

**Royal Institute of British Architects**

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

**Date of visiting board: 17-18 October 2024**

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 08 January 2025**

**1 Details of institution hosting courses**

University of Kent  
 Kent School of Architecture and Planning  
 Marlowe Building  
 Canterbury  
 Kent  
 CT2 7NR

**2 Courses offered for validation**

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
 Part 2 MArch in Architecture  
 Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice

Architect Apprenticeship L7: Master in architecture (L7 Architecture Apprenticeship – Part 2) leading to award Master in Architecture  
 Architectural Practice (L7 Architect Apprentice – Part 3): Postgraduate Diploma

**3 Head of School & Course Leads**

Chloe Street Tarbatt	Head of School
Manolo Guerci	BA Course Lead
Ambrose Gillick	MArch Course Lead
Peter Wislocki	PG Dip Higher Degree Apprenticeship Course Lead
Antonio Lazaro-Reboll	Director of Division of Arts + Humanities

**4 Awarding body**

University of Kent

**5 The visiting board**

Pro Kevin Singh (Chair)	Academic
Carol Norton (Vice Chair)	Practitioner
Alison Coutinho	Practitioner
Alex Warnock-Smith	Academic
Tracy Flanagan	RIBA Validation Manager

Nenpin Dimka	Observer (Day 3 only)
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**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](http://www.architecture.com).

**7 Proposals of the visiting board**

On 8 January 2024, the RIBA confirmed continued validation/s of the following courses:

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
 Part 2 MArch Architecture

Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice

Architect Apprenticeship L7: Master in architecture (L7 Architecture Apprenticeship – Part 2) leading to award Master in Architecture Architectural Practice (L7 Architect Apprentice – Part 3): Postgraduate Diploma

The next visit to the University of Kent 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)**

Our School of Architecture was established at the University of Kent (UoK) in 2005, and now sits within a significantly larger School of ‘Arts and Architecture’. Our architectural community is deeply embedded in its locality and enjoys a strong network of creative relationships with local- and London-based practices, local authorities, and community groups across Kent and beyond, while also punching well beyond its size in international profile, through its esteemed global research activity. The School play a central role in the University of Kent’s evolving ‘Civic Mission’ strategy, which states its primary commitment as *‘transforming lives and places’*, and we are dedicated to expanding and developing our civic role, working with local regional communities, local authorities and industry partners to mitigate the biodiversity and climate crisis, develop cultural and creative eco-systems, and to build a sustainable future. The activities of our students and academics support civic engagement through its ‘Live Projects’, research and knowledge exchange activities. The School enjoys a close relationship with the ‘Institute of Creative and Cultural Industries’ (iCCi), one of the four flagship Institutes within UoK, which encompasses the campus-based Gulbenkian Arts Centre and undertakes extensive outreach activities, enabling new ways of research and teaching to play a key regional role in the development of these fast-paced creative industries.

In addition to offering RIBA Part I, Part II and Part III courses in Architecture, the School has recently expanded to provide undergraduate courses in Spatial Interior Design and Graphic Design (launched 2022). We are strongly committed to widening participation and equal opportunities, and have recently expanded our suite of courses to support this agenda: Our new optional integrated Foundation year ‘0’ (launched September 2023) allows access to students who might not have performed so highly academically, yet demonstrate creative potential, while our new Higher Degree Apprenticeship (launched April 2024) offers UG Architecture graduates the opportunity to complete RIBA Parts II and III while fully employed in practice, providing a more egalitarian route to registration as an Architect.

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A more recent re-alignment of University School structures, combines us with the School of Arts, bringing UG and PG courses in Film & Media, and Drama under our auspice, and presenting a rich offering to our students across an exciting range of interconnected cultural and creative disciplines. Our academics are energised by the expanded interdisciplinary potentials afforded for both research, teaching and extra-curricular events and activities across this wider School

### **Location and Setting**

Our lively design studios are located in the Marlowe Building, which is a fine example of Brutalist Architecture, located in the center of our beautiful green campus, overlooking the charming historic city of Canterbury (a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site). Our interiors have been recently refurbished to a design by the highly regarded Sam Jacob, whose consultative design approach has produced a practical and flexible environment, with a friendly, distinctive character. Our expansive physical workshops provide tools and facilities for working wood, metal and plastics, stone, material and casting, enabling students to develop physical work through a range of media at a variety of scales. We encourage students to evolve and communicate ideas through model-making and physical testing, ensuring the sound understanding material qualities that is essential for the design of aesthetic, safe and sustainable buildings.

### **Approach to Architectural Education**

Our design ethos focusses on buildings, places and spaces that are sensitively conceived, resilient and community oriented; supporting society's needs through a design approach that promotes people's wellbeing and equality, while respecting the environment and local vernacular. Our academic and professional expertise ranges from history and theory, conservation and heritage, through to retrofit and adaptation. Our significant strength in research supports our ethos; informing and enlivening our evolving curricula and regular School events. The School also offers a number of accredited postgraduate taught courses in conservation, architectural visualisation, sustainable environments and planning and resilience, which afford industry-focused consultancy specialisms, while our active PGR community supports our rich research environment.

We are strongly committed to using 'Live Projects' as the basis for most of our design projects, and to building on the pedagogical and civic value this approach affords. We have been working closely with Medway Council over a number of years; most recently on a funded 'Heritage Action Zone' project with Historic England, and are now embarking upon a 'UKSPF' funded pilot 'Urban Room', supporting the ongoing Levelling Up agenda to enhance public participation in the design of place shaping proposals. The School is developing a collaborative working relationship with the Estates department and Canterbury City Council, contributing expertise to the sustainable development of University buildings and landholdings, and supporting local community engagement.

Our Architecture BA is taught 'horizontally', with all students in each cohort studying a fixed programme of modules/briefs. The curriculum provides a clear, near chronological suite of cultural context modules culminating in a Contemporary Architectural Investigation module that builds on the scholarly

skills developed through previous modules to support an independently directed extended essay. Our successful and popular ‘artefact’ option allows students the choice to opt to develop a physical manifestation of their academic study. Technology teaching oscillates between a construction and environmental focus each term throughout the BA, with project briefs closely aligned to design projects, building an integrated understanding of architectural production. Our Stage 1 course dedicates an additional studio-day to upskilling students in tools of representation and communication, ranging from sculpting and fine art, through to technical drawing and digital tools, establishing a firm basis of skills and expertise for students arriving to architecture from a range of backgrounds. Our design modules develop in complexity from a small public building in Stage 1, through to landscape and housing design in Stage 2, culminating in an integrated year-long design project in Stage 3, encompassing urban design, brief writing for complex building typologies, and retrofit.

Our MArch course is taught ‘vertically’ in shared units across Stage 4 and 5, and offers three distinct studio options providing a focus on alternative typologies, scales and locations (urban, peri and suburban). The community focus is further reinforced in MArch, where the smaller scale of the focused studios, and maturity of the students, allows closer relationships to be forged with their peers and other stakeholders.

Professional Practice teaching is embedded throughout all of our courses, culminating with dedicated modules in Stages 3 and 5 that ask students to test their design projects against real-world requirements, utilising authentic assessment methods. Our unique Stage 5 elective module dedicated to Architectural Pedagogy involves MArch students developing ‘teaching innovations’ that are subsequently trialed and tested through appointments as Teaching Assistants on Stage 1, with reaching evidence-based conclusions for curriculum development and enacting a cyclical model for continuous pedagogical improvement.

### **Student Support and EDI**

We celebrate the fact that we are an ethnically and demographically diverse School. Our students are each supported by assigned academic advisers, and through frameworks for peer-mentoring (PALS), ‘Student Academic Success’ service (SAS), and our dedicated subject librarian, and student support service. The wider University has a strong emphasis on both employability and EDI, with many services on offer including the ‘Aspire Academy’ supporting entrepreneurs to establish startups, and a wide programme of activities targeted to break down barriers to success and mitigate identified attainment gaps in HE.

### **Research and Scholarship:**

Since its launch in 2005, the School has rapidly established a solid reputation for research, ranking equal-6th in REF2021 (UoA13). Our active research group ‘Centre for the Sustainable Built Environment’ drives our core research activity, and benefits from a diverse established network of academic and industry partners at local, national and international scale. We have academics involved in high-profile research partnerships, including an ongoing secondment to the

Houses of Parliament, and through leading PI roles on a number of prestigious UKRI and Horizon grants. Our research academics are all also involved in teaching across the School in delivering both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, ensuring the dissemination of their scholarly expertise at all levels of study.

**10 Commendations**

- 10.1** The Board would like to commend the student community in terms of the studio culture, student society, and peer learning which has been energised by the UoK Peer Assisted Learning 'PALS' scheme, M.Arch to BA mentoring scheme, and aspects of the Architectural Pedagogy option.

**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** Despite the pre-meeting with the RIBA and exemplars being readily available, the Board were very disappointed with the lack of adherence to the protocols of a RIBA Visiting Board event. This included the lack of completeness, currency, and accuracy of documentation (including the required mapping documents), clarity of information, meeting attendance, other protocols, and general established best practice, including ensuring that portfolio submissions are comprehensive and simply structured. Before the next visit the School must ensure that all expectations are met without exception and need to have staff engage with the RIBA on a regular basis, the Visiting Board process (either as members or observers), and appoint a critical friend with extensive experience of RIBA visits to support the process ahead of the next point of validation.

- 12.2** Whilst there are areas of interesting academic activity, the Board found these to be fragmented, and lacking a clear narrative that defines and binds the School. Many of the proclaimed preoccupations of the School were not as evident as they should be in the documentation, or in the evidence found within the student work or indeed the students' understanding of the School. This should include how the specific character, ambitions, and experience that the course offers can be better represented and articulated within course documentation (including briefs), and how the specific qualities can be made apparent to potential candidates within external facing materials. With this in mind, the School needs to formulate a cohesive and confident clear vision, mission and narrative that provides a clear framework for the way forward which recognises the reality of the context of the wider University.

- 12.3** The recent financial constraints and staff vacancies, and on-going structural changes have put the staff team under considerable pressure, both professionally and personally, a situation which is not sustainable. Despite claims that this has not impacted the student experience, the Board found evidence that these circumstances have impacted on the ambition, pedagogic environment, skills learnt, and general progress of some students. Particular areas of concern

are regarding the importance of the digital aspect of the profession, climate emergency, along with contemporary approaches to construction. The University needs to implement a staffing strategy that ensures that all aspects of the RIBA criteria can be delivered in a sustainable manner and that evolutions in the profession can be responded to.

- 12.4** The School undertakes some positive work in terms of carrying out the University’s “Civic Mission” but this is being eroded by the lack of administrative support. The University needs to implement a staffing strategy that ensures support for these important external relationships, as well as providing staff with the “head space” to innovate, perform their day to day activities (including research) as well as emerging challenges, to ensure that the student experience is not undermined.
- 12.4** Given the current context that the School is operating within, the Board had some concerns about the ability of staff to maintain currency of emerging issues in both architectural education and professional practice. The School needs to devise policies and procedures for staff to have the ability to engage in the wider architectural education community and engage in current discourses, along with professional CPD for registered Architects on the staff team. This need to reflect the wider profession should also be considered in relation to more representative and diverse staffing, including the appointment of External and Professional Examiners.
- 12.5** The University and School must ensure that the synthesis of all of the above is fully and cohesively embedded in the new programme proposals, with an expectation of greater levels of student research, experimentation, criticality, speculation, innovation, design quality, methods of presentation and communication, technical exploration, professional responsibilities, and personal agency.

**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.

**There is no advice given**

- 14** 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 (Level 7).

- 15** 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 BA (Hons) in Architecture (Level 6).

**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 (Level 7).

**Themes and Values for Part 3**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 2 MArch (Level 7).

**16 Other Information**

**16.1 Student numbers (from the school)**

BA Architecture: **244**

M.Arch: **49**

**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
- Students
- Head of Institution
- External examiners
- Staff