



Royal Institute of British Architects

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# **Report of the RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Hertfordshire**

**Date of visiting board: 12 & 13 November 2020**  
**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 6 January 2021**

**1 Details of institution hosting course**  
Architecture and Interior Architecture and Design  
School of Creative Arts  
University of Hertfordshire  
Hatfield AL10 9AB UK

**2 Programme Leader**  
Dr Luigi Pintacuda

**3 Course/s offered for Part 1 validation**  
BA (Hons) Architecture  
BA (Hons) Architecture (Sandwich)  
BA (Hons) Architecture with Year Abroad

**4 Awarding body**  
University of Hertfordshire

**5 The visiting board**  
Nick Hayhurst – Chair  
Paula Craft-Pegg  
Jon Phipps

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 visiting board timetable and Board composition were 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.*

*The majority of meetings with University of Hertfordshire staff and students were conducted virtually.*

**7 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**  
The Board was invited by the University of Hertfordshire consider its BA (Hons) Architecture/ BA (Hons) Architecture (Sandwich)/ BA (Hons) Architecture with Year Abroad for validation for Part 1.

On 6 January 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses be awarded Initial Validation with Conditions for Part 1:

BA (Hons) Architecture  
BA (Hons) Architecture (Sandwich)  
BA (Hons) Architecture with Year Abroad

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A revisit to consider the School's response to the conditions will take place once the 2020/2021 cohort has graduated. Dates will be agreed between the University and the RIBA.

**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 (statement written by the School)** The BA (Hons) Architecture programme offers a grounded and forwardfacing design education that prepares graduates for contemporary architectural practice within a rapidly changing urban context. The programme focuses on the unique edge territory in which Hatfield is based, examining spatial and architectural conditions of the urban fringe, suburbia and rapid urban growth — issues that have relevance far beyond this local context. The programme interrogates interventions at the regional scale with a global perspective, examining and imagining new towns, garden cities, smart and digital cities, and considering the social, political, environmental and cultural impact of such approaches. Located between the urban and the rural, the programme aims to build a critical knowledge of the spatial conditions that characterise the Hertfordshire - North London continuum, and to improve the quality of living and working in these local communities.

**Preparing for Practice**

The University of Hertfordshire aspires to be internationally renowned as the UK's leading business-facing university, creating an ethos of enterprise and innovation that this course taps into. Our academic offer provides students with knowledge of the architectural profession's regulations and procedures involved in translating design concepts into buildings in the UK. In addition, we provide opportunities to consider the complexities surrounding the mechanics of the global architectural industry. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, we equip our graduates with the soft skills of collaboration and coordination required for the rapidly changing architectural industry — enabling them to work with and across other disciplines and communities. The course provides an in-depth understanding of how to create architectural designs that satisfy both aesthetic and technical requirements in a grounded and practical way that prepares students for the profession. We align our modules and briefs

closely with local businesses, organisations and communities, so that our students gain real-world experience on live projects — fostering relationships and readying our graduates for the world of work.

### **Engaging with Local Communities**

The school offers students the opportunity to engage with the local community and we are committed to addressing issues which are important for the local area. In particular, students are involved in studying public space as an interface between both public and personal needs, working on projects including squares, lobbies, libraries, shopping centres and streetscapes. Both design modules and School's academic position statement 10 contextual studies modules draw on examples within Hertfordshire, including the Garden Cities, New Towns and other settlement forms. Through these means, students link theory to the practice within the context of a specific community. Our Architecture award has been developed in response to a series of industry and societal demands. The first is future infrastructure development and place making by the UK Government in the development of its system of cities and primary urban areas (PUAs) (Clark & Clark 2014) in relation to global markets including High Speed Two (Hs2) and the creation of new Garden Cities such as Ebbsfleet, Kent (Egan 2004). The second is the growing demand for expertise in sustainable design and planning (Arup 2014). In accordance to The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), announced in March 2012, future residential development is firmly growth oriented: 'Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices' (NPPF 2012 p ii). This growth area and development can be evidenced in the recent Wolfson Economics prize for Garden Cities and regional planning (2014). Recent University of Hertfordshire research reinforces these trajectories very strongly (Parham & Hulme 2014). Moreover, the new award responds to North Hertfordshire's draft plan to include 12, 100 homes over the period to 2031 as part of the NPPF. We work closely with the Hertfordshire Architects Association (HAA) who currently runs its annual lecture at UH, awards an annual student prize and contributes to crits, teaching and curriculum development, and with RIBA EAST, who annually award the best projects of our final year students. Our unique geographical location on the periphery of London with both convenient access to the city centre and simultaneously to smaller metropolitan areas and the countryside, allows us to engage our students in projects of different scales that offer both design-retrofit and new-build architecture. We place our students in a unique position to understand, guide and explore the changing landscape as it evolves from the utopian ideal of the Garden Cities of the early twentieth century and the post-war New Towns towards our future cities.

### **A New Generation of Architects and Designers**

The next generations of architects will need to deal with a complex social and technological scenario, where the essence of architecture cannot be simply reduced to solving functional or market-driven problems at the

expense of design and management of the city. This is why the educational model which we use to train our future students has been carefully designed. It is innovative and informed in fields such as economics, technology, data production and analysis, and social intervention, and it uses techniques including real community based live projects, team working, exploring making and technology, and experimenting with site context. It is crucial that our future architects will incubate and grow within a solid and research-intensive environment, with critical and technological awareness, and a strong connection with industry. This is why our BA (Hons) Architecture award is intended to equip graduates with the knowledge and skills to work within the most innovative architectural practices, pushing the boundaries of architectural design. The architecture degree is for students who are both creative and analytical and who will challenge the technical and regulatory frameworks that exist within the discipline.

## **10 Conditions**

The following conditions of validation will apply:

- 10.1 Further to Action Point 11.2 of the 2019 Exploratory Board, the School must ensure that all elements of GC1.2 and GC8.2 (the integration of technology) are evident in all portfolios. In particular, the School should ensure that student portfolios evidence integration of building-wide structural and constructional strategies in the design work.
- 10.2 Further to Action Point 11.3 of the 2019 Exploratory Board, the School must ensure that all elements of GC4.3, GC10.3, GC11.2 and GC11.3 (the management, practice and law subject areas) are evident in all portfolios. In particular, the School should ensure that student portfolios evidence an understanding of CDM, building procurement, planning policy and development control issues.

## **11. Commendations**

- 11.1 The Board commends the School's supportive and organised response to the Covid Crisis. The dedication of staff, both full and visiting lecturers, to the teaching and welfare of students was raised as a particular strength of the School by the students. Students were particularly appreciative of staff availability, and continued support and feedback across the year.
- 11.2 The School continues to demonstrate a pro-active approach to inclusivity and widening participation at both strategic and course level. This was evident in the continued review and actions to improve progression and awards for BAME students. At Course level, the Board commends the decision to widen the scope of precedents, research and literature beyond the traditional Western references used in the C&CS modules.

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

- 12.1 In line with the External Examiner's comments, the School must ensure that all students evidence the creative application of the fine arts and culture in the development of design projects.
- 12.2 Whilst the board found evidence of students carrying out a number of studies relating to energy efficiency and approaches to sustainable design, the School must ensure that these principles of sustainable design are holistically integrated into the student's own design work.
- 12.3 Whilst the board appreciates that the architecture course is now fully distinct from the interior architecture course, the School must ensure that all other aspects of Action Point 11.4 of the 2019 Exploratory Board are carried out. The board supports the idea that the upcoming Periodic Review may be a good opportunity to meaningfully address these.
- 12.4 Further to Action Point 11.5 of the 2019 Exploratory Board, the School recognises the strength of the School's ambition to engage with the 'edge' condition reflecting the School's regional context. Whilst the board appreciates that projects are located locally, the idea of the 'edge' condition is not evident in the student work in the form of architectural enquiry and the design methods being deployed.
- 12.5 The School must ensure that all student portfolios include students' 'architectural thinking'. This should include their design enquiries, spatial explorations and design process that, together, make up a comprehensive design portfolio.
- 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 Further to the Advice noted in 12.1 of the 2019 Exploratory Board, this board also advises the School to improve the ratio of full-time staff relative to part-time staff in the interest of ensuring consistency of academic standards. This should be regularly reviewed to remain commensurate with growing student numbers.
- 13.2 Further to Action Point 11.8 of the 2019 Exploratory Board, the board advises the School to increase the provision of studio space (and continue to do so in line with the increasing number of students) such that a studio culture might be developed.
- 13.3 The board observed that, in some portfolios, there was duplication of drawings and work submitted for assessment across different modules. We advise the School reviews the submission requirements for the modules to provide more clarity to the focus of the work in relation to the assessments. The range of work submitted could then be tailored to

respond to different audiences and purposes, using a wider range of media and representation techniques.

**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.

**14.1 BA (Hons) Architecture, BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1**

Please see conditions 10.1 and 10.2 regarding the criteria which underpin the graduate attributes.

**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.

15.1 Please see Conditions 10.1, 10.2. Please also see the action points and advice.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers**

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1: 177

**16.2 Documentation provided**

The School provided all documentation before and during the visit as required by the Procedures for Validation.

**17. 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 revisiting board and the next full visiting board.**

- Meeting with the Head of Art and Design and Programme Leader
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the Deputy VC and Dean
- Meeting with External Examiner
- Meeting with staff