

Report of the RIBA visiting board to Loughborough University

Date of visiting board: 24 & 25 June 2021
Confirmed by RIBA Board: 17 November 2021

1 Details of institution hosting courses

lu – arc
School of Architecture, Building and Civil Engineering
Loughborough University
Loughborough, LE11 3TU

2 Programme Director (BArch) Architecture & LU-ARC Group Lead

Dr Robert Schmidt III

3 Courses offered for validation

Bachelor of Architecture, BArch

4 Awarding body

Loughborough University

5 The visiting board

Dr Jenny Russell (Chair)
Prof Doug King (Vice-Chair)
Anthony Petrilli
Daniel Goodricke

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA validation manager – in attendance

6 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.

7 Proposals of the visiting board

At its meeting on 17 November 2021, the RIBA Board confirmed that the following course receive validation for Part 1:

Bachelor of Architecture, BArch (Hons) – Part 1

The next full visiting board should take place in 2026.

8 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

9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

As architects, it might serve to conceive our education more as a cultural immersion than simply dry academic training. It is therefore uppermost in our minds to nurture an environment that is challenging and exciting, one that is artistically stimulating, culturally aware and technically demanding. We believe that architectural education should excite students with the possibilities of what they can achieve - it should drive curiosity of the unknown and propel a raw enthusiasm and inquisitiveness for life, art and the built as well as the natural environments. Students should enjoy their studies and increasingly take ownership of their education as part of their personal journey.

At LU-Arc (Loughborough Architecture) we have set ourselves a high standard whilst understanding that this cannot be achieved overnight. Over the course of four years, we have built on our successes and learnt from our misadventures; we have brought together an inclusive and diverse team of exceptional educators, practitioners, researchers and most importantly students, all of whom share a passion for architectural education. It is not enough simply to be purveyors of expert knowledge: a high quality educational experience requires alternative pedagogies that are blended, interactive, adaptive and diversified. Design work should foster imagination, creativity, and design intuition underpinned by knowledge bases and critical abilities that directly connect to contemporary social, political, environmental and economic issues.

At LU-Arc, we have cultivated a unique design eco-system of actors and opportunities that transitions learning beyond the studio, activates our surrounding built environment as a living lab, and enables our School (staff and students) to play an active role in establishing a high quality and more sustainable built environment. We have begun to write our story: the unification of our five objectives below is what we collectively strive for through the architect-maker ethos. This position embraces the architect's role as a collaborative design-leader who is not only capable but also motivated to re-negotiate the processes of design, construction and use within and as communities, thereby becoming better able to serve and even anticipate societal needs.

1 An active design focused culture

The allocation of dedicated, customisable studio space throughout the educational journey and the support of world-class labs/workshop spaces provides a strong foundation for our programme to stand apart and facilitate an inspirational and collaborative environment that stimulates the

imagination, creativity, intellectual curiosity and critical thinking that is essential in a successful architect. The inclusive studio environment is at the centre of the students' education and discovery of their own design process through a heuristic approach: sketching, drawing, modelling, researching, writing, debating, sharing and critiquing. We ensure our studio culture is engaging and capable of differentiation, affording the greatest opportunity of personal growth and ultimately independence in design and learning. The open plan studio environments with all furniture on castors, adjacent computer labs, smart boards and writable, magnetic surfaces allow students to 'own' the space and appropriate it to their design needs. This vibrant, design focused culture has fostered the growth of a student architecture society, a summer school, a book club, student competitions, extracurricular trips and peer-to-peer mentoring (see Appendix A, LU-Arc diagram).

2 Learning through making

Our course embraces the University's tradition of learning through making, where students benefit from over 3,000sqm of lab and workshop facilities including new resources specific to the BArch. Studio and module teaching are designed to take advantage of the continually evolving facilities by providing learning experiences that cultivate an acute understanding of materials, their properties, technical capabilities and associated construction processes which inform the craft of architecture. Traditional workshop spaces enable the exploration of design ideas through hands-on construction of physical objects. The Digital Fabrication Lab (DFL), Mixed Reality and Robotic Research Lab (MR3 L) and STEM Lab allow students to push the boundaries of design and making. The assembly space, full of workbenches and hand tools, benefits from a double-height, open plan space for model making and large-scale mock-ups. The Archi-quad, a large green space adjacent to the studios, has already hosted multiple installations and remains ripe for full size prototypes and pavilions to engage the broader student population and local community.

3 Broad based & integrated education

The creation of our built environment cuts across several disciplines as collectively we co-produce our surroundings. Our goal as a course, then, is to educate our students in a learning environment that reflects this complexity and interdisciplinary reality. Students are required to consider architecture within broader cultural, environmental and historic contexts, involving the cross-fertilization of the broader curricula of our School and the School of Design and Creative Arts. These provide opportunities to explore knowledge, technologies, skills and attitudes that contribute to the broad anatomy of architecture. Our integrated School thread traverses the undergraduate journey as a series of focused weeks that challenge our students to work collaboratively as part of an interdisciplinary team in response to real-world, 'live' problem-based scenarios that ask them to plan, design, construct and manage a part of our built environment. This integrated approach offers our students the opportunity to learn directly from a range of Environmental Engineers and Construction experts increasing their knowledge and application of climate literacy and building safety.

4 Practice integration

The broader School's educational alignment with industry chimes well with our fundamental belief that architectural education benefits from a strong practice connection. The educational pathway that we have laid out looks to increase the interactivity and visibility between theory and practice. We feel this is key to the production of graduates who are better connected and equipped to contribute to their chosen profession. As such, students undertake an earlier, integrated placement year following the completion of the second year of study. During the year they are connected to University through workshops, tutor visits and coursework to earn a Diploma in Professional Studies (DPS). This integrated year in turn enhances the final year experience where students can choose a unique design lab that integrates academic and practitioner delivery through a joint design and research agenda. Further practice integration occurs throughout the course with guest lectures, site visits, design reviews, mentoring schemes and placement events. This is supported through the continual development of a diverse network of practice collaborators (see Appendix B).

5 High quality learning experience

Architecture is a resource-heavy education; however, the boutique nature of our degree is focused on nurturing a high-quality learning experience that exploits the University's proven strengths, our world-leading research and global network of opportunities. Excellence starts with key underlying aspects in the progressive structure of the course with small cohorts, year-long modules and a sandwich model, and the fluid environment with dedicated desks in studio, labs, a large green campus and community and practitioner involvement. These are amplified through a growing list of study and work opportunities nationally and abroad. The wealth of world-leading research within our School has already had a profound influence as students are introduced at an early stage to techniques for robust research and exploration as a basis for evidence-based design. Moreover, understanding how design translates into real architecture is crucial: 'live' projects, deployed here as a form of hands-on research, require students to make connections and identify gaps between briefing, visualisation and assembling. This is further underlined through cross-disciplinary, collaborative studios that engage real sites, communities and University estate needs.

Architects are asked to translate the complex needs of others into three-dimensional solutions – and indeed four-dimensional solutions if we accept, as we must, our obligations to the future. Put simply, architects must respect the world while imagining a world that does not yet exist. It is here, in this global cultural immersion, that we are inculcated with the important skills of asking the right questions and pursuing the right solutions, of outlining and redefining just what it is that great architecture might deliver for the benefit of society. We expect our graduates to have the courage and confidence to become leaders wherever their careers take them – we would be disappointed if they did not. We look to continue to build a strong reputation through the quality of the course and its

teaching, the dedication and expertise of our staff, and most importantly the quality of the graduates we produce.

10 Commendations

- 10.1 The Board commends the School's comprehensive preparations and arrangements for the visit of the RIBA visiting board.
- 10.2 The Board commends the institution's support of and investment in the development of the architecture programme, both in staff cohort and physical facilities, including dedicated studio space.
- 10.3 The Board commends the collegiality amongst staff and students in the co-production of knowledge through scholarship and research.
- 10.4 The Board commends the School for the very clear structure and progression of the BArch programme through the themes of identity, community, practice and diversity.

11 Conditions

There are no conditions.

12 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.

- 12.1 The School should ensure clarity in their communications with students that assessment is on the basis of learning outcomes and not simply on production. Creativity and innovation involve exploration and students can succeed outside a didactic framework for project delivery.
- 12.2 The staff and student community should jointly develop a manifesto for good studio practice, contact hours and deadlines in order to achieve a healthy and sustainable work- life balance for all.

13 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.

- 13.1 The School should continue to build upon the strengths of its interdisciplinary nature, helping both architecture and engineering students to make meaningful connections between the contributions of the various disciplines.
- 13.2 The Board strongly advises that studio briefs and assessments recognise the holistic nature of the design process, encouraging students to

investigate the poetic, technical and theoretical as equivalent generators for design.

- 13.3 The Board advises that the rigorous testing of spatial experience be evidenced within the design work.
- 13.4 The School should consider capping the length of the portfolios, to encourage and teach the discipline of editorship in order to emphasis values of quality over quantity.
- 13.5 The Board encourages the School to further enrich the programme with a wider range of lectures and study trips to expose the students to a greater diversity of pedagogy, culture, place and forms of practice.
- 13.6 The Board advises the School to collate a library of exemplars to demonstrate to students success at various levels.

14 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.

14.1 Part 1

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the BArch (Hons) programme.

15 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.

- 15.1 The Board made no further comments.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers BArch

190

16.2 Documentation provided

The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

17 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