Royal Institute of British Architects

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Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Brighton

School of Architecture & Design

Date of visiting board: 03/04 November 2016
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 31 May 2017

RIBA ⊞

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1   Details of institution hosting course/s
University of Brighton, School of Architecture & Design
Third Floor Mithras House
Lewes Road,
Brighton
BN2 4AT

2   Head of School of Architecture and Design
Professor Robert Mull

Deputy Head of School, Architecture & Urban Planning
Kate Cheyne

3   Courses offered for validation
Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2 MArch
Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Management, Practice and Law in
        Architecture

4   Course leaders
Dr Ben Sweeting, BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Dr Sarah Stevens, MArch Part 2
Nick Hayhurst, Postgraduate Diploma in Management, Practice and Law
in Architecture, Part 3

5   Awarding body
University of Brighton

6   The visiting board
Professor Kevin Singh – chair
Peter Williams – vice chair
Jillian Jones
Soo Ware
Nicholas Humes
Andy Parsons – 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
On 31 May 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed, by circulation,
unconditional revalidation of the following:

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2 MArch

Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Management, Practice and Law in Architecture

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 (written by the School)
The Architecture Programme is constantly exploring the edge. The edge of the arts, the edge of humanities, the edge of science and technology. As a School of Architecture and Design we join with Product Design, Sustainable Design, Interior Architecture and Urban Planning. Together we interweave these edges, through the discipline of design. Our ground condition is made up of three key ingredients common to all design thinking – people, materials and place.

*People remain central to the success of the programme. Our staff pour energy and ideas into the courses and the students understand this, responding in kind. An exciting recognition of this is that we continue to win prizes at the RIBA President's Medals & Awards. Academics Katrin Bohn and Andre Viljoen received the award for **Outstanding University-located Research for their book** 'Second Nature Urban Agriculture: Designing Productive Cities', outlining their leading research on Continuous Productive Urban Landscapes. For the students' awards, over the years our MArch student, Irene Klokkari received a commendation for her dissertation titled 'Memories of Famagusta: Recapturing the image of the city through the memories of refugees', Oliver Riviere's won the RIBA Serjeant Drawing Prize and Kirsty McMullan's jointly won the RIBA Journal Eye Line Drawing Prize.*

The architectural practitioners that teach at Brighton also continue to win awards for their buildings including from the Civic Trust, Architects Journal, Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust and RIBA Regional Awards. It is wonderful to see so many practices, founded by current and past tutors, listed in the New Architects 3 book that showcases innovative and talented young architectural practices.

Our student society, BIAAS, thrives. They built on their hosting of the 2015

Architecture Student Network (ASN) summer conference by working with the ASN to put forward a manifesto to the Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA) on architectural education and health issues. This included a list of recommendations to challenge the culture of all-nighters and to promote architectural studies being balanced between life and play. Recognition of the energy within BIAAS came when they were awarded the 'Excellence Award' for Academic Society of the Year.

Adding to our ever growing studio culture, each year we have several lecture series. Over lunch you find students and staff taking their sandwiches into the gallery space to hear the tutors present their research and practice work. BIAAS run their own evening lecture series, focusing on varying issues. An example of this was the theme 'Women in Architecture' that included talks from architects such as Alison Brooks (founder of ABA) and Julia Dwyer (co-founder of Matrix). Our international lecture series invites architects and designers to talk to us about the 'non-finito' or work in progress and has the likes of Perry Kulper, Mark West, NaJa & deOstos and Magma Architecture come and talk to us. One of the highlights was the BIAAS presents lecture by Mark Kermode on 'The Auteur: Film Director and Architect'.

Across both our Part 1 and Part 2 courses our focus is on research-led teaching in all of our subject areas including technology and professional practice. The vertical studio system has allowed this to evolve and by asking both practitioners and academics to use their own expertise and interests to instigate briefs we are able to offer a greater variety and diversity of content and methodology within the School. Pluralism makes for a lively debate in the School. We have found that friendly competition amongst staff and studios gives students the space to start developing their own positions within the world of architecture. This is true at all levels of learning, but the expectation is that at undergraduate a student will learn to synthesise their own thinking and learning, whilst at postgraduate the student will have the capability to understand how their thinking fits in the wider world.

'Enquiry' is a word that is common across design disciplines and runs alongside 'curiosity'. Research forms not only the basis to teaching, but in how we ask students to process design, where feedback is a way of forming a loop of knowledge and where learning is fed back in and makes for ever richer ways of considering the world around us. The strength of the school lies in the implementation of brave and experimental design methodologies that use drawing and making to develop an investigation. Work ranges from careful hand drawings to hyper-real computer images and from large 1:20 spatial models to unusual material prototypes. We ask students to explore and test their ideas through this process, creating and sharing new possibilities rather than replicating existing ones.

Whilst encouraging students to take ownership of their work and ideas, we emphasise that architects always work as part of a diverse group of people. As such, the students need to grow their ideas through collective and interactive thinking. Within the programme you will see many signs of

group work in design studios (master planning, site models, peer-to-peer reviews), but also in the technology (1:1 group builds, shared report writing) and humanities (collective books of essays). At Part 3 the students engage with each other in role-play to understand the nuances of relationships and responsibilities in professional practice. This ability to work together successfully as well as independently is important within the school and to the profession.

Socially engaged forms of education and practice can be found in many aspects of the learning and teaching. These are strengthened through our Projects Office that supports both research and learning and teaching 'live projects', whether it be live builds or live community participation and project development. This includes the live project "classrooms" delivered with academic partners in the US, Sweden, Ireland, South Africa, Russia and Korea.

Our confidence in encouraging difference, allows us to form successful inter-disciplinary teaching so that architectural design can bind together varied approaches and knowledge. A key feature of all our courses, as noted by our external examiners, is our successful interplay between core subject areas - design, technology, architectural humanities and professional practice. Each contextualises and is contextualised by the other. Modules are directly related to design studio yet this is configured so they are not dominated by it and it's needs. This allows them to consolidate and reflectively critique different forms of architectural learning and also to situate an understanding of the requirements of each subject within an architectural whole.

This designerly thinking lies at the core of our School. The conscience of an architect and the consequence of designing 'stuff' or 'things' is central to us. We ask our students to be inquisitive of their surroundings and the people that inhabit them. We want them to consider what exists, why it exists and where it exists. This is true for both the current context and any future context and can be seen in the design studio briefs that spend time working within politically contentious urban, suburban and rural developments in Brighton and its surrounding region, developing alternative proposals to what is currently being suggested.

Architectural proposition is nearly always transformative and the value of architectural education is that projects are usually set in real-world situations. We encourage briefs to be taught in-situ to have a direct relationship to the context of a project. By setting projects locally it enables students to repeatedly visit their sites and gain an ongoing and deeper understanding of place. Previous years have seen design studios working alongside architectural practices on complex regeneration projects that our debated throughout the year on site, with the local community. For example, a live project working alongside Studio Gill's practice project with Carnival del Pueblo around Elephant and Castle included constructing 1:1 installations for the South London Latin American festival, one of Dezeen's top 10 picks for the London Festival of Architecture.

Field trips and short residencies compel the students to be implicated in their work. Studios often decamp their students to their project sites to test in-situ architectural pieces and develop thesis propositions. By having to take responsibility for the consequences of their design proposal our students are taught to take on a level of autonomy within the teaching framework, and allows the generation of many personal lines of enquiry. The student develops skills beyond the traditional role of an architect. They learn to act as protagonist and entrepreneur, environmentalist and community worker. We want our students to understand that they are part of a wider culture of place making and material development. It is their designs that will influence society and impact on our environment. It is they that will make the future.

Finally, we return to 'place'. The city of Brighton & Hove is uniquely placed in the UK, with a proximity to London, France and the surrounding South Downs National Park. As a consequence, we are constantly developing responses not only to our urban surroundings, but our coastline and surrounding countryside. Having Sussex as our backdrop offers so much potential for students and staff to follow lines of research that engage with the relationship between historic, contemporary and future scenarios of city and town, country and coast.

11 Commendations

11.1 The Board commends the sense of community between students and all levels of the staff team within the School. Furthermore, the appointment of the Student Support and Guidance Tutor (SSGT) which provides pastoral support to students and engages with their personal development is considered to be best practice.

