

ARCHITECTURE ROUNDTABLES AT THE BARTLETT

22.06.2022



**HOW CAN
WE RADICALLY
REMAKE
ARCHITECTURE?**

**ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION:
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Built Environment, UCL



INTRODUCTION

UCL's Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment hosted a roundtable discussion on 22 June 2022 asking: how can we radically remake architecture?

The Bartlett School of Architecture recently received findings from an independent environmental investigation into behaviour, culture and educational practices at the school. This report identified unacceptable conduct. Our full apology and statement can be read [here](#), and the full investigation report is available [online](#).

We know this must be a moment of change. We have committed to improving workplace cultures and behaviour in the school. We want to reshape our own role as educators, and contribute to a positive future for the wider architecture sector.

This event aimed to start a conversation about how to disrupt existing structures of privilege and power, and to create spaces and opportunities for those who have been marginalised.

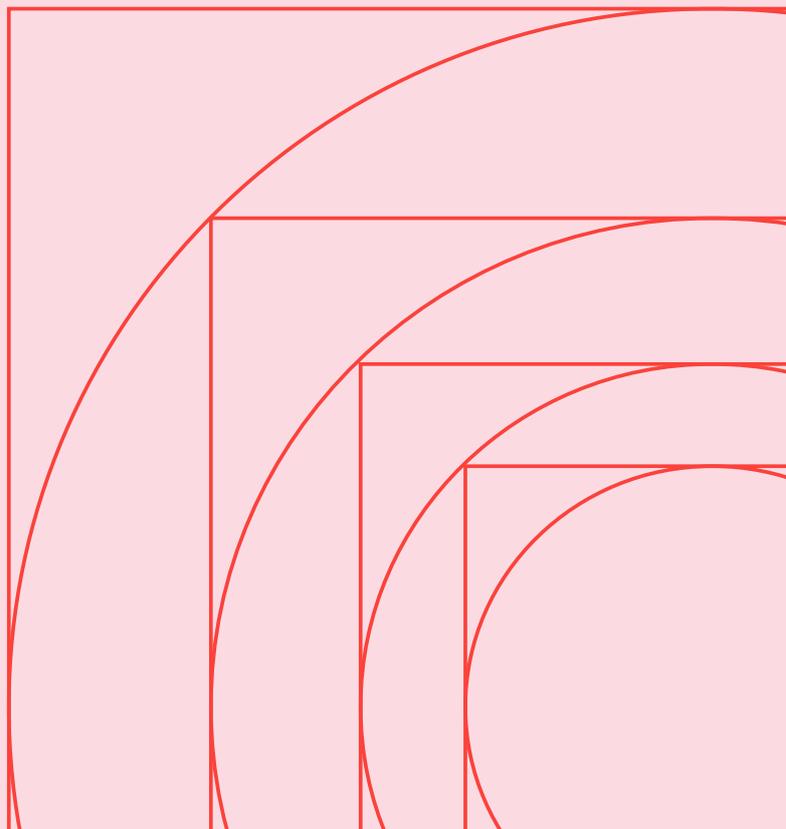
Representatives from Howlett Brown, the external agency which conducted the investigation, presented a summary of findings from their environmental report.

The roundtable discussion was hosted by [Professor Christoph Lindner](#), Dean of the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment, and [Professor Jacqui Glass](#), Interim Director of the Bartlett School of Architecture.

They were joined by attendees from across the architecture sector, including practitioners, educators, researchers, advocacy groups and professional bodies.

The agenda included challenges to be addressed in architecture education and practice today, and alternative visions for the future.

We thank our guests and hosts for approaching these topics with openness, humility and care.



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**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 real, lasting and positive 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.

Why hasn't change happened already?

- Increasing equality, diversity and inclusion has been a high priority at The Bartlett School of Architecture (BSA) and across the sector for some time. But the Howlett Brown report shows not enough has been done by the BSA.
- We acknowledge that students have been exposed to unacceptable behaviours during their time at the BSA, and insights from the report will be a starting point for urgent action to drive systemic change at the BSA.
- There is also a need for wider conversations to address structural inequalities across the architecture sector.

The gap between academia and practice

- Some gaps still exist between architecture education and practice. More can be done to create connections, synergies and shared spaces between education and practice, with mutual learning.
- Both practice and academia are engaging with social issues, the climate crisis and political questions. These pressing issues can inform best practice in the sector, and feed into education.
- Alternative models of education can help bridge the gap and cultivate relationships. Diverse forms of architecture education, including non-accredited and transdisciplinary courses, can be developed.

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Working culture

- Architecture students are influenced by the culture of their educational environment, as well as influencing it.
- The culture of design education, and students' relationships with their work, are deeply personal. Tutors' individual styles and design philosophies are reflected in teaching, and this propagates into educational culture.
- Students can be asked to take on heavy workloads, creating a culture of 'more is better' and a 'working through the night' philosophy. This is carried over to practice, and workloads in educational settings feed directly into workplace cultures.
- Some architecture schools and practices are moderating and setting boundaries in working hours, and the sector can learn from this best practice.

Excellence and success

- The BSA has long been seen as a place of educational excellence, attracting students from around the world. But the investigation found that this perception is partly founded on a deeply problematic 'boys' club' culture, enabling unacceptable behaviours.
- This non-inclusive culture must be dismantled, and 'excellence' redefined with integrity, and with less emphasis on reputation, growth, prestige or rankings.
- Educators' success can be seen as the cultivation of a healthy culture and processes, and the empowerment of students.
- Academia is a unique opportunity for students to think freely, and to be exposed to a diversity of views. This is essential to allow students to realise their individual aspirations and potential.
- Success as a practicing architect is about more than being able to design and produce buildings. Other skills taught in the sector can be re-examined, both in education and in workplaces.
- An inclusive, safe student experience is a precondition to excellence, not an addition. To foster this, accountability, health and wellbeing can be prioritised.

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The role of competition

- There can be an emphasis on individual achievement and competition in the assessment of architecture courses. This is compounded by hyper-specialist design units, as well as some admissions and supervision practices.
- Competition plays a role in what we do as architects and educators – it can be healthy, invigorating and energising. However, competition must be fostered in a way that is not harmful or toxic.
- A unit system can be created with a strong ethical framework and oversight, and with competition in balance with collaboration. Ways to strengthen connections between units can also be found.

Safety and the balance of power

- The personal, emotional and psychological safety of students and staff must be a priority for educators.
- Negative language used in design reviews and crits can undermine individual safety and reinforce power hierarchies. Critique will always have a place in design education, but it should be constructive, not destructive or demoralising.
- Students benefit from clear expectations and boundaries in interactions with tutors and other influential figures. They need to be confident of safety in all their interactions and equipped and supported to respond if boundaries are crossed.

Remaking the curriculum

- The BSA must be willing to review the architecture curriculum, and be bold, radical, and open to the invitation for change.
- Alternative paths to architecture degrees, and specialist pathways, can be explored. The Architects Registration Board (ARB) and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) are actively engaging with these ideas.
- Choosing a degree is a lifechanging decision. Educators can prepare students to graduate as experts, with the confidence to find their own professional path.
- Architecture programmes can embrace different interests, personalities and skillsets in student cohorts. They can equip graduates with evolving skills needed in practice in response to rapid digital, social and environmental change.
- A global perspective can be taken, understanding that students from different cultures and regions of the world offer diverse viewpoints, and acknowledging architecture's relationship with inequality and social justice.

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Empowerment and agency

- Individual agency can be placed at the heart of architecture education, to enable students to create their own path. This can include offering diverse units to choose from, rather than selection into a particular space without sufficient support to make individual choices.
- Architecture students can be empowered to practice activism, challenge systems that fail them, and create political and societal change for their generation.
- Tutors can play a key role in this, helping develop students' individual agency in the studio and educational and working environments.

Money and value

- Rising tuition fees and low earnings for educators and early-career graduates are barriers to diversity across the sector. Only 29% of people on the UK Architects Register are women, and disproportionately few are from ethnic minorities. There is significant attrition in these groups throughout education.
- Public perceptions of the value of architecture can be shifted to increase understanding that architects not only create aesthetic value, but also practical, social, cultural, financial, environmental, and cross-disciplinary benefits.

Intergenerational justice and the climate crisis

- The architecture sector must maintain a focus on the climate crisis, with attention and care given to this global existential challenge in curricula. The built environment should serve people and planet, helping societies survive increasingly extreme environmental conditions.
- Current and future students are being asked to address problems created by previous generations. The pressing challenge of keeping our planet alive is in their hands. Educators have a duty to help them deal with this challenge.

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CONCLUSION

We did not imagine that this discussion would solve all of the BSA's challenges. But many powerful ideas were expressed. We will listen, share these discussions with our community, and use them to help shape how we move forward together.

We are committed to accepting and putting in place the recommendations of the environmental investigation. We are working together with our student and staff community to implement change for the 2022-23 academic year. Immediate work is starting through Action Groups on care and wellbeing for our community, the crit experience, the unit selection process, and communication within our community.

Together with you, our valued partners and colleagues, we can inspire meaningful change within the BSA and in the wider sector. The global and societal challenges that architecture faces are significant. We are ready to make the intellectual and emotional investment needed to address longstanding issues in education and practice.

We openly invite you to stay in touch. We look forward to the next Architecture Roundtable at The Bartlett in Autumn 2022, and to continuing and developing these conversations.

This event is the first in a series of Architecture Roundtables hosted by the Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment at UCL.

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