
Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA revisiting board

to

the University of Central Lancashire

Part 2 Master of Architecture

Date of visiting board: 25 April 2017

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 31 May 2017

1 Details of institution hosting course/s (report part A)

School of Built and Natural Environment
 University of Central Lancashire
 Harris Building
 Corporation Street
 Preston
 PR1 2HE, UK

2 Leadership roles

Maria Murray	Head of School
Desmond Fagan	Academic Lead
Mr Christopher Lowry	MArch Course Leader

3 Course/s offered for revalidation

Master of Architecture

4 Course leader/s

Mr Christopher Lowry	MArch Course Leader
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5 Awarding body

University of Central Lancashire

6 The visiting board

Carol Norton	practitioner
Nick Hayhurst	practitioner/academic
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, second revision 2014); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

8 Proposals of the visiting board

8.1 At its meeting on the 31 May 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated

Part 2 Master of Architecture

The next full Visiting Board to the University of Central Lancashire will take place in 2020.

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

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- 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

The Master of Architecture course aspires to equip our students with the knowledge and skills required to meet the varied and complex demands of architectural practice. This is pursued through the successful completion of a series of interrelated modules engaging design, technology, theory and professional practice.

During the first year of the degree, design projects enhance our students' existing architectural abilities and interests, whilst concurrently introducing new strategies of enquiry and realisation. These are employed by testing the challenges and opportunities that the specific contexts of Preston and the broader Lancashire region present. We consider these environments as our contextual apparatus. We are especially interested in the opportunities concealed between contemporary urban continuities as a result of centuries of varying infrastructure implementation and industrial decline. Employing acute tectonic interrogation of these physical territories, we endeavour to realise the potentials for architecture which resist current tolerations of monotony.

Moving to contexts further afield, students enter the second year equipped with an expanded analytical vocabulary to undertake projects of significantly higher academic and professional complexity, concluding with the completion of the Design Thesis and Written Thesis, both of which are underpinned and informed through individual students' personal interests and their developing architectural identity.

Institute staff are engaged in a variety of research activities which inform their teaching. These activities encompass the Practice and Pedagogy of Architecture; Design Creativity; Critical Cultural Contexts; Housing and Everyday Life; the Phenomenology of Making; and Building Performance. This varied approach to the praxis of architecture contributes diverse specialisms that help inspire student-led propositions at thesis level.

Fundamental to achieving this aspiration is the Institute of Architecture's ethos of maintaining a collaborative community of students, staff and architects involved collectively in the exploration of architecture. This community is made possible by the scale of the Institute - our small cohorts across both years enable a concentration of inclusivity. Now part of the School of Art, Design and Fashion, our community exists within the context of a larger institute of undergraduate architects and technologists, and at school level in a creative environment, whilst maintaining strong historic ties with the construction and engineering disciplines.

Whilst the Institute sits in the heart of the city campus, the broader campus environment is undergoing a £200 million Masterplan

rejuvenation with the aim to create a world-class educational environment providing new facilities to benefit the university, the city of Preston, and the economy of the North West. The Institute is becoming integral to this re-shaping of the campus and City, maintaining a key voice in the future of the University.

Our links to the city and region are also significant – the involvement of our students and staff in research-led projects position the Institute as an essential resource for the facilitation of local city developments – most recently as entrants for the Preston Bus Station competition, and as advisors for the £14.5 million Heritage Lottery-funded re-imagining of the Grade I listed Harris Museum.

We have established a network of practical experience opportunities - the University Alumni Programme facilitates a tailored start-up package in collaboration with Northern Lights for those students wishing to test out their entrepreneurial skills and benefit from the access to our extensive studio, workshop and advanced laboratories. The University's reputation as a regional economic powerhouse is demonstrated in its strong track record of supporting graduate business start-ups – UCLan is ranked as the leading UK University for incubated start-up businesses.

This vocational support, equipping students with the means to move on to practice in context with the knowledge and skills gained on the Masters course is essential to the aspiration of the Institute as the facilitator of a collaborative community of students, staff and architects.

11 **Conditions**

There are no conditions

Please see below for the revisiting Board's response to 2015's conditions:

- 11.1 The board was not satisfied that the school had developed a mapping tool which adequately documented individual student attainment across all modules against the Graduate Attributes and General Criteria. The school is required to devise a mapping tool that can be used by all staff members, external examiners and students, as a developmental tool as well as a mechanism to check compliance.

2017 Board commentary:

The school has developed clear and succinct mapping documentation that allows modules to be easily mapped against the RIBA Graduate Attributes and General Criteria. The General Criteria is cross-referenced against the school's own learning outcomes and this is clearly evidenced in student hand-outs and briefing documentation that is available to all staff and students. The school is also in the process of implementing an individual student assessment sheet which will record where and how each student has met the Graduate Attributes and General Criteria.

- 11.2 The board was not satisfied that the course currently demonstrates sufficient, coherent and in-depth evidence of the achievement of

General Criteria 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3 and Graduate Attribute 2.3. The school should consider how the existing modules and project work can provide evidence to demonstrate this throughout all portfolios.

2017 Board commentary:

The board acknowledges that the school has improved its' delivery and the breadth of content in those modules that contribute to students meeting GC 8.1, 8.2 and 8,3 and GA 2.3. The board was encouraged by the detailed façade investigations that clearly explored and integrated structural and constructional systems. The board suggests that the school continues to develop this aspect of the course and encourage students to develop;

1. More rigorous and critical analyses of the precedents and case studies explored by students.
2. Greater investigation into the different technological strategies (as opposed to applications) that students could use to help inform the design development of their thesis design projects.
3. Greater level of independent research and exploration. Evidence of student reflection on technological issues and how they can contribute to the synthesis of design projects.

- 11.3 The board was concerned that the mapping of GA2.6 and GA2.7 - as currently solely mapped against module A04003 Professional Studies 2 alone - neither accurately reflects the integrated nature of architectural design and practice, nor provides sufficient range or depth of evidence of student engagement with these attributes. The school should consider how these attributes are mapped more appropriately against the wider range of modules across both years.

2017 Board commentary:

The school has re-mapped GA2.6 and GA2.7 which are now achieved by students in a number of modules across both years of the MArch course. In addition to this, students now have to complete a 'Reflective Report' as part of their final portfolio submission. This provides students with the opportunity to articulate the development of their own learning.

- 11.4 The board was not satisfied that the course currently demonstrates sufficient coherent and in-depth evidence of the achievement of GA2.1 across all portfolios. The school should consider how the ambition set out in GA2.1 can be more systematically and consistently be embedded within the course and particularly within module A04007 Design 2.

2017 Board commentary:

The board acknowledges that the school has introduced four developmental 'stages' to module A04007 'Design 2' which provides a clearer and more comprehensive structure to support the student's development of a thesis design project that meets GA2.1. The board was encouraged by the recent work that demonstrated an upward trajectory to more ambitious, complex and well-resolved architectural projects. The board suggests that the school continues to develop this aspect of the course and encourage students to develop;

1. A clear design narrative that would demonstrate and articulate the development of the thesis design.
2. Alternative design methodologies and to take more risks in their design proposals.

12 Meetings

12.1 Meeting with Head of Architecture and part two course staff

- The school has addressed the conditions, using the process as a refocusing exercise to develop and strengthen the course. This is made explicit and is evident in the student work.
- The staff body is more consolidated and are in a position to see the student cohort grow successfully whilst still maintaining the environment and intimate atmosphere that the school enjoys.
- The school is forging local links in terms of research and encourages students to engage further with specific areas of study. Students have the opportunity to engage with a live, institute-centred design office (Design Research North) run by staff and students: this provides an opportunity for some students to work on live projects, including outreach community projects. Design Research North has offered those involved to work on 'Makerspace' for the listed Harris Museum in Preston and is in development for several others.
- In terms of recruitment and retention of students, the trajectory is moving in the right direction with a positive amount of interest from prospective applicants. There is currently only one student enrolled on the second year of the MArch and this is dealt with by merging much of the teaching and studio time across the two years.
- The school has generated a series of mapping tools/tables that are further cross referenced against the learning outcomes of both the RIBA and the school. Students also have the opportunity to write a reflective document as part of their final portfolio submission, allowing students to articulate the development of their own learning.
- There has been a refocusing of innovation and realisation with a detailed approach to the design thesis proposal. There has been a reinforcement of precedent especially in developmental work and structural approaches which are evident in sketchbooks and models. The façade study that the students undertake further encourages students to explore the possibilities of integration and assembly.
- Recent developments to the course have also included a more in depth and accurate understanding of the client and user needs when designing a project. Students are more aware of client requirements and are able to think beyond the remit of the brief and explore possible alternatives.
- Staff members encourage students to explore their interests and think about the end user and the client when developing their projects. This is also informed by staff research and areas of study.
- Students are encouraged to engage in a self-analytical approach, challenging the norm and exploring the context. This enables individuals to develop and establish their own area of interest.

12.2 Meeting with part two students

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- Students chose to study for their part two at UCLan for the following reasons:
 - small cohort
 - studio and workshop space
 - the generous SSR
 - contact time between staff and students
 - familiarity
 - financial benefits due to the location
 - experienced and knowledgeable tutors
 - The tutors are supportive and inspire the students, further encouraging and pushing them to achieve and explore a variation of interests and possible areas of study.
 - Students embrace being part of a young course as they feel like pioneers and are able to influence the course and future of the programme.
 - New appointments and restructuring have enabled a balance across the staff body, where previously it felt as though the course was being pulled in various directions.
 - The current workload is attainable and well-structured allowing students to research, explore and complete a project to high standard. All briefs are assigned after a discussion and exchange of ideas between staff members and students allowing the students to explore through making and testing.

12.3 Meeting with external examiner

- Previous issues regarding PSRB regulations have been dealt with and as a result, examiners feel as though their comments are appropriately dealt with and responded to.
- There is a need for the school to be vigilant regarding the pass threshold however this is currently being addressed and dealt with.
- The students are adequately pushed but the academic team are now in a position to challenge them further now that the cohort is growing and the course is strengthening. Students have been supported and encouraged to explore areas that may have not been previously explored.
- The changes that have been made since the previous RIBA visiting board have strengthened the course which is critical to the school's progression and development.
- Examiners have confidence in the staff members and students to progress and achieve making the school stronger and more established. Currently, architecture is well supported by the university and this should continue in order for the courses to achieve their goals.