

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to De Montfort University**

**Date of visiting board: 17 & 18 November 2021
Confirmed by RIBA: 1 March 2022**

1 Details of institution hosting courses

School of Art, Design, Architecture
Faculty of Arts, Design and Humanities
DE MONTFORT UNIVERSITY
Vijay Patel Building
Leicester LE2 7BJ

2 Head of the School of Arts, Design and Architecture

Professor Kate Cheyne

3 Courses offered for validation

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture MArch, Part 2
PG Dip Architectural Practice, Part 3

4 Programme Leaders

Neil Stacey, BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Ben Cowd, MArch, Part 2
Jamileh Manoochehri, PG Dip Part 3
Tim Barwell, L7 Architect Apprenticeship, Parts 2 and 3

5 Awarding body

De Montfort University

6 The visiting board

James Soane, Chair
Prof Kevin Singh, Vice-chair
Peter Culley
Jennifer Harper

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance

7 Procedures and criteria for the online 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.

The procedures were adapted to allow the board to function remotely.

All requirements for documentation and portfolio samples were exactly as for a physical visiting board but viewed remotely.

All timetabled events took place as for a physical board but remotely.

8 Proposals of the visiting board

On 1 March 2022 the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following courses:

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture MArch, Part 2
PG Dip Architectural Practice, Part 3
L7 Architect Apprenticeship, Parts 2 and 3

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 of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

10 Academic position statement (written by the School)

De Montfort University (DMU) is a civic university embedded into Leicester City's social and physical infrastructures. It is a vibrant and ambitious institution, sharing its local understanding of place and people with our international partners, through its award winning #DMU Global initiative and TNE activities. It is the educational global lead for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UNDG) number 16 - supporting peace, justice and strong institutions and leading the #jointogether Partner Universities. Leicester School of Architecture's identity responds to these core ideas by being intensely local whilst globally connected, growing knowledge to reframe how we live in the world, with an eye on our environmental responsibility as citizens, and on ethical practice.

Cross-disciplinary Education

Leicester School of Architecture (LSA) was established in 1897, as part of an Arts College with Architecture taught alongside other building-related crafts and trades. This tradition of a collective understanding of 'learning through making' remains central to the School. LSA became part of a new School of Art, Design and Architecture (ADA) in 2019, sitting in a Faculty of Arts, Design and Humanities and exchanging ideas with the School of Fashion & Textiles and School of Humanities and Performing Arts. This allows us to build on our arts and crafts history by placing inter-disciplinary thinking and collaborations central to the School. We show how different disciplines can positively disrupt one another, revealing new ways of seeing, thinking and making.

Civic Engagement

Programmes in ADA span from architecture (Part 1,2, 3 and Level 7 Apprenticeship), architectural technology, surveying and interiors, across design crafts and design products and into photography, video and fine arts, with a nationally respected Arts and Design Foundation course as a pathway into these degree programmes. All courses are housed in the RIBA award-winning Vijay Patel Building, sited within Leicester City. Our public facing Leicester Gallery showcases the work of students and staff to our wider community of Leicester, alongside international recognized artists and designers. This physically underpins our ethos of being a civic School of Art, Design & Architecture embedded in society, and ensures architecture students arrive with an understanding of the importance of designing for place and people.

Tradition of Making

The Vijay Patel building was designed with state-of-the-art workshops, offering cutting-edge digital fabrication facilities alongside a wide range of specialised craft workshops, where students can learn, experiment and innovate with materials and processes, alongside students from other disciplines. Embedded into the act of making is the need to understand material cultures and circular economies through ethical choice of materials and reduction in waste. It is a dynamic and multidisciplinary environment that supports one of the School's tenets that the exploratory process of making the work is as important as the final piece. Students are encouraged to design through experimenting and testing ideas with drawing and making as well as writing, reading and discussion. The facilities support our strong tradition of excellence in teaching (TEF Gold) underpinned by world-class research and strong industry links in the professional fields of architecture, construction, urban design and environmental design.

Local Impact

Our LSA community is seen as a place where academics, practitioners and students are co-designing new ways of thinking and meaningfully challenging conventions to redefine the future of practice. In architecture, our academic body includes a substantial number part time lecturers who teach alongside practice. They represent the regional creative community so that we can work closely with local stakeholders such as Leicester City Council (Heritage Action Zone), LCC Planning Department (Urban Observatory & future Urban Room), the National Forest (Live Projects), LCB Depot (Design Season), RIBA East Midlands (Education Forum), UKNewArtists (Leicester Takeover), Leicester and Rutland Society of Architects (Love Architecture) and #DMU Local (a university volunteering programme) to evolve briefs with a long lifespan that are relevant to our region and showcase the work widely through public facing exhibitions and talks. This allows us to design courses that prepare our students for the changing nature of the profession and its responsibilities and teach them to be bold and fearless in creatively exploring their ideas.

