

# **Report of the RIBA exploratory board to the University of Hertfordshire**

**Date of visiting board:** 27 and 28 September 2019  
**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee:** 22 January 2020

**1 Details of institution hosting course**

Architecture and Interior Architecture and Design  
School of Creative Arts  
University of Hertfordshire  
Hatfield AL10 9AB UK

**2 Head of Art and Design**

Dr Silvio Carta

**Programme Leader**

Ilona Hay

**3 Course/s offered for candidate course status**

BA (Hons) Architecture  
BA (Hons) Architecture (Sandwich)  
BA (Hons) Architecture with Year Abroad

**4 Awarding body**

The University of Hertfordshire

**5 The visiting board**

Professor Karim Hadjri, Chair  
Dr Jenny Russell, Vice-Chair  
Peter Williams

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, validation manager – in attendance

**6 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).

**7 Recommendation of the Exploratory Board**

The Board was invited by the University of Hertfordshire to consider its BA (Hons) Architecture programme for the award of candidate course status for Part 1. The designation ‘candidate course for recognition’ implies that the following programme is considered to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated.

The designation ‘Candidate Course for Validation’ implies that the course has been judged to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to recognition, which can only be granted once the standard of work produced by graduating students has been assessed and found satisfactory.

On 22 January 2020 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed candidate course status for Part 1 for the following:

BA (Hons) Architecture  
BA (Hons) Architecture (Sandwich)

## BA (Hons) Architecture with Year Abroad

A full visiting board to consider the programme for initial validation (full RIBA validation) of Part 1 will only take place following the completion of the 2019/2020 year 3 (level 6) cohort.

This will allow the Department time to consider and implement the action points recommended by the Exploratory Board.

### 8 **Standard requirements for validation**

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

### 9 **Academic position statement (Statement written by the school)**

#### ***Our Vision***

*The BA (Hons) Architecture programme offers a grounded and forward-facing design education that prepares graduates for contemporary architectural practice within a rapidly changing urban context. The programme focuses on the unique edge territory in which Hatfield is based, examining spatial and architectural conditions of the urban fringe, suburbia and rapid urban growth — issues that have relevance far beyond this local context. The programme interrogates interventions at the regional scale with a global perspective, examining and imagining new towns, garden cities, smart and digital cities, and considering the social, political, environmental and cultural impact of such approaches. Located between the urban and the rural, the programme aims to build a critical knowledge of the spatial conditions that characterise the Hertfordshire - North London continuum, and to improve the quality of living and working in these local communities.*

#### ***Preparing for Practice***

*The University of Hertfordshire aspires to be internationally renowned as the UK's leading business-facing university, creating an ethos of enterprise and innovation that this course taps into. Our academic offer provides students with knowledge of the architectural profession's regulations and procedures involved in translating design concepts into buildings in the UK. In addition, we provide opportunities to consider the complexities surrounding the mechanics of the global architectural industry. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the subject, we equip our graduates with the soft skills of*

*collaboration and coordination required for the rapidly changing architectural industry — enabling them to work with and across other disciplines and communities. The course provides an in-depth understanding of how to create architectural designs that satisfy both aesthetic and technical requirements in a grounded and practical way that prepares students for the profession. We align our modules and briefs closely with local businesses, organisations and communities, so that our students gain real-world experience on live projects — fostering relationships and readying our graduates for the world of work.*

### **Engaging with Local Communities**

*The school offers students the opportunity to engage with the local community and we are committed to addressing issues which are important for the local area. In particular, students are involved in studying public space as an interface between both public and personal needs, working on projects including squares, lobbies, libraries, shopping centres and streetscapes. Both design modules and contextual studies modules draw on examples within Hertfordshire, including the Garden Cities, New Towns and other settlement forms. Through these means, students link theory to the practice within the context of a specific community.*

*Our Architecture award has been developed in response to a series of industry and societal demands. The first is future infrastructure development and place making by the UK Government in the development of its system of cities and primary urban areas (PUAs) (Clark & Clark 2014) in relation to global markets including High Speed Two (Hs2) and the creation of new Garden Cities such as Ebbsfleet, Kent (Egan 2004). The second is the growing demand for expertise in sustainable design and planning (Arup 2014). In accordance to The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), announced in March 2012, future residential development is firmly growth oriented: 'Development means growth. We must accommodate the new ways by which we will earn our living in a competitive world. We must house a rising population, which is living longer and wants to make new choices' (NPPF 2012 p ii). This growth area and development can be evidenced in the recent Wolfson Economics prize for Garden Cities and regional planning (2014). Recent University of Hertfordshire research reinforces these trajectories very strongly (Parham & Hulme 2014). Moreover, the new award responds to North Hertfordshire's draft plan to include 12, 100 homes over the period to 2031 as part of the NPPF.*

*We work closely with the Hertfordshire Architects Association (HAA) who currently runs its annual lecture at UH, awards an annual student prize and contributes to crits, teaching and curriculum development, and with RIBA EAST, who annually award the best projects of our final year students.*

*Our unique geographical location on the periphery of London with both convenient access to the city centre and simultaneously to smaller metropolitan areas and the countryside, allows us to engage our students in projects of different scales that offer both design-retrofit and new-build architecture. We place our students in a unique position to understand, guide and explore the changing landscape as it evolves from the utopian*

*ideal of the Garden Cities of the early twentieth century and the post-war New Towns towards our future cities.*

**A New Generation of Architects and Designers**

*The next generations of architects will need to deal with a complex social and technological scenario, where the essence of architecture cannot be simply reduced to solving functional or market-driven problems at the expense of design and management of the city.*

*This is why the educational model which we use to train our future students has been carefully designed. It is innovative and informed in fields such as economics, technology, data production and analysis, and social intervention, and it uses techniques including real community based live projects, team working, exploring making and technology, and experimenting with site context. It is crucial that our future architects will incubate and grow within a solid and research-intensive environment, with critical and technological awareness, and a strong connection with industry.*

*This is why our BA (Hons) Architecture award is intended to equip graduates with the knowledge and skills to work within the most innovative architectural practices, pushing the boundaries of architectural design. The architecture degree is for students who are both creative and analytical and who will challenge the technical and regulatory frameworks that exist within the discipline.*

**10 Commendations**

- 10.1 The Board commends the quality and breadth of the workshop facilities available to architecture.
- 10.2 The Board commends the diversity of the student body.

**11 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.

- 11.1 As the RIBA requires that “Schools will provide courses where at least 50% of all assessed work at part 1 and at part 2 is undertaken as design studio projects”, Design Skills 1 and 2 must demonstrate more explicit evidence of how they, along with the Design Studios, meet this requirement.
- 11.2 In line of the external examiner’s comments regarding technology (GC9), the Board recommends that the School improve the application and integration within the design portfolio.
- 11.3 In line with the external examiner’s comments regarding the delivery of management, practice and law content (GC10 and GC11) the Board recommends that the School improve its application to design work.

- 11.4 The School must conduct a programme review involving all staff (full-time, part-time and fractional) in order to:
- Clarify and articulate the over-arching identity of the course.
  - Crystallise the academic journey (progression) of a student from Year 1 to Year 3.
  - Review the scale of the projects to ensure that there is emphasis on architecture as opposed to urbanism. In particular, the scale and level of complexity of projects should be appropriate to the year level of the students.
  - Review the shared content with BA (Hons) Interior Architecture so that the distinctiveness of each programme is preserved.
  - Produce clearer mapping of the criteria in line with the changes above.
- 11.5 The Board recognised the strength of the School’s ambition to engage with the ‘edge’ condition reflecting the School’s regional context; however, this is not yet reflected in the design outcomes of the studio. The Board recommends that this is reconsidered.
- 11.6 The Board strongly recommends that the School appoint a dedicated external examiner for the BA (Hons) Architecture course and, as student numbers grow, the appointment of further external examiners is considered.
- 11.7 The School is reminded that a future full visiting board will expect to see complete academic portfolios, as required by the Procedures for Validation (section 4.7, 2011 Procedures, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revision May 2014). These must include process work such as sketchbooks, process models and other media.
- 11.8. The Board strongly recommends that the studio spatial provision and access arrangements are improved in order to foster a studio culture.
- 12. 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.
- 12.1 The Board advises that the full-time and fractional to part-time staffing ratio is improved, in the interest of ensuring consistency of academic input. This should be regularly reviewed to remain commensurate with growing student numbers.
- 12.2 The Board advises that less reliance is placed on Revit and 3D CAD modelling in the exploration of architectural space and design development. The Board would welcome greater use of diverse representational media.
- 13 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 BA (Hons) Architecture programme had the potential to meet the Part 1 graduate attributes, if developed as anticipated.

**14 Review of work against criteria / potential to meet criteria etc**

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 confirmed that the BA (Hons) Architecture programme had the potential to meet the RIBA validation criteria, if developed as anticipated. Please see Action Point 11.2 regarding GC9 and Action Point 11.3 regarding GC10 and GC11.

**15. Other information**

**15.1 Student numbers**

BA (Hons) Architecture: 168

**15.2 Documentation provided**

The School provided all advance documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation. Please see Action Point 11.7 regarding the requirement to present full academic portfolios at the full visiting board.

**16. Notes of meetings**

**Copies of the minutes taken from the following meetings 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 the Vice-Chancellor
- Meeting with the Head of Art and Design
- Meeting with Students
- Meeting with Staff