
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to Kingston University**

Date of visiting board: 22/23 June 2017

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 9 February 2018

1 Details of institution hosting course/s

Kingston University,
Knights Park Campus
Grange Road
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey KT1 2QJ

2 Head of School of Art and Architecture

Dr Sarah Bennett

Head of Department of Architecture and Landscape

Eleanor Suess

3 Courses offered for validation

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture MArch Part 2
Professional Practice Architecture (ARB/RIBA Part 3 exemption) PgDip

4 Course leaders

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1 – Timothy Smith
MArch Architecture, Part 2 – Cathy Hawley
PG Dip Professional Practice in Architecture, Part 3 – Judi Farren Bradley

5 Awarding body

Kingston University

6 The visiting board

Professor Lorraine Farrelly – chair
Professor Norman Wienand – vice chair
Andrew Usher
Virginia Rammou
Martin Feakes – co-professional member
Albena Atanassova – student/graduate member
Brendan Tracey - regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – RIBA validation manager was in attendance.

Justin Lunn from the University of Leeds attended as an observer.

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 9 February 2018 the RIBA that the following courses and qualifications be unconditionally revalidated:

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture MArch Part 2
Professional Practice Architecture (ARB/RIBA Part 3 exemption)
PgDip

The next full 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 (written by the School)

The Department of Architecture and Landscape at Kingston has established a clear position within the UK context of architecture education. Our concern with continuity in architectural culture, and in making work which is sensitive to situation and context, places us in a notional community of European schools in places as diverse as Ireland, Switzerland, Scandinavia and Iberia. The architectural practitioner from Kingston is a generalist capable of thinking and making with the technical and critical skills required to be both nimble and empowered to act in today's diverse architectural culture.

Our situation as part of the School of Art and Architecture is key to our identity. The large workshops and the ethos of thinking through making speak of the inherent dynamic of how we see architectural knowledge generated in the productive tension between tectonics and representation. This is a fundamental and essential part of how the department seeks to enable its students; firstly through a direct and immediate connection with how things are made and the nature of the spaces that result; and secondly with how it is represented critically (through images, text, or other means of exploration). These are equally valued as a way of interrogating, contextualising and developing a critical position, one that is unique in the UK context. The strengths of this are evidenced by our presence at the highest level in events such as the RIBA president's medals (particularly at undergraduate), in the DOMUS list of top architecture schools in Europe and by signature projects such as this year's collaboration with the Barbican and Professor Fujimori.

We value the views and voices of our students, who come from a diverse range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds which is rare in Architecture. We increasingly foster the value of the perspectives these students bring to the discipline. The structuring of the course around tectonics and representation is a fundamentally and enabling one – avoiding the more esoteric theoretical or technical approaches espoused elsewhere, while still allowing space for these to be explored if a student's interest takes them there. This enabling ethos arises from

how we see developments in the professional context our graduates arrive into.

Architecture no longer presents clearly established orthodoxies in terms of language or style, nor is it a site for self-expression unhindered by civic responsibility. To thrive practitioners must establish their own critical position, but be nimble in how this might be deployed and developed, as part of today's highly evolved and complex design teams. Today the constraints on the architect, arising from the complexity of the legislative environment, building technologies, standards and consequently cost, are many, and must be engaged with in the first instance to produce work that has value. Above all these, the need to be imaginative in making sure each proposal is socially and environmentally sustainable is key. These constraints are not a diminishment of the architect, rather they make the skill of those negotiating these and producing work that speaks beyond its practical value all the more important. These constraints are what shape the built environment today, just as others have in the past.

We value how this abrasion between ideal and real allows the built environment to act as a repository of information about our evolving society. The landscapes and cities we live in are both archives and laboratories, with new work taking its place beside the old. With our students we study this landscape, (both domestically and internationally) as a source of provocation and inspiration, to find in the work of others, observations that can be of use in making work today. Here too we see this approach as being fundamentally an enabling one for our students – removing the apparent pressure to seek originality above all else, but to be comfortable in using lessons gained from others. This is why so many of our studios and units weave precedent studies through field trips and desk study through the design work. In the years to come we will be finding ways to contextualise and make available this work so that it might be of value to the broader discipline of architecture.

In the past the school has set themes based on a common context for all the work in the school (UNESCO world heritage sites for example). Starting this year and running for the next 4 years we have taken the theme of 'Dwelling in the Periphery'. This will be run through studio work, research and symposia. This common purpose allows an engaged conversation across the department, and we are looking forward to a new teaching layout in 2018 which will allow for a far more fertile level of interaction between students and staff across the department.

We are explicit and open about this common agenda – that we are all learning and teaching at our various stages of development. For our students and graduates we are also aware of a heightened responsibility on how we might more fully equip them to negotiate the world of practice if they do not have easy access to the social contacts which make navigating the discipline possible. We see it as key that we enable our students in the fullest sense – by making the nature of practice more readily comprehensible through an inclusive curriculum and by providing a means by which they might understand how to

position themselves relative to it. We also see a value in how we might informally support our alumni once they have graduated. The department derives its strength from its ability to articulate the value of our approach in real world settings – in the actuality of the built work. We have recently recruited a new leader of the professional practice course, and established support networks for our alumni (including their inclusion in the school assembly) to help them in ongoing career development. We have also set up a partnership with RFACT and Drawing Matter to run a summer school aimed at secondary school students who might be interested in architecture but who might be unsure whether to apply, and a school podcast so that those who are part of the school’s broader community can retain contact.

Our staff are drawn from the full width of our discipline, and operate in an ethos which is collegiate and mutually supportive. We value this civil discourse which is not present in all architecture schools, but are also aware of the need to foster a more critical and diverse discourse of value to students and staff alike. The department submitted history, theory and practice based research to the last REF. It is a key goal to significantly grow our REF submission along with the establishment of an embedded culture of research that allows us to draw on the work of our practitioner academics, and in turn provide a supportive context for them to grow their critical thinking. With this in mind we are establishing a PhD by practice, to capture and contextualise the knowledge present in their practices, and to allow them deploy it with more acuity.

Fundamentally this is how we see our school, as a place where a critical conversation about architecture might be broader than the 5 years of formal education. What is interesting about the RIBA criteria is that they form a valuable ethical context broader than their application for accreditation alone – rather they speak about the value of the architect as widely read and rigorous. All involved in the department benefit by engaging critically with this situation – making explicit to our students that there are no ‘bolt-ons’ that are done as a procedure to demonstrate competence. Rather technical, legislative, cultural and other matters are all aspects of being an architect; inspiration can derive as much as contemplation of structural or fire constraints as from theory. It is this fusion of the aspirational and the practical which allows the built environment to act as both a laboratory and an archive, to act as a continuum of built thought. It is the thoughtful act of how we add to this continuum which forms the primary conversation of our school.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The range of physical outputs from the workshops and the ethos of “thinking through making” that is informing all years from first to fifth in terms of design, making and theoretical ideas underpinning studio and written work. This is evident in the end-of-year exhibition with an excellent display of high quality models using a range of media and techniques from stone carving to plaster-casting and woodworking.
- 11.2 The architecture practice-led teaching curriculum which has created a rich experience for students informed by a community of teachers from a broad range of design practices.

11.3 The Board commends the Part 3 course which is extremely rigorous and well-structured and the length and organisation of the course encourages students to investigate and understand issues of contemporary practice.

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 Studio spaces need careful managing to encourage and facilitate peer review and to ensure students feel they adequately accommodate their expectations around studio space as a place to collectively learn, discuss and critique their architectural ideas.

13.2 In support of the objective to maximise the engagement of practice-based teaching staff, the University should ensure that hourly-paid staff and those on smaller fractional contracts are adequately supported to engage with the formal professional development expected of teachers in higher education.

13.3 In support of the objective to maximise the engagement of practice-based teaching staff, the University should ensure that support structures are in place to safeguard the well-being and professional development of full-time pro rata teaching staff to allow staff to undertake duties additional to core teaching.

13.4 The Board had limited discussions with student groups and for future visits more evidence is needed about the student experience and how this impacts on both curricular developments and other aspects of their student life to fully inform the validation process.

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.

General

14.1 The Board advises that the administrative support required by course leaders across the Department is carefully considered. As there is such a dependence on part-time and pro-rata teachers the continuity of this administrative function is particularly important.

14.2 The Department should consider that the School alumni could provide continuity between parts 1, 2 and 3 of the architecture programme offering employability and other opportunities for students across the professional courses.

- 14.3 Where possible, the Department should continue to develop inter- and cross-disciplinary learning opportunities for students within the wider Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture.

Advice – MArch Part 2

- 14.4 The Department should continue to develop strategies to support interdisciplinary learning with consultants from a range of technical and environmental areas to support the design module.

- 14.5 The Board would encourage the School to continue developing the ambition, complexity and resolution of the final design project in the final year of the course. There needs to be a clear differentiation in the scale and complexity of this project from the Part 1 final design project.

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.

15.1 BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

15.2 MArch, Part 2

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.

15.3 PG Dip Professional Practice in Architecture, Part 3

The Board confirmed that all Part 3 professional criteria were met.

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.

- 16.1 The Board made no further comments.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1: 350

MArch, Part 2: 115

PG Dip Professional Practice in Architecture, Part 3: 43

17.2 Documentation provided

The School provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

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.

- 18.1 Budget holder and course leaders
- 18.2 Meeting with students
- 18.3 Meeting with the Vice-Chancellor
- 18.4 Meeting with external examiners and professional examiners
- 18.5 Meeting with staff