

Report of the RIBA exploratory board to the University of Suffolk

Date of visiting board: 2 July 2021
Confirmed by RIBA Board: 17 November 2021

1 Details of institution hosting course

University of Suffolk
Waterfront Building
19 Neptune Quay
Ipswich IP4 1QJ

2 Head of Architecture

Dr Liana Psarologaki

3 Course offered for candidate course status

BA (Hons) Architecture

4 Awarding body

University of Suffolk

5 The visiting board

Professor Paul Jones, Chair
Peter Williams, Vice-Chair
Stacey Hahn-Smith

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, 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 standard RIBA exploratory board timetable was modified exceptionally to allow the visiting board to take place online.

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 Recommendation of the Exploratory Board

The Board was invited by the University of Suffolk to consider its Bachelor of Architecture, BA (Hons) Architecture for candidate course status for Part 1.

The designation ‘Candidate Course for Validation’ implies that the course has been judged to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to recognition, which can only be granted once the standard of work produced by graduating students has been assessed and found satisfactory.

At its meeting on 17 November 2021 the RIBA Board confirmed candidate course status for Part 1 for the following:

BA (Hons) Architecture

A full visiting board to consider the programme for RIBA Part 1 validation will take place on a date to be agreed between the RIBA and the School

8 Standard requirements for validation

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

9 Academic position statement (written by the school)

Architecture at Suffolk is a programme of study uniquely affiliated with the Suffolk Sustainability Institute (SSI) and supported since its infancy by the local chapter of architects RIBA Suffolk, situated in the School of Engineering, Arts, Science and Technology at the University of Suffolk Ipswich campus. It takes a unique approach to Architecture as mode of life and living – as affordance: what the environment creates for people and other living beings, and we see ourselves as environmental professionals in theory (ecosophy) and practice (sustainability). This is a fundamentally ecological and ethical approach to the discipline more broadly. It is underpinned by the principles of our global network of Schools of Architecture and Universities (RMIT, NTUA, TUDelft) and the immediate needs of situated practice in the region of East Anglia and Ipswich; one of the richest contexts in terms of typologies of natural and built environments in the UK.

The course embodies a strong agile studio agenda and Suffolk presents a particularly intriguing platform for architectural education. Self-contained and idiosyncratic, it presents strong historical links to continental Europe and the rest of the UK and is an assemblage of architectural specimens from period buildings at risk and conservation areas (to include Wolsey Gate and Christchurch Mansion), the youngest listed building (Willis Building by Foster + Partners) and intense current development defined by socioeconomic fluctuations of the past (floods and recessions) and the potential of the present and future. Natural wildlife reserves, river Orwell and its bridges, Constable's landscapes and the docks and the metamodern townscape of conflict become the immediate reference for Suffolk Architecture students. At Suffolk we do not merely attempt to solve the problem but use the problem to hesitate and see the world differently before taking action.

The first unique aspect of the course is its pedagogy and learning and teaching model investing on synthesis of knowledge in the context of architecture and building design. In all modules we address issues of pedagogies, ecologies and technics and allow one module and unit to link to others on same level and across the years. The second unique aspect of the course is synergy and partnership. Our programme has been envisioned and created by diversely experienced educators together with the profession. Students learn from the complexities that are very close as well as further away in organic and formal partnership with experts in specific roles (studio

tutors, project consultants, visiting lecturers, advisers and mentors) all and each with a passion to educate. We are the only School of Architecture that is in partnership with the planning department of the local council (see MoA in Appendix 5) and our students' projects come directly from the planning document. Our students have access to specialist consultants and to key meeting and planning activities. The third unique aspect of the course is its situated culture as ethics, climate literacy, and diverse emancipation. Tutors draw from a wealth of background knowledge and diverse experiences to establish a curriculum that looks at how people and other living beings live and less on what people use buildings for. We have a growing reputation on cross species and creative ecologies briefs in collaboration with ecologists, our sustainability experts and wildlife academics that address the future of our built world beyond the silos of each discipline.

Our course is interdisciplinary because for us Architecture should be challenging social, economic and environmental agendas that are stagnated and contribute to shaping new ones that are based on critical and situated practices for people, communities, ecosystems and places. Such Architecture we advocate, is defined by agencies and ethical considerations and ecosystemic values in response to advanced capitalism systems, technology mediations and the intricacies that shape the built environment.

10 Commendations

- 10.1 The Board commends the architecture team for developing a strong sense of collegiality and community of practice between staff and students within a short period of time.
- 10.2 The Board commends the architecture team for its commitment to the profession in the region and also preparing their students for professional practice.
- 10.3 The Board commends the University for its dedication and support for the development of the architecture provision.

11 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. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 11.1 The course team should rewrite the academic position statement in time for the full visiting board, clearly articulating the core strengths and values of the architecture programme.
- 11.2 While the Board recognises that the architecture programme is nascent, it believes that there is still work to be done on defining its identity, with particular reference to the unique context of Suffolk.
- 11.3 The architecture team should review the scale of the projects at a building level and place a greater emphasis on context and architectural language.
- 11.4 The architecture team should ensure that the theory teaching is better aligned to the defined identity of the programme.

- 11.5 As sustainability is a strong theme within the architecture programme, there should be a more focused approach to environmental analysis at a building scale; the architecture team needs to provide clearer understanding of how ecology, in its widest sense, forms a core strand of theory and design delivery.
- 11.6 As technology is integrated into the final year design project, the architecture team should clearly signpost to the students that this must be evidenced in their portfolios - particularly at the level of construction details.
- 11.7 The visiting board documentation should be organised for coherence and clarity with reference to the RIBA procedures.
- 11.8 In line with the RIBA New Courses Group's recommendations, the architecture team should revisit the course diagrams as they are currently difficult to understand.

12 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.

- 12. There is no advice.

13 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.

The Board confirmed that the BA (Hons) Architecture programme had the potential to meet the Part 1 graduate attributes, if developed as anticipated.

14 Review of work against criteria / potential to meet criteria etc

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.

The Board confirmed that the BA (Hons) Architecture programme had the potential to meet the RIBA validation criteria, if developed as anticipated.

15. Other information

15.1 Student numbers

BA (Hons) Architecture: 31

15.2 Documentation provided

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

16. Notes of meetings

Copies of the minutes taken from the following meetings 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.

- Vice-Chancellor
- Subject Head
- Students
- Staff