

**Report of the RIBA visiting board  
to the University for the Creative Arts  
(UCA)**

**Date of visiting board: 25 February 2022**  
**Confirmed by the RIBA: 3 May 2022**

**1 Details of institution hosting courses**

University for the Creative Arts (UCA)  
UCA Canterbury  
New Dover Road  
Canterbury  
Kent CT1 3AN

**2 Head of Schools of Architecture and Crafts & Design**

Professor Colin Holden

**3 Courses offered for validation**

Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

**4 Programme Director - Architecture**

Sam McElhinney

**Senior Lecturer in Architecture (Professional Studies Advisor)**

Suzanne Gaballa

**PSA/Part 3 Convenor**

Patrick Monaghan

**5 Awarding body**

University for the Creative Arts (UCA)

**6 The visiting board**

Paul King  
Carol Norton  
Dr Carl Meddings

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, 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](http://www.architecture.com).

The procedures were adapted to allow the Board to function remotely.

All requirements for documentation and work samples were exactly as for a physical board but viewed remotely.

The timetable and all meetings took place as for a physical board but remotely.

**8 Proposals of the visiting board**

On 3 May 2022 the RIBA confirmed unconditional validation of the following:

Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture, Part 3

**9 Standard requirements for validation**

Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

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- 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 (written by the school)**

Our School has a distinctive approach to architectural education that originates in its Art School heritage, emphasising critical and engaged models of teaching, learning and research. We foster varied cultures of thinking and making that synthesise traditional hand drawing and making techniques with advanced digital media workflows. We believe that inter-relationships between processes and media provide important opportunities for the architectural imagination to invent and to be enacted. Our pedagogic approach situates such imaginative futures in clearly articulated critical understandings of the present.

CSA has a commitment to providing students with courses where they can develop process-based skills to act as future agents of spatial, social and ecological intervention. Through participation in an integrated programme of Design, Technology, Communications, Creative Practice and Cultural Context units, students develop the tools and skills to shape their own situated responses to architectural contexts and design problems. From the entry to the BA degree onward, we provide immersive studio cultures establishing key skills and aptitudes that allow students to view both courses and the wider school as a testing ground for architecture and spatial design. As students progress through the Part 1 course, they are encouraged to critically question models of spatial practice, in order to take positions in relation to the contemporary condition of the city and society.

We encourage our students to behave as activist citizens rather than as passive consumers; to take responsibility for all aspects of their projects' objectives and aims, their iterative development and ultimately their transformative dissemination and use. Our students learn how to test action by commencing at the scale of the body, and then by considering the immediate experiences of the urban spaces of Canterbury. They subsequently progress to consider the complex landscapes and fringe ecologies of our East Kent locality, before eventually engaging with international horizons and agendas.

Our Part 2 course continues this trajectory starting with an examination of infrastructure and macro regional conditions, with students framing their own Design Research agendas in the context of studio themes. The course begins with a live competition to encourage interaction with the wider profession, before students join an elective studio unit system where each unit proposes a distinct research agenda. In both the Part 1 and Part 2 courses, students explore the relations between individual citizens and community groups as users of architecture, alongside critical awareness of the wider issues and

forces acting upon the city itself. Such process-based knowledge frames a series of projects, covering small, medium and large buildings and their potentials to act as catalysts for change.

Our new Part 3 course completes the final stage of training to become an architect and is a natural point of progression for our own Part 2 graduates as well as an attractive offer for others. It is predominantly taught online with uploaded lectures remaining available throughout, recognising the value of flexible time management around professional practice commitments. Online webinars / tutorials occur periodically to encourage discourse around taught topics and the development of an online community. Course content is closely determined by the professional competencies laid out jointly by the ARB/RIBA.

Our 2021/22 BA(Hons) Architecture graduating cohort (77 students) comprised 23% international students and 23% UK domicile BAME. The MArch (21 students) comprised 57% international students and 29% UK domicile BAME. We are committed to equality of opportunity. We select students by folio and individual interview, taking a 360-degree view of the applicant, rather than relying on simple metrics. Students and teaching staff together curate inclusive spaces for learning, blending inquiry-based learning, discussion and debate and structured learning-by-doing. We support individual learning needs from the outset, with the pedagogic approach concentrating on core skills, before moving incrementally towards an explicitly student- UCA Canterbury School of Architecture RIBA Validation 4 of 43 centred approach, enabling each student to develop both an individual voice and also process based abilities as an architect.

