

Programme Specification 2025-26

MASTER OF STUDIES IN SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Awarding body	University of Cambridge
Teaching institution	Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership
Accreditation details	None
Name of final award	Master of Studies
Programme title	Sustainability Leadership for the Built Environment
HECoS code(s)	100150 (construction and the built environment) 100583 (architectural design)
Relevant QAA benchmark statement(s)	None
Qualifications framework level	7 (Masters)
Date specification produced	December 2024

The University of Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL), an institute within the School of Technology, has run executive development programmes in sustainability for over 30 years, with open programmes in the UK, Europe, North America, South America, South Africa and Australia, and customised programmes for many leading organisations. CISL has a global alumni base of over 40,000 senior leaders from business, government and civil society.

The MSt in Sustainability Leadership for the Built Environment (SLBE) is offered by Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership (CISL) in association with the Departments of Architecture and Engineering.

Educational aims

The MSt in SLBE is part of CISL's mission to empower individuals and organisations to take leadership to tackle critical global challenges.

As an applied, practitioner-oriented Master's, the programme is designed to support personal and professional development. This is reflected in the content in the learning journey, which is focused on collaboration, reflective practice and applied learning, and which includes peer-learning groups, extensive feedback and assignments that are focused on the built environment industry.

More specifically, through a combination of inter-disciplinary insights, academic analysis, practical application, peer-learning, and personal reflection the course aims to:

- Build awareness regarding current challenges and opportunities facing the built environment, such as sustainability, resilience, climate change and rapid urbanisation.
- Equip professionals with the strategic decision-making, inventive problem solving, leadership and collaboration skills needed to respond to the challenges and opportunities.
- Develop skills in leadership, effective collaboration and communication for action, particularly between clients, consultants, contractors, specialists and occupiers.

Learning outcomes

Master of Studies in SLBE	
<i>1. The changing global context, the case for a radical shift from current systems and professional paradigms, and the role of built environment professionals</i>	
LO1 A	Understand, analyse, and evaluate structural dimensions of global economic, environmental and social pressures and trends from a systems perspective
LO1 B	Articulate, analyse, evaluate, and establish the need for radical changes in current systems and professional paradigms to address sustainability and resilience related challenges and opportunities
LO1 C	Understand, analyse, assess, and generate the relationship of built environment professional practice to this systemic change
<i>2. Sustainability and resilience and the potential pathways for achieving them, and managing synergies and trade-offs</i>	
LO2 A	Understand, analyse, and assess essential theoretical concepts in sustainability and sustainable development literature and conceptual frameworks
LO2 B	Identify, analyse, and evaluate the role of high-level pathways and change theories in achieving desired outcomes through systems change
LO2C	Identify, analyse, evaluate, and generate responses to address synergies, tensions and trade-offs in delivering and maintaining the sustainability and resilience of built environments
<i>3. The leverage points that can shape sustainable and resilient outcomes in built environments, and levers such as design, innovation, technology and socio-cultural actions that control and influence leverage points</i>	
LO3 A	Understand, analyse, and assess theoretical concepts and practical examples of the use of levers and leverage points to effect change in built environment practice
LO3 B	Identify, analyse, evaluate, and apply a broad and deep range of research and best practice using levers and leverage points in organisations and professional practice to manage systems in order to achieve positive impact
<i>4. Insight, knowledge and research for the design, delivery, management, and use of sustainable and resilient built environments</i>	
LO4 A	Identify, analyse, critically evaluate and apply a broader and deeper range of existing academic and practitioner knowledge and insights to address sustainability challenges and opportunities
LO4 B	Generate advanced primary and secondary research in individual and group contexts to formulate critical responses to sustainability, resilience, and interdisciplinary practice challenges and opportunities.
<i>5. Personal, team, organisational and professional leadership and effective action as an agent of change in diverse built environment contexts</i>	
LO5 A	Identify, develop, assess, and apply advanced concepts that enhance the skills, knowledge and competencies that support effective leadership and teamworking
LO5 B	Engage with, develop, critically evaluate, and apply concepts of leadership through reflective practice as a competency to improve personal and professional practice
LO5 C	Identify, develop, and generate impact through individual contribution to effective action as an agent of change
LO5D	Identify, develop, and generate impact through interdisciplinary and collective collaborations to effect positive outcomes
<i>6. Communication and engagement, individually and collaboratively, to advance the sustainability agenda</i>	
LO6 A	Create clear, concise and logically ordered written and verbal communications appropriate to an advanced academic level, and professional contexts

LO6 B	Contribute to and generate effective and collaborative engagement with peers and wider networks as part of learning and practice communities
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Programme Structure

In recognition of the practical challenges of students undertaking study whilst holding down a full-time job, the programme does not require prolonged periods away from the workplace.

