RIBA

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to Nottingham Trent University

School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment

Date of visiting board: 14/15 June 2018
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 19 October 2018

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1 **Details of institution hosting course/s**
Architecture, Design and the Built Environment
Nottingham Trent University
Arkwright Building
Goldsmith Street
Nottingham
NG1 4BU

2 **Head of Architecture**
Gavin Richards

Architecture Programme Manager
Guillermo Garma Montiel

3 **Courses offered for validation**
Bachelor of Architecture (Honours) BArch (Hons) Part 1
Master of Architecture MArch Part 2

4 **Programme Directors**
BArch (Hons) Architecture Part 1 – Dr Lois Woods
MArch Architecture – Dr Marta Pastor

5 **Awarding body**
Nottingham Trent University

6 **The visiting board**
Carl Meddings – Chair
Peter Williams – Vice chair
Gul Kacmaz Erk
Aleks Rizova
Charlie Follett – student / graduate

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**
On 19 October 2018 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of the following programmes:

Bachelor of Architecture with Honours BArch (Hons) Part 1
Master of Architecture MArch Part 2

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)
NTU's BArch and MArch courses aim to develop graduates who can undertake responsible design which creatively address social, cultural, historical, and technological considerations in the creation of meaningful buildings and spaces. NTU prepares architectural students who can integrate into the profession, by providing a broad understanding of the technologies and processes that define practice, and by cultivating a confident entrepreneurial spirit. The architecture courses are based in the Newton – Arkwright complex, which is located at the heart of Nottingham's City Campus. The institution's civic locus defines us as an urban university and infuses our courses with a civic focus. The city serves as a driver for architectural research, a generator of spatial explorations and the stage for many of our architectural projects. Our students develop an understanding of the relationship between the built environment, the city and diverse communities and cultures.

Our ETHOS embraces three key principles:

1. 'Responsible design'
2. 'Reflective making'
3. 'Access to practice'

Our pedagogic framework is constructed around the integration of strands of knowledge and skills; our students develop the ability to incorporate a combination of theoretical, technical and professional knowledge into their architectural output. The assimilation takes place in design studio through live and academic projects. We believe that these core principles encourage the integration of academic knowledge, reflective thinking and individual experience, coupled with practical skills to drive the design process; whilst allowing students to draw on the wealth of knowledge, ongoing research and the connections with local practice provided by our faculty. Furthermore, the student learning experience is enriched by the inclusion of NTU's key strategic drivers of personalisation of learning, internationalisation and professional skills.

1. ***RESPONSIBLE DESIGN*** *– Our students are exposed to the importance of the site and context in the design of projects. The founding notion is that the understanding of site is actively 'constructed' by the architect's comprehension and translation of the tangible and intangible characteristics of the surrounding context in which it sits. The active construction of the site emphasises the need for an architect to reflect, debate and theorise architecture within global and local contexts. Discussions about site/context and global/local embrace historical, political, social, technological and cultural factors. Therefore, our students develop a critical understanding and wide appreciation and respect for the values and needs of diverse communities and cultures.*

2. ***REFLECTIVE MAKING*** *– We focus our students' attention on the idea of reflective making as a design methodology underpinning the design process; the principle is developed through engagement with a variety of strategies and materials in the conception, evolution and definition of projects. Reflective making encourages students to synthesise the following: personal experiences, theory and research and practical 'hands on' skills in support of a reflective architectural decision-making process. It directs our students' architectural passions into designing well-considered, thoughtful buildings that also explore atmospheres, experiences and materiality, rather than adopting a particular architectural style. Our excellent studio facilities in the Arkwright building, and the workshops in Maudslay building, are the main vehicle for the delivery and achievement of our pedagogical goal.*

3. ***ACCESS TO PRACTICE*** *– Employability is central to our identity and one of the main threads of NTU's vision. In 2016, 82% of our students were in graduate level employment or further graduate studies within six months of graduation. Consequently, we foster in our students an awareness of the needs and expectations of clients, allied professionals, consultants, and other stakeholders within the construction and creative industries; aiming to develop graduates with an entrepreneurial spirit, professional skills and practice knowledge. In preparation for modern professional practice, and in line with NTU's professional skills and employability agenda, our courses offer a number of live projects and site visits that expose our students to real clients, engagement with local communities, development of briefs and interaction with consultants and professionals.*

    TEACHING, LEARNING AND PRACTICE *– Nottingham Trent University has a well-established learning and teaching philosophy. This is supported and developed by novel initiatives such as the Trent Institute for Learning and Teaching (TILT), which promotes the principles of participative, sustained and shared endeavour. Members of the architecture academic team have become involved with TILT, with the majority gaining HEA fellowships. As the team are continuously developing their teaching methods and skills, this fosters an active learning environment and contributes to a*

stimulating student learning experience through creative project, 1:2:1 exercises and study trips among other learning activities. We adopt a student-centric pedagogic approach based on meaningful dialogue between academics and students, which is characterised by an engaging, supportive and reflective attitude by the faculty team. We do not advocate a teacher centred and confrontational style of teaching. Rather, we aim to provide a safe, inclusive learning environment where students can be creative, by experimenting, testing, taking risks and developing architectural ideas through conversation, debate and design in seminars, tutorials and reviews. The student-centric approach has produced excellent results in the National Student Survey, where between 2014-16 we achieved consecutive scores of 94%, 94% and 96% in respect of overall satisfaction. Additionally, we have moved up in ranking significantly from 31st (2015) to 21st (2018) in The Guardian table and from 35th to 29th during the same time period in The Complete University Guide.

The three key principles that form our over-riding ethos are embedded within the pedagogic structure of our courses, combining directed, student-centred teaching and independent learning. To support the delivery of the key underlying aims within our ethos, four thematic strands provide the structure of our courses' curricula: 1. Design Studio (DS); 2. Context, History & Humanities (CH&H); 3. Technology & Environment (T&E); and 4. Professional knowledge/Communication skills (PkCs). DS is the core strand with the other three connecting with it at various points throughout the 5 years, increasingly integrating knowledge and skills into design projects. Furthermore, with reference to NTU's key strategic drivers, the BArch final year design project acts a synthesis, incorporating historical and theoretical research completed in CH&H and technical understanding and tectonic resolution in T&E. The project is located in a European city and students personalise their learning experience by selecting from a range of Design Ateliers and sites within the selected city. NTU sponsors the Part 1 and 2 European Study Trip and previous locations have included Barcelona, Berlin, Venice, Rotterdam and Milan. The MArch Year 2 Design Thesis project follows a similar pattern of integration, using the Study Trip for research and architectural inspiration.

It is through the PkCs and T&E strands that our students become accustomed to the challenges within the profession and the construction industry, as well as providing insights into the roles of its key stakeholders. In the BArch, academic knowledge is complemented by skills training in conventional CAD software, visualisation and 3D modelling. In the MArch, the Digital Design option module provides access to the Creative and Virtual Technologies Research Lab where students can learn the possibilities of parametric modelling. In both courses, we make extensive use of our workshop facilities. Our courses develop professional skills that allow students to understand, appreciate and respond to cultural and commercial values, statutory requirements

and the time constraints of design and construction reflected in the RIBA Plan of Work 2013.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN PART 1 AND PART 2 *– NTU's architecture courses were established and validated (BArch 2009; MArch 2015) within the last decade. We are continuously striving to advance the courses in line with ongoing evaluation, student feedback and changes in the profession and as such, the courses remain in a state of evolution towards the establishment of a distinctive identity. At undergraduate level, students are increasingly empowered to personalise their learning experience, becoming independent learners and defining a direction by selecting sites, briefs, essay options, representation techniques, etc. In the BArch, Year 1 explores and tests the basic components that shape architecture, while acquiring foundational historical and technological knowledge and basic professional skills. Year 2 investigates and analyses the ideas of site, context and place-making, subsequently locating architecture within an urban context and addressing the needs of a particular community. The increasing pedagogic decision-making in Year 2, prepares students to take control of their learning in final year. In Year 3, students select from a range of Design Ateliers, led by academics and practitioners. Students address the challenges of designing a civic building within an urban context, under an umbrella theme. The four thematic strands (DS, CH&H, T&E and PkCs) are linked to the final project, creating connectivity and a sense of shared purpose, also providing practice-based knowledge and developing competencies essential for employability and professional practice.*

At postgraduate level, students develop an advanced critical approach to architecture, using research to expand their architectural position and to acquire an understanding of current practice within a global context. The MArch students appreciate the opportunity to define and shape the identity of the course. The key differences at MArch level include the learning experience in the vertical studio; the role of research in design; the integration of technology in design; designing through analogue and digital techniques; and insights derived from professional practice. The vertical studio brings together the both year groups, enhancing the student experience by producing synergies and providing learning opportunities between students. The MArch Year 1 aims to produce experimental design propositions within urban contexts, which are controlled by strong design constraints and technological exploration; students discuss and investigate the notion of the city, being Nottingham, London or Berlin. In Year 2, the course offers an in-depth experience of design, and its technological realisation, by undertaking a large-scale project. The Design Thesis project explores key themes related to the city (Culture– 2018; Living– 2017; Working– 2016; and Production– 2015) and their technological resolution. A key aspect of Year 2 is the involvement of our Professoriate in delivering the Option modules, either Heritage & Conservation or Digital Design, which provides a

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combination of in-depth research, practice-oriented skills and cross-disciplinary knowledge.

RIBA CRITERIA INTERPRETATION – As Part 1 and 2 competencies are embodied in the same General Criteria, the expectations on both courses are defined by the higher level of learning described in the Graduate Attributes. Our ethos aims to highlight the importance of being responsible and reflective designers whilst providing them with the professional knowledge and skills to enable them access into practice. We support our undergraduate students in developing the position that creativity is a social and cultural responsibility with an important role to play in society at large. At Part 1, we emphasise the dependence of architectural design on multiple inter-related factors, disciplines and stakeholders. Through our teaching, we aim to articulate the responsibility of the architect to cross-fertilise information from a wide range of sources and respond to this in a creative, reflective and holistic manner in the production of architecture. At Part 2, our students are expected to develop a deeper critical and reflective approach to architecture, demonstrating independence, self-motivation and autonomy in the production of advanced architectural and technological design, dealing with contemporary themes in urban contexts.

11.   Commendations

The Board thanks the School for the well-organised visit. The Board commended the following:

11.1   Good relationship between staff and students. There is a collaborative and passionate staff team, including permanent academic staff, hourly-paid lecturers, technical support and administrative staff. The team is willing to listen and respond to various stakeholders, including students, employers, the University and external examiners.

11.2   The School benefits from exemplary facilities, particularly the materials workshops. It has built good connections with regional practices. This complements and enhances the depth and breadth of Professional Studies within Part 1 and Part 2.

11.3   The University's student-centric ethos. The Board noted the clear faith that the University has placed in the development of architecture at Nottingham Trent and the ongoing financial support. Institutional support is also demonstrated by the new framework for staff career pathways (teaching and research; teaching and scholarship; teaching and practice) and the clarity that this might bring to workload planning and the benefits for balance between research, teaching and administration.

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 School should explore ways to help students to develop a more conceptual and critical approach to architectural design. This aspect should be explored at all levels, from first year introduction to critical thinking through to final year at Part 2, in such a way that students are able to explore their own emerging critical position and intellectual ambition.

13.2   The School should develop a stronger cognitive alignment between theoretical studies and design projects, such that designs are more clearly informed by a theoretical, reflective and critical approach.

13.3   At Part 2, within the design studio, students should be encouraged to conduct a deeper analysis of context and explore the potential to generate architecture that is responsive to the site and the wider physical and social urban condition.

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 academic position statement clearly articulated the School's ethos in relation to responsible design, access to practice and, particularly reflective making. However, as this is a public document, there is an opportunity to express more clearly the School's intellectual ambition and critical approach.

14.2   There is potential for the College to more clearly support interdisciplinarity between subjects at all levels, from undergraduate through to staff research.

14.3   At Part 2 the course could challenge students to consider broader methods of investigation in developing and preparing personalised design project briefs to a degree that is commensurate with Master's-level enquiry.

14.4   Within the Professional Studies modules there is potential to explore and pioneer new and emerging forms of practice.

14.5   The School could find ways to make individual staff research activity more transparent to students and ways in which links between research and teaching practice can be developed, to mutual benefit.

14.6   As the size of the Part 2 course grows, the School could consider the extent to which student work is curated and find ways to encourage more diverse outputs.

14.7   In order to demonstrate depth and ambition in design projects, student portfolios would benefit from evidence of iterative design development processes.

14.8   In order to encourage design ambition, students could have more freedom to choose their dissertation theme/topic and explore the ways in which their research might underpin or link with the design projects.

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

15.2   MArch, Part 2
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 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
Bachelor of Architecture BArch Part 1 – 196

MArch Part 2 - 35

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**

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**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 the head of college
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff