



Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full visiting board
to Loughborough University - 2023**

Date of visiting board: 7-8 September 2023
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 9 January 2024

- 1 **Details of institution hosting courses**
 School of Architecture, Building and Civil Engineering
 Loughborough University
 Ashby Road
 Loughborough
 LE11 3TU
- 2 **Courses offered for validation**
 Master of Architecture MArch, Part 2
- 3 **Head of School**

 Malcolm Cook – Dean of School
 Adam Crawford – Head of Operations (Budget Holder)
 Robert Schmidt III – Architecture Group Lead & MArch Programme Leader
- 4 **Awarding body**
 University of Loughborough
- 5 **The visiting board**

Musa Garba	Practitioner / Chair
Oliver Hall	Practitioner
Ryan Stuckey	Academic
Abi Van Hoorebeek	Practitioner
Jaime Solloso	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 9 January 2023, the RIBA confirmed validation of the following course:

 Part 2 MArch of Architecture

 The next visit to the Loughborough University will take place in 2026.
- 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)**

As architects, it might serve to remember our education more as a cultural immersion than simply dry academic training. It is therefore uppermost in our minds to facilitate an environment that is challenging and exciting, one that is artistically stimulating, culturally aware and technically demanding. We want passionate debates that can inspire free-wheeling creativity expressed by articulate thinking and critical interrogation. We want our school to foster the close friendships, warmth and mutual support that make the successes and failures of learning through problem-based explorations, not just engaging but life forming. We believe that architectural education should excite students with the possibilities of what they can achieve - it should drive curiosity of the unknown and propel a raw enthusiasm and inquisitiveness for life, art and our built environment. Students should enjoy their studies and increasingly take ownership of their education as part of their journey.

While we hold this passion firmly, we believe architectural education should not be a place of exploitation, of endless hours in studio. We are committed to nurturing the wellbeing of students and staff here at LU-Arc by creating an exemplary culture of how we conduct ourselves. Our wellbeing charter is a declaration of support for, and set of commitments to, the wellbeing of everyone in LU-Arc. Our aim is to inculcate an open and inclusive culture of shared values and responsibility that allows students and staff to flourish in our work while balancing other activities in our lives.

It's been nearly six years since our first students started their journey with us. We have had passionate debates, work that has won national and international recognition, graduates who have continued their own journey with us and at other top universities and practices – all of which has begun to solidify a collective ecosystem of students, researchers and staff that foster a distinct character and strong reputation. Graduates come back to re-engage for reviews and to support placements, staff that have moved on remain in touch and often partake in reviews and events. While this in no way suggests our work is complete, it does provide a measure of success toward sustaining a quality ecosystem where people feel included and can be successful.

As we continue to reflect and evolve, our current focus is building on our existing strengths with the launch of our Part 2, MArch programme. We have already seen the planned and serendipitous benefits that having such senior students can have for our Part 1 students. We aim to continue to enhance this vertical interaction and formalise a clear journey from Part 1 through to Part 2. The Part 2 offers our students the comfort of our ecosystem, but without simply offering more of the same geographically and pedagogically. Through the course we have established an active presence at our London campus in Here East which has brought a range of new opportunities from hosting design events to implanting ourselves in practices for creative challenges. Pedagogically, we provide a scaffolding for students to take further ownership of their studies, defining their own design framework and offering them the ability to choose and move between design practice and research in their first year.

Both programmes are designed with a clear balance between Arts and technical teaching to produce rounded and highly motivated graduates well prepared for a successful career as an architect, and for those that wish, to be leaders in other fields. The particular combination of knowledge and skills the programmes offer include the successful practical and transferable skills our current graduates bring to industry such as excellent verbal communication, management and teamwork to

supplement core design skills. While our part 2 builds off our brand of ‘architect-maker’, this has synergistically expanded to ‘architect-entrepreneur’. The ambition is for our graduates to (re)enter practice in a state of ‘intelligent control’, to give them the confidence and capacity to disrupt current practices and drive change.

We are currently developing a strategic portfolio of additional PGT programmes in architecture to study alongside postgraduates on our other built environment courses as well as our London school which has a focus on design management, innovation and enterprise.

Our overarching academic approach embodies five tenets of teaching and learning:

1 Design focused culture - The allocation of individual studio space throughout the educational journey enables our programmes to stand apart and facilitate an inspirational and collaborative environment that stimulates imagination, creativity, intellectual curiosity and critical thinking that is essential in architectural education. The studio is the centre of the students’ education and discovery of their own design process and must present an engaging and inclusive platform, capable of differentiation, for the greatest opportunity of personal growth and independence.

2 Learning through making - Our programmes embrace the University’s tradition of learning through making. Workshop spaces enable the exploration of design ideas through hands-on making of physical objects and the Digital Fabrication Lab (DFL) and Mixed Reality and Robotic Research Lab (MR3L) allow students to explore and enhance their designs digitally. Our broader School lab facilities provide unique kit that cultivates an acute understanding of materials, their properties, technical capabilities and associated construction processes which in turn inform the craft of architecture.

3 Broad based education - Students study architecture within broader cultural, environmental, organisational and historic contexts. Cross-fertilization with modules in the broader curricula of the School and the University’s School of Creative Arts and Design provide opportunities to explore knowledge, technologies, skills and attitudes that contribute to the broad anatomy of architecture. This enables opportunities to work with allied professions and a team of individuals with different skills to create successful design projects.

4 Connecting Theory and Practice - We have established a strong educational alignment with industry which facilitates our fundamental belief that architectural education benefits from a practice-based anchor. Both our Part 1 and 2 courses have practice experience enmeshed in their journeys. This is coupled with practitioner engagement throughout the degree with guest lectures, practice and project visits, design workshops, tutorials and ‘live’ projects.

5 Research based modules - The wealth of world-leading research within our School has a profound influence on our educational culture introducing at an early-stage techniques for design-research and exploration as a basis for evidence-based design. Design work should foster imagination and creativity, but students should develop knowledge bases and critical positions through a rigorous design process that underpin their creativity and respond to contemporary social, political, environmental and economic issues.

We are fortunate to be part of a School and University with fantastic facilities and a strong reputation for teaching, research and student experience. We have built a

team of exceptional educators, practitioners and researchers that share a passion for architectural education. It is not enough to simply be a purveyor of expert knowledge – a high quality educational experience requires forward thinking pedagogies that are blended, interactive, adaptive and diversified. Architects are asked to translate the complex needs of others, described in words, into three-dimensional solutions. It is here, in this cultural immersion, where we are inculcated with the need to question everything and search for new possibilities that great architecture can arise for the benefit of society.

10 Commendations

10.1 The Board commends the commitment and passion of staff to their students and the course.

10.2 The Board commends the university for their commitment and support to the School as it has grown and evolved in the form of access to facilities, equipment, materials and resources whilst recognising the need to grow at a sustainable rate.

10.3 The Board commends the School for the courage and ingenuity in forming this novel course which provides new routes to enter the field of architecture and the energy and drive of staff to engage with the profession.

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 The School is to provide a strategy for how construction technology is incrementally integrated in a project specific way and is evidenced by students.

12.2 The School is to adapt teaching of existing outputs to allow students to express knowledge of traditional architectural history & theory and how these manifest in design and/or written work.

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 To tie in with the institutions' Well-being Charter, the School should put in place a formal learning agreement between practices and the institution for those students who are on the practice pathway. The School should also consider appointing a work and well-being liaison person(s) to help students in practice negotiate a sensible work life balance.

13.2 The School should consider the appointment of a practitioner as an external examiner to further diversity of opinion, and quality of feedback.

13.3 The School should ensure that research time for staff is protected, and further, enhanced to strengthen the research reputation of architecture within the School.

13.4 The School should provide deliverables guidance for the practice based M1 cohort to use in demonstrating creative thought in their studio module.

13.5 The Board advises that the rigorous testing of spatial experience be evidenced within the design work of M2.

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 Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Master of Architecture (MArch).

15 Review of work against Themes and Values

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Themes and Values for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Master of Architecture (MArch).

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

Master of Architecture (**Part 2**):14 (2022) / 20 (2023)

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 mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.**

- **Meeting with architecture budget holder and course leaders**
- **Meeting with students**
- **Meeting with staff**

- **Meeting with Head of Institution**
- **Meeting with external examiners**