



Royal Institute of British Architects

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

Date of visiting board: 15 & 16 June 2023
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 19 October 2023

Preamble:

The Board would like to thank the staff of the Mackintosh School of Architecture for the clarity and organisation of the exhibition and the information provided.

1 Details of institution hosting courses

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

2 Courses offered for validation

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

3 Head of School

Professor Sally Stewart

4 Awarding body

University of Glasgow

5 The visiting board

Olive White – Chair
Daniel Elkington – Vice Chair
Peter Culley

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – RIBA – Validation Manager

6 Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education

The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture (published September 2021, and effective from September 2022). This document is available at www.architecture.com.

7 Proposals of the visiting board

On 19 October 2023 the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following programmes:

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

The next visit to the Mackintosh School of Architecture will take place in 2028.

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)**

A distinctive history

While inextricably linked to Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the architecture of Glasgow, the distinctive intellectual heritage and roots of the Mackintosh School of Architecture can be traced back to its inception with the founding of The Glasgow School of Art in 1845 as one of the first Government Schools of Design. The centrality of architecture within the creative context of an art School sets it aside from other schools of architecture embedded within university environments. Equally, the size and scale of GSA, with approximately 3,000 students across four academic Schools, offers architecture students and staff a 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 through active engagement with GSA Open Studio, offering ways of learning about architecture and routes into the discipline at different levels including through portfolio preparation, foundation programmes and articulations and complementing its professionally accredited Bachelor of Architecture with Honours and Diploma in Architecture degree programmes which form MSA's 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, as international students and RUK students represent just over half of our total student population, we aim to offer, 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 this defines the places we imagine and realise. Additionally, they need to learn how to work together with others to achieve their common aims, to be equitable and suitable in how we work.

The studio is the laboratory where individually and collectively students and staff test and share ideas, where thinking is translated into actions and where a personal critical practice evolves.

Glasgow provides a distinctive backdrop for learning and research in architecture. It offers a rich urban context reflecting cycles of development and regeneration, reflecting social and architectural change from the Victorian grid, post-industrial decline of the 1970s and the urban regeneration of the second half of the 20th century, to the contemporary imperatives of Climate Change, social engagement, ethical and innovative practice. 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-led 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 manifests itself in many ways; physically, socially or even temporal as recent years have vividly demonstrated.

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 generations of successful and importantly, professionally impactful alumni influencing the future of architectural practice. This results 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 the design studio at its core, and supported through specialist teaching 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. This is underpinned by research excellence demonstrated by our contribution to REF2021, and research led enhancements within the curriculum.

At Part 1 the Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) programme provides a comprehensive grounding in 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 specialisms. INTERACT, delivered in stage 3 three allows students to work with engineering and surveying students from the University of Glasgow and Glasgow Caledonian University, focusing on the collaborative within design teams and across disciplines.

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 and ethical practice, exploring complex sites and deploying contemporary construction techniques and environmental thinking.

Globally relevant

We are established partners proactive across 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 aspire to be 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.

10 Commendations

- 10.1 Professional Studies has been integrated comprehensively at every level and is producing students who are intellectually prepared for practice.
- 10.2 We would like to commend the continued engagement with Glasgow as a forum for exploring the multi-layered issues relevant to contemporary architecture. We welcome the Deputy Director (Academic)'s intent to utilise the ongoing restoration of the Mackintosh Building as a unique didactic tool for the student experience.

- 10.3 The Board commends the broad, diverse and committed group of external examiners and MSA's continuous positive response to their feedback.
- 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 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 Diverse external voices such as researchers, part-time staff, the wider architecture community, and adjacent disciplines should be incorporated to ensure that the course is embracing contemporary issues including decolonisation, a rigorous understanding of the site and place and responsive technologies to the Climate emergency.
- 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 advises GSA to maintain their commitment to the provision of physical studio culture as a key asset towards effective teaching of architecture and to support staff and students with the necessary space and resources to continue to provide this.
- 13.2 Staff need to be equipped via relevant training and development to support the GSA's aspirations for an increasingly diverse population.
- 13.3 The Board encourages the MSA to effectively resource and make transparent the opportunity of GSA's Common Academic Framework project to describe and align with future priorities within the School.
- 13.4 The Board advises MSA to ensure that all staff are briefed and have time and resources set out to contribute towards the ongoing academic evolution.
- 13.5 The Board advises MSA to utilise real-life exposure to local construction sites including the Mackintosh Building.
- 13.6 The Board advises MSA to promote a rigorous approach to exploration, experimentation and evaluation, particularly at Stage 3.
- 14 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 met by graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture, Part 1 and the Bachelor of Architecture (with Honours), Part 1 achieved at year 3.

Graduate Attributes for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Diploma in Architecture, Part 2

15 Review of work against Themes and Values

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Themes and Values for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture, Part 1 and the Bachelor of Architecture (with Honours), Part 1 achieved at year 3.

Themes and Values for Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Diploma in Architecture, Part 2.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

Part 1: Bachelor of Architecture, 365
 Part 2: Diploma in Architecture, 120

16.2 Documentation provided

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

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 architecture budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with Head of Institution
- Meeting with staff