



Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full visiting board
to Coventry University**

Date of visiting board: 16-17 November 2023
Confirmed by RIBA: 10 September 2024

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Coventry University
 Delia Derbyshire Building
 Cox St
 Coventry
 United Kingdom
 CV1 5PH

2 Courses offered for validation

Architecture BSc (Hons) Part 1

3 Head of School

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Dr Shaun Hides | Dean of School |
| Nick Gorse | Head of School (Art and Design) |
| Minna Kantonen | Associate Head of School - Quality and Accreditation |
| Dr Tulika Gadakari | Course Director BSc Architecture |

4 Awarding body

Coventry University

5 The visiting board

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| Professor Christian Frost | Academic / Chair |
| Jeremy Diaper | Practitioner |
| Dr Luigi Pintacuda | Academic |
| Dr Athena Moustaka | Academic |
| 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 10 September 2024, the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following course:

Architecture BSc (Hons) Part 1

The next visit to Coventry 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)

Our distinct offer is a study of BSc (Hons) Architecture, uniquely positioned in a School of Art and Design. It provides students with the opportunity to nurture their creativity while also focusing on the scientific and technical aspects of architecture.

Originally established in the Department of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Building in 2009, the course transitioned to the School of Art and Design in 2016. In 2021, the course underwent a comprehensive review, leading to an enhanced curriculum that emphasises a holistic approach to architectural education. The new curriculum ensures that scientific, technical knowledge is integrated throughout the course, not only within the Technology strand but also in other interconnected teaching strands of Design, Cultural Context, and Professionalism. The course encourages students to engage in critical thinking and creative problem-solving, emphasising the alignment of context, buildability, social responsibility, and ethical practice in addressing real-world challenges.

The most recent External Examiner reports (2021-22 & 2022-23) positively highlight our unique offer, *"The course 'BSc-ness' is appreciated by the students, stressing urban design, buildability and technical knowledge as well as creative practice. The balance of these is always a challenge in architectural courses and the team are doing an excellent job in encouraging students to integrate these issues and avoid the polarity of 'technical or 'creative', graduating students with both vision and realism."*

By considering the diverse needs and aspirations of our student body, and designing our teaching to embrace their heterogeneity, we have created an inclusive learning environment that emphasizes flexibility and personalisation of education. Flexibility is gradually scaffolded across three years. Students are guided and supported through structured teaching and learning, with opportunities to negotiate their responses to set briefs, aligning their interests and skills with real-world engagement. We believe this collaborative approach to curriculum creation continues to promote a sense of ownership and encourages students to take initiative in their learning journey. *"Individuality of student work is a real strength to the course" (EE Report 2021-22 & 2022-23)*

Additionally, the international diversity of our staff brings a wealth of expertise and research interests, enriching the curriculum and creating a diverse and decolonised learning environment. Collaborations between staff and students on focused architectural agendas have yielded impressive results, such as one student's work being shortlisted for the AJ Sustainability Prize 2023.

Sustainability is a central theme in the course, aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals, further developed during the 2021 course review. The

course's principal values of creativity with sensitive contextual considerations and evidence based design rooted in social and natural sciences further reinforce the importance of sustainable and ethical design practices.

The course continues to connect with the city, drawing inspiration from its historical and contemporary contexts. Coventry's post-war reconstruction phases, medieval layers, and evolving development patterns serve as references for student projects. This provides a unique opportunity for our students to address both local and global issues. *"The USP of the course as a BSc exploring urban design, technical realities and employability are clearly apparent and recognised by the students. The relevance of projects to the local conditions of the city and the Midlands remains a strength"* (EE Report 2022-23)

Industry integration and the incorporation of ARB/RIBA graduate criteria in determining graduate competencies, such as agility, innovation, digital fluency, and professionalism played a pivotal role while rewriting the course in 2021. The addition of the Professionalism strand equips students with industry-specific skills, digital proficiency, communication abilities, and professional acumen. The course emphasises real-world relevance through cross-disciplinary collaboration, exemplified by the final year interdisciplinary project module. This collaboration fosters teamwork, communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills, whilst allowing students to gain insight and perspective into what each discipline brings to a project. It has resulted in student success, including winning a national design competition (Design Concrete 2023) that emphasised sustainability, biodiversity, and material investigations.

