



Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Exploratory Board to Newcastle University

Date of visiting board: 7 – 8 November 2024
Confirmed by RIBA Education: 10 July 2025

- 1 **Details of institution hosting courses:**
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape
Newcastle University
Henry Daysh Building
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 7RU
- 2 **Courses offered for validation:**
Master of Architecture and Urbanism Planning (Architecture) (M-AUP)
- 3 **Head of School & Course Leads:**
Dr Paola Gazzola
Head of School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape

Dr. Samuel Austin
Director of architecture

Dr. Loes Veldpaus
Degree Programme Director for Stages 1-3 of M-AUP

Armelle Tardiveau
Joint Stage 4 lead, design co-ordinator

Daniel Mallo
Joint Stage 4 lead, design co-ordinator
- 4 **Awarding body:**
Newcastle University
- 5 **The visiting board:**
Athena Moustaka – *Chair/Academic*
Elizabeth Dow – *Academic*
Valentin Dolhan – *Practitioner*
Joshua Brooks – *RIBA 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 **Recommendation of the Exploratory Board**
On 10 July 2025 RIBA Education confirmed candidate course status for Part 1 of the following course:
 - Master of Architecture and Urban Planning (Architecture) (M-AUP)

The designation ‘Candidate Course for Validation’ implies that the course has been judged to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to recognition, which can only be granted once the standard of work produced by graduating students has been assessed and found satisfactory.

A full visiting board to consider the programme for RIBA Part 1 validation will take place at a date to be agreed between the RIBA and the School.

8 Standard requirements for 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 completion by the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

Architecture at Newcastle University is characterised by a commitment to caring for others and for the environment, fostered within a culture of creative inquiry into architecture and its rich contexts: social, technical, environmental, historical, and professional. As a research-led school, we understand design to be a collective cultural endeavour that involves the acquisition and exercise of complex knowledges and skills. These we believe are best realised through a dynamic approach that sees education as on-going process of interdisciplinary inquiry in which staff and students are both participants. We promote an ethical, inquisitive and independent spirit amongst our students, encouraging them to develop individual approaches and areas of interest within a supportive structure that fosters rigorous research, design and professional skills. Thus well-prepared for practice {in the architectural profession or elsewhere), our students are equipped to face with confidence the urgent environmental and social challenges of our time.

We are one of the most successful and long-established architecture schools in the UK - celebrating our centenary in 2022. We are consistently well-placed in rankings, including QS's Global Top 100 for Architecture. Our graduates include Alison and Peter Smithson, Sir Terry Farrell, the Matrix collective, Eric Parry, Richard Murphy, and Jo Noero. Farrell is a Visiting Professor and has made a substantial donation towards The Farrell Centre, a new 'urban room' for the city based on campus. Since its opening a year ago, it has become a lively space for discussion between professionals, academics, students and public. The University is part of the Russell Group, and sees our local context as a privileged vantage point for addressing national and international challenges — 'From Newcastle, For the World'. The School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape mirrors this in several ways. First, in our contributions to Newcastle's globally recognised culture-led regeneration, forwarded through the programme and activism of the Farrell Centre. Second, in the inspiration we draw from the city's legacy of technological innovation, embodied in our Hub for Biotechnology in the Built Environment (HBBE), a research centre that experiments in ground-breaking ecological building materials. Third, like our port city, we are international in outlook with a global research agenda and a diverse body of students and staff.

Finally, the long-standing tradition of participatory design in the North East, epitomised by Ralph Erskine's work at Byker, is reflected in our engagement with local organisations and the council to empower communities, and in student design-build programmes, including the award-winning 'Testing Ground' pavilions constructed in Kielder Forest. Thus, our research and research-led education — our interest in the cultural opportunities that architecture affords, our focus on material and environmental innovation, our commitment to extending diversity, and our attention to the politics of the built environment — are profoundly rooted in our region's heritage and traditions.

Our Architecture Research Collaborative (ARC) supports a research culture that spans the reach of our discipline from architectural science to practice, history and theory. The most recent UK research assessment, REF 21, placed us fourth for 'Research Power'. We have one of the largest and most active groups of architectural humanities scholars in the UK and are home to arq: Architectural Research Quarterly, unique in publishing peer-reviewed research to an audience of practitioners as well as academics. The HBBE, established in 2019, is funded by the largest research grant ever awarded to a UK architecture school and includes 'The OME', a test-bed structure we claim as the world's first experimental biological house. In 2020, our Design Office was listed in the AJ's '40 Under 40' of the UK's 'most exciting emerging architectural talent'.

We work closely with colleagues in Planning to co-teach our Architecture and Urban Planning degree as well as postgraduate programmes. Our institution provides excellent opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaborations and we have teaching and research links with several schools including Engineering and Fine Art. We offer a range of specialist masters programmes, including a Masters in Landscape Architecture recently fully accredited by the Landscape Institute. We have the largest group of PhD by Creative Practice candidates outside London and our substantial PhD cohort contributes significantly to teaching.

Over the last 10 years, our facilities have been enhanced by a £3.4m workshop and studio extension, a specialist prototyping workshop for biological materials, equipped with a weaving machine and robot arm, and the full refurbishment of the Henry Daysh Building to include upgraded studio and review spaces for AUP and landscape programmes. We have expanded staffing in climate literacy, construction and professional practice, and have worked hard on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, as a research topic and in examining our own culture. Consequently, our architecture professoriate is now predominantly female, our staff cohort continues to diversify, we have an Athena SWAN Bronze Award, and are home to increasing numbers of Widening Participation and international students. In 2020, we welcomed our first 'Building Futures' students (formerly 'Stephen Lawrence'), on scholarships co-funded with local practice partners.

We are committed to the cultivation of architects as skilful, responsible and collaborative individuals. We recognise that the architects of the future will perforce be both specialist and generalist, and we help students identify and develop their interests by offering increasingly diverse choices of research-led options as they progress through our programmes.

We know that architects must deliver their speculations responsibly and we are committed to the translation of research into practice. In this spirit, our accredited programmes are structured to help students to develop their own ethical position, define the kind of architect they want to be and tailor their portfolio towards the kinds of practices that interest them.

Our BA Architecture and AUP programmes begin by opening students to the historical, cultural, constructional and artistic richness of architecture, while embedding the idea that design involves research. Stage 2 situates architecture in urban and global context, emphasising the urgency of the climate crisis and related social and political issues.

Technology and practice modules address materials, construction and detail, safety principles, legal, regulatory and business aspects, and environmentally responsible design, feeding into studio projects which address community and public buildings. AUP's interdisciplinary structure additionally allows space to introduce planning contexts and socially engaged practices to inform projects that combine urban, landscape and architectural design thinking, as well as construction. A dissertation enables students on both programmes to pursue a topic of their own choosing in depth, and we value the rigour it imparts to students' thought, articulacy and, ultimately, design. In their final year, students have a choice of research-led studios, each directed towards a different kind of critical practice. The technology course is fully integrated at this stage, while students are asked to critically position and reflect on their designs in written work.

In MArch, design is taught through thematic vertical studios, which pursue diverse research-led architectural agendas while following a common structure that ensures the attainment of core skills in integrating ethical, climate, tectonic and safety concerns. Parallel modules introduce diverse research themes and critical methods, informing students' choice of specialist study route: urban design, urban planning, learning lab or an individual or group research project. Our thriving Part III programme (DAPM) allows students to combine study and work effectively through block teaching. Scenario based coursework prompts students to apply their learning to practical situations, while group-work extends research into practice in the form of CPD presentations to peers, which also champion the ethical and reflective dimensions of professionalism.

Many of our core teaching staff are active in architectural practice and we have over a hundred part-time practitioner staff, drawn from across the UK and beyond, who contribute as tutors, lecturers, reviewers and structural and environmental consultants. Our graduates are highly sought after. Practices report that our alumni bring both the competences they need and, as a direct consequence of our research-led approach, an independence and self-starting ability to think through problems creatively. Alongside our research culture, our greatest strength lies in our highly capable and enthusiastic student community. Studio culture is strong and our students play an active role in running the School: they are members of School committees and inform policy and curriculum development. They organise end-of year exhibitions in Newcastle and London, and they design and edit the annual Design Yearbook.

Recently awarded 'Runner-Up Best Academic Society' by the University's Student Union, our student society, NUAS, organises a vibrant programme of events and talks, skills-sharing workshops and well-being support activities. Our international identity is further supported by our partnership with the INTO organisation, with whom we have developed successful architecture-themed English language programmes and by two study-abroad options offered at MArch level: a single semester exchange in Stage 5 or a year-long exchange via our new 3-year 'Master of Architecture with International Study Year' programme. Our attractiveness to students from across the world and our consolidating global reputation provides us with the impetus and foundation for the next stages in our development. Having firmly established ourselves as one of the most significant hubs for architectural education and research in the UK, we are keen to do the same on the global stage.

10 Commendations

The Board made the following commendations:

- 10.1** The Board commends the School and different departments for the collective effort and united support in crafting a distinctive course, especially recognising their strong sense of collegiality in this endeavour.
- 10.2** The Board recognises the significant investment in student facilities and the provision of resources available to M-AUP students.

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** Whilst building on the unique strengths of the programme, the school should ensure that students' Stage 4 final year portfolios meet all of the RIBA Themes and Values demonstrated across a range of projects of differing scales.
- 12.2** The school should continue to monitor the maximum target for student intake, allowing it to develop a strategy for maintaining and supporting students in a manner that retains the cohesive nature of the programme. This includes advocating for peer to peer support and learning across stages 1 - 3 and considering the maximum number of students that can be accommodated on the stage 4 architecture route.

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 that the school clearly communicates to prospective and current students the different professional pathways available upon completion and the further requirement for a Part 2 on the route to professional qualification.
- 13.2** In the absence of a creative portfolio requirement for admission, the Board advises the School to consider the different entry requirements between the BA Architecture and the BA & M-AUP.
- 13.3** The Board advises the School to clearly communicate the course structure to future RIBA Visiting Boards, highlighting shared modules between different programmes and modules that are taught solely to AUP students.
- 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 the Part 1 - Master of Architecture and Urban Planning (M-AUP) programme demonstrated the potential to meet the Part 1 Graduate Attributes if developed in the way anticipated.

- 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 the Part 1 - Master of Architecture and Urban Planning (M-AUP) programme demonstrated the potential to meet the Part 1 Themes and values if developed in the way anticipated.

16 **Other information**

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

Students can join M-AUP (Architecture) following Stage 2 of the BA AUP programme. In 2023-24, 4 Stage 3 students joined the programme.

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