

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to
The Architectural Association**

1 **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**

Architectural Association School of Architecture
 Architectural Association
 34-36 Bedford Square
 London
 WC1B 3ES

2 **Head of Architecture Group**

Brett Steele - Director

3 **Course/s offered for revalidation**

Part One: The Architectural Association Intermediate Examination (three years full-time)

Part Two: The Architectural Association Final Examination (two years full-time)

Part Three: The Architectural Association Professional Practice & Practical Experience Examination.

4 **Course leader/s**

Brett Steele

5 **Awarding body**

The Architectural Association

6 **The visiting board**

David Howarth	Chair/Practitioner
Hannah Vowles	Vice Chair/Academic
Stuart Piercy	Practitioner
Lilly Kudic	Academic
Norman Wienand	Co Professional
Oliver Hall	Student
Negar Mihanyar	Regional Rep

Sophie Bailey (RIBA 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 **Proposals of the visiting board**

On the 10 June 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

Part One: The Architectural Association Intermediate Examination (three years full-time)

Part Two: The Architectural Association Final Examination (two years full-time)

Part Three: The Architectural Association Professional Practice & Practical Experience Examination.

The next full Visiting Board to the Architectural Association will take place in 2020.

- 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
 - 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 (Written by the School)

Context, Location and History

The AA is an independent and financially self-supporting school of architecture with charity status. Our independence means we constantly challenge our ways of thinking, operating and organising ourselves and how we teach in an changing profession and discipline. Our location in the centre of London is not unique, but we recognise and value that it provides our students and tutors with all the intellectual, cultural and geographical advantages of the world's most global city. The quantity, quality and resources within the AA's listed Georgian buildings, dating from 1775, have been greatly enhanced in recent years, bought together and integrated with adjacent mews buildings reinforcing a distinctive architectural quality indelibly linked to the school's ethos and character.

Beyond its London centre, the School also owns 350 acres of woodlands in Dorset, at Hooke Park, where students and tutors have workshop and fabrication space, accommodation and expert technical support to fabricate models, buildings and 1:1 prototypes. Overseas, the AA's Visiting School provide short-course design workshops, research programmes and public events in more than 50 cities across five continents.

The AA is the oldest independent school of architecture in the UK. Students and tutors have been addressed and influenced by historic architects and educators stretching back more than 150 years including figures such as Ruskin, Gilbert Scott, Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. The School is also fortunate that many graduates and former tutors have also become established figures in architecture, design, design education and related disciplines. Many maintain contact with the AA, to the benefit of our current students and staff. The AA Archives maintain an extensive collection of material relating to the School's history, and is used not only by our own students and tutors for design and research, but by academic institutions and scholars worldwide furthering connections and dialogues.

Objective

The AA School produces knowledge, develops understanding, deepens awareness, and equips our students with the breadth of skills we believe relevant to evolving the broadening and disparate forms of contemporary practice. Most importantly, we expect each student to demonstrate personal initiative and responsibility in identifying problems, making judgments in their work and be able to communicate how and why decisions have been made both

visually and verbally. We seek to empower our students with these qualities and attributes well beyond their education at the AA in their diverse and unpredictable futures around the world.

Distinctive Features

A core part of the AA's educational strategy is that our tutors and students form an extremely diverse, multi-cultural and international school community. We promote and maintain active interrelationships with numerous schools of architecture, as well as design practices, throughout the UK and abroad. As part of our staff development we encourage academic and administrative colleagues to teach, lecture and examine in other universities in the UK, Europe, the USA and South East Asia. Many tutors and recent alumni also direct AA Visiting Schools. We also work to involve our tutors and staff in more than one teaching programme and at different levels of study within the School to utilise, evolve and disseminate their particular interests.

Our extensive Public Programme of lectures, exhibitions and publications welcomes wide external participation. The school's 'AA Agendas' publication series has in recent years published monographs on the work of tutors and students engaging audiences far beyond the school itself. In addition, our Night School offers what are usually internal activities as open evening events, redrawing the lines between practice and theory, and between student and professional. We continually strive to make the AA more accessible, physically, virtually and financially, to all who would like to participate in it.

Fundamental to the AA is our School Community, whose voting constituency, comprising all employed contracted staff and full-time enrolled students, guides the School by consensus. This right continues to be cherished and fiercely protected. The School's ethos embodies collective responsibility on all matters, administrative, practical and academic. This is historically embedded in our pedagogic methodologies, notably in our Unit system and our collective assessment processes used throughout the School.

School Structure

We are one of the few UK schools to offer a Foundation course in architecture. This constructs a bridge from secondary schools that only offer art, not architecture, as a subject. It also offers A level students who have focussed on a more limited selection of subjects, the chance to ~~take~~ enter a discipline and profession that embraces both arts and sciences as well as academic and practical knowledge.

Our First Year is run as a single, year long studio that introduces and grounds students with a range of fundamental skills, knowledge and design principles. The Unit system then operates across Intermediate School (second and third years) and across Diploma School (fourth and fifth years) with units offering students a diverse range of agendas for investigation, discourse and resolution.

Outside the five year ARB/RIBA accredited Undergraduate School, the AA Graduate School offers Masters programmes on subjects addressing the history and theory of architecture, landscape architecture, urbanism, housing, cities, environmental design and emerging technologies that can lead to a Ph.D. by thesis or by design. These graduate programmes contribute additional intellectual depth, diversity and context to our Undergraduate School.

Our Part 3 programme is offered twice annually to graduates from the AA as well as to those from other Schools. The seminar series leading to the Part 3 examination is organised in Spring as a Saturday School over 11 weeks, and in Autumn as an intensive two-week course.

Pedagogical Culture

The strong relationship between tutors and students, and the rigorous debate between students, between tutors and between students and tutors, is present throughout the School. This most notably commences with the presentation of each Unit's agenda and each student's Unit selection at the start of the academic year. Each Unit is limited to approximately 12 students from both years, and most Units are co-taught by a pair of tutors. This provides every student with a high level of tutor contact time. Learning is also enriched by the influence of different years studying together. The cross-School tutor : student ratio is approximately 1:5. Intellectual exchange also occurs between different Units throughout the year. Formally this is facilitated via joint tutorials, juries, the Open Portfolio, the Open Jury, Progress Reviews, Previews and Reviews. Informally, students will seek conversation with other tutors at any opportunity.

Design, and design-related study, undertaken primarily in the Units, forms the heart of the AA's educational approach. This is reinforced by the compulsory integration of a wide range of complementary courses in history and theory, technology, communication and media, and professional practice all of which are regularly reviewed. In both Intermediate and Diploma Schools we address the range of recommended graduate attributes with particular emphasis on personal responsibility, initiative and engagement with contemporary socio-political issues. This is reflected in the pedagogic approach of our Units and courses which, individually and collectively, explore and question architecture in its full breadth, depth and diversity.

Aims and Outcomes of Intermediate and Diploma Schools

The Units and courses in Intermediate School, leading to Part 1, support students to acquire fundamental knowledge, skills, and understanding across a broad range of aspects of architecture, forming a sound platform upon which to evolve more personal interests leading to Part 2 in the Diploma School.

Intermediate School students learn how to design and present projects that integrate and communicate knowledge of both the discipline and profession through a range of media. Work is evolved iteratively to evidence clear, effective and apt applications of materials and construction techniques in relation to current discourses in theory and culture. Basic knowledge of the building industry and the context of the practicing architect underlie an awareness of professional ethics, and students gain confidence by learning to carry increasing responsibility for self-development, including being able to make decisions and negotiate unexpected or unstable circumstances.

Diploma School, leading to Part 2, demands a marked shift to more proactive thinking in technical, written and design work. Bedded in original research, these projects are more complex, more speculative and are encouraged to engage, debate and test current socio-political issues. Students are supported to research and produce thoughtful, exploratory essays and reports, relating and integrating cultures and theories of design with technical investigations, understanding and awareness of the contemporary professional context of the industry.

As part of this, our Previews and Reviews for each year group require every student to present, explain, justify and argue for their own work to an assessing panel of tutors from different Units. Frequent visual-verbal presentations develop focussed, informed discussions and high-level communication skills. Review panels raise questions and probe justification not only of each student project but of colleagues' teaching agendas and methodologies. In this way, our assessment processes not only provide a basis for consideration of the relevant validation criteria but also form a means of regular peer review for our tutors. The External

Examiners are ultimately responsible for determining whether the student has achieved an appropriate standard for ARB/RIBA Part 1, Part 2 or Part 3. Examiners receive induction packages and course information prior to the arrival at the school for the examination.

For Parts 1 and 2, the school annually invites a total of 14-15 examiners who, working in pairs over two days, undertake a thorough examination of every Part 1 and Part 2 portfolio, while engaging in an extended review and commentary with design tutors. Their method of assessment also gives opportunities to review and provide feedback to the School on the agenda and work of each Unit and complementary studies courses.

Interpretation of the Validation Criteria

Maintaining the diversity of the Unit agendas is fundamental to the pedagogic approach of the School. The range of current issues taught and explored via the units not only raises valuable questions for the discipline and the profession but additionally engages open minds in documenting, anticipating and speculating on methods and modes of address. The School embraces this breadth of exploration while still ensuring that the validation criteria are met: all Units are required to meet a core set of the criteria, and our mapping documents demonstrate how all the other subjects in the criteria are addressed within other courses where the students' choice is more limited.

The School values intellectual agility, insightful problem-identification and the ability to address contemporary questions with integrity and commitment through imaginative and practical responses. Our students and tutors are also encouraged to pro-actively and independently interrogate relationships with other disciplines and investigate alternative forms of practice in order to push the boundaries of our discourse. As a school we believe in continually questioning our methodologies of education in relation to the discipline and profession of architecture. We endeavour to be open to criticism and debate, act inclusively, learn from our students as well as from our peers and engage and embrace change.

Future

Looking forward, the School Director's AA 2020 five year plan sets out clear objectives and a strong focus to enhance the school. It seeks to achieve autonomy through AA Application to the UK Privy Council for taught degree awarding powers that, the School believes, will further strengthen its pedagogic independence and enhance its UK higher education and academic research standing. This process commenced in 2012 through the achievement of QAA Educational Oversight, and has provided the School with valuable opportunities to reflect on, refine and develop our educational approach and methodologies whilst fully retaining the School's educational ethos. Recently secured planning permissions and listed buildings consent ensure additional improvements to the school. Great challenges continue to face both the profession, and contemporary education, of architects everywhere. The AA School seeks to address and engage these challenges in creative, critical ways, and continues to see the enquiry, learning and work of our students as not only a focus, but as well a force, for transforming architecture.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the school for creatively engaging with the Criteria in the ongoing development at Parts 1 & 2 and encourages the school to continue to refine the iterative process by which the criteria are demonstrated in all parts of the course.

11.2 The board commends the open and democratic culture of the school community, which encourages students to develop a strong and independent attitude to learning.

11.3 The board commends the depth of enquiry evidenced in technical studies at parts 1 & 2.

11.4 The board commends the innovative and comprehensive nature of the Part 3 programme.

12 Conditions

There are no conditions.

13 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 criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring visits. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

13.1 The school acknowledges that it has reached an optimum size; the board thus recommends the school continue to deliver their plans for upgrading and expanding facilities to match, in particular the workshops.

14. 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

14.1 The board advises the school to use the opportunities provided by the move towards degree awarding powers to consolidate and formally articulate their research activities.

14.2 The board advises the school to take the opportunity to re-draft their academic position statement to more clearly and concisely capture the essence of the school.

14.3 In light of the school's move to degree awarding powers the board encourages the school to further review their academic regulations regarding the role of external examiners to fully reflect the requirement for rigorous peer review.

15 Delivery of academic position

The following key points were noted:

15.1 see 14.2 for key points (Advice)

16 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.

The Board was content that all graduate attributes for Part 1, Part 2 & Part 3 were met.

17 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.

The Board was content that all general criteria for Part 1, Part 2 & Part 3 were met.

18 Other information

18.1 Student numbers

Part One: The Architectural Association Intermediate Examination (three years full-time):

219 students (total of 1st, 2nd and 3rd Year) OR 74 students (3rd Year only)

Part Two: The Architectural Association Final Examination (two years full-time)

177 students (total of 4th and 5th Year) OR 89 students (5th Year only)

Part Three: The Architectural Association Professional Practice & Practical Experience Examination.

Total of 53 students:

November 2013 cohort – 26 students

May 2014 cohort – 27 students

18.2 Documentation provided

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

***Notes of meetings**

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings:

- Budget holder and course leaders
- Students
- Head of institution
- External examiners
- Staff