

# **Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Leeds**

**Date of visiting board:** 10 & 11 March 2022  
**Confirmed by the RIBA:** 1 June 2022

**1 Details of institution hosting courses**

School of Civil Engineering  
Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences  
University of Leeds  
Woodhouse Lane  
Leeds LS2 9JT

**2 Courses offered for validation**

MEng, BEng Architecture, MEng, BEng Architecture (Industrial)

**3 Head of School of Civil Engineering**

Professor Carlo Prato

**Associate Professor in Architecture**

**Programme Leader MEng, BEng Architecture**

Justin Lunn

**4 Awarding body**

University of Leeds

**5 The visiting board**

Daniel Goodricke - Chair  
Paula Craft-Pegg – vice chair  
Dr Robert Grover  
Dr Luigi Pintacuda

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance

**6 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](http://www.architecture.com).

**7 Proposals of the visiting board**

On 1 June 2022 the RIBA confirmed unconditional validation of the following courses:

MEng, BEng Architecture; MEng, BEng Architecture (Industrial)

**8 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 of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

## 9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

### **Background and vision.**

The MEng, BEng Architecture programme at the University of Leeds is a unique four-year programme of learning, providing professional qualifications in Architecture, Civil & Structural Engineering and Building Physics. Its aim is to produce construction industry design professionals who can work across disciplines, in preparation for the complex challenges of practice. At a time which has seen increasing specialisation of construction industry professional roles, it is increasingly difficult to maintain a coherent overview of a construction project's progress – a 'golden thread' of understanding. Architects are traditionally the guardians of this but to be effective need an excellent understanding of design and management processes across disciplines. This course aims to increase the level of expertise and capacity of its architectural graduates in these respects.

Architecture has been taught at the University of Leeds, School of Civil Engineering, as part of the Architectural Engineering programmes, since the 1970's. The School, as part of a Russell Group University, has a strong reputation for high quality teaching and research, with high profile research activity in materials science, structures, sustainability and environmental engineering, building energy, indoor air quality, and construction project management. Within this setting, Architectural Engineering has consistently offered a pioneering integration of creative design with scientific knowledge through building design. The MEng, BEng Architecture programme is founded on this heritage and is currently the only programme in the UK to be accredited by ARB(Part1), RIBA(Candidate Part1), CIBSE(CEng) and the JBM(CEng).

The University's architecture teaching is within an established School of Civil & Structural Engineering. A fundamental aim of this Part 1 course is to reintegrate and reinforce technical learning as a fundamental part of architecture. Enhanced technical content within the course is not an alternative to creativity, but instead is a source of inspiration and confidence in creative and thoughtful design. Far from being a dilution of architectural value, expertise in materials, structures and building services is seen as a strength.

Architecture is seen as a technical art form concerned not just with the aesthetic and spatial aspects of design but also with realisation: an art form whose medium is the construction of buildings. Enhanced technical ability and expertise will provide future design professionals with enhanced capacity, reinforcing the idea of a golden thread of expert design continuity within building projects.

At the same time, graduates from the programme who choose a career in engineering have enhanced creative design abilities benefiting construction design teams.

### **Teaching in the School**

Entrance requirements to the School are the same for all undergraduate programmes and the first year of study is common to all. It is possible to transfer between any programme within Year 1. There is no pre-requirement to show ability in art or creativity as these skills are taught, supported and learned throughout the course of study.

Undergraduate students start together in a shared first year, learning fundamental principles of materials, spaces and design before developing along their chosen path, recognising that architecture and engineering have significant commonalities.

Learning on the course involves significant elements of the curriculum which are shared with conventional engineering students – including mathematics, structures and materials but also cultural context: architectural history and theory modules are available to all undergraduates in the first three years.

The School considers that these subjects are appropriate for both groups and that shared learning promotes shared understanding. Where architecture differentiates from civil engineering in the School is in the emphasis on creative building design projects, which are the means by which students develop an applied understanding of the relationships between people, place, spatial and aesthetic concerns, and the understanding of materials, constructional and service systems which allow these to work.

There is an emphasis on the design investigation of real-world buildings with design briefs set in local, accessible locations. This could be seen as a potential restriction on students ability to exercise their imagination, to take risks, but this is not the intention or the observed result of student achievement. The School understands that students want to engage with 'real' design as they want to design real buildings. This is reinforced by visiting tutors from architectural practice as well as having teaching staff with extensive practice experience.

The School sees contact and feedback between staff and students as a key strength of the course, with detailed written feedback provided at intermediate points as well as at the end of design projects in addition to verbal guidance in reviews and tutorials. Teaching staff are available to students outside of scheduled sessions. Students in turn are highly engaged and active in promoting architectural culture within the School, with the University of Leeds Architecture Society hosting sketching and CAD workshops, social events, talks by architectural practitioners and community design projects.

As well as conventional modules, students take part in a residential surveying field course in year 1, a 5-day study visit to a European city in Year 3 (currently Naples, where the visit collaborates with the Naples School of Architecture) and at the end of third year an option to join the Construction Site Field Course.

Research activity in the School includes significant architectural content and this is a growing part of academic culture, with increasing numbers of doctoral candidates with an architectural focus. Architectural staff are firmly embedded in School and University research groups, in leadership positions. Awareness of architecture as a University subject area and collaborations arising from this are growing as a result.

The School hosts a variety of external lectures and seminars on a range of architectural and engineering topics, including the annual Lunoe Lecture, which has recently included speakers on the V&A Dundee, the Darwin Centre

at the Natural History Museum and the Shard. This year's lecture will be on 22 Bishopsgate, London.

**The future.**

The School currently offers a Part 1 course which uses the School's expertise and across the University to deliver a programme of architectural learning with enhanced technical content. The School is preparing proposals for a Part 2 MArch: in line with the School's vision of enhancing professional capacity, these proposals include elements covering building realisation, in terms of the ways in which building projects are managed through procurement and construction, with a view to gaining a clear appreciation of the ways these process can affect and influence design intent and outcomes. Without compromising the depth and clarity of creative investigation, this approach will equip future graduates with an understanding of the different goals and aspirations of other actors and in turn an understanding of how ideas can be more effectively communicated and realised.

**10 Commendations**

- 10.1 The Board commends the staff for their dedication and support of the student experience.
- 10.2 The student and staff body are to be commended for championing diversity and inclusivity within academia and industry.
- 10.3 The Board commends the School for developing professionals who are able to contribute across disciplines in response to increasingly complex contemporary challenges.

**11 Conditions**

There are no conditions.

**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. 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.

- 12.1 Having clarified the pedagogical differences between architecture and architectural engineering, the course team should more clearly define the architectural culture and position of the Part 1, to support risk taking and innovation.
- 12.2 The School should offer physical making facilities and specialist support in the creative skills. This should be recognised within the curriculum.
- 12.3 The course team should take advantage of its enhanced technical curriculum to develop a unique conceptual and critical approach which integrates aesthetic, experiential and technical requirements and the needs of users.

**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 Having established a culture of recording and documenting of process, the Board advises that this is recognised within presentation boards as part of the project's narrative.
- 13.2 Since the exploratory board there have been few opportunities to act on action point 12.1 of the 2020 report, therefore the Board reiterates the need for students to broaden their frame of reference, including, but not exclusively, by visiting other schools of architecture end of year shows, exhibitions, building visits and so forth.
- 13.3 The Board supports the proposal for the establishment of the University of Leeds Institute for Architecture, especially in terms of teaching and research collaborations with Fine Arts, Design, Humanities and Social Sciences.
- 13.4 The Board advises the course team to utilise the expertise and experience of external examiners and the Industry Advisory Board in further course development e.g. RIBA Themes and Values and ARB "Modernising the initial education and training of architects" document.
- 13.5 The Board advises that the existing provision of careers and employability advice be tailored for architects.
- 13.6 The Board encourages the course team to set a visual culture within the programme.

**14. Graduate attributes**

**14.1 Part 1**

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

**15 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.

- 15.1 The Board made no further comments.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers**

At the time of the visit, there was a combined cohort of 126 students across all four years for architectural programmes, of which 54 are enrolled on the MEBE Architecture variants.

**16.2 Documentation provided**

The Department provided all portfolios and supporting documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation. The Board reiterates the requirement for a synoptic exhibition for any future validation event.

**17 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 Deputy Vice-Chancellor
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff