

**Report of the RIBA Initial Visiting Board
to the University of Wales Trinity Saint
David**

- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Faculty of Architecture, Computing and Engineering
Prifysgol Cymru Y Drindod Dewi Sant | University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Swansea
- 2** **Head of Architecture**
Paul Harries

Programme Director
Ian Standen
- 3** **Course/s offered for validation**
BSc (Hons) Architecture (Part 1)
- 4** **Awarding body**
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
- 5** **The visiting board**
Jenny Russell chair / academic
Luke Murray academic
Paul King 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 course is unconditionally validated:

BSc (Hons) Architecture (Part 1)

The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2026.
- 8** **Academic position statement**
(Statement written by the school)

Architecture in Wales – a sustainable, regional approach.

We are located within a land that has a distinct culture and identity, but whether it has a distinct architectural identity has been the cause of widespread debate. No doubt the debate will continue. Irrespective of judgements upon the past, this School will endeavour to place itself in a pivotal position in terms of promoting and sustaining architectural quality in Wales.

We find ourselves in a very interesting time in Wales. The Welsh Assembly has passed ground breaking legislation binding us to a responsible attitude towards future generations. Sustainability is at the heart of the political agenda and architecture needs to move to the heart

of the cultural agenda. In that way Wales will create the possibility of an architecture that is distinctive, socially responsive and socially responsible.

The landscapes, climate, settlements, buildings and cultural traditions of Wales are a key resource for the development of a unique approach to the study of architecture that is rooted in its community, and responsive to its indigenous culture. This means that design projects are fashioned to equip students with the knowledge and skills that they will need if they choose to practice in Wales, or indeed further afield.

Our school is embedded within its regional context, offering the opportunity for Welsh students to study within Wales, whilst developing a profile which is attractive to students from other parts of the UK as well as international students. The immediate landscape is one of great physical contrasts. Swansea, described by Dylan Thomas as a 'Lovely Ugly Town', provides a unique setting for design projects. While the scars of industry of this former 'Copperopolis' still remain its post-industrial landscape presents intriguing design challenges, both in terms of preservation and adaptation. The city sits adjacent to the UK's first designated 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty'; one of the finest stretches of coast in the UK. A limestone coast, with sandy beaches, dunes, cliffs and salt marshes. This affords the opportunity to set architectural projects that are responsive to the diverse geographic qualities of the region: rural, coastal, industrial towns and city centre.

We are a relatively small School of Architecture, about 20 students a year enter the first year of our BSc Architecture course. The longer term projection is to raise this to an intake of 30 students per year. These small student numbers result in a strong course identity, a closeness between lecturers and students and a common sense of purpose. The full time academic staff are joined by practicing architects to make the studio a dynamic and creative space where everyone can express themselves in their work. We value collaborative design as well as individual expression, students are encouraged to work within groups and also with other disciplines. Building a studio ethos, a collective workplace, is an important aspect of the course.

As students move up through the years studio projects gradually become more complex. The first year is focused on small scale design challenges and developing skills in drawing and making. The second year comprises a series of design projects focused on small scale buildings and the development of CAD skills. In the third year students produce a masterplan and select a site within their masterplan to develop a design proposal. They formulate a brief for a project of their choice and design a proposal for a new building. This they develop with a distinct design language to a degree of technical resolution.

We run projects that actively seek engagement with the people of Swansea and Wales. Architecture is a social art, it has a social purpose, it is a discipline that has a real effect on the lives of people and the built environment. To challenge the fact that much of today's architecture has an over-riding concern with buildings as objects, we place particular

emphasis on designing buildings from the inside out, as well as from the outside in, and on the design of interior spaces.

The concept of sustainability informs the teaching throughout the school. This is examined not just as a method of low energy, low carbon building design, but also in its broadest sense, to include social, economic, cultural, health and resource efficiency. Re-cycling existing buildings forms an important part of this agenda and we set projects that engage with the reuse of existing buildings. Students examine how existing buildings can be transformed, with integrity, to accommodate new functions and future uses.

We promote an approach to building design that is responsive to physical and cultural contexts. Whether in the city, the countryside or on the coast, design should be responsive to both functional requirements and its physical location. We encourage careful study of the particularity and characteristics of any given site, using a design process which is contextual.

Preparation for the practice of architecture is central to the way in which the educational experience is delivered. We equip our students to enter professional practice with skill and confidence. It is important that they are able to contribute to the world of architecture, and play their part in sustaining and transforming architecture, so it is attuned to future needs. The school has formed strong links with local practices and leading architects. Practitioners are invited into the school to contribute talks, lectures and commentary on student's work. We also organise placements with local practices, so students gain an early experience of what it is like to work in the profession.

We encourage our students to pursue their own personal and research interests throughout the course, which culminates in the third year in a dissertation, affording our students the opportunity to research and analyse a topic of their choice in some depth.

This approach not only provides a route for our students to become practicing architects, but also provided a route to them gaining confidence, finding their own identity as designers and realizing their personal potential. As one of our recent graduates wrote, the course 'helped me figure out what I want to do in my life and discover what I am capable of. I think I found myself during the architecture course'.

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 orientation of the course towards professional practice and links to industry, which is a result of the exceptional dedication shown by the small staff team.
- 10.2 The board commends the commitment of the institution in developing a school of architecture for Wales, which embeds the Wellbeing of the Future Generations Act in both education and practice, further strengthening regional architecture and widening access to the profession.

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 The school should write an academic position statement which aligns and communicates the overall philosophy of the school and narrates a clear vision for the future, in the understanding that this is integral to the overall RIBA report and will be published online.
- 11.2 The school should ensure that students demonstrate fully their design process through 2D and 3D means, in particular, using model making to fully interrogate and explore depth of understanding.

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 fully supports the school's desire to develop an M Arch course. Considering this, the board strongly advises that a research culture is established and strengthened within the school, to both reflect the specialisms of the staff and expand interdisciplinary opportunities.
- 12.2 The board recognises the potential of CWIC and advises the school to capitalise on these connections, in particular the opportunity to respond to evolving forms of technology.
- 12.3 The board advises the course team to reflect on and review the relationships between the year 3 design modules to afford greater opportunity for integration and depth of understanding. In addition, as the course matures, the synthesis between the dissertation and design could be explored.

- 12.4 In light of the plans for growth of the school, the board advises the institution to encourage greater diversity of input, further strengthening the student experience. In particular, the board advises the institution to extend the staff cohort to reflect growing student numbers.
- 12.5 While the board recognises the value of informal pastoral support between staff and students, the board advises a more formal structure of personal tutors be implemented to reflect the plans for growth.
- 12.6 The board advises the school to continue to develop the year one design programme to lessen the jump between first and second year.
- 12.7 The introduction of a student society would greatly benefit the school as a whole, encouraging links and opportunities of collaboration with other schools of architecture, both regionally and nationally. This will further enable students to voice their architectural interests and concerns to a wider audience.
- 12.8 The board recognises the institution's commitment to studio culture and the benefit of the excellent studio spaces. The board advises that on return to the studios, following this current period of online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students take full ownership of the space available through testing, experimentation, and a culture of making.

13 Delivery of academic position

Please see action point 11.1

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 Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the BSc (Hons) 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 Part 1

The Board confirmed that all the Part 1 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers

41 students

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**