UCL
THE BARTLETT

ARCHITECTURE ROUNDTABLES AT THE BARTLETT

19.04.2023

CREATING MANY PATHS TO ARCHITECTURE

INTRODUCTION

The Bartlett, UCL's Faculty of the Built Environment, hosted a roundtable discussion on 19 April 2023 titled 'Creating many paths to architecture'.

This was the third and final event in a series of roundtable discussions about how to disrupt architecture education and create more inclusive and equitable pathways through learning and practice.

The first roundtable 'How can we radically remake architecture?' was held in June 2022, and the second, 'Inclusion and diversity: An open future for architecture', in October 2022, as part of the action we are taking following an independent environmental investigation into The Bartlett School of Architecture.

We invited practitioners, educators, researchers and advocacy groups to join this roundtable discussion. We wanted to hear their views and create space for an open dialogue with colleagues and partners from across the sector.

The agenda focused on widening participation in architecture education and practice and creating more diverse pathways to the architecture profession.

The event was hosted by Professor Amy Kulper, Director of the Bartlett School of Architecture, Professor Jacqui Glass, former interim Director of the Bartlett School of Architecture, and Professor Christoph Lindner, Dean of the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment.

We thank our guests and hosts for approaching these topics with openness and care.
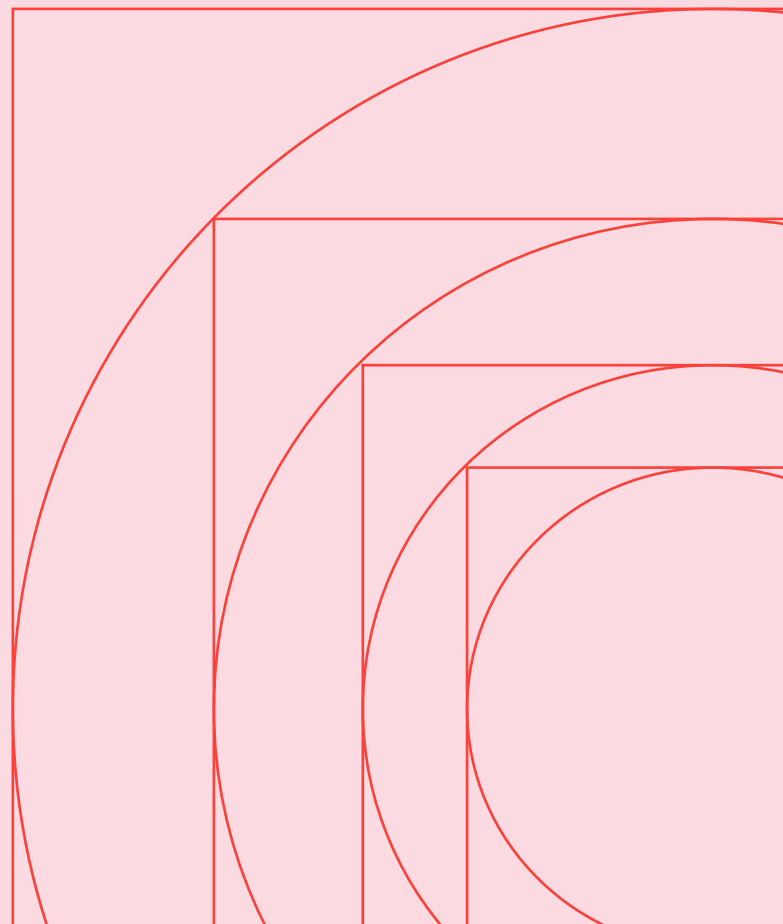
EMERGING THEMES AND IDEAS

We are sharing a summary of themes and ideas which emerged from the discussion, and we hope this will contribute to positive and lasting change in architecture education and practice.

This summary is not intended to represent the views of UCL, or of any individual. It is a condensed summary of the diverse views and opinions expressed during the roundtable discussion.

Change and reform in the architecture sector

- Access to the architecture profession can be improved through reforms like those planned by the Architects Registration Board (ARB), enabling people with a range of different undergraduate degrees or practical experience, within the UK and internationally, to take a path to becoming an architect.

- Discussions on alternative forms of assessment are underway in the sector, moving away from traditional formats such as unit selection and the crit/review.

- Institutions like the London School of Architecture are creating new ways to educate architecture students to decolonise, decarbonise and destandardise architectural design, leveraging networks of practitioner and peer engagement in career-long learning.

- New forms of practice are emerging – for example retrofit design – and equality, diversity and inclusion can be embedded into education and capacity-building.

- These changes can create the conditions to catalyse widening participation in architecture education and practice.

Contexts for architecture education

- Historical reflection can contextualise why architecture education has evolved to exist as it does today, and the 1890s debate on the future of architecture education offers perspectives that are still radical now.

- The context of architecture education has changed significantly in the past decade with factors including the climate crisis, the Grenfell disaster, Brexit and the UK government Skills and Post-16 Education Act in 2022.

- Architecture education can contribute to wider global issues of spatial justice, and more just built environments can be created through an intersectional approach to racial, social and environmental justice.

Broader perspectives and voices

- Listening to marginalised voices and broadening access to higher education are critical ways to achieve spatial justice.

- Working with schools and local authorities can result in new opportunities to broaden access for underrepresented and underserved groups.

- Students can be empowered to inform, shape and partner in their educational process, moving away from traditional hierarchies of educational space, authority and power.

- There are many perspectives and ways to approach widening participation in architecture, and there is value in many voices, ideas, pathways and actions around this.

- Personal identity can be part of design, and architecture education has the opportunity to support this so that students can see diverse identities and lived experiences reflected in pedagogy and practice.

Plurality of inclusion

- Experiences of architecture and educational spaces can be deeply personal and subjective and cannot be represented through a singular narrative. Plurality is crucial in inclusive teaching practices and transdisciplinary pedagogies.

- Knowledge is essential to feel included and to participate. Education institutions can challenge themselves to open up broader definitions of knowledge, accept different kinds of knowledge, and destandardise knowledge.

- Educators can be upskilled to support many dimensions of diversity in the individual students they teach, including diversity of ability and neurodiversity, equipping them with the tools to teach inclusively.

- The design of practice can acknowledge the myriad ways in which people can participate and be included in the architecture field – for example through co-design, activist design, non-profit practice, exhibition design, interior design, adaptive reuse, repair and preservation.

People and communities

- Everything that architects and educators do is centred on people, and the physical and communal spaces created for people in education and practice are essential for inclusion and participation.

- People can be excluded from communities through overwork: people with high workloads might be perceived as immersed in a community while actually experiencing exclusion.

- Architecture communities can become atomised leading to competition and lack of dialogue. There is strength in an ecosystem of collaborative communities that are invested in each other's success.

- Networks of support in education and practice, both formal and informal, play an important role in nurturing in creating inclusion.

- Spaces of interaction between people, in educational settings and in the buildings they inhabit, can be physically rethought to break down hierarchies. The positioning of bodies, seated and standing, can be designed to create more inclusive exchanges and interactions between people and communities.

- Shared spaces can be created between education institutions and the wider communities they serve, transcending physical barriers and concepts of 'inside' versus 'outside'.

Achievement and participation

- The goal of widening participation in architecture is to make it possible for everyone who wants to enter architecture to find a place and feel at home in the field, and to achieve their own success.

- Achievement does not need to be defined as academic excellence or being the best: it is about equipping students to unlock their own pathway to success, however they choose to define success.

CONCLUSION

We are so grateful to the colleagues, peers and partners who contributed to this critical discussion on broadening and pluralising pathways to architecture education and practice.

The Bartlett School of Architecture is on a journey of radical change, and our students and staff are working collectively towards a new future for architecture education at the school. Changes have already begun, and new approaches to educational practice and culture will continue to be piloted, tested and embedded in the months and years to come. We are continuing to listen and engage with our community of students and staff as we make these changes.

We openly invite you to stay in touch and continue to collaborate with us as we continue this crucial journey of change.

This event was the third and final in a series of Architecture Roundtables hosted by the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment at UCL.

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