11.2 The Board commends the innovative, exciting and engaging approach to Professional Studies throughout the School including the structure of the Part 3 examination paper format and the robust assessment processes

11.3 The Board commends the attitude of the School towards the broader components of architectural education including Humanities, Technology, Professional Studies, and the opportunities presented by the Options Projects.

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 processes. 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's attitude to the "taught subjects" sharing an equal status is commendable. However, on occasions students are not applying the

6

information received from lectures and seminars into their design proposals, particularly at M.Arch level where more freedom is afforded to students. The Board advises that minimum / core requirements are consistently put in place in project briefs to ensure that students do not avoid key areas of criteria such as cost, sustainability, and production information. In addition to this, despite the research-led teaching agenda, an appropriate balance should be found between the research aspects of a project and the design resolution.

13.2   The Board was impressed with the level of ambition, trajectory, energy, and variety of the BA programme, and the cohesiveness of the teaching and support team. To aid further development the School is advised to address the ability of students to evidence the integration of criteria within their design proposals, and in particular the following:

GC1 ability to create architectural designs that satisfy both aesthetic and technical requirements

13.3   The Board recognises that the M.Arch is in a state of evolution but strongly advises the School to develop a very clear identity for the programme and its studios, and enhancing the development between M.Arch 1 and M.Arch 2. To aid this, the School is advised to address the ability of students to evidence the integration of criteria within their design proposals, and in particular the following:

GC1 ability to create architectural designs that satisfy both aesthetic and technical requirements

GC5.2 the impact of buildings on the environment, and the precepts of sustainable design

GC8.3 the physical properties and characteristics of building materials, components and systems, and the environmental impact of specification choices

GC10.1 critically examine the financial factors implied in varying building types, constructional systems, and specification choices, and the impact of these on architectural design

13.4   Whilst the students make use of various representational techniques as part of the iterative design process there is a noticeable absence of final representations of the design proposals in their context and of the internal spatial experience. The board encourages the School to extend the use of large scale model making at both the building and site context scales, quality computer CGIs and other forms of media, throughout the process from conceptual development to the representation of the building in its entirety.

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   Whilst the Board was encouraged by the ambitions of the new Vice Chancellor and the opportunity for the new Head of School to grow the School (particularly at Part 2), the Board was concerned that the current studio space allocation and support facilities such as workshops are already stretched (including limited opening hours) and that growth in student numbers would compromise the student experience and School operation. There is already a sense of "having to make do" and with a "culture of making", this agenda is potentially being compromised by the limited physical resources.

14.2   The School's studio system is well established and the undergraduate vertical studio system brings a number of pedagogical benefits such as the peer review system. The Board advises that this is extended to the MArch programme in order to foster a stronger connection between the BA and MArch courses.

14.3   Whilst the day-to-day operations of the studios are diverse, the Board suggests that the School debate the merits (or not) of clearer visual identities for the range of studios at both BA and MArch level.

14.4   Brighton enjoys a unique physical, social and political position in the UK in terms of its edge condition and its political green agenda and credentials. The sense of the city could be more evident in the work, and whilst the School has world-class research in sustainable design there are a number of student projects that do not engage with both the wider and specific issues of this. Attention to 13.1 above will help to address this missed opportunity, and in particular GC5.2.

14.5   With reference to 11.1 above, the School is encouraged to utilise the stable base of its community and the newly formed student society to challenge students to be more pro-active, push the boundaries of critical thinking, embrace the edges of contemporary architectural discourse and design, and generally take more risks.

14.6   The School's approach to External Examiners looking at both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is interesting and brings a number of benefits but the Board advises the School and University to reconsider the format of the External Examiner reports so that the BA and M.Arch courses are more specifically referred to within these reports to aid future response by the course teams. Furthermore, whilst the University of Brighton only requires a 10% sample to be seen, the Board encourages the School to increase the sample to allow the Examiners to see a greater representation of the work across all of the design studios.

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 BA (Hons) Architecture 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.

Please refer to action points 13.2, 13.3 and advice 14.4. The Board made no further comments.

17 **Other information**

17.1 **Student numbers**
Part 1: 300
Part 2: 70
Part 3: 25

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.**

- Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the Vice Chancellor
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff