

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Central Lancashire

Date of visiting board: 25 & 26 November 2021
Confirmed by the RIBA: 3 May 2022

1 Details of institution hosting courses

The Grenfell-Baines Institute of Architecture
Victoria Building
University of Central Lancashire
Preston
PR1 2HE

2 Acting Head of Architecture

Mr Chris Lowry

3 Courses offered for validation

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture, MArch, Part 2

4 Programme Leaders

BSc (Hons) Architecture Mr Lee Ivett Course leader
Master of Architecture Mr Gerard Bareham

5 Awarding body

University of Central Lancashire

6 The visiting board

Peter Williams – Chair
Frazer Bufton – Vice Chair
Olive White
Layton Reid

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 3 May 2022 the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following courses:

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture MArch, 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)

Ethos

The Grenfell-Baines Institute of Architecture offers an innovative, creative and critical architectural education within the North West of England. We utilise architecture as a vehicle to explore the pressing issues of the day: the environment, urbanisation, digitalisation, social justice and collective life. Staff and students study the impact of global and regional issues from the perspective of local problems of key interest to the city of Preston, and the North West of England establishing the terms for an appropriate and sustainable, socially focused architecture by means of practice and research-informed pedagogy. We are interested in contested spaces and ideas; challenging the status quo through an employment of architecture as a tool for empowering the individual and collective. We believe in the power of architecture and its associated discourse to be a primary tool in creating a more equitable, accessible and just world. Widening participation is at the core of our mission; we seek the curious and the enthused from all backgrounds and walks of life; utilising our established Foundation programme as an alternative route into architectural education. A diverse profession results in a plurality of opinions, experience and culture that inspires a more relevant and progressive built environment. Our institute challenges wider public perceptions of architecture as being solely concerned with lifestyle and spectacle; we engender a sensibility towards architecture and spatial practice as the primary societal tool through which we create instances of delight and opportunity in the everyday and through which we elevate peoples experience of ordinary life in extraordinary ways.

Our strategic position at the heart of the UK allows us to explore these themes through an engagement with other urban centres and inspiring contexts to discover how different architectural typologies and spatial conditions emerge through the specifics of a particular time and place and draw informed comparisons with our home city of Preston and wider region. We disseminate, exchange and combine these localised studies with related academic institutions, municipalities and agencies at a local, European and global scale. With Study visits to Paris, Athens, Rotterdam, and Projects based between Blackpool and Beirut, connecting and communicating in person and online, the geographical reach of the School offers tantalising opportunities and prepares our students with a confidence and accompanying skill set for local, national and international practice.

Context, Culture and Distinctiveness

Thinking-through-making; making drawings, models, books, objects, and texts are understood as tools of enquiry and essential methodologies and outputs within all modules. The development of these skills and their application ensure the maintenance of a tangible and distinct studio culture from which

we deliver all of our classes. Our studios allow for dynamic interaction between each year of the course - working in the same space, students informally cross-fertilise ideas in systems of both facilitated and casual peer review. We aim to catch the 'process in action' through design experiences and encourage students to develop their communication skills using a full range of traditional and digital techniques through which they register, document, analyse, inform, iterate, advocate and resolve. The creation of virtual learning environments and digital communities also complements the Institutes' local agenda by providing access to a global discourse; promoting mobility and networking.

Students are provided with space to shape the direction of their own education, facilitating approaches to self-directed study and engendering agility, resilience, rigour and a collaborative community. This community is made possible by the scale of the Institute - our small cohorts across both courses creates a concentration of inclusivity and accessibility. This scale is further recognised through group 'vertical studios' at key intervals throughout the year each with a specific focus on the analysis of place and building technology. Foundation, Undergraduate and Masters students unite to explore common design propositions and themes and collaborative negotiation, communication and responsibility skills are acquired within these events.

Staff are engaged in a variety of research activities which inform their teaching. Research is organised into two interrelated groups incorporating theoretical and design research, scholarship and professional practice: 1. Processes and Practices; 2. Theories and Cultures. This varied approach to the praxis of architecture contributes diverse specialisms that help inspire student-led propositions; building upon and integrating the research interests and esteem of our staff members by using this expertise to inform the content and delivery of our modules. (See section Research and Scholarly Activities). Within the School of Engineering, the opportunity now exists for enhanced access to spaces for interdisciplinary discussion across parallel curricula. This includes the Schools' Engineering Innovation Centre (EIC), a new state-of-the-art world class facility and our enlarged and improved workshop and fabrication facilities in Wharf Building. These new relationships are already starting to inform cross disciplinary approaches to teaching and research with a particular emphasis on supporting our transition to the new RIBA Criteria.

Practical Experience

Practical experience opportunities have been established – students engage with local architectural practice through our RIBA coordinated Student Mentoring Scheme delivering practical experience and opportunity for ongoing employment. We have also worked in collaboration with other discipline and subject areas to establish CJam; a day long built environment industry networking event that provides our students to pitch for placements and support with relevant local companies. This professional experience is also enhanced through an engagement with stakeholders and change-makers active within the territories that we explore through our studio and module briefs. The Forestry Commission, Gisburn Forest Hub, Cloudspotting Festival, Left Coast Arts and Grizedale Arts all provide opportunities for live and situated practice acting as project partners, critical friends and contextualising the real-world issues that we examine.

Criteria Assessment

Although staff emphasise the importance of criteria attainment across all modules, we also wish to develop reflective and self-motivated students who are able to identify their own strengths and specialisms. We encourage students to practise speculative thought and iteration as a means to consider differing approaches to problems. We ask students to appraise their existing knowledge in juxtaposition with new skills gained from the course, in the context of current local and academic professional practice. Knowledge and skills gained on our courses are essential to the aspiration of the Institute as the facilitator of an inclusive environment within which staff and students feel confident in their ability to give and receive criticism, inform development of their work and themselves, and contribute to a culture of excellence

11 Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the strength of the staff and student relationships enabled by the scale of the school as one of its core strengths, as well as the collegiate and supportive working environment of the school's staff. This is clear in the high-quality feedback which students receive and the core staff's ability and willingness to respond to feedback from the external examiners.
- 11.2 The Board commends the School's resilience in recent years when faced with re-alignment within different faculties and schools. We hope that the recent move to Engineering will enable a long period of stability in which the School can securely plan its future academic position, research and teaching ambitions.
- 11.3 The Board commends the School on its Foundation course and its strong underpinning of the degree course in allowing wider access to those of various attainment levels and socio-economic backgrounds.

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 make explicit the future direction of research and enquiry in relation to the MArch course and in general at post-graduate level, for example, potential new Master's courses, and through to PhD in reinforcing the identity of the School.
- 13.2 The recent appointment of the lecturer in Sustainable and Environmental Design is a positive step. This will enable the development of teaching and testing of both Social Sustainability and Environmental Technology to be embedded better at every level of both the BSc and MArch. The action point 12.3 from the VB of 2018 (BSc) still remains valid in this regard.

- 13.3 The School should encourage greater engagement of testing of architectural technology in response to the project brief and the context in which the project is sited. This will be of particular relevance to the RIBA's new Themes and Values and mandatory competences, which will be reviewed at the next visiting board in 2026.
- 13.4 Further to the recent developments which have been made in relation to Professional Practice at both BSc and MArch, the School should work to further develop existing links with practice and forge new ones to ensure that the curriculum for the programme is current, progressive and relevant to the present and future needs of the profession.
- 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 should avoid the “over curation” of the academic portfolios provided and to illustrate process and development in a rawer form which might more fully illustrate the level of investigation not only within design modules but also within history and theory.
- 14.2 We would encourage the School to engage in the rich diversity of context within Preston and the North West and to encourage a deeper level of consideration of the social and economic conditions of project location, to reinforce and reflect the School's Academic Position Statement in reference to architecture as a ‘primary societal tool through which we create instances of delight and opportunity in the everyday’.
- 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 BSc (Hons) Architecture**
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.
- 15.2 Part 2 MArch Master of Architecture**
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes 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 (from the School)

BSc (Hons) Part 1: 120 (approx.)

MArch, Part 2: 30

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 head of institution
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff