
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board
to the Arts University Bournemouth**

**Date of visiting board: 17-18 October 2019
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 12 February 2020**

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- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 Arts University Bournemouth
 Wallisdown
 Poole
 Dorset
 BH12 5HH
- 2** **Head of School**
 Dr. Christian McLening
 Dean of Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture
- 3** **Course/s offered for validation**
 Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
 Part 2 MArch
- 4** **Course leader/s**
 Simon Beeson Part 1
 Ed Frith Part 2
- 5** **Awarding body**
 Arts University Bournemouth
- 6** **The visiting board**
 Jenny Russell chair / academic
 Jeremy Diaper practitioner
 Abi Van Hoorebeek practitioner /academic
 Valentin Dolhan student
 Sophie Bailey validation manager
- 7** **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.
- 8** **Recommendation of the Visiting Board**
 On the 12 February the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are awarded full validation
- Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
 Part 2 M Arch
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2024.
- 9** **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

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- 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 institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

10 Academic position statement
(Statement written by the school)

The distinctiveness of studying architecture at AUB begins with the context of the institution. AUB was founded in the 1880's as an arts and craft school and has evolved over the years to be one of Britain's leading arts universities. AUB offers a small, specialist, single campus community located on the south coast of Britain, in the dispersed conurbation of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP), surrounded by diverse natural environments (land and sea). Studying and practising architecture in this location offers unique challenges for students to engage with. All courses have a strong vocational focus for the creative industries, valuing practice as well as academic study.

We believe AUB is unique in the value we place on personal development, evidenced in student participation in collaborations within the institution and beyond, as well as self-directed study. As a specialist institution AUB offers unique opportunities to enhance architectural studies through cross-course collaborations, for example through shared studio projects with other departments or on an informal basis with students in other courses, including Modelmaking, Textiles, Graphic Design, Fashion, Photography, Film Production, Fine Art, and Dance. We also collaborate with external clients and manufacturers in live projects where appropriate. Students' own interests and aspirations are encouraged. A Personal Development Portfolio (PDP) documents all their engagement with course enrichment activities (such as guest lectures, cross-course collaborations and exhibition visits) in addition to any other activities which are initiated by the students. The PDP allows students to demonstrate enthusiasm, initiative and curiosity, and develop a personal trajectory into practice.

AUB support students through 'learning-by-doing' in a studio-based 'maker culture'. Architecture courses are situated in the School of Art, Design and Architecture alongside cognate disciplines including Interior Architecture and Design and Modelmaking. We expect students to apply their skills in integrated propositions, demonstrating practical and conceptual skills and knowledge of the discipline. We encourage students to collaborate, both within the courses and across other courses at AUB (and through the AUB Careers and Employability service) to develop the inter-personal 'soft' skills necessary for employment and to learn the common and specialist nature of creative practice.

Students engage in critical, thoughtful making. Making architecture thoughtfully means crafting tangible propositions that mediate between the individual, the world and those we live with. We emphasise the role of drawings, models and texts in the making of architecture: the things we make to think about the things we make. We promote critical

thinking that explores the material, spatial and social nature of architectural ideas. Students develop projects with strong narratives exploring current social, cultural and environmental issues. They are encouraged to adopt an iterative methodology, mindful of how their propositions might be realised.

The studio generates an atmosphere of creative exploration and critical debate where we test, discuss and present ideas through making. In our studio culture we experiment playfully, analyse thoughtfully, apply rigorously and reflect critically. Over the five years of Part 1 and Part 2 students develop individual strengths and preferences (of making) that inform their design methodology, with increasing fluency and confidence. Studio practice is supported by regular lectures, seminars and reviews. Students can expand their skills with printmaking, book binding, life drawing and a range of other media that is available to them on campus. Additionally, there are shared facilities such as the library, workshop, print room, digital facilities, lecture theatres and the drawing studio. Studio culture provides the safe, inclusive environment in which students can take risks and increase in confidence. Students move between freehand and technical drawings, physical models and digital media. Models are used to explore tectonics and form at various scales. Students learn to consciously choose appropriate methods of representation and communication. Each technique can influence the design process.

A distinguishing quality of the courses is that all teaching, learning, and assessment is integrated as creative practice, including design methodology, representation, technology, cultural context and professional studies. We stress the importance of exploring and understanding architecture through the notion of contextual knowledge, situating architecture within a larger field of interconnected disciplines and domains of knowledge, including the social, the technical and the cultural. Students improve their academic writing skills by attending lectures and seminars and engaging in practical workshops, and are further supported through the AUB English for Academic Purposes and Study Skills support team. We encourage concept- and research-driven approaches to architectural design that link history, theory and design. At Master's level research-led critical thinking is fundamental of our design methodology. In MArch1 students develop a narrative, sensitive to the social, environmental and the cultural ecologies, starting with the body and expanding to the wider landscape. The final Thesis Design year at Part 2 gives students the opportunity to develop their own research design project that integrates making and collaboration. Students research, study and question the local and regional with an understanding of how these relate to global issues of concern.

We expand students' knowledge of current issues in architectural practice regionally, nationally and internationally. The courses have strong links with local architectural practices and the regional RIBA. This provides opportunities to meet and visit local practices and potential employers, through mentorship and the employers' forum. Specialists and consultants contribute to lectures, seminars and reviews, introducing students to the collaborative nature of

interdisciplinary practice. Guest lectures include architects, artists, curators and other creative practitioners.

Our team of academic, technical, professional and visiting tutor staff support students in formal and informal learning. Their specialisms and interests are as diverse as the students and their research supports the development of the curriculum. Most teaching is in small group seminars, but individual support is always available. The studio provides for many informal 'micro tutorials', a particular advantage of the scale and compactness of the courses. Whether studying Part 1 or Part 2 at AUB, we believe we offer the students a unique context and learning opportunities that provide them with the necessary practical and critical skills to engage in active, innovative and emerging creative practice.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the ambition of the school, in particular through the development of the fully integrated programme and the establishment of the processes by which to implement it. This also includes the organised and ad-hoc opportunities for collaborative practices undertaken both internally within the institution and externally with local bodies.
- 11.2 The board commends the exceptional facilities and dedication of staff, including support staff available to students.
- 11.3 The board commends the development of the professional development plan (PDP) as a means to recognise the extended learning of students through the broader realms of architecture.

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. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 12.1 The board strongly recommends that the course team encourage students to interrogate the development of their design proposals at a range of scales both within the wider context of the locality through to the experiential investigation of specific spaces. In particular, this should include sectional investigation as a means to develop both spatial experience and site understanding.

13. Advice

The visiting board offers the following advice to the Department on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

- 13.1 The board advise that staffing levels are reviewed across the courses, particularly at M Arch level, to ensure appropriate input and support to both the student experience and staff wellbeing.

- 13.2 The board advise that studio space provision is reconsidered across the courses, particularly at M Arch level, to more accurately reflect the student numbers and underpin the importance of studio culture and peer learning.
- 13.3 The board advise that now a clear programmatic structure is in place, students should be encouraged to push the boundaries of design and presentation to further reflect the unique offering of the institution.
- 13.4 The board advise the school to celebrate and make better use of the local context as a laboratory for investigation and thinking. The board recognises that work is already being done in this regard, however, sees much greater potential in this being a key driver in the academic positioning of architecture at AUB.
- 13.5 The board advises that evidence of urban design at M Arch level could be strengthened and could benefit from some external support.
- 13.6 The board recognises the rich school context in which architecture is positioned within AUB and would encourage greater opportunity for input from staff in other disciplines within the formative review process.
- 13.7 The board advises that, in the context of a maker-rich institution, students should be encouraged to use their model making and drawing to specifically further their level of critical thinking.

14 Delivery of academic position

Please see advice point 13.4

15 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 Parts 1 & 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Architecture BA (Hons) and the Architecture M Arch.

16 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.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1 & 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria and were met by graduates of the Architecture BA (Hons) Architecture M Arch.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

2018-19

Level 4/First Year: 39

Level 5/Second Year: 28

Level 6/Third Year: 29

Level 7 M Arch 1: 12

Level 7 M Arch 2: 5

Part 1: 113

Part 2: 17

17.2 Documentation provided

The faculty provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

18 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.

18.1 Budget holder and course leaders

The board was pleased to meet with Dr. Christian Mclening, Dean of the School of Art, Design and Architecture; Simon Beeson, BA (Hons) Architecture Course Leader; Ed Frith, MArch Course Leader

- AUB is a studio-based arts university where all courses share an interest in making, building on the values of innovation, collaboration and connectivity. Architecture is considered a gift to public space that is inhabited, immersed and experiential. Embedded from the beginning is the notion that the courses do not sit within an architecture school but are structured so that they are embedded within the arts, where context holds great importance.
- Employability and the rich maker culture are at the centre and the key themes support the philosophy of the curriculum which in turn encompasses values and qualities shared both in education and practice: making architecture and studio culture; collaborations and research; links with the profession and constructions industry; and personal development.
- Students are encouraged to develop their own work and use their own voice. As a result, there is a variety of outputs and a focus on various streams of research and personal development work. The PDP is integrated into the students' portfolio, encouraging them to be a lifelong learner and understand the idea that your practice is not what you're doing now, but what you are doing within the wider world.
- AUB does not follow the concept of *teaching* architects at part one but focusses on the understanding of *preparing* students for architecture, finding an opportunity to develop specialisms. PDP allows students to develop the breadth of their own interests.
- The integrated programme and understanding of learning outcomes are very structured at undergraduate level. Students often submit

work reports isolating which learning outcome they are meeting and learning through representational methods. Students are frequently using making and testing to demonstrate their understanding of building and technology and that the idea of realising design is being thought about.

- At postgraduate level, there is a greater connection with AUB innovation. The aspiration of the student is developing, evolving ideas and exploring innovation. There is a different sense of criticality, thinking, drawing, making and modelling.
- The main challenge of a fully integrated model is the staffing and the courses rely heavily on external contribution.
- The Masters recently shifted into a more landscape context, looking wider into Dorset, establishing a coastal and urban connection. Bournemouth is a sprawl of suburbia and is attracting creative industries. The level of population density is low, and the challenge lies with environmental change and how the rural areas adapt.
- Co-teaching in studio ensures that students have input from different voices as current staffing across the two courses is thin, especially in the Masters. Teaching in groups and peer to peer working is valuable and is essential to the student's personal development.
- Staff absence can be problematic as continuity is difficult. The course leadership workload is immense and there is a hope that the model may be reviewed by the new Vice Chancellor.
- Students travel and engage with the profession in a variation of ways, this includes: visiting practitioners; end of year shows; "afternoon tea" and "speed dating" with practices. At undergraduate level there is mentorship and the embedded professional practice element of the course. Students are well prepared for industry and it is important that students find appropriate employment.

18.2 Students

The board was pleased to meet with students from all years across both courses, including graduates.

- All students have seen the student course appraisal which was collated and circulated by the year representatives after receiving feedback and comments.
- Students chose AUB for the following reasons:
 - location and good bursary programmes
 - small studios and community feel
 - opportunity of freedom to express individuality and innovation
 - excellent resources and opportunities to collaborate with other disciplines
 - accessible and supportive tutors
- Many students felt that the course exceeded their expectations due to the good collaborative and interdisciplinary working and the academic freedom providing the opportunity to discover a niche. Students felt that the environment is more like an architectural office due to the engagement with live projects; many felt like an architect, rather than a student.

- Some first-year students felt as though collaboration was there for collaborations sake as attendance from the other courses was poor. Some thought that this was due to the other disciplines not being assessed on those particular collaborative projects. Some students would have liked more opportunities to engage with drawing.
- The value of the collaboration is not always equal on both sides, as some of the other disciplines around AUB enjoy the input from architecture, but some students felt that it was fairly limited and that building the connections is down to the individual, rather than relying on the structure of the curriculum.
- Many agreed that the skills that students are entrusted with in terms of collaboration is a strong ethos of the university curriculum, enriching the project.
- Students are provided with unit presentation at the start of term where the importance of learning outcomes and the criteria are understood. Tutors provide good feedback and support and the dedication of the tutors is never questioned.
- Communication regarding research and guidance was considered the weakest point for the Masters course as feedback was limited, especially for those that recently submitted their Learning Agreement. It was understood that there was a lack of parity across some years. Additional staff members would be beneficial to the courses as staff are overworked and stretched thin.
- The BA is a lot more structured but there is a good understanding of time management. There is an input of history and theory and technology, along with opportunities to debate and engage with group tutorials.
- There is a good level of input from practice, the profession and guest lectures are popular across the student body. The school is much more aligned with new models of practice in terms of interdisciplinary working and collaboration. Students would however like architects to contribute to reviews and crits in design studio.
- Time for facility and workshop inductions can be difficult with clashing scheduled classes. It was felt that the size and provision of studio space was poor considering AUB is a university that champions collaboration and a rich making culture.
- Students would like their own dedicated space, improved storage and better organised studios, as it was felt that this was not utilised appropriately.
- For pastoral issues, students can approach tutors or student services. Staff members are good at recognising issues and helping to address it, approving extensions if necessary. Masters students have occasionally conducted seminars if tutors are absent as staff provision is not always sufficient.
- If given the option, students would change the following:
 - increased staffing provision
 - increased and earlier introductions into computer software
 - better access to workshop facilities
 - improved communication regarding required output
 - increased site visits
 - increased collaboration with engineering

18.3 VC and Dean of Faculty

The board was pleased to meet with Stuart Bartholomew, Vice Chancellor of AUB.

- There is a tradition of architecture manifested through AUB's alumni. The level of integration and complementarity makes architecture a focal point at the university. Architecture is critical to the onward development of the institution as the expression of design is influential to other programmes on offer. Connections are growing and are being manifested and the discipline has a strong roll beyond its studios and its footprint.
- Architecture staffing is stretched thinly and due to the fluctuation in student recruitment for the M Arch, it has been difficult to recruit appropriately.
- The leadership team in the institution is large but is connected with the university and the studios. It was agreed that course administration could be dealt with in a different way, rather than being a burden to the course leader.
- There is a complex situation of land acquisition within the estate, however, accommodation and new studios are planned to be housed within the new buildings. It is a 20-year development overall, but the studio space development should be addressed 2021-22.

18.4 External examiners

The board was pleased to meet with external examiners Piers Taylor and Carolyn Butterworth.

- The Architecture discipline actively recognises that they are within an arts environment. There are institutional barriers, but they are finding ways of celebrating their position. The discipline may sit differently within the institution in comparison to others due to the professional accreditation that comes with the courses, and maybe don't feel as supported as what they could be.
- The craft of making and how that can inform the students' journey is key to the students' understanding and are exposed to different ways of extending the nature of interdisciplinary working.
- The undergraduate course is well resourced and has a core identity, but still has some way to go to fully establish itself.
- The suburban context within the rural and coastal location is super interesting and the locality is not talked about enough in their position statement and could be embedded further. There is more opportunity for critical thinking through model making.
- The Masters staffing is thinly stretched and is a problem. As a result, the work is not as good as what it could be.
- The students could be exposed to more examples of critical thinking, as sometimes there is a lack of interrogation in making and context. Students at the top end respond well, but those at the lower end may respond with difficulty.
- The undergraduate is very thorough in terms of the curriculum; academic staff have clear strengths in terms of technical, theoretical and professional practice.
- The M Arch is strengthening over time and is much more engaged; the thesis enquiry coming out of research is richer.

- Examiners are provided with handbooks, course material, essays, summary portfolios, learning outcomes and mapping ahead of time, ensuring that examiners have a clear grasp of the curriculum.
- Examiners do feel listened to regarding comments and feedback. However, they do sometimes feel as though some of the recommendations are made annually regarding the production of an authentic image and expressing an idea through image making.
- Maybe the cross disciplinary working does not happen enough, as students have often said that they would like to increase the amount of collaborative working, and that early collaboration with the model making course would transform the programmes.
- Both courses are in an excellent position to be much more socially engaged, since the architectural heritage in the area has had less focus and engagement than areas with denser populations such as London
- Sectional and spatial development could be more focussed and resolved. The site and scheme are sometimes not drawn in enough detail and examiners have addressed this. Greater influence of urban design could assist, informing a better sense of ecology. There is a wonderful social and rich cultural history and the students should build on this and have a better grasp.
- Regarding external input, examiners considered that maybe the courses should focus more on who is in the institution, rather than bringing in big names to contribute to the course. The university houses a community of people that are engaged with making and this should be taken advantage of. It is the same group of tutors that do the formal reviews and students would like these to be more of an event, be more critical and be pushed further.
- The studios have improved, but there is a worry that if the M Arch cohort size increases, there will be an issue.
- The scale in design is often midsize and could be explored further, as the point of practice is to provoke change and do something different.
- It seems to be unclear what the relationship is between the M Arch and the graduate school. This could be a good vehicle at supporting the Masters in terms of a support network and a level of thinking.

18.5 Staff

The board was pleased to meet with a selection of academic and support staff.

- AUB helps to engage students with various disciplines and industries, both internally and externally. The size of the architecture courses creates an interesting dynamic, producing well rounded, confident students. The student output is varied and there is an individual approach to practice. The courses do not feel segregated, so community and environment are contributing factors to the student experience.
- The fully integrated programme allows a variety of inputs from various tutors which helps to embed skills and disciplines within the design project. It is a holistic process and what they are learning from varying disciplines helps to inform a final project. Working with visiting tutors

and various disciplines outside of the core of architecture feeds into a series of varying agendas and schemes.

- Students begin to identify the direction of their third-year project within the second year and research for the PDP is encouraged over the summer. To support the students, they are encouraged to work in smaller groups, discuss interests and connect with someone from AUB or externally helping to inform their work and research.
- The first year at M Arch level is more rigid; then the student is given more freedom to develop their own direction. The idea is to engage students as soon as possible and expose them to cross-disciplinary working, developing organically.
- To ensure parity across the courses, staff focus on looking at evidence of development, the quality of communication and evidencing theory etc through learning outcomes. Tutors gather and discuss, and feedback is given frequently to individual students and collectively as a whole cohort.
- The General Criteria and Graduate Attributes are achieved through the learning agreement and whether it is within the realms of what is expected through the learning outcomes. This approach is used across both courses and at Masters level this is of course more complex as they are operating at different scales.
- At undergraduate level, there are collaboration weeks and other opportunities outside of scheduled interdisciplinary working. At Masters level, other courses engage with architecture and the new graduate school will encourage further collaboration through shared taught sessions and presentations.
- Due to the nature of the campus and the shared spaces, students encounter the work and ideas of others. The accessible environment and community feel, encourages students and peers to communicate.
- Staff absence puts a lot of pressure on the team due to the current size and there is a feeling of being over-stretched. The course relies heavily on the input from visiting lecturers to ensure that students can engage with a variation of people from the profession.
- Within reason, the majority of the facilities on campus are available. Specialist collaborations happen outside of the courses and are not confined to just the student body as staff also learn from this process.
- Undergraduate studio space is sufficient, but the M Arch provision could definitely be improved. The studio culture in general is good, but managing the space, storage and materials can be difficult as well as finding space for making. The courses and students would also benefit from increased site visits.

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 next full visiting board.