

RIBA 

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full visiting board
to the University of Westminster - 2022**

Date of visiting board: 19, 20 & 21 October 2022

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 20 March 2023

1 Details of institution hosting courses

University of Westminster
35 Marylebone Road
London
NW1 5LS

2 Courses offered for validation

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2 MArch Master of Architecture
Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice in Architecture
Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design

3 Head of School

Professor Harry Charrington – Head of School of Architecture and Cities

Course Leaders

Dr Paolo Zaide – BA Architecture Part 1 Course Leader
Stefania Boccaletti – BSc Architecture and Environmental Design
Richard Difford – MArch Architecture Part 2 Course Leader
Alastair Blyth – Leader in Architecture (Part 3) Course Leader
Wilfred Achille – Leader in Architecture (Part 3) Course Leader

4 Awarding body

University of Westminster

5 The visiting board

Professor Paul Jones – Chair
Ana Monrabel-Cook
Lindesay Dawe
Andrew Thompson
Julian Dickens
Jaime Solloso – RIBA – validation manager

6 Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education

The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture (published September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

7 Proposals of the visiting board

On the 20 March 2023, the RIBA Educational Committee confirmed that the following course and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2 MArch Master of Architecture
Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice in Architecture
Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design

8 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

9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

The School of Architecture and Cities, formed in 2018, maintains our foundational 1882 Polytechnic ethos of offering a transformative and vocational higher education accessible to all. Building on the legacy of student and staff alumni from Ralph Erskine to Robin Evans, we aim to educate reflective practitioners capable of critically engaging with the world and improving it.

Our students are superdiverse. Over half home-students identify as BAME, most are female, many are drawn from within indexes and areas of deprivation (and others not), and there are a significant number from overseas. Our Equity Forum, leads our intercultural approach to EDI, encouraging the interplay of a mix of perspectives which distinguishes our work. In a high-wire act that balances access with rigorous standards, care with challenge, our aim is to give agency to our graduates, and the added-value of our offer saw the DoE assess the School as No.1 for social mobility in the UK in 2021. Our (NSS) student satisfaction scores are the highest in the university and exceed benchmark, and our students continue to receive major accolades, including the RIBA Presidents' Medals.

Our multinational staff includes spatial and transport planners, urban designers, interior specialists, artists, tourism and event designers, technologists, fabricators, as well as architects. We are all in one 'silo' and can contribute to any course. At a time when architects need to respond architecturally to issues that are not strictly architectural – the climate emergency, social justice, changing technologies – this is a critical dimension of our development of a paradigm of architectural education rooted in collaborative practice, regenerative place-making, retrofit and reuse.

Students and staff collaborate on events, and networks such as our Climate Action Taskforce (ArCCAT) continually challenge us. Staff offices are pepper-potted through our expansive Studios in which each studio group has its own assigned space. Our Fabrication Lab enables students to exploit advanced fabrication in combination with analogue techniques, material- and environmental-testing, and AR, VR and 3D-scanning. Ambika P3 is a world-leading exhibition space in which we stage events and build. The pandemic stimulated an evolutionary jump in our digital capabilities; for example, the development of our virtual home openstudiowestminster, and our Software Studio which gives students recourse to learning key digital skills.

Knowledge Exchange & Research RKE

We are a London School, and we cultivate professional engagement through our external links. Most staff are part-time, and, together with our permanently contracted visiting lecturers, in practice when not at the School. This enables a reciprocal

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relationship in which staff engage students with current issues and, in turn, our academic space offers practitioners a place to explore things that are important to practice, but which it can rarely afford. Part 1 students also undertake a 2-week practice placement in third year and are mentored by local practices. Our hybrid end-of-year OPEN [exhibition](#) and [catalogue](#) promote students' work to employers, whom we also work with through our Employability Advisory Board and seminars. We also sustain fruitful relationships with neighbouring schools, museums, and institutes.

As practice informs our courses, so does research (see B6). The currency of our submission to UoA13 in REF2021 saw us ranked 7th for Research Power, and included design portfolios, as well as personal scholarship and funded research, and knowledge exchange articulated through our [Studio as Book](#) series. Our research structure promotes interdisciplinary collaboration through 5 cross-cutting Research Groups, and our research is disseminated through our [openresearchwestminster](#) platform and research fora.

RIBA VB 2022 2 Learning & Teaching – Architecture

Characterised by a triangulation of teaching, research and practice, the School's courses are an interdependent portfolio of environmental [disciplines](#) ranging from interiors to infrastructure. While necessarily specialist, courses explore synergies rather than distinctions, and emphasise cross-disciplinary practice – for instance, with our [Active Travel Academy](#) and the crosspollination of BA Interior Architecture and Part 1. [Events](#), workshops, and open lecture series complement our regular semester-based teaching.

The School sustains a critical mass of students at Parts 1, 2 and 3 that reflects our commitment to all facets of an architect's education. As learning is ontological as well as epistemological, so our diversity extends into the variety of our approaches to architecture. We view architects as agents not supplicants – helping to brief the project through an informed artistry, and we cherish risk and experimentation – expressed as a praxis of invention and testing.

The democracy of the open-ended, iterative project lies at the heart of our pedagogy. We teach design two-days-a-week in studio peer groups with a dedicated tutor team, as well as invited specialists, student PALs and assistants (see B4). Students develop their creative practice within the context of continually expanding theoretical and critical knowledge of technical and environmental studies, fabrication, cultural context, and professional studies. These are not integrated with design studio – which might restrict a student's study to the limitations of their designs – rather, we aim for a synthesis in which students can research and substantiate work which, as well as informing studio, has its own value.

Part 1 The two complementary courses share common dimensions of study, but differing approaches to regenerative design. Following a largely joint first year educating both cohorts of students in architectural concepts and competencies: BArch students explore architecture's physical, social, and cultural contexts, and develop a conceptual design method that, underpinned by material and environmental experimentation, demonstrates the principles of sustainable construction and form. They also write a live site diary and a reflective dissertation. BScAED students explore architectural experience and building performance, and develop an evidence-based design method that, underpinned by material and environmental examination, demonstrates computational numeracy as well as

principles of sustainable construction and form. They also write an extended essay on the constituting contexts of their design work.

Part 2 MArch students build on their practice and undergraduate experience to forge a culminating academic portfolio containing productive and reflective theses, combined with technical, environmental, representational, and professional studies. Each Vertical Studio and Dissertation Group has its own methods and priorities, enabling students to specialise in their final moments of full-time study.

Part 3 PGDipPP educates approximately 40% of architects in this country. A core team, and some 40 practitioner tutors, guide students in critically reflecting upon their engagement with our sui generis discipline. At its core lies a reflective case study drawn from their experience of architectural practice, alongside critical studies on management, law, and contracts. Our Part 3 Champions mentor students on the course (see B4).

10 Commendations

- 10.1** The board commends the school on the outstanding community of practice (between the staff and students) resulting in an excellent student experience.
- 10.2** The board commends the world class fabrication facilities that enable students to produce innovative and exciting project work.
- 10.3** The board commends the efforts of the Part 3 staff (both full-time and part-time) in producing an outstanding programme that is integrated and holistic, in preparation for architectural practice.

11 Conditions

There are no conditions.

12 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.

- 12.1** While the board celebrates the testing and innovation in the design projects, the school should ensure that all students (BA, BSC and MArch) demonstrate resolution within their construction section drawings.

13 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.

- 13.1** The board values the school's commitment to the health and wellbeing of the students but recognises the personal toll on the teaching staff. We therefore advise that the university provides dedicated student-support staff, within the school of architecture, to protect learning and teaching activities.

13.2 The board advises that the university dedicates more time to showcase the rich and varied research and teaching projects through their website and associated social media platforms.

14 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.

Graduate Attributes for Parts 1,2 & 3

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1, 2 and 3 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Bachelor of Arts in Architecture, the Bachelor of Science in Architecture and Environmental Design, the Master of Architecture and the Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice in Architecture

15 Review of work against criteria RIBA Themes and Values and Graduate Attributes

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion graduate attribute to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion graduate attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion graduate outcome was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

BA Arch (Part 1): 360

BSc (Part 1): 81

M Arch (Part 2): 165

Postgraduate Diploma (Part 3): 471

16.2 Documentation provided

The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

17 Notes of meeting

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 budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the head of institution
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff