
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to the Institute of Technology, Sligo**

Date of visiting board: 24 and 25 September 2018
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 13 February 2019

1 Details of institution hosting course/s
Yeats Academy of Arts, Design & Architecture
Institute of Technology, Sligo
Ash Lane
Sligo
F91 YW50
Ireland

2 Acting Head of School
Emmet O'Doherty

3 Courses offered for validation
BA (Hons) in Architectural Design (Part 1)

4 Architecture Programme Chair
Bernadette Donohoe

5 Awarding body
IT Sligo

6 The visiting board
Dr Jenny Russell (Chair)
Carol Norton (Vice Chair)
Dr Susannah Hagan
Stacey Smith
Professor Doug King

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:

BA (Hons) in Architectural Design (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

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- 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

The aim of Architecture at IT Sligo is to value the fundamental connection between people and architecture, from a phenomenological, physical and societal perspective. Through our progressive approach to architectural education we aim to empower students with a core belief in the genius loci of a region and a desire to make a positive difference. We value a strong student-centred and student-led culture and our ambition is to impress upon the students their role in contributing to society as a new generation of architects for this area and beyond. The programme now sits within the recently restructured Faculty of Engineering and Design, which brings the creative disciplines together into the new Yeats Academy of Arts, Design and Architecture (YAADA). Architecture at IT Sligo aims to encourage students to develop an understanding of and sensitivity to historical, contextual and cultural influences on the practice of design in a local, national, and global context. Just as music and poetry possess universality as well as an acutely personal sentiment, architecture provides another perspective into how we dwell, how we interact and how we seek meaning between ourselves and the world which surrounds us.

The Architecture programme is in the Faculty of Engineering and Design, within the Institute of Technology Sligo; situated on the north-west coast of Ireland, on the Atlantic edge of Europe. The region has traced one of the most enduring lines through the history of civilisation; an area rich in ancient lore, apparent in both the physical remains of human settlement, archaeological monuments and in the lineage of storytelling passed from one generation to the next. In this evocative landscape of ever-changing light and glacially sculpted topography, the lines between history and mythology are intertwined.

The spirit of this place has inspired creativity through the ages, notably in the works of Yeats family, whose writing and artworks are infused with the unique character of Sligo. The region's drawing power for creative thinkers is still evident from the influx of world renowned writers, artists, musicians, and designers who become both dwellers and participants in this region.

Our Architecture programme endeavours to continue this lineage of creative thinking through innovative architectural design, exploring concepts of our identity and our relationship with place. We embrace our role in the region as the educational centre supporting discourse and social engagement around the transformative role of architecture and exploring its relevance for future place-making,

facilitating active participation of the people of a place being vital to realising its potential.

Our philosophical approach to architecture centres on:
Interpretation of Place; Regionally Transformative Architecture; Architectural Regeneration of our Built Heritage; Human Experience and Perception of Space.

Interpretation of Place

We promote an architectural process that sets meticulous importance on the investigation and interpretation of geographical, historical, cultural and social context, one that addresses key issues of global importance such as memory, identity and sense of place; unveiling layers of the past, and uniting them with the complexities of the present to innovate for the future. This programme draws on the existing genius loci of the north-west of Ireland as an international hub of creativity, where projects are integrated into the local area from a social, environmental, historical, and cultural perspective.

Regionally Transformative Architecture

We believe in the possibility of architecture to transform places. This programme provides an educational foundation supporting discourse and social engagement on the transformative role of architecture and exploring its relevance for future place-making, facilitating active participation of people in realising the potential of their place. We seek to raise awareness of the transcendent possibilities of architecture beyond its physical relevance, interrogating concepts of creativity and identity, and resonating with current global issues aiming to stimulate both social engagement and dialogue around the identity and creative flux of the region at this time. We aim to continue to build on relationships with local and national practices and other architecture schools nationally and internationally.

Architectural Regeneration of our Built Heritage

We believe that architects must explore the possibilities of reusing, adapting and evolving the intrinsic qualities of a site and its built heritage. This programme places an emphasis on reading and evaluating the existing context and imprint of place, and the impact these decisions and interventions have on the regeneration of place, using principles of environmental, social and cultural sustainability.

Human Experience and Perception of Space

We believe that the nature of the interior experience is essential for the design of architecture. This programme focuses on the intimate dialogue between the user and the space they inhabit emphasising the layered relationships between the user, function, site and the spatial experience of architecture, strengthening the connection between inside and out.

An important aspect in the development of our programme has been the connection to industry and the community it serves. We have developed our ethos, structure, syllabus and delivery to ensure and enhance such links with the local practitioners. Our projects are live and collaborative where possible and address regionally relevant issues. We have included expert input from regionally based practitioners into the academic syllabus and developed a programme vision which is both inspired by the region and offers inspiration to those practicing here. The presence of our programme within this region contributes to, supports and strengthens a socially responsible design conscience, by linking education and economic growth, challenging ways of thinking, enriching dialogues and disseminating knowledge. Architecture at IT Sligo is entering an exciting phase of development and growth. Two recent significant developments are emerging due to internal and external alliances.

Internally, the repositioning of Architecture within the Faculty of Engineering and Design, situated now in the new Yeats Academy of Arts, Design and Architecture (YAADA), will enable a greater exchange with the creative disciplines through the use of shared physical and staff resources. The creative and innovative approach taken to architecture education at IT Sligo will be further enhanced by future opportunities for collaboration, cross-disciplinary teaching and research with Art and Design in addition to those that currently exist with Engineering and Construction. This educational context, where Architecture at IT Sligo benefits from both art and science will be a unique offer on the island of Ireland.

Externally, the development of the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) validated BArch over the next five years will provide a platform for the Architecture programme to benefit from the support and resources of the official registration body in Ireland. In order to grow Architecture at IT Sligo it is critical that the programme aligns with the procedures for prescription under the Building Control Act 2007, which the RIAI as the registration body direct. The proposed Bachelor of Architecture will therefore expand the Part One offer to include an equivalent Irish Part Two offer. This will provide an increased focus within the programme on the professional range of skills and the standard of performance attained by students graduating from a programme required for competent architectural practice, widening accessibility into architecture and the built environment professions.

The future of Architecture at IT Sligo holds a position amidst the creative milieu, as exemplified by the Yeatsian tradition, thereby elevating its international recognition and reach.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the academic position statement, which clearly articulates the specific standpoint of the programme. It provides an exciting focus through the five principles which are a source of enthusiasm for staff and students.

- 11.2 The Board commends the high degree of joyful exploration embodied in the first year.
- 11.3 The Board commends the adventurous shift in scale from micro to macro in year 3.
- 11.4 The Board commends the School's focus on broadening access to the profession, in terms of nationality, socio-economic background and most notably, age.
- 11.5 The Board commends the institution's commitment to the support of architecture and creative arts in the region through the creation of YAADA.

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 Board recognizes the additional maturity and capability that the fourth year imparts to the students. However, the final year project briefs should be considered in order provide greater opportunity for the students to explore their personal philosophical position as a thesis. Whilst the live projects are seen to be valuable, it may be that greater freedom of choice of brief and location could unlock some of this potential.

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 As the institution pursues Technical University status, the Board strongly advises that the School programme reviews its administrative structures to include programme handbook, module handbook, submission timetable and expand the assessment criteria to include clear grade descriptors that are specific to IT Sligo's programme, in order to improve the student experience.
- 14.2 The Board advises the Institute to provide additional staff resource to focus on developing a robust administrative framework that will allow the School to grow and progress.

- 14.3 While the Board commends the pursuit of hand-crafted techniques, there is place to allow digital techniques to support and enhance this practice. The Board strongly suggests that, in the interests of student employability, appropriate resource is given to support students in furthering their digital skills.
- 14.4 The Board strongly suggests that greater support is given to students in the visual communication of their work, both in terms of the academic and employment portfolios. Consideration should be given to the recording of all aspects of the design process.
- 14.5 The Board strongly advises that the institution ensures sufficient technical and environmental teaching support in design studio to enable the students to increase the sophistication of their design work.
- 14.6 The Board advises that the dissertation be taken as an opportunity to produce a more substantial piece of academic research which reflects the five principles in the academic position statement.
- 14.7 The Board strongly advises that the institution reconsider the current constraints on student access to the workshops.

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 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

Part 1: 80

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 the head of institution
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff