



**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA visiting board  
to Nottingham Trent University**

**School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment**

**Date of visiting board: 29 & 30 June 2023**  
**Confirmed by the RIBA: 2 January 2024**

**1 Details of institution hosting courses**

Nottingham Trent University  
School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment  
Arkwright Building  
Goldsmith Street  
Nottingham  
NG1 4BU

**2 Courses offered for validation**

Part 1: Bachelor of Architecture, BArch (Hons) Architecture  
Part 2: Master of Architecture, MArch

**3 Head of Architecture**

Gavin Richards

**Course leader/s**

Guillermo Garma Montiel, Programme Manager for BA Arch and M Arch  
Dr. Tom Hughes, BA Architecture (RIBA Part 1) Programme Co-Leader  
Dr. Marisela Mendoza, M Arch (RIBA Part 2) Programme Leader  
Holly Mills, BA Architecture (RIBA Part 1) Programme Co-Leader  
Dr. Lois Woods, BA Architecture (RIBA Part 1) Programme Co-Leader

**4 Awarding body**

Nottingham Trent University

**5 The visiting board**

Professor Robert Brown – Chair (Academic)  
Frazer Bufton  
Peggy Le Cren  
Hannah Durham

**In attendance:**

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA validation manager

**6 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 September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

**7 Proposals of the visiting board**

On 2 January 2024 the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following courses:

Bachelor of Architecture, BArch (Hons) Architecture, Part 1  
Master of Architecture, MArch Part 2

The next visit to Nottingham Trent University will take place in 2028.

**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)**

We believe Nottingham Trent University’s BArch (Hons) Architecture and MArch in Architecture courses provide students with the professional knowledge, architectural understanding, environmental consciousness and practical skills that will allow them to face the challenges of the twenty-first century. The global awareness of humanity’s impact on the environment requires a change to the way human activities are performed in all societies. In architecture, the importance of the users’ wellbeing, climatic and environmental considerations, the professional and ethical responsibilities of the architect and the effect of technological innovations have increased the contextual complexity in which architects exercise their careers. To respond to these challenges, architects require to cultivate a deeper understanding and knowledge of multiple themes: socio-cultural, historical, environmental, wellbeing and professional issues, in order to design architecture that can become a positive force of change in the world.

**Areas of exceptional activity:**

We consider that the areas of exceptional activity in NTU’s architectural courses are aligned to two main themes that shape our ethos: Architectural Practice and Architecture & Wellbeing.

**1. Architectural Practice**

The core aim at the heart of the architecture courses at NTU is to produce graduates that have the knowledge, skills and understanding to become an asset to modern practices at the end of their studies. This aim is aligned with the University’s central values of producing graduates who are ‘industry ready’ and to enrich society by contributing to its environmental, social and cultural development. To achieve these goals, our graduates work towards developing excellent technical and environmental knowledge to address the evolving climatic circumstances of the twenty-first century. In addition, the professional skills developed at undergraduate level prepare our graduates to deal with the demands of architectural practice, while at postgraduate level students develop specialist knowledge by taking part in advanced research led by our Professoriate. By undertaking practical projects and producing realistic designs and outputs, the architecture courses at NTU, strive to develop graduates who are highly employable and ready to enrich society in architectural practice.

**2. Architecture & Wellbeing**

We believe that the architecture courses at NTU excel in the integration of wellbeing as a core theme in our pedagogic endeavours, pastoral support and within our collaborative staff and student community. From the outset, students are introduced to issues of social sustainability in their projects and with reference to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (in particular, 3, 11

and 13). By Year 3, well-being, the city and environmental concerns become core themes in the design atelier briefs; these themes run in parallel in other supporting modules. At postgraduate level, students are challenged to explore design methodologies that allow them to elaborate architectural enquiry responsive to wellbeing matters, and socio-cultural and sustainable future contexts.

We consider the wellbeing of our student and staff community to be of utmost importance and the pastoral support for our students is well-structured and of excellent quality. Our staff-student communication channels are effective in resolving emerging issues; staff and students are continuously encouraged to feedback on both curricular issues and matters of wellbeing – staff have won NTU awards for pastoral support. We are currently developing a research strand, running co-creation projects with our students and alumni, whereby student research is informing future curriculum developments. Our aim is to develop the theme of well-being across our pedagogy, pastoral support, the student-staff community and co-creation projects to make our architecture course(s) the leading centre for 'sustainable well-being' in the UK.

#### **Teaching and Learning Features:**

NTU has a well-established learning and teaching philosophy that places students at the centre of the learning and teaching experience. The programmes provide a safe, inclusive learning environment where students can be creative by experimenting, taking risks and developing architectural ideas through dialogue and debate with the teaching staff. The courses use collaborative StudentCentred Active Learning Environments with Upside-down Pedagogies (SCALE-UP) whenever possible to create a stimulating learning experience aimed at closing the attainment gap. The architecture courses are based in the Newton – Arkwright complex, which is located at the heart of Nottingham's City Campus, hence the institution's civic position defines the urban nature and focus of our projects. The key principles that form our area of excellence have been weaved within the courses' four strands of knowledge: Design (Dsg); Context, History & Humanities (CH&H); Technology & Environment (T&E); and Professional Skills (PS). We have integrated essential knowledge relevant to modern practice in the T&E and PS strands: for example, climatic and environmental concerns, health and safety principles and the rise/use of new technologies. The modules within these strands work in unison with the design projects to deliver the necessary knowledge and understanding to address creatively the challenges of modern practice, the construction industry and global environmental concerns.

#### **Distinction between Part 1 and Part 2:**

The BArch and MArch curriculum is centred around design, which is complemented by three strands of architectural knowledge – CH&H, T&E, and PS. At undergraduate level, students are gradually empowered to pursue a personalised learning experience by choosing a distinctive direction based on the selection of briefs, research topics and representation techniques. The culmination of the students' journey is the final design project in Year 3, which provides the platform to synthesise technical, environmental, tectonic, theoretical and experiential knowledge in the design of a medium/large scale project. The personal choices serve as scaffolding for the students' transformation into independent learners and responsible designers. This student-centric approach facilitates the fulfilment of the course's aims of

producing Part 1 graduates with a design ethos that enables them to comprehend the current complexities of the world and to develop a sensitivity for other cultures and communities.

At postgraduate level, students develop a deeper critical position based on a studio-centred research environment responding to complex contexts such as socio-economic inequality and the climatic emergency. They are encouraged to adopt an architectural position that questions the production of new, diverse and inclusive architectural typologies and spaces. This is informed by research from our Professoriate, which helps students understand current practices within global, national, and local contexts. The MArch Year 1 is based on experimental design briefs within urban contexts, and projects are developed using challenging design constraints and technological exploration. In Year 2, students design a large-scale project that focuses on the comprehensive resolution of all aspects of a scheme – compositional, functional, experiential, tectonic, and environmental. Whereas the BArch focuses on addressing the challenges of the near future, the MArch explores themes connected with the future evolution of the profession, 8 for example, the role of AI and digital technologies. The aim of the MArch course is to develop students who can critically and systematically explore through research a personalised design methodology in response to the current and future challenges the discipline faces.

## **10 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1** The Board commends the School for its innovative, extensive and reflective approach to wellbeing, including: the pastoral and financial support provided to students; the overall atmosphere of care that extends to the wellbeing of staff; a learning and teaching culture that embraces diversity and inclusion; and enabling students with a sense of efficacy.
- 10.2** The Board commends the School for its continuing agenda of fostering professional knowledge, skills and understanding in students and as evidenced in student work, underpinned by: its engagement with pertinent issues of contemporary practice including but not limited to climate change and working with existing buildings; a clear pedagogic framework that enables a scaffolded learning journey (e.g., through modelmaking); a constructive alignment between modules; and the workshops and technical support provided.
- 10.3** The Board commends the School for its emerging initiative of supporting students in the development of research skills, including its programme of collaborative student-staff research, and which is starting to positively inform Design Studio work.

## **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** There are no action points.

**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 recognises the School has a number of strengths and suggests that School rewrite its Position Statement to better celebrate the School's distinctiveness.

**13.2** The Board recognises the School's strengths, and suggests the School consider how it can better distinguish itself and afford scope for enhanced, deeper learning through: the critical alignment of theory, technology, professionalism with the Design Studio; providing opportunities for more ambitious students to pursue more speculative work; affording the development of a broader understanding of the implications of their work.

**13.3** The Board recognises the School's emergent exploration of digital design and fabrication and their potential to inform design and research practice, and suggests the School continue the development of its IT suite and support to better enable these initiatives.

**13.4** The Board recognises the School's active advancement of employability, and suggests the School explore opportunities to further extend student learning and the School's civic engagement through: connectivity with local industry, the city and region via synergies of practice and research (e.g., under themes of cultural heritage, digital design / fabrication, and well being).

**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 1**

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture, BArch (Hons) Part 1.

**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, Part 2

**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 1**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture, BArch (Hons) Part 1.

**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, Part 2.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers**

Part 1: Bachelor of Architecture, BArch (Hons) Architecture: 350

Part 2: Master of Architecture, MArch: 27

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