Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Bath

Date of visiting board: 17 & 18 October 2024
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 8 January 2025

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1   **Details of institution hosting course/s**
     Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
     6 East
     University of Bath
     Claverton Down
     Bath BA2 7AY

2   **Head of Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering**
     Professor Andrew Heath

     Head of Architecture
     Professor Alex Wright

3   **Courses offered for validation**
     Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture
     Part 2 MArch
     Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice
     Part 2 and 3: Postgraduate Certificate in Architectural Practice (PG Cert AP)
     (L7 degree apprenticeship)

4   **Director of Studies**
     Dr Sara Biscaya - Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture
     Matthew Wickens - Part 2 MArch
     Jayne Barlow: Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice

5   **Awarding body**
     The University of Bath

6   **The visiting board**
     Professor Kate Cheyne (Chair)
     Musa Garba (Vice Chair)
     Aoife McGee
     Virginia Rammou

     Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance

7   **Procedures and criteria for the visit**
     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.

8   **Proposals of the visiting board**
     On 8 January 2025 the RIBA confirmed validation of the following courses:

          Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture
          Part 2 MArch
          Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice
          Part 2 and 3: Postgraduate Certificate in Architectural Practice (PG
          Cert AP) (L7 Architect degree apprenticeship)

     The next full visiting board will take place in 2029.

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9 **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 institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

10 **Academic position statement (written by the School)**
The following statement was prepared following consultation with Architecture staff in September 2023 and with the Student Staff Liaison Committee in March 2024.

The University of Bath provides a unique offer within UK architectural education characterised by three distinctive components:

> **Practice Informed Education**
> **Collaborative Design Projects**
> **A Clear and Distinctive Signature Pedagogy**

Practice Informed Education: Integrated placements
The Part 1 and Part 2 courses at the University of Bath offer a unique structure of academic and placement learning. Each course includes integrated placements of one semester's duration. These occur in the 2nd and 3rd years of the Part 1 and the 1st year of the Part 2. This provides students with the opportunity to apply and develop their skills within professional practice as part of their academic courses.

At Part 1 level the two periods of placement occur in semester 2, allowing students to extend their placement over the vacation period, should they wish to do so. As a result students entering their final undergraduate year may have accumulated more than a year of professional practical experience. In their 3rd and 4th year students are able to share through studio learning the skills and knowledge acquired in practice, to the benefit of the whole cohort.

In the Part 2 students are able to extend their existing work experience or commence a new placement period at the start of the course. This follows an induction into the MArch programme, with the placement period being integrated with their Practice Management and Law studies.

Each student in the UK is visited by academic staff as part of their placement and students working overseas are contacted through Skype if face-to-face visits prove impractical.

Practice informed teaching
The courses at the University of Bath engage with innovative and creative practice through the extensive use of lecturers and tutors based in

professional practice. The Department maintains and continually develops close relationships with a broad network of external stakeholders with numerous beneficial consequences for both our teaching and research activities. In 2023-24 approximately 300 different organisations and practices contributed to the delivery of our accredited programmes.

This exposes students to a wide variety of skilled practitioners, often working at the cutting edge of their discipline. Through the breadth and quality of this input the students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills which are readily applicable to contemporary practice within a challenging and supportive academic environment. The Department seeks to support and develop this cohort of educator-practitioners as an essential and valued part of its academic community.

Collaborative Design Projects
Through years 1-6 we place considerable emphasis on collaborative working on design projects with each year containing an element of collaborative design activity. These collaborative design projects make-up approximately a third of the overall design studio time over the Part 1 and 2 courses.

Half of this time is spent working with other architectural students in years 2, 5 and 6. The other half of this time is dedicative to collaborative design projects is spent working with civil engineering students on multidisciplinary projects in year 1, 3 and 4. These multidisciplinary projects are a longstanding distinctive feature of our courses and reflect one of our founding principles, that professions that work together should be educated together in order to promote mutual understanding and the holistic design of the built environment. The joint project in 4th year, The Happold Foundation Project (TED), has been running for more than 50 years and is widely seen as an exemplar in integrated, cross-disciplinary design education.

The majority of all our design projects are supported by multi-disciplinary teaching teams with contributions by Architects, Environmental Engineers, Structural Engineers, Landscape Architects and specialist consultants.

A clear and distinctive signature pedagogy
The education provided at Bath is rooted in the philosophical tradition of critical rationalism. The pedagogy employed in Architecture at the University of Bath is continually reviewed and developed but its principles have endured over many years of critically reflective educational practice. Our signature pedagogy is referred to as Critical Method[1]. This teaching method is communicated to all studio staff through annual induction. It is based upon the creative and effective use of criticism within clearly articulated models of the design process. It relies upon the effective assimilation of core aspects of knowledge within the early years of study and supports the increasing independence of each student, fostered through project-based, problem-led learning.

Differentiation of Parts 1 and 2
The Part 1 and 2 programmes have clearly different aims which are based upon, and embody, the attributes specified within the RIBA criteria. The Part 1 programme provides a broad education in architecture, which is clearly structured, allowing transition from the school environment to that of being an

independent learner within higher education. The Part 2 course allows students to develop and explore their own architectural agenda and acts as a springboard into professional life.

All accredited programmes (Parts 1, 2 and 3) are designed to embody, in a manner appropriate to the level of study, the educational aim of the Department. In summary this aim is to **teach architecture as a learned, responsible and technically proficient discipline that requires its students to be culturally aware and focused in their use of creative imagination**.

1. Wright, A. (2011) 'Critical Method: A Pedagogy for Design Education', Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal, vol.5, issue 6, pp. 109-122

11   Commendations
The Board made the following commendations:

11.1   The Board commends the school's commitment to pedagogy, especially with regards to students' advocacy to ethical and regenerative practice. The students are equipped with skills and expertise to become future leaders of a built environment more sensitive to the natural environment.

11.2   The Board commends the school curriculum of practice informed teaching and embedded professionalism. This is achieved using real-world briefs, active engagement with inter-disciplinary projects, multiple practice placements and employing practitioners throughout the design projects.

11.3   The Board commends the collaborative design projects and normalisation of group work which is embedded into all years.

11.4   The Board commends the mature enquiry, rigour, scale and breadth of the design projects and portfolios in the Year 6 MArch, and the integration of technical, ethical and professional considerations within the portfolios.

12   Conditions
There are no conditions.

13   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.

13.1   To maintain its identity as a progressive and high quality architectural institution, the School should develop strategies for encouraging students to pursue radical and experimental methods of design and spatial exploration to engage with the informal and less tangible aspects of people and context.

13.2   To encourage the students to consider the user experience throughout the design process, the School should meaningfully engage with external stakeholders by way of live projects or other mechanisms. This would support

the BSc and MArch students' exposure to real life project conditions and the complexity of working directly with community.

13.3 The School benefits from a diversity of local and international students in their cohort which could be reflected in projects. This would allow them to challenge architectural norms in terms of architectural language and approach to design that embeds culture and society. This would also encourage them to take a unique position.

14. 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.

14.1 The reputation of Bath School of Architecture continues to be known in architectural education and practices, as a place of excellence. The Board recommends the Faculty uses the excellent practice found in this school of architecture around ethics, professionalism and employability to be an exemplar for the University.

14.2 The Board recommends that the Faculty bring in a culture of listening and co-creation on curriculum and structural changes, to ensure all staff are heard and can lead on future change.

14.3 The Board suggests that the School reviews the diversity of the staff research to allow for architectural humanities and creative practices to inform the teaching and collaborative projects.

14.4 The Board advises the School to support more peer to peer learning and mentorship amongst the different year groups. This could include the introduction of the rich volume of staff research and practice to undergraduate students.

14.5 The Board recommends that the School, in discussion with the student body, reviews how finances are allocated to enable all students to have access to more affordable software, printing and materials etc. and all tools that are vital to the development and production of architectural design proposals.

15 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.

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

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

Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice Part 3
The Board confirmed that all professional criteria were met by the graduates of the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice.

Postgraduate Certificate in Architectural Practice (PG Cert AP) (L7 Architect degree apprenticeship) Part 2 and 3:
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes and all professional criteria were met by graduates of the Postgraduate Certificate in Architectural Practice (PG Cert AP).

16   Review of work against themes and values
It should be noted that where the visiting board considered themes and values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or themes and values clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested themes and values were particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

The Board made no further comments.

17   Other information

17.1   Student numbers
Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture 527
Part 2 MArch 85
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice 31
Part 2 and 3: Postgraduate Certificate in Architectural Practice (PG Cert AP)
(L7 Architect degree apprenticeship) – no current candidates as phased out.

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

18   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