RIBA ☳

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Strathclyde

Date of visiting board: 5/6 November 2015
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 25 March 2016

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1   **Details of institution hosting course/s**
    University of Strathclyde

2   **Head of Department**
    Professor Ashraf Salama

3   **Courses offered for revalidation**
    Part One: BSc/BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies
                  BSc/BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies with International
                  Study

    Part Two: PgDip/M.Arch Advanced Architectural Design
                  PgDip/MArch Architectural Design (International)

4   **Course leaders**
    Michael Angus, Part 1 course director
    Dr Ombretta Romice, Part 2 course director

5   **Awarding body**
    University of Strathclyde

6   **The visiting board**
    Roz Barr – Chair
    Martin Pearce – Vice Chair
    Elizabeth Dow
    Alison Coutinho
    Dr Nicholas Humes –graduate/practitioner
    Dr Sharon Wright – co-professional member
    Gordon Smith – RIAS representative

    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**
    The RIBA Education Committee confirmed by circulation on 25 March
    2016 that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally
    revalidated:

    Part One: BSc/BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies
                  BSc/BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies with International
                  Study

    Part Two: PgDip/M.Arch Advanced Architectural Design
                  PgDip/MArch Architectural Design (International)

    The next full visit to the University of Strathclyde should take place in
    2020.

Confirmed Report – for publication

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)
In its present form The University of Strathclyde Department of Architecture was formally established in 1967, although the teaching of architecture at the origins of the technological institution started in late 1800s. The Department is among the oldest and largest in the UK and enjoys a distinguished international reputation. The Department captures the University's ethos as '*the place of useful learning'* in its vision, mission, and standard pedagogical practice. Operating at the intersection of art and design, culture and technology, engineering and society, in global and local contexts, our teaching addresses the environmental and societal challenges facing the built environment and places emphasis on the opportunities those challenges create.
Its vision is to continue to be one of the world leading providers of education and research in sustainable architecture and urban design while contributing effectively to global society and to the welfare of the country. Such a vision is articulated in a mission that attempts to reflect the trans-disciplinary nature of architecture as a profession and as an academic discipline. Through various pedagogical approaches, the Department strives to:

• Create an enabling environment conducive to critical inquiry and reflective design practice;
• Excel in design studio teaching and delivery of instruction while promoting a culture of scholarship and life-long learning;
• Explore and disseminate knowledge through scholarly architectural and urban design research and exemplary creative design production;
• Advance and apply professional knowledge and expertise through effective international partnerships and service to the profession and society at large.

The study of architecture at Strathclyde utilises the University's location in the heart of an aspiring and continuously growing city. Glasgow, being one of the thriving cities in the UK surrounded by distinct landscape with cosmopolitan outlook, offers a unique hinterland with a richness in its built environment and thus provides a unique opportunity

for learning about architecture and urbanism. Therefore, many of the issues explored in design projects as well as in theoretical and optional classes manifest a continuous commitment to the positive development of the city, its professional and cultural institutions, and its local communities. This enables instructive and constructive discourse that crosses the boundaries between academia, society, and the profession. This is not all; it is coupled with our global reach where our students have the opportunity to engage with pressing issues of concern to the world community.

Architecture students have undertaken recent projects in contexts that range from Peru to India and from Costa Rica to Malawi. Such opportunities expose students to less familiar situations than those at home and at the same time to primary sources of knowledge while learning about current challenges in these contexts such as poverty reduction, community development, cultural identity, and contested urban environments. This reflects our appreciation that architecture is created in a field of tension between reason, emotion, and intuition and thus architectural design pedagogy should emphasise the manifestation of the ability to conceptualize, coordinate, and execute the idea of building rooted in human traditions.

Two major aspects that characterize our course delivery:

- Balancing students' learning through exposing them to both local and global contexts underscores the multiple roles these nascent architects of our future could and should be able to play in different contexts. Such roles range from individual (sole) design decision makers to facilitators, whose role is not just to solve problems but also to create processes that enable individuals and communities to solve their own issues, and from technical assistance givers to advocates whose role is to adopt and defend the needs of a specific community over the broader public interests. This is reflected in the various projects students are exposed to, for example in Year 3 (*Part I*) and year 5 (*Part II*). At the same time, they channel energies into the in-depth understanding of their more local context putting their own work at the service of local groups.

- Our teaching practices focus on implementing experiential, active, inquiry-based, and reflective learning approaches. This echoes the aim to integrate the 'art' of making and the 'act' of making into students' learning and is clearly reflected in all studio projects in the *Part I* course where the notion of the 'verb' as a design originator as contrasting to the 'noun', i.e. 'to shelter', 'to work', etc. in comparison to 'a shelter', 'an office', etc. Primarily, this enables students to develop an understanding and ability to regard and practice design as a process and as a product and comprehend that architecture is originated out of human need and activity and that built environments and human artefacts are developed in the sense they embody human actions, decisions, and choices.

The strong design led profession in the city provides a pool of talented mentors and as such we are proud of the integrated delivery of our courses by experienced full time professionally qualified staff, professional engineers, and a multi-generational cohort of part-time

staff with strong commitment to linking professional practice imperatives to studio pedagogy. In various ways this has enabled practice-based and trans-disciplinary design research to develop over time. It has also enabled materializing the principal interest of the courses to develop students' professional abilities and skills in parallel to their intellectual growth. At various year levels and utilizing projects of different complexity, this is achieved by exposing students to design situations that juxtapose client and user needs, cultural and environmental parameters, social and economic constraints at architectural and urban scales.

In the *Part I* course students acquire the fundamental knowledge and skills across a wide spectrum of aspects that influence the production of architecture. Ranging from a conscious-raising foundation through to a series of making and doing projects offered in Year 1 students acquire the necessary skills in physical and digital modelling and IT and manual skills. Through their exposure to live projects from the early stages of the learning process they learn that they can conceptualize spaces and still end up with something that can be built. Understanding contextual issues and integrating them with structure, construction, and choice of materials is an integral component of Year 2 design endeavours. As they move toward completing *Part I* students design in more complex situations where the numbers of variables that affect the design outcome are increased to include designing multi-occupancy housing and buildings for cultural enterprises in a dense urban context in Year 3. In these projects more factors are conceived to go in parallel to the development of design propositions including budget, legislative demands, client demands, user needs, and health and safety.

The *Part II* course is based on our belief that architectural education is not only the imparting of knowledge and skills necessary for successful practice, but also involves developing and embedding values, and cultural and philosophical positions in the students approach. It is also the point at which evidence based design through research comes to the fore. In Year 4, which constitutes the first year of a two year PgDip/MArch in Advanced Architectural Design, and the first year of a two year PgDip/Masters in Architectural Design International (MADi), students produce a research piece (the Dissertation) with the support of a range of specialisms from within the Department offers as optional classes. In design terms, the drive is to reconcile technical and programmatic aspects of architecture with conceptual propositions wherein design experience is developed through exposure to specific user groups such as hospice projects for young adults, or to the notion of healing and wellbeing in the bathhouse project. Students in Year 5 juxtapose theoretical discourse to architectural design. Developing inquisitive cognizance, they