

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA revisiting board
to
the University of East London**

Confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee 28 November 2012

School of Architecture, Computing, and Engineering

BSc (Hons) Architecture

Part 1

Date of visiting board 14 September 2012
Report confirmed by Education Committee: 28 November 2012

1 **Details of institution hosting courses**

School of Architecture, Computing, and Engineering
University of East London
Docklands Campus
4-6 University Way
London, E16 25R
United Kingdom

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www.uel.ac.uk

2 **Head of architecture**

Dr Renee Tobe (r.tobe@uel.ac.uk)

3 **Course leaders:**

Part 1: Mark Hayduk (m.hayduk@uel.ac.uk)

4 **Courses offered for revalidation**

BSc (Hons) Architecture

RIBA Part 1 (3 years full time)

5 **Awarding body**

University of East London

6 **The revisiting board**

Richard Parnaby (chair)

Neil Lamb (vice chair)

Jonathan Bone

Gillian Lambert

Jenna Quinn (secretary)

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* (September 2011); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

8 **Proposals of the visiting board**

At its meeting on 28 November 2012 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following course and qualification be unconditionally revalidated:

- BSc (Hons)Architecture RIBA Part 1 (3 years full time)

9 **Standard requirements for continued recognition**

Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

- 9.1 external examiners being appointed for the course
- 9.2 any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA
- 9.3 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
- 9.4 submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed

10 **School's academic position statement**

Please refer to section 10 of the full visiting board report (2011).

11 Commendations

The present Board made no further commendations, and refers the School to section: 11 of the full visiting board report (2011).

12 Conditions

There are no conditions attached to the course listed in item 8.

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.

BSc (Hons) Architecture RIBA part 1 (3 years full time)

13.1 The Board is confident that graduating students have demonstrated, on the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the ability to apply a range of communication methods and media in design proposals. However, the Board strongly recommends that the School offers clear guidance to students on how to curate their academic portfolios for assessment, professional body visits and presentation to employers.

13.2 With reference to action point 13.1 of the 2011 visiting board report, the Board welcomes the actions the School has taken in reevaluating and clarifying assessment methods for technical studies, and recommends that it continues to develop the identity of these elements of the curriculum whilst maintaining close connection between technical studies and studio project work.

13.3 With reference to action point 13.2 of the 2011 visiting board report, the Board supports the School's intention to create a new full-time post to deliver technology and resource/efficient sustainable design. However, it remains essential to create a full-time post to lead history and theory, and the Board welcomes the possibility of the appointment of a new full-time professor in this area.

14 Advice

The present Board gave no further advice, and refers the School to the advice section: 14 of the visiting board report (2011).

15 Meetings

15.1 Meeting with students

The Board would like to thank the students for an open and constructive discussion. Eight students were present who were representative of years 2 and 3 of the BSc course. Students were positive about the staff team and supportive of the School's ethos. The Board is grateful for their suggestions on how the course could be improved. The key points from the discussion were:

- UEL is a challenging and interesting School.
- Students choose to study at UEL because of its character and reputation. Students are attracted to the School's ethos of materiality and its 'physical, hands-on approach to the exploration of materials'.
- Faculty staff are supportive and approachable, students reported that their problems are resolved informally.
- Year 3 technical studies have improved; there are more one-to-one tutorials which the students have found very helpful.
- Students were pleased that a printing room is now available; however, the software requires further upgrading.

- IT tuition has improved, and students are learning a range of different programs.
- Design tutors give a stronger focus on the academic portfolio in terms of presentation and ordering.
- All students confirmed that they had been given advice on their academic portfolios through design tutorials.
- Each year, the School's allocation of rooms and spaces change according to the units. Students reported that they were satisfied with the changes in arrangements.
- Some students expressed surprise that there is no dissertation option in the Part 1 course.

Students identified the following areas for improvement:

- The building's opening hours remain limited and the workshop is often closed; students would like to have extended access to the building.
- Additional space is required for the high level of work and models that students are expected to produce during the course.
- Although students understood the benefits of sharing machinery with other departments, they felt frustrated over the long queuing times that increase prior to hand-in dates.
- Some students reported that they had not yet received inductions to the engineering School.
- Printing remains an issue, and the booking system is problematic and inefficient. Students reported that they felt frustrated over the lack of A4 and A3 printers in the building. At present, they have to use the library printers which are heavily used by all students in the University.
- Third year students suggested that the School deliver more environmental studies lectures in the second year of the BSc.
- There has been a shortage in history and theory teaching, and some students reported that they had self-directed the majority of their learning in this area.
- Although students were aware of a security presence on campus, they reported that security remains an issue and theft is taking place inside the building.

15.2 Meeting with head of school

The Board was pleased to meet the head of school, course leader for BSc (Hons) Architecture and the technical resource manager for the building. The School gave a verbal update on the actions they had taken to address the condition and respond to the action points of the visiting board in 2011. In addition, the following key points were discussed:

- Architecture is now part of a new Faculty of Architecture, Computing and Engineering.
- The School wishes to consolidate the idea of architecture and the built environment, through working collaboratively with the civil engineering department.
- Employability workshops are being delivered and students are encouraged to take their work in to the public realm. The School is keen for the workshops to be made a mandatory part of the course, rather than optional.
- The School has appointed new staff members who are experienced in teaching digital representation; in addition, there is new staffing in the studio.
- The student intake has been reduced in year 1, so that numbers are more manageable and the faculty can offer a more supportive environment to new students. This year, 90 students entered year 1 of the BSc in comparison to the 120 that were recruited in the previous year. However, the number of students entering year 2 has increased.
- The UK tariff entry point has been raised from 240-260 points to increase the quality of student entry.

- A higher number of year 1 applicants are applying with technical backgrounds rather than fine arts backgrounds. There is speculation that this is due to the change of faculty name to include computing and engineering.
- An internal architecture academic review is taking place this academic year. The School will use the process as a self-evaluation exercise and an opportunity to focus on the delivery of the courses and their structure and content. Staff reported that they would like to revise the modular system and to separate out the modules with larger credit weightings.

School's response to the following condition made in the 2011 visiting board report:

*12.1 In a significant number of sampled academic portfolios, **Graduate Attribute GA1.2 was not met**, i.e. 'the ability to apply a range of communication methods and media to present design proposals clearly and effectively'*

12.2 A revisiting subgroup will visit the school, usually within one full year of the full visiting board, to consider the actions taken by the school responding to the condition stated in the report and review the work of the next graduating cohort

- The condition is being addressed through the School's teaching and assessment criteria. 'Portfolio and Communication' has been made a criterion for assessment, and the quality and presentation of portfolios is an additional requirement.
- The School has focused on increasing the employability of Part 1 students. Students are taught to use the portfolio as a tool to secure a job, and they understand that portfolios should not require extensive reformatting.
- All unit tutors are briefed on portfolio presentation by the Head of School and the BSc course leader.
- Unit tutors inform the students that portfolios need to demonstrate professionalism in terms of representation.
- The School is teaching 'communication skills' through workshops.
- Technical staffing has increased, the building has a new digital fabrication room and they plan to increase this facility.
- There are two new members of staff in the digital environment; each has experience of working with traditional plotters and 2D printing.
- All facilities are shared by departments, which is giving students exposure to other disciplines.
- Architecture students have access to three computing suites, and a new multi-media production centre, which offer a range of cameras and video equipment through a well-orchestrated borrowing system.
- The School operates an induction system for using new machinery; the system is tailored for groups of students who require tuition in specialised workshops and machinery.
- Where sessions for machinery are over-subscribed, the School is able to expand the hours and staffing.

School's response to the action points made in the 2011 visiting board report:

Action point 13.1

It is strongly recommended that the school re-evaluate and clarify the assessment mechanisms for technical studies, and ensure that submissions for this curricular area, particularly at award level, are clearly represented in the academic portfolio

- The School has introduced a technical report as an individual coherent piece of work that is separate from the assessment of technology within the design projects. Previously, technology had been assessed purely through the design project.

Action point 13.2

It is strongly recommended that the school is invited by the university to propose a comprehensive staffing plan to enhance and support not only the key components of the academic position statement and delivery of graduate attributes at part 1, but also the teaching of history and theory, technology, and resource efficient/sustainable design

- The School has focused on the development of a new position for technological delivery, and the University has approved their request to recruit for an ‘Environmental Design and Technology’ post.
- The School would like to teach ‘common sense thinking’ rather than mechanics.
- The School has a comprehensive group of staff who deliver the lectures and seminars in the area of history and theory.
- At Diploma level, the School delivers a two week workshop on critical thinking and essay writing that is intended to inform and influence students at BSc level.
- The University has announced that they will advertise for professors of all faculties and there are 50 posts available within the institution. The Head of School reported that she would like a full-time appointment to be made in the area of history and theory and considers this an absolute necessity. The following points were discussed:
 - The University has informed the School that professors will be appointed according to their research profile.
 - Architecture is encouraging and inviting individuals to apply for the position.
 - An academic with a strong research profile and a practice background would ideally be appointed in Architecture.

Action point 13.3

It is strongly recommended that - as a critical component of its academic identity - the school critically review and evaluate how evidence of materiality is synthesised, and significantly more comprehensively represented, in design studio projects, especially those at award level

- The School is briefing tutors on the delivery of the ethos of the School, and hopes to represent the strong UEL identity through the student work. All projects should demonstrate ‘buildable buildings’.
- It was reported that all examiners commented that last year’s cohort expressed a strong character and quality.

Action point 13.4

It is strongly recommended that, in collaboration with the University, the school reviews its physical resources to make optimum use of workshops, and teaching and studio space; this should include, as a matter of urgency, major improvements to the acoustic environment of the AVA building used by Architecture, and investigation of extended opening hours for both the timber workshop and casting studio

- The planning and management of resources has improved, and there is improved access to facilities for students.
- Problems with the acoustics in the building remain an issue. The School has been consulting engineers to identify a robust and elegant solution. Once an appropriate solution has been found, the School intends to implement it so that students can be heavily involved with the process. The Head of School reported that it was helpful to highlight acoustics as an area for improvement in the RIBA visiting board report of 2011.

Action point 13.5

It is recommended that the school offers comprehensive tuition in digital software to BSc students at all levels to enhance their employability in professional practice

- The School is integrating computing skills with design, with an aim to develop a new method of using the computer that is unique.

- In the first and second year of the BSc, students are taught basic skills (CAD, Rhino, Photoshop).
- There is a staff member who is responsible for familiarising students with different types of software and understanding where they are appropriate to use.
- The School would like to appoint further technical staffing in this area, but is unsure if the request will be approved by the University.
- The School intends to work with civil engineering to develop a broader approach, so that architects and engineers may work together at Diploma level.

16 **Delivery of academic position**

The School is referred to section 16 of the full visiting board report (2011).

17 **Delivery of graduate attributes**

The Board was satisfied that all graduate attributes were met within the sample of portfolios provided during the revisit. The School is referred to section 17 of the full visiting board report (2011).

18 **Review of work against criteria**

The Board was satisfied that all criterions were met within the sample of portfolios provided during the revisit. The School is referred to section 18 of the full visiting board report (2011).

19 **Other information**

19.1 **Documentation provided**

The school provided documentation appropriate to preparing the members of the visiting board for the revisit.

The following additional documents were provided during the visit, at the request of the board:

- External examiner reports
- Professional studies book/ site diary