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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to  
Queen's University Belfast**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** (report part A)  
The School of Planning, Architecture & Civil Engineering  
Queen's University Belfast  
David Keir Building  
Stranmillis Road  
Belfast BT9 5AG
- 2 Head of Architecture Group**  
Alan Jones & Prof Greg Keeffe
- 3 Course/s offered for revalidation**  
Bachelor of Science in Architecture with Honours (part 1)  
Master of Architecture (part 2)  
Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture (part 3)
- 4 Course leader/s**  
BSc Dr Sarah Lappin  
M Arch Dr Gary Boyd  
PG Cert Mr Tarla MacGabhann
- 5 Awarding body**  
Queen's University Belfast
- 6 The visiting board**  
Patrick Monaghan Chair  
Peter Culley  
Jane McAllister  
Pam Cole  
Joseph Edgard  
Sharon Wright  
Aidan McGrath Regional representative  
  
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](http://www.architecture.com).
- 8 Proposals of the visiting board**  
On 21 September 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated.  
  
**Bachelor of Science in Architecture with Honours (part 1)**  
**Master of Architecture (part 2)**  
**Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture (part 3)**  
  
The next RIBA 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**

(Statement written by the school)

**What makes Architecture at Queen's unique?**

Architecture at Queen's University, although being one of the smaller schools of architecture in the UK, has one of the highest proportions of research active staff and practice based university tutors.

Over the past ten years we have evolved from being a small school with a high proportion of indigenous staff satisfying a regional need. We are now better connected, with a national and increasingly international profile, with a broad mix of staff and an increasingly diverse mix of local, national, EU and international students making widespread impact.

We consider ourselves well positioned, as a fulcrum, in geographical, economic, political and architectural terms between mainland UK and Ireland/EU. As a relatively small, well-defined region we consider Northern Ireland as a laboratory in which we, as the major school of architecture, have an important and useful role. Research, community, education and design projects explored here could be then applied elsewhere.

The local traditions of workshop, innovation and making and our world leading research expertise in humanities, sustainable urbanism, practice-based research and material assembly inform our teaching on the validated programmes.

We present ourselves as more compact than other schools, allowing us to know our students and provide them with good levels of pastoral support. The high number of applications our students make to the RIBA Hardship Fund reflects the lower economic profile of our cohorts compared to other schools of architecture based within the Russell Group. We nuance the content and delivery of our courses accordingly.

We facilitate and influence thinking on architectural education, practice and research through organisations (AIARG, AAE) events (ASN 2016,

SCHOSA 2016, AHRA 2011) projects (Street Society and Success through Architecture), programmes (new PHD by Practice) through roles (VP RIBA, RIBA, RSUA, RIAI) and through the process and impact of our research.

We have ambition and drive to be relevant and make a difference – locally, on the island of Ireland and beyond. We are well connected to local, national and international practice – through research and invited university tutors and critics; and through connections with external bodies such as the RSUA, RIBA and RIAI – and through contributions to councils, boards, committees and award judging panels.

Our research performance is strong, moving from a non-submission in RAE 2008 to a healthy seventh place in the UK for research impact in REF 2014. Being in a school with Planning and Civil Engineering widens the educational experience of our students.

### **Regional context**

Strong connections with city, community and industry through our research and teaching. research, (Belfast City Council, Ulster Architectural Heritage Society and Street Society)

We consider that we must support and nurture a regional architectural culture that employs our graduates, embedding the school in the region. We are poised to take advantage of the new NI urban culture. (Eg FCBs discussions)

We are fortunate that the Department of Education and Learning in NI directly funds PhD study through a series of generous grants and stipends up to the value of £25k per year. Architecture has been the recipient of eight of these grants over the past five years, which has helped to create a very vibrant post-graduate research culture.

### **Course ethos and content**

We take our strengths in technology and humanities and mix them with leading practice. The context of being with Structural Engineering and Planning allows us to introducing students to working across and with other disciplines.

We have a vibrant studio culture, with a permanent working space for each student. Our high level of research and scholarly activity informs the method, process and outcomes of many design studio thematic groups.

The studio structure of Part 2 (adopted 2014-15) offers extensive student choice across design, humanities and technical dissertations and allows previous strengths to continue to flourish whilst also offering other themes exploring other relevant and important issues.

### **A richer more diverse school and contribution**

We wish to encourage a continuation of the increasing variety of staff and student joining our programmes. The increasing length of period of peace in Northern Ireland is leading to a greater optimism to come to Northern Ireland to work and study and we wish to ensure we do what we can to maintain the enriching of our staff and student body, which

informs the discourse, life and output of our discipline – and our contribution and impact upon society and industry.

**11 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the supportive culture of the school and the engaged and articulate staff and student body.
- 11.2 The board commends the dedicated library resources available to students.
- 11.3 The board commends the high standard of the written work produced by students.
- 11.4 The board commends the advancement of research within the school since the previous RIBA visiting board.
- 11.5 The board commends the school's engaged responses to feedback from external examiners.

**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 visits. 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 should increase the emphasis on integrated technology and in particular a greater understanding of the systems for environmental comfort and detailing of the building envelope at M Arch level.
- 13.3 The architecture team should define how they will develop a strategy for the delivery of the aspirations set out in the academic position statement within the context of the new School of the Natural and Built Environment. The strategy should pay particular attention to careful succession planning to maintain the development of research.

**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 board recognises that the loss of a central crit space has impacted negatively on the cohesive culture of the school. This should be addressed.
- 14.2 The board recognises the innovative work of the school to integrate research and education. In order to continue the momentum, the board advises that design methodology, context and communication are

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developed as part of the portfolio. In pursuit of clarity, the school should consider how research by staff can contribute to learning outcomes at all levels.

- 14.3 The board advises that the school take advantage of their position to exploit opportunities for cross disciplinary research and to develop pedagogic approaches to interdisciplinary learning.
- 14.4 The board recognises that the portfolios are robust and encourages the school to use this as a base to foster greater risk taking and experimentation.

**15 Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted: see action point 13.3

**16 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**

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

**17 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.

18 Other information

18.1 Student numbers

Part 1 - BSc (Hons) Architecture

	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
Stage 1	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
Enrolled Stage 1	70	51	57	54	59
<i>plus</i> students Repeating Stage 1	4	5	1	8	3
<i>less</i> withdrew/transferred before assessment	7	7	3	9	
<i>less</i> Failed	5	3	8	3	
Passed Stage 1	58	46	44	49	
<i>less</i> withdrew/transferred after assessment	4	2	3	1	

Stage 2	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	
Continuing to Stage 2	57	46	43	48	
<i>plus</i> Direct Entry to Stage 2	1	0	2	1	
<i>plus</i> students Repeating Stage 2	7	3	4	3	
<i>less</i> withdrew/transferred before assessment	3	2	0		
<i>less</i> Failed	2	4	2		
Passed Stage 2	60	43	47		
<i>less</i> withdrew/transferred after assessment	5	0	0		

Stage 3	13/14	14/15	15/16		
Continuing to Stage 3	62	43	47		
<i>plus</i> Direct Entry to Stage 3	0	0	0		
<i>plus</i> students Repeating Stage 3	0	4	4		
<i>less</i> withdrew/transferred before assessment	7	2			
<i>less</i> Failed	0	2			
Passed Final Examination	55	43			

Results					
1st	11	4			
2.1	36	29			
2.2	8	10			
3rd	0	0			
<b>Total No of Part 1 Graduates</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>43</b>			

Part 2 - MArch Architecture

PG 1	Year	Year	Year	Year	Year
	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
entrants from overseas	1	0	2	0	3
plus students repeating this Year	1	0	3	2	2
Total intake to the First Year of the Part II*	55	31	41	27	48
less withdrew/transferred before assessment	1	2	3	3	
less Failed	2	2	1	3	
Passed Stage 1 (Part II)	52	27	37	21	
less deferred/withdrew/transferred after assessment	0	0	0	1	

PG 2	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	
Continuing to Year 2 (Part II)	52	27	38	22	
plus Direct Entry to Year 2 (Part II)	0	0	0	2	
plus students Repeating Year 2 (Part II)	0	0	0	3	
less withdrew/transferred before assessment	0	0	0	1	
less Failed	0	0	4		
Passed Final Examination	52	27	34		

Results	Distinction	14	7	7		
	Commendation	29	15	21		
	Pass	9	5	6		
	Total No of Part 2 Graduates	52	27	34		

Part 3 – Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice and Practical Experience

Year of Assessment	No of Candidates	No of Candidates who took Exam	No of Candidates who Passed
2012	28	21	14
2013	21	16	13
2014	37	30	24
2015	59	44	33

**18.2 Documentation provided**

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

**19 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**