Coventry University's commitment to employability is highly valued by students and local employers. The involvement of industry professionals in teaching and mentorship provides students with invaluable insights and networking opportunities. Industry engagement is particularly strong in Year 3 Design Studio modules, where students gain regular industry feedback.

Although the course external examiners have commended our high achieving students exceeding the Part 1 requirements *'All graduating students have met the ARBIRIBA Part 1 criteria. Some work exceeds the expectation for a Part 1 student'*, student progression in level 4 and 5 has been a challenge post Covid. We have worked closely with the Student Success Coaches to support student engagement, and we have appointed a new Year 1 lead, with a positive impact. We are exploring potential Year 0 route to better prepare students for Year 1. Parallel to these, the team revised the course assessment rubrics ensuring there is clarity of coursework requirements for students. This together with the additional support from the Student Success Coaches on student workload management, has boosted student engagement, and enhanced their progression back to pre-Covid level.

The strands closely align with RIBA's new Education and Professional Development Framework and the associated Themes and Values for architectural education. The Cultural Context Strand encompasses a broad

range of architectural theory, history, politics, and societal influences. The Technology Strand focuses on technology and its role in sustainability and buildability. The Professionalism Strand covers industry specific skills, digital proficiency, communication, and professional skills. Within the Design Strand students work on practical, site-specific, and contextualised design projects of varying scales and complexity and in alignment with ARB and RIBA accreditation requirements, at least 50% of modules dedicated to teaching and assessing design.

Looking ahead, we aim to create a more collaborative and dynamic educational environment over the next five years. The new student-centred building and the flourishing Architecture Student Society are assets that enhance our curriculum and informal learning opportunities. We have developed interdisciplinary collaborations with courses such as Automotive and Transport Design, Graphic Design and Fine Art. We plan to explore further innovation in architectural education with access to hyper studio, hack labs, and immersive studios. In addition to our studio culture, students are increasingly using the new social learning spaces and activity led learning opportunities as well as vertical learning between MArch and BSc students (MA Student Proctor initiative).

Our five-year plan includes a creation of a dedicated curriculum area for architecture. Although there have been number of changes, including a new staff team, refreshed course, and transition to the new building, the course has made significant improvements in the last few years, as evidenced by EE reports. The course is recruiting well, has achieved excellent NSS scores and produces award-winning students, however developing further key strategies that implement the vision for the course is our main priority.

10 Commendations

- 10.1** The Board commends the university on the investment in the building and facilities.
- 10.2** The Board commends the diversity and inclusivity of the staff and student body.
- 10.3** The Board commends the enthusiasm of the architectural student society, particularly their lecture series.

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 recommends the creation of a separate curriculum area of architecture and interior architecture and design with a subject dedicated leader.
- 12.2 The architecture team should continue to address the pass/progression rates of students on the course and maintain vigilance in relation to ensuring all RIBA Graduate Attributes are met by all graduating students.
- 12.3 The School should improve staff awareness of promotion possibilities by introducing mentorship in research, scholarly activity, and knowledge exchange.
- 12.4 The university should broaden the definition of research outputs acceptable to the institution (particularly research portfolios) and promote these opportunities to architectural staff.
- 12.5 In addition to the current provision of the RIBA Themes and Values, the architectural team should develop History & Theory in design, technology and professionalism strands to further investigate and understand its contribution to architectural discourse.
- 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 that the student submissions for the technology and design modules display more clarity and distinction between their narratives.
- 13.2 For continuity, the Board advises that the School ensures there is an overlap of external examiners contracts.
- 13.3 The Board advises that the School should look into the possibility of short-term architectural practice placements for undergraduate students which form part of the normal three year programme.
- 13.4 The Board advises that the architectural team monitors the effectiveness and impact of blended learning and AI within the student journey.
- 13.5 The Board advises that in line with T&V5 the architectural team increases the significance of tectonic understanding in the design process in Year two and Year three.
- 13.6 The Board advises the architectural team to reduce the focus of strategic urban design in Year two, semester one.
- 13.7 The Board advises that students should be encouraged to experience more buildings, including field trips where possible.

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

Please see Action point 12.2.

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 BSc (Hons) Architecture.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture (Part 1): 212

16.2 Documentation provided

The Department provided all documentation as required by the RIBA 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