



Royal Institute of British Architects

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# **Report of the RIBA exploratory board to Anglia Ruskin University**

**Date of visiting board:** 2 October 2020

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee:** 6 January 2021

**1 Details of institution hosting course**

Anglia Ruskin University  
Lord Ashcroft Building  
Bishop Hall Ln,  
Chelmsford CM1 1SQ

**2 Head of the School of Engineering and the Built Environment**

Dr Esther Norton

**Deputy Head of Architecture, Planning and Architectural Technology**

Dr Alison Pooley

**Professor of Architecture**

Prof Maria Vogiatzaki

**BA (Hons) Architecture Course Leader**

Dr Francesco Zuddas

**3 Course offered for candidate course status**

BA (Hons) Architecture

**4 Awarding body**

Anglia Ruskin University

**5 The visiting board**

Dr Jenny Russell, Chair  
Simon Gratton, Vice-Chair

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, validation manager – in attendance

**6 Procedures and criteria for the visit**

The visiting board was carried out under the *RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria for UK and international courses and examinations in architecture* (published July 2011, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

The standard RIBA exploratory board timetable was modified exceptionally to allow all parties to comply with UK Government guidelines on social distancing necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and current at the time of the visit.

Board composition and numbers of attendees at each meeting were reduced, again exceptionally and with the full agreement of all parties, to reduce risk. Some staff members participated remotely.

**7 Recommendation of the Exploratory Board**

The Board was invited by Anglia Ruskin University to consider its BA (Hons) Architecture for candidate course status for Part 1.

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.

On 6 January 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that Candidate Course status for Part 1 be awarded to the

BA (Hons) Architecture

A full visiting board to consider the programme for RIBA Part 1 validation will take place in 2021.

**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)**

Our long-lived Ruskinian tradition started when John Ruskin founded the Cambridge School of Art, in 1858. This grew eventually to become Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), now accommodated in our Chelmsford, Cambridge, Peterborough and London contemporary, purpose-built campuses. The Chelmsford site, which is home to our BA (Hons) Architecture course, is nestled by the natural habitat of the river Chelmer and nature reserve. Previously, Chelmsford Technical College was home to the courses of Construction and Surveying, with Architectural Technology added in 1992 when the College joined Anglia Polytechnic University, ARIJ's predecessor. With a firm foundation of technologically accomplished graduates, the ground was thus laid to expand the University's ambition, breadth and depth: a BSc (Hons) Architecture Degree Course was created, which, in 2016, evolved into a fully compliant BA (Hons) Architecture Course that maps to ARB's part I Prescription Criteria.

Our curriculum has developed in light of the contemporary philosophical posthuman worldviews that are rooted in Ruskin's agenda Of the arts and crafts as inextricably linked. The posthuman era, distinguished for blurring the lines of modernity's problematic, artificial, clear-cut distinctions, binary oppositions and polarities, is found in Ruskin's belief in the merit of cross-pollinating — rather than separating — the sciences and the humanities, towards a better world. This marriage is key to our curriculum.

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We articulate the crafts, emanating from the engineering tradition, with humanities, to nourish creativity through arts and to strengthen our students' intellect. The balance of our teaching staff profiles — from practising architects; to leading researchers on the resilient cities research agenda that is blooming within the Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE), to which our BA belongs; to Associate fine artists; to staff from other engineering specialisations — reinforces cross-disciplinary teaching towards the integration of these spheres of thought. This integration further brings into focus the acuteness of the contemporary environmental, ethical, geopolitical and social crises, and fosters the catalytic role our graduates, as architects of tomorrow, can play in redesigning the planet, by reediting it and co-authoring it with and for communities. The ultimate aim of our curriculum is, through the transformative power of the integration of arts and crafts, to reform and transform our graduates, who will in turn reform and transform all those human and nonhuman forces they design for and design with, towards creating and crafting a world of healthy people and a healthy planet#

All our distinctive curricular underpinnings originate from John Ruskin's spirit, values and principles, characterised by his pupils and contemporary scholars as prophetic of — and hence relevant to — our troubled times of climate change, environmental disasters, and geopolitical and ethical crises. These principles are translated into our learner-centred and research-led pedagogic approach that defines the studio as the melting pot of all modules. Our design studio is central, and supported further by satellite modules, of which there are two genres. The first genre elaborates on techne and crafts (techniques of expression, representation, communication, use of integrating software and hardware, building technology, construction, simulation and performance). The second genre elaborates on humanities and attunes our learners to evaluating critically their design briefs and respective proposals by contextualising them in the histories and theories of architecture, and its professionalism, values and ethics. Thus, students learn what has given rise to the various paradigms, and are prepared to conduct a moral, ethical and politically aware practice where all the above coalesce in sustainable, integrated projects.

Year 1 delivers a learning-by-doing pedagogical experience in the studio that acts as a 'baptism of fire' and exposes students to the entire spectrum and complexity of architecture. The Year addresses fundamental questions spanning from the arts, or the poetic— conceptual and abstract creations and their representations — to the techne, or the poietic — real-life scenarios of making and building 1:1, sponsored by industry. The studios are supported by: thinking, through modules on History and Theory; making, through Building Technology; and expressing-representing-communicating, through Elements of Construction, Folio Skills and Essential Skills.

The aim in Year 2 is to develop independent learners able to elaborate on the topics of domesticity, housing and public buildings in a dense, urban context, in the studio. Investigating and questioning the boundaries between privacy and publicity, students develop briefs and projects of

growing complexity from the scale of the single household to that of collective living. Integrations are sought throughout. The History and Theory module sustains these investigations by reviewing housing in relation to the dramatic urbanisation of the last century. Moreover, making is further supported through the modules, Advanced Construction Technology, Modelling Sustainable Architecture, and Environmental Building Performance, which integrate design, building technology and the environment.

The third-year agenda is research-led and related to design (create) towards sustaining contemporary resilient communities and their urban life. The themes focus on the interface of architecture with important global issues such as: the continued over-harvesting, pollution, and destruction of nonhuman habitats, in disregard for nature's complex interrelationships; and the omnipresence of networks, Big Data, and Artificial Intelligence augmenting life in contemporary urbanities. Students articulate their responses to the need for architecture to act catalytically in changing attitudes and habits at a global scale — including their own attitude and ethos — focusing on how to redesign and edit the Urban Environment. Design is integrated with thinking from additional modules on Project Evaluation and Development, Professionalism, Values and Ethics, Conversion and Adaptation of existing architecture; and with making through the Construction, Technology and Innovation module.

Ruskin's emphasis on the importance of traveling as a way of sharpening inquisitiveness and appreciation of the various geopolitical and cultural contexts in which architecture develops, is reflected in our annual study trip abroad, open to all year cohorts. Our proximity to London allows for numerous short study and site visits, and workshops. Most second and third-year sites are in London. Some of the History and Theory modules, and live drawing and photography classes, are taught via study visits to the capital, a valuable and intellectually-significant experience.

The blend of technical skills (sciences) combined with creativity and an ethical stance to design (humanities) renders our students attractive to employers (Employers' Advisory Group, summer 2019), with 90% of graduates in work or further study six months after graduation (Unistats, 2019 dataset). Our working relationship with the Royal Institution of British Architects (RIBA) East, as well as the local RIBA Chelmsford Chapter, bridges academe and practice. RIBA East hold their monthly regional CPD events on campus and the RIBA Chelmsford Chapter organise their local CPD events and talks in the architecture studio. RIBA East also award prizes to ARU students in our end-of-year exhibition.

The Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE) is home to 6,000 students, and is research-active in six subject areas. In 2014, 12 of ARU's research areas were ranked as 'world-leading' in the Government's Research Excellence Framework (REF). FSE is committed to the Athena SWAN principles of gender equality in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine) education and research; indeed, FSE received an Athena SWAN Bronze Award in autumn 2019.

Our inclusive recruitment policy — following Ruskin's mission to bring positive change by reforming and transforming the many — ensures a diverse cohort with rich qualities of background, skills, ethnicity, gender and age, as well as commitment, passion and enthusiasm. Our active, student-led ArchSoc society guides and mentors the entire student body of the BA (Hons) Architecture course.

Our aspiration is to prepare our graduates to engage morally, ethically, politically, aesthetically, sustainably and technically — to ultimately play a key role in appreciating and confronting the contemporary ongoing crises and uncertainties related to the built environment. Through a strong RIBA Part 1 accreditation and further plans to expand to Parts 2 and 3, our aspirations will live up to Ruskin's prescient legacy, focussed through the prism of the present day. We, at ARLI, are firm believers in the pedagogic challenge and the power of transforming people through a purposeful education, which is evident in our student portfolios and underlying ethos.

#### **10. 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. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 10.1 The School must conduct a programme review in order to clarify the identity and character of the course, so as to:
  - articulate the academic progression of a student from year 1 to year 3; and
  - review the scale of the projects to ensure that there is emphasis on quality of architectural resolution.
- 10.2 The School is reminded that a future full visiting board will expect to see complete academic portfolios as required by the Procedures for Validation (2011, second revision 2014: section 4.7). These must include process work such as sketch books, process models and other media.
- 10.3 The Board advises that future documentation clearly demonstrates that the course meets the RIBA requirement that at least 50% of all assessed work is undertaken as design studio projects (RIBA Validation Procedures 2011, revised 2014: pages 5, 14 and 57).
- 10.4 To enable the development and progression of architecture provision, including the projected MArch, the Board strongly recommends there is dedicated studio and making space commensurate with the size of growing cohorts.
- 10.5 The portfolios of the graduating cohort need to demonstrate a greater level of technological understanding and its integration in the final year project.

**11. 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.

- 11.1 The Board advises the course team to rewrite the academic position statement to align with and communicate the philosophy of the course (see action point 10.1).
- 11.2 The Board advises that the School review the staffing support in year 2, particularly within the design studio to support the design studio leader and underpin the integration of technology and environment.
- 11.3 The Board advises that the course team review the mapping of the general criteria to differentiate where they are delivered and where they are assessed.
- 11.4 The Board advises that the course team consider opportunities for peer learning to enhance studio culture.
- 11.5 The Board advises that the documentation for a full visiting board clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of key architecture staff members and programme leadership.

**12 Delivery of graduate attributes**

The Board confirmed that the BA (Hons) Architecture programme demonstrated the potential to meet the Part 1 graduate attributes if developed in the way anticipated. The School is referred to the action points and advice.

**13 Review of work against criteria**

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

The School is referred to the action points and advice.

**14. Other information**

**14.1 Student numbers**

80

**14.2 Documentation provided**

The School provided all advance documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation. However, please see action points 10.2 and 10.3.

**15. Notes of meetings**

**Copies of the minutes taken from the following meetings 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 the Pro-Vice Chancellor and Deputy Dean
- Meeting with the Head of School
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with staff