



Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA full visiting board
to Kingston University - 2023**

**Date of visit: 14 & 15 September 2023
Confirmed by the RIBA: 4 September 2024**

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Kingston School of Art
Kingston University
Grange Road, Kingston upon Thames
KT1 2QJ

2 Courses offered for validation

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2 MArch
Part 3 PG Diploma in Professional Practice Architecture

3 Head of School & Course leaders

Professor Alistair Payne - Head of School of Arts
Dr Heba Elsharkawy - Head of Department
Laura Evans - BA (Hons) Architecture (Part 1) Course Leader
Alex Gore - BA (Hons) Architecture (Part 1) Course Leader
Aoife Donnelly – MArch Architecture (Part 2) Course Leader
Austin Williams – Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice of Architecture (Part 3) Course Leader

4 Awarding body

Kingston University

5 The visiting board

Professor David McClean	Academic / Chair
Steve McIntyre	Practitioner
Christina Godiksen	Academic
Julian Dickens	Practitioner
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 4 September 2024 the RIBA Education and Learning Committee confirmed continued validation of the following courses:

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2 MArch
Part 3 PG Diploma in Professional Practice Architecture

The next visit to the Kingston 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)

The Department of Architecture and Landscape is part of Kingston School of Art (KSA), specifically the School of Arts, alongside the departments of Fine Art, Film and Photography, and Performing Arts under the ethos of ‘Thinking Through Making’, and an ‘Art School’ pedagogy which is problem-driven, student-centred, and practice-based. At the heart of our teaching, we prioritise developing our students’ skills in reading and learning from the built work of others, making new work, and developing and communicating this using creative forms of representation. We seek to equip our students to make meaningful and innovative work from an ability to engage in critical enquiry, collegiate negotiation and precise observation aligned with the ethical framework that informs professional behaviour and self-reflective processes. Our pedagogy is further enabled by the institutional Town House Strategy’s Future Skills model which combines subject-specific knowledge with the future skills and higher-level attributes most needed by employers.

Our department is highly diverse in its student body where nearly 65% of our students are non-white. The ideas of decolonisation, which emphasize how the subjectivities bear upon the written record and by extension on history and scholarship offer insights of immense value. We believe that the diverse histories and interests of our students are legitimate starting positions in the making of work, and that there is personal value to each. In so doing we expand the ways that the built environment can be seen, engaged with, and the stories it can be deemed to tell. In response to the climate emergency, and loss of biodiversity, we see that architecture is fundamentally transforming as we develop an increased understanding of the consequences of our choices. In this, we set a clear agenda for the Department, as a place where practitioners, academics and students engage in a shared exploration, often via live clients and briefs, to develop an architectural stance conducive to buildings that are beneficial, responsive, and culturally situated.

Our staff are drawn from the full breadth of the discipline, academics and practitioners, who share a common aim to facilitate a collegiate, and mutually supportive learning environment. We are also aware of the need to foster a more critical and diverse discourse of value to students and staff alike. Research agendas in practice and academia are closely intertwined with teaching agendas and pedagogies. The REGISTER research group and its programme invites leading thinkers to the school and acts as a platform for research emanating from the Department: holding seminars, publishing books, podcasts and more. The Department submitted history, theory and practice-based research to the last REF in UoA32, with 87% of submissions being rated world-leading or internationally excellent. We aim to significantly grow our REF submission along with the establishment of an embedded culture of research that allows us to draw on the work of our practitioner academics, and in turn provide a supportive context for them to grow their critical enquiry. With this in mind, we are establishing a PhD by practice, to

capture and contextualise the knowledge present in their practices, and to allow them to deploy it with more acuity. The Department has also secured research grants in the area of sustainability and net zero carbon, with an ambition to advance this strand in teaching and research.

Architecture is a complex subject with numerous competencies, technical skills and sensibilities required, all bound by an ethical framework. Parts 1 and 2 courses are designed around the four pillars of Reading, Making, Representation, and Professional Practice in a carefully crafted interrelationship that we believe matches more closely the rich synergies of architectural practice. A unique narrative approach has been applied to Parts 1 and 2 revalidated courses. These have been designed centred on the student experience, encouraging them to own their education and post it themselves as emerging proto professionals from the start. The narrative approach allows key ideas to be introduced at the appropriate time, interlinked with modules based on concentrated activity around specific aspects of the subject. This approach also weaves disciplinary specific skills and competencies with transferable employability skills such as teamwork, project planning and delivery, and self-reflection. The framing of weekly studio sessions as ‘feedback’ and varying the form these take from workshop to seminars to desk reviews, help ensure active engagement and participation of students. Architecture students also greatly benefit from the interdisciplinary opportunities facilitated by the Landscape Architecture and Historic Building Conservation courses offered within the Department. Ultimately, all our courses aim to enable students articulate ambitious design proposals that are imminently plausible, culturally situated and that show the way to what might come next.

Being part of KSA is key to our identity. We make extensive use of the shared workshops (3D workshops, Printmaking, Digital Media, Moving Image and Photography) and facilities afforded by this context and the shared ethos of ‘Thinking Through Making’. This is a fundamental part of how the Department nurtures its students: through a direct connection with how things are made - from experiments with materials and abstract models to detailed drawings and (spatial) representations of all kinds - as part of a process of continuous reflection and iterative development of each project.

Our Part 1 course builds a clear structure for students to develop skills, understand their fascinations in the subject, and refine their judgment and critical thinking. The course is characterised by three independent years, each with its own character. First year is a year structure, with common briefs and group activities with an interlinked set of exercises to develop core competencies. Second year is based in units, with a set theme of ‘dwelling’ applied to the entire year. Third year is more open and involves a structured series of exercises set by each unit and culminating in a clear thesis that addresses the unit agenda and proves professional competencies. Part 2, by contrast involves two years working jointly in studio. The overarching agenda is to allow units to offer a range of specialisms, operating at the leading edge of contemporary practice, which allow students to engage as proto professionals in a shared conversation. The scaffolding of briefs into bite sized stages aids in the incremental construction of a body of work leading to final projects. Our aspiration is that by the end of the Part 2 course students can clearly articulate their own position in the discipline and engage with the

professional context on these terms. Part 3 course focuses on the legal, procedural, professional and managerial competencies needed to engage in architectural practice as an independent and reflective practitioner.

The coursework is designed to develop core skills of value in graduates including the ability to work collaboratively, to lead, to communicate, to operate in a team with agility and confidence. Described as 'all-rounders', these graduates tend to progress quickly and naturally to senior positions in practice. We also engage students with issues around sustainability, strong technical skills that inform the design process, essential digital skills proficiency including rendering, visualisation and 3D modelling, and a familiarity with BIM (Building Information Modelling). In year 2 of Part 1, the Department runs a sponsored work placement programme, which captures a range of architectural practices, aiming to help overcome barriers for students from diverse backgrounds to gain their first practice experience. At our 'Looking Out' event each year, we connect alumni and communities of practice with our graduating and continuing students, to facilitate networking and graduate job opportunities. The diverse cohort, studio environment, and shared practices and experiences in architectural education at KSA are integral to developing a positive approach to inclusive and collaborative practice in the workplace.

We have integrated the RIBA themes and values throughout all levels to progressively build understanding and competence as students move through the courses. The topics are introduced in a way that is intended to be relatable and tangible, drawing upon the students' own experience and relating to academic briefs and projects. Key aspects such as climate literacy and sustainability run through all modules, while legal matters of health and life safety are introduced iteratively and progressively to aid in the formulation of portfolios that fully meet the requirements of the RIBA. To conclude, the Department continues to offer a stimulating learning and teaching environment informed by a shared ethos that places the student success at its heart.

10 Commendations

- 10.1** The Board commends the Department's imaginative, integrated re-casting of the courses, utilising a narrative-based module structure, and the University's investment in an exemplary workshop facility that supports the ethos of 'Thinking Through Making', encourages cross-disciplinary engagement, and serves as an impressive advertisement for the courses.
- 10.2** The Board commends the collegiate and dedicated Department team, and the shared ownership of their academic agenda and direction.
- 10.3** The Board commends the commitment to inclusion, and the acknowledgement of student diversity as a resource for enriching learning.

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 reminds the Department to ensure that portfolio submissions to future Visiting Boards are comprehensive and simply structured, and that preparation is afforded adequate administrative support.
- 12.2** The Board reminds the Department of the importance of dialogue with students in the revalidation process, and the benefits that brings in other QA processes, such as external examinations.
- 12.3** The Board welcomes and encourages the growth of the Department of architecture but notes a responsibility to ensure the space provided for teaching is commensurate to any growth in student and staff numbers. The university should ensure that the future provision of space is embedded within their future estate's strategy. Similarly, the current ratio of external examiners in relation to student numbers should be maintained.
- 12.4** Students clearly benefit from the significant number of practice-based staff juggling teaching and practice responsibilities. The Board seeks reassurance that this essential and distinctive offer is safeguarded.
- 12.5** The Board recommends reviewing levels of technical and administrative support as a key enabler of a high-quality student experience, and in supporting a strong contribution to the University's forward strategy.
- 12.6** The coursework-based model offered by the Part 3 course is welcomed as an alternative to others with more emphasis on examination components. However, the Board strongly recommends reviewing the number of assignments and/or wordcount required across the course to relieve pressure on both students and staff.
- 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** In line with the commendable Thinking Through Making ethos, the Board would encourage the Department to further develop the ambition and complexity of the final design project, particularly in the MArch course.
- 13.2** The Board advises the Department to consider how its imaginative integrated learning model may be further enriched by the input of allied professionals in course delivery.
- 13.3** The Board suggests that the University considers supporting the Department research by design agenda, as an area for future investment as there is an opportunity to consolidate strategies for research and reputation and this holds significant potential.

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.

Graduate Attributes for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Master of Architecture MArch, Part 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 BA (Hons) Architecture.

Themes and Values for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Master of Architecture.

Themes and Values for Part 3

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 3 PG Diploma in Professional Practice Architecture.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture **(Part 1): 335**

Master of Architecture **(Part 2): 117**

Part 3 PG Diploma in Professional Practice Architecture **(Part 3): 41**

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 architecture budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with Head of Institution
- Meeting with staff