**To build global understanding and collaboration through architectural education, and to shape the debates in the field that transcend national boundaries.**

# our strategic priorities

## 1. Securing the AA’s future

To create a robust and sustainable framework to maintain the school’s academic and financial resources.

The AA is a world-leading academic institution. Over the next five years we aim to reinforce the stability of the school and our reputation; mitigate against global political and economic uncertainty; expand our provision to generate new critically relevant teaching techniques, approaches and technologies; and extend our global impact.

- We will secure indefinite and full degree awarding powers to provide academic longevity and enable greater access to research funding.
- We will reflect on and accommodate changes to the UK professional registration process (ARB) whilst remaining aligned to international standards in architectural education.
- We will maintain robust, clear and simple management structures and systems that can be proactive and resilient in a shifting regulatory environment.
- We will diversify the student body to provide a balance of nationalities and backgrounds.
- We will expand opportunities for staff career development and the promotion of new leading voices, ideas, projects and research at the AA.
- We will launch new academic and research programmes that explore creative reuse, land management and infrastructure, cultural hybridity, and virtual futures.
- We will diversify the use of Hooke Park to accommodate innovations in regenerative landscape management, material use and the maintenance of experimental architectures.
- We will use the school-wide Low Carbon Survey to understand and improve our environmental impact.
- We will develop the AA’s fundraising strategy to diversify funding streams and to expand endowment, sponsorship and support for teaching and academic resources.
- We will garner support for the expansion, renewal and maintenance of the school’s infrastructure, physical access and academic resources.

## 2. Enabling Access

Extend the reach and impact of the AA to a more diverse cohort of students and staff.

The AA’s independence is reliant on fee-paying students. Over the next five years we will increase both the number and range of opportunities for students from all backgrounds to access the school, and work with our supporters to ensure that the most promising future architects can access a world-leading education, irrespective of their financial situation.

- We will increase the numbers of students in receipt of financial support across the school.
- We will launch a new funding framework and introduce an integrated development support team to the membership and alumni office.
- We will activate our alumni network to expand funding and develop an integrated programme of mentors, sponsors and outreach champions.
- We will expand our UK outreach programme as a full partner of the Accelerate Initiative.
- The Director will embark on local and international promotional visits to secure funding for financial support for students and diversify applications to the school.
- We will continue to expand the AA Visiting School and Global Forums to reinforce our international network and institutional collaborations worldwide.
- We will engage specialists and student activists to help review space provision and develop a revised master plan to enable viable and equitable access to the school.

## 3. Enhancing Communication and Building Community

Activate the student body, membership and alumni network to reaffirm the AA’s global community and support our ability to lead change in architectural education and the profession.

The AA has trained leaders in architecture for decades and has built a vast global network of graduates and members over the past 175 years. Over the next five years we will reengage the alumni community and membership to revitalise the network of ideas and mutual support that is at the heart of the AA, address the relationship between teaching and professional practice, and shape changes to educational and workplace cultures to secure the highest standards of dignity and respect.

- We will continue to develop and promote a standard for best practice in architectural education based on dignity, accountability and integrity.
- We will vigorously question the impact of teaching practices on patterns of professional behaviour to generate more humane future working environments.
- We will create opportunities for global cross-programme and interdisciplinary discussion around the future of the workplace, the architectural profession and pathways into it.
- We will introduce a programme of AA residencies to initiate new forms of interdisciplinary and inter-institutional learning and discussion.
- We will develop an online resource for students, members and alumni to access one another, share information, raise concerns and provide mutual support.
- We will enhance our publication, online and media representation to promote this network and its voice and to engage a wider public with the AA’s achievements and objectives.
- The Director will reinforce the free and non-hierarchical communication of ideas and issues at the heart of AA through an open-door policy that extends to her own office.
- We will reduce student numbers in the undergraduate programme over five years to preserve the distinct character of the school and the coherence of its community.