Global Application

LSA delivers an advanced enquiry-led education, designed to prepare and challenge students to take a personal and critical position in the globalised architectural world. We have an international academic community with 50% of our substantive posts being transnational, bringing a global perspective to architectural education. We support students to engage with the world through our #DMU Global project, subsidising students to attend global study trips. These have included studio field trips to Berlin, Dubai, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Ahmedabad, with many being active learning opportunities embedded into studio briefs. In 2021, De Montfort University announced the commencement of graduate and undergraduate programmes in its new Dubai Campus, which coincides with participating in the Dubai Expo, where our M.Arch students are showcasing work, responding to Spatial Justice and the UN Human Rights agenda. This will support our growing Trans National Educational opportunities out in China, Sri Lanka, Jordan, Thailand and Malaysia.

Research-led teaching

Our research at DMU is underpinned by the aspiration to better understand and improve social justice. The way the built environment is designed and managed shapes the distribution of resources, the efficiency of their use and

the long-term sustainability of the communities that depend on them. LSA therefore explores social and spatial histories and proposes innovative, sustainable architectural solutions to contemporary environmental challenges in order to create a just and equitable society with a more even distribution of resources. Both academic and practice-based research are folded into our teaching through offering design studio briefs that respond to our academic community's depth of knowledge within the discipline; and our M.Arch studios are seen as studio laboratories where students, academics and practitioners evolve knowledge together.

Diverse

We have a diverse student body, reflecting the multicultural nature of Leicester, as well as a significant community of international students. Decolonising the curriculum, alongside embedding sustainability and UN SDGs, is part of our commitment to ensure future architects reflect the UK's culturally diverse society and bring an inclusive and nuanced response to all of society's needs when responding to the climate crisis we are living in.

Ethical

Students are supported by tutors that are leaders from industry, practice and research. Learning is extended throughout our lives, and our community is seen as a place where academics, practitioners and students are co-designing new ways of thinking while maintaining the highest standards in terms of ethics and integrity. Staff experience and knowledge combined with the students' openness allow us to challenge existing conventions, redefining our subject, as we teach students to discover that architecture is not only about a building but a vehicle for living, plugged into wider ecologies and social networks. LSA believes that the need to develop an ethical construction industry is central to the future of architectural practice. As the industry shifts away from large carbon emissions, poor quality construction, excessive construction waste and unsafe working practices, LSA is leading in tackling the Climate Emergency and the need for Spatial Justice for all. Students' projects reflect our ethos of the work needing to be relevant to contemporary issues, addressing social and cultural conditions whilst also being visually and aesthetically mature and critically engaging.

11 Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the School's openness and willingness to evolve its culture from the leadership team, staff body, students and external examiners to deliver the academic vision.
- 11.2 Despite the constraints of the recent pandemic, the activities available to all students was impressive. The University and School has given excellent support to staff and students throughout this period and is a reflection of the approach to supporting the whole community. This was reinforced by the positive student comments.

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 academic position statement is contemporary and enticing. The Board encourages the School to strengthen the connection between the recently developed powerful vision for the School and the delivery through teaching, research and design. This includes ideas around ethical practice, social and spatial justice and how to connect with the climate crisis. The engagement of staff with specific skills, interests and experience is key to the delivery of these stated values.
- 13.2 The Board notes that while the School has embedded the teaching of technical principles in the programme, it remains important to critically frame technology as an ethos as well as building science integrated in a cohesive and holistic manner. There is the chance to radically reposition the agenda with respect to aligning with the vision.
- 13.3 The School has identified it has access to world class research within the University and school-based research by design/practice. This should be strategically harnessed to greater inform the studio and humanities teaching and in particular the studio themes as well as the dissertation topics.
- 13.4 Whilst it is clear that ethical practice is an emerging discussion at all levels within the School, the Board considers it is necessary to synthesise the worlds of theory, research and practice to develop a more critical understanding of the agency of the architect and the value architectural design skills can bring to the built environment and society.

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 School is strongly advised to work closely with the student body to evolve a collaborative attitude towards their working relationship with the staff. A more independent and challenging student body would be of great benefit to the School. Peer to Peer learning is a potential strength of the School that the Board advises the faculty to ensure is nurtured and encouraged via more formal mechanisms. A proactive student society would also be a positive addition.
- 14.2 While the Board notes the exploration of block teaching and some of the benefits this could bring to the student experience, the School will need to be careful to maintain continuity of teaching and learning strands that cross the year. We advise the University to liaise closely with the School to ensure any changes do not compromise connectivity across all areas of the PSRB curriculum.
- 14.3 The aspiration to decolonise the curriculum is appreciated although it has yet to fully inform the current programme. The Board sees the history and theory teaching as an opportunity to support the vision and offer a forward looking critical pathway. The School may also wish to take the opportunity to review the length of the written submissions at both levels.

- 14.4 The School is advised to ensure that they communicate the vision and pedagogical aims of the School with students which, by definition means that all areas of the curriculum are equally valued.
- 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 - BA (Hons) Architecture**
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.
- 15.2 Part 2 Master of Architecture, MArch**
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.
- 15.3 Part 3 PG Dip Architectural Practice,**
The Board confirmed that all Part 3 professional criteria were met.
- 15.4 L7 Architect Apprenticeship, Parts 2 and 3**
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes and 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**
500 (across Parts 1, 2 and 3)
- 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.**
- 18.1 Architecture head and course leaders
 - 18.2 Students
 - 18.3 Head of Institution
 - 18.4 External and professional examiners
 - 18.5 Staff