
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board
to the University of Portsmouth**

**Date of visiting board: 29-30 April 2021
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 07 July 2021**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 Portsmouth School of Architecture
 University of Portsmouth
 Eldon Building, North Wing
 Winston Churchill Avenue
 Portsmouth
 PO1 2DJ
- 2 Architecture Lead**
 Head of School Oren Lieberman
 Associate HoS Paula Craft-Pegg
- Course Leaders**
 Part 1 Course Leader Roberto Braglia
 Part 2 Course Leader Phevos Kallitsis
 Part 3 Course Leader Emma Dalton
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**
 Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture
 Part Two: Master of Architecture
 Part Three: Final Examination in Professional Practice
- Degree Apprenticeship Courses:
 Level 6: BA (Honours) Architecture (DA)
 Level 7: Master of Architecture and Professional Practice (DA)
- 4 Awarding body**
 University of Portsmouth
- 5 The visiting board**
 Nick Hayhurst Chair / Practitioner / Academic
 Bernadette Donohoe Academic
 Andrew Wilson Academic
 Sophie Bailey RIBA validation manager
- 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.
- 7 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**
 On the 07 July 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:
- Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture
 Part Two: Master of Architecture
 Part Three: Final Examination in Professional Practice
- Degree Apprenticeship Courses:
 Level 6: BA (Honours) Architecture (DA)
 Level 7: Master of Architecture and Professional Practice (DA)

The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2026.

8 Academic position statement
(Statement written by the school)

Architecture and interior design are always deeply entangled with both 'big' issues and with everyday lives, and their 'produce' directly participates in various intertwined ecologies, including those of the environment, culture, economy, the political, and the aesthetic. Whether we are looking at climate catastrophe, the nature of community empowerment, the distribution of wealth, or issues of health and well-being, the transformative power of the disciplines and practices of spatial design cannot be underestimated. At PSA, the transformations occur through our ethos of care and through methodologies of encounter – material, constructional, theoretical and conceptual – and through pressing local and global situated matters of concern.

PSA students are expected to engage socially, politically, culturally, bodily, materially, and environmentally with their world through their work, embodying ethical responsibility in caring for co-existence. This co-existence is between humans, flora and fauna, earthly and human-made materials, technologies, and constructions. Through the projects and coursework we set, and through our curricula which draw from current research, we critically engage with, and question, the normative behaviours which often marginalise human and non-human kin (including the earth), and look for architectures which nourish the oft-fragile and diverse relationships in situated ecologies.

PSA, one of four Schools within the Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries, is in the creative hub of the University which provides access to a broad range of making facilities and interdisciplinary interactions, encouraging and supporting students and staff to establish creative alliances and collaborations. PSA itself is a community of staff and students with diverse cultural and disciplinary backgrounds – our environment includes master's courses in Interior Design and Architecture, Sustainable Cities, and Conservation Architecture. We strive to be inclusive in all we do, from our initiatives in decolonising the curriculum, to pedagogical, research and innovation collaborations with business and community partners; from our Equality, Diversity and Respect Group to our research-led programme of 'Design Activism: Acts of Care' lecture and workshop series. Our ecology includes the city of Portsmouth, its history, communities and spaces, and students engage with live briefs as well as live 1:1 building projects through our Project Office. Our staff are involved with university colleagues from other disciplines in various research initiatives which are tied to Portsmouth.

Our courses are structured through the broad headings of humanities, – i.e., histories and theories –, technologies, communication – e.g., (re)presentation –, professional practice, and design. These are recognised as complementary and integrated in the design process, as it is design which is the tapestry of all these threads. Most courses are

offered as degree apprenticeships or part-time modes, to provide students with the opportunity to study while working.

Our Part 1 students embark on a journey which begins with them raising their awareness of these multiple strands through both making and discursive practices, continues with deepening their understanding of how to weave these threads together, and culminates with them confidently evidencing their knowledge and expertise. Accompanied in their first year by the Interior Architecture and Design students, Part 1 students engage with the fundamentals of design and, through various explorations, embrace architectural challenges at various scales. Their approaches are enriched in their second year where design investigations and narratives stimulate multifaceted contextual responses. The final year of undergraduate study brings into sharp focus the socially engaged ethos and matters of concern of the School, where we tackle real situations and scenarios, and support inclusive design thinking where an understanding of and relationship with users is critical. The urban environment is seen as a laboratory for inventive and well-informed design speculations and proposals. The explicit integration of technology and professional practice (as well as humanities through the dissertation if students so choose to) with the studio projects supports students in their understanding of architecture as situated ecologies of multiple 'actors'.

At Part 2, vertical studios provide a test-bed to engage with various theories of the design process. Thematic studios provide platforms underpinned by staff specialisms, research and external networks, and offer opportunities to engage with physical and cultural conditions both within and beyond the local, furthered by an active programme of international trips (physical where possible, virtual recently due to the pandemic). The palette of themes instigates a greater level of independence, signposting pathways of interest to the students who start forming their own positions. Substantial lines of enquiry are developed through the thesis study, advancing the potential of our students as individuals within a collective. Reflexive practice drives transformative learning and challenges preconceptions, recognising and utilising the diversity of the coexistence of three different modes of learning (full-time, part-time and DA) and the multicultural backgrounds of our students and staff. Our culture of enquiry and innovation is framed within our ethos and matters of concern, and critically through the professional context. The learning experience is enriched with collaborations across various Masters programmes, research initiatives within industry, and by embedding visiting specialists to support multidisciplinary design.

The Part 3 completes the professional learning that is embedded throughout the courses, and the innovative approach to learning through game playing ensures that experiential learning builds upon practice. Delivered through clustered seminar days, we offer an immersive learning experience incorporating role play and scenario-based activities, forum-based discussion, engagement with industry experts both locally and nationally, topical research into current practice, and student-led presentations.

PSA's courses incorporate academic as well as practice-led research. Key amongst the research and innovation structures which provide this space and opportunity are the Cluster for Sustainable Cities and the Media HUB, which have produced high-quality research and have been key in student knowledge sharing. Vibrant relationships with the Venice Biennale, with a range of other UK HEIs and NGOs through the Wastes and Strays, Soft Interface and Trauma Informed Design projects, amongst many others, provide an extraordinarily rich pool from which many teaching and learning encounters have been able to emerge. In addition, international collaborations have been established, for instance, through GCRF funding in the Caribbean, as well as in heritage studies with universities and heritage bodies in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Malaysia, contribute to our diverse research and teaching ecology.

The School builds strong mutually beneficial connections with practitioners – architects, interior designers and engineers as well as artists, historians, and social scientists – connections which underpin students' rich, integrated programmes of learning and support them in their career ambitions whether that be within architecture or in a host of cognate disciplines and professions. Our engagement with practice is further embodied in our Project Office, with its a commitment to making positive differences in the world. It strives to set a new benchmark for civic engagement through live projects, such as the "Multicultural Pavilion", a public art installation in a neglected space in Portsmouth; "Little Box of Peace", a live project for a place of retreat and refuge within St Margaret's Church in Portsmouth; and the "Portsmouth Phoenix", an international charrette on the future of housing.

Key to the richness of the PSA ecology is the Portsmouth Architecture Student Society (PASS), which curates a range of extra-curricular activities, including the weekly Polyphony lecture series which explores the complex ecologies of our matters of concern, drawing upon diverse external speakers. These lectures are recorded and are a free resource accessible to all. In addition, PASS deliver student-led competitions and are currently launching a new initiative 'PASS-OUT' designed to engage alumni and profession practice with the PASS offer. PASS is explicitly represented on the PSA Student Voice Committee (SVC) and the PSA Equality, Diversity and Respect Group (EDRG). The SVC is the primary forum of the student voice drawing upon student representation from all cohorts. The EDRG is responsible for leading our forthcoming Athena Swan submission, and is also tasked with promoting the our ethos of care, our concerns, and inclusivity within all facets of PSA.

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 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 The board commends the ethos of the school expressed in the academic position statement. This is visible and tangible across all aspects of the school, in such areas as inclusivity, decolonisation of the curriculum and the broad implementation of “matters of concern”.
- 10.2 The board commends the strong collegiate spirit of staff and students, and the prevailing positivity within the school.
- 10.3 The board commends the high level of organisation and support for student success and experience. This is exemplified by the dedication of the staff and the exceptional support for students through the disruption caused by Covid 19.

11 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.

- 11.1 At BA level, the board encourages the school to enhance the exploration and design rigour applied to spatial, material and interior qualities of the students’ design projects.
- 11.2 Whilst the board was pleased to see technology integrated into the design projects at MArch level, the board encourages the school to consider how students might engage with a specific, thesis-level area of technological study carried out in parallel with the development of the design thesis. This is to ensure full delivery of GC8 & GC9.

12. Advice

The visiting board offers the following advice to the Department on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

- 12.1 The board was encouraged that the ethos set out in the academic position statement was clearly appreciated and understood in the meetings with staff and students. However, the school is encouraged to consider how this vision is constructively aligned with the learning outcomes, design projects and valued as part of the assessment process.

- 12.2 The board noted that there appears to be some duplication in the coverage of the technology-related criteria in Module 30648 (Major Project Technical Resolution) and Module 30654 (Technology and Environment: Discovery). The school is encouraged to reflect on whether the content of the modules could be adapted to avoid duplication of technology related outputs.
- 12.3 The board noted that only one of the External Examiners in 2019/20 reviewed work from the BA3 level of the course. The board encourages the school to consider a more even distribution of external examiners' time across the courses such that the outputs from the Part 1 award year benefits from scrutiny from multiple voices and a wider range of continuous feedback.
- 12.4 Whilst the studios in the MArch course look at different programmes in different locations, the structure of prescribed outputs set out in the briefs appears to curtail the exploration of what a MArch-level design thesis might be. The board advises the school to consider how students can be encouraged to explore a wider range of design techniques and methodologies that might lead to different types of outputs for a design thesis.
- 12.5 The board was encouraged by the school's development of the Degree Apprenticeship (DA) programmes and how these are dovetailing with the modules that make up the existing full and part time courses. The board encourages the school to explore how the introduction of the DA provision at Part 3 level could lead to a further development of the curriculum and pedagogic techniques to enhance the already-robust delivery of professional studies and the Part 3 course.

13 Delivery of academic position

Please see advice point 12.1

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 Parts 1 & 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the BA (Honours) Architecture and the Master of Architecture.

15 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.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1 & 2 and Professional Criteria at part 3

The Board confirmed that all the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the BA (Honours) Architecture and the Master of Architecture. The Board confirmed that all the Professional Criteria at part 3 were met by graduates of the Final Examination in Professional Practice.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers

Part 1 389

Part 2 116

Part 3 22

16.2 Documentation provided

The faculty provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings:

- **Budget holder and course leaders**
- **Students**
- **Head of Institution**
- **External examiners**
- **Staff**