The SLBE programme is a two-year part-time Master's Degree course with the students attending six intensive workshops and completing online modules. The six workshops and online modules are compulsory, and there are no modular choices. The part-time format permits students to continue with their professional career while studying. They prepare their written work between workshops. The workshops are themed and the content and learning is delivered via the subject of lectures, workshops, and a studio design project.

Across the six weeks and online modules, students are introduced to a wide range of issues relating to the design and production of the built environment, including the construction industry, professional responsibilities, effective teamwork, as well as the social, economic and the environmental context within which they work. The programme explores how successful, sustainable built environment projects rely on the coordinated effort and visioning of multiple disciplines and professions, and it encourages the integration of skills between specialists from different background disciplines to improve project design. The core modules are:

1. Leadership, professionalism and interdisciplinary practice
2. Sustainability and resilience
3. Innovation and technology
4. Design thinking
5. Research skills

The course examines these modules across a diversity of contexts:

1. Living environments
2. Working environments
3. Moving environments
4. Heritage environments
5. Future urban environments

Each workshop includes a multidisciplinary design exercise or a group task. Students work on their individual written assignments between the workshops.

Teaching Methods

Teaching methods on the programme span different session formats and techniques, to accommodate different learning styles. For example:

- plenary and small group sessions taught by academics and practitioners, who are

thought leaders and/or case study contributors.

- group work, involving dialogue, debate and presentations throughout the taught modules, as well as group research assignment.
- experiential techniques including role plays, simulations, debates and field trips.
- individual work, involving structured reading and reflection, research, and written presentation of findings on selected topics.
- support and facilitation by a CISL-led team of supervisors.
- an E-learning programme, including online modules and webinars.

CISL's applied, practitioner-oriented postgraduate programmes are designed to support personal and professional development. The following are key features that underpin CISL's distinctive approach to learning:

Flexible: Programmes are designed for professionals working full-time; hence the intensive workshops are blended with remote working on assignments and other course-related activities.

Thought leadership: The speakers, lecturers and facilitators are leading experts and practitioners from academia, business, government and civil society.

Practical relevance: Business case studies and hearing from leading industry figures are an integral part of the taught content, and assignments are focused on real contexts; thereby developing skills needed to translate cutting-edge insights into practice.

Topical: The content includes developing a robust 'business case' for sustainability, a focus on sustainability leadership aims and responses, and covering both established and emergent experiences.

Interactive: The learning approach is highly interactive, collaborative, interdisciplinary, and designed to encourage reflection and debate.

Diversity of perspectives: Students come from a wide range of functions, disciplines, and geographies; hence provide a wide spectrum of insights and opportunities to benchmark against how other organisations are responding to sustainability.

Peer-learning: Shared learning and networking with between peers and the extensive range of contributors together provide a rich co-learning environment.

Support and mentorship: A dedicated CISL team and expert supervisors support the learning journey, including by providing feedback on assignments that are focused on real-world challenges and opportunities.

Personal application: Students are encouraged to identify personal opportunities for leadership and engage in reflective practice throughout the programme, supported by peers and supervisors.

Assessment methods

The degree is awarded on the basis of the case study, two essays and thesis that every student writes and which form the main assessed part of the students' work. The collaborative studio design work is also graded but this assessment forms a relatively minor element in the overall assessment of the student's output.

The **reflective case study** (4,000 words) is the opportunity for the student to reflect on and to critically analyse a recent project on which he or she has worked in practice. Students are expected to account for the successes and difficulties encountered, provide commentary on

the effectiveness of the team and offer conclusions of relevance to other practitioners.

The **literature review essay** (3,000 words) develops research skills in searching, analysing and writing a critique of the academic literature. There are no prescribed titles; however, the focus must be sustainability-related (including resilience or efficiency). Students are encouraged to venture beyond the boundaries of their home disciplines.

