

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Reading

School of Architecture

Date of visiting board: 20 & 21 June 2019
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 19 September 2019

Preamble

The Visiting Board would like to acknowledge the hard work and professionalism of staff at the School of Architecture in setting up and running a new course over the last three years and congratulates staff and students on the graduation of the first cohort.

1 Details of institution hosting course

School of Architecture
University of Reading
London Road campus
Reading
RG1 5AQ

2 Head of Architecture

Professor Lorraine Farrelly

3 Courses offered for validation

BSc (Hons) Architecture

4 Course Director

Assoc. Prof. Oliver Froome-Lewis

5 Awarding body

The University of Reading

6 The visiting board

Nick Hayhurst – Chair
Angie Pascoe – Vice Chair
Sara Biscaya
Andy Parsons
Sharon Wright – co-professional member.

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance.

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 19 September 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional validation of the:

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1

The next full visiting board to the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme will take place in 2024.

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 – to be imported)

We are developing a model of education which is informed by the debate around contemporary practice and research.

The long-term vision is to develop a linked suite of options to engage in professional education in the built environment, utilising the extensive expertise of academic staff in the School of Built Environment these options connect to specialisms across the School of the Built Environment, such as BIM and energy and environment and are part of the third-year study. They will also be informing our subsequent Masters in Architecture course. Students have a dedicated studio space directly simulating the working environment of the modern architectural practice. The students are actively encouraged to manage their space in a professional way. The undergraduate degree will feed a Masters in Architecture course and also a range of post-graduate courses offering alternative career directions within the School of Built Environment. There is also strong potential for CPD programmes for mid-career professionals, thereby resonating with a further aspect of the University Strategy around employability.

Relationship to practice

A key ambition for the new programme is to engage with practice. We offer our students a range of career options within the construction industry and built environment professional sectors. The School is developing a work experience programme to align with the good practice established in CME, placing second year students in short-term work experience in a range of companies associated with architecture and the construction industry. We have already hosted a series of practice-based events inviting practitioners to engage in a debate around architecture education and also the possibilities of practice-based research and future collaboration with the University. These collaborators contribute to a taught module in second year and are offering work experience to our students.

The relationship to the local regional debate around architecture and the built environment is important for the new School. We have developed a series of public lectures starting in October 2016 around the theme of *Innovative Practice in Architecture* and in 2017 *Communities of Design* and in 2018 *Making Architecture Making Communities* which was run by our student society. We have worked with the local authority to help establish a local design review panel to encourage debate around design of the public realm and architecture. We are also hosting a series of events around environmental design and the vision for the city of Reading to encourage our students to participate in the debate around current issues affecting architecture. . We also host a series of lectures – *Reading 2050* to

encourage debate around the future vision for the region. The idea of an 'Urban Room' to invite the local community to debate and engage in ideas around the Built Environment has informed the design curriculum using local sites and issues for our students to test design proposals

Collaborative Education

We are proposing a new paradigm of collaborative architectural education, providing students with the opportunity to learn across a range of built environment disciplines. Such an approach answers many of the criticisms of the Farrell Review and has been welcomed by architectural practice. Moving towards more a practice-focused model of architectural education with more emphasis on collaboration between different built environment professions aligns strongly with current thinking on architectural education.

In the first instance, the School of Architecture offers a three-year full time BSc Architecture degree (Part 1). This has been prescribed by the ARB from September 2016 and the first cohort of 43 students has been admitted. In 2017 we had a first-year cohort of 55 students, in 2018 a cohort of 64 students. A full RIBA validation visit will take place in June 2019. A two-year Masters in Architecture (Part 2) programme is proposed to start from 2020, The intention is that this will be a research informed approach - with studios offered to connect with the University's research expertise in our research groups in the School of the Built Environment including: (i) Urban living and (ii) Energy and environmental engineering and iii) Organisations People and technology .

Relationship to Research

The intention is to build relationships and establish connections with the extant strong research ethos across the broader School of the Built Environment including the following specialisms:

- Urban Living - Sustainable Cities and Environments
- Energy and Environmental Engineering
- People Organisations and Technologies

The studio design projects in both undergraduate and future postgraduate courses will relate to a range of relevant themes connected to live research interests with the School providing an environment of applied research and debate. The research of the Urban living group in particular is informing our curriculum content in undergraduate taught courses and design studio. We are also developing synergies with the RIBA Research and Innovation Group connecting to ideas around Practice-based Research, developing connections and opportunities with colleagues working in design studio from practice. This would be an attraction to the architects and consultants who contribute to the studio, ensuring that they too would be part of the research culture in the School. We invite all part time teaching staff to a set of research days each academic year to support them to engage with the research culture of the University.

Resources

The School of Architecture is initially housed in a 1910 former library building on the London Road campus of the University, which has been refurbished for sole use for Architecture. It comprises a set of studio spaces with an associated workshop and CAD facilities to offer students a unique

environment within which to learn and study.

There is a ten-year financial plan to support continued staffing for the School; this started in 2014 with the appointment of the Head, the Research Professor in 2015 and the course director in April 2016. A new lecturer post started in August 2016 with two more lectureships commencing in January 2017 and a further lecturer post in August 2017. In 2018 we recruited 3 pro rata staff who are running their own practices and bringing that practice knowledge to our students. In Autumn 2018 we appointed 4 more staff starting with a range of expertise from History and Theory to Construction technology, studio design and representation of architecture. There are also staff with existing expertise in construction management, building technology and BIM (Building Information Modelling) in CME. The School of the Built Environment has a broad diversity of expertise, including economists, sociologists and anthropologists in addition to the core construction disciplines. In addition, ten specialist design tutors and practice-based tutors have been employed alongside academics to drive the studio culture within the new School. We also appointed two visiting professors, Bob Allies and Stephen Greenberg in February 2017, and a Royal Academy of Engineering funded visiting professor Gillian Horn in 2018 who is a director of Penoyre and Prasad Architecture, in particular to support the interdisciplinary and practice ethos of Architecture in our new School.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the University for the level of investment made in setting up the new course. The board was impressed by the commitment of the staff at all levels and the progress that has been made towards the 10-year plan.
- 11.2 The Board commends the school's ambition to develop a new model of interdisciplinary architectural education within the School of the Built Environment.

Students have made connection with other disciplines, benefitted from interaction with local practices and the appointment of key Visiting professorships.

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 The University should ensure that there is sufficient and appropriate accommodation and specialist facilities for the delivery of the architecture course. This should be part of a clear strategy for the current and planned professional courses.

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- 13.2 The School should review the content, timing and delivery of module AA3 SCA to ensure the integration of structures, construction and environmental technologies with the final design project.
- 13.3 Whilst the Board supports the opportunity for students to take optional modules in other built environment disciplines, it does not believe that the current timing of these optional modules is well placed. As it is delivered in terms 2 and 3 of level 6, it has the potential to compromise the outcomes of final design projects. The school should review in which year of the course these are undertaken.
- 13.4 Whilst the Board supports the ambition of the design briefs, the school should review the progressive and incremental scale, complexity and level of academic challenge in design projects through the three years of the course.
- 13.5 The School should ensure that all students clearly present a portfolio of 'architectural learning' that includes strategic decision-making, the methodologies employed and design development undertaken in the making of a design project.
- 13.6 The School should encourage students in all levels to further test the materiality and spatiality of their design proposals and their relationship with their respective contexts.
- 13.7 Whilst the Board supports the development of the 'Innovation in Practice' modules in Levels 4, 5 and 6, the School should consider how the student outputs could further enhance and support GC10.3 and GC11.1.
- 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 advises the school to exercise caution in the grading and assessment of design portfolios.
- 14.2 Now that the School has completed its first three-year cycle, the Board advises that the School ensure that staff research time is protected.
- 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 BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1**
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met by all graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme. However, please refer to action point 13.7 regarding GC10.3 and GC11.1.

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.

16.1 The Board made no further comments.

17 Other information**17.1 Student numbers**

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part 1: 152

17.2 Documentation provided

The School provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation. However, please see Action Point 13.5 regarding portfolios.

18. Notes of meetings

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