
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board
to Northumbria University**

**Date of visiting board: 27-28 September 2018
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 31 November 2018**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** (report part A)
 Northumbria University
 Architecture and Built Environment
 Ellison Building
 Newcastle upon Tyne
 NE1 8ST
- 2 Head of Architecture Group**
 Head of Department Ruth Dalton
 Head of Subject Paul Jones
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**
 BA (Hons) Architecture
 BA (Hons) Architecture (with study abroad)
 Master of Architecture (Full-Time & Part Time)
- 4 Course leader/s**
 BA (Hons) Oliver Jones
 Master of Architecture Kyung Wook Seo
- 5 Awarding body**
 Northumbria University
- 6 The visiting board**
- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Norman Wienand | academic / chair |
| Virginia Rammou | academic / vice chair |
| Carlos Sanchez | academic/practitioner |
| Daniel Goodricke | academic |
| Chris Boyle | co professional |
| Julian Manev | student |
| Sophie Bailey | RIBA validation manager |
- 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 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**
 On the 31 November 2018 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are awarded full validation
- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|
| Architecture BA (Hons) | Part 1 |
| Architecture M Arch | Part 2 |
- The next RIBA 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

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- 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

(Statement written by the school)

At Northumbria University we aim to develop graduates of architecture, with the skills, knowledge and attributes that are sought by both employers and society. Design creativity remains at the heart of our programmes, where our students learn to apply their learning and creativity to the rich social, cultural, aesthetic and theoretical opportunities that the North-East region offers. As staff we are advocates of constructivist and situated learning approaches, where we encourage and facilitate our students to develop their own motivations for learning and, where possible, expose them to real-life, authentic design problems. By engaging with current educational theories, we continue to develop learning partnerships with our students, reflecting the creative, collegial and supportive environments of best professional practice. Our studio culture seeks to promote peer-learning and assessment, coupled with a developmental approach that promotes autonomy and self-direction. As they progress through their education and their learning journey, their projects become increasingly complex, and attributes of self-direction, independent research, and professional development are rewarded. Given the fluid nature of the modern workplace, we believe that this degree of autonomy and choice enables our students to adapt flexibly to changing circumstances and to identify opportunities for entrepreneurship. Consequently, we believe our graduates leave the institution better prepared for the world of work, armed with the confidence to follow different careers paths if they so wish. This approach to architectural education has led to outstanding employment statistics, with Northumbria University having the second highest employment rates in the subject in the UK in 2018, with 95% of its graduates in employment. This statistic is even more impressive considering that the region has fewer than 30 graduate jobs annually in architecture, and with another school of architecture operating within a small city with a depressed local economy. Northumbria University is the first university in the UK to gain approval from the ARB to run a Part II Degree Apprenticeship, demonstrating the commitment to future employability of our graduates and employing authentic and situated learning.

Our theoretical position continues to be concerned with multivalent concepts of context, Critical Regionalism and Genius Loci. The North-East region is remarkably diverse and often beautiful; comprising over a hundred miles of coastline; new and ancient forests; and rare and significant geologies. Scattered across the region are important historic settlements, as well as worldly important religious buildings and defensive relics. The North-East continues to be known for its industrial activity and heritage; however, large swathes of the built environment

are in a state of dereliction as a result of the demise of industry. This has also resulted in significant social and economic issues with many communities left in poverty. Our approach to context therefore also centres on the importance of people and how architecture can be a force for social benefit. The contrasting landscapes and fortunes of the North-East provide the backdrop for our architectural projects, inspiring a strong theoretical position that informs both the design work and much of the staff research inquiry. We consider that the variety of locations offered by the North East provides extensive and rich opportunities for legitimate, poetic, imaginative and socially important design projects. Our ethos provides a deep grounding in the key considerations of locale, including the wider social, economic and environmental agendas, fundamental to enhancing and preserving a sense of place, towards the development of an applicable and relevant pedagogy of resistance against unreflective, and unrelenting, capitalist globalisation and the resulting loss of place and local identity.

We continue to use local sites for our student projects, often working in collaboration with local authorities and charities. This ease of access to sites and stakeholders (clients, architects, co-professionals) allows students to revisit and re-assess local environments, projects and briefs with minimal additional expense, thereby seeking to alleviate some of the issues of student debt and providing maximum opportunity for deep inquiry and positive engagement with wider communities. This core consideration of the multiple interpretations of context has led to numerous research and enterprise initiatives over the past four years. In conjunction with an increased drive towards research across the institution, this has led to the inquiry themes of 'authentic learning' and 'people and place' emerging as key fields of scholarship that can be linked back to our multivalent reading of context. We seek to make good on our ethos of architecture as a social and inclusive art, and believe this approach transfers successfully to other locales and regions.

We progressively seek to move students from being passively taught to facilitating active independent learning. We continue to use prescribed project briefs in the undergraduate course. As levels of complexity in typologies and sites increase, and the students become familiar with architectural design processes, we reduce the amount of scaffolding and expect postgraduate students to develop their own briefs, responding to both contextual influences and personal career interests. We also constructively align the academic modules to design projects as the students progress through the programmes so that they can see their learning as an integrated whole. In the Part II course, there is an initial period of socialisation, whereby students from other institutions can become familiar with Northumbria's expectations of learning and research. After this induction period, students are expected to view Part II tutors as co-creators of knowledge and design, rather than masters and connoisseurs of normative design studio teaching. The transferrable lessons of classical research methods, and engagement with wider notions of cultural context (beyond the history and theory of architectural design) inform many of the innovative practices employed by students. An example of this research-rich learning was the use of 'walking interview' methodologies in Tom Hewitt's 2017 Part II runner

up project for the RIBA Students Medals. This additional rigour in terms of inquiry, data collection and analysis, and the testing of alternative proposals results in our students developing a creative synthesis of academic skills and professional practice. As touched on above, authentic ‘live’ projects are increasingly becoming a principal pedagogic method and continue to underpin studio design processes, especially at Part II, engaging the students with creative re-use, public policy and co-professionals from the region and beyond. In recent years, our close relationships with charities, not-for-profit organisations, public agencies and services have resulted in numerous real-life projects, several of which have been ultimately realised. We are constantly developing models of authentic learning that do not undermine the work of local practices. Indeed, we seek where possible to work with architectural practices to ‘unlock’ projects where funding is contingent upon demonstrating the potential of sites, existing buildings, planning opportunities etc. As such, projects that are built or under construction, such as Humbledon Hill (a sustainable housing scheme in Sunderland), the Land of Oak and Iron Visitor Centre, and Izolyatsia Art Quarter in the Ukraine, continue to strengthen the positive impact of the department. We argue that the external opportunities outlined above can expand the students’ academic horizons and help build self-confidence and self-efficacy. They also give Northumbria students valuable employability skills that often expand and transcend more limited conceptions of the architect’s role in society.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The constructivist and situated learning pedagogical approach and the exceptional commitment of staff support, encourages students to develop their own motivation for learning.
- 11.2 The dedicated support of individualised progress throughout the duration of the students’ studies leads to a self-critical and concise body of work; as demonstrated in the exhibition provided for the RIBA Visiting Board.
- 11.3 The creativity and power of the live projects provides students with an advanced skill-set and improves graduate prospects.

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 The board recognises the exciting potential and value implicit in the transition into the newly refurbished and extended Sutherland Building. The school is to ensure the existing study culture, environment, community and student experience are maintained during the move.

12.2 The board recognises the integral role played by industry as part of a comprehensive teaching provision, and therefore recommends that all students in the programme benefit from exposure to current practice consistently and throughout the Part 1 course.

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 students' development process should be more explicit within the design portfolio, by means of sketching, physical modelling and use of precedents in order to synthesise an individual and original response to the brief.

13.2 In order to sustain high levels of student and staff satisfaction, the school should evaluate and manage the demands on academic staff with regards to distribution of teaching, research, pastoral care and administrative duties.

14 Delivery of academic position

The board commented that the position statement clearly illustrated the way in which the school frames the teaching and addresses critical regionalism and design creativity which is central to the school's ethos and identity.

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 and 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Architecture BA (Hons) and the Architecture M Arch.

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 and 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria and were met by graduates of the Architecture BA (Hons) Architecture M Arch.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

At the time of the 2018 RIBA visiting board:
190 in BA (Hons) Architecture
80 in the M.Arch (including 18 apprentices).

17.2 Documentation provided

The faculty provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

18 Notes of meetings

***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**