CSA is further characterised by the strong connections it has forged with practitioners locally, regionally and nationally. We have built a comprehensive network of diverse sessional staff practitioners as valued colleagues and integral members of the teaching team. In 2021/22 approximately 50% of teaching on the prescribed courses was delivered by such staff, extending the reach and influence of current professional practice deep within the school and further reinforced by the new Part 3. Our commitment to equality of opportunity recognises the importance of providing strong role models for diverse cohorts and this is reflected in our sessional team, invited guests and critics and local networks. We provide a local hub for the RIBA Canterbury branch, regularly hosting their meetings and evening lectures within our building.

Our combined student and staff teams have engaged with external communities such as local arts and community organisations, regional development agencies and international industry partners. All of our activities consciously face outwards to the world and engage diverse audiences through exhibitions, publications, collaborations and a strong public programme of lectures and events, including our continuing 'MULTISTORY' evening lecture series. Such a focus has inspired student-led initiatives to think more widely about the profession and possibilities to shape it. An example of this is the MArch students film 'Building Her Story', a project that invited shared experiences of female construction industry professionals.

CSA is situated in a dedicated, purpose-designed building that provides a strong sense of subject and personal identity. Our Art School campus

provides a supportive wider environment where students can make work in and between the various studio spaces, workshops and the internal and external public spaces. We share a characteristic concern with thinking through making and materiality, pursued across all levels of study in our studios and extensive workshops, fully supported by expert technical teams. Our TrakLab and FabLab, initiated and developed by the school, have set a high standard in the wider institution, giving opportunities for advanced digital media exploration and production.

Our graduates will face major societal and ecological challenges in their future lives and careers. Both Part 1 and 2 courses provide skills for analysis, design and fabrication in conjunction with tactics and strategies of advocacy, activism and entrepreneurship. The school equips students with independence of thought, as well as the ability to work collaboratively and collectively as effective and successful future practitioners. The Part 3 course consolidates and completes the journey, ensuring the requisite competencies are met for graduates to become registered architects

**11 Conditions**

There are no conditions.

**12. Commendations**

The Board made the following commendations:

- 12.1 The board commends the distinctive distance-learning offer of the course that maximises geographical catchment, offers students flexibility and enables widening participation.
- 12.2 The board commends the pastoral support provided by staff to students.

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

- 13.1 The board requires the school to develop guidance notes that clearly describe progression milestones throughout the year.
- 13.2 The board requires the school to establish a structured approach to PEDR, school PSA activity and their relationship to practice mentoring.
- 13.3 The school should provide formal guidance for the external examiner as moderator for the programme.
- 13.4 The school should articulate a formal mechanism for responses to the school from the professional examiners.
- 13.5 The school should provide guidance notes for professional examiners that include clear guidance on their roles and responsibilities, assessment mapping in relation to the professional criteria and guidance on assessment grading.

**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 advises the school to consider how the Part 3 learners engage with the wider UCA architecture student community.
- 14.2 The board advises the school to consider an element of face-to-face delivery of learning to augment distance learning.
- 14.3 The board advises the school to give careful consideration to the quality of delivery as numbers increase.
- 14.4 The board advises the school to consider the nature of the feedback loop from external examiner to the school.
- 14.5 The board encourages the school to provide additional support to students for the preparation of the oral exam.
- 14.6 The board advises the school to develop a strategy for recruitment of professional examiners as the course grows in scale.
- 14.7 The board advises the school to develop ways to further enhance students' critical thinking skills in relation to writing the case study, reflecting upon professional judgement, ethics and their overall experience.

**15 Delivery of professional criteria**

**15.1 Part 3**

The Board confirmed that the course met the Part 3 professional criteria.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers**

(2021 cohort): Two current students (plus one re-sit of case study)

**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 next visiting board.**

- **Meeting with budget holder and course leaders**
- **Meeting with candidates**
- **Meeting with external and professional examiner**