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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

# Report of the RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Reading

**Date of visiting board:** 26 - 27 June 2025
**Confirmed by RIBA**: 27 August 2025

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**1      Details of institution hosting course**
School of Architecture
University of Reading
London Road campus
Reading
RG1 5AQ

**2      Head of Architecture**
Dr Penélope Plaza & Dr Oliver Froome-Lewis

**3      Courses offered for validation**
- BSc Architecture - **Part 1**
- Master of Architecture MArch - **Part 2**

**4      Awarding body**
The University of Reading

**5      The visiting board**
Sara Biscaya – *Chair & Academic*
Stephen McCusker – *Academic*
Liana Psarologaki – *Academic*
Shaun Young – *Academic*
Joshua Brooks – *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 27 August 2025, RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following courses:

- **Part 1** - BSc Architecture
- **Part 2** - Master of Architecture (MArch)

The next visit to the University of Reading will take place in 2030.

**8      Standard requirements for validation**
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 institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

**9      Academic position statement (written by the School)**

*We are a young school of architecture, opened in 2016, settled in the historic and leafy London Road Campus with its distinctive two-storey red brick buildings and broad lawn. We have grown steadily from a first cohort of 36 to just over 200 students. This level of growth has enabled us to create a close-knit community with a strong and positive sense of belonging between students, academic staff and our support teams facilitated by our caring approach to students, the peaceful location and the provision of dedicated studio spaces for each year cohort and desks for every student. Our studio spaces stimulate social connections as well as providing a working environment that emulates the collaborative nature of the best architectural practices, where students manage their spaces in constructive, stimulating, pleasurable and professional ways.*

*Our welcoming and nurturing learning environment enriches opportunities for a good balance between collaborative learning and deep work. We value students as individuals with diverse interests, backgrounds and capabilities and we believe that there is no such thing as the 'average' student.*

*From its beginning, Architecture at Reading has developed in alignment with the University's strategy and its overlapping and interdependent principles:*

> *__Community__: using our knowledge and skills, collectively and individually, to solve problems and create opportunities for the benefit of people and the planet.*
>
> *__Excellence__: we work in partnership with government, business, charities and other organisations to enhance student learning and career development and to extend the impact of our research.*
>
> *__Sustainability:__ We are committed to play our part in tackling climate change and are recognised as a University that leads on global environmental sustainability.*
>
> *__Engaged University__: impact beyond our campuses.*

*We are also working towards closer alignment with the University's strategy of Education for Sustainable Development (2023), in particular the key principle of "Empowering our students with the knowledge, skills, and attributes to contribute solutions to global challenges in an equitable and just way".*

*Reading has been ranked as the fourth university in the UK for sustainability in the 2024/25 People & Planet University League table and has been named Sustainable University of the Year 2025 in The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide, in recognition of its outstanding commitment to tackling climate change and driving sustainability.*

*Our vision is to educate collaborative and socially engaged future professionals with the expertise to make meaningful and positive contributions in practice to build sustainable futures.*

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*Our pedagogical approach prioritises the interdependencies between practice, research and teaching across the BSc and the MArch.*

*Our curriculum integrates the varied backgrounds and expertise of our academic staff, studio practitioners, our network of external professional experts and colleagues across SBE and the wider university.*

*Architecture has established strong connections with the broader School of the Built Environment (SBE) relating to the research groups, all our permanent academic staff are members of one or more research group within SBE. In particular, the research of the Urban Living Research Group is informing our curriculum content in BSc and MArch modules and design studio.*

***Active Learning for Professional Practice.*** *We place great importance in building relationships with practice and encouraging students to participate in debates around current issues affecting architecture and professional practice. Our curriculum includes five practice-focused core modules, embedded through the BSc and MArch with strong links to professionals, practices and experts. We offer students direct, hands-on, experience through two live projects: The Live Structure Build is developed by Year 2 BSc students working in groups, from design through to completion, to realise the production of an architectural space, The building of this structure is a collaboration between BSc and MArch students through their Technology modules. Our annual End of Year Show is designed by Year 3 students, who organise themselves into small 'practices' and compete to 'win' the contract to showcase their peers' achievements. The successful design is again built by students from all years across the BSc and MArch.*

*Across both courses, we integrate one-to-one tutorials in design studio with environmental designers and structural engineers as well as talks, workshops or visits with external experts from practice and research from multidisciplinary backgrounds (urban design, real estate, fashion design, archaeology, agriculture, etc). In the MArch, we offer optional modules to engage with professional education in the built environment, utilising the extensive expertise of SBE academic staff in Construction Management and Environmental Engineering in subjects such as Urban Microclimates and Energy Management, Renewable Energy and Management of Construction Projects.*

***Integrated teaching alignment.*** *We scaffold the content across modules and years to facilitate synergies between subjects and their learning. Module handbooks and teaching content are updated every year, with teaching teams organised by subject and year collaborating to maintain alignment and cohesive correlation across modules. This provides students with a clear journey of mastery in managing increasing complexity as they progress through the course. All our FT and PT academic staff teach design studio weekly, which increases opportunities for interactions between staff and students, the integration of staff's expertise into the curriculum and lively discussion between FT and PT contributors, as well as fostering a sense of belonging underpinned by the nurturing teaching environment.*

*Socially and Environmentally Engaged Education.*
*Final year studio projects in BSc and MArch address current, place-based social and environmental challenges through architectural complexity. These are underpinned by a series of studio design projects in both BSc and MArch relating to a range of relevant themes connected to live research interests within the School providing an environment of applied research and debate. Furthermore, the dissertations in the BSc and MArch provide direct engagement with staff's research expertise. This inclusively embraces a diversity of topics to examine with critical engagement to address wider concerns within architecture and the built environment, prioritising primary research, multidisciplinary approaches and a formal research ethics process.*

*The BSc and MArch programs place different emphasis on students' agency and ownership of their educational journey. The aim of the BSc is to provide students with the opportunity to learn across a range of built environment disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach addresses many of the criticisms raised in the Farrell Review of 2019. Our practice-focused model of architectural education places strong emphasis on collaboration between built environment professions, aligning closely with current debates about the evolving landscape of architectural education. As a result, our students graduate equipped to pursue a variety of career paths within the construction industry and built environment professional sectors. The aim of the MArch is to offer a professional course informed by current trends in both research and practice. Our research-led approach shapes the design studio, drawing on the expertise of the Urban Living research group within the School of Architecture, as well as research expertise from SBE and the wider university. Furthermore, a core module includes work experience, allowing students to apply research methodologies in practice or work as studio teaching assistants on our undergraduate course, or serve as research assistants on academic staff's grant funded research projects. This aligns with the University's strategy on employability, equipping students with the knowledge and experience needed to pursue three interdependent career paths: practice, research, and education.*

**10    Commendations**

**10.1**    The Board commends the staff for their enthusiasm, perseverance and resilience in maintaining the sense of community within the School through this transitory period.

**10.2**    The Board commends the improvements and additions to studio spaces, as well as the confirmed location at the current London Road Campus as well as the campus-wide opportunities it presents.

**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.

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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 strongly recommends that the School conducts a formal review of its marking and moderation processes to address inconsistencies in assessment, avoiding grade inflation, and ensure a transparent calibration process across studio and taught modules, particularly in the MArch.

**12.2** The Board strongly recommends the School clearly distinguishes between the MArch & BSc offer, by developing a medium term strategy that identifies key pedagogical themes, clear studio identities, and balance of research in practice, constructively aligning both programmes.

**12.3** The Board strongly recommends the School reviews and clearly articulates how 20% of the assessed outputs at Part 1 & Part 2 address professional skills; although AAMPS presents a clear opportunity for students to record valuable professional experience, students currently seem to prioritise graduate teaching opportunities over placements; the students expressed interest in better understanding non-traditional career paths.

**12.4** While the co-head model seems to be working, given the recent changes in the Architectural leadership and management provision, the Board strongly encourages the School (SBE) to provide more institutional support to the current team in recalibrating and articulating a clear and coherent vision that is considerate of roles and allocation of duties across the BSc & MArch.

**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** While students recognised the effort staff put into feedback, concerns about consistency, depth, and clarity were noted. The Board advises the School to review and streamline feedback practices and the format of course documentation to ensure equitable experience across modules.

**13.2** The Board acknowledges the positive feedback on peer to peer learning from the MArch to the BSc, however the School is encouraged to develop regular opportunities for BSc students to learn from MArch work such as shared crits, exhibitions, or talks, to foster aspiration, peer learning, and programme coherence.

**13.3** The Board advises the School to deepen its engagement with Reading as a major town, both as a pedagogical context and through live projects that reflect local cultural, environmental, and social challenges.

**13.4**. To strengthen the RIBA Themes & Values (no.4), the Board advises the School to implement progressive exposure of students to research methodologies and critical practice beyond reflective analysis of case studies towards propositions around more ethical, equitable and sustainable futures, particularly on the MArch (AAMSPR and AAMRM).

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**13.5**  The Board recognises that the integration of staff research into teaching is positive. The School is encouraged to further articulate how this informs studio and dissertation work across both BSc and MArch.

**13.6**  Whilst there is increasing evidence of critical reflection in realisation modules such as AA3REA1 & AA3REA2, the Board advises the School to ensure design process and precedent analysis in portfolios is consistently documented and embedded in final submissions.

**13.7**  The Board encourages the Institution to ensure workshop space can support planned growth, with equitable access across cohorts, particularly during assessment periods; also considering access to different technical equipment and artistic facilities, for example, photography.

**13.8**  The Board advises the School (SBE), to ensure parity in the optional Construction and Management modules offered to the M.Arch with regards to credits and workload.

**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 BSc 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 - Master of Architecture (MArch).

**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 BSc 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 - Master of Architecture (March). *Please also refer to advice point 13.4.*

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**16      Other information**

**16.1    Student numbers (from the School - 2024/2025)**
The School enrols approximately 208 students across both years (Part 1 & 2):

**Part 1**
-    Year 1: *72*
-    Year 2: *57*
-    Year 3: *62*

**Part 2**
-    Year 1: *7*
-    Year 2: *10*

**16.2    Documentation provided**
The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

**17      Notes of meetings**
These notes will not form part of the published report. 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