

Report of the RIBA visiting board to Newcastle University

Date of visiting board: 10 & 11 February 2022
Confirmed by the RIBA: 3 May 2022

- 1 Details of institution hosting courses**
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape
Newcastle University
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU

- 2 Courses offered for validation**
BA (Hons) Architecture, RIBA part 1
MArch/MArch with International Study Year: Master of Architecture, RIBA Part 2:
Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management, RIBA Part 3

- 3 Director of Architecture**
Dr Samuel Austin

Associate Directors of Architecture
Prof. Rosie Parnell
Dr John Kamara

- 4. Programme Directors:**
BA (Hons) Architecture, RIBA part 1: Toby Blackman
MArch/MArch with International Study Year: Master of Architecture, RIBA Part 2: Ivan Marquez Munoz
Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management, RIBA Part 3: Dr John Kamara

- 5 Awarding body**
Newcastle University

- 6 The visiting board**
Harbinder Birdi – Chair
Oliver Hall – Vice Chair
Tony Cleford
Dr Claudia Trillo

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.

Acknowledgements

The Board would like to thank the staff and students for the tremendous effort in collating and presenting the material in an engaging manner. The Board is

particularly grateful as the School was initially planning for an in-person visit, which had to revert to online at short notice.

8 Proposals of the visiting board

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

- BA (Hons) Architecture, RIBA part 1
- MArch/MArch with International Study Year: Master of Architecture, RIBA Part 2
- Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management, RIBA Part 3

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)

Newcastle University's school of architecture is characterised by a *commitment to caring for others and for the environment*, fostered within a culture of *creative inquiry into architecture and its rich contexts*: social, technical, environmental, historical, and professional. As a research-led school, *we understand design to be a collective cultural endeavour that involves the acquisition and exercise of complex knowledges and skills*. These we believe are best realised through a dynamic approach that sees education as on-going process of inquiry in which staff and students are both participants. We promote an *ethical, inquisitive and independent spirit* amongst our students, encouraging them to develop *individual approaches and areas of interest* within a *supportive structure* that fosters rigorous research, design and professional skills. Thus well-prepared for practice (in the architectural profession or elsewhere), our students are equipped to face with confidence the urgent environmental and social challenges of our time.

We are one of the most successful and long-established architecture schools in the UK – this Visiting Board takes place in our centenary year. We are consistently well-placed in rankings, including QS's Global Top 100 for Architecture. Our graduates include Alison and Peter Smithson, Sir Terry Farrell, the Matrix collective, Eric Parry, Richard Murphy, and Jo Noero. Farrell is a Visiting Professor and has made a substantial donation to fund The Farrell Centre, a new architecture centre for the city, based on campus. The University is part of the Russell Group, and sees our local context as a privileged vantage point for addressing national and international challenges – 'From Newcastle, For the World'. The School of Architecture, Planning

and Landscape mirrors this in several ways. First, in our contributions to Newcastle's globally recognised culture-led regeneration, forwarded through the programme and activism of the Farrell Centre. Second, in the inspiration we draw from the city's legacy of technological innovation, embodied in our Hub for Biotechnology in the Built Environment (HBBE), a research centre that experiments in ground-breaking ecological building materials. Third, like our port city, we are international in outlook with a global research agenda and a diverse body of students and staff. Finally, the long-standing tradition of participatory design in the North East, epitomised by Ralph Erskine's work at Byker, is reflected in our research-led student design-build programmes, including the award-winning 'Testing Ground' pavilions constructed in Kielder Forest. Thus, our research and research-led education – our interest in the *cultural opportunities that architecture affords*, our *focus on material and environmental innovation*, our *commitment to extending diversity*, and our attention to *the politics of the built environment* – are profoundly rooted in our region's heritage and traditions.

Our Architecture Research Collaborative (ARC) supports a research culture that spans the reach of our discipline from architectural science to practice, history and theory. The most recent UK research assessment, REF 2014, placed us fourth for 'Research Intensity and Power', second only to UCL amongst schools with both Parts I and II RIBA accreditation. We returned over 90% of eligible staff and 85% of our work was graded as world-leading or internationally excellent. We have one of the largest and most active groups of architectural humanities scholars in the UK and are home to *Journal of Architecture* and *arq: Architectural Research Quarterly*, the latter unique in publishing peer-reviewed research to an audience of practitioners as well as academics. The HBBE, established in 2019, is funded by the largest research grant ever awarded to a UK architecture school and recently completed 'The _OME', a test-bed structure we claim as the world's first experimental biological house. In 2020, our Design Office was listed in the *AJ's* '40 Under 40' of the UK's 'most exciting emerging architectural talent'. We work closely with colleagues in Planning, co-teaching postgraduate programmes and our BA Architecture and Urban Planning (AUP) (now developing a four-year undergraduate Masters route, with Part I accreditation, M-AUP). Our institution provides excellent opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaborations and we have teaching and research links with several schools including Engineering and Fine Art. We offer a range of specialist masters programmes, including a new Masters in Landscape Architecture which has candidate accreditation with the Landscape Institute. We have the largest group of PhD by Creative Practice candidates outside London and our substantial PhD cohort contributes significantly to teaching.

Since the last Visiting Board, we have completed a new £3.4m workshop and studio extension, and a specialist prototyping workshop for biological materials, equipped with a weaving machine and robot arm. We have expanded staffing in climate literacy, construction and professional practice, and have worked hard on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, as a research topic and in examining our own culture. Consequently, our architecture professoriate is now predominantly female, our staff cohort continues to diversify, we have an Athena SWAN Bronze Award, and are home to increasing numbers of Widening Participation and international students. In

2020, we welcomed our first 'Blueprint for All' students (formerly 'Stephen Lawrence'), on scholarships co-funded with local practice partners.

We are committed to the cultivation of architects as skilful and responsible individuals. We recognise that the architects of the future will perform both specialist and generalist, and we help students identify and develop their interests by offering increasingly diverse choices of research-led options as they progress through our programmes. We know that architects must deliver their speculations and we are committed to the translation of research into practice. In this spirit, our accredited programmes are structured to help students define the kind of architect they want to be and tailor their portfolio towards the kinds of practices that interest them.

In the BA, Stage 1 introduces professional methods and responsibilities, opens students to the historical, cultural, constructional and artistic richness of architecture, and embeds the idea that design involves research. Stage 2 situates architecture in urban and global context, emphasising the urgency of the climate crisis and related social and political issues. Technology modules address materials, construction and detail, safety principles and environmentally responsible design, feeding into studio projects which address community and public buildings. Teaching is enriched through collaboration with artists and engineers. Halfway through the year, students embark on a year-long dissertation that bridges Stages 2 and 3. We are one of the last UK schools to require an undergraduate dissertation and do so for the rigour it imparts to students' thought, articulacy and, ultimately, design. Stage 3 offers students a choice of research-led studios, each directed towards a different kind of critical practice. The technology course is fully integrated at this stage, while a theory module provides students with space for reflection on their designs. Professional studies inform all years, in the broad sense of fostering communication, group working, technical and IT skills. Stage 3 introduces the legal, regulatory and business aspects of architecture, in relation to studio projects.

At MArch, around half of our students are returners, the other half joining from other UK and international schools. Stage 5 opens with the Tools for Thinking about Architecture module, introducing research themes, and amplifying students' critical research and writing skills. Design is taught through thematic vertical studios, which pursue diverse architectural agendas but follow a common structure that ensures the attainment of core skills. In Stage 5 students design in response to urban context, their work culminating in a project that integrates skilful response to climate, tectonics and safety. Typically, projects are sited in a European city (though we have focused on UK sites during the pandemic). Both years of the degree are envisaged as translating research into practice, with Stage 6 students developing a research-led design thesis that responds to the agenda of their studio. At this Stage, 'practice' is freely interpreted, sometimes resulting in a comprehensive building design, and sometimes in other kinds of architectural inquiry (secure in the context of a fully rounded portfolio). Students follow specialised studies alongside studio, choosing between: urban design (suspended during 2020-21), urban planning, a dissertation, and a Linked Research Project with a staff member. The latter, a distinctive offering at Newcastle, includes our 'live build' Testing Ground programme. The Stage 6 Architectural Practice module allows students to chart and

understand their own development in relation to professional competences, whilst taking their own designs as the locus of inquiry into professional issues and ethics.

Our thriving Part III programme (DAPM) attracts students from all over the UK and especially from the North East and Scotland. Block-teaching allows students to combine study and work effectively, and scenario-based coursework prompts them to apply their learning to practical situations. The research-led ethos of the school carries into group-work that requires students to conduct research and present their findings as CPD to their peers. In addition to meeting all validation requirements, the course emphasizes the ethical dimensions of professionalism and equips students to be reflective practitioners beyond qualification. Many of our core teaching staff are active in architectural practice and we have over a hundred part-time practitioner staff, drawn from across the UK and beyond, who contribute as tutors, lecturers, reviewers and structural and environmental consultants. Our graduates are highly sought after. Practices report that our alumni bring both the competences they need and, as a direct consequence of our research-led approach, an independence and self-starting ability to think through problems creatively.

Alongside our research culture, our greatest strength lies in our highly capable and enthusiastic students. Studio culture is re-emerging post-pandemic and, with it, a renewed sense of community. Our students play an active role in running the School: they are members of School committees and inform policy and curriculum development. They organise the Kofi bar and end-of-year exhibitions in Newcastle and London (online in summer 2020 and 21), and they design and edit the annual Design Yearbook. Twice awarded 'Best Student Society' by the University's Student Union, our student society, NUAS, organises a vibrant programme of events and talks. Our international identity is further supported by our partnership with the INTO organisation, with whom we have developed successful architecture-themed English language programmes and by two study-abroad options offered at MArch level: a single semester exchange in Stage 5 or a year-long exchange via our new 3-year 'Master of Architecture with International Study Year' programme. Our attractiveness to students from across the world and our consolidating global reputation provides us with the impetus and foundation for the next stages in our development. Having firmly established ourselves as one of the most significant hubs for architectural education and research in the UK, we are keen to do the same on the global stage.

11 Commendations

- 11.1 The School of Architecture should commend itself on establishing a motivated cohort of staff that work collaboratively, clearly putting the students learning and emotional experience at the University as a priority.
- 11.2 The Board also commends the level of investment that has been made by the Faculty and the leadership initiative by the Vice-Chancellor.
- 11.3 The Board commends the integration of detailed research pedagogies within the School at all levels which demonstrates clear scholarly quality across the student experience.

11.4 The Board commends the excellent quality of the student work and the depth displayed at all levels, which demonstrate attainment of professional standards.

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 At Part 1 students should demonstrate the integration of technological exploration, testing, and detailing of alternative construction and fabrication techniques discovered through research (eg Thinking Through Making) into the specific technical aspects of the final design studio project. The variety of technical research undertaken throughout the year should be reflected in unique studio outcomes.

13.2 The School should encourage the inter-disciplinary exchange between the creative faculties in the University, notably the Engineering and Fine Art school to enable the graduates to broaden the opportunity for creative dialogue as well as their networks.

13.3 The School should develop a mechanism for students from all stages of the School (Parts 1 to 3) to be able to connect and encourage them to provide support, guidance and mentorship to one and other.

13.4 At Part 3 the School should make students more aware of the range and diversity of contemporary architectural practice, perhaps through a cohort-wide sharing of student employment and practice early in the course. We encourage a network of alumni to be able to engage with the Part 3 course.

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 Way Ahead (Themes and Values) implementation in the curriculum might be channelled through a co-created action plan, including a team discussion on potential impacts of the curriculum enhancement in terms of credit allocation particularly in the BA programme. This would inform discussion on the potential necessary resources for upskilling the staff, both in terms of time allocation and CPD.

14.2 Students could be more creatively disruptive in their exploration of materials and construction methods to address the challenges of climate emergency and the loss of biodiversity.

- 14.3 The Board advises the School to investigate the nexus between global aspirations of the School and its actual ethos and commitment towards global issues.
- 15.1 Part 1**
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.
- 15.2 Part 2**
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.
- 15.3 Part 3**
The Board confirmed that all Part 3 professional criteria 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)**
BA (Hons) Architecture, RIBA part 1: 450
MArch/MArch with International Study Year: Master of Architecture, RIBA Part 2: 90
Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management, RIBA Part 3: 50
- 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 and professional examiners**
 - **Meeting with staff**