

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to
Sheffield Hallam University**

**Date of visiting Board: 25/26 November 2021
RIBA confirmed: 22 April 2022**

- 1 **Details of institution hosting course/s**
Sheffield Hallam University
The Department of the Natural and Built Environment
City Campus
Howard Street
Sheffield
S1 1WB

- 2 **Head of Department of Natural and Built Environment**
Dr Luke Desforges

Head of Architecture
Andrew Wilson

Deputy Head of Architecture
Paul King

- 3 **Course/s offered for revalidation**
BSc (Hons) Architecture **Part 1**
MArch Architecture **Part 2**

- 4 **Course leader/s**
Oli Cunningham: BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Dr Sam Vardy: MArch (Part 2)/ L7 Architect Apprenticeship, Part 2 & 3

- 5 **Awarding body**
Sheffield Hallam University

- 6 **The visiting Board**
Professor Bob Brown - Chair-academic
Abi Van Hoorebeek - practitioner/academic
Holly Rose Doron - practitioner/academic
Christina Godiksen - academic
Jayesha Fernando - RIBA 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 22 April 2022 the RIBA confirmed unconditional revalidation of the following courses and qualifications:

BSc (Hons) Architecture (RIBA Part 1)
Master of Architecture, MArch (RIBA Part 2)/L7 Architect Apprenticeship

The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2026

- 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 (Statement written by the School)

Welcome to the Sheffield Hallam University School of Architecture. Our unique School is a pioneer in the field of environmental architecture and technology with a strong ethical base and societal purpose. Our School declares a climate emergency. Environmental issues of climate change were the basis of the School foundations 20 years ago. These issues are as prevalent today but bring an even greater cause for action. We see it as our moral duty to educate for sustainable practice, both within the School and through external engagement. We take a positive stance, believing architecture can be instrumental in tackling climate change and creating healthy, sustainable and civil human habitats. Our teaching and Research are informed by, and actively explore, the significant technical, social and educational challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

We are an inclusive and diverse community. We promote architecture as an accessible profession, open to many from all backgrounds and our approach is embedded in the Sheffield Hallam University ambition to transform lives through education and opportunity. We are a welcoming and plural school, valuing the importance of a variety of approaches to architecture and the potential of the individual. We are described as hard-working, gritty and committed to our environmental and social ethos and to the success of each and every one of our students. We attract students locally, regionally, nationally and internationally from a wide variety of academic routes and prior experiences. We provide interviews for all applicants and base offers on personal attributes and attitudes, as much as on predicted or prior academic performance.

We engage locally and think globally. Many of the projects our students undertake explore and engage with the city of Sheffield and the wider region. Our interest in places, people and cultures also extends further afield, to UK cities and Europe through field trips, Research, diverse case studies and guest speakers. We are committed to low-carbon travel. Taking inspiration from models of practice and socially conscious architecture across Europe and the world, we are committed to addressing the wider issue of equality and diversity in architecture. Embedding the value of architecture in the lives of people and society is central to our ethical basis; architecture for people and their wellbeing, not for its own sake. At all levels of the course we are dedicated to how architecture can build communities, bring people together and involve and empower society in the production of architecture.

We take a vocational approach from first year undergraduate, through postgraduate to PhD, we aim to work at the frontier of architectural thinking and practice, with a supportive, and vocational approach to education. We

offer a progressive preparation for practice, which involves both understanding and challenging the conventions of practice. From co-operative housing in year 1 to the politics of development, landownership, funding and stakeholder inclusion at postgraduate, we explore alternative models of practice, of the architect as an agent of social and environmental improvement.

BSc (Hons) Architecture Part 1 Part 1 integrates the principle of Knowledge Applied across all three years, offering a series of practical and creative engagements with diverse real-world scenarios, contexts, clients, and live project briefs. The focus in years one and two is on live design projects, introducing students to clients and specialist knowledge through collaboration, with the potential to lead to built outcomes. In the final year this vocational experience extends to a short placement where students undertake a period of work experience. A diversity of experience is encouraged and supported, from conventional practice to hands on construction, from live projects to starting a business. Our students develop awareness, soft skills and confidence to provide an authentic preparation for architectural practice and related professions. Our Part 1 Students are balanced and broad thinkers. They thrive by developing and applying a wide range of practical skills and knowledge to real world situations, fostering independent, credible, resilient and creative decision makers. The Part 1 course strikes a balance between the creative and the technical, through evidence informed design. Students develop construction knowledge, up to date digital skills and advanced environmental simulation whilst understanding and appreciating the importance of spatial quality within, around and between buildings, exploring the potential of landscape and ecology to create architecture of purpose and delight.

