
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board
to Central Saint Martins, UAL**

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- v In the UK, standard requirements of validation include the completion by the institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

10 Academic position statement
(Statement written by the school)

Architecture at Central Saint Martins is embedded in a globally renowned art and design school, from which we draw a commitment to explore expanded forms of practice and education. We want to equip our students with the creative and critical skills to carve new pathways into practice, providing the tools to engage productively and, where necessarily, disruptively with the architectural profession and beyond. The manifesto of the Spatial Practices programme, in which architecture sits, establishes a series of strong and distinctive drivers which we use to shape our educational approach.

We see the production of space as fundamentally social and political

We believe that architecture should be understood within a social and political context. The space of the city is charged and shaped through the play of multiple dynamics and tensions, which architectural students need to understand. We are committed to socially-engaged practice, including design approaches that are open to more democratic forms of space-making. We ask how, as a profession, we can reclaim political and social agency. How might students form independent and critical positions which produce conscientious practitioners: practitioners not only concerned with the formal aspects of architecture but also the social, political, economic and environmental forces which shape it? Embedded within the critically-engaged, culturally rich, environment of Central Saint Martins, our students have access to wider events which support this enquiry, including Public Debates, Round Tables, Symposia and Workshops, through which they are prompted to refine their critical skills and ask questions of their profession. This position aligns with the commitment of the college and university to notions of social justice and diversity.

We support not only the development of radical ideas, but also the potential of making and building.

To complement this critical approach, we want to provide skills and knowledge that support the potential of making and building. In an art school environment, richly endowed with workshops and specialist technicians, emphasis on the practical and organisational arts of building and constructing has a powerful, and often neglected, value. We draw reference to the first Principal of the Central School, William Lethaby who sought to promote the 'practical arts'; "*Train us to practical power, make us great builders and adventurous experimenters*"¹. We situate this approach in the context of contemporary and emerging digital technologies, as well as known analogue ones. The Granary Building itself is a structure which can host and facilitate transformative

¹ RIBA Journal Vol 24, 1917 p252. Cited in Rubens G, (1986) William Richard Lethaby, The Architectural Press

projects and engagements within its spaces, offering the volume and space for significant built installations and events on the other. We have cultivated experimentation within the expansive spaces of the Street and its multidisciplinary workshops, using them as a resource to promote 1:1 making, manufacture, and collaboration. This includes vertically integrated intensive construction workshops which transform the College 'Street' into a fabrication space; as well as individual Modules/Units which involve the construction of large-scale built outcomes.

We use our programme name (Spatial Practices) to rethink our profession by imagining roles beyond disciplinary limits and actively engaging in our art school setting.

Throughout the programme we explore broader forms of 'spatial practice' as pathways toward a wider engagement in the built environment. Spatial practices are for us an expandable set of techniques that can support the design of successful civic places, celebrate human occupation and address regeneration and urban change; expanding and re-defining architectural practice. This leads to a much broader understanding of the role of the architect, expanding the scope of the profession into new fields. To support this, we cultivate collaborations and collisions with the other programmes throughout the College. Through these workshop-based projects our students have engaged with craft disciplines including ceramics, textiles, and metalwork. Our students learn core aspects of knowledge within the early years of study (1-3) with an increasing independence (4+5) fostered through project-based, problem-led learning, which culminates in an independent, external 'live' project (Yr 5). This project requires students to define their own trajectory and marks the first step toward their own incipient practice, incorporating and capturing new forms and structures of expanded architectural production.

We engage creatively with the reality of the city around us, and its legislative and economic constraints, by undertaking live projects that have agency.

We believe that our agency as architecture students, staff and professionals is best located and most effective when enacted in the city we know. This allows us to build long term partnerships and thematic research, based on the urgent spatial issues that are evident in London. Our location in King's Cross, embedded within one of Europe's biggest regeneration projects, is the key to this mission. We use our neighborhood as a source of reflective focus through activities and projects, so students and staff explore and understand regeneration through operating within it. We focus on a studio-based design programme providing a pathway from Foundation, to Years 1-3 (Part 1), and Years 4-5 (Part 2). Our approach is a curriculum rich in external and live projects, and collaborative engagements with others – both within the College and the University, and beyond to external partners, agencies and communities. Project Briefs, set by studio tutors who are practitioners in London, forge alliances ranging from proposals for housing enclaves to whole neighbourhoods; working with government, developers, as well as arts and cultural organisations.

This trajectory of live research culminates in the final year of Part 1 (with a self-directed project) and the final year of the Part 2, when students create an independent design thesis project, selecting a partner and mentors, and situating their work in a real site in which they have agency. Where possible, and relevant, they are encouraged to consider the realisation of aspects of their project through built or strategic implementation, in collaboration with partners. Our Innovation and Business team is a distinctive College resource which provides the legal, administrative and management expertise for curricula, and extra-curricula, consultancy projects, run through and across courses and programmes. Through these 'Student Sponsored Projects' we can offer a wide range of opportunities over and above the curriculum, working directly with clients, government, industry and community in consultancy situations, providing everything from design concepts to events and bespoke objects.

We provide flexible, alternative pathways for study encouraging diverse careers and innovative future practices

We believe that facilitating pathways into practice is an integral part of our educational mission, and we believe in a critical engagement with the profession during study. We also want to provide the opportunity for diversity, through the provision of an accessible and affordable architectural education that embraces widening participation, and blends learning in academia with situated learning with external partners, placements with industry, and (distinctively) study at postgraduate level that can be combined with employment. At Part 1, Central Saint Martins was instrumental in establishing a RIBA Mentoring Partnership which provides an opportunity for final year students to be placed with mentor practices, developing experience and networks which can be consolidated in their year-out. At Part 2 level, our course operates with 30 hours study time per week and an extended calendar year with summer schools. Through this model, students have the capacity to be employed two days a week, often in practice. Finally, and importantly, an industry placement is integrated into the course as an embedded period of study. This happens in Summer Term (10 weeks April-July) with the potential to extend placements over the vacation period. These initiatives allow an immersive blurring of employment, study and placement. It also means that our student body is very diverse and mobilized to build on networks beyond the College. Students develop lifelong skills which balance a critical approach with practical reality, and the abilities to nurture and mobilise networks in the world beyond the course.

Our response to contemporary challenges in architectural education is to provide our students with the skills and opportunity to reconsider conventional architectural roles in expansive and transformative ways; to act both productively and disruptively within the profession; and to form new trajectories of practice beyond it.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the programme's clear academic position and inventive engagement with the subject of architecture and how this has informed its manifesto for Spatial Practices. The board also commends how the manifesto acts as framework that underpins all the units and subject areas.
- 11.2 The board commends the team on the successful on-going evolution of the course and fostering a supportive and collaborative environment for staff and students.
- 11.3 The board commends the quality and range of briefs within the vertical studio structure.

12 Action points

The visiting board proposes the following action points. The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 12.1 In light of the on-going expansion of courses within the programme, the institution must reduce the level of uncertainty surrounding the annual allocation of studio and teaching space for BA Architecture. This will allow the continued development and innovation of the course's activities and enhance the quality of the student experience.

13. Advice

The visiting board offers the following advice to the Department on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

- 13.1 The board supports the high-level of integration between subject areas at each stage, however advises that there needs to be clear distinction between assessed outputs for each of the units.
- 13.2 The board acknowledges the future changes to the credit weighting and advises that full advantage of this is taken to develop the content and outputs for technology and professional studies at Stages 2 and 3.

14 Delivery of academic position

The board commented that the position statement clearly illustrated the way in which the programme frames the teaching and addresses the production of space, which is central to the school's ethos and identity and is clearly outlined within the Spatial Practices manifesto.

15 Delivery of graduate attributes

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered graduate attributes to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or an attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a graduate attribute was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Graduate Attributes for Parts 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture.

16 Review of work against criteria

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

At the time of the 2018 RIBA visiting board:
2018/19 247

17.2 Documentation provided

The faculty provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures and during the visit, viewed the proposed modifications to the structure and credit-weightings of units at each of the three stages. This will be picked up by the 2023 visiting board

***Notes of meetings**

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings:

- **Budget holder and course leaders**
- **Students**
- **Head of institution**
- **External examiners**
- **Staff**