



MANCHESTER SCHOOL
OF ARCHITECTURE



The
SECOND
ACT

Visit msa.ac.uk for more information



MSA
LIVE 26

Team

Daniel Smith (MArch1)

Ding Ying (MArch1)

Dominic Fisher (MArch1)

Li Xiaokai (MArch1)

Harry Colton (MA AR)

Yongkang Yuan (MA AR)

Ilya Saedy (BA1)

Juwan El Ghandour (BA1)

Malaika Amjad (BA1)

Natalie Szmyd (BA1)

Collaborators

The Salford Victoria Theatre Trust (SVTT), located in Salford, Greater Manchester, is a community-driven organisation working to preserve and restore the Grade II listed building. Their aim is to reanimate the theatre into a vibrant space for creativity, education, and civic pride in Salford. Michelle Richardson and John Joyce played leading roles in communicating the current state of the theatre and their main goals for the site. By this collaboration, we can suit the SVTT's goals for the Theatre alongside proposing a creative hub to reinvigorate this historic building.

The Salford Theatre faced a history of decay; an unsuccessful history as a bingo hall and was left in a neglected state by previous owners. Due to its current state, renovations and rebuilding is inevitable. However, the lack of funding means that the proposal would need to be enacted in stages to allow for the raising of finances for future repairs as suggested by the Feasibility study (feasibility study citation) carried out by the Trust.

The SVTT is transparent in its core aim: reinstall the Theatre in its role as a vital centre for the society. Strengthening the surrounding area with their holistic growth which restructures the building as a member of the community, viewed by the SVTT as a 'sleeping beauty poised for revival'.



Introduction

The Second Act

Restarting:

The Victoria Theatre has begun to find its footing: raising funds, gaining volunteers, and slowly reclaiming its place in the public imagination. Yet its future remains uncertain. Restoration alone is not enough; the theatre must earn its future. Our proposal establishes a starting point: a space that shifts and adapts to meet demand, generating consistent revenue that feeds directly back into the building's ongoing renewal.

Salford:

The Salford community has watched the Victoria Theatre lay dormant, decaying, for too long. A space that adapts to demand is a space that adapts to people; providing freelancers, creatives, local businesses and residents to gather, grow and give back to the community.

Community:

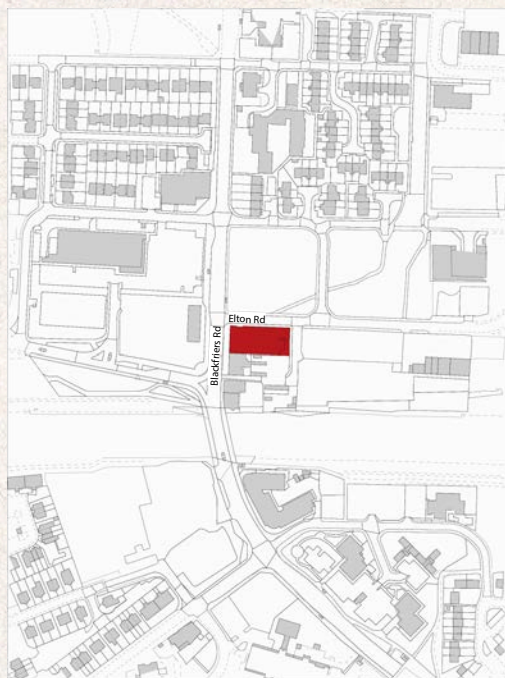
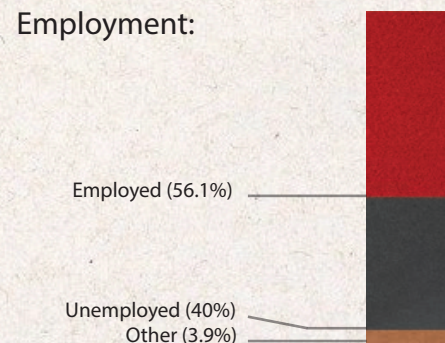
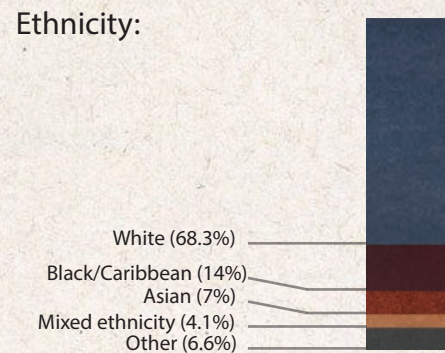
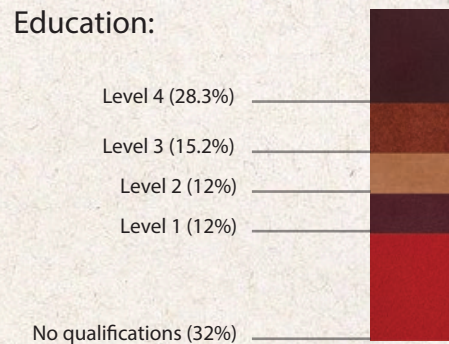
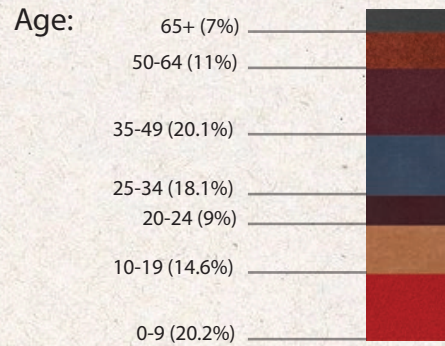
The SVTT are constantly engaging in building public support and funding: gaining a Grant from Theatres Trust of £5000 as well as one from the Heritage Revival Fund Grant, worth up to £15000. Most importantly, they finally achieved becoming an official charity, which not only validates the community's interest in the building, but brings in a range of practical and financial benefits. They are working tirelessly to preserve and bring new life into the Victoria Theatre, which is a well-loved cultural institution which could, with restoration, form an attractive and vibrant hub for Lower Broughton.

The Future:

Salford, akin to Manchester, is an industrial centre with creativity running through it. Home to its own university and a rich history in textile manufacturing, already prepared for reinvention. The large scale of the Victoria Theatre makes opportunities vast: educational, commercial and creative. Reimagined for its current context, the Victoria could bring in all these various elements and form a vibrant and creative hub for Lower

Understanding Site Context

Built in 1899 by renowned architect Bertie Crewe, Victoria Theatre has served as a theatre, cinema, furniture warehouse, and bingo hall, repeatedly closing and reopening as its function evolved, before finally closing in 2008. Located in Lower Broughton, Salford, just outside Manchester City Centre, the Grade II listed building is the last surviving fragment of the area's Victorian past. Much of its surrounding historic context of which was lost to post-war clearances and redevelopment between the 1960s and 1980s. Today, the Theatre stands as a reminder



The Existing Building

The structure comprises three distinct sections: the front-of-house, auditorium, and back-of-house. Its front façade is constructed from ornated terracotta tiles - retaining visible traces of years as a bingo hall.

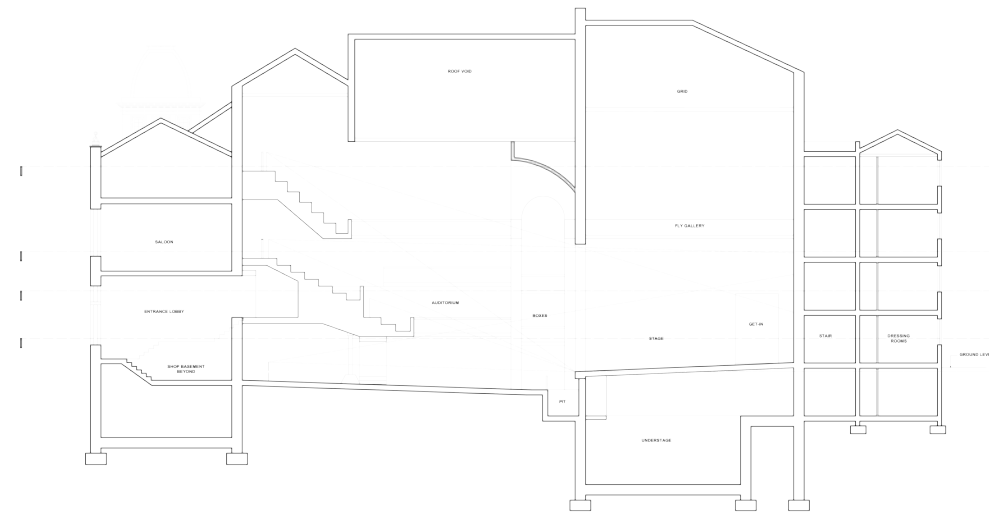


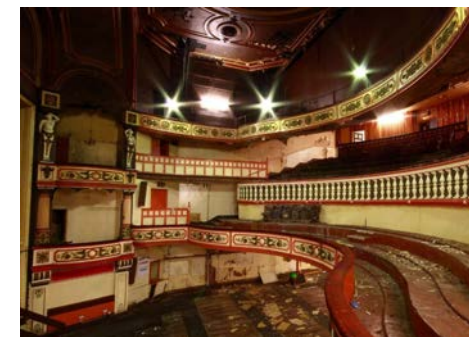
Image Top: Existing Section of the Salford Victoria Theatre

Image Left: Site Map highlighting the theatre

Image Right: Theatre's street facing facade

Image Bottom Left: Theatre's auditorium

Image Bottom Right: Theatre's north-facing facade



Initial Concept

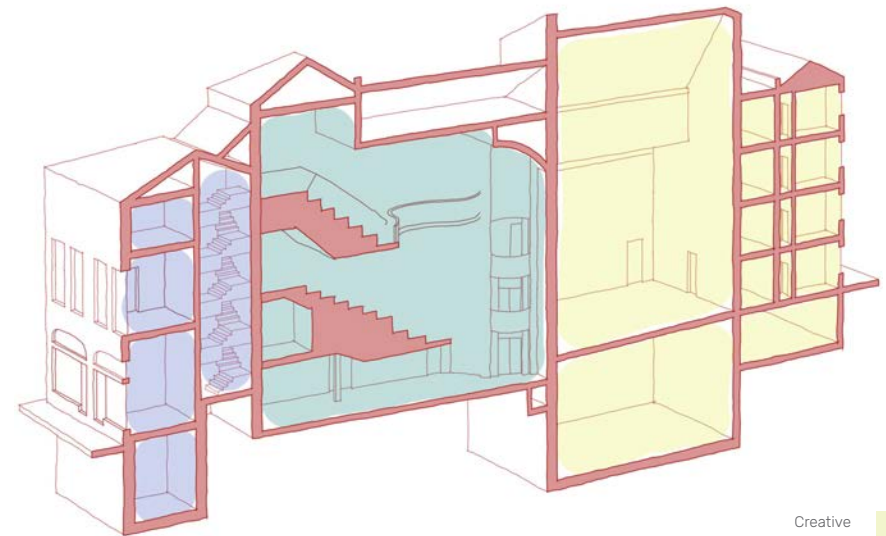


Initially we were briefed and tasked with looking into how the theatre could be “rejuvenated and brought back to life”, but with one constraint, not as a theatre. In response to this, and the creative freedom we were given, we proposed a “social condenser” based on long-life, loose-fit principles. We explored the idea of an adaptable hybrid space with multiple functions that could change over time. If a business, activity, or use proved successful, the physical space could expand or contract accordingly, whether its daily or annually. Driven by demand, the building would continuously adapt to changing community needs.

This way, whatever is successful can “spread” throughout the building. While we do not yet know the exact demand, but by metaphorically planting the seed we think is most suitable, we can test its growth. This will be informed from our analysis of the local area and people, as well as results from the community engagement activity.

Precedent:

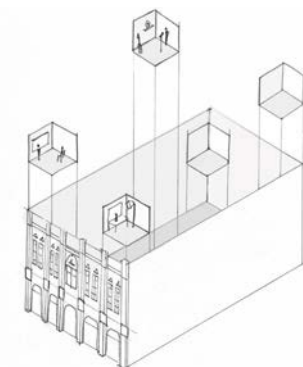
We were inspired by the Observer Building community hub in Hastings by IF_DO Architects, particularly its novel concept of refurbishing one vacant floor at a time, where a single “planted” room could expand over time, with new spaces added as demand grew. This precedent was also relevant due to it also being a similarly large historic building. Similarly, the Victoria Theatre is a listed heritage building which we reimagined as a community-focused “incubator” for start-ups.



- Creative ■
- Education ■
- Commercial ■

Circular Economy:

We feel it is necessary to allow a circular economy to flourish, to ensure for a long-lasting building. This is based on our three ‘zones’ – these being retail, creative and educational. Creative studios hosting workshops and classes would produce stock to sell. The sale of work in shops would then be invested into expanding the adaptable spaces to host new activities. Furthermore, creative classes may align themselves with educational spaces, while retail units could overlap with education spaces, as, for example, library spaces.



Engagement Workshop

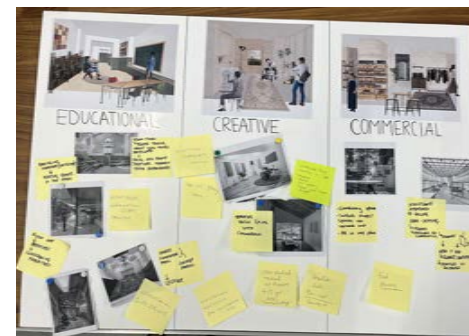
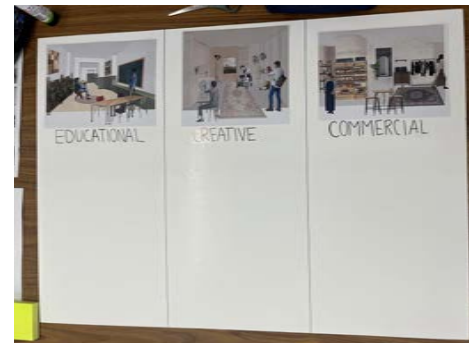
Planning & Process:

Since our project aimed to restore an out-of-use theatre, there were lessons to learn from it falling out of the community's demand. Therefore, tailoring our concept in relation to the community was important, which is why the engagement had to be carefully thought out in order for us to gain purposeful insights. Given that our group lacked experience in designing and conducting a public engagement workshop, we began by researching different workshop methodologies through the community planning handbook, developing our own creative consultation from methods like the "Choice Catalogue." In addition, by defining quality engagement through The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's key principles (Purpose, People, Process and Evaluation), it helped us establish a clear intention of what we aimed to achieve from our specific community group and how to execute it.

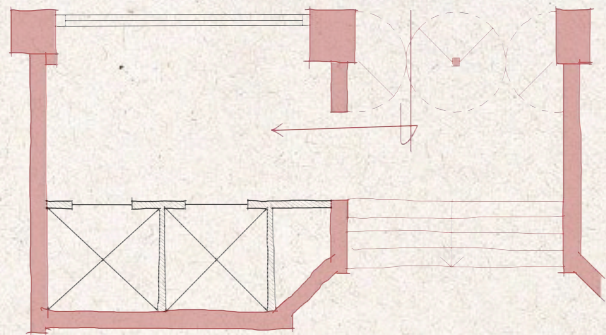
Considering that we would be collaborating with non-architectural participants, we prepared a range of visual materials and precedents, including collages we constructed of our proposed concepts to ensure that we communicate our ideas clearly and receive clear responses in return.

Execution & Outcome:

Our Public engagement activity consisted of consulting with a local craft group in Salford's Naz Centre. In collaboration with the few attendees, we were able to give each member a chance to express their valuable insights on the types of spaces that we could intergrade inside the theatre, allowing us to identify gaps in the city's community. Discussions included concerns such as Salford's commercial and creative spaces being too dispersed and the lack of accessible outdoor leisure areas. We were also encouraged to consider the surrounding natural habitats, including beehives, which led to a recommendation for incorporating a roof-off terrace concept that could double as both social and ecological functions. This was further strengthened by the fact that they were an older demographic who have experienced and witnessed the ways in which their city has evolved, unlocking unexpected perspectives that we could not access through our collaborators or online. Overall, the engagement session exceeded our expectations, where we received a much greater variety of proposed ideas than expected, we believe this worked alongside the visual imagery we provided, proving them effective. Had we had more time, another session with a different age group, would have strengthened our justifications further. However, we still left with a deeper and clearer understanding of how the engagement would inform our concept development.

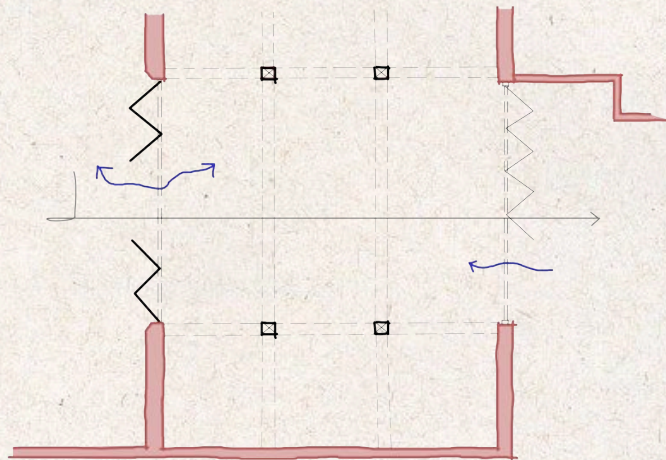


Developing the concept



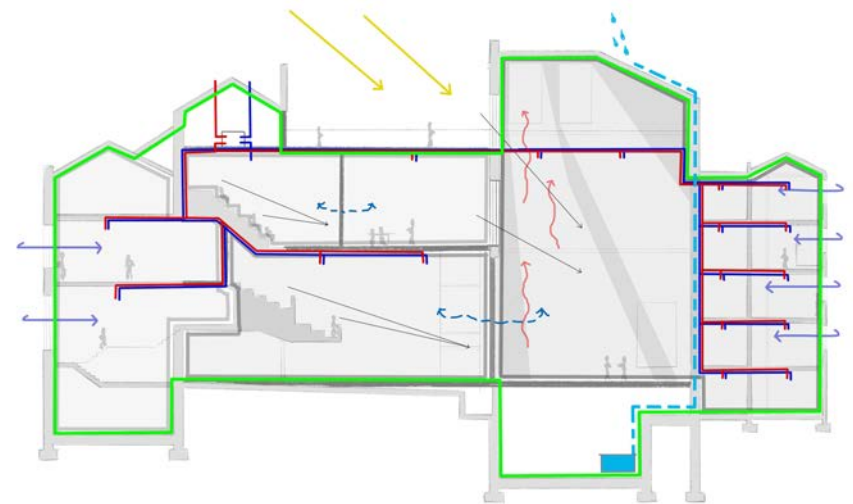
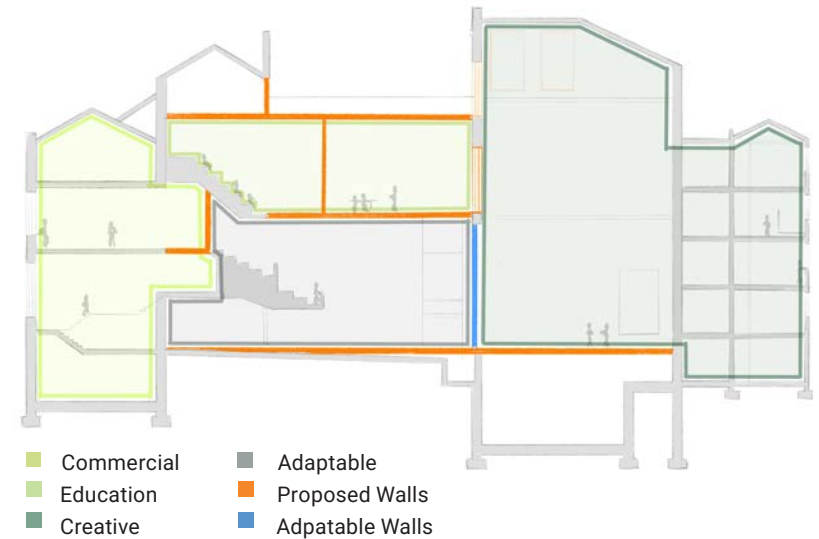
"Just make sure you put in a lift for me."

"Could you consider including access to an outdoor garden space?"



Responding to the Engagement

Following the engagement workshop, we began developing our concept in response to the feedback and comments received from the community. A key focus was improving accessibility, which led to the inclusion of lift access at the main entrance point. We also responded to the identified lack of outdoor leisure space by creating a continuous route from the creative space to a rear allotment area. Moveable partition walls were introduced to allow flexibility, adaptability, and improved access throughout the space.



Proposed Changes & Sustainable Strategies

Environmental strategies were central to the proposal, particularly when adapting the existing historic building. A fabric-first approach improves thermal performance through upgraded windows, continuous insulation, and airtightness layers. Natural ventilation, supported by an MVHR system, helps maintain indoor comfort year-round. Adaptable partition walls enable purge ventilation, while new north-facing rooflights introduce natural daylight into the creative spaces. Rainwater harvesting will also be integrated beneath the existing stage, providing recycled water for toilets throughout the building.

Image Top:
Proposed additions
and demolitions to the
existing building.

Image Bottom:
Applied environmental
strategies

Final Concept

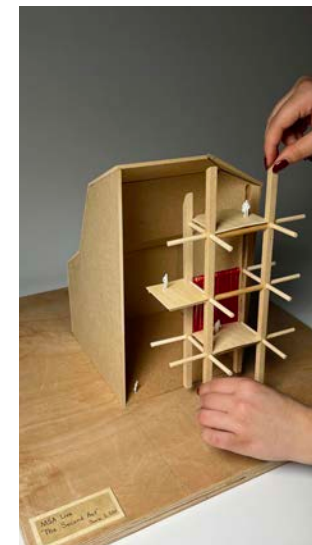


Zooming in

We then developed the proposal further within the creative zone, as this was identified as one of the most important spaces during community engagement. The concept follows the idea of a “structure within a structure,” combining a contemporary architectural intervention with the retained historic shell of the existing stage area.

Overall, the proposal aims to balance heritage preservation with contemporary community use, creating a flexible and sustainable future for the Victoria Theatre.

As shown in the physical section model, the proposed internal structure creates a variety of interconnected creative spaces, using translucent and semi-open partition walls to encourage collaboration, visibility, and flexibility between activities. The structure was designed with disassembly in mind, supporting sustainability through ease of reuse, adaptability, and future recycling of materials, reducing the overall the carbon footprint of the proposed design.





Reflection

Over the past few months, "The Second Act" group was brought together, learned about each other and the site, and came together to develop out ideas to bring the Victoria Theatre over its current ruins. Our collaborative journey was filled with concepts and cooperation, which developed our initial ideas past the elementary stage and the group effort finalised it into a fitting proposal for the theatre. The beginning months were mainly admin: preparing the timeline, creating forms and discussing ideas. The last intensive week proved the most fruitful with everyone communicating clearly and developing outputs to explain our proposal effectively. By addressing our skills and weaknesses, we were able to assign suited roles, whether it was hand-drawing, proficiency with software or model making. Discussion allowed us to hand out tasks in an organised manner, that helped to spend the time more efficiently.

Constant feedback and active reflection allowed the group to produce high quality work. There were many instances where an output was produced by multiple people to maximise on the skills of the group. Whilst there were some issues with attendance and unmotivated individuals, online communication bridged the gap which allowed for work to be distributed. The engagement activity was an essential team building activity, requiring everyone to understand the concept up to that point and prepare resources. Feedback from the collaborators allowed us to understand what the Salford Theatre required to move on from its current state deprivation.

The Presentation

Our presentation became a testament of the hard work from the action week and the previous months. While our collaborators were not able see the finalised proposal, Rob Hyde and Emily Crompton thought that the modular and adaptable design fit well into this constantly changing, with the pods being able to vary with size and materials, rather having to be refurbished each time to meet new standards. They also found our effort in having an engagement activity commendable since the theatre had no current members, resulting us to look for advice externally from the trust.

We are all greatly thankful for being able to take part in this project that forced us into uncomfortable, unknown positions which we were able to overcome for an effective proposal.

ABOUT

Each year the MSA LIVE programme unites Masters Architecture year 1, Masters of Architecture & Adaptive Resuse students, BA foundation and year 1 and Masters Landscape Architecture 1 in mixed-year teams to undertake live projects with external partners to create social impact.

LIVE PROJECTS

All MSA LIVE projects are live. A live project is where an educational organisation and an external partner develop a brief, timescale, and outcome for their mutual benefit.

SOCIAL IMPACT

All MSA LIVE projects are for community benefit or have social impact. Social impact is the effect an organization's actions have on the well-being of a community. Our agendas are set by our external collaborators.

EXTERNAL PARTNERS

MSA LIVE projects work with many organisations: charities, community groups, social enterprises, community interest companies, researchers, practitioners and educators.

STUDENT-LED

Our MSA students take the lead in the project conception, brief development, delivery and co-ordination of a small project. The projects are celebrated in presentations at the end of the academic year.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Working in teams within and across year groups and courses; MSA students participate in peer to peer learning. In addition, collaborators, participants and students engage in the transfer of tangible and intellectual property, expertise, learning and skills.

LARGE SCALE

This year approximately 400 students from 5 cohorts in MSA have worked on 34 projects with partners.

QUESTIONS

For questions about MSA LIVE please contact the MSA LIVE team, Emily & Julie:

e.crompton@mmu.ac.uk and j.fitzpatrick@mmu.ac.uk

BLOG

live.msa.ac.uk/2026

SOCIAL

#MSALive26
@msa.live.26
@TheMSArch

WEBSITE

www.msa.ac.uk