
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to
the Leicester School of Architecture, De
Montfort University**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 Vijay Patel Building
 Faculty of Arts, Design & Humanities
 De Montfort University
 The Gateway
 Leicester LE1 9BH
- 2 Head of Architecture Group**
 Derek Cottrell (acting)
- 3 Course/s offered for revalidation**
 Part 1: BA (Hons) Architecture, 3 years f/t
 Part 2: Master of Architecture (M.Arch), 2 years f/t , 3 years p/t
 Part 3: Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice
- 4 Course leader/s**
 Part 1: Mary Johnson
 Part 2: Ben Cowd
 Part 3: Jamileh Manochehri
- 5 Awarding body**
 De Montfort University
- 6 The visiting board**

Alison Mackinder	practitioner / chair
Lindesay Dawe	academic / vice chair
Daniel Goodricke	academic
Jon Phipps	practitioner
Brigit Luffingham	student
James Badley	regional representative
Sophie Bailey RIBA	validation manager
- 7 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.
- 8 Proposals of the visiting board**
 On 7 December 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated.
- Part 1: BA (Hons) Architecture, 3 years f/t**
Part 2: Master of Architecture (M.Arch), 2 years f/t, 3 years p/t
Part 3: Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in: 2021
- 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

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- 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 Academic position statement
(Statement written by the school)

Leicester School of Architecture (LSA) has a proud tradition of engagement with the profession, the City of Leicester and the Midlands Region, as well as being a significant contributor to the global ambitions of De Montfort University (DMU). Central to the ethos of the school is the vibrant studio culture, which is the foundation of the student experience and emphasises a culture of the craft of making integrated with digital design. The school values the design tutorial, peer learning and critical review as central to the studio culture. Design studio is seen as a place for the exchange of ideas where students learn from each other as well as staff and visiting scholars and practitioners. Studio links all the areas of study and aims to integrate knowledge and skills development in a mutually supportive atmosphere which is strengthened by high levels of pastoral care. The school places significant emphasis on building a supportive relationship between its students and staff.

Our student body is diverse in terms of ethnicity, culture, social background and experience reflecting the University as a whole and the city of Leicester. Difference is celebrated and is a strength of all our programmes, encouraging the development of a teaching methodology which focuses on the role of the individual student. The graduating student is expected to be a strong creative designer with a clear understanding of technologies, current architectural theory and the principles of contemporary practice. An understanding of the urban context and sustainability are embedded in our professional programmes. Students achieve excellent graduate employability, being represented in many top design practices. The standard of their design work has been recognised both nationally and internationally, evidenced by student awards. For example in 2012, Christopher Christophi was awarded the RIBA President's Medal: silver medal commendation and the RIBA Sergeant award for best drawings, in 2013, Thomas Bush won the RIBA Presidents Medal: Bronze medal commendation, in 2014 Matthew Webb was winner of the 3D Reid prize and in 2015, Alistair Wood was awarded the RIBA President's Medal : silver medal commendation and Alexander Mills was awarded the RIBA Wren Scholarship.

The school has recently moved to a new building designed especially for the University's art and design disciplines at the heart of its campus in the centre of Leicester. This houses all art and design disciplines

together, with the intention of exploiting practical and creative opportunities occasioned by cross disciplinary teaching and research. In addition to studios, the building also houses seminar spaces of various sizes, an auditorium, specialist workshops and a series of exhibition spaces which will be used to showcase the work of the Faculty. There is the potential for interaction on a daily basis with all the design disciplines in studios and workshops and in the new cross-disciplinary study areas or “hubs”, in association with related exhibitions, reviews and conferences. The context of being within an art and design faculty supports the school ethos of craft with the student having access to state-of-the-art workshops for digital design and fabrication technology, ceramics, CNC cutting, photography, printing and casting. The School’s strategy is to use the new environment to build on the potential for cross fertilisation and possible collaborations, encouraging the students to experiment with other art and design techniques under the ethos of “thinking through making”.

The school capitalises on its strong links with the profession in the region and its regional, national and international links evidenced by the involvement of a large number of visiting tutors and consultants, as well as guest critics and visiting speakers. The school has developed a successful mentoring scheme with the East Midlands RIBA that provides the student with the opportunity to engage with architects in practice, discuss design work and technological strategies and to begin to understand the processes and challenges facing the contemporary practitioner. Local practitioners form the main element of the third year technology tutoring scheme. Annual events such as the Year 3 evening of mock interviews with members of the Leicestershire and Rutland Society of Architects, contribute to the supportive and professional relationship with practice. In Part 2, the Mega MArch critics

included Robert Sakula (Ash-Sak), Prof. Dean Hawkes, Marcus Lee (Lee-p), Jonathan Hall (AHMM), David Chou-Shulin and John Burrell (Burrell-Foley-Fischer). Scholarships and Awards have also been established with local practices such as Pick Everards and BHB Architects. Further interaction with practice occurs in the mock interviews run in Year 3. All of these activities expose the student to a wide variety of viewpoints on design, practice and technology.

The school runs international study trips at each year level of both the Part 1 and Part 2 programmes. Study trips and the use of sites abroad for design projects offer the students the opportunity to study international contexts. Students are given the opportunity to study specific architectural and urban development case studies, aiming through the study of an unfamiliar culture, to reflect on their own. The University subsidises these trips through its #DMUglobal programme.

In recent years the design and cultural context strands of teaching have been reorganised to better reflect the areas of staff expertise. Design studios and cultural context seminars are now offered in staff specialisms including housing, sustainability, computational design, lighting, adaptive reuse, urban design etc. New staff with specialisms in History and Philosophy, and Urban Studies have been appointed to further this new direction and integration within the studios. The school

has also taken advantage of the university's VC2020 programme of recruitment to appoint new research active lecturers. Research in the school is organised thematically, with research informing the curriculum and underpinning the teaching. The school continues to strengthen links between research and learning, both in studio and in history, where seminars are aligned with the research of staff.

LSA offers programmes at Parts 1, 2 and 3 as well as specialist degrees at master's level in Architectural Design and Design and Sustainability. The Part 1 and 2 programmes are distinct in their offering although "Making" is an enduring theme within all courses.

Part 1

Part 1 provides a broad education with a clear structure allowing students to become independent learners. The students gain knowledge fundamental to the study and understanding of architecture and are encouraged to develop rigorous creative approaches to design and research processes to inform architectural design. Projects become incrementally larger in scale, more intellectually complex in context and programme, and more technologically integrated as the students move through the programme.

They are exposed to a wide variety of full time tutors and skilled practitioners who come from a diverse background both culturally and educationally. They come with a broad range of opinions, who through their theoretical interests enrich the architectural debate and introduce students to skills and knowledge relevant to contemporary practice.

The design studio and its related culture are central to teaching and learning at Part 1. The learning outcomes are achieved through a clearly structured 3-year programme which encourages group working and the growth of the individual student. Students gain the necessary skills of drawing, model making, design, analysis and communication and critical thinking. "Making" is very important in Part 1 with the studio being used as a vehicle to connect theory and technology. Year leaders coordinate all the year modules, ensuring continuity and parity. In all three years, the annual international study trip is an invaluable learning experience.

Year 1 is organised as a horizontal year structure and focusses on key principles and skills. It is a general introduction to the discipline and students become competent in design, representation, technology and theory. Students learn to question their work and begin to explore architectural issues of interest to them individually. The school has always emphasised

the importance of hand drawing in the design process and as a communication skill and this is instilled at year 1, where all drawing and representation is by hand.

Year 2 studio is a hybrid of year and studio unit teaching. Students build on skills learnt in year 1 and are encouraged to experiment and begin to develop their own architectural agenda. It begins with a horizontal studio project using a number of city sites to develop an

urban response. This prepares them for term 2 which is run as studio “units” where students have more independence in the design process and decision making.

Year 3 studio is also run as a hybrid of year and studio unit teaching. Students explore a wide range of ideas through the studio units, all relevant to issues of contemporary architecture internationally. Students must take responsibility for the direction of their design project, its objectives, process and ultimately its proposed solution. Year 3 gives the student the opportunity to demonstrate the integration of their learning through their studio project and portfolio, with an original graduating project which is focussed and rigorous, with fully integrated technology and an independent and thoroughly researched essay demonstrating personal enquiry.

Technology in the School is taught by a team with architectural, structural and environmental backgrounds with modules being taught progressively. Part 1 is both lecture and workshop-based giving students an understanding of materiality, construction technology, structures, environmental design and sustainability, and current practice.

The Year 1 History module begins as a historical course which is both historical and theoretical. In term 1 this also has a thematic approach that aims to link history, theory and the practise of architecture, allowing students to see the relevance of history and theory in their design studio work. Term 2 is a chronological overview of historical movements. Year 2 focusses on the concept of writing architecture and on urban studies.

In Year 3, students are beginning to be able to analyse architecture and critically evaluate and reflect on it. Students are introduced to theoretical topics taught as a seminar in small groups by research active studio staff and visiting tutors. Students research and produce a 6- 9,000 word essay on a topic of their choice related to the seminar, supported by individual tutorials with their seminar tutor.

Students leave prepared for Part 2 with a clear set of critical and analytical skills, design development and communication skills, the ability to be an independent and self-directed learner and an attitude to the practice of architecture which fits them for the next stage of their development. This wide set of transferable skills prepares the student for life beyond architectural school.

Part 2

The MArch programme offers the students the opportunity to develop a personal theoretical and critical approach to architectural design and their own position within the discipline of architecture. The teaching approach is to promote the individual identity of each student, with an emphasis on the craft of making whilst encouraging a global perspective

The MArch focus in Year 1 is on research-oriented teaching, providing opportunities for students to align their interests with the particular expertise/experience of tutors to experiment, test and practice

hypotheses in design laboratories. These design laboratories concentrate on particular contemporary issues, through craft-oriented and digital production techniques. The agendas are set by full time and visiting tutors who offer an opportunity for in-depth study through individual and collaborative work.

The March Year 2 continues the emphasis on the “craft of making” whilst challenging the students to take more critical positions in their world view on the discipline of architecture. An array of studios is offered in which tutors initially propose particular interests and/or focuses in order to establish a common critical dialogue with in a studio group. The intention of Year 2, therefore, is to allow for an individual, yearlong investigation to flourish within the context of shared ideas, interests, methods, etc. within a particular studio group.

In MArch Year 2 technology is integrated fully with studio. Technical specialists offer individual tutorials to the students with practitioners, structural engineers and environmental specialists which supplement studio tutorial. Students also produce a technical design report, an integrated project running concurrently with the design project, asking students to consider how their buildings are designed, communicated, constructed and delivered.

In M Arch Year 1, History and Theory is taught through seminars which reflect the specialisms of our research active staff. The knowledge gained from the seminar is expected to culminate in a comprehensive dissertation in term two. In M Arch Year 2, students are expected to integrate their interests in History and Theory into their year-long studio investigation, which is documented in their Architectural Design Research Study.

The Professional Studies module builds on the experience gained in Part 1 and is delivered through an intensive series of lectures, seminars and full-day workshops. This pedagogical approach accommodates part time students whilst preparing all students for the intensity of the Part 3 programme.

There is a long-standing practice of offering a part-time programme in MArch. Our part-time students tend to work in practices in the region and attend university one day per week, further enhancing the school’s relationship with the profession and the construction industry. The expectations of our part-time students are as high as the full-time students and our part-time students perform well, and often exceed the performance of full-time students.

PG Dip. Architectural Practice (Part 3)

The Part 3 programme, long established in the school, is the conclusion of our RIBA accredited programmes. The course offers a platform for debate about the current and possible future modes of architectural practice and the changing roles of architects. It seeks to develop the knowledge and skills of students already engaged in practice to establish competence and an enhanced capability for architectural practice and management. It is also concerned with developing professional attitudes, maturity and responsibility.

The course seeks to enlarge the student's personal commitment to the profession by encouraging appropriate attitudes, tested against the student's ability to apply both theoretical and practical knowledge, in the light of their practical experience. The course consists of a series of short courses, linked with concurrent practical experience and work assignments in a professional office. Candidates are expected to attend the Advisory Interview, a minimum of three short courses, normally each for three days, and any necessary additional visits to the University for advice and/or tuition. Currently these additional days take the form of recall Days where the candidates meet the professional examiners and also a revision Day with guidance on the Office-based exam and the Professional Interview.

The Part 3 programme is delivered through a series of lectures from specialists and experts dealing with aspects of modern architectural practice; interactive seminars and discussions considering a range of set topics; case studies and practical exercises; videos, computer-based learning packages and other audio-visual material; and consultations on an individual basis relating to case studies and work assignments based on the candidate's own professional experience.

The course is primarily office-based although students attend 3 x 3 day study units and engage in workshops and lectures delivered by a team of specialised lecturers from practice and the construction industry who deliver three main themes – Marketing, Management and Practice, Building Contracts and The Architect and the Law.

Graduates demonstrate all attributes relating to the professional criteria and will have a wide variety of skills relevant to working within or running a successful contemporary practice.

During the past two years the course has gone through some structural changes in order to align it more closely with the postgraduate taught courses at the university. To this effect the course has been modularised, and its start date has been brought forward to September. The course has been building on the experience of qualified architects on the school staff and consolidating the relations we have with practitioners, in particular those from local practices that contribute as visiting lecturers. The current year has seen noticeable improvement in our recruitment to the Part 3 course. In the past two years, DMU has also increased the number of the Professional Studies Advisors who support those on our PEDR service.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the facilities in the new Vijay Patel Building and the opportunities that this is providing for interdisciplinary working. This is manifested on an informal scale and the board encourages this to be developed further with more structured activities.
- 11.2 The board commends the staff body for maintaining a high level of

support for students during a period of uncertainty. It is hoped that in the coming months the new building and the appointment of the new head of school will offer stability and opportunities for the future.

- 11.3 The board commends the culture of making at M Arch level in particular, and believe that the new facilities offer an opportunity for this to be expanded further and for it to inform the identity of the school.

12 Conditions

There are no conditions

13 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. The university is referred to the RIBA's criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid term monitoring visits. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 13.1 Whilst it was recognised that the delivery and assessment of the technology content has been better integrated with the summative design project, in parts there was insufficient evidence to confirm consistency of delivery, supervision and adherence to the stipulated outcomes at Part 1.

- 13.2 The board acknowledges that the Part 3 course is being developed and in doing so, the school should ensure that there is no conflict of interest between the role of the internal professional examiners and that of tutoring. Ie the internal examiner should not have offered any interim feedback to students that he/she would be examining.

14. 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

- 14.1 The board advises that the school continue to develop links with local practices.
- 14.2 Whilst the quality of architectural representation is very high, the board advises that a greater emphasis is placed on communication methods, whether drawn or written, in order to clearly demonstrate their investigation and design process. The board acknowledges that the School have identified this weakness and efforts are being made in this regard.
- 14.3 The board advises that given the university's aspirations for greater internationalisation, this could be further developed through Erasmus exchange programmes. This could further enhance the potential for diversity across projects within the M Arch., develop research strategies at Thesis level, and help 'ground' projects within various geographic locations.
- 14.4 In the development of the undergraduate programme the board advises

that the School make the structure and pedagogic objectives of Year 2 and Year 3 themes/pathways more explicit.

15 Delivery of academic position

The following key points were noted: the position statement could be made increasingly ambitious to reflect more what makes the school unique in comparison to neighbouring establishments.

16 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 and 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

17 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 and 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

18 Other information

18.1 Student numbers

BA Hons: 375

M Arch: 91

M Arch p/t: 18

PGDip: 14

18.2 Documentation provided

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

19 Notes of meetings

***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**
- **External examiners**
- **Staff**