

# **Report of the RIBA Exploratory Board to the University of Wolverhampton**

**Date of visiting board:** 12-13 December 2024  
**Confirmed by RIBA:** 24 March 2025

**1 Details of institution hosting courses**

University of Wolverhampton  
Springfield Campus  
School of Architecture & Built Environment (SoABE)  
Grimstone Street  
Wolverhampton  
WV10 0JP

**2 Courses offered for candidate course status**

MArch Architecture                      Part 2

**Courses offered for full validation as a pathway of the existing validated course, BSc (Hons) Architecture:**

BSc Apprenticeship L6                      Part 1

**3 Head of Department**

Professor David Heesom (interim)

**Programme Lead**

Olive White

**4 Awarding body**

University of Wolverhampton

**5 The exploratory visiting board**

Professor Sally Stewart	Chair/Academic
Ryan Stuckey	Academic
Rob Grover	Academic
Sophie Bailey	RIBA Head of Validation

**6 Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education**

The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture (published September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

The timetable was adapted and agreed between RIBA and the SoABE ahead of the exploratory visit.

**7 Recommendations of the visiting board**

The Board was invited by University of Wolverhampton to consider its MArch Architecture for proposed candidate course for Part 2. The designation 'candidate course for recognition' implies that the programme is considered to have the potential to meet the RIBA Themes and Values, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to recognition, which can only be granted once the standard of work produced by graduating students has been assessed and found satisfactory.

On 24 March 2025, the RIBA confirmed candidate course status be granted to the following course:

**M Arch Architecture (Part 2)**

On 24 March 2025, the RIBA confirmed full validation be granted to the following course:

### **BSc Apprenticeship L6 (Part 1)**

Part 1 validation is awarded as a pathway of the existing validated course, BSc (Hons) Architecture. As has been the case with other apprenticeship pathways of existing courses, this is validated with immediate effect.

The initial visiting board for full RIBA validation will take place at a date agreed between the School 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 (written by school)**

The following statement was prepared following consultation with the architecture community within SoABE; a community committed to exploring and engaging with architecture as a multifaceted and broad area of study and application. Our school is positioned within the architecture and built environment campus which is located within our 12-acre site in a Grade II listed former brewery within Springfield. The experience within SoABE is unique as it draws together students across the various disciplines within Architecture and the Built Environment. Sitting within the Faculty of Science and Engineering, the School is able to draw on an integrative skillset, weaving elements of mathematics and engineering combined with the creativity of the form and space of architecture underpinned by their relationships to political, social and cultural movements. The architecture department has established its own distinct identity within SoABE and this, along with our pedagogy, is strongly influenced by our geographical position in Wolverhampton, known as the "Capital of the Black Country". This place not only shapes our identity, but also serves as a valuable source of inspiration for our teaching. The brownfield sites in the geographic region still bear the scars of our past and offer our students an ideal environment to refine their design skills. Additionally, they serve as a perpetual reminder of our history and ensures we do not forget our origins.

Wolverhampton's Architecture programmes offer a unique educational experience grounded in design, technology and science. The curriculum includes design studio, history and theory of architecture and urbanism, building science and sustainability, structures and construction, technological

design and professional practice. Within each of these areas, design is at the heart of instruction. Our primary mission is to inform on good design which will improve people's lives minimising the detriment to the planet. There is a strong emphasis on understanding the context, materiality and function, reflected within our assessments and grading criteria.

Our Part 1 and Part 2 programmes have very distinctive objectives which are derived from, and encompass, the attributes outlined in the RIBA criteria. Our projects progress in scale and complexity through the years of study. Through the Part 1 programme focus in the first year is on the human scale, whilst urban scale is developed in the second year leading to a holistic approach in the third year. This provides our Part 1 students with a broad education in architecture: offering a clear pathway to guide those transitioning from school and college to become fully autonomous learners within higher education. By Part 2 our students become conversant with the multi-faceted research conducted by the school and develop a strong connection between the research and teaching methods. Consequently, encouraging the students to develop and explore their own architectural objectives within design studio, all the while serving an entry-point into their future professional career. Across all years of study, design work is supplemented by lecture modules covering design principles and methods, digital processes, the cultural context of architecture, and construction technology.

Practice and management issues are introduced in the third year of the Part 1 programme, but the focus is on providing students with a general awareness of the professional context, rather than a detailed understanding. Detailed knowledge of practice and management is addressed more appropriately in our MArch Education.

Our modus operandi is centred on welcoming and valuing distinct views that broaden each of our own perspectives through respectful debate; there is no one singular style of architecture attached to our programmes. Our approach to learning encourages interest in the entire life cycle of the building, which underpins/reflects the research across the SoABE, from conceptualization, through design and representation, manufacturing and construction, operation and performance and reuse or recyclability.

The University is committed to the very personal experience our students receive, which aligns with their unique offering of pastoral care. This fosters a sense of community across the campuses, engendering an equally strong local community which has been forged within SoABE. The relatively smaller class sizes allow our students to receive individual attention from our lecturers and a reciprocal learning experience; all with a high level of pastoral support. This ethos aligns well with the diversity of the university and its mission as the University of Opportunity & Employability. The University has recently ranked as eighth out of 101 universities across England for social mobility.

It is important that the studios are supportive, intellectually engaging and highly motivating. It is critical that our students have a space where they can hone their critical thinking skills both as individuals and as a larger community providing a strong foundation in the creative process. In addition to the permanent staff, we are supported by a diverse group of highly skilled

practitioners who inform and support part-time as studio instructors and critics.

Collaboration thrives in our purpose-built building; the physical nature of the architecture studios promotes collaborative working, and these are supplemented by a material workshop, smart modelling and an assembly workshop. Each of these facilities support a mix of theory and practice, thinking and doing, respect and collaboration, health and safety and experimentation for the future without detriment to our world. To further develop a collaborative community, teaching activities are augmented by an annual vertical project whereby all students from all years of both Architecture and Architectural Design Technology programmes take part in a focused design project. Whilst teamwork is particularly important part of the curriculum, students are required to develop their own design responses in a context that they develop.

All our students from the Foundation Year to Year 5 are housed within the one collocated studio space. With each year having adjacent and dedicated studio facilities, this environment promotes an inclusive approach to design and facilitates both peer-to peer and vertical learning, which aligns with our educational philosophy.

Adjacent to these facilities is an architecture model making area, where students have freedom to assemble their designs and produce tangible scaled site and working models. This expanded area facilitates our scheduled Speed-Sketching sessions and Theory-Chats, allowing all students crucial interaction with other peers and instructors. Our students are given the opportunity to engage with 'real life' projects and gain firsthand experience working for a real client, helping to create work-ready graduates. As it is an environmental imperative that we build on more suitable brownfield sites in the future, we actively encourage students to participate in the extensive industry focused research and development conducted at the National Brownfield Institute (NBI), which is situated on our campus. Additionally, it is important for our students to have the chance to work on a range of brownfield sites in the Black Country and wider region to understand the complexities these sites provide.

The courses and the Architecture community is strengthened through architectural focused visits both within the UK and abroad. This broadens students' wider exposure and assists in improving their abilities to analyse architectural and urban situations simultaneously. The Architecture Department actively facilitates and organizes a wide range of inclusive public events, including providing support to the Wolverhampton and District Society of Architects which includes hosting their local RIBA lecture series.

## **10 Commendations**

The Board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 The Board commends the commitment and input of the programme team, in particular the programme lead, and recognises their response to recent circumstances and contextual challenges.

10.2 The Board commends the quality and range of facilities the programme has access to, and the positive way these are used by students and staff.

10.3 The Board commends the programme's focus on regionality, civic responsibility and contribution to the local professional community.

## **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 Department should produce a full mapping of the programme against the 2021 RIBA Graduate Attributes. In this, the team should be mindful of how differentiation and progression from the Part 1 award is achieved and articulated.

11.2 The Department should explore how they can ensure resilience and scalability in the programme, to ensure its long term viability.

11.3 The programme team consider the balance of credits and related workload across courses, and in particular in relation to professional studies and technology teaching. The school should also consider how credits and workload within the part-time mode can be balanced to better support students choosing this route of study.

11.4 The Board requires the development of a curriculum map which explicitly defines the syllabus across design, architectural technology, history & theory, and management, practice & law, and the delivery of this content.

The completion of this also provides a mechanism to make explicit where knowledge and skills are applied, and synthesis occurs providing opportunity for broader awareness and deeper investigation by all students. This will support the programme team when evaluating and developing curriculum enhancements, and ensuring content and delivery mechanisms support course and module ambitions.

11.5 The Board urges the Department to provide a scaffolding within the module briefs supporting student learning and connecting to the wider aims of the curriculum, ensuring the progression from Part 1 to Part 2 is clearly articulated.

11.6 The Board urges the Department to consider how the focus on brownfield land, conservation & heritage, and adaptive reuse is connected into a wider body of architecture knowledge, competencies and practice.

## **12 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.

- 12.1 The Department should consider what mechanisms could be agreed within the institution to streamline the admissions process for students completing their Part 1 and intending to enter the MArch (Part 2).
- 12.2 The Department may consider how the curriculum map could support and inform how workload allocation and teaching responsibilities are distributed coherently.
- 12.3 The Department may consider how a wider range of teaching voices and expertise can be introduced within the MArch by the introduction of fractional staff, allowing diverse and consistent teaching teams week to week.
- 12.4 The Department may consider how they can better use the external examining process to support the consolidation and evolution of the programme.

#### **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 the graduate of the BSc Apprenticeship L6 (Part 1).

##### **Graduate Attributes for Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the M Arch Architecture (Part 2).

#### **15 Review of work against Themes and Values**

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

##### **Themes and Values for Part 1**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduate of the BSc Apprenticeship L6 (Part 1).

##### **Themes and Values for Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the M Arch Architecture (Part 2).

#### **16 Other information**

##### **16.1 Student numbers**

BSc (Hons) Apprenticeship: 1 Student  
M Arch: 9 Students

**16.2 Documentation provided**

The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

**17 Notes of meetings**

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
- Staff