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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to  
The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL**

**Date of visiting board: 07/08 July 2016**

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 21 September 2016**

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- 1**      **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**  
**The Bartlett School of Architecture**  
**UCL**  
**132/140 Hampstead Road**  
**London**  
**NW1 2BX**
- 2**      **Head of Architecture Group**  
 Bob Sheil
- 3**      **Course/s offered for revalidation**  
 BSc Architecture      **Part 1**  
 M Arch Architecture      **Part 2**  
 Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice and Management in  
 Architecture      **Part 3**
- 4**      **Course leader/s**  
 Mollie Claypool & Matthew Butcher      **Part 1**  
 Julia Backhaus      **Part 2**  
 Soo Ware      **Part 3**
- 5**      **Awarding body**  
 UCL
- 6**      **The visiting board**  
 Lorraine Farrelly      academic/Chair  
 Andy Usher      practitioner/VC  
 Dyfed Griffiths      academic  
 Doug King      co professional  
 David McClean      academic  
 Tracy Meller      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](http://www.architecture.com).
- 8**      **Proposals of the visiting board**  
 On 21 September 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated.
- BSc Architecture      **Part 1**  
 M Arch Architecture      **Part 2**  
 Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice and Management in  
 Architecture      **Part 3**
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in: 2021

**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**

(Statement written by the school)

**Our vision.** The Bartlett School of Architecture (BSA) operates as a vital and creative agency in a world in which our discipline, as both a method of critical thinking and creative speculation, is valued for its capacity to advance human experience and understanding, improve global environmental conditions, and provide a constructive and adaptive legacy for future generations. We seek to encourage big questions that address social, cultural and economic challenges; radical questions that approach history, technology and practice with an open and critical mind; and difficult questions that provoke liberal and imaginative ideas described through speculative projects in design and in text. We are fortunate to attract extremely high calibre staff and students from all over the world who fuel this vision with immense dedication and commitment. As set out in our strategic plan we value:

- **CREATIVE INNOVATION**
- **INNOVATIVE & RELEVANT RESEARCH**
- **AUTONOMY**
- **DIVERSITY**
- **PARTNERSHIPS**
- **INTEGRITY**
- **RADICAL ORIGINS**
- **ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**
- **LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENGAGEMENT**
- **DIGNITY**
- **INCLUSIVITY**

**Our context.** BSA is the Bartlett Faculty's (BF) oldest and largest section dating back to 1841 when UCL appointed Thomas Leverton Donaldson as its first professor of architecture. We've been celebrating the 175<sup>th</sup>

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anniversary of his appointment throughout 2016, beginning with a public talk by Grayson Perry RA as the first speaker in a new annual 'Donaldson Lecture'. In April, in collaboration with *The Architectural Review*, we published a '175' book that summarised the school's on-going student work, its history, and its alumni. In his inaugural lecture in 1842, Donaldson referred to the study of architecture as '**wandering in a labyrinth of experiments**'. His phrase fittingly describes the school's present ethos, and has been quoted as a '175' motto that arcs back to the origins of architectural education in the UK.

**Our mission and profile.** In the early 1990's the BSA aimed to set new international agendas for what architecture is and what it could be. 25 years on these agendas have matured into rigorous scientific and humanities-based research in **design-led experimentation** and **critical thinking**. Established initially through formidable and inspiring leadership, the school operates now as a constellation of highly established and diverse strengths with about half of its design units led by senior staff who established their teaching practice up to 25 years ago, and others who are quite new to the school. This profile has evolved through improved support structures for careers including; the Individual Research Fund, the Architecture Research Fund, and the Architecture Projects Fund. It is this mix of experience, renewal, and support that has shaped the core profile of BSA today, and it is this defining structure that provides the platform of its research and teaching strength; it's passion for inventiveness, intelligence, productivity, and wit. The school's core emphases are; drawing, making, computation, history & theory, narrative, performance, landscape, environment, urbanism, culture, and building.

**Our achievements.** In recent years we have been ranked UK's No1 department for architectural research (RAE 2008 and REF 2014), the UK's best school of architecture in the *Architects' Journal* poll since it began over 12 years ago, and we have been rated the UK's top school of architecture by the *Guardian* University League Tables on 10 occasions in the same period. Students on our professional programmes have won 6 Bronze, 3 Dissertation, and 10 Silver medals at the RIBA Presidents Awards. Our staff are at the forefront of international research and teaching, encompassing individual excellence, interdisciplinary collaborations, and pioneering methodologies. Many of our graduates have gone on to occupy leading roles in established practices worldwide, others have set up award winning practices of their own, and the 2015 RIBA Stirling Prize was won by BSA graduates (AHMM) for the first time. We have a large alumni network embracing established positions of influence both within and outside the discipline. We are increasing efforts to deepen our relationship with alumni as a barometer on measuring our impact beyond the institution, and influencing our activities within.

**Our connections.** Our vision, roots, profile, and achievements continually inform how we operate, how we make improvements, introduce change, and respond to evolving contexts. Through regular formal and informal staff consultation, the school is continually developing its programmes, updating content, synchronising timetables, and nurturing culture. A great deal of this activity is generated through 'bottom-up' ideas, demonstrators, and innovations. Students are central to this 'ecology', with admissions tutors,

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then module tutors, acting as the key interface of the school. For external perspective, we rely on several key networks including our part-time practice based staff, and our extensive alumni and research contacts, partners and collaborators. Each are vital sources of council on issues such as our long-term strategic thinking, the impact of our graduates and our research in the field, regulation, policy, industry, culture, etc. Our greatest asset is our position as a vibrant hub in a vast network. Communication platforms and public events are integral on making this work beneficially.

**Our concerns.** Whilst we are profoundly confident in the transformative agency of architectural education, we are deeply concerned with rising student debt, rising demands on teachers and researchers, and the imbalanced profile of the profession. Impact of cost upon social mobility is substantial. London adds further issues on affordability, and whilst there is more the BSA can do and will do on lower running costs for our students (more bursaries, increased subsidies, affordable field trip destinations, quotas on printing, etc) the overarching challenge of enduring a long and expensive education leading to low salaries is the greatest obstacle facing the future of professional programmes and the profession. Within the context of opportunities and challenges facing accredited education we have begun to explore new models for architectural education to address access, duration, cost, as well as multiple career pathways. In addition, we are continually adapting our course content in order to enhance and develop the knowledge and adaptability of our graduates. We achieve this primarily through the unit system, and parallel principles in history and theory seminar groups, we also achieve this through other modules in professional practice, and technology, which includes environmental design and sustainability. Proposals for next year include developing skills in business, management, marketing, digital technologies, construction, manufacturing, and environmental impact of design.

**Our developments.** In response to many of the points made above, and rapid changes in the built environment domain, the BSA is currently undergoing a significant transformation in its scope and profile. Later this year our move back into substantially refurbished and extended premises at 22 Gordon Street, followed a year later with high volume additional facilities in Hackney Wick, marks a period of investment in the BSA not seen in over 40 years. Concurrently, not only is the architect's role evolving, but also the role of architectural education. We have approached this challenge as a creative opportunity for design and critical thinking. For many years now, the BSA's accredited programmes have become increasingly influenced, (and visa versa), by our post-professional programmes in Architectural Design, Urban Design, Architectural History, as well as our undergraduate programme in Architecture and Interdisciplinary Practice. Graduates of these programmes have knowledge, skill, and talent of immense value to the profession and many are establishing highly successful new forms of practice that broaden and enrich the field. Facilitated by the additional space in central and east London, the BSA will be opening three new 15-month programmes in autumn 2017; MArch Design for Manufacture, MArch Design for Performance and Interaction, and MA Situated Practice. In addition, we have also established a new partnership with; UCL's Institute for Sustainable Heritage (ISH), the UCL Institute for Environmental Design and Engineering (IEDE), and UCL's

Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering (CEGE) to launch and host a new a 4-year integrated MEng programme in Engineering and Architectural Design. Our strategy in developing these new programmes is based on; existing and emerging strengths in the BSA, our interest in creative partnership with other departments and disciplines (in arts and sciences), our ambition to extend the influence of architectural design and expertise across the built environment, our desire to elevate the craft of making buildings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, market demand, and a determination to pioneer new forms of practice, knowledge and collaboration that address global challenges. The BSA is now **a labyrinth of many experiments**, in which staff and students contribute to, and profit from, many enriching relationships and interactions that exist between different modes and routes of enquiry.

## 11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the fostering of a rich and diverse culture of research and enquiry across wider social, cultural and environmental issues, whilst maintaining rigorous and consistent assessment.
- 11.2 The board commends the development of a programme structure that allows all students to clearly demonstrate the criteria and graduate attributes whilst still allowing space for genuinely speculative enquiry.
- 11.3 The board commends the School's focus on the practice of architecture evidenced in the programme content at parts 1 and 2, in the continuing support of a rigorous part 3, support to year out students and engagement with a wide cohort of part time practitioner tutors.
- 11.4 The range of innovation and exploration of architectural ideas evidenced in the student work is impressive and diverse which culminates in a world class exhibition and celebration of architecture.

## 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 board acknowledges that some progress has been made since the previous RIBA visiting board regarding the provision of pastoral care, but believes further consideration is necessary to address ongoing concerns. Discussions have highlighted the complexity of the issue with particular relevance to the validated courses, as well as a wider institutional context of student support mechanisms. However, it is understood that the university is moving towards the provision of a

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more centralised and independent process of student support. The board supports this initiative, but also encourages the development of a specific and transparent school driven strategy that explicitly responds to the intensity of the experience of architecture students, to safeguard their wellbeing. Within this, the school should carefully consider separating the academic and personal support roles of tutors.

- 13.2 The board observed, with additional comments from students and external examiners, an emphasis on production of large quantities of work which require extensive editing. This results in high costs for students and pressures in terms of time commitments to work long hours. The students should be encouraged to become more critically reflective at key points in their design process enabling a concise and focussed presentation of their design portfolio.

**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 were strongly supportive of the current BSA short course format and structure of the part 3 award, which the BSA is encouraged to continue to develop. Notice was taken of the duration of the programme which is offered over 12, 18, or 24 months, which requires the completion of 6 academic components. It was acknowledged however that the current flexible 12,18, 24 month modular programme suited some students whilst other students might prefer a more compact conventional exam based 12 month programme. In response to this the board supports the proposal of the BSA to develop in parallel with the current modular award a 'conventional' part 3 programme and examination for those candidates for whom such a programme of study is more appropriate and which responds more favourably to the pressures of their professional obligations in practice.
- 14.2 The board recognises the successful use of the temporary building at Hampstead Road which has enhanced the ethos of the school and encouraged the interaction and cohesion of years and design units. The board encourages the School to ensure that this attitude is fostered in the newly refurbished Gordon Street building and that the future use of this space maintains the diversity of the existing and evolving studio culture.
- 14.3 The development of a student society may help the students establish a support network within their own community to alleviate their concerns around their experience at the School. This was mentioned in the last report, and students may need support from staff to set this up, but it would be very beneficial to the student experience. It would develop more opportunities for communication and exchange within the student body.

**15 Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted:

The Academic position statement offers a balanced perspective of the achievements and the challenges that face the BSA and are part of a discussion around social mobility and the profile of students entering the course and the profession. The distinctive nature of the School offers students an experience to study alongside staff from impressive academic and practice backgrounds, which provides a dynamic education environment.

The challenges of living in London with the associated expenses of an architecture education and career prospects for graduates are important issues that are identified as concerns. This is something that is also raised by students in their appraisal, in terms of the length of the traditional education to become an architect and the associated living costs in London. This is something that both BSA and the University, in association with the profession, need to consider for the short term and long term impacts on the student experience.

**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.

**Graduate Attributes for Parts 1 and 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

**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.

**Graduate Criteria for Parts 1 and 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

**18 Other information**

**18.1 Student numbers**

328 UG, 483 PGT, 114 PGR, 103 Part 3 and 197 Year Out and CPD students.

**18.2 Documentation provided**

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



**19 Notes of meetings**

**\*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**