
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Initial Visiting Board
to the University of Wolverhampton**

Date of visiting board: 06-07 April 2021

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 07 July 2021

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 University of Wolverhampton
 School of Architecture & Built Environment (SoABE)
 Faculty of Science & Engineering
 Springfield Campus
 Grimstone Street
 Wolverhampton
 WV1 1LY
- 2 Head of School**
 Mohammed Arif Head of School Architecture & Built Environment
- Subject Lead and Course Leader**
 Colin Orr Architecture Subject Lead
 Olive White Course Leader BSc (Hons) Architecture
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**
 BSc (Hons) Architecture (Part 1)
- 4 Awarding body**
 University of Wolverhampton
- 5 The visiting board**
 Virginia Rammou 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)
 The following statement was prepared following consultation with Architecture staff in March 2021 and was formally agreed at the Architecture Group meeting in April 2021.
- The University of Wolverhampton (UoW) prides itself on being the University of Opportunity. This underpinning philosophy has resulted in the university being acknowledged for encouraging wider participation and this is further underpinned by its position in the Top 10 Higher Education Institutions for Social Mobility. Placing students first is at the centre of the University strategy where we have been commended by

the Quality Assurance Agency for enhancing student learning opportunities. Furthermore, ensuring our students are industry ready is critical to our success as demonstrated by our 96% employment rate, placing us second in the country in this area.

The School of Architecture and Built Environment (SoABE) has been a cornerstone of the University since its inception as a technical college in the early 20th Century. The school began to develop an architectural design knowledge base in the early 21st Century culminating in the creation of the BSc (Hons) Architecture in 2014. The experience within SoABE is unique as it mirrors the sector; drawing together students across the various disciplines of Architecture and the Built Environment and is the only school in the world that offers dedicated degree courses for every stage of the lifecycle of a building from design to demolition. Our success with Apprenticeships not only aligns to our social mobility ethos, to provide higher education for all, but it also highlights the strong industrial links we have both regionally and nationally. Our school has recently moved into the new Springfield campus, a £100 million project, turning a 12-acre Grade II listed former brewery, into Europe's largest specialist design, construction and built environment campus. This site will not only house the School but will share its location with the new National Brownfield Institute; a Government supported centre; focused on driving the next generation of thinking and techniques, for transforming brownfield land into new communities.

The Architecture subject area within SoABE addresses the needs of the built environment by drawing on an integrative skillset weaving elements of mathematics and engineering combined with the creativity of the form and space of architecture, and their relationships to political, social and cultural movements. Central to our pedagogy is our geographical location. Located in the "Capital of the Black Country", SoABE offers Architecture Programmes for BSc Architecture and Masters in Architecture allowing us the perfect setting to engage with a wide variety of brownfield sites - a reminder of our history and heritage.

Our philosophy

Wolverhampton's BSc in Architecture offers a unique educational experience grounded in design, technology and science. Our mission is to inform good design which will improve people's lives whilst minimising the detriment to our Earth's ecosystems. Design is at the heart of the curriculum which then underpins modules including design studio, history and theory of architecture, urbanism, building science, sustainability, structures, construction and professional practice. There is a strong emphasis on understanding the context, materiality and function of design. Projects progress in scale and complexity; beginning with the human scale in the First Year, urban scale in the Second Year and holistic in the Third Year.

This approach provides a broad education in architecture; with a clear pathway to guide those transitioning from school and college to become self-motivated fully autonomous learners within higher education. Our philosophy is focused on welcoming and valuing distinct views that broaden each of our own perspectives through critical

thinking and respectful debate; there is no one singular style of architecture attached to the school.

Graduate employability is one of the key ethos and area of focus for all the courses in SoABE. Throughout the course, our students, have the opportunity, to work on real world projects, gaining first-hand experience and often engaging with an actual client, helping to create 'work ready' graduates. These projects allow students to develop their own design responses within a context, but also allow engagement in teamwork, an important part of the curriculum. Many of our 'real' projects are located within the Black Country and associated with brownfield research, ensuring students understand the environmental imperative, that we build on more suitable brownfield sites in the future. Whilst these provide a local and regional focus, architecture excursions both within the UK and abroad, augment student exposure and assist in improving their abilities to analyse architectural and urban situations simultaneously.

The diversity of the University is a key strength, and we recognise the individual needs of our students. In addition to the pedagogic journey, we are committed to providing a very personal experience for our students, offering a unique level of pastoral care which fosters a sense of community. By providing smaller class and studio sizes we allow our students to receive individual attention from the academic team and develop a reciprocal learning experience, all with a high level of pastoral support. The University's success in providing social mobility, employability as well as improving access and long-term success features heavily in the Architecture subject. Our students are supported all the way through their education journey including "meet the employer" events, engagement with our very strong alumni networks, comprehensive outreach events and involvement with the RIBA Ambassador's programme. We are also keen to support the journey beyond graduation and embrace the entrepreneurial spirit of many of our students. To this end we offer a range of opportunities for students including the SPEED programme to support business start-ups through advice on entrepreneurship opportunity via our ERDF funded Built Environment and Climate Change Innovations (BECCI) centre and more widely the Wolverhampton Science Park to provide incubation space for new companies.

Feeling a part of a learning community is crucial to success in higher education. Whilst part of a larger School, the WLVArchitecture brand provides a specific identity for the Architecture course and allied architectural design courses. This brand helps to provide a horizontal and vertical community which transcends boundaries and supports our physical studio spaces, allowing supportive, intellectually engaging and highly motivating workspaces for all students. The Architectural Studios are all located on the top floor of the School building where all of our students from Year 1 to Year 5 are located, allowing for peer-to-peer learning and naturally occurring vertical learning, which we feel is important to prepare for practice. Each student, including apprentices, has a dedicated individual workspace where they can hone their critical thinking skills both as individuals and as a larger community providing a strong foundation in the creative process. The dedicated architecture

studios are supplemented by a material workshop, smart modelling and assembly workshop for physical model making and the Construction Holodeck to support state of the art digital workflows.

The course encourages interest in the entire life cycle of the building which reflects the broad spectrum of research across the school. The Research structure of the school is built upon two core Research Groups with one focusing on Smart and Sustainable Construction and the other on Digital Construction. These are underpinned by four major research projects; The Brownfield Research and Innovation Centre which deals with bringing more brownfield sites to use through remediation and retrofit, The Construction Futures Research Centre which looks at use of digital intervention for improvement in design and processes of construction, Built Environment Climate Change Innovations which deals with post-occupancy innovations and interventions for turning the buildings sustainable, and the Environmental Technologies and Resource Efficiency Support Service to promote circular economy, recycling and waste management in construction sector. Each of these engages in applied Research and Development with dedicated research and industry facing teams. The applied nature of the research being undertaken provides opportunities for Architecture students to directly engage in real world problems whilst having access to cutting edge technology and thinking, significantly enriching the learning experience.

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 pastoral support for students during the pandemic from all levels of the institution, especially the swift move to online learning allowing the seamless continuation of students' education.
- 10.2 The board commends the strong emphasis and value given to design process work in the student portfolios.
- 10.3 The board commends the clarity of the pre-visit documentation and the information made available during the visit by the course leader for the RIBA visiting board.

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 consider a structured review of the curriculum to ensure it remains progressive and addresses the future demands of the architectural profession.
- 11.2 The school should formalise a measured approach to student engagement and progression to ensure that the student experience is maintained throughout the delivery of the course, both on and off campus.
- 11.3 If the 'Black Country' agenda is an overarching theme for the undergraduate course, the team must consider how this is integrated and how it manifests in the work of modules such as history and theory, technology, professional practice to demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of the complex socio-economic issues associated with the context.
- 11.4 The school should consider how design project briefs are conceived to enable students to develop the spatial qualities of their architectural design projects in more depth and the integration between design, technology, and humanities.

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 school should carefully manage the planned growth of the school to ensure the student experience is not compromised.
- 12.2 The use of physical modelmaking should be fully integrated into the design process and be evidenced in the student portfolios.
- 12.3 The course team should consider how the student experience and the understanding of architecture may benefit from field trips, engaging with the wider profession and varying contexts.
- 12.4 The school should reflect on the opportunities that arise from the dialogue between Architecture and Architectural Technology; which may enhance the distinct identity and output of the course.

13 Delivery of academic position

The board agreed that the school's philosophy could be broken down into key headlines within the APS so that the uniqueness of the course and its agenda is more explicitly celebrated. This could include greater reference to diversity and opportunity (specifically the attraction of local students into work ready graduates).

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

There are 30 students registered on the BSc (Hons) Architecture course.

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**