
Royal Institute of British Architects

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

- 1 Details of institution hosting course**
Falmouth University
Woodlane
Falmouth
TR11 4RH

- 2 Head of Subject – Architecture and Interior Design**
Tom Ebdon, Head of Subject – Architecture & Interior Design

- 3 Courses offered for validation**
BA (Hons) Architecture

- 4 Awarding body**
Falmouth University

- 5 The visiting board**
Professor Lorraine Farrelly - Chair
Andy Parsons – Vice Chair
Holly Rose Doron
Charlie Follett – student/graduate member
Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance.

- 6 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.

- 7 Proposals of the visiting board**
At its meeting on 13 February 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional validation of the following:

BA (Hons) Architecture

with effect from the 2016/2017 graduating cohort.

The next full visiting board will take place in 2023.

- 8 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

9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

The BA(Hons) Architecture degree at Falmouth University, was established in 2014/15 with the aspiration of teaching architecture through the haptic processes. The course is defined by making, from the hand-crafted to the digital, allowing the students to explore the possibilities of what different materials can do, want to do and the inter-relationship of materials, spaces, places and people that defines the tectonics of architecture. As the only degree for Architecture in Cornwall the course is firmly rooted in this unique location and draws upon the diverse and sometimes extreme environments that exist here.

Teaching and learning is defined by an inclusive attitude to both the structure of the design projects undertaken by the students and of the environment in which the learning takes place. Participatory design principles are taught, placing great emphasis on the power of collective decision making, creative engagement and widening the modes of traditional architectural design.

The course is delivered through integrated design projects. The projects are supplemented by lectures, seminars and workshops (technical, IT and communications) and is studio based. The exceptional character of the course is marked by socially engaged live projects, working with local groups, clients, organisations and places to encourage students to first identify and then develop their own briefs for design projects. Students are supported in a broad engagement process that encourages co-authorship of projects; working closely with a client group for an inclusive version of the design process.

The course has been established within a world class arts institution. We place great emphasis on the ability to be able to communicate and explore ideas through drawing and making. In the tradition of a fine arts institution the freedom of the individual student is encouraged as they progress through the course. Uniquely, first and second year students are taught together, they work on the same sites, with more complex briefs developed for the second year projects. There is shared endeavour and intellectual resources that promote peer-to-peer learning and establish a risk-taking environment for experimentation. As students progress from second to third year, an increased level of independence is encouraged, balanced with the need for support. The students are encouraged to establish their own critical position in relation to the natural and built environment, supported by the varied visiting lecturers who share their own working practices and concerns.

The first year (Level 4) is defined by a live build project, students working collaboratively to engage with a client group and then design and physically build a building. This experience immediately prompts the students to challenge what is possible and helps to formulate a deeper understanding of place and materials. During the second year (Level 5), students undertake a professional practice module during which each student secures a work placement at a practice. This 3-5 week experience is underpinned by a lecture and seminar series that looks at the reality of working in practice. Students write an annotated report that links practice to their on-going design project. The module is designed to first introduce students to the world of professional practice and then help to develop an ongoing relationship with a firm. The module leads to opportunities for career networking and employment at Part 1 level. The module is also critical in grounding a student's experience in an academic environment, developing a far greater understanding of the workings of an architect's office. Through this module we also explore new and changing modes of architectural practice, be that project specific set-ups, competitions or collaborative structures that are inclusive of the wider design community.

The third year (Level 6) is the opportunity for students to pursue areas of specific interest that they have developed over the preceding two years of the course. The Independent Exploratory Project aligns with the Dissertation as a critical piece of experimental architecture, technically resolved. The critical thinking and writing of the dissertation asserts the philosophical position of the student, contextualizing their research and design process and outcomes. The Final Major Project is the opportunity for the students to pull all their knowledge and understanding together into a comprehensive architectural project.

Features of the BA(Hons) Architecture degree at Falmouth University:

- *Teach and learn architecture through live projects delivered through participatory design processes.*
- *To reflect upon and engage with Critical Regionalism - a response to the unique place of Cornwall.*
- *Design Through Making - 1:1 hands-on making. Understanding the properties of materials and what they are capable of.*
- *Graduating students that have the ability to define and create critically strategic projects as well as the ability to challenge existing briefs*
to create architecture that excels in its inclusivity and relevance to the issues that face society today and in the future.
- *A research culture that critically investigates the role of the architect in relation to participatory design, engagement and making.*
- *Exploration into the craft of architecture and the response that architecture can have to place.*

Graduates from Falmouth University BA(Hons) Architecture course have the ability to become provocateurs, entrepreneurial in their thinking and critically reflective Part 1 graduates.

10. Commendations

- 10.1 The board would like to acknowledge the supportive staff team, both in terms of their development of a positive learning environment for students and their critical reflection of the curriculum. They are also supporting the development of a positive studio culture.
- 10.2 The board commends the ambition of the School to relate the studio design projects to the local community and landscape context to have a positive impact on the region in and around Falmouth through participatory approaches- which includes community consultation and presentation and the live-build as a distinctive aspect of collaborative making.
- 10.3 Relating to the architectural practice environment regionally and incorporating work placement as an important aspect in the second year of the curriculum. This experience will support students to prepare for future employment.

11. Conditions

There are no conditions.

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. 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.

- 12.1 Ongoing review of staff, space and other resources as the course develops to provide adequate staff and student learning spaces and studios required for a professional course.
- 12.2 The employment experience of students within the course is good practice but needs to be reviewed perhaps incorporating professional mentoring such as the RIBA Regional Mentoring Scheme to support students' employability. There should be a meaningful alternative for students who cannot get practice experience, such as a professional mentoring scheme.
- 12.3 Computing and IT support for students – students identified the need for more structured support to develop appropriate IT and CAD skills, particularly given the diverse intake of students from different backgrounds with a range of skillsets. We would suggest encouraging students to develop more informal learning of these skillsets across and within year cohorts.

12.4 Technical support for student learning. Technical support to complement the design project should be continually reviewed to ensure there is the appropriate additional teaching support of technical skills so students have an appropriate level of understanding of structural design, environmental design and other relevant technical knowledge and how this is applied to the design project.

13. 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.

13.1 To continue to review the framework of the final major project to ensure all criteria and associated learning outcomes are consistently evidenced and assessed.

13.2 The Board encourages the School to develop further the integration of building technology and to review students' understanding of structural design, environmental design, tectonics and other technical knowledge and how particularly this is applied and evidenced in their final year portfolio.

13.3 The 3-week work placement in second year is beneficial for students and practices however the experience isn't always consistent with the requirements of the module which is evidenced in the final reports. It would be useful to review the baseline set of experiences to be met during the 3 weeks, such as visiting a site, project costings, planning and, building regulations and health and safety legislation and basic project management issues.

For students without a placement, we would advise they make use of RIBA mentoring scheme to ensure parity of knowledge and experience.

13.4 The Board would advise encouraging where possible inter and cross disciplinary learning and research for staff and students across and within the distinctive arts context in Falmouth University

14 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.

14.1 BA (Hons) Architecture (Part 1)

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

15 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.

15.1 The Board made no further comments.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1: 62.

16.2 Documentation provided

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

17. 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.**

The RIBA agreed with the School that it was not necessary to meet the Vice-Chancellor during this visit as the Exploratory Board had taken place very recently (February 2018), at which the RIBA was able to discuss institutional support for the development of architecture with university senior management.

- Meeting with Head of School
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff