

Royal Institute of British Architects

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

Department of Architecture and Built Environment

Date of visiting board: 28/29 June 2018

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 19 October 2018

- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s**
 Department of Architecture and Built Environment
 The University of Nottingham
 University Park
 Nottingham, NG7 2RD
- 2 Head of Department**
 Robin Wilson
- 3 Courses offered for validation**
 Part 1 - Bachelor of Architecture with Honours in Architecture
 Part 1 - Master in Engineering with Honours in Architecture and Environmental Design
 Part 2 - MArch Architecture (ARB/RIBA Part 2)
 Part 2 - MArch Architecture with Collaborative Practice Research (ARB/RIBA Part 2)
 Part 3 - Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture
- 4 Programme Directors**
 David Short, BArch Part 1
 Jack Wu, MEng Part 1
 John Morgan, MArch Part 2
 Graeme Barker MArch Part 2 Collaborative Practice Research
 John Edmonds, PG Cert Part 3
- 5 Awarding body**
 The University of Nottingham
- 6 The visiting board**
 Professor Karim Hadjri – academic
 Andrew Wilson – academic
 Holly Rose Doron – practitioner/academic
 Femi Oresanya – practitioner/academic
 Oliver Hall – graduate 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**
 On 19 October 2018 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of the following programmes:

Part 1 - Bachelor of Architecture with Honours in Architecture
 Part 1 - Master in Engineering with Honours in Architecture and Environmental Design
 Part 2 - MArch Architecture (ARB/RIBA Part 2)
 Part 2 - MArch Architecture with Collaborative Practice Research (ARB/RIBA Part 2)

Part 3 - Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

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)

Our programmes are built upon an understanding of student journeys. They cater for the needs of different student cohorts as they progress through their education, as well as recognising and unlocking the individual's potential. We place value in diversity and our studio structures open up multiple pathways that students can navigate to tailor their education.

The core qualities at each stage of the Nottingham architectural offer may be summarised as conceptual creativity at Part 1, research and technical integration at Part 2 and collective reflection at Part 3. Our graduates leave with highly marketable skills, having benefitted from the freedom to develop their individual design ethos, within an environment that instils creative rigour to the art of spatial design. This unifying fusion of choice, rigour and creativity, shapes the distinct qualities of a Nottingham architecture graduate: confidence, excellent graphic and verbal communication skills underpinned by critical thinking, a solid foundation of technical ability and exceptional design skills. These qualities are valued by practice, supporting high levels of graduate employment. They are also highly transferrable and offer exciting opportunities for those pursuing alternative career pathways.

New entrants to our Part 1 programmes join a studio environment designed to ease school leavers into their new university setting. Studio units are formed of around 30 students comprising 'dens', selected to promote diversity within learning groups of 6. Each studio unit works together under the supervision of 2 tutors and final year students from our Part 2 programme. Supported by lecture series that introduce key humanities, technical and environmental themes, the curriculum develops drawing, modelling and design skills through a number of often playful exercises. Years 2 and 3 of the programme are delivered via 9 vertical studio units that energise peer-to-peer learning by offering mentor-mentee partnerships that bridge the year groups. The studios range from the highly conceptual, to concerns with urban, social and

sustainability issues, and include making, and computer-aided design options. This choice allows students to develop their talents and the approach taken to developing final year project briefs further tailors the syllabus to the interests of the individual. Brief making is informed by a process of rigorous investigation, an ability that, along with creative problem solving, represents key skills that make our Part 1 graduates distinctive in the eyes of practice. The quality of work generated by Part 1 finalists is reflected in recent RIBA Bronze commendation and medal winning projects, and the repeated success of graduates in securing year-out places in top national and international practices.

We have deliberately structured our Part 1 studios around the energy and talent of our practice-based studio Unit Heads. Working on part-time contracts, they provide strong role models to students, view teaching as an activity that enriches their practice work, and possess the experience necessary to support their students through the earliest stages of their architectural education. With the autonomy to decide upon the architectural direction of their studio offer to students, Unit Heads have the freedom to build their own teams with budgets to employ unit assistants, specialist tutors and reviewers to deliver a tailored studio programme.

Part 2 sees a sharpening of the offer to students with activity concentrated on a smaller number of research studios. Headed by full-time academics, in first semester these run vertically, focusing on the delivery of research, design and making skills across the year groups in studios comprising new starters and thesis students. Themed around urbanism, tectonics, adaptive reuse, and ecology, students again have choice and the freedom to follow their interests. Second semester sees a restructuring of the unit system with Year 1 students tackling a comprehensive design project in thematic units that are practitioner-led. Working on a shared brief for a complex mixed use project on real urban infill sites, design work is enriched through the integration of content delivered in environmental, tectonics and professional practice modules. Thesis students, having completed a major piece of research-informed writing in autumn, remain within their themed unit and are supported through complementary practitioner input in the development of their design proposals. The end product is a response to the research work that is a well resolved and mature piece of architecture providing proof of concept for their thesis. The advanced skills our graduates develop are evident in the interest from top practices who return annually to recruit from the programme and maintain its high levels of employability.

At Part 3, we provide our students with the knowledge to understand the context of practice and the skills to reflect critically on their experiences. The use of study groups provides further opportunities for peer-to-peer working and promotes a valuable process of collective reflection.

Specialist teaching that feeds into and enriches all of our studios is delivered by teams of experts from research and practice backgrounds. The Department's rich research base, which provides input from

leading centres of research excellence in architecture, history and theory, urban design, landscape design, and environmental engineering, feed environmental design and humanities delivery. Tectonics and professional practice teaching streams are delivered by academics with extensive practice experience, supported through contributions made by leading experts from practice and industry. The combination informs a dynamic curriculum that ensures students reap the benefits of cutting edge research and up to date practice activity.

Interleaved through the structure of our architectural offer are identifiable areas of strength that the Department is recognised for, and into which it is continuing to invest. Building upon its reputation for innovation in the areas of sustainable architecture and energy efficient building technologies, the MEng in Architecture and Environmental Design recognises the importance of the relationship between architect and engineer in the design process. It delivers graduates who have both a Part 1 recognised qualification and have met the educational requirements for recognition as a Chartered Engineer. Valued by employers within both disciplines for almost 15 years, the programme is being joined by similar offers from other institutions in what we view as a welcome indicator of the importance of this approach to the built environment sector. Our 10 years of experience in student design and build projects allow us to support a Part 1 studio that sees students fund raising to purchase construction materials and then travel to rural South Africa to realise the construction of a village crèche. The benefit of this powerful approach to teaching architecture is being strengthened and diversified through investment in staffing and development of a studio structure that links to a vertical making unit at Part 2. Collaboration with practice represents a further area of strength. Practitioner contributions from local, national and international practices permeate the development of programmes, delivery of teaching, injection of specialist expertise, review of work within studio, the examination process, and the custody of our students once they leave us. Most recently, this has seen the introduction of a new Part 2 programme that situates research activity within practice, developing a theme that is of mutual interest to student and employer. Supported by a full time academic, students are able to contextualise the taught content of Year 1 within the workings of their office. This approach strengthens the research capabilities of practice, allows students to earn while studying, and provides an effective support network to develop their interests prior to returning to campus for thesis year.

The programmes that we deliver are situated within a community of learning and practice that comprises passionate staff and talented students working within a well-resourced environment. We recognise the challenge that architectural education places on students and seek to alleviate this where we can. The provision of free site visits, architectural field trips, and model making materials continues to be a Nottingham offer that students value. In addition, we seek, where we can, to spend Department money in the local 'student economy'. Key examples include the opportunity for Part 2 students to earn while contributing to Part 1 teaching and the involvement of student ambassadors in the student recruitment process. On open days, our

students are our greatest recruitment asset, effectively communicating to potential applicants ‘what it is actually like’ to study at Nottingham and demonstrating the quality of work that the student body generates. The student society, Tongue & Groove, provides extracurricular offers to the student body that are social, as for example the Annual Ball, and skills building through workshops and presentations. Acting as the interface between staff and student bodies, this student society is instrumental in supporting the transition of the Department from a place of examination to one of celebration at the End of Year Show.

We are a caring Department that takes its responsibilities to its students seriously. We provide the opportunity for students to acquire the necessary intellectual agility, skills, competence and confidence in spatial conception, criticism and design, to pursue exciting careers in architecture and beyond. We view the opportunity students have to move between institutions for Part 2 study as valuable and equip our graduates to secure places and succeed within top Schools offering experiences that are very different from our own. In turn, we value the diverse experience that those joining us for Part 2 study bring with them. Finally, we seek to support a world of practice that is complex and diverse in terms of practice size and focus, as well as in the range of specialisms individual practices depend upon to thrive. We view creative rigour, which combines critical thinking and design, as a cross-cutting core skill that sets our graduates up to secure good jobs. We view the choice and freedom we offer our students to develop their strengths and interests as providing the means for them to succeed within their chosen vocation.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the Department for managing students’ transition into university effectively through a well-structured BArch Year 1.
- 11.2 The Board commends the technical rigour displayed across all programmes.
- 11.3 The Board commends the Department and the University for the level of care and attention given to student wellbeing.

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 Department should consider reviewing design briefs and workload in Year 3 of the BArch and final year of the MEng programme to allow for more spatial exploration in creative work, critical thinking and experimentation.

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 Department should consider reviewing the Year 3 unit framework briefing document to more clearly promote cross-module integration.
- 14.2 The Department should consider reviewing BArch Year 2 design work to improve clarity and consistency of aims and ambition.
- 14.3 The Board advises the Department to review the design studio connectivity between Years 2 and 3 of the MEng. In addition, the Board advises that the Integrated Design in Architecture module better reflects the identity of the MEng.
- 14.4 The Board advises the Department to expand the humanities at Year 5 of the MArch to inform thesis development.
- 14.5 The use of the SWOT analysis in the personal evaluation in the PG Cert (Part 3) is welcomed. A CPD plan for the first year post-Part 3 would be a useful addition.
- 14.6 The Board looks forward to seeing how the University will physically co-locate the Architecture department in one building.
- 14.7 The Board reminds the Department of the requirement under the RIBA Procedures for Validation that portfolios contain sufficient process work to allow the Board to understand design development.
- 14.8 As recommended in the RIBA Procedures for Validation, the student meeting should include representatives of all validated programmes. Additionally, external examiners from all validated programmes should be available.

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.

15.2 Part 2

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.

15.3 Part 3

The Board confirmed that all Part 3 professional criteria 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 1 415

Part 2 97

Part 3 42

17.2 Documentation provided

The Department 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