



Royal Institute of British Architects

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

**Date of visiting board: 20-21 June 2024
Confirmed by RIBA: 02 December 2024**

1 Details of institution hosting courses

University of Cambridge
Faculty of Architecture
1 Scroope Terrace
Cambridge
CB2 1PX

2 Courses offered for validation

Part 1 Bachelor of Arts with Honours (BA Hons) in Architecture

Part 2 Master of Architecture (M.Arch)

Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) in Professional Practice in Architecture

Level 7 Master of Studies (MSt) in Architecture (Degree Apprenticeship – Parts 2 & 3)

3 Head of School & Course Leads:

Head of Department

Prof. Flora Samuel

Deputy Head (Teaching)

Dr. Maximilian Sternberg

Deputy Head of Department and Director of Research

Dr. Ronita Bardhan

Course Director BA Hons Programme

Prof. James Campbell

Co-Director M.Arch Programmes

Dr. Irit Katz

Co-Director M.Arch Programme

Dr. Tao DuFour

Course director Part 3

Associate Prof. Miranda Terry

Course leader MSt Architecture Apprenticeship

Dr Timothy Brittain-Catlin

4 Awarding body

The University of Cambridge

5 The visiting board

Bob Brown - Chair / Academic

Luke Murray - Academic

Jeremy Diaper - Practitioner

Christina Godiksen - Academic

Joshua Brooks - RIBA Validation Manager

Nenpin Dimka – Observer (day 2 only)

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 2nd December, the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following course(s):

Part 1 - Bachelor of Arts with Honours (BA Hons) in Architecture

Part 2 – Master of Architecture (M.Arch)

Part 3 - Postgraduate Certificate (PG Cert) in Professional Practice in Architecture

On 2nd December, the RIBA confirmed that initial validation is granted for the following course(s):

Parts 2 & 3 Master of Studies (MSt) in Architecture (Degree Apprenticeship)

The next visit to the University of Cambridge will take place in 2029.

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 at Cambridge is dedicated to educating the next generation of polymath professionals. Due to its intimate scale and the collegial, highly interdisciplinary, structure of the University our students develop into well rounded individuals, with excellent communication skills, empowered to confidently create their own paths into the future of architecture and design. This is exemplified by our long established and highly entrepreneurial student society ARCSOC which enacts a culture of care, critical enquiry, and conviviality that feeds into everything we do. The Department derives obvious benefits from its place within the School of Arts and Humanities (ranked 3rd in the QS World University Rankings by subject) and the wider University, giving both students and staff an opportunity to thrive at many levels.

Whilst we take an inclusive and pluralistic attitude to research our focus is on the environment and its sustainability, social justice and technology, including the vital role that history and theory play in unpacking these agendas.

The Department has a long tradition of excellence in architectural research, in particular the fostering of research in practice begun by Prof Sir Leslie Martin who inspired the setting up of the Martin Centre, the umbrella organisation for all our research work. We are proud to have achieved top place in our Unit of Assessment in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework. To link us with practice we rely on studio teaching delivered by our distinguished Design Fellows who practice in a wide range of design and research fields. We are encouraging our DFs to develop their own research agendas, and are working hard to develop improved links between research and teaching. To enable this, we are reorganising the DF role to provide improved opportunities for career development for our current DFs while maintaining the excellence of our student experience and continue the tradition of thoughtfully-designed, humane architecture responsive to its setting, for which the Department at Cambridge has long been known.

The Department is also top of the Guardian University Guide for Architecture. We hope to maintain this position despite the announcement of an unprecedented 5% cut in operational budgets across the University. At the moment we supply materials and cover all printing costs for the students and a fully paid for first year study trip to Europe. Under the leadership of the previous Head we expanded student numbers and on space allowing for the setting up of a new digital fabrication workshop in the Dyson Building.

Our MSt Architecture Apprenticeship covers RIBA Parts 2 and 3, helping foster stronger links with practice which we intend to develop and grow while making architectural education more accessible. We successfully bid for and won the funds to set up a new undergraduate course in the built environment - the Design Tripos - with the first students arriving in October 2024. The existing Architecture Tripos and the Design Tripos will share courses and facilities, allowing us to expand the numbers of staff, broadening our range of expertise while keeping staff-student ratio stable. The new tripos explores the technical side of architecture, combining architectural design, environment, engineering, material and computer science. We have appointed a distinguished panel of industry advisors to collaborate with us in developing this course to educate and train a new generation of interdisciplinary designers equipped to meet global challenges.

The development of the Design Tripos and the new ARB criteria have prompted the introduction of Professional Skills course in each year of the undergraduate degree starting in 2024 (Professional Skills is currently only taught in Year 3). We recognise that in our current system access to skills training can be uneven, with a certain amount of variance between Colleges. We want to make sure that all students have access to basic skills training in visual and other forms of communication, ethical practice and of course computer modelling. The current studio system in years 2 and 3 mean that students can pick and mix their learning through their choice of studios. The Professional Skills courses will help deliver a basic foundation for all and allow us to explore more fully topics like professional practice and research ethics, currently taught in the dissertation.

