

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Belgrade

Date of visiting board: 2 & 3 December 2021
Confirmed by RIBA: 1 March 2022

1 Details of institution hosting courses

University of Belgrade
Bulevar kralja Aleksandra 73/II, office 238
11000 Belgrade
Serbia

2.1 Head of the School

Prof. Vladimir Lojanica

2.2 Head of Department

Department of Architecture - prof. Vesna Cagić-Milošević
Department of Urbanism - prof. Aleksandra Stupar
Department of Architectural Technologies - prof. Budimir Sudimac

3 Courses offered for validation

Bachelor of Architecture, 3 years full time, Part 1
Master of Architecture, 2 years full time, Part 2

4 Study Programme Directors

Bachelor of architecture Study Programme Director: Dr. Milena Kordić,
Assistant Professor
Master of Architecture Study Programme Director: Dr. Jelena Živković

5 Awarding body

University of Belgrade

6 The visiting board

Professor Alex Wright - Chair
Anthony Petrilli – Vice Chair
Lucia Medina
Branislav Hetzel – regional representative

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.

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:

Bachelor of Architecture, 3 years full time, Part 1
Master of Architecture, 2 years full time, Part 2

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)

BELGRADE – LOCAL AND GLOBAL OUTLOOK: With over 170 years of tradition, the University of Belgrade - Faculty of Architecture (UB-FA) has been the focal point of development, promotion and dissemination of architectural knowledge in the region. The city of Belgrade, in addition to being a vibrant and continually changing capital of the country, is an important node in Southeast Europe and provides a rich contextual framework for teaching and learning through different spatial scales and typologies. Observatory cases engaged within the Design studio environment include: 1) local spatial frameworks through three Belgrade identities (Old Belgrade as a historical city, New Belgrade as a modernist city, and Third Belgrade as a rising city), 2) series of medium and small-scales cities in Serbia and region enhanced by cooperation with local municipalities, as well as 3) international environments including international competition briefs and initiatives. Graduates are thus prepared equally for professional practice in the region, as well as for other parts of the world. The education they receive at the UB-FA provides them with either an excellent foundation for further education abroad or the launching pad for a successful career all over the world.

INTEGRATED EDUCATION: A distinctive feature of the Study Programme at the UB-FA is based on the integrated approach to education, emphasising at the same time identity and distinctive qualities of each of the three departments: Architecture, Urbanism and Architectural Technologies. The Study Programmes are comprised of technical and technological sciences, arts and humanities, and social sciences, with perspective to develop sound professional knowledge, and the capacity to innovatively engage with current problems of the society.

The Department of Architecture is oriented toward developing an understanding of the spatial organisation for contemporary life. It nurtures students' ability to create architectural projects of diverse scales and complexities in both urban and rural environments. Instruction at the Bachelor's level is based on the use of both digital and analogue media, with particular emphasis on the use of physical architectural models. Typical design briefs at this level aim to establish knowledge of basic architectural typologies through an understanding of the needs and aspirations of their users. The educational programme at the Master's level deepens a reflective and critical approach to architectural design. Typical design briefs at this level are strongly related to contemporary architectural theory and include environmental, social, cultural and economic aspects.

The Department of Urbanism provides knowledge of the relationship between people and the built environment. It aims to understand contemporary cities and settlements better and comprehend their plan and design within present-day societies. A particular aspect of the education provided by the Department of Urbanism is related to sustainable communities, the problem of urban regeneration, and sustainable and resilient development in general. While general education at the Master level aims to help students develop an integrated problem-based approach to a wide range of current architectural and urban planning practices, the Urbanism module additionally provides them specific knowledge and skills that originate from considering broader and deeper natural and socio-spatial contexts, frameworks, structures, and processes.

The Department of Architectural Technologies provides knowledge of structural principles, design techniques, construction methods and building technologies. Its objective is to help students understand the design process, beginning with conceptualization and leading towards procurement and realization of architectural projects. At the Bachelor's level, the learning process is oriented towards basic comprehension of structural principles and building materials. Instruction at the Master's level is oriented towards understanding the growing influence of technology on the contemporary building industry. Students are encouraged to have a creative and experimental approach to understand building material properties and construction methods better. Strong emphasis is placed on energy efficiency and its early integration in the overall design strategy.

FROM FUNDAMENTALS TO EXPERIMENTATION: The distinction between the aims and outcomes of the Bachelor and the Master level is the degree of curriculum complexity. At the Bachelor level, emphasis is on understanding the complexity of architecture both as a phenomenon and as a discipline, tools and skills required to work in architecture, the general knowledge of architectural typologies and basic understanding of building materials, construction methods, procurement routes, planning and building regulations. Typical design briefs at this level include studying different housing models and other complementary uses in the built environment familiar to students. At the Master level, the emphasis is on research mechanisms, development of critical thinking and creative application of knowledge acquired in previous courses. Students are encouraged to conduct research according to personal interests and advance their knowledge of building materials, structural principles, construction methods and technologies. Typical design briefs at this level are more challenging and include programmatic and contextual complexities.

LEARNING BY DESIGN: The teaching and learning process at the UB-FA is structured around the Design Studio culture. Design-based curriculums, increasing yearly in complexity and scale, comprise the majority of the Study Programme. Through practical experience and a project-based learning system linked with a wide variety of theoretical and research-oriented courses, students are prepared for contemporary professional practice. The Study Programme is delivered by a pool of teachers with backgrounds in both practice and research to ensure the balance between theoretical and practical aspects of education. At the same time, the UB-FA

actively participates in scientific research projects and strategic partnerships, which enable the faculty to provide the continuous opportunity for new knowledge introduced and offered within study programmes.

ELECTIVITY: The Study Programme at the Faculty of Architecture allows the student to come up with individual course selection, thus tailoring the education to their particular needs. All three departments offer a number of elective courses, open to all students. The number of electives increases and diversifies throughout the Study Programme. At the Bachelor level, the choice is very limited, while at the Master level, students are given greater freedom and the opportunity to decide. They are encouraged to attend electives from all Departments and explore specific areas according to individual interests and aspirations. The topics offered through electives range from theoretical discourses, applied and performing arts-related themes to those related to a better understanding of the design methodologies, urban morphologies and strategies, and building technologies.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND DISSEMINATION: UB-FA Research Center (CID) provides a strategic platform for linking teaching and research with a strong focus on developing a wide range of extracurricular activities, as well as future strategic partnership establishment. During each academic year, students are given the opportunity to engage in activities such as workshops, exhibitions and competitions that are realized in cooperation with external partners and connect with different types of events, thus opening up to a broader audience. In this context, UB-FA has two dissemination pillars - the AF Files yearbook and the annual Architecture Week event, in which students, their initiatives and results play a central role.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES: Future perspectives and development strategies are reflected in establishing active communication and partnership with the public and broader professional sector in order to create capacity for joint action through: 1) developing alumni network, 2) cooperation in the implementation of public policies, strategic programs and projects, 3) cooperation with SANU – Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, 3) support of education and employment of specific profiles of architects – practical trainings, scholarships, 4) development of regulatory instruments in the field of education and profession of architecture, 5) cooperation on the institutionalization of the Chamber of Architects, 6) initiation of the National Architectural Center of Excellence), 7) initiation of the Regional Platform for Architecture.

11 Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the School on the breadth and range of the taught curriculum it offers across both Parts 1 and 2, and on the ambition and excellence demonstrated in the thesis projects.
- 11.2 The Board commends the School for the dedication of its staff and for fostering a culture of excellence within the student body in both Parts 1 and 2.
- 11.3 The Board commends the School for the agility demonstrated in responding to the Covid pandemic and its success in maintaining the delivery of high-quality programmes throughout this period.

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 consider the new RIBA 'Themes and Values' document and meet the requirements for implementation when these are confirmed. The School should begin to address the new RIBA 'Themes and Values' in considering possible improvements to the programmes during the period of validation.

13.2 Architectural education in all aspects is currently having to respond to the climate and biodiversity crises. All schools are having to reassess their current courses with respect to the rapidly changing professional environment in which carbon literacy and low carbon design are likely to become essential attributes of any professional in architectural practice. The requirements of GC 5.2 and GC 9.2 should now be seen within the context of the climate crisis. We suggest the School reviews the content and delivery of its mandatory courses with respect to sustainable design, to ensure all its students at Parts 1 and 2 demonstrate appropriate awareness, knowledge and ability in this area, through their thesis projects and associated units.

13.3 The School should ensure the planned provision of additional workshop equipment in 2022-23 is delivered. A stated strength of the programmes is the use of physical models. Laser cutting, rapid prototyping and CNC cutting would improve the facilities available to students and offer scope for developing the role of physical models within the design units. It appears likely demand for this equipment will be considerable and the school should consider how access will be managed with respect to the various year groups. In addition, the School should continue to ensure adequate space is available to allow for model assembly by students and to provide storage for models which the students could exploit.

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 There is evidence of excellence in many aspects of the thesis work which is to be admired. However in both Parts 1 and 2 within the work sampled their appeared to be a relative lack of detailed enquiry and resolution with respect to structure, construction and technology. Extending the demonstration of the intellectual thread of these thesis projects though the urban and building scales and into detailed design should allow students to demonstrate the integration of prior learning within the context of their final design project.

- 14.2 The Board appreciates that following the last validation visit, progress has been made regarding collaboration and cooperation between departments. We suggest efforts to enhance the productive collaboration and cooperation between departments are maintained, in order to fully exploit the potential benefits for staff and students.
- 14.3 The Board suggests the school reviews the support provided to students in acquiring required software skills and how such support may be improved and made more consistent in first year.
- 14.4 The Board suggests the School reviews the number and form of assessment points in the Part 1 programme. We understand recent changes have reduced the assessment burden on students and staff but, relative to other validated schools, the assessment burden within the Part 1 course appears relatively high.
- 14.5 The Board suggests the School considers allowing some form of suitable re-assessment of failed units in year 1. We suggest that in some cases allowing for supplementary assessment in specified circumstances, may be more beneficial than requiring a student to repeat the first year. We suggest the School monitors the proportion of students resitting the final year in the Part 1, in order to evaluate whether any action could be usefully taken by the School to improve progression.
- 14.6 The Board suggests the School reviews the provision of personal, mental and emotional well-being support for students, and considers if additional support is required.
- 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 by graduates of the Bachelor programme.
- 15.2 Part 2**
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Master's programme.
- 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 Part 1:	821
Master of Architecture Part 2:	331

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 Dean of Architecture
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff