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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

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

School of Architecture

- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s**  
Liverpool School of Architecture  
University of Liverpool  
Leverhulme Building  
Abercromby Square  
Liverpool L69 7ZN
- 2 Head of School of Architecture**  
Professor Soumyen Bandyopadhyay
- 3 Courses offered for validation**  
Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Architecture (3 years, full-time) and  
Master of Architecture with Honours (2 years, full-time)
- 4 Programme Directors**  
BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1 - Alexander Dusterloh  
Master of Architecture MArch, Part 2 – Jack Dunne
- 5 Awarding body**  
The University of Liverpool
- 6 The visiting board**  
Professor Karim Hadjri – Chair  
Ben Cowd – Vice Chair  
Barbara Griffin  
Carol Norton  
Sheila Ryding  
  
**In attendance:**  
Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA validation manager  
  
Dr Martina Murphy, Ulster University, attended as an observer of the  
RIBA validation process.
- 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](http://www.architecture.com).
- 8 Proposals of the visiting board**  
On 14 June 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed  
unconditional revalidation of the:  
  
BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1  
Master of Architecture MArch, Part 2  
  
The next full visiting board will take place in 2023.
- 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

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- 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 Liverpool School of Architecture (LSA) is one of the UK's largest schools in terms of student numbers. It is also one of its oldest. Founded in 1895, it was the first to be granted full accreditation by the RIBA. Based within the School of the Arts, at a Russell Group university, we are an internationally recognised research centre, the highest placed department that submitted solely as a school of architecture in REF2014 and third overall in terms of research outputs. The LSA's strategic aim is to provide a robust and rigorous, yet flexible academic infrastructure that offers architectural education attuned to its heritage and critically responsive to the emerging demands of the fast-changing world of architecture and urbanism. Research-led teaching is a core feature of both the University as a whole and our department in particular. It encourages our agenda-setting and our approach to architectural design development, and it provides the fundamental knowledge necessary for its pursuit in a professional environment.*

*Embedded within its regional context, the LSA has many teaching and research links with the dynamic port city of Liverpool, a World Heritage Site and UNESCO Creative City, engaging with local government and cultural institutions such as the Museum of Liverpool, Tate Liverpool, Bluecoat Gallery, and the Foundation for Art and Technology (FACT), as well as the profession through RIBA North and the Liverpool Architectural Society. The city offers a laboratory for our students with global architectural and urban design challenges set in a vibrant local context and design briefs are therefore often set in the Merseyside region. However, regular use is also made of our diverse staff's knowledge to investigate problems elsewhere in the UK and abroad. We have a rich and mature relationship with our overseas partner institution, Xian Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU) in Suzhou, China, where Chinese students are based for at least their first two years. Subject to them meeting agreed pass standards they may then opt to study for a further two years in Liverpool joining our Home/EU/direct international intake cohort at the beginning of Year 2. The LSA has therefore developed a distinctive educational approach, resource base and infrastructure to deliver a large-scale, high-quality architecture programme with a significant international student base. We deliver teaching from our active research strengths in architectural/urban history, heritage, architectural design, the visual arts, environmental design and acoustics, thereby promoting the exploration of important contemporary issues such as community regeneration; institutional infrastructure; reflective practice; adaptive reuse of cultural landscapes; housing; and complex urban conditions in*

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*the design of cities. Our curriculum demonstrates a strong globally-aware commitment, focused on our students' interests and staff expertise. In our teaching we emphasise design methods and approaches that inspire imagination and creativity synthesised with real-world knowledge and skills, delivered with a professional approach. The LSA aims to provide an architectural education of the highest international standard based on experimentation, investigation, research and rigour. It offers a comprehensive foundation for the lifelong acquisition of skills and critical thinking that is attuned and flexibly responsive to the changing culture of architecture.*

*Studio culture is imperative at the LSA and recently procured substantial additional accommodation has provided a dedicated personal space for all students who wish to work in our buildings. This is supported by generous adjacent physical modelling and workshop facilities; photographic, IT and AV laboratories; and dedicated tutorial and review spaces. There has been significant continuing investment in technology-enhanced learning, including equipment and software, but also practices such as presentation methods, lecture streaming, and assessment. These resources are thanks to an excellent relationship with and support from the University based on a detailed action plan that aims to anticipate our needs and respond to them effectively with appropriate funding. There is an admirable staff-student ratio (1:12 or lower) in design studios across all our programmes and a rich mix of staff and student backgrounds commensurate with a large school. We positively encourage non-traditional entrants and strive to maintain an even gender balance. There is a pro-active relationship with an active student body (ASOC) and a broad outreach programme delivering lectures, exhibitions, workshops, film series, student accessible symposia and conferences.*

*The architecture programmes at the LSA are shaped by high quality, experienced, full-time professionally qualified staff with a strong commitment to teaching, and a large cohort of excellent part-time staff with direct 'real-world' practice experience. Flexible programme design delivers responsive, changing projects that complement and extend core learning whilst maintaining criteria fulfilling content. Course delivery benefits from teaching that takes place alongside a strong Masters/PhD programme with doctoral and postgraduate students contributing to teaching. Our professional programmes are the BA Hons Architecture (RIBA Part I, c.600 cohort) and the Master of Architecture (RIBA Part II, c.100 cohort). These programmes are complemented by a non-professional pathway at graduate level (K10D) and specialised taught postgraduate offerings (MA Architecture; MSc Sustainable Environmental Design; MSc Building Information Modelling, c.70 cohort), as well as the postgraduate research degrees (M.Phil/PhD c.55 cohort). In the BA Hons Architecture, group and individual teaching focuses on attaining personal confidence and a research-led design approach to take advantage of both academic and professional practice experience. Studio and lecture course themes draw on contemporary issues, practice-led design processes, live projects, industry and local government clients, and architectural competitions. Year 1 Liverpool-based students are taught their foundation year as a single group. When our XJTLU intake arrives at*

*the beginning of Year 2, all students may then choose which studio (three or four depending on cohort size) they wish to join, each with its own dedicated staff, theme and projects, though all working to the same unified module description. In the M.Arch, there is an increased emphasis on student choice in response to individual interests and personal future professional career development. Students occupy small studio 'offices' and team projects provide a simulation of practice where complex problems can be tackled in a 'laboratory of the profession'. There is strong live client and professional practice input, a focus on personal research leading to self-selected dissertation and design thesis topics, often engaging with current real-world issues.*

*The LSA is characterised by its amazing, dedicated student body, which constantly surprises and challenges staff with their capacity for hard work and enthusiasm for architecture. To respond to their ambition, with the support and encouragement of the University, there has been a number of key initiatives instigated in the last four years including:*

- *a major staff recruitment drive in design research, architectural science/technology, humanities and professional practice, which directly supports research-led undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum development and delivery;*
- *the launch of the London pathway with a permanent location, staffing, dedicated learning environment, library access, and physical and digital workshop facilities, providing students wider educational choice and access to the profession;*
- *a much-enlarged student exchange programme embracing Europe, Australasia and the USA, also with the opportunity to spend up to a year at XJTLU in China;*
- *an international LSA-led competition to identify an accomplished architect for a large, high-quality extension to the original Leverhulme Building commencing in 2019, with a shortlist informed by student and staff choice;*
- *structured professional mentoring and practice visits to enhance employability.*

## **11. Commendations**

- 11.1 The Board commends the School of Architecture for its development of an effective feedback app and the potential this offers.
- 11.2 The Board commends the University for the investment in studio space, and the recruitment of academic and technical staff.
- 11.3 The Board commends the School of Architecture for its flexible and adaptable approach to managing an extremely large cohort, particularly at Year 2 (BA).

## **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 at the mid-term review. 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 of Architecture should ensure that criteria are clearly evidenced through delivery and assessment; in particular: GC2.3, GC3.3, GC8, GC9, GC10.1 and GC10.2.
- 13.2 The School of Architecture should ensure that, for future validation boards, the work is presented in complete academic portfolios as required by the RIBA Procedures for Validation 2011; second revision May 2014, section 4.7. This should include evidence and articulation of concept development and design process (Visiting Board report 2014).
- 13.3 At BA level there should be more evidence of exploration, testing and critical analysis of ideas in environment and technology.
- 13.4 The School of Architecture should exercise caution with generous marking at BA and MArch.
- 13.5 The School of Architecture should review external examiners' working methods to increase the level of direct access to individual BA3 students and complete portfolios of their work.

**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 The School of Architecture should increase opportunities for peer-to-peer learning between the BA and MArch including the provision of social space.
- 14.2 The School of Architecture should seize the opportunities offered by its position in the School of the Arts, the significant investment in staff and resources, the links with China, and the London pathway to raise its ambition and to achieve its stated aim of providing “an architectural education of the highest international standard based on experimentation, investigation, research and rigour” (Liverpool School of Architecture Academic Position Statement).
- 14.3 To ensure staff well-being, the University should provide appropriate administrative support at departmental level. This is particularly important given the size and diversity of the student body.
- 14.4 The Board questions whether multiple-choice assessment in BA3 is appropriate and advises that the School review this. This may present an opportunity to reconsider introducing an undergraduate dissertation.

**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.

**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 comments further to the action points and advice given in paragraph 13.1 i.e. The School of Architecture should ensure that criteria are clearly evidenced through delivery and assessment; in particular: GC2.3, GC3.3, GC8, GC9, GC10.1 and GC10.2.

**17 Other information**

**17.1 Student numbers [ask School to confirm approximate total numbers]**

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1: BA1: 115; BA2: 285; BA3: 225; total for Part 1: 625

Master of Architecture MArch, Part 2: 47

**17.2 Documentation provided**

The School provided all supporting documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation. However, the School is referred to action point 13.2 regarding the content of academic portfolios. For future reference, the London pathway should be represented in the mid-term report and the next full visiting board.

**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 the budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the head of institution
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff