

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Sheffield

Date of visiting board: 6 & 7 October 2022
Confirmed by the RIBA: 23 November 2022

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Sheffield School of Architecture
The University of Sheffield
Arts Tower
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN

2 Courses offered for validation

Part 1

BA (Hons) Architecture
BA (Hons) Architecture and Landscape
MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture
MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture with a Year in Industry

Part 2

MArch Architecture
MArch Architecture: Collaborative Practice
MArch Architecture and Landscape Architecture

3 Head of Department

Professor Renata Tyszczyk

Programme Directors:

Simon Chadwick: Director of Undergraduate Programmes
Simon Chadwick: BA (Hons) Architecture
Simon Chadwick: BA (Hons) Architecture and Landscape Architecture
Simon Chadwick: MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture; MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture with a Year in Industry

Part 2

John Sampson & Cith Skelcher: MArch Joint Directors of MArch Programmes
John Sampson & Cith Skelcher: MArch Architecture
Satwinder Samra: MArch Architecture: Collaborative Practice
Howard Evans: MArch Architecture and Landscape Architecture

4 Awarding body

The University of Sheffield

5 The visiting board

Professor Kate Cheyne – Chair
Professor David McClean – Vice-Chair
Alex Warnock-Smith
Jenny Harper

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 July 2011, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

7 Proposals of the visiting board

On 23 November 2022 the RIBA confirmed validation of the following courses:

Part 1

BA (Hons) Architecture
 BA (Hons) Architecture and Landscape
 MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture
 MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture with a Year in Industry

Part 2

MArch Architecture
 MArch Architecture: Collaborative Practice
 MArch Architecture and Landscape Architecture

The next visit to the University of Sheffield will take place in 2027.

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)

Sheffield School of Architecture (SSoA) is the social school of architecture. This has been our shared identity for 25 years. We consider this to be a dynamic and evolving position, and a ‘work in progress’, as our school is guided by questions of response and responsibility in addressing current and future societal and environmental challenges. SSoA is distinctive in its approaches to citizenship, climate crisis, pedagogy and well-being, and in its ethos of liveness, embedded across its activities and programmes.

Citizenship

SSoA is a diverse and international community of students, staff and alumni, nested in a civic University which has commitments and connections with the city of Sheffield and the wider region, and with a global perspective on innovative teaching and impactful research. Our no.3 position and 4* Environment rating in the UK 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) confirms the school as a world-class centre for architectural research. Our understanding of global citizenship extends to our ambition in placing decolonising and anti-racism at the core of the research-led curriculum, across our pedagogical initiatives and public engagement activities. We are committed to empowering our students to be better citizens as well as better designers. We therefore encourage our

student-citizens to be good listeners and communicators, ethical practitioners and agile and collaborative agents of change.

Climate crisis

Our staff and student body have been collectively developing responses to the climate crisis. The 'SSoA Students for Climate Action' group has been proactive in its campaigning for greater emphasis on sustainability in architecture education. Representatives from the School have also been instrumental in the development of the national ACAN network. The recent RIBA Publication of 'Designing for the Climate Emergency: A guide for Architecture Students' was co-authored by our Director of Education and features a range of student good practice examples from across the School. We are committed to addressing the climate crisis through learning at all levels, and continue to collaborate with industry leaders to explore the potential of carbon calculation tools, circular economy and retrofit strategies in teaching and research. In terms of student projects, this has produced work that is spatially sophisticated, socially just and environmentally relevant. Our understanding is that the climate crisis provokes us in developing not just decarbonisation strategies and resilient urban futures, but promoting just and equitable spaces of inhabitation. It also underlies our commitment to reshaping architecture and design education in ensuring that future practitioners are equipped with interdisciplinary and multi-scalar perspectives, more agile and adaptive skills and capacities, and a robust sense of architecture's responses and responsibilities.

Pedagogy

SSoA continues to be exceptional in its team-based development of innovative, agenda-setting and student-centred pedagogies. We see our international body of students as engaged researchers, built environment professionals, creative practitioners, entrepreneurs and civic participants. This global community and wide-lens means that 'decolonisation' and 'climate emergency' are not seen as new challenges for us, but rather expressions of some of the deepest and most long standing responsibilities of architecture as a practice and profession. This collaborative, pragmatic and purposeful ethos is reflected in the example of our MArch Collaborative Practice route where our citizen-students 'earn as they learn' in Year 5 before returning to full-time education for Year 6. This route is firmly established as a leading alternative which is not only more affordable but also encourages productive dialogue between academia and practice and it continues to expand with over 65 UK practices involved. The same purposes of critical analysis, reflection on contemporary issues in practice and peer-led expertise inform our respected Dual programmes partnerships with the Departments of Engineering and Landscape. Together with our students we have developed considerable skill in hybrid digital-analogue methods of both teaching delivery and outputs. Our approach to digital design reviews has been developed since 2016 and has proven inclusive, reduced costs for students, and further nurtured their adaptability.

