This designation consultation is open for comment until 29 October 2026

Give us your comments

Historic Environment Scotland consult with those who are directly affected by designation proposals – including owners, occupiers and tenants – and with the planning authority.

We also welcome comments from interested persons or groups.

When we consult about a designation case we will have carried out research and set this out in a **report of handling**. This report is an assessment produced for consultation and it sets out our view, including a proposed decision. The assessment is not intended to be a definitive account or description of the site or place. We consider the comments received before we take a final decision.

We consider comments and representations which are material to our decision-making, such as:

- Your understanding of the cultural significance of the site or place.
- Whether sites or places meet the criteria for designation.
- The purpose and implications of designating the site or place. We consider whether these are relevant to the case.
- Development proposals related to the site or place. Where there are development proposals, we consider whether to proceed with designation in line with our designation policy.
- The accuracy of our information.

You can find more guidance on providing comments and how we handle your information on our website.

Information on how we treat your personal data is available on our Privacy Notice.

How to make a comment

Please send your comments to designationconsultations@hes.scot and provide us with the case reference. You can also make comments through our portal by clicking on the link 'email your comments about this case'.

If you are the owner, occupier or tenant or the planning authority please email us at: designations@hes.scot.

If you are unable to email your comments please phone us on 0131 668 8914.

Report of Handling
Case information

Case ID	300081897
Name of Site	Gray's School of Art (Robert Gordon University), Garthdee Road, Kaimhill, Garthdee, Aberdeen
Postcode (if any)	AB10 7QD

Local Authority	Aberdeen City Council
National Grid Reference	NJ 91130 03077
Designation Type	Listed Building
Designation No. and category of listing (if any)	N/A
Case Type	Designation

Received/Start Date	12/08/2025
Decision Date	Pending

1. Proposed decision

Previous Statutory Listing Address	N/A	Previous category of listing	N/A
New Statutory Listing Address	Gray's School of Art (Robert Gordon University), Garthdee Road, Garthdee, Aberdeen excluding modern block to south of courtyard	New category of listing	B

Our assessment using the selection guidance shows that the building meets the criteria of special architectural or historic interest. The proposed decision is to list the building at category B.

2. Designation and Development Proposals

2.1 Designation Background

The building was previously proposed for listing on 26/07/2013. Following research and a site visit the building was assessed and found to meet the criteria of special architectural or historic interest on 24/02/2014. At the time, the site was part of the approved Robert Gordon University's Garthdee Masterplan: Development Framework (2009), adopted as supplementary guidance to Aberdeen City Council's local development plan. Stage 7 of the Framework proposed the demolition of the school and the development of a student residential village on the site. We decided not to take the case forward due to the current development proposals for the site which were found to be at an advanced stage. The Framework and related proposals have since lapsed and were not undertaken.

The building is located within Pitfodels Conservation Area (CA457).

2.2 Development Proposals

There are no known development proposals.

3. Assessment

3.1 Assessment information

We received a request to designate Gray's School of Art on 12/08/2025. (Designations requests are published on our portal and will be available to view during the lifetime of the case and until 3 months after the case is closed.)

The proposer provided the following information and views in their request form:

- Information about the architect/designer
- Information about alterations to the building
- Their views on special architectural and historic interest
- Information about previous and/or current development proposals

We informed the planning department at Aberdeen City Council on 04/09/2025 that we had been asked to list the building.

Our policy states that 'our assessments may involve a site visit, and will aim to make use of the best available evidence.' (See Designation Policy and Selection Guidance, p.7.) We decide on a case by case basis whether a site visit is required to inform our assessments.

In this case we considered that a site visit was required to inform our assessment of the building's special architectural or historic interest. We visited Gray's School of Art on 02/10/2025. We saw the exterior and interior of the school including the exterior and interior of the south classroom block, the courtyard and the area around the building.

3.2 Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

We have found that the building meets the criteria for listing.

We carried out an assessment using the selection guidance to decide whether the site or place is of special architectural or historic interest. See **Annex A**.

The listing criteria and selection guidance for listed buildings are published in Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019), Annex 2, pp. 11-13, https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy.

4. Consultation

4.1 Consultation information

Consultation period: 08/10/2026 to 29/10/2026.

We have consulted directly with the owner(s)/occupier(s) and the planning authority.

The consultation report of handling is published on our portal for comment from interested parties.

4.2 Designation consultations

Comments we consider

We will consider comments and representations which are material to our decision-making, such as:

- Your understanding of the cultural significance of the site or place and whether it meets the criteria for designation.
- The purpose and implications of designating the site or place. We consider whether these are relevant to the case.
- Development proposals related to the site or place. Where there are development proposals, we consider whether to proceed with designation in line with our designation policy.
- The accuracy of our information.

Comments we don't consider

We do not consider comments and representations on non-relevant/non-material issues, such as:

- Economic considerations

- Abusive or offensive remarks
- Whether you personally like, or do not like, a proposal

Our video about consultations explains how you can comment on our designations decisions, and what we can and can't take into account when considering your views. https://youtu.be/ZlqU51tRA6g.

Designations Service
Heritage Directorate
Historic Environment Scotland

Contact	designations@hes.scot, 0131 668 8914

ANNEX A
Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

1. Statutory address/Building or site name

Gray's School of Art (Robert Gordon University), Garthdee Road, Garthdee, Aberdeen excluding modern block to south of courtyard

2. Description and historical development

2.1 Description

Gray's School of Art is a Modernist higher education (art school) building, in the 'Miesian' style designed by the architect Denis Michael Alastair Shewan of Scott Sutherland and Partners between 1962 and 1968.

The building has a U-plan comprising a long three-storey north wing and two single storey flanking wings, arranged around a courtyard (former sculpture court). The courtyard has an upper level with decorative pool and lawn and a lower terrace to the south, now occupied by a detached classroom block (built 2020). The lower terrace is accessed through specular (or mirrored) staircases located at the opposite sides of the terrace. The school is set on a steeply sloping site within a wider woodland setting, overlooking the River Dee. It is located on the outskirts of Aberdeen and to the west boundary of the Robert Gordon University Garthdee campus.

The building has an exposed steel structure, concrete floor slabs, glass curtain walls and some sections panelled in steel or brick. The two flanking wings originally had cantilevered end-bays. These were infilled in the late 20th century with the infill set back from the building line and constructed in a similar fabric and style.

The roofs are flat with some sawtooth rooflights. There are solar panels on the eastern section of the north wing.

The main entrance is to the north elevation of the north wing and there are two flanking entrances at the side wings. The building is also accessed from the inner courtyard through three further entrances located at the centre of the main block and at each wing. Ramps have been installed at most of the entrances. An original external staircase is located on the east elevation of the building connecting the higher front yard to the sloping garden at south.

The interior comprises studios and workshops accessed from continuous corridors which include original timber storage lockers. There is a steel and concrete cantilevered staircase at the centre of the north wing facing the main entrance which leads to the upper floors. There are two original symmetrical staircases in the

northwest and northeast corners of the building. There are double height studios at the ground floor in the north wing, some of which have been subdivided by a mezzanine. There are some painted brick and concrete walls, and clerestory windows separating the corridors and the workshops in the east wing. The internal joinery and doors were provided by the Alexander Hall joinery shop in Granitehill. The original Crittall windows and ironmongery and the steel girder trussed ceiling survive. Temporary plasterboard separators are used to subdivide the open plan classrooms and studios.

A two-storey glazed and steel framed classroom block known as “Design Haus” (excluded from listing) was added around 2020 to the south side of the inner court enclosing the courtyard. The detached structure was built on the lower terrace of the courtyard.

2.2 Historical development

Gray's School of Science and Art was founded in 1885 by John Gray (1811–1891), a philanthropist and head of the firm of William McKinnon, Engineers and Iron Founders in Aberdeen. The school was initially accommodated in a building by Alexander Marshall Mackenzie as part of his Aberdeen Art Gallery design at Schoolhill in Aberdeen’s city centre (listed building reference LB19978). By the 1960s the school had outgrown this building and in 1967 relocated to the purpose-built building Robert Gordon’s University’s Garthdee site marking the beginning of the development of the campus.

Garthdee Estate was gifted to Robert Gordon’s College by Tom Scott Sutherland (1899–1963), an Aberdeen School of Architecture graduate. At the centre of the estate there is a 1872 mansion house by William Smith II (listed building reference LB47908) which opened in 1957 as the Scott Sutherland School of Architecture.

The origins of Robert Gordon University can be traced back to 1729 when Robert Gordon, an Aberdeen merchant trader, founded Robert Gordon's Hospital, which in 1881 became Robert Gordon's College. The college was awarded university status in 1992.

Gray’s School of Art was designed by Denis Michael Alastair Shewan of Scott Sutherland and Partners and built by Alexander Hall and Son (Builders) from 1962 and formally opened in 1968.

Early drawings and models of 1962-1963 indicate that the north (main entrance) wing was originally conceived as a two-storey block, but a smaller third storey was added to the later designs (1964 onwards) when more accommodation was required. The drawings indicate that the third floor could be increased to the full width of the block if further accommodation was required.

The open basement created by the overhanging flanking wings was infilled in the late 20th century and mezzanine levels have been installed in some of the double height studio spaces.

Temporary accommodation in the form of a two-storey cabin was constructed on the original lower terrace of the inner courtyard in 2004 and was replaced by a permanent detached, two-storey steel framed classroom block around 2020.

3. Assessment of special architectural or historic interest

To be listed a building must be of 'special architectural or historic interest' as set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997. To decide if a building is of special interest for listing we assess its cultural significance using selection guidance which has two main headings – architectural interest and historic interest (see Designation Policy and Selection Guidance, 2019, Annex 2, pp. 11-13).

The selection guidance provides a framework within which judgement is exercised in reaching individual decisions. The special architectural or historic interest of a building can be demonstrated in one or more of the following ways.

3.1 Architectural interest

The architectural interest of a building may include its design, designer, interior, plan form, materials, regional traditions, and setting and the extent to which these characteristics survive. These factors are grouped under two headings:

3.1.1 Design

Gray's School of Art is a major example of Modernist architectural design which is characterised by a symmetrical plan form and long low wings emphasising its horizontality. The cubic form, created by an exposed steelwork structure and glass curtain walls is reminiscent of the work of the internationally renowned architect, Mies van der Rohe. Gray's School of Art is a rare example of this style in Scotland and the United Kingdom more widely.

The building's architect, Denis Michael Alastair Shewan (1926-2006), studied at Aberdeen School of Architecture before moving to Canada around 1957. His time in Canada is likely to have exposed him to the influences of contemporary Canadian public and commercial architecture, which was strongly Miesian in style such as the Buchanan Arts Building University of British Columbia (1956-58) and the Vancouver public library (1953-7). Mies van der Rohe's reputation internationally was long established by the 1950s with well-known highly influential commissions in Chicago and New York. He designed significant buildings for universities, including the iconic architecture school for the Illinois Institute of Technology (Crown Hall), to which the Gray's School of Art is indebted. The architectural aesthetic of exposed structural

steel and glass curtain walls is typical of the Miesian architectural vocabulary and is so recognisable that it gained its own adjective, 'Miesian', and exemplifies the architect's famous adage 'less is more'. Typifying this style are Mies' major US commissions of the 1950s including, 860-880 North Lakeshore Drive, Chicago (1951); the Farnsworth House, Illinois (1951); S R Crown Hall (1956), Chicago and the Seagram Building, New York City (1958).

Shewan's design is lightweight and minimalistic, emphasising voids and light, in contrast to the contemporary move in the United Kingdom towards new Brutalism in the form of bulky, sculptural concrete megastructural compositions. Rather, the Gray's School of Art's design reflects the sleek and sophisticated aesthetic of post-war North American modernism.

The Modernist ideal, that the form of a building should follow its function, espoused by early modernists such as Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe and contemporary architects working in Europe during the pre-Second World War period, is reflected in the art school's design. The inclusion of natural light was a key concern, and this device is demonstrated by the expanse of glass and the layout of the building. The west and north wings have saw-toothed rooflights to provide north-facing natural light to studios and where it is necessary to restrict light, steel panels were installed instead of glazing. Shewan, in his initial design report, recommended a building of "broad, light workspace, unbroken but articulated according to the organisation of work." The steel frame allowed him to achieve a flexible plan form that is particularly suitable for this building type. Different disciplines and functions were located in the building according to their required light levels. Design, drawing and painting studios were accommodated in the north wings (drawing and painting on the upper floors), crafts and sculpture studios to the west wing, exploiting the light provided by the continuous rooflights, and the hall and dining facilities were in the east wing.

The building plan is largely unaltered, retaining its symmetrical form, with continuous corridors linking studios and workshops and with the different departments still accommodated in the wings Shewan had conceived. The space within the classrooms and exhibition rooms is mainly subdivided by means of temporary plasterboard separators and mezzanine levels have been installed in some of the double height studio spaces.

The building also uses innovative building materials and technologies. Gray's School of Art was one of the first buildings in Scotland to use the German "Holorib" decking technology – a structural flooring system including hollow steel ribs that provide reinforcement while reducing weight compared to standard steel beam flooring. This system allowed the creation of ample spaces and to maximise light exposure.

The building previously had open cantilevered ends to the flanking wings. These were infilled in the late 20th century but are set back from the building line with detailing derived from the original building. A similar design approach can be seen at Mies van der Rohe's Richard King Mellon Hall building in Pittsburgh (1965).

The later alterations to the building, both internal and external, have had a minimal impact on its intrinsic design interest and overall Modernist character with the material quality and design intent still largely intact.

3.1.2 Setting

The school is set on a steeply sloped site within a woodland setting, overlooking the River Dee, located on the outskirts of Aberdeen and to the west boundary of Robert Gordon University Garthdee campus. The campus includes Garthdee House (Scott Sutherland School of Architecture) by William Smith (listed building reference LB47908), Kaim House (listed building reference LB15782), the West and East Lodges (listed building references LB52365 and LB52364) and other unlisted buildings constructed after the 1960s.

The wooded estate landscape setting was influential in the plan form and orientation of the building. The courtyard plan and the originally overhanging wings were specifically arranged to use the steep slope of the site with the ground dropping to the River Dee to obtain views of this natural feature from the building. The relationship with the natural landscape setting and in particular the dissolution of interior and exterior spaces by using glass walls, was a key concern in Modernist architectural planning.

The relationship of Gray's School of Art with the natural environment was altered when the court was enclosed by the two-storey steel framed classroom block around 2020. The two-storey south classroom block has been constructed on the original lower terrace, now enclosing the courtyard and restricting some views over the river from the inner courtyard and ground floor spaces of the school. Whilst the relatively lower height of the structure allows for partial views to the natural setting from the building, the composition of the original design has been impacted by this change.

3.2 Historic interest

Historic interest is in such things as a building's age, rarity, social historical interest and associations with people or events that have had a significant impact on Scotland's cultural heritage. Historic interest is assessed under three headings:

3.2.1 Age and rarity

Tertiary education buildings of this period are not rare. However, Gray's School of Art is notable as a key example in Scotland for its date and art school building type. It is also an important example of its particular style of Modernist architecture which has been thoughtfully informed by International Modern precedents.

The exposed steel structure and the glass curtain walls are typical of the Miesian architectural vocabulary. Miesian-style buildings are rare in the United Kingdom and particularly outside London. Comparable examples in Scotland include John Hardie Glover's (Basil Spence and Partners) Roger Land Building at University of Edinburgh

(1962-64), and Peter Womersley's domestic commissions in the Borders which are also influenced by Mies van der Rohe, including High Sunderland (listed building reference LB50862) and the Bernat Klein Studio (listed building reference LB19484).

Other listed Modernist university complexes include Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall and Partners, Stirling University Campus, Pathfoot Building (1966-67) (listed building reference LB51327) and Frank Fielden of Frank Fielden and Associates, 131 Rottenrow, University of Strathclyde, Architecture Building (1964-7) (listed building reference LB51962).

3.2.2 Social historical interest

Social historical interest is the way a building contributes to our understanding of how people lived in the past, and how our social and economic history is shown in a building and/or in its setting.

The post-war period in Britain placed much emphasis on the expansion of higher education, including the creation of new universities and the reconstitution of existing establishments. This socially inclusive approach to education was promoted through the influential 1963 Robbins Report. During this time, newly emerging ideologies in architectural design found favour in the ambitious building programmes planned at campuses across the country. In the 1950s, significant building projects were already underway at Dundee and Edinburgh. In the 1960s, the modern campuses of the newly established universities of Stirling and Strathclyde were also developed.

Gray's School of Art exemplifies the comprehensive development of Scotland's universities, in line with the wider expansion of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom, during the 1960s.

3.2.3 Association with people or events of national importance

There is no association with a person or event of national importance.

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4. Summary of assessment

Gray's School of Art meets the criteria of special architectural or historic interest for the following reasons:

- It is a distinctive example of Modernist architecture in Scotland with its characteristic horizontal design and modern materials of glass, steel and concrete. There is a direct link between nature and the modern structure through design and choice of materials.

- The original fabric and design authenticity of the building has been largely retained including the cantilevered staircases, windows and bespoke internal features and fittings.

- It is a rare example of Miesian-inspired Modernist architecture in Scotland and rare within the wider context of the United Kingdom.

- Within its building type, it is a major example of an art school. The internal layout of the building was planned with a focus on spatial and practical functions and their specific demands for natural light.

- It exemplifies the comprehensive development of Scotland's universities, in line with the wider expansion of the higher education sector in the United Kingdom during the 1960s.

In accordance with Section 1 (4A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 the following are excluded from the listing: modern block to south of courtyard.

5. Category of listing

Once a building is found to be of special architectural or historic interest, it is then classified under one of three categories (A, B or C) according to its relative importance. While the listing itself has legal weight and gives statutory protection, the categories have no legal status and are advisory. They affect how a building is managed in the planning system.

Category definitions are found at Annex 2 of Designation Policy and Selection Guidance (2019) https://www.historicenvironment.scot/designation-policy.

5.1 Level of importance

Gray's School of Art level of importance is category B.

Buildings listed at category B are defined as 'buildings of special architectural or historic interest which are major examples of a particular period, style or type.

Taking into account the level of alteration to the original design of the building and its setting, category B is considered to be the most appropriate level of listing.

6. Legal exclusions

In accordance with Section 1 (4A) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) (Scotland) Act 1997 the following are excluded from the listing: modern block to south of courtyard.

Around 2020, a two-storey glazed and steel framed classroom block was added to the south side of the sculpture court and enclosing the courtyard.

7. References

National Record of the Historic Environment (NHRE) ID 149557: https://www.trove.scot/place/149557 (accessed on 17 November 2025).

Maps

Ordnance Survey Map (Revised 1970, Copyright 1971) NJ9103SW – C 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey National Grid Map 1944-1974. Ordnance Survey.

Archives

Robert Gordon University Library, *Gray's School of Art*, Gray's Box 3.

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Glendinning, M., MacInnes, R. and MacKechnie, A. (1996*) A History of Scottish Architecture* Edinburgh University Press, p.594.

Glendinning, M. (1997) Rebuilding Scotland: The Postwar Vision, 1945-75 Tuckwell Press Ltd, p.158.

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Liscome, R W. (exhibition catalogue - 1997) *The New Spirit: Modern Architecture in Vancouver, 1938-1963.* Canadian Centre for Architecture / Vancouver Art Gallery / Nickel Arts Museum Calgary.

The Scotsman. 30 March 1963, 3 August 1964 and 20 October 1965.

Online Sources

Chalmers, M. (*2014*) *Gray's School of Art: Gray's Matters*, Urban Realm.com *29 Oct 2014 at* *https://www.urbanrealm.com/features/467/Gray%27s_School_of_Art%3A_Gray%27s_Matters.html* (Accessed 04 February 2026).

Dictionary of Scottish Architect. *Denis Michael Alastair Shewan* at https://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/apex/r/dsa/dsa/architects?session=1743460257673 (Accessed 17 November 2025).

Robert Gordon University. *Timeline* at https://www.rgu.ac.uk/about/our-history (Accessed 17 November 2025).

What is Holorib Floor Deck? at https://engineerhardwoodflooring.com/what-is-holorib-floor-deck-5-key-benefits-for-builders/ (Accessed 26 June 2026).

8. Indicative Map

A map of the proposed listed building is attached separately.