

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Reading

School of Architecture

Date of visiting board: 16 & 17 June 2022
Confirmed by RIBA: 29 September 2022

1 Details of institution hosting course

School of Architecture
University of Reading
London Road campus
Reading
RG1 5AQ

2 Head of Architecture

Professor Lorraine Farrelly

3 Courses offered for validation

Master of Architecture MArch

4 Programme Director

Dr Izabela Wieczorek

5 Awarding body

The University of Reading

6 The visiting board

Professor Sally Stewart – Chair
Simon Gratton – Vice Chair
Steve McIntyre
Dr Aisling Rusk

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – 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; updated May 2014); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

8 Proposals of the visiting board

On 29 September 2022 the RIBA confirmed unconditional validation for Part 2 of the following programme:

Master of Architecture, MArch Part 2

The normal validation period is 5 years. The next full visiting board to the Reading School of Architecture will take place at a date to be agreed between the School and the RIBA to align the validation cycle of the BSc (Hons) Architecture Part 1 (validated in 2019) and the MArch Part 2, if the School wishes to do so.

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 (written by the School)

We are developing a model of education which is informed by the debate around contemporary practice and research. The idea of the MArch is to provide a professional course informed by research and practice – with themes and topics shared by academics and practices, explored and informed by students.

The vision is to offer our students a suite of options to engage in professional education in the built environment, utilising the extensive expertise of academic staff in the School of Built Environment subjects as BIM, energy and environment.

Students have dedicated studio spaces directly simulating the working environment of the modern architectural practice. The students are actively encouraged to manage their space in a professional way. There is also a module within the new Masters' course that offers students an option to work in practice- applying their learned research methodologies, or to work as a studio teaching assistant on our undergraduate course, thereby resonating with a further aspect of the University Strategy around employability, providing students with knowledge and experience that prepares them for three interdependent career paths: practice, research and education.

Relationship to practice

The relationship to the local regional debate around architecture and the built environment is important for the new School. Fostered through research initiatives such as the CCQoL urban room and our knowledge transfer projects with Stantec and Pollard Thomas and Edwards. We have developed a series of public lectures starting in October 2016 around the theme of Innovative Practice in Architecture and in 2017 Communities of Design and in 2018 Making Architecture Making Communities which was run by our student society. We have worked with the local authority to help establish a local design review panel to encourage debate around design of the public realm and architecture.

We are also hosting a series of events around environmental design and the vision for the city of Reading to encourage our students to participate in the debate around current issues affecting architecture.

We also host a series of lectures – Reading2050 to encourage debate around the future vision for the region.

Collaborative Education

We are proposing a new paradigm of collaborative architectural education, providing students with the opportunity to learn across a range of built environment disciplines. Such an approach answers many of the criticisms of the Farrell Review and has been welcomed by architectural practice. Moving towards more a practice-focused model of architectural education with more

emphasis on collaboration between different built environment professions aligns strongly with current thinking in architectural education.

In the first instance, the School of Architecture offered a three-year full time BSc Architecture degree (Part1). This has been prescribed by the ARB from September 2016 when the first cohort of 43 started the course.

In 2017 we had a first year cohort of 55 students, in 2018 a cohort of 64 students, in 2019 72 students, in 2020 78 students.

A two-year full- time Master of Architecture (Part 2) programme started in September 2020 with 15 students. This is a research informed approach with studios offered to connect with the University's research expertise in our research groups in the School of Architecture.

Relationship to Research

The intention is to build relationships and establish connections with the extant strong research ethos across the broader School of the Built Environment relating to the research groups, all staff are members of one or more research group within SBE.

The studio design projects in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses relate to a range of relevant themes connected to live research interests with the School providing an environment of applied research and debate. The research of the Urban living group in particular is informing our curriculum content in undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses and design studio.

A further distinctive aspect of the course is the emphasis we give to ethics. Students leave the school with an awareness of ethical good practice in terms of data gathering and the respectful use of photography and film. Any projects that they do that involve data about real people must receive ethical approval from the School of Built Environment Ethics Committee.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The board commends the School's pastoral care, and the additional support put in place for students during the COVID Pandemic, and to support the first cohorts during challenging times.
- 11.2 The board commends the School's focus on architectural practice, evidenced through its partnerships with architectural practices, and the opportunity to consolidate and extend student experience through a placement in practice, teaching or research.
- 11.3 The board commends the programme's focus on research, and the aspiration and opportunity provided through the curriculum to support research-informed design.

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 board recommends the School consider how research methods and design studio can become better aligned to allow the demonstration of research-informed design, and reflection on its contribution within design projects.
- 13.2 The board recommends that process work, including models and sketchbooks, as well as reports and other forms of testing, is represented in the academic portfolio so that evolution of ideas and design progression and judgements can be followed.
- 13.3 The board recommends the School consider how the experiential, tectonic, and phenomenological aspects of studio work could be better evidenced within Design Thesis projects.
- 13.4 The Board recommends that the School consider how to use its existing spaces, internally and externally, to build on the curriculum and develop the identity of architecture on campus.

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 assessment criteria and marking system recognises and rewards the specific qualities and characteristics the programme has been developed to emphasise, including research informed design, regenerative design and collaborative design.
- 14.2 The board advises that the School considers how greater diversity within future MArch cohorts can be encouraged.
- 14.3 The board advises the School to consider how greater connections can be fostered between student and professional networks across the School of the Built Environment, within research, teaching and the learning community.
- 14.4 The Board advises the School to consider the extent of intended learning outcomes and the translation of these to assessment criteria within Architectural Design 3 – Thesis Design, to ensure that resulting grades align with the aims and objectives, and priorities of a final comprehensive design project.

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 2

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

MArch 2021/2022: 18

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 next full visiting board.**

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