



Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full visiting board
to University College, Dublin**

Date of visiting board: 11 & 12 April 2024
Confirmed by the RIBA: 10 September 2024

1 Details of institution hosting courses

School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy
University College Dublin
Richview, Clonskeagh
Dublin
D14 E099
Ireland

2 Courses offered for validation

Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture, MArch, Part 2

3 Head of School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy

Oliver Kinnane

Head of Architecture

Michael Pike

Bachelor of Science in Architecture - Co-Ordinator

Peter Cody

Director, Master of Architecture - Co-Ordinator

Dr Finola O'Kane Crimmins

4 Awarding body

University College Dublin

5 The visiting board

Kate Cheyne – Chair
Paul King – Vice chair
Dr Gul Kacmaz Erk
Ryan Stuckey

In attendance: Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, 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 courses:

Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture, Part 2

The next visit to University College Dublin 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)

9.1.1 Context

UCD Architecture is at the centre of Ireland’s architectural culture; it operates within the immediate framework of the practice of architecture in Ireland and in the larger context of international architecture. Its mission is to prepare students for careers in architecture and related fields, to be a genuine learning laboratory and testing ground for the architectural profession, and to make a strong contribution to architectural and interdisciplinary research. Accordingly, UCD Architecture promotes a close, dynamic relationship between teaching and research, the profession, the industry and the culture at large. This mission informs all aspects of its activities, and particularly its main teaching programmes.

9.1.2 Practice and the Profession

UCD Architecture has a long history of producing excellent practitioners and continues to do so. Prominent alumni have won significant international awards¹. UCD Alumni have also been notably present in representing Ireland at exhibitions around the world, including having a significant influence on the curation of the Biennale in Venice. Practitioners have always been centrally involved in teaching architecture at UCD. The great majority of studio modules are led and taught by practising architects who are at the forefront of their field, their work recognised through awards, publication and competition success. Practitioners hold fractional academic positions, at full professor, associate professor and assistant professor level, which encourage and enable them to produce research and scholarship relating to their practice. In 2018, a new role of Design Fellow was introduced, to recognise the large number of other practitioners and part-time teachers who contribute to the teaching of design. These roles are now filled by some of Ireland’s most significant and lauded emerging practitioners of architecture, working across a range of forms and types of practice nationally and internationally. Since 2018, the world in which architecture is operating has changed dramatically. UCD Architecture is responding to this through the Building Change programme working at Undergraduate level, which is also strengthening the School’s relationship to practice and the profession. It is also worth noting that practice-based teachers have achieved significant accolades at University Level with Emmett Scanlon and Orla Murphy being awarded University Teaching Awards for their work in the MArch programme.

¹ This includes but is not limited to Pritzker Prize winners Kevin Roche and Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara of Grafton Architects; RIBA Gold Medal Winners Michael Scott, Sheila O'Donnell and John Tuomey, Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara; Stirling Prize winners Grafton Architects and Niall MacLaughlin.

9.1.3 Research and Innovation

In line with UCD's mission as a research-intensive university, the large majority of Architecture faculty are research-active, publishing monographs, book chapters and journal articles, leading funded research projects and supervising postgraduate students. Areas of particular strength include the history of architecture and landscape, sustainable design and building performance. The expansion of the school to include planning and environmental policy alongside landscape architecture has resulted in a significant amount of new research activity as well as² facilitating more interdisciplinary work in areas such as heritage planning, resilience and smart cities. Besides its scholarly value and recognition, much of this research also has an impact in the sector, facilitated by increased funding for enterprise and industry based PhDs.

Research fundamentally informs teaching, in terms of the knowledge being imparted through lectures and seminars but also through studio projects and dissertations. Students, particularly at graduate level, participate in coursework which feeds into and off faculty's research projects. At graduate level, cultural and technical modules are fully oriented towards research. This is supported by the new structure of Design Research Studios that seek to support the students by providing access to faculty and Design Fellows with expertise in a particular area.

9.1.4 Exhibition and Dissemination

UCD faculty and alumni continue to be active in exhibiting and disseminating architecture. As well as serving to further reinforce UCD's international connections and networks, this unparalleled experience in curatorial practice offers the opportunity to highlight and develop the areas of dissemination and exhibition within our programmes and in future collaborations and partnerships. In 2023/24 this has been explored with the in situ exhibition in *Building 71*, part of the Building Change programme, being run in Year 2 studio.

9.1.5 Partnerships and networks

Partnerships are centrally important to UCD Architecture's core activities. Studio programmes often develop partnerships with external agencies, groups and companies in order to align closely with real-world scenarios and issues. Partnerships also allow more ambitious programmes of visitors and events. Recent and current partners include Peter McVerry Trust, Hammersons, Dublin Port Company, among others. Research partnerships extend across many other disciplines within the university, from art history to computer science to materials and mechanical engineering, as well as numerous international networks involved in funded projects. Finally, an extensive network of international exchange partners, including over 40 Erasmus partners, facilitates over 70% of UCD students studying abroad for a semester

² In 2018 alumni and Adjunct Professors Shelley MacNamara and Yvonne Farrell curated the 16th Venice Biennale of Architecture, Freespace. Two Assistant Professors, Alice Clancy and Emmett Scanlon were instrumental in every aspect of the exhibition in their role as Assistants to the Curators. In 2023, Scanlon and Clancy worked directly with Professor Lesley Lokko on The Laboratory of the Future, the 18th Venice Biennale. In the same year UCD Faculty comprised most of the team representing Ireland at Venice, as part of Hy-brasil, including Assistant Professors Peter Cody and Mary Laheen and alumni Peter Carroll and Joseph Mackey. In 2016 Orla Murphy was part of the team which represented Ireland at Venice as part of Free Market, along with UCD alumni Laurence Lord, Tara Kennedy and JoAnne Butler. Many other members of UCD Architecture staff, current and previous, have also participated in Biennales around the world.

and a large number of incoming students. This international network also facilitates staff exchange, joint projects and research initiatives to develop.

9.1.6 The Programmes

All of these characteristics of UCD Architecture feed into a programme which is informed and fed by research, related continuously to practice, sustained and enriched by partnerships, open to collaboration, increasingly oriented towards dissemination and exhibition and globally connected and informed. This wide-ranging educational ethos has always been anchored by the specific requirements of professional accreditation. All graduates are required to demonstrate the 11 core competences set out by the EU Directive on Architecture (85/384EEC), which in turn forms the basis of more detailed lists of competences required by accrediting bodies. In every area, from technical and regulatory to cultural and aesthetic, these competencies span knowledge, understanding, skill and ability. In keeping with its continuous benchmarking against the highest international standards, in 2018, UCD attained International Certification from NAAB, the US accrediting body. This both facilitates the increasing intake of international students, and allows UCD graduates to enter practice more easily around the world.

9.1.7 Philosophy and Culture

The emphasis in the Undergraduate cycle continues to be on the acquisition and demonstration of a wide range of essential competencies and capacities. This now is being radically adapted under the Building Change programme.³ The ethos of research and innovation is also introduced. At Masters level, the emphasis on innovation, investigation and original creative work is underpinned by a due regard for rigor, depth and precision, by a firm foundation in advanced methodologies and skills, and by a robust engagement with the broader disciplinary, regulatory and societal frameworks within which professionals must operate. The expectation is that graduates are able to act competently within a framework of knowledge and a context of understanding.

Both lecture-based and studio modules allow the introduction of content and projects which derive from, or feed into current research activity. Studio projects in particular have the capacity to produce work of analysis, survey and design that can provide important content and groundwork for research work. This flexibility and adaptability is one of the programme's key strengths: it can shape itself to opportunity and to circumstance. Without diluting their educational purpose, studio work and other assignments acquire a feeling of urgency and of relevance to the current discourse and situation.

The programme in architecture places creativity and the design process at its centre. From the outset, students are engaged in creative thinking and problem solving. They are required to take ownership of their work, to direct its development and to learn through their self-directed actions. While lectures and seminars play an important role in the architecture programme, the design studio is the focal point. For students, the educational experience revolves around a collective space within which each has her or his own workplace. The studio supports a series of unique 'settings for learning', each

³ A short description of the Building Change programme is included in the Appendices. This was agreed on a briefing call with the RIBA team. More details and explanations can be given during the visit but given its potential impact on the future programme it was considered prudent to include it in the first report.

with their own ratios and relationships. Students experience a high degree of autonomy and self awareness, an expectation of engagement and a high level of individualised input and feedback. The extent of individual tuition received by a student (usually calculated at an hour a week) is probably unique, and certainly unusual within the university, but it is vital to the nurturing of creative action. The challenge to students to produce and perform is matched by a commitment to support and direct their individual interests and directions.

9.1.8 Summary

UCD Architecture is locally rooted but globally connected, that is to say that while it is symbiotically linked to Ireland's architectural culture and practice, it is resolutely international in its outlook and ambitions. While it is committed to producing capable and committed graduates, equipped for professional life, it recognises that the nature of practice and of professional life is changing. Its graduates must be prepared to adapt in response to this change, but they must also be capable of inventing their own futures.

10 Commendations

- 10.1 The Board commends the cohesive and supportive student community and studio culture, which are enhanced by the intimacy of the school facilities. This is an exemplary model of belonging in a university context.
- 10.2 The Board commends the school's engagement with tackling the climate emergency, both as a technical and social response, including the need for change in attitude to territory, place, ground and materials.
- 10.3 The school is outstanding in its use of physical model making, material testing and understanding of material cultures to support their reputation for regional, craft-based architecture.

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 school should create, and sustain, the time for an inclusive environment for all staff to discuss and influence complex issues affecting architecture at UCD, such as: staff workloads, future architecture premises, changes to curriculum, and equality, diversity and inclusion.

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 school to work with the university to consider the opportunities for career progression through both teaching and research pathways for staff appointed on design fellow contracts.
- 13.2 The Board advises the school to establish clear induction processes and training in learning and teaching practices for the staff community.
- 13.3 The Board advises the school to review existing provision of employability support for students, to develop a structured approach to work-placement employment readiness. This could include CV writing, professional portfolio development and interview techniques.
- 13.4 The Board advises the school to further develop cross-disciplinary collaborations, such as with Landscape Architecture and Social Sciences at UCD.
- 13.5 The Board commends that UCD have successfully engaged with the Building Change programme in Ireland, especially through the work of their second-year design studio. The Board anticipates that the newly proposed Design Research Centre could be a promising future place to relocate and sustain this programme and its benefits, with the support of the University.
- 13.6 The Board suggests that the school could carefully structure the vertical studios in Year 4 and Year 5 to: (1) consider the timing of the Erasmus exchange programme, (2) give the students more agency over sites, methods, users, typologies, etc., (3) include briefs in other countries, and (4) encourage more experimental design methodologies including mixing analogue and digital techniques to encourage new hybrid forms of making.
- 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.
- 14.1 Graduate Attributes for Part 1**
The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part 1.
- 14.2 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, 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.

15.1 Themes and Values for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part 1.

15.2 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, Part 2.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the school)

Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part 1: 257

Master of Architecture, Part 2: 118 (including Erasmus)

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