
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to the Mackintosh School of
Architecture**

The Glasgow School of Art

1 Details of institution hosting course/s

The Mackintosh School of Architecture
167 Renfrew St
Glasgow
G3 6RQ

2 Head of Architecture

Sally Stewart

3 Courses offered for validation

Bachelor of Architecture, Part 1
Bachelor of Architecture (Honours), Part 1 achieved at year 3
Diploma in Architecture, Part 2

4 Programme Directors

Alan Hooper, Undergraduate Programme Leader
Jo Crotch, Postgraduate Programme Leader
Dan Dubowitz, Acting Postgraduate Programme Leader

5 Awarding body

The University of Glasgow

6 The visiting board

Andrew Wilson –Chair
James Lai – Vice-Chair
Alison Mackinder
Aleks Rizova
Paul Collins – co-professional member
Julian Manev

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance

Nicky Watson, RIBA Vice-President (Education) attended as an observer.

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 14 June 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of the following:

Bachelor of Architecture, Part 1
Bachelor of Architecture (with Honours), Part 1 achieved at year 3
Diploma in Architecture, Part 2

The next full visiting board will take place in 2023.

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)

A distinctive history. While inextricably linked to Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the architecture of Glasgow, the distinctive intellectual heritage and history of the Mackintosh School of Architecture at The Glasgow School of Art can be traced back to its inception with the founding of the GSA in 1845 as one of the first Government Schools of Design. The centrality of architecture within the visual creative context of an art school sets it aside from other Schools of Architecture embedded within comprehensive university environments. Equally, the size and scale of GSA, with approximately 2,500 students across five academic schools, offers architecture staff and students uniquely intensive, highly social and deeply creative circumstances in which to work.

This environment is further enhanced by the diversity of our student body. The GSA has one of the highest percentages of students in Scotland from SIMD20 postcodes and the Mackintosh School of Architecture contributes to this, offering ways of learning about architecture and routes in to architecture at different levels including portfolio preparation, foundation programmes and articulation and through active engagement with GSA Open Studio, complementing its professionally accredited Bachelor of Architecture with Honours and Diploma in Architecture degree programmes which form its core. We remain one of only a handful of UK architecture schools offering a part-time mode of study, allowing student to work in practice and study simultaneously, providing a continuous thread to our origins as the fifth oldest recognised architecture school in the UK. Equally, our international students (including EU) and RUK students represent just under half of our total student community offering all students a higher education experience which is globally referenced, internationally networked and yet still locally engaged.

The importance of place.

Architects must learn about how people use and relate to space, and in turn how it is defined. Additionally, they need to learn how to work with others to achieve their aims. The studio is the laboratory where individually and collectively students and staff share and test

ideas, where thinking is translated into action and where a personal critical practice evolves. Glasgow provides a distinctive backdrop for learning and research in architecture. The regeneration of the city from its post-industrial decline of the 1980s, offers a framework in which to study architecture which is socially-engaged, connected to Glasgow's distinctive architectural heritage, urban context and setting, reflecting social and architectural change from the Victorian grid and the urban regeneration of the second half of the 20th century. The city is both our primer and our field of operations, and this is apparent throughout our curriculum.

The distinctiveness of place is further reflected in nature of being an architecture school based in an art school where the pedagogical model of studio-based, practice-lead teaching is central.

At the core of the educational experience at the MSA are our studios and workshops. Studio to us means both physical place or space and also a mode of working, collaborating and creating. Studio can be permanent, residential or even temporal as demonstrated recently following the Mackintosh Building fire in June 2018. The successful At Risk: Glasgow vertical project brought over 520 architectural students together in one place to explore 18 threatened locale across the City, working in multi-year groups covering Stage 1 through to Masters, to explore the nature of fragility and vulnerability, and the potential for conservation and regeneration.

Our studios are central to defining and delivering learning and teaching, and in establishing the teaching of architecture as a collaborative and integrated practice. Peer learning underpins this experience, while thinking and making characterises studio activity supported by workshops across the GSA that provide the opportunity to turn simulation and speculation into reality, to experiment, prototype and to improvise, and where technical staff are crucial partners in guiding students in realising design ambitions.

While studios and workshop are becoming increasingly rare in the UK, they are something we share with the other schools within GSA where they are valued, celebrated and their potential recognised.

Learning through practice.

Our studio based, practice informed education is recognised and respected within the architectural profession with practitioners consistently rating MSA within the top 5 schools of schools within the UK (Architects Journal 100), with generations of successful and importantly, professionally impactful alumni. This resulting in high employment amongst graduates who are seen as having a professionally ready skill set, including socially aware, collaborative and productive working capabilities.

Our programmes and teaching are organised around a year structure, with design at its core, and supported through specialist teaching underpinned by research excellence in architectural

technology, history of architecture and urban studies and professional practice, with the aim of providing an integrated and holistic experience which prepares the student not only for joining contemporary practice, but also equipped to shape its future.

At Part 1 the Bachelor of Architecture programme provides a comprehensive grounding in architectural design and a preparation for the first entry to practice. Integrating expertise through specialist subjects within studio design projects requires students to apply knowledge within their own design work, while dealing with projects of increasing complexity.

Collaborative projects in the first two years of study allow students to understand the dimensions and agency of their discipline in relation to GSA's other creative specialism. INTERACT, delivered in year three allows students to work with engineering and surveying students from the University of Glasgow and Glasgow Caledonian University, focusing on the professional requirement to work in collaborative design teams.

At Part 2 the Diploma in Architecture provides an intensive theoretical background to the forces shaping contemporary architecture and supports individuals to develop and extend their creative design skills with intellectual and aesthetic rigour. Creativity is stimulated by projects which engage with the dynamic nature of societal needs, located in complex sites and deploying contemporary construction techniques and environmental thinking.

Learning through design is equally underpinned by learning through research, itself often practice based. Research within the Mackintosh School of Architecture is organised through the formal research centres the Mackintosh Environmental Architectural Research Unit and Glasgow Urban Lab, and research groups covering history of architecture and urban studies and practice and pedagogy.

Globally relevant. We are established and proactive partners in a range of international networks through which we aim to provide opportunities for staff and students to disseminate our work and expertise to new audiences and in return encounter alternative approaches and thinking that can help inform our contribution to the development of the discipline of architecture and through our graduates the future of the profession.

Students are encouraged to engage in international exchange and all Part 2 students undertake their final design thesis within a European city or the wider international context, recognising the globalised nature of contemporary architectural practice.

In conclusion

We are a flourishing community of architectural thinkers, designer and researchers, creatively active and critically engaged with our

profession, our academic colleagues and peers and wider society. Our staff form a highly supportive community with a shared purpose focused on challenging norms, being experts in their fields and respected externally for their knowledge, actions and output. As a confident and collegiate community of practice engaged in a joint endeavour we aim to contribute to the contemporary discipline of architecture in the wider world and academia, and lead in the development of the profession of the future.

Equally, our students are curious, proactive, and highly committed, for whom the Mackintosh School of Architecture provides a place which is empowering, challenges what the future might be and supports them in finding their place in that.

Collectively, we are a School of Architecture built on creative exploration and critical thinking, providing an innovative and engaged architectural education, not purely one defined by or limited to a preparation for practice.

11. Commendations

The Board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The careful and strong leadership of the new Head of School through challenging times in taking the School forwards in its ambitions whilst maintaining the longstanding strengths on which the reputation of the School is based.
- 11.2 The creation of a lively, open and creative learning community across the students and staff working together with a strong vocational purpose.
- 11.3 The educational aims and methods of the School to create independent, autonomous, culturally-aware, resilient and passionate graduates.

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 The School should review the structure, projects and assessment of year 3 to allow greater development and project synthesis to a deeper level. This should help to realise the full architectural potential of the students and demonstrate the School ambition to produce graduates who have synthesised skills. This would include

review of how the Erasmus scheme is delivered and how this is influencing the wider pedagogy of year 3.

- 13.2 The School of Art should work closely with the staff and students of MSA to fully understand the impact of the current physical environment on teaching and learning and to take steps to improve this provision. These improvements should have immediate and strategic long-term aspects.

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 the School to continue explore the potential within the environmental research unit to have greater influence on the curriculum and project aims across Part 1 and Part 2. This is an unrealised strength of the School.
- 14.2 The Board advises MSA and GSA to work closely with the students and all staff to understand and address well-being in relation to the nature of architectural study. The board notes the steps taken to address this through the pilot scheme and hopes that this will be implemented at the earliest opportunity.
- 14.3 The Board advises MSA to be mindful of the importance of organisation and to be aware of student concerns about some instances of late notification of critical teaching activities and the effect this has on their learning and well-being. Added to this, work could be done with the students to appreciate the importance of co-ordinating the sequence of submissions and deadlines.
- 14.4 The School could seek to raise students' awareness of support mechanisms in place for finding year-out work placements.
- 14.5 The Board notes the continuing work to strengthen the Part 2 in relation to the thesis projects and advises MSA to expand the preparation for this throughout year 4.
- 14.6 The Board advises MSA to give full consideration to general criteria 5 across year 3.
- 14.7 The Board advises MSA to ensure that full regard is given to GA2.3 and the degree to which technology is not only studied but developed into practicable solution.
- 14.8 The Board advises MSA to review and extend the challenge of studio projects programme complexity at year 3 as part of action point 1.

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 Part 1

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

15.2 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, session 2018/2019

Part 1 256
Part 2 162

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 institution
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff