



**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Full visiting board  
to The University of Nottingham**

**Date of visiting board: 06-07 July 2023  
Confirmed by RIBA: 13 November 2023**

**1 Details of institution hosting courses**

Architecture and Built Environment  
University of Nottingham  
Lenton Firs  
University Park  
Nottingham, NG7 2RD

**2 Courses offered for validation**

Part 1 Bachelor of Architecture with Honours in Architecture  
Part 1 Master in Engineering with Honours in Architecture and Environmental Design  
Part 2 M Arch Architecture  
Part 2 M Arch Architecture with Collaborative Practice Research  
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

**3 Head of Department**

Professor Lucelia Rodrigues Head of Department

**4 Awarding body**

The University of Nottingham

**5 The visiting board**

Paul King	Chair/Academic
David Howarth	Vice Chair/Practitioner
Alida Bata	Academic
Sara Shafiei	Academic
Sophie Bailey	RIBA Head of Validation

**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](http://www.architecture.com).

**7 Proposals of the visiting board**

On 13 November 2023, the RIBA confirmed continued validation/s of the following courses:

Part 1 Bachelor of Architecture with Honours in Architecture  
Part 1 Master in Engineering with Honours in Architecture and Environmental Design  
Part 2 M Arch Architecture  
Part 2 M Arch Architecture with Collaborative Practice Research  
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

The next visit to the University of Nottingham 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)

Our Department of Architecture and Built Environment (DABE, Est1843) aims to deliver the highest quality teaching and learning experience, underpinned by world-leading research, to train built environment professionals that are able to design and deliver thriving, healthy and sustainable places. We are a leading institution as evidenced by our position in rankings: we are a top 100 department/school of architecture in the world and 5th in the UK according to the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2023, consistently ranked within the top 10 for architecture in the UK in all major guides (Times Good University Guide and the Complete University Guide) and 1st for buildings in the Complete University Guide 2024 and ranked 1st in the Russell Group universities for 'overall satisfaction' in Architecture at the National Student Survey 2022. Our community comprises over 60 full-time equivalent passionate staff and circa 900-1000 talented students in 15 undergraduate and postgraduate programmes covering architecture, architectural environmental engineering, urban design, building services, and sustainable energy technologies.

We were the first university to combine engineering and architecture into our MEng in Architecture and Environmental Design programme, accredited by RIBA/ARB and the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE) 20 years ago. This is being replicated in other institutions, an indicator of the importance of this approach.

### Pathways and Levels Aims

Our architectural programmes cater for the needs of different student cohorts as they progress through their education, as well as recognising and unlocking the individual's potential. We place value in diversity and our studio structures open-up multiple pathways so students can tailor their journey. The core qualities of each stage are summarised below.

#### *Part 1 - Conceptual Creativity*

Entrants to our Part 1 programmes join a studio environment designed to ease school leavers into architecture. Studio units are formed of 30 students, 2/3 tutors and final year Part 2 students. Studio is structured around core skills: reading and understanding context, drawing, modelling, development of concept and design skills. Delivered by a dedicated practice-based staff, supported by lectures series, the curriculum promotes independent critical design processes through several often playful exercises. Years 2 and 3 of the programme are delivered via 10 vertical studio units that offer mentor-mentee partnerships that bridge the year groups. Studios range from conceptual, to concerns with urban, social and sustainability issues, and include making, and computer-aided options, allowing students to develop their individual talents and interests. Brief making is informed by a process of rigorous independent investigation, an ability that, along with creative problem

solving, represents key skills that make our graduates distinctive in the eyes of practice.

#### *Part 2 - Research and Technical Integration*

Part 2 sees a sharpening of the offer to students with activity concentrated on a smaller number of research studios headed by full-time academics. Themed around urbanism, tectonics, adaptive reuse, and ecology, students again have choice and the freedom to follow their interests. Design work is enriched through the integration of content delivered in environmental, tectonics and professional practice modules. Thesis students complete a major piece of research-informed writing and are supported through complementary practitioner input in the development of their design proposals. The end product is a response to the research work that is a well resolved and mature piece of architecture. The advanced skills our graduates develop are evident in the interest from top practices who return annually to recruit from the programme.

#### *Part 3 - Collective Reflection*

At Part 3, we provide our students with the knowledge to understand the context of practice and the skills to reflect critically on their experiences. The use of study groups provides further opportunities for peer-to-peer working and promotes a valuable process of collective reflection.

### **Graduate Employment**

We're the second most targeted university by top recruiters (Graduate Labour Market 2023), ranked UK top 10 in the QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2022. 90.6% of DABE's graduates are in employment/further education 15 months after leaving us (Graduates Outcomes Survey 2022). Our graduates leave with highly marketable skills having benefitted from the freedom to develop their individual design ethos, within an environment that instils creative rigour to the art of spatial design. This unifying fusion of choice, rigour and creativity, shapes the distinct qualities of a DABE graduate: confidence, excellent communication skills underpinned by critical thinking, a solid foundation of technical ability and exceptional design skills. This is recognised by practices: we were voted UK top 3 architecture school/department by 100 top architectural practices (Architects' Journal).

### **Design Excellence**

All the above come together to deliver on our core principles of striving for design excellence. We believe we are the most RIBA awarded architecture school/department outside London for student projects.

### **Teaching Informed by Research**

DABE's rich research base, with input from leading centres of research excellence (see document B6), supported by leading experts from practice and industry, informs a dynamic curriculum that ensures students reap the benefits of cutting edge research and up to date practice activity. DABE's research expertise and reputation for innovation in the areas of sustainable architecture and energy efficient buildings is interleaved through the structure of our architectural offer and a particular area of strength. Graduates include Clara Bagenal-George from Introba UK (Elementa Consulting), who established the London Energy Transition Initiative (LETI) and Victoria

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Burrows, the Director of Advancing Net Zero at the World Green Building Council.

### **Hands-on Learning**

We include free field trips to Europe as an essential part of our BArch Architecture, MArch and MEng Architecture and Environmental Design courses. Students also receive access to free materials and model making support to use in our state-of-the-art facilities including our Centre for 3D Design and a range of technical workshops and labs within FoE. Since 2009, we have been building schools in South Africa as part of the curriculum through our Design+Build Studio, offering architecture students an immersive, hands-on, learning experience focused on community projects with a net positive impact. The studio has grown into one of the largest in Europe, and the most prolific in the UK, and has seen 300+ students deliver 11 creches to date that home over 3000 children.

### **Student Welfare**

With the increased awareness of physical and mental health challenges faced by architecture students, we place an emphasis on welfare and wellbeing. We have a Support and Wellbeing team that provide students with practical help, advice, and guidance, with a dedicated DABE officer. The team works alongside personal tutors, senior tutors, disability liaison officers, module convenors, programme directors and other University services to ensure holistic approach to support. They can also refer students to specialised support (eg. Counselling, Mental Health Advisory Service). New undergraduates can enrol in our peer-mentoring scheme. Tongue & Groove student society provides extracurricular social events and skills building through workshops and seminars. We recognise the financial challenge that architectural education brings so the provision of free site visits, architectural field trips, and model making materials continues to be a Nottingham offer. In addition, we spend money in the local 'student economy' (eg. Part 2 students teach Part 1).

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

We are the first engineering unit in the country to obtain an Athena SWAN Gold award, for excellence in advancing gender equality (see B10). Our People Board sets priority areas and plans to further enhance and develop our people and culture, underpinning our ambitions in education, student experience and research. We believe that a diverse and inclusive community makes us stronger and commit to developing people's potential and embedding inclusive practices.

### **Collaboration with Industry and Practice**

Collaboration with practice represents a further area of strength. Practitioner contributions (local, national and international) permeate programmes development, teaching delivery, injection of specialist expertise, review of studio work, the examination process, and the custody of our students once they leave us. Most recently, this has seen the introduction of our new Part 2 Collaborative Practice programme that situates research activity within practice, developing a theme that is of mutual interest to student and employer. This approach strengthens the research capabilities of practice, allows students to earn while studying, and provides a platform to develop their interests. We also count on the expertise of our extensive list of

Honorary Professors, including John Assael (Assael Architecture), Michál Cohen (Walters&Cohen Architects), Tracy Meller (RSHP), Robin Nicholson CBE (Cullinan Studio) and Hattie Hartman (Architects' Journal).

**Environment**

DABE is located on University Park set within 300-acre of extensive greenery, and widely regarded as one of the most attractive UK campuses. The campus is two miles from Nottingham's centre, UK 9 th best city for students and 53rd in the world (QS Best Student Cities 2022). Our global campuses enhances opportunities for staff and student exchange. DABE students have full access to studio facilities with portered supervision for out-of-hours access.

**10 Commendations**

- 10.1 The board commends the department for the commitment to collaborative ways of learning and working across all programmes. The specific emphasis on co-learning provides the department with a clear identity and position in UK architectural education.
- 10.2 The board commends the department for the pastoral care provided to students. The personal tutor system is of particular note in supporting students during their academic journey.

**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 faculty should provide students with access to the standard architecture and design software packages required by UG and PG architecture students. Furthermore, the faculty should address the need for computer hardware capable of serving a department of this scale.

**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 department to consider the number of components in each module at Part 2 level to help students reduce repetition, foster an iterative design process and a succinct integrated design portfolio.
- 13.2 The board advises the department to make space for staff reflection and further opportunities for co-creation.
- 13.3 The board advises the faculty to provide a clear induction process and support structure for staff training and continuous professional development.

- 13.4 The board advises the faculty to involve the department staff in the design and development of the new physical spaces and estate improvement.
- 13.5 The board advises the department to consider how external examiners engage with the annual review of programmes and student work. The process would benefit from external examiners to review a full academic portfolio.
- 13.6 The board advises the department to review the academic position statement to better reflect the department's ethos and identity now and going forward.
- 13.7 The board advises the faculty and department to collaborate on the development of a dedicated architecture website to showcase student work, staff research and the identity of the department.

**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 with Honours in Architecture and the Master in Engineering with Honours in Architecture and Environmental Design.

**Graduate Attributes for Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the M Arch Architecture and the M Arch Architecture with Collaborative Practice Research.

**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 with Honours in Architecture and the Master in Engineering with Honours in Architecture and Environmental Design.

**Themes and Values for Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the M Arch Architecture and the M Arch Architecture with Collaborative Practice Research.

**Themes and Values for Part 3**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers (from the School)**

Part 1 B Arch	<b>394</b>
Part 1 M Eng	<b>65</b>
Part 2 M Arch	<b>59</b>
Part 2 M Arch w/ Collab Practice	<b>57</b>
Part 3 Postgrad Certificate in Professional Practice	<b>36</b>

**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.

- Budget holder and course leaders
- Students
- Head of Institution
- External examiners
- Staff