
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA exploratory board to
University of Wolverhampton**

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- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 University of Wolverhampton
 School of Architecture & Built Environment
 Faculty of Science & Engineering
 Wulfruna Campus
 Wulfruna Street
 Wolverhampton
 WV1 1LY
- 2** **Head of Architecture Group**
 Mohammed Arif Head of School
- 3** **Course/s offered for validation**
 BSc (Hons) Architecture Part 1
- 4** **Course leader**
 Colin Orr Subject Lead
- 5** **Awarding body**
 University of Wolverhampton
- 6** **The visiting board**
 Virginia Rammou chair / academic
 Luke Murray academic
 Sara Biscaya 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, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at www.architecture.com.
- 8** **Recommendation of the Exploratory Board**
 The Board was invited by the University of Wolverhampton to consider its BSc (Hons) Architecture programme for the award of candidate course status at RIBA Part 1. The designation 'candidate course for recognition' implies that the programme is considered to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. On the 14 June 2019, the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that candidate course status should be granted to:
- BSc (Hons) Architecture (part 1)**
- A full visiting board to consider the programme for initial validation and full RIBA recognition of Part 1 will take place at a date to be agreed between the RIBA and the University of Wolverhampton. This will allow the department time to consider the action points recommended by the Exploratory Board.

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

(Statement written by the school)

Architecture at Wolverhampton

The roots of the University of Wolverhampton lie with the Wolverhampton Tradesmen's and Mechanics' Institute and the Wolverhampton Free Library which, in the 19th century, developed a series of technical, scientific and commercial classes to be available openly to the people of the area. Developing from these humble beginnings, the University of Wolverhampton, as it stands today as a world leader in its built environment teaching/research, has maintained a vision of providing this educational opportunity within the Black Country.

The Architecture of Opportunity

As the University of Wolverhampton is the '**University of Opportunity**' and the Architecture course aligns with this manifesto - the commitment to providing opportunity to both enter, and succeed within the study of architecture is a fundamental aspect of our provision.

We run our Architecture course to **generate a culture** that would not be reductive, representing the stylistic or intellectual approach of a single interest group, but instead reflect and thrive on differences of opinion and conflicting points of view. Our model is an **inclusive community**, a wider microcosmos populated by individuals of **different backgrounds**. From students to staff, the variety of culture is our richness.

The new architecture course sits within a portfolio of experienced construction-based disciplines within the School of Architecture and the Built Environment. This affords benefits from the wider community of academics and students through the **cross-fertilisation of ideas between theory and practice and between education and the world of professional practice** making. Practical on-site experience, cutting

edge digital technologies such as VR/AR and the physical craft of making are blended in a real simulation where students from different disciplines can engage in meaningful debate. To further underpin this, prominent thinkers and practitioners are invited to provide a critical framework for our architectural design exploration.

The Architecture of the Black Country

By widening access to architectural education through a range of different routes, and through creating a Focus for **architectural education within the Black Country**, we see the **industrial legacy** of the local area as a rich landscape within which to design and experiment. The huge heritage of **Brownfield** sites in the region can be traced to the mid-nineteenth century, due to an area featuring shallow 30ft thick coal seams. The smoke of the many thousands of ironworking foundries and forges were the manifestation of one of the most important paradigm shift in modern times: the Industrial Revolution. The ruins of that fast-growing period are the link between past and present: looking at these **we design new places and shape new generations of professionals.**

The Architecture course at Wolverhampton is actively engaged in promoting a new way of looking at **Brownfields** as a unique **Heritage**. Huge parts of the **Black Country** now appear as scars, but as Lebbeus Woods declares, scars must be identified as “a deeper level of reconstruction that fuses the new and the old (...) a mutant tissue, the precursor of unpredictable regenerations”. For us, **looking at the Brownfield** sites presents **the opportunity to explore our future**. We teach future architects about the regeneration of this area and, in a wider context, to be vivid ambassadors of both the political and civic choice “**Brownfield first**”. Our aim is to lead this regeneration process through teaching, research (BRIC, Wolverhampton University Brownfield Research Innovation Centre) and public engagement.

The School, the Industry and the Community

We have a striking vision for architecture students from the University of Wolverhampton to become **skilled professionals who will lead the Black Country towards a sustainable future**. Building on technological knowledge, they will progress to support the wider regeneration of the area. The presence of our programme within this region contributes to, and strengthens **a socially responsible design conscience**, by linking education and economic growth, challenging ways of thinking, enriching dialogues and disseminating knowledge. We have included expert input from regionally based practitioners into the academic syllabus and developed a programme vision which is both inspired by the region and offers inspiration to those practicing here.

Future Plans for Architecture at the University of Wolverhampton

For many years the School of Architecture and Built Environment has had a great deal of success with its CIAT accredited courses for predominantly local and regional students. One of the principal aims of the School is to **provide even wider opportunities for more national and international students.**

To help achieve these aims the University has committed **to growing the discipline of architecture by 60% over the next 5 years.** With a significant investment in infrastructure, the University is providing state of the art facilities, which will house the School of Architecture and Built Environment providing a significant increase to the space allocation for the Architecture course. The new resources will facilitate our growth and provide space for the development of a Part II MArch provision.

The site of the former Springfield brewery is currently being transformed through a **one hundred million pound investment into Europe's largest specialist design, construction and built environment campus.** The new building for the School of Architecture and Built Environment will enable **a greater exchange with the creative and construction disciplines** through the use of shared physical and staff resources. It aims to be a place in which to foster future opportunities for collaboration, cross-disciplinary teaching and research, and continue to develop our international reputation in delivering activities that face up to the challenges of the 21st Century.

RIBA value

Architecture in the Black Country is entering an exciting phase of development and successful RIBA validation for the Architecture course at the University of Wolverhampton is seen as a crucial step in the local grounding of this discipline. This, in turn, will **help the Black Country design its own sustainable future.**

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board would like to commend the ethos of the students and their sense of community and engagement with the course and members of staff.
- 11.2 The boards would like to commend the university's commitment to facilities and resources for the course.
- 11.3 The board would like to commend the staff's determination and commitment to developing the course and studio culture.

12 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.

- 12.1 The school should better integrate the context of the 'Black Country' agenda, emphasising the rich, local history into the narratives of the History and Theory and City and Urbanism modules. This agenda should also be represented visually and conceptually within the student's Design Studio projects.
- 12.2 The school must make full academic portfolios containing the range of students' achievements available to the RIBA Visiting Board. An academic portfolio contains all assessed work produced by a student in modules where the RIBA Graduate Attributes and General Criteria are met. (as noted in clause 4.7 of the RIBA Procedures for Validation).
- 12.3 The school must make all required course documentation available for the full RIBA visiting board including project briefs, module descriptors, feedback sheets and course timetables.
- 12.4 The school must provide a clear criteria mapping document, demonstrating how each academic module reflects the RIBA validation criteria and provide evidence that at least 50% of all assessed work at part 1 is undertaken as design studio projects.
- 12.5 The school should clearly articulate the aims and objectives of each level to support the development and communication of a progressive curriculum across the course.
- 12.6 The board recommends better integration of the History and Theory, Urbanism and Technology modules within the Studio modules throughout the level progression, whilst at the same time maintaining a clear and distinct 50% design element.
- 12.7 The assessment criteria and rationale should be clear in the terms of learning outcomes and performance criteria. This should be consistent across all levels and modules.
- 12.8 Care should be given to the production of the design portfolio as the final outcome. Assessment in the design modules should be clearly demonstrated.
- 12.9 The structure of level 6 should be carefully analysed to give more time for students to develop their design work and the technical aspects that relate with their design development.

13. 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.

- 13.1 The board recognises the exciting potential and value in the move to the new Springfield Campus and the targeted 60% growth to Architecture and Built Environment. The school is to ensure the existing

study culture, environment, community and student experience is not compromised in the move.

- 13.2 The school should consider reviewing the academic position statement to better reflect identity, ethos and direction of the programme.
- 13.3 The exhibition should more clearly reflect the academic position of the school, the aims and objectives of each module studied and students' journey at all levels across the programme.
- 13.4 The board recommends a more meaningful integration of all modules over all levels and special care should be taken with visual representation, annotation and drawing conventions.
- 13.5 The content of level 6 should be reviewed and evaluated, regarding:
- the size of the 20 credit 6AT009 module
 - the 6 week 6AT011 and 6AT012 modules their content size and their integration with the 6AT013 Major Project module

14 Delivery of academic position

The following key points were noted: see advice point 13.2.

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.

Graduate Attributes for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were to be met by graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture.

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.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate criteria were to be met by graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture.

17. Other information

17.1 Student numbers

L4	5
L5	6
L6	5
Total	16

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**