
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to Edinburgh University**

**Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture
(ESALA)**

- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s**
EDINBURGH SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE & LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE (ESALA)
Minto House
20 Chambers Street
EH1 1JZ
- 2 Head of Subject Area – Edinburgh School of Architecture & Landscape Architecture**
Suzanne Ewing
- 3 Courses offered for validation**
BA Architecture Part 1 (3 year programme)
MA Hons Part 1 (4 year programme)
Master of Architecture MArch Part 2
- 4 Programme Directors**
Douglas Cruickshank, BA/MA Part 1
Liam Ross, MArch Part 2
- 5 Awarding body**
The University of Edinburgh
- 6 The visiting board**
Roger Hawkins – Chair
Hannah Vowles – Vice Chair
Carl Meddings
Frazer Bufton
Paula Craft-Pegg
Brigit Luffingham – student/graduate representative
Karen Anderson – regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance.
- 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 20 September 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed, by circulation, that the following programmes be unconditionally revalidated:

BA Architecture Part 1 (3 year programme)
MA Hons Part 1 (4 year programme)
Master of Architecture MArch Part 2

The next full visiting board will take place in 2022.

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 Academic position statement (written by the School)
Bachelor of Arts in Architecture/ Master of Arts with Honours in Architecture (Part 1), Master of Architecture (Part 2)**

In the ESALA taught professional programmes we recognise architecture as a cultural and societal practice, as a civic endeavour concerned with people and how they live. We are committed to building this knowledge and expertise across the disciplinary concerns of: design, technology, the environment, history, theory and the fine arts. In both the curriculum and the school environment, we establish broad horizons within which we guide depth and intensity of work, and offer tools and techniques of inquiry, analysis, interpretation and proposition for rigorous and responsive approaches to contemporary architectural, urban and landscape practices. Our studio culture builds on the experimental, practice-based endeavour of an art school and the academic strengths and scholarly traditions of the University. ESALA is situated in Edinburgh College of Art (ECA), a School within the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Science (CAHSS) alongside two other University Colleges: Science and Engineering and Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. Six years on from the institutional merger between Edinburgh College of Art and the University of Edinburgh, ESALA is maturing into a school with an international outlook, community and identity. It is the largest, most diverse school in Scotland, one of the largest in the UK, and with strong European links and exchanges. The school has a quietly respected international profile, healthy levels of recruitment, and a network of alumni extending far beyond the local context.

The ESALA educational portfolio is grounded on the research expertise and specialisms of our staff, which includes architects, designers, artists, engineers, computer scientists, historians and cultural theorists. Rather than promoting a dogmatic style or singular architectural vision, we nurture an ethos of educating designers and thinkers to navigate skillfully and knowledgeably through historical models and contemporary conditions. Many models of design thinking and working in ESALA grow directly out of operating within

the complex, fine-grained, stratigraphic context of Edinburgh. We have strengths in material practice and a novel synthesis of digital and physical fabrication processes in the design studio, supported by extensive ECA workshop and digital media facilities. History and theory of architecture, fine art, and heritage management are embraced within the context of urbanism and the cultural history of cities, where the civic is defined as relating to people and that which is local to them.

*ESALA offers three Architecture degrees: **Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (BA)** is a three year, full-time undergraduate degree which can be selected in year 2; **Master of Arts with Honours in Architecture (MA (Hons))** is a four year, full-time undergraduate degree which all UG students are admitted to; **Master of Architecture (MArch)** is a two-year full-time postgraduate degree.*

*The **MA (Hons)** is an enhanced architectural education offering an embedded period of professional experience, or a period of cultural exchange, providing a paced externality that enriches and informs design and dissertation work in the final stages of the degree, strengthening engagement with established and emerging forms of professional practice and the international dimensions of curricula content and experience. Elective courses may follow a structured programme pathway in Architectural Histories or Digital Culture. Design studio is central to the curriculum throughout, and in years 3 and 4 a series of thematically directed design units enable students to consolidate a specific exploration and appropriate tectonic resolution. The early year courses establish understandings of broad international paradigms, histories, technologies and environmental contexts that are often tested within a local Edinburgh or Scottish context in later courses or years. The **BA** route allows a student to obtain a first accredited degree in three years, which is the norm in Europe and rest of the UK, but distinctive in Scotland.*

*The **MArch** degree has developed an ethos around a shared commitment to the city as an object of study and design, evidenced through engagement with both the physical context of Edinburgh and global field-trips and exchanges. Theory, technology, professional practice and design options benefit from exchanges with cognate ESALA postgraduate courses and interdisciplinary collaboration with landscape architecture, cultural theory and urban design, around thematics such as: everyday cultures, text and the city, drawing the city, histories and theories of architecture. The 2 year integrated pathway offers the school a distinctive platform within Part 2 education, leading to design thesis work of remarkable depth, while the accumulation of two single year modular pathway studios offers a breadth of inquiry and project conditions, combining flexibility with rigour for deep design and research work. The MArch provides a route for students to continue into specialist MScs, PhD by Design, and other research degrees as well as progressing to an ARB/RIBA Part 3 examination, following suitable work experience.*

ESALA aims to be a national locus for public discussion and debate in architecture, landscape, construction and urbanism. We regularly host the most interesting, influential and respected scholars, practitioners and thinkers in the discipline. We curate advanced seminars in design, architectural research, conservation and history/theory, exhibitions, workshops and open reviews. These events benefit both students and the wider public. The school environment is envisioned as a place of lifelong learning, dialogue and architectural excellence. Our academic ethos seeks:

- *to offer an education which nurtures agile, deeply informed architectural thinkers and makers*
- *to encourage productive and surprising interdisciplinary conditions and exchanges around issues of space, place, public, city, culture and society as well as pursuing formal and aesthetic dimensions of the subject and its practice*
- *to shape knowledge and future practices of architectural education, understanding 'practising' as an explicit strand of both learning and research in architecture*
- *to support architectural practice as collective endeavour and as citizen entrepreneurship through extra-curricula work and other practice and research activities and collaborations*

Our medium term ambitions are to make stronger intersections with the professional programmes in Landscape Architecture, to strengthen the Digital Culture and Architectural Histories pathway in the MA (Hons) Programme, to build more bespoke Elective courses based on current staff research expertise and inquiry, to support the best scholarship in dissertation work, and to intensify and shape tacit material and investigative design and research practices underpinning successful design studios at both Part 1 and Part 2.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends ESALA on the evolution and development of its new programmes and the positive response to the action points and advice of the previous visiting boards.
- 11.2 The Board commends ESALA on the quality of the relationship between critical enquiry and techniques of representation in research and teaching as evidenced in all aspects of student work and in particular in making.
- 11.3 The Board commends and encourages the University's ambition to develop and explore architecture studio pedagogy in other disciplines as a model for teaching and research.

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

- 13.1 In view of the growth of the School and the University's acknowledgement of the relevance of the studio pedagogical model for its future vision, the Board considers that it is imperative to ensure that the ratio of permanent staff, guaranteed hours staff and external examiners is commensurate with student numbers.

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 Following the University's recognition of the merits of the architectural pedagogical model, the Board advises that ESALA engages with the institution to promote its expertise in this methodology.
- 14.2 The Board recognises the opportunities created by the relocation of the Part 1 second year to the Lauriston campus but advises that there is a need for further support to develop space across the School dedicated to crits, smaller tutorial groupings, exhibition, display, experimentation and cross-year interaction.
- 14.3 The Board advises that ESALA establishes new and further develops existing cross-disciplinary practices within teaching, learning and research in ECA and the wider University.
- 14.4 The Board recognises ESALA's positioning of itself as a school based in cultural and societal practice and advises that it should strengthen student engagement with the wider community.
- 14.5 The Board advises that the 4-year MA (Hons) Part 1 should be promoted more widely within the profession and related industry for the benefit of students seeking positions in practice.
- 14.6 The Board recognises the strength in the diversity of options available to students within the programmes but the Board advises that this be clarified through a simple mapping diagram.

15 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.

15.1 BA/MA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

15.2 MArch, Part 2

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.

16 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.

16.1 The Board made no further comments.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

Part 1 (BA & MA Hons) – 450

Part 2 (MArch) - 110

17.2 Documentation provided

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

18. Notes of meetings

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings: **These notes 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 mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.**

- Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the Head of Edinburgh College of Art
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff