



Laura McClorey's project 'Belfast Stories' looked at an existing space in a new way.

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Northumbria student architects celebrate success at RIBA awards

Architecture students at Northumbria University have triumphed for the second year running in the region's most prestigious award scheme for students of the subject.

The North East branch of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) named Evelina Somoglou and Laura McClorey as the winners of this year's Student Awards following a rigorous process judged by representatives from international firm Ryder Architecture and independent practice ALT Studios.

The entries, which were segmented into RIBA's Part 1 and Part 2-level classifications, comprised of the students' main end of year projects, one to encourage recycling in the community and one that re-imagined a disused space to encourage tourism and give it a new identity for the future.

RIBA Part 1 provides an entry-level standard to those pursuing a career within architecture, while Part 2, which is usually completed over two years full-time, provides students with an enhanced architectural knowledge and project complexity. Students can also choose to move on to Part 3 studies, which give them an advanced diploma to practice professionally.

Architecture BA (Hons) graduate Evelina, who is originally from Greece, won the RIBA North East Student Award for her Part 1-level project, The Battery Hub, which conceived of a very different future for the former Dex garage and car park that has now been demolished as part of Newcastle's Pilgrim Street redevelopment.

Evelina Somoglou.

She said: "I'm primarily interested in the fields of community, innovation and education so I wanted to create an active playground in which people could learn while having fun."

Evelina's proposal for the space, which was created in response to a brief to transform a public venue in a way that would encourage and promote recycling, involved both a centre for the reprocessing of used batteries, and an active recreation area to harness the movement of its users in the form of kinetic electricity.

A bird's eye view of Evelina's idea.

"I think I did well at the RIBA Awards because I didn't want to let my tutors down", Evelina explained. She continued: "When I was applying to study in England I met with five universities and Northumbria was the friendliest, which was what I wanted the most."

Evelina has felt so supported by the team at the Department of Architecture and the Built Environment that she hopes to return to become a Master of Architecture ([MArch](#)) and would love to teach on the course herself one day.

But for now, she is preparing for her new role as a Design Assistant at Ryder Architecture.

Judges, Ryder's Andra Antone and Paul Milner and Scott Savin of ALT Studios, said of The Battery Hub: "The project confidently addresses its complex, urban site constraints, art deco-style facades and existing structures. This is an impressive understanding of context proposing a sensitive and fun implementation of future technologies.

"The architectural response presents a sequence of sculptural elements which injects life back into the city centre with an ethos of sustainability and re-use."

Architecture Degree Apprentice Laura's project 'Belfast Stories', which won the Part 2-level prize, also looked at an existing space in a new way.

Laura, who moved to Newcastle from Ulster University in 2015 before a short diversion studying International Business Management, explained: "The brief was to come up with a hybrid solution for an existing space that would mix tourism with community use, and I chose a site in my native Belfast that I've loved from a young age.

Laura McClorey.

"I did quite a bit of my own research and wanted to honour the heritage of the area by acknowledging issues such as social isolation, deprivation and the unrest between communities in Northern Ireland, so my vision for the building was that the design would be all about reconciliation. I'm very proud of what I achieved."

Laura's scheme envisioned the building as a hub that would not only reach out to a number of different potential visitors to the city by telling its story, but would also attract people from different parts of Belfast and connect them.

Laura McClorey's Belfast Stories, central atrium

Laura added: "It was quite an ambitious scheme in terms of scale and

programme. To ensure the project was 'of Belfast', I used references from the city's past to inform architectural detailing; for example by expressing a rope texture within the facade to honour the city's rope-making heritage. It was also important to use sustainable technologies where possible."

The Degree Apprenticeship has allowed Laura to return to her passion for architecture at a time when she felt that full-time education wasn't a viable option for her. This is because the structure of the course allows her to combine her studies with a long-term placement as an Architectural Assistant at the British arm of FaulknerBrowns.

She said: "The reception at work has been great and I feel this award is a great reflection of the mentoring I've received. By working alongside studying there's a lot of support, and I gain from combining hard and soft skills and applying them through the chance to work on real-life projects.

"I've loved every minute of being at Northumbria and would love to continue to be involved in apprenticeships within the industry once I qualify."

Laura is now also in the running for the RIBA President's Medal, and is due to begin her Part 3 studies, which will result in her becoming a fully-qualified architect next year.

The judges said of Laura's win: "Belfast Stories' acknowledges and celebrates Belfast's heritage, carrying itself with grace from masterplan strategies to building details.

"The architectural response is well considered, with new build elements complimenting the revitalised 1930s art deco building in a sensitive and well executed manner."

Laura added: "I'm completely elated."

Equally proud is Laura's tutor Kelly MacKinnon, an Associate Professor in the Department of Architecture and the Built Environment who awarded her the title of Northumbria's Most Outstanding Degree Apprenticeship Student 2022.

She said of Laura's prize from RIBA: "This is especially impressive as it's been

two years running that a Degree Apprenticeship student from Northumbria has won this award, and for students to win whilst working is incredible, and a real testament to the talent we are attracting here at Northumbria.

“Although it’s a regional award, it gets recognised across the whole of the UK and shows the diversity and skills of our students, who’ve shown resilience and innovation over a challenging few years.

“Degree Apprenticeships represent a new way of studying architecture, combining the rigour of study with the practical application of the workplace – students ‘can earn whilst they learn’. And for host organisations, that makes business sense as they get to hold on to and invest in some of our best students.

“It’s a really exciting time for the industry and Laura’s award shows how well-rounded she is as an architect already. It’s a showstopper of a project, which we look forward to bringing back to Belfast.”

Northumbria University is ranked 11th in the UK for its research power in [Architecture, Built Environment and Planning](#) in the Research Excellence Framework 2021.

Discover more about Northumbria’s Architect Degree Apprenticeship at [northumbria.ac.uk](https://www.northumbria.ac.uk) or watch a video on the University [Vimeo channel](#).

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