

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of East London

Date of visiting board: 3 & 4 March 2022
Confirmed by the RIBA: 18 August 2022

1 Details of institution hosting courses

School of Architecture, Computing and Engineering
University of East London
Docklands Campus
University Way
London E16 2RD

2 Courses offered for validation

BSc (Hons) Architecture (ARB/RIBA Part 1)
MArch Architecture (ARB/RIBA Part 2)

3 Head of School of Architecture, Computing and Engineering

Dr David Tann

Head of Department

Carl Callaghan

4 Cluster Leader & Programme Leader Part 1

Alex Scott-Whitby

Programme Leader Part 2

Isaie Bloch

5 Awarding body

University of East London

6 The visiting board

Professor Paul Jones – Chair
Neil Stacey – Vice Chair
Jeremy Diaper
Ana Monrabal-Cook

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 18 August 2022 the RIBA confirmed: continued validation of the following:

BSc (Hons) Architecture (ARB/RIBA Part 1)
MArch Architecture (ARB/RIBA 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 institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

10 Academic position statement (written by the School)

Architecture has been taught at the University of East London since the mid 1970's and the Architecture school is coming up to its fiftieth year. The school is among the most diverse Architecture schools in the UK. Whilst other Architecture schools are beginning to increase their diversity, here at UEL we have been successfully training students from diverse backgrounds and often from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups for decades. The diverse cultural backgrounds play a vital role in individual student design projects and theory work. We are very proud of our success in this area and the essential contribution that UEL has made and is making to societal change by increasing the diversity of Architects in UK practice.

The school is enriching lives and is addressing the climate emergency. We have developed a strong position in sustainable design and for many years, have developed the shared theme across the school zero percent carbon one hundred percent people. The link between environmental and social sustainability has grown our engagement with new and emerging technologies and organisational structures as well as people and communities in need. In this process, we engage students in knowledge transfer, skill-building, research, place-making, iterative explorations and testing. Our students develop their work through a culture of critical, practical and creative engagement as designers and thinkers. We ask questions and aim to enable answers, from the things we touch to the world around us and from the individual to society. This approach to sustainability whilst preserving human experience is a core value shared by staff and students. We were very pleased to have this recognised in the five awards to UEL students this year for sustainable design by RIBA London.

UEL Architecture is located in east London, one of Europe's largest urban redevelopment areas. We understand our role within a demanding, but also inspirational context. East London is home to enormous urban transformations and challenges, but also resilient multi-ethnic communities, diverse architectural forms and rich urban wildlife, to just mention a few. Currently, London is 'moving' east-wards and our students are part of this, with local community projects featuring in their design briefs. Students design and build numerous small architectural projects with local social clients as part of the MArch Construction Week and successfully participate in competitions to improve public spaces around the Royal Docks, organised by the London Festival of Architecture.

The Architecture school is situated in the department of Architecture and Visual Arts (AVA) which is itself located in the School of Architecture Computing and Engineering (ACE) on the purpose-built Docklands Campus. We have close links with other courses and departments. For example, we run short interdisciplinary competitions for students including the Broadgate Prize and this year, the MOBIE Housing Ideas competition.

These close links between courses give us access to other staff groups who bring expertise to enrich our own staff input. We benefit from technical input on Fire and Life Safety from the Architectural Design Technology course and Theory input in RIBA Part 2 from Landscape Architecture, Computing, Environmental Theory, Urban Theory and the MRes Critical Cities. We have a specific Architecture foundation course which prepares level 3 students for access into Architecture Part 1. Although all Architecture modules are separate, students work alongside Interior Design students in the Mental Wealth and History and Theory modules and share lectures and seminars groups. There is therefore significant opportunity for students to mix across disciplines.

The close proximity between courses also brings access to a wide variety of technical workshops and labs including the full range of Engineering and Arts workshops, such as photography, the traditional metal, plaster and wood workshops as well as the newer digital fabrication and robotics workshops. Students are encouraged towards a hybrid use of the workshops with project work spanning both traditional and more contemporary digital technologies. As part of our making culture, the hands-on learning by doing is an important aspect of our teaching and learning. The integration of different technologies into project work has been maintained during the Covid period, with students experimenting and developing architectural propositions and qualities through model making and 1:1 construction.

Level 4 (Year one) is taught as a year structure in which students share the same brief. Above this at levels 5 and 6 and in Part 2 levels 7a & b are taught in vertical units. The units are taught by 2 staff, one of whom is a fully qualified ARB registered Architect.

Each unit offers general architectural education and a special area of expertise and focus. The unit system gives choice to the students and acknowledges their diverse interests. The levels 5 and above are mapped against ARB/RIBA Criteria. Both Part 1 and 2 project briefs are expected to share sustainable goals and objectives. Part 1 projects have simpler sites, less complex briefs and are usually smaller in scale. The project work in Part 2 differs from Part 1 and is characterised by more complex sites, often international, more complex briefs and larger scale building projects. In Part 2 students are expected to understand complex urban environments and make sustainable proposals with short and longer-term impacts.

Going through our educational approach step by step, we equip students to become competent, responsible and passionate designers, architects and thinkers.

The school is reviewing the RIBA Way Ahead and the new sub-criteria from the ARB and a mapping exercise is in progress. We will discuss options with

Quality in Term 2 and we hope to be able to integrate the new ARB sub-criteria for September 2022 start. We would prefer to integrate the new RIBA and ARB requirements through content reinforcement and incremental change. Courses were internally revalidated 2 years ago and we are in the second year of implementing the newly revalidated courses. In this way we hope to avoid constantly revalidating courses.

In 2021 the Architecture school made a strong Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission with UEL's Sustainability Research Institute SRI and it is likely that a research platform will continue to grow. Research is currently organised across ACE into 5 research groups. These are cross disciplinary groups who meet regularly to develop research bids and proposals. The new post REF structure should assist staff who wish to become early researchers to access the research platform. There are also opportunities for students to assist in research and develop specialised research skills and competencies.

Teaching during the Covid period has been challenging but staff, students and the University have adapted well to the changing environments. There has been considerable investment in the AVA Atrium (forum) space, Gallery and Studios. We have adapted and revised the Gallery space and lighting and opened it up to increase the available space and provide a new student social space. We have built a new purpose designed Crit space and a new meeting room for interview rehearsals etc.

There has been considerable investment in IT, furniture and fittings for these spaces.

We have equipped the Atrium, Gallery, Lightwell and external entrance area with large digital displays. We have upgraded the computer teaching suites with 45 new computers with dual monitors. We are currently fitting out all studio unit spaces with two computers with dual monitors and the first-year studios with four computers. The digital teaching facilities have also been enhanced by a laptop loan system and upgrades to teaching spaces.

The university has a revised mission referred to as Vision 2028. This is available on the UEL website. The vision outlines a strong focus for a careers-led university and this new mission fits excellently with the professional courses in Architecture. Going forwards, we are looking at expanding the Architecture offer with a new online Part 3 course and options for Apprenticeships in the Part 1 and 2 courses. The University is also developing a revised sustainability mission and is looking at Carbon objectives for 2030. This strengthened research environment is very supportive of the Architecture school's position on sustainability and there will be many research opportunities available for Architecture students in the coming years including a partnership with Siemens that conceptualises the Docklands Campus as a living lab to research carbon reduction.

Overall, this refined Mission coupled with the considerable investment in facilities has strengthened our ability to meet the current challenges as we work towards our 50th Anniversary as the leading school of Architecture in east London

11 Commendations

The board commends

- 11.1 The school's commitment to ensuring a high-quality student experience, through the nurturing of a strong community of practice and studio culture.
- 11.2 The studios and making facilities (analogue and digital), and the university's commitment to ongoing campus improvements.
- 11.3 The school's commitment to authentic learning strategies, used to engage the students with the wider community and the profession, enhancing their experience and employment opportunities.

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 While the board acknowledges the staff commitment to student learning and pastoral care, we recommend that there is a rebalancing of teaching time, particularly within the M.Arch, to encourage independent learning.
- 13.2 The board acknowledges the extensive efforts to support diversity in the student cohort and within the course material (design briefs and module descriptors). The Board believes that there are opportunities to further develop this in student design work and theoretical studies.
- 13.3 The board recommends that the department strengthens its methods of embedding the staff's excellent practice-based research into the curriculum (particularly at undergraduate level) as part of the university's commitment to *Research Informed Teaching*.

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 that the school remain vigilant regarding apparent generosity and inconsistency of marking.

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 BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

15.2 MArch, 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

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1: 156
MArch, Part 2: 65

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