The **group research project** (5,000 – 7,000 words) is produced collaboratively by members of group of 5-7 students. It represents the outcomes of an original piece of research undertaken collectively. It is up to the group – guided by a supervisor – to choose a topic for the research.

The **research dissertation** (15,000 words) must be of relevance to the built environment; however, students are permitted a high degree of freedom in selecting the focus. Students are expected to undertake original research and to make academic contribution to the field.

During the first year, students complete their and case study, essay and group project, and in the second, the dissertation.

Full and active participation in the studio projects is compulsory, although the assessment of their contributions is only a relatively minor element of the overall assessment. The projects are intended to be an opportunity for students to experiment with new ideas in a supportive and collaborative, rather than a competitive and adversarial, environment.

The course also makes use of workshops which along with the programme of lectures and seminars do not form part of the examination scheme; however, their value is monitored through the self-reporting of the students. This feedback is sought through on-line feedback on the Virtual Learning Environment which the students are expected to complete for each workshop.

Entry and/or progression requirements

Candidates are assessed and accepted on the basis that they have:

1. At least a 2.i honours degree from a UK University or an equivalent standard from an overseas institution. *
2. A minimum of three years' work experience in the built environment after graduation.
3. Demonstrable enthusiasm and/or aptitude for sustainability leadership in the built environment.
4. Good ability in written and spoken English language.
5. Endorsement from employer or, if independent, a demonstrated understanding of the time commitment needed to undertake part-time study at this level
6. Access to appropriate computer technology and internet software.
7. The ability to pay the course fees or to identify a sponsoring institution.

* Exceptional applicants who do not meet the standard admission criteria of a 2.i honours degree will be assessed on an individual basis and may be required to provide further materials in support of their application.

Student Support

Students are provided with significant support, including;

- course handbooks and assignment guidelines
- an online Virtual Learning Environment
- a dedicated CISL team to handle enquiries and deal with any issues that may arise.
- project groups for the duration of the first year of the programme, which provide a supervisor and peer support network.
- sessions and resources on research skills, and inductions to the University Library, to help students prepare for and execute their assessed work.
- a supervisor who has primary responsibility for supporting their individual and group assignments
- a Course Director or Director of Studies for the duration of the programme and an academic supervisor to support the dissertation.
- MSt students are members of a college and have access to a Tutor and other support from their college.

Management of teaching quality and standards

The University ensures high quality of teaching and learning in the following ways:

- Scrutiny of the External Examiners Reports for all teaching programmes.
- Encouraging student engagement at both the local level, through involvement in Faculty and Departmental Committees, and at a central level by participation in nationally benchmarked surveys
- Participation in the biennial Education Monitoring and Review Process to explore provision, share good practice and suggest constructive courses of action.
- Mentoring, appraisal, and peer review of staff, and encouraging staff participation in personal development programmes.

Graduate employability and career destinations

On completion of the first workshop, students are invited to join the CISL Network which brings together over 40,000 senior decision- makers, thought-leaders, policy-influencers and executives from across the world who share an interest in and a commitment to creating a sustainable future.

As the MSt is a part-time degree, the students will mostly be in employment and will use the programme to improve their career prospects. The programme takes an applied approach to knowledge, with both the teaching and assignments oriented towards relevance to their work situation.

It is also clear from our research into the sustainability market that this is a growing field of work, both as a result of the high-profile global policy developments (such as those around climate change) and significant financial stimulus investments in the “green jobs” sector. The Careers Service maintains links with employers and takes their needs and opinions into account in the services which it provides for students. The Careers Service also allocates a Careers Adviser to each College, faculty and department to act as a point of contact.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this programme specification. At the time of publication, the programme specification has been approved by the relevant Faculty Board (or equivalent). Programme specifications are reviewed annually, however, during the course of the
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academical year, any approved changes to the programme will be communicated to enrolled students through email notification or publication in the *Reporter*. The relevant faculty or department will endeavour to update the programme specification accordingly, and prior to the start of the next academical year.

Further information about specifications and an archive of programme specifications for all awards of the University is available online at: <https://www.camdata.admin.cam.ac.uk/>