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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA visiting board  
to Leeds Beckett University**

The Leeds School of Architecture  
School of Art, Architecture and Design

Date of visiting board: 16/17 June 2016

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 21 September 2016

**1 Details of institution hosting course/s**

The Leeds School of Architecture  
School of Art, Architecture and Design  
Leeds Beckett University, room B501, Broadcasting Place  
Woodhouse Lane, City Campus, Leeds LS2 9EN

**2 Head of Architecture**

Dr Andrew Wilson

**3 Course/s offered for revalidation**

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1  
Master of Architecture (MArch), Part 2  
Postgraduate Diploma Architectural Professional Practice, Part 3

**4 Course leader/s**

Dr Claire Hannibal BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1  
Sarah Mills, MArch, Part 2  
Simon Warren, PG Dip, Part 3

**5 Awarding body**

Leeds Beckett University

**6 The visiting board**

Harbinder Birdi, Chair  
Jane Anderson, Vice Chair  
Jeremy Diaper  
Layton Reid  
Oliver Hall, student/graduate representative.  
Jenny Thomas, co-professional member  
Robin Machell, regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA validation manager, was 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](http://www.architecture.com).

**8 Proposals of the visiting board**

At its meeting on 21 September 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of the following courses:

*BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1*  
*Master of Architecture (MArch), Part 2*  
*Postgraduate Diploma Architectural Professional Practice, Part 3*

The next 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 (written by the School)**

*The Leeds School of Architecture operates within the School of Art, Architecture, and Design, an ideal setting to support our ambition to sustain architecture as a critical and collaborative practice, and to lead debate about future approaches to the built environment, as a hub for emerging forms of practice, and innovative interdisciplinary research. Our courses address in different ways the role of the contemporary architect in relation to physical and social contexts – from responses to climate change, the revitalisation of the post-industrial city, to ideas of urbanity and community, to the application of forms of digital fabrication and new technologies, and exploration of opportunities afforded by big data, and applications of new media to reinvent the languages of architecture in multidisciplinary practices.*

*Underpinned by an ethos of ‘open work,’ we aim to educate problem-solving, change-provoking professionals with a conscience. We promote and practise architecture as a cultural and critical act in society, and in the physical environment. We aim to foster ambition, vision and courage. We investigate, teach, research, and practise across the complexities of the architectural discipline, and through productive interaction with allied disciplines, attending to the discipline’s multifaceted roles and responsibilities. We offer a diverse suite of open and propositional “Studio Identities,” and theoretical frameworks at Part 1 and Part 11, that provide a platform for students to shape the direction of their education, facilitating a broad range of approaches, and engendering resilience, agility, and ethical stances, necessary to enable our students to negotiate challenging times. This studio culture is conducted in an intimate setting, allowing dynamic interaction between studios, staff, and students, and high levels of pastoral support.*

*At Part I, Technology modules over the three years of the BA course introduce Principles in the first, elaborate Materials and Energy Systems in the second, and conclude with the capstone theme of Integration, aimed to provide students with an armature of critical abilities to creatively combine structural, environmental, and material systems into studio projects. Our “live” Project Office, a design and research collaboration between staff and students, is premised on the pedagogic value in providing the opportunity for direct*

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*experience, and understanding of ethical project delivery in an academic setting. The annual 'Speed Dating' event, facilitated by the Project Office, offers BA2 and BA3 students temporary work placements with architectural practice at the start of Semester 2, providing first-hand experience of regional approaches. The Project Office collaborated with other disciplines in the School of Art, Architecture and Design, handed over an addition to the New Wortley Community Centre, and has facilitated a competition for our recent graduates for the design of a Sustainable Technology and Resource Centre at the Headingley Campus of Leeds Beckett. The Project Office along with the Professional Practice module offered in the graduating year, equip students with an understanding of the rigours of architectural practice today, prior to embarking on the year out.*

*BA Studio work is supported by Architectural Context modules, studies in architectural history and theory, representation, and urban studies, as well as the production of manifestos and dissertations. As direct outcome of the sister city relationship between Leeds and Brno, in the Czech Republic, models produced by BA2 students for Architectural Context, working alongside Doreen Bernath and Giorgio Ponzio, were incorporated into the Brno: The City of Modern Architecture Exhibition in February this year. The Brno Modernism Symposium run in parallel, was attended by staff and students, with Visiting Professor Marco De Michelis (IUAV University Venice) offering lecture content for first year students. This year a group of BA2 and BA3 students visited the Netherlands at the beginning of March, to inform their design studio research, visiting significant architectural sites in Amsterdam, Delft, Utrecht and Rotterdam. Students from Part I and Part II have been selected to participate in the British Council Venice Architecture Biennale Steward-Study Fellowship Programme over the summer.*

*The Master of Architecture course places strong emphasis on the design studio – as a series of modules aimed at developing solutions to architectural design problems in complex urban contexts that challenge the role of architecture in the city. Site visits and study trips inform design research agendas. Within this lively context, students develop their personal interests and an individual approach to architecture. Studio work is supported by Architectural Context Studies in the areas of History, Contemporary Criticism, and Social Agency. Building and Digital Technology Studies benefit from consultancies from advanced practice, currently with BuroHappold Engineering. The Professional Studies module builds on the curriculum of Part 1, and students' experience of practice in the year out, developing key aspects of Professionalism, with insights into Clients, Users, and the Delivery of Services, Legal Frameworks and Processes, Architectural Practice and Management, and Project Procurement. In-house workshops, seminars, and lectures are supplemented by specialist input from regional practices.*

*The three MArch Studios, Cinematic Commons, Fluctuating*

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*Archipelago, and Abstract Machines address crucial issues, such as architectural agency and its forms of social engagement; the critical employment of computational techniques in architecture aimed to produce solutions within material and social systems; and urban, landscape, and architectural responses in the wake of climate change, and the promotion of innovative integration of different media and software in the architectural and urban design process. Students are encouraged to explore these themes in relation to the city, across regional and global perspectives.*

*Sarah Mills and Doreen Bernath from the Cinematic Commons Studio co-curated the exhibition 'Cinematic Commoning' at The Tetley in Leeds, in November 2015, that explored relationships between film, architecture, and the city. The studio also undertook a field trip to Mexico, and participated in the workshop, Catalytic Commoning: Filmic, Essayistic and Scenographic Construct of Architecture and the City at Taller13 in Mexico City. This Studio had previously collaborated on an exhibition and workshop with Studio X at Columbia GSAPP in Mumbai. That same semester, Fluctuating Archipelago embarked on a field trip and workshop in Formby, in partnership with the National Trust, the fastest eroding property under their care. In Semester 2, Keith Andrews, coordinator of Abstract Machines Studio, facilitated valuable student participation in Cross Crit 2016, hosted by Northumbria University in Newcastle, along with students from Newcastle University. In the coming year students from Kajjima Laboratory at the School of Art and Design in the University of Tsukuba, Japan will visit Leeds at the beginning of October to participate in a one-week workshop in Scarborough.*

*To complete our offerings, over the course of fifteen months of the Part III, Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Professional Practice (PG Dip) course, students attend four study unit events to engage in a series of lectures and workshops on the various topics delivered by specialists from practice, and the construction industry.*

*Professor Teresa Stoppani, Programme Director of the PhD in Architecture leads a strong research culture within the School, nurturing a healthy cohort of PhD candidates who also contribute productively to our teaching. A committee of staff from the School led by Professor Stoppani convened the 12<sup>th</sup> Architectural Humanities Conference entitled This Thing Called Theory, at Leeds Beckett, that productively informed Context modules in Semester One. Open lectures were also hosted by the School, by Alastair Donald from the British Council, Professor Marco De Michelis, Professor John Macarthur, Director of the ATCH Research Centre at the University of Queensland, Australia, and Belgian photographer David Bergé.*

*The recently announced restructuring of the University will deliver The Leeds School of Architecture greater autonomy, and enhance our ability to lead debate about approaches to the built environment, and emerging forms of practice. Our dynamic and agile studio*

*culture with its breadth of approach and enquiry, sees us well positioned to productively contribute to changes in architectural practice, education, and the production of innovative interdisciplinary research. It positions us to investigate new approaches to the integration of curriculum and practice at Part II, working with RIBA Yorkshire and The Leeds Society of Architects to address issues such as equity, inclusiveness and diversity, and the paucity of women leading architectural practice, stronger links with practice and industry in the region and beyond, and affirm the significant and productive role the discipline of architecture can play in shaping the built environment.*

**11 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The Project Office has become a valuable resource for the School in connecting Parts 1, 2 and 3, supporting interdisciplinary collaborations and making connections with local communities and practices. The students were vocal in their support of it as an important part of their learning and it is a valuable asset that the University should continue to support.
- 11.2 The Board commends the University on its strategy for promoting research within the University and supporting and encouraging professional development in the context of research among staff across the School of Architecture.
- 11.3 The Board commends the quality of the present facilities which are clearly an asset to the School and welcomes plans for estate development which will release more space in the present building for the School of Architecture to both grow and develop.
- 11.4 The Board commends the collegiate approach of the staff in their support for the School through the recent period of transition.

**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 recommends that BA Year 3 students be encouraged to explore technology strategies that support their individual design proposals rather than the deploying of generic solutions and details within their work.
- 13.2 The Board notes that progression and retention need to improve. While the course team are aware of this and some progress has been made, the Board recommends that clear strategies are discussed, devised and implemented across all validated programmes.

13.3 The Board recommends that, with the restructuring of Faculty and School, all staff and students are included in and inform a sustained conversation about the School of Architecture's ambition and direction.

**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 School belongs to a Faculty that has several creative design disciplines and this is a key asset. Interdisciplinary collaboration will inform and enhance the students' academic and creative experience and prepare them for employment in professional practice. The School is advised to explore ways to take full advantage of this.

14.2 The School has demonstrated that it has strong relationships with local authorities, communities and practices and this is clearly to be applauded. The School is advised to also foster links with national and international practices engaged in high quality architecture and practice-based research.

14.3 The Board noted that Part 1 design projects often lacked context and that in many cases orthographic drawings were insufficiently resolved. The Board advises that this be addressed more consistently across the cohort.

**15 Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted:

The clarity of concept and language gives direction. The School should continue to consult students and staff as this evolves under the leadership of the new Head of School.

**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 confirmed that the Graduate Attributes for Part 1 were met by the graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

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

**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.

**18 Other information**

**18.1 Student numbers**

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1

180 Students

Master of Architecture (MArch), Part 2

55 Students

Postgraduate Diploma Architectural Professional Practice, Part 3

44 Students

**18.2 Documentation provided**

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

**19. 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.**

**19.1 Budget holder and course leaders**

**19.2 Student meeting**

**19.3 Meeting with the Vice Chancellor and Dean, Faculty of AET**

**19.4 Meeting with external examiners**

**19.5 Staff meeting**