MArch in Architecture Part 2 our MArch course explores the productive spaces between theory and practice, and between the civic University and the city. Our Part 2 graduates are intelligent, independent and resourceful practitioners: with skills in critical and creative processes. Across design and written modules students engage with architectural practice and local and national cultural organizations and local authorities, and explore diverse models of practice and architectural production. The Part 2 course was founded on the principle of working alongside study, and the 3 year part-time route is well established. The new Degree Apprenticeship strengthens this provision and creates stronger associations with practice as well as leading to a Part 3 qualification. The 2 year full time route maintains the core thread of Praxis – positioning the students and their design projects in relation to the politics of practice and the production of architecture. The M.Arch is researched, supporting students to develop and construct compelling arguments for architectural and urban proposition, grounded in advanced social, spatial, and economic mapping and analysis. Ethical and ecological considerations of architecture sit at the core of the M.Arch; through design and research students tackle various aspects of how the discipline and profession can inform the production of architecture and urbanism based on principles of both social and environmental justice. To have an ecological approach to architectural design and the construction of buildings, projects critique how and when to act as an architect, acknowledging that multiple and diverse approaches to generating architecture responses are possible and necessary.

Our School is founded on a set of values and attitudes that our students take forward: a commitment to make a positive difference; a sense of purpose; an intent to challenge; and with skills and ambition to make the argument for things to be different. To enable them to operate in a changing climate and an uncertain future.

11 Commendations

The visiting Board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The Board commends the staff's strong sense of identity and co-joined agency of environmental technology and social purpose, and the opportunity afforded to students to articulate their own sense of agency within this ethos.
- 11.2 The Board commends the School's and University's timely delivery to students of mental support and services (most notably in terms of accessible digital software and hardware) during critical points of the pandemic, and the progressive attitude adopted for carrying these initiatives forward as part of a more resilient educational practice.
- 11.3 The Board commends the School's practice of critical reflection and evolution of their own pedagogy, evidenced both in the development of its programs since the last Revalidation Visit and an emergent research-informed pedagogy.

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 visits. 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 must enable students to demonstrate knowledge of the fine arts as an influence on the quality of architectural design (GC3).
- 13.2 The School must enable students to demonstrate adequate knowledge of the fundamental legal, professional and statutory responsibilities of the architect and the regulations and procedures involved in the negotiation and approval of architectural designs, including land law, development control, building regulations and health and safety legislation (GC11.1).
- 13.3 The School must enable students at Part 2 to demonstrate greater critical understanding of how knowledge is advanced through Research to produce clear, logically argued and original written work relating to architectural culture, theory and design (GA 4). Particular attention is drawn here to supporting students in developing arguments that evidence greater criticality through measuring, testing and reinforcing their arguments with reference to relevant discourse, and simultaneously in making original, more speculative arguments.

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 Board recognizes the accessibility, tangibility and value of the University's agenda of "knowledge applied" (and in the context of the pandemic), but advises that this agenda can be further extended to more real life testing, both through live projects and in design / technical studies.
- 14.2 The Board values the ethos of the School but advises that the School should be more celebratory about its unique identity and practices. Such celebration will enhance current students' understanding of the distinctiveness and value of their learning. This can be further advanced through continuing University support of the School in its spatial and technical provision.
- 14.3 The Board values the School's co-joined agency of environmental technology and social purpose but advises that it encourages greater exploration of Architecture as an integration of the poetics of craft and spatial experience, and organization of spatial form; this is particularly relevant in portfolios which engage with small buildings / simple typologies. Additionally, the Board recognizes the steps being taken to advance integration of environmental technology and construction in the Part 2 Program but advises greater demonstration of construction techniques and the environmental impact of these strategies.
- 14.4 The Board welcomes the School's pioneering apprenticeship route that gives students clear agency but advise that more can be achieved in terms of student experience in regard to their practice / academic commitments.
- 14.5 The Board recognizes that marked improvements have been made to the organization and cohesion of the course and in student support provided by the staff / university but advises that further development can be implemented in student-to-student learning across the Part 1 and Part 2 programs.
- 14.6 The Board recognizes the efforts of students and staff in generating analysis of the brief, context, and thematic considerations, but advises that exhibited and examined portfolios would be enhanced by the inclusion of more iterative design process work that leads to the final proposition.
- 14.7 The Board recognizes the discursive, socially grounded nature of Part 1 Critical Context modules, but advises that there could be greater engagement with a broader range of history, precedents and case studies and which further inform design propositions.

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.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers

Part 1 year 1 - 80

Part 1 year 2 - 66

Part 1 year 3 – 45

Part 2 year 1 – 25+13 (DA)

Part 2 year 2 (DA) - 5

Part 2 year 3 – 13

17 Documentation provided

The School provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

18 Notes of Meetings

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings:

- **Meeting with budget holder and course leaders**
- **Meeting with students**
- **Meeting with the Vice Chancellor**
- **Meeting with external examiners**
- **Meeting with staff**