Wellbeing

We endeavour to create a supportive and inclusive environment at SSoA, but we know this work is never done. We are therefore conscious of making careful, responsible, ethical and critical choices when it comes to working with people, adopting technologies and practices and addressing societal issues. We recognise the importance of nurturing a sense of collective endeavour of SSoA. The One University approach at Sheffield will further bolster our established EDI and student initiatives, for example the Voices Survey, The Feminist Library, Athena Swan bronze award, Sheffield University Architecture Society (SUAS) families and MatriArch. Our world leading journal field: was relaunched this year with a focus on the anti-racist and decolonial research being done in the school. Our view is that the best architecture, whether as a student or practitioner, comes out of a supportive and collaborative environment. It is characteristic that the School led the field in taking a radically different approach to project reviews – replacing the crit system with peer-led reviews back in 2000. We emphasise group work, joint projects, cross-studio reviews, project swaps, and peer review for our students. At the same time we encourage a healthy life/work balance and avoidance of a long working hours culture. The pandemic demanded that we take a fresh look at care needs and issues of accessibility in teaching and learning environments, and these insights have furthered our thinking about what it means to be a School of Architecture that places inclusivity and wellbeing at the core of our values.

Liveness

SSoA introduced the pioneering Live Projects programme in 2001, and in 2014 set up Live Works, the only permanent University-funded 'Urban Room' in the UK. Live Works creates and cross-subsidizes live collaborations with civic and community partners that develop graduate employability making a real impact in Sheffield and the South Yorkshire region. Our Urban Room has gained national profile as originator of the Urban Rooms Network and the Urban Rooms Toolkit. We place ethical practice at the heart of our Live Project offer and take care to support our community partners on the 'way in' to a collaboration and for the 'way forward' beyond the Live Project into sustained relationships, via Live Works, design studios, 'project stacks' and research projects. This ethical approach expands beyond Live Projects to form an ethos of 'liveness' across the School that values a commitment to responsive and critical enquiry, citizenship, awareness of real-world value of collaborations, and to making an impact with communities and organisations. This means that SSoA is never complacent, rather we are prepared to face future challenges with a spirit of collective responsibility and an ambition to explore and expand the boundaries of architecture

10 Commendations

- 10.1 The Board commends the development of the School Part 2 Masters course portfolio through innovative new provision that embeds collaborative and cross-disciplinary practices, introduces specialisms, and offers flexible study models to foster inclusion.

- 10.2 The Board commends the strength of the School community to which both students and staff belong, and the championing of well-being within the School at a demonstrable level of professionalism.
- 10.3 The Board highly commends the ongoing strength of the School pedagogic research and scholarly endeavour, recognised across architecture schools. This includes leading on nationally recognised curriculum developments in response to EDI, climate literacy and assessment & feedback.
- 10.4 The Board commends the conceptual questioning, rigour, scale and breadth of the design projects and portfolios in the Part 2 Masters courses, and the integration of technical, ethical and professional considerations within the portfolios.

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 Board recognises the ambitions of the Management and Practice components and encourages the School to continue to be innovative in reflecting the dynamic nature of architectural education, practice and the wider construction industry.
- 12.2 The Board encourages the continued development and strengthening of decolonisation across the undergraduate courses and curriculum, particularly in relation to broadening the selection of case-studies in Design Studio and Environmental and Technical Studies to encourage more diverse design responses.
- 12.3 In support of the School aim for holistic and responsive design projects, the Board suggests the School further develops and defines an architectural portfolio at UG level that includes process and exploration.

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 advises the School to work with Estates to develop a 5 year strategic resource plan for studio and workshop facilities that support their pedagogic practices and the projected size of the student and staff body.
- 13.2 The Board commends the School in its sustained pursuit of core values, themes and interests around social justice, collaboration and the climate emergency; the cutting-edge nature of the School's work in these areas, and its future vision, should be championed more clearly.

- 13.3 The Board advises the School to work in conjunction with Faculty and HR colleagues to explore the potential for developing staff progression criteria. This should fairly accommodate the expertise and achievements of staff, alongside the roles that they undertake within the specific disciplinary context of Architecture.
- 13.4 Through closer dialogue between the student body and Estates Department, the Board recommends the School leads on finding appropriate access times to the Arts Tower in order to improve the School ethos of a good life:work balance and a student need to access specialist facilities.
- 13.5 The Board acknowledges the introduction of the PAT system and strongly recommends that the School seeks direction of existing exemplary models from other leading Schools to support successful development, resourcing and progression of the initiative.
- 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.
- 14.1 Part 1**
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the following programmes:
BA (Hons) Architecture
BA (Hons) Architecture and Landscape Architecture
MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture
MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture with Year in Industry
- 14.2 Part 2**
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the following programmes:
MArch Architecture
MArch Collaborative Practice
MArch Architecture and Landscape Architecture
- 15 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.
- 15.1 The Board made no further comments.
- 16 Other information**
- 16.1 Student numbers**
Part 1
BA (Hons) Architecture: 376

BA (Hons) Architecture and Landscape: 43
MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture: 55
MEng Structural Engineering and Architecture with Year in Industry: 13

Part 2

MArch Architecture: 111
MArch Collaborative Practice: 39
MArch Architecture and Landscape Architecture: 5

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