Another important development has been the re-naming postgraduate MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design degree into a more widely understood MArch has increased its profile and made it more accessible to a wider range

of applicants. Led by University Teaching Officers (UTOs), this has provided a model for future collaboration between academic and DF teams. The MArch selling point is that it is research-led, with students being guided to develop a personal research agenda through both writing and design. Admissions numbers to our MArch are growing with highly committed students engaging with the research themes of the department in their proposals.

Mention is needed of two initiatives with implications for teaching. The first is UNFOLD which is a student led initiative with support from the Department, the aim of which is to foster dialogue in response to demands for social justice and decolonising the curriculum in our educational programme. Student representatives from UNFOLD addressed our termly Design Fellow 'awaydays' which aim to promote cross cutting discussion across the team. We are starting to see more pedagogical developments emerging across the school, such as the introduction of student-led reviews. We hope to see more initiatives develop in the coming years.

The second initiative is the development of the Cambridge (Urban) Room as a place for debate between communities, local authorities, industry, practice and universities about the future of this, the most unequal city region in Britain, is popping up in the Grafton Centre in central Cambridge in November before hopefully arriving in its permanent site in Mill Lane next year. In line with guidance offered by the last VB we hope to build the Department's role as an agent of change in the region, working locally to develop innovation that is scalable globally. The relocation of the ARCSOC end of year exhibition from London to Kettle's Yard in Cambridge reinforces the role of the 'local' in our work - thinking globally and acting locally.

10 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1** The RIBA Visiting Board commends the student body generally, and ARCSOC especially, for their proactive, autonomous initiatives which positively contribute to the life of the School and student learning experience.
- 10.2** The RIBA Visiting Board commends the progressive agenda of research and design inquiry of the School that: 1) is evidenced in staff scholarly activity, and staff commitment to the School (including Design Fellows), 2) informs teaching, 3) fuels student ambition, and 4) affords a common sense of purpose between staff.

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 RIBA Visiting Board values the ambitions of the School that help foster the culture of the School and infuse students' ambitions, but draws attention to the need for the School to revisit its position statement to more accurately and fully reflect its ethos and how this informs its pedagogy programme structure and content.
- 12.2** The RIBA Visiting Board recognises the collegiate structure of the University which fosters interdisciplinary dialogue, but identifies the following points for the School to act upon in order to improve student learning and the staff experience:
- Ensure clarity and continuity in day-to-day communications and communication of year / programme / school structure to students and staff.
 - Ensure clarity and fairness in assessment to enable transparency of marking (including in relation to the RIBA Themes and Values) for students and compliance with the University's own regulations on external examination.
 - Ensure cross year / cross programme dialogue in critically reflecting on, planning for, and induction in programme and School pedagogy, structures, content, and pending changes in architectural education
- 12.3** The RIBA Visiting Board recognises the history and distinctiveness of the School's physical space (i.e., Scroope Terrace and the Colin Wilson addition) and recent improvements (i.e. the Dyson Building) but advises the University that in order to better support its ambitions for growth of the School of Architecture and expectations of the School retaining its profile, that it fulfils its commitment to ensuring the provision of additional space to meet the planned significant growth in student numbers.
- 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 RIBA Visiting Board recognises the School's critical stance in examining the identity and role of the architect in relation to built environment practice, but draws attention to the need to (and learning opportunity afforded by) critically examining the RIBA Themes and Values and its implications on Part 1 and Part 2 programme content.
- 13.2** The RIBA Visiting Board recognises the School's civic engagement, and engagement with practice notably in the Part 3 and MSt programmes, but advises the School to investigate how this engagement can be enhanced in all levels BA Arch and M.Arch through further engagement with local practice and local government bodies in public-facing initiatives that are simultaneously embedded within teaching and learning activity.
- 13.3** The RIBA Visiting Board recognises the School's collegiate structure, although advises that the School explores how to better enable commonality of experience for students across colleges, access to workshops for MSt students, and access to a shared learning environments with Part 1 and Part 2 students for MSt students.

13.4 The RIBA Visiting Board recognises the BA Arch Year 1 Design Studio pedagogy and its support of entering students in making the transition from pre-university education into the School's agenda of research-driven, self-led inquiry, and for the level of achievement in student work, and advises that the School explore how this pedagogy can be further enabled throughout the student journey across the BA Arch and M.Arch.

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 Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture.

Graduate Attributes for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Part 2 MArch Architecture and the Master of Studies (MSt) in Architecture (Degree Apprenticeship).

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 Part 1 Bachelor of Arts with Honours (BA Hons) in Architecture.

Themes and Values for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 2 MArch Architecture and Master of Studies (MSt) in Architecture (Degree Apprenticeship).

Themes and Values for Part 3

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

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School - 2023/2024)

Bachelor of Arts with Honours (BA Hons) in Architecture
 Year 1 – 57 students
 Year 2 – 64 students

Year 3 – 65 students

Part 2 – MArch

Year 1 – 26 students

Year 2 – 19 students

Part 2 – Mst Apprenticeship in Architecture

Year 1 – 21 apprentices

Year 2 – 19 apprentices

Year 3 – 12 apprentices

Part 3 - 27 students

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 next full Visiting Board.

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