

# **Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Bath**

**Date of visiting board:** 10/11 October 2019  
**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee:** 22 January 2020

- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s**  
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering  
6 East  
University of Bath  
Claverton Down  
Bath BA2 7AY
- 2 Head of Architecture**  
Professor Alex Wright
- 3 Courses offered for validation**  
Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture  
Part 2 Master of Architecture  
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice
- 4 Programme Directors/leaders/course leaders**  
Daniel Wong                      Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture  
Matthew Wickens                Part 2 Master of Architecture  
Dyfed Griffiths                    Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice
- 5 Awarding body**  
The University of Bath
- 6 The visiting board**  
Professor Paul Jones – Chair  
Bernadette Donohoe – Vice Chair  
Albena Atannasova  
Peter Culley  
Oliver Hall  
Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance

**Observer:**  
Dr Paul Harries, Head of Architecture, University of Wales Trinity Saint David (Swansea) attended as an observer.
- 7 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).
- 8 Proposals of the visiting board**  
On 22 January 2020 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed continued validation of the following programmes:

Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architecture  
Part 2 Master of Architecture  
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice

The next full visiting board will take place in 2024.

**9 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 institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

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

The following statement was prepared following consultation with Architecture staff in January 2019 and was formally agreed at the Architecture Group meeting in May 2019.

- The University of Bath provides a unique offer within UK architectural education characterised by three distinctive components:
  - integrated placements within the ‘thin-sandwich’ course structure
  - collaborative teaching and learning within a joint Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering
  - a clear and distinctive signature pedagogy

**Integrated placements**

The Part 1 and Part 2 programmes at the University of Bath offer a unique structure of academic and placement learning. Each programme includes integrated placements of one semester’s duration. These occur in the 2nd and 3rd years of the Part 1 and the 1st year of the Part 2. This provides students with the opportunity to apply and develop their skills within professional practice as part of their academic programmes.

At Part 1 level the two periods of placement occur in semester 2, allowing students to extend their placement over the vacation period, should they wish to do so. As a result students entering their final undergraduate year may have accumulated more than a year of professional practical experience. In their 3rd and 4th year students are able to share, through studio learning, the skills and knowledge acquired in practice, to the benefit of the whole cohort.

In the Part 2 students are able to extend their existing work experience or commence a new placement period at the start of the programme. This follows an intensive induction and study week at the University, with the placement period running concurrently with their Practice, Management and Law unit.

Students in the UK are visited by academic staff as part of their placement and students working overseas are contacted through Skype if face-to-face visits prove impractical.

### **Collaborative teaching and learning**

The University's accredited programmes are taught within a joint Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering, which was the first of its kind in the UK and in many respects remains unique. The courses were founded on the principle that professions that work together should be educated together in order to promote mutual understanding and the holistic design of the built environment. This collaborative ethos still guides the Department's teaching and research activities.

The first semester of first year is largely shared by architect and civil engineering students. Students from the architecture and engineering programmes also work together on joint design projects in 3rd year and 4th year. Multi-disciplinary design projects are tutored by multi-disciplinary teaching teams with contributions by Architects, Environmental Engineers, Structural Engineers, Landscape Architects and specialist consultants.

The joint project in 4th year, The Basil Spence Project, has been running for more than 45 years and is widely seen as an exemplar in integrated, cross-disciplinary design education.

### **A clear and distinctive signature pedagogy**

The education provided at Bath is rooted in the philosophical tradition of critical rationalism. The foundations laid by Professors Brawne and Happold in the 1970s and 1980s have continued to be built upon during the last thirty years and inform the Department's signature pedagogy: Critical Method<sup>1</sup>. This teaching method is communicated to all studio staff through annual induction. It is based upon the creative and effective use of criticism within clearly articulated models of the design process. It relies upon the effective assimilation of core aspects of knowledge within the early years of study and supports the increasing independence of each student, fostered through project-based, problem-led learning.

### **Programme design and delivery**

The Part 1 and 2 programmes have clearly different aims which are based upon, and embody, the attributes specified within the RIBA criteria. The Part 1 programme provides a broad education in architecture, which is clearly structured, allowing transition from the school environment to that of being an independent learner within higher education. The Part 2 course allows students to develop and explore their own architectural agenda and acts as a springboard into professional life.

The Department maintains close relationships with a broad network of external stakeholders with numerous beneficial consequences for both our teaching and research activities. In 2017-18 approximately 300 different organisations and practices contributed to the delivery of our accredited programmes. This exposes students to a wide variety of skilled practitioners, often working at the cutting edge of their discipline. Through the breadth and quality of this input the students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills, which are readily applicable to contemporary practice, within a challenging and supportive academic environment.

All three accredited programmes are designed to embody, in a manner appropriate to the level of study, the educational aim of the Department. In

summary this aim is to teach architecture as a learned, responsible and technically proficient discipline that requires its students to be culturally aware and focused in their use of creative imagination.

**11 Commendations**

The Board commends the following:

- 11.1 Exceptional facilities and resources contributing to an outstanding student experience and exemplary studio culture.
- 11.2 The School's engagement with professional and authentic learning in preparation for their students' future careers.
- 11.3 Empowered, vocal and engaged student body that contributes to the culture and values of the School.
- 11.4 The intelligent and ongoing integration of world-class research into the curriculum at both Part 1 and Part 2.

**12 Conditions**

There are no conditions.

**13 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.

- 13.1 The Board recommends that the School looks for more opportunity for critique and self-reflection in the spirit of improvement and development of the curriculum.
- 13.2 While the Board commends the quality of the PG Certificate in Professional Practice, the School should consider providing more support for the Director of Studies. The programme assessments should be streamlined, limiting the word count of its components (particularly in the case study). There should be a rebalancing of the credits of each component, so as to reduce the emphasis on the oral exam.
- 13.3 Further development and evidence of contemporary cultural and social theories, their relevance - and impact - on design project briefs should be provided at Part 1 level (GC2 and GC3). This is following the advice point 14.1 in the 2014 report.

**14. 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.

- 14.1 While the Board applauds the quality of the summative portfolios, in both Part 1 and 2, the students should be encouraged to retain development work that

demonstrates their learning, that is distinct from the edited documents used to gain employment. This should be provided for future visiting boards.

- 14.2 The University should support and assist the students in the practicalities surrounding the placement, particularly at year 2 level. This should take account of the increase student numbers, particularly those from overseas.

**15 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.

**15.1 Part 1**

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

**15.2 Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.

**15.3 Part 3**

The Board confirmed that all Part 3 professional criteria were met.

**16 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.

- 16.1 The Board made no further comments.

**17 Other information**

**17.1 Student numbers**

Part 1 - 459

Part 2 - 86

Part 3 - 57

**17.2 Documentation provided**

The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation. However, please see Advice 14.1.

**18 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 budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the head of institution

- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff