



Royal Institute of British Architects

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

Date of visiting board: 18-19 January 2024
Confirmed by RIBA: 07 May 2024

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Falmouth University
Woodlane
Falmouth
TR11 4RH

2 Courses offered for validation

BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1

3 Head of School

Drummond Masterton	Head of School: Architecture, Design & Interiors
Tanya Griffiths	Architecture Course Leader

4 Awarding body

Falmouth University

5 The visiting board

Sally Stewart	Academic/Chair
Sara Biscaya	Academic/Vice Chair
Andy Bourne	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.

7 Proposals of the visiting board

On 07 May 2024, the RIBA confirmed continued validation with conditions of the following course:

BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1

Details of the condition can be found in section 11. A revisiting board will take place at a date to be agreed between the RIBA and the School.

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)

The Undergraduate Architecture Course is framed by the **Falmouth University Creativity in Everything Strategy 2030** and the vision statements below: -

To be the leading institution for the nexus between creativity and technology. Architecture occupies a natural and leading position within this nexus between creative and technology and as such the Architecture Course encourages students to:

- use creative talent to address the technical challenges of mitigating climate change
- drive social change through strong collaboration and creative communication
- navigate the opportunities and risks of the digital environment and of artificial intelligence

To establish Cornwall as the County for Creative Learning, using innovative and open pedagogies as an integral part of its education and business ecosystem.

A distinctive part of the course offer is the location. Our coastal /rural location is remote and beautiful. It is home to communities characterised as having a very strong cultural identity and entrepreneurship, but also affected by post-industrial economic decline, climate change and the housing crisis.

We see the importance of regional access to architectural education as vital to social equity and diversity in practice. The pedagogy focusses on developing a framework for understanding local and regional distinctiveness and a keen awareness of the profession, its duties and responsibilities and requisite business skills. The staff team combines academic and practice expertise, with strong networks and seeks to innovate, and share knowledge.

To develop the next generation of creative leaders and explorers, who will change the world through their curious minds, creative impact, and unique skillsets.

This speaks very directly to students of architecture and the spirit of curiosity and exploration that the course at Falmouth is designed to engender. Graduates should feel that they are equipped and empowered to make a positive change.

The emphasis the course has on design through making, hand-drawing, and handcrafting but also digital modelling and digital making are part of a toolbox of skills which give a tactile and three-dimensional understanding of materials and assembly. This toolbox also contains skillsets that relate to understanding of place through analysis, the ability to listen, articulate and represent creative and technical thinking.

To build on our strengths in research and knowledge exchange to deliver experimental, environmental, and societal impact.

The academic engagement to acquire these skills and an understanding of the profession is enhanced through live project briefs throughout the curriculum and offers an opportunity to interact with clients, stakeholders, and design professionals. This is underpinned by principles of collaborative and

interdisciplinary working to be able to navigate the complex body of knowledge and to enable ethical decision-making and robust problem-solving. Live project briefs are a dynamic part of the course curriculum, are inherently experimental in nature and engage social and environmental values.

Our research strengths lie at the intersection of academic endeavour and practice experience and are primarily focussed on Sustainable Futures and resilience of coastal and rural communities.

Teaching and Learning delivering the Vision

The BA(Hons) Architecture degree at Falmouth University, was established in 2014/15 with the aspiration of teaching by making, from the hand crafted to the digital, allowing the students to explore materials and their assembly as well as the spaces, places and people that make up the complex body of knowledge in architecture. As the only degree for architecture in Cornwall the course is firmly rooted in its unique location and draws upon the diverse and sometimes extreme environments that exist here. It is also the only course in the South West with a relatively small cohort size which means it is able to offer a very supportive studio culture.

The course is delivered through integrated design projects. The projects are supplemented by lectures and seminars, workshops (arts, making, technical and digital) and is studio based. The exceptional character of the course is marked by socially engaged live projects, working with local groups, clients, organisations, and places to encourage students to first identify and then develop their own briefs for design projects.

In the tradition of a fine arts institution, within which the course sits, the freedom of the individual student is encouraged and increases as they progress through the course. There is also the freedom to explore other arts disciplines something that has contributed to the work of our most successful and award-winning students.

The first year (level 4) is characterised by a sustained development of drawing and making capability including using input from other courses, for example fine arts and photography. A highlight for the students is a live build project, students working collaboratively to engage with a client group and then design and physically construct either a building or prototype. This experience enables students to grasp tectonics, working in a professional context and helps to formulate a deeper understanding of place and materials.

During the second year (level 5), students develop their technical skills and undertake a professional practice module during which students are encouraged to find work placement at a practice for 1-3 weeks. The module is designed to first introduce students to the world of professional practice and then help to develop an ongoing relationship with a firm. Through this module's seminars, lectures, and short symposium, we also explore new and changing modes of architectural practice which is inclusive of the much wider design community.

The third year (Level6) is the opportunity for students to pursue areas of specific interest that they have developed over the preceding two years of the course. The Independent Exploratory Project is a critical piece of experimental

architecture, technically resolved. The critical thinking and writing of the dissertation assert the philosophical position of the student, contextualising their research and design process and outcomes. The final major project is the opportunity for the students to consolidate all their knowledge and understanding together into a comprehensive architectural project. During the Final Project students participate in the RIBA Future Architects mentoring scheme and placement workshops.

Graduates of the course are encouraged to be curious, to establish their own critical position in relation to the natural and built environment receiving input from a wide range of practitioners and academics; inspired by the location and nurtured by an inclusive culture.

10 Commendations

- 10.1** The board commends the Architecture Course Leader for the focus and care they have demonstrated when responding to the significant challenges and dynamic circumstances faced over recent academic sessions.
- 10.2** The board commends how Wednesday Open Workshops(WOW) infuses cross fertilisation between all courses across the creative arts and increases innovation within the programme.

11 Conditions

- 11.1** Conditional validation has been recommended for the following reason:

While there was evidence within student portfolios that the final output of projects could be mapped against the RIBA Graduate Attributes and Themes and Values, it was unclear how teaching across the programme ensured all students encountered or were exposed to the same aligned content. This was also noted within the provided external examiners reports.

The board requires the development of a curriculum map which explicitly defines the syllabus across design, architectural technology, history and theory, and management practice and law, the progressive nature of this input and the delivery of this content. The completion of this also provides a mechanism to make explicit where knowledge and skills are applied, and synthesis occurs providing opportunity for broader awareness and deeper investigation by all students within an undergraduate programme.

This will support the programme team when evaluating and developing curriculum enhancements, and ensuring content and delivery mechanisms support course and module ambitions.

The revisiting sub-group will visit the school for 1 day within 1 year of the full board and following the graduation of the next award level cohort. Where the revisiting sub-group is satisfied the conditions in the report have been met, the RIBA Education and Learning Committee will recommend validation without conditions until the next scheduled visiting board (i.e., usually 5 years after the last full board visit).

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** For future RIBA Visiting Boards, the School must provide complete and comprehensive documentation ahead of the visit to ensure board members are appropriately briefed.

The list of documentation required for a full Visiting Board can be found on page.32 of the RIBA Procedures for Validation.

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 programme team to consider how the specific character, ambitions, and experience that the course offers can be better represented and articulated within course documentation, and how the specific qualities can be made apparent to potential candidates within external facing materials.
- 13.2** The board advises the programme leader to consider the development needs of the teaching team, and the potential for topics such as curriculum development and alignment to be tackled in-house or in a wider institutional manner through the annual Core Academic Training event.
- 13.3** The board advises the programme team to consider the fostering of the student's society to make the most of the local and regional context and professional opportunities.
- 13.4** The board advises that the programme team builds on the links within the creative industries with the business school to develop collaborations.
- 13.5** The board advises that the programme team continues to review the improving architectural studio culture to develop group and peer to peer learning activities across all years within SADI.
- 13.6** The board advises that the programme team develops a strategy for staff training across the programme to support staff membership of the HEA as part of the Learning and Teaching pedagogy.

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 BA (Hons) Architecture.

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 BA (Hons) Architecture.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

Year 1: 27

Year 2: 30

Year 3: 44

16.2 Documentation provided

Please see action point 12.1.

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