
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA full visiting board to
University of Dundee**

Date of visiting board: 18/19 May 2017

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 20 September 2017

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- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 University of Dundee
 Matthew Building
 13 Perth Road
 Dundee
 DD1 4HT
- 2** **Head of Architecture Group**
 Head of Architecture and Urban Planning Helen O'Connor
 L+T Neil Verow
- 3** **Course/s offered for validation**
 BA Architecture, Part One
 M.Arch, Part Two
 Masters in Architecture with Urban Planning, Proposed Part 2
- 4** **Course leader(s)**
 Part 1 Cameron Wilson
 Part 2 Graeme Hutton
 part 2 Helen O'Connor
- 5** **Awarding body**
 University of Dundee
- 6** **The visiting board**
 Martin Pearce academic / chair
 Jeremy Diaper practitioner / vice chair
 Andrew Wilson academic
 Jonathan Bone practitioner
 Jenny Thomas co-professional
 Scott Turpie 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.
- 8** **Proposals of the visiting board**
 At its meeting on the 20 September 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:
- BA Architecture, Part One**
M.Arch, Part Two
Masters in Architecture with Urban Planning, Part 2
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in: 2022

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

Architecture at the University of Dundee explores the relations between our continually evolving cities, their regions, and the people that inhabit them. We teach a form of design practice that confronts contemporary global challenges, critiques contemporary approaches and implements them within real contexts. Since 2012, staff and structural changes have led to a new multi-disciplinarity and a reaffirmation of our strengths in thinking through making and transformation through design.

Studio practice is fully integrated with technology and humanities in all 5 years; lecture courses are taught in parallel with studio, enabling students to extend and test their knowledge through design practice and see practice as a form of critical enquiry. Threaded through this matrix from year 1 design exercises to year 5 design research units are key themes in humanities, technology & environment, and urbanism; these themes re-emerge as specialist research options in final year. Although drawing boards have largely been replaced by laptops and wireless networks it is the physical spaces and surfaces which enable students to engage with material experiments and to share that learning with their peers.

We capitalize on the collaborative potential of our studio space, to make distinctive 'thinking through making' *design research* exercises a characteristic of our course and a structured element of the curriculum. This culminates in an individual design research unit (DRU) project in year 4, which acts as a bridge into the year 5 thematic studios. Students in year 5 select one of a number of 'studios' (the themes of which are defined by staff research interests) within which to develop and position their individual thesis project. The 5th year studios vary in response to student numbers, but cover the range of areas of architectural endeavour from intellectual culture to zero carbon networks, and a range of scales. Each unit has links to other disciplines, industry and professionals out-with the University appropriate to their focus and forms of inquiry.

Architecture and Urban Planning

Architecture at Dundee is newly aligned with Urban Planning which will enable us to benefit from specialist knowledge and to frame the design of the built environment within a more holistic approach to context. The integration with Urban Planning has facilitated a unique hybrid part 2 qualification (MArch with Urban Planning) which has been prescribed by ARB and accredited by RTPI, building skills and expertise, widening career prospects and ultimately enriching both professions.

Beyond Arch + UP

Architecture and Urban Planning sits within the newly formed School of Social Sciences, giving us the potential to draw upon the skills and expertise of other school disciplines – Politics, Psychology, Law, Business, Geography, and Environmental Science - to further develop our teaching and research. *Social Sciences* is in the process of building a school-wide research environment that is bigger and better resourced than that which any single discipline can provide, this has already benefited staff and PhD research.

We expect that this network will inform coursework (particularly at 4th and 5th year), and our *Architecture and Urban Planning* research/practice environment. It is our intention to build on the model developed for the *MArch with Urban Planning* to create new specialist study options at year 5, and to enrich our undergraduate course. Beyond Social Sciences we continue to build on our strong historic links with the School of Engineering, developing a final year thematic studio for September 2017 which will enable direct collaboration between MEng and MArch students to develop complex design projects which explore this interface.

While being part of an academic school which places the study of the environment and society at the centre of its concerns, Architecture and Urban Planning is located within a college of art and design with a strong design research culture. This allows us to share specialist resources such as our library, exhibition space, workshops, and new enlarged shared digital making facilities, but more importantly, it enables our students to fully participate in a vibrant creative environment and positions the discipline at the boundary between creative and more traditional academic subjects. We aspire to the Bauhaus approach and ethic of exploration and transformation through design in all spatial media.

The Wider Context

Our location in the Tay River puts us in one of the most spectacular natural settings in urban Scotland, in a building whose stair towers and other 'geologic' features celebrate this setting. This context is also recognized by the river front location of the new V&A Dundee, which – when it opens in 2018 – will transform the cultural landscape of the region. Our location is a 'live lab' which frames the study of diverse urban and rural environments but allows us to relate and translate these issues to the broader context. We continue to value our strong engagement with practitioners, local government and community bodies through live projects, lectures, seminars and critique, and grounding all our projects (even those which might appear highly

abstract) in an understanding of real places and real people. Sustainable development is highly dependent on a wide network of professions. We continuously engage with these groups, the city/region and wider community to ensure that students understand their position in this network, their role and responsibilities. With the construction of the V&A museum, the city's designation as UNESCO city of design, and the developing bid for European Capital of Culture, the city of Dundee is ambitious to position itself as a hub of innovation and creativity, an emerging identity of which the university and the school is part.

We recognize that the architectural profession and the context within which it operates is in flux. The way the profession is structured, the role of the architect, his/her responsibilities their clients, to wider society, and to the planet - even the methods that are employed in moving from initial ideas, to the (metaphorical) drawing board, to site and – ultimately - use, have fundamentally altered and continue to do so. We aim to equip graduates with the skills and confidence to meet the challenges of future society and the contemporary workplace, as innovative, effective and responsible individuals within an increasingly complex and diverse profession.

11 **Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 Experiencing architecture: The fieldtrips linked to design studies occurring in each year are a strength of the School and make a valuable contribution to the student experience linked to their design projects.
- 11.2 Studio culture: The Matthew building along with the library, workshop and Make Lab are a clear strength in the resources of the School and along with the excellent studio facilities help to promote a strong creative culture of studio based learning.
- 11.3 Specialism: The development of the M Arch with Urban Planning has proved successful in its first year and the student experience, standard of work and tangible future benefits to the graduating students is evident. The potential development of further cross-disciplinary courses seeks to build on this strength through specialism allied with the Part 2 qualification. In the context of this success, the Board felt that it might now be timely to reappraise the structure of the Part 2 course.
- 11.4 Studio teaching: The Board felt that the staff were exceptionally committed to their work in supporting the students in their studies. There is a feeling of collegiate enterprise between the staff and students. However, with increasing numbers of overseas students entering the 4th year of the course the University will need to ensure that it provides enough staff and resources to continue to support this teaching excellence.

12 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. Failure by the University to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 12.1 Part 2, recording the design process: The recording of design process was satisfactory in the Part 1 course. The portfolios at Part 2 demonstrated evident strength in respect of research and brief development. However, there was little evidence at Part 2 of the iterative design process that demonstrated the testing and critical appraisal and development of the work that led from the research and brief development through to the final proposals. GA 2.2

13. 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.

- 13.1 Transparency of assessment: The Board supports the integrated approach to the final design projects at Part 1 and 2. The School might consider making an elemental breakdown of the units/modules more transparent to the students, indicating how these are applied to the marking process.
- 13.2 Feedback: Students expressed concern that feedback and interim marks that enable them to benchmark their progress could be more consistent across the units/modules. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the holistic nature of integrated projects some form of elemental breakdown of their progress would benefit students in their ability to gauge performance and allocate their time.
- 13.3 Communication: The operation of the Blackboard virtual learning environment and the central scheduling and timetabling could be improved to be both more consistent and reliable.
- 13.4 Engaging with the profession: The extracurricular activities of the student body might be further supported by the University encouraging wider engagement with the local architectural/design community to promote a greater range of outside inputs that will enrich the design discourse of the School. Through such means the School might strengthen its connection with architectural practice and the profession. With Dundee's important place as UNESCO City of Design and the V+A Museum of Design Dundee, these activities along with engagement in the broader cultural discourse could enrich the educational experience and external profile of the School. This important potential for connecting the University to the broader city, regional and national interests, might serve to enhance the experience for new overseas students and might require support from the Institution, in addition to the good will of potential contributors.
- 13.5 Supporting the technical agenda: The students benefitted from the input of specialist consultants and design workshop exercises directed at the technological development of their projects. This pedagogical

method seemed to the Board an important mechanism in ensuring the success of the integrated project structure. Continuing to engage part-time teaching inputs from specialist is an important part of the model of architectural education practiced in the School. In respect of technology the Board noted that there might be more evidence in the folio of the GC8 and GC9 criteria where the demonstration of the testing of alternative technological approaches might be more fully evidence particularly at the Part 2 Level.

- 13.6 Part 2: M Arch cohesion: The course might consider section 1.1 of the validation guidelines about the continued differentiation of the Part 1 and 2 and the idea of sustained study.

In its current format of a criteria compliance project in year 4 followed by a research led thesis project in year 5 it may be that this presents a disjointed experience. The emphasis on research, whilst strong, can sometimes impede design and this on occasions seemed the case in year 5 units.

The encouragement of academic risk and experimentation intended within Year 5 may be more effective if more structured through Year 4 and Year 5 as a whole.

The emergence of the MArch with Urban Planning and the intention to deliver M Arch with Engineering indicates that the School is looking to broaden the offer of specialist units in Part 2 and this is seen as a positive step towards strengthening the outward facing offer of the Part 2 course and it's alignment to key strengths emerging within the School.

- 13.7 Diversity of design project: The School might consider developing the strategy in year 4 and 5 for ensuring diversity of complexity and type in choice of building across the period of study.
- 13.8 M Arch with Urban Planning : The Board felt the structure of the course and focus of study was very strong. The accompanying planning led modules might be further aligned to the subject of the design exercise to concentrate the learning around the central focus of the project.
- 13.9 Manageability of workload. The students felt that the workload whilst challenging was nevertheless manageable. However some felt that staff might consider the expectations of units of study, regarding the time pressures on students.

Additional comments

Staff appointments. There is clearly a concern in the School that new and replacement appointments require important decisions to be made about research active academic staff and architectural teachers with interest in the practice of architecture and connection to the profession. The Board welcomed the Principal's view the University is looking to develop criteria for promotion and appointment that better reflect the needs to support professional courses, including part-time staff and

those whose concern bridges academia and practice to extend beyond the sole merits of their research ability.

Integrated learning: There are clear strengths in the design exploration and Part 1 course. The design programmes in the early years are innovative and creative as for example integrating structural engineering through the cantilever exercise, or using moulded space.

Equally the teaching of history and theory employs some innovative assessment methods, with the measured drawing in year 1 or the case study/dissertation in year 3. In this way there is a seamless learning experience which sweeps the student up in a virtuous cycle of design learning where each aspect of the RIBA criteria is orchestrated and sequenced to make a holistic learning experience of relevance. This might be used as a model in thinking about the development of the Part 2 course.

14 Delivery of academic position

The following key points were noted: The school were asked to rephrase to more accurately capture the strengths of the School. In particular, the School voiced the ideas that emanate from Sir Patrick Geddes concerning the local, regional and global.

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.

Graduate Attributes for Parts 1 and 2

Please see action point 12.1.

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.

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.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

Part 1	184
Part 2	102
(of which 7 were enrolled on the MArch with Urban Planning)	
Year out	33

17.2 Documentation provided

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

***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**