
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to Coventry University**

1 Details of institution hosting course

School of Art & Design
Faculty of Arts and Humanities Coventry University
Graham Sutherland Building Coventry
CV1 5PH

2 Head of School of Art and Design

Nick Gorse

3 Courses offered for validation

BSc (Hons) Architecture

4 Course Director

Katherine McNeil

5 Awarding body

Coventry University

6 The visiting board

Norman Wienand, Chair
Lindesay Dawe – vice-chair
Chris Bryant
Peter Garstecki
Lucia Medina – student member

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance.

7 Procedures and criteria for the visit

The visiting board was carried out under the *RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria for UK and international courses and examinations in architecture* (published July 2011, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

8 Proposals of the visiting board

At its meeting on 13 February 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of the following:

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1

The next full visiting board will take place in 2023.

9 Standard requirements for continued recognition

Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

- i. external examiners being appointed for the course
- ii. any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA
- iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title

- iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed
- 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 (written by the School)

The study of Architecture at Coventry University is now in the 10th year of teaching. Establishing a reputation as an innovative and imaginative course, we have a strong relationship with the City and its people, and enjoy the opportunities for interdisciplinary dialogues within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. Part of our unique offer for students is to study on a BSc (Hons) Architecture course in a School of Art and Design.

Social Purpose

The BSc (Hons) Architecture course at Coventry University responds to the challenges of the environmental, economic and social climate of the 21st century, reflected in our ethos of architecture's role in 'social purpose'. Students engage in the full depth and breadth of contemporary architectural education, enriched by interdisciplinary projects. We support and develop critically reflective, practically informed and collaborative graduates of architecture.

The course is strongly committed to context, materiality and function. Central to the studio discipline is real world relevance through spatial and material declaration. Making drives our pedagogy. Students engage with creative and technical processes based on rigorous contextual justification. Emphasis is placed on studio projects with an iterative design development informed by technical and theoretical taught modules. Personal responsibility and critical evaluation are highly valued.

Connected Identities

The pedagogical identity of the architecture course at Coventry University originates from the fabric of the city and its specific social and physical contexts. The contrast between the strategic modernist post-war reconstruction phases, the medieval layers and new patterns of development acts as a stimulating reference for our contemporary students. As a major post-industrial city in the UK experiencing significant cultural transformation, Coventry offers a unique opportunity for students to develop individual positions which identify local and global issues.

Our close connection with the macro and micro environments of the city develops an intimate understanding of Coventry's identity. This informs students' discoveries and understanding of global relevance. We have built relationships with a range of civic organisations, including the Historic Coventry Trust and the Coventry Society. City of Culture 2021 and Coventry's Ten Year Cultural Strategy are backdrops for the wider narratives of student projects. International study visits act as referential counterpoints to the forces involved in the transformation of the urban environment. They are live experiential situations for students to create comparisons with their experimentation within Coventry.

Responsive Learning Environment

The embedding of staff research, professional practice and pedagogic enquiry supports a research driven studio culture and responsive learning environment. This is evolving to form clusters of staff and students working closely together on focused architectural agendas. We encourage all year interactions to cross fertilise ideas and generate peer to peer learning. We place emphasis on an informed response to expose students to the broader holistic influences which generate architecture.

The course agenda balances theory and the tectonics of architecture through student generated design briefs. Throughout their studies, students are supported to make informed decisions which respond to context and embed the principles of technology and environment. The development and implementation of tools to explore and communicate spatial, social and economic contextual conditions are the main departure points for all studio projects.

Our approach relates directly to the RIBA validation criteria, with a strong focus on building students' experience, acquisition of skills and professional attributes. The two key strands of theory and technology, interact, inform and support the design studio projects. Tutors encourage students to apply and connect learning between all modules through the design process. The design studio projects build in scale and complexity, using the making of drawings and models as generators for the architectural process. Materiality and making processes connect the two strands, universal tools which define architecture as a 'social craft'.

Outward Focus

The outward facing nature of the course is evident in the studio projects which connect with live issues within the city of Coventry. Students meet with members of local organisations through city focused projects, which include, city walks, site visits and talks. This engagement opens up learning beyond the studio, giving projects a deeper meaning and breadth of social, historical and political contexts, embedding a sense of responsibility and duty of care at the heart of learning.

The culmination of learning at stage 3 gives students the opportunity to apply their knowledge and experience through a suite of modules which form the main design project. Students propose eye level urban projects, complemented by intensive research skills in the dissertation. The dialogue with 21st century global challenges provides a framework to stimulate debate. Individual project briefs are generated from contextual sensitivity and study.

The integrated collaborative project mirrors the reality of practice and connects students with professionalism in an interdisciplinary environment. Team working prepares students for their future architectural practice looking forward to developing the role of the architect as an informed, responsive and imaginative collaborator.

Our approach to internationalisation, collaborative working and individual creativity is highly relevant to the pluralistic nature of

contemporary practice. From the outset, students are encouraged to value their own experiences, and those of others, as part of the dialogue of ideas with their peers and wider society.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the University for its commitment to developing the subject area of Architecture by providing clear leadership within the School of Art & Design.
- 11.2 The Board commends the enthusiasm, energy and drive of new staff appointed within the subject area.

12. Conditions

There are no conditions.

13. 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. The university is referred to the RIBA's criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring processes. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 13.1 The University should ensure that the course team conducts a course mapping exercise to bring clarity to the student learning pathway over three years, with emphasis on the particular relationship between modules and the attainment of core skills
- 13.2 In order to address the limited range of experience in pedagogy in the teaching team the School should ensure that all staff become more familiar with external benchmarks
- 13.3 The School should provide greater direction and advice to students on how to properly curate a portfolio of work, appropriate to different audiences.
- 13.4 The School should define its direction and identity with a clearly articulated focus.
- 13.5 The School should ensure Add+Vantage modules are related to architectural education, especially in year 3. They should not be relied on to deliver core digital skills.
- 13.6 Further development of the management, practice and law module is required in order to increase students' readiness for practice.
- 13.7 Greater integration of core skills such as spatial planning, design resolution, analogue and digital techniques is required in the core course modules to ensure students leave university with the required skill set.
- 13.8 The School should consolidate its leadership structure in order to ensure appropriate response to the action points outlined above

14. Advice

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

- 14.1 The Board encourages the School to provide opportunities for the architecture society to strengthen their relationship between undergraduate and March
- 14.2 The Board encourages the School to reconsider complexity of briefs and the role of students in their writing, to enable time effective resolution of projects.
- 14.3 The School should ensure that students become more familiar with external reference points both in terms of student work and contemporary architectural practice.
- 14.4 The Board encourages the School to complete the full transition of the subject area to the School of Art & Design in order to enhance meaningful and focused collaboration across associated subject areas.
- 14.5 The Board encourages the co-location of Architecture students at Part I and Part II level for improved opportunities for peer group learning
- 14.6 The Board encourages the School to make more explicit the aims and objectives of the design process to better support 'social craft' and 'making'.

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.

15.1 BSc (Hons) Architecture [Part 1]

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

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.

- 16.1 The Board made no further comments.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1: 171 (2018)

17.2 Documentation provided

The School provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

18. Notes of meetings

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings. These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request. The full set of notes will be issued to the mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.

- Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with head of institution
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff