
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to Cardiff University**

The Welsh School of Architecture

Date of visiting board: 7 & 8 July 2016

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 7 December 2016

- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
Cardiff University
Bute Building
King Edward VII Avenue
Cardiff
CF10 3NB

- 2** **Head of School**
Professor Chris Tweed

- 3** **Courses offered for validation**
Part 1 BSc (Hons) in Architectural Studies
Part 2 MArch
Part 3 Diploma/MA in Architecture: Professional Studies

- 4** **Course leaders**
Dr Andrew Roberts, Director of Learning and Teaching
Ms Juliet Odgers, BSc (Hons) Architecture Scheme Convenor
Dr Juliet Davis, MArch Convenor
Professor Sarah Lupton Part 3

- 5** **Awarding body**
Cardiff University

- 6** **The visiting board**
David Howarth – Chair
Pam Cole – Vice Chair
Nick Hayhurst
Alison Coutinho
Jonathan Jones, regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, Validation Manager – in attendance.

- 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**
At its meeting on 7 December 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

Part 1 BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies
Part 2 MArch
Part 3 Diploma/MA in Architecture: Professional Studies

The next full 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)

The Welsh School of Architecture's mission is to inform the creation of built environments that enhance people's lives without destroying the planet for future generations. Our distinctiveness lies in promoting a grounded creativity, which is both informed by the interests of our staff and distinguished visiting tutors and by the world-leading research carried out in the School.

The School continues to maintain an outstanding reputation for research and teaching. Student satisfaction rates have risen in all areas according to the 2015 National Student Survey (NSS). Overall satisfaction has risen to 93% (up 4% on 2014), which places the School second among the Russell Group. Students rated the School's academic support particularly highly. Employers are keen to employ our students with a high proportion of our graduates finding employment in architectural practice within six months of graduation. In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework, 45% of our submissions rated at 4 and we had the highest rating in research impact amongst all schools of architecture. Staff research areas reflect the inherent interdisciplinary of architecture - from architectural history and theory to urbanism and urban studies, conservation studies, architectural science and practice based research. Research informs our teaching directly as many research active staff play central roles in designing and delivering our RIBA validated courses. We value the cross-fertilisation of ideas between teaching and research, and between academia and practice. The depth of expertise in specific research areas and diversity of research agendas across the School thus helps us to build a rich teaching programme.*

The School benefits from strong institutional support and has strong links with local and national government, professional and construction industry bodies and with practice. This outward facing position enriches the student experience. Our physical location provides us with unique opportunities to engage with a variety of architectural contexts, from the post-industrial landscapes of the South-Wales valleys, to our coastal fringes. Cardiff, one of the UKs

fastest growing cities, presents the opportunity to engage with pressing issues for sustainable urban growth relevant to contemporary regional, national and international contexts.

Reflecting our mission, our design teaching encourages students to confront and address real-world issues. The School distinguishes itself by emphasising the value of addressing issues of sustainable architecture and development through design. The School continues to promote informed place-making, and to build on its established reputation for offering a good technical grounding, ensuring that ambitious propositions can be resolved in detail. We emphasise that this focus on reality is not at the expense of architectural ambition or creativity.

We boast a number of other distinctive features when considered against other schools of architecture. Our 'Vertical Studio' programme, which takes place at the end of the spring semester in years 1 and 2, promotes experimentation and speculation beyond the core validation criteria. Vertical Studios are run by a wide range of contributors – many of whom come from outside the School and who join contributors from our research community. The MArch is exemplary in that the first year is conducted as a year of 'Education in Practice' where academic study takes within professional practice, providing context for the development of professional skills alongside learning in research methods and design. The Dip/MA (Part 3) adopts an in-depth and rigorous approach to professional studies. Through a series of expert-led workshops and assignments, it equips graduates with a portfolio of skills essential to running a successful practice. In terms of facilities, from 2016 onwards, we will be in a position to increase our already generous studio provision to be able to offer a studio space to the majority of our Part 1 and 2 students.

Our engagement with the diversity of strands that make up the discipline of architecture ensures that we meet the validation criteria, which we use to inform rather than determine our learning outcomes. We emphasise the integration and synthesis of skills and abilities through the processes of contextual analysis and design. The differences between our first and second awards is found in: the scale and complexity of design proposals, the expectations of students with regard to the presentation of ideas and arguments, the development of research skills, knowledge of the role of the architect in practice, and the independence of students in setting agendas for their projects and learning. Our courses are crafted to facilitate the advancement of capabilities in these areas, with increasing emphasis being placed on integration and on students' ability to frame the objectives of their designed and written projects.

At BSc Level a succession of design and design-related projects is carefully devised to balance creativity and competence. Projects progress in scale and complexity, building up to urban scaled propositions within thematic design units in the third year. In all

years, students are asked to demonstrate ‘technical imagination’ in their design project work. Design work is supplemented by lecture modules covering design principles and methods, digital processes, the cultural context of architecture, and technology. Practice and management issues are introduced in the third year but the focus is on providing students with a general awareness of the professional context, rather than a detailed understanding, which we address more appropriately in our MArch year of Education in Practice. All years of the BSc course take an overseas study visit to broaden the students’ knowledge of cities and of architecture through the study of exemplary works and environments.

During the MArch 1 year of Education in Practice students are able to contextualise their earlier studies in a professional context. Uniquely, students complete a design project set by the School whilst in their practice – this ensures that a broad range of the validation criteria are covered before students return to the School for the final year. The students’ active reflection on their practice setting provides a key vehicle for developing an understanding of professional and managerial issues. Academic work is supported by several short courses held at the School, and by visits from representatives of the School to graduates in practice.

In MArch 2 students return to the School and are required to develop a ‘design thesis’ that responds to a clearly defined issue or theme, which is developed by the student in collaboration with the unit leader. This represents a culmination of the development of the student’s personal stance towards design. The thesis is a vehicle through which the students acquire important skills in research and its translation into process, programme, form, and materiality. The themes of the design units reflect agendas developed from staff research expertise and the interests of visiting practitioners. Unlike the BSc, the curriculum at MArch level does not feature separate modules in technology and cultural context; these are addressed within the Design Thesis and 10,000 word dissertation. A series of technical consultancies are provided which focus on a student’s individual design needs.

The Dip/MA (Part3) covers a wider range of subjects than those required under the criteria, in particular it includes an international module. There are some unusual assignments, for example an adjudicator decision, designed to develop analytic skills as well as an understanding of contracts. A series of essays and case studies requires students to explore topics of relevance to current practice. The small cohort allows for workshop-based learning, run by a subject expert (internal or invited). Each student receives a placement visit, normally by the course director, and extensive individual feedback.

The School prides itself on its liberal and balanced student-centred approach to teaching. Whenever appropriate, we encourage students to follow their own interests in choosing and framing their

studies, believing that this allows each individual to develop a distinctive intellectual and design position. This attitude leads to a rich diversity of student work.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The Board commends the provision of a dedicated on-site architectural library and the reassurance of its continued place within the school.
- 11.2 The Board commends the breadth, depth and rigour of the Part 3 course.

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 should review the role of the external assessor to ensure clarity of both internal marking and moderation, and external examiner national benchmarking.
- 13.2 The School should review the examination procedures in order that at least one external examiner has a full overview of all modules of the course. This is to ensure all graduate attributes are met at Part 1 and at Part 2.
- 13.3 The School should encourage a greater level of theoretical understanding, exploration and rigour in the application of technologies in the MArch Design Thesis.

14. Advice

- 14.1 The Board was enthused by the introduction of the unit system across both award years and encourages its ongoing development.
- 14.2 The School should find ways to manage the temporary relocation of the MArch course to maintain connectivity across peer groups and courses.
- 14.3 Whilst the Board commends the thorough assessment of cost mechanisms within the PME (Practice Management and Economics) modules at parts 1 & 2 the School is encouraged to more fully explore the wider context of future practice.

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.

The Board confirmed that the Graduate Attributes for Part 1 were met by the graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies programme.

The Board confirmed that the Graduate Attributes for Part 2 were met by the graduates of the MArch programme.

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.

The Board made no further comments.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers 2015/2016

Part 1 236
Part 2 86
Part 3 21

17.2 Documentation provided

The School 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. The full set of notes will be issued to the mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.**

- Budget holder and course leaders
- Student meeting
- Meeting with the Pro-Vice Chancellors
- Meeting with external examiners and external assessors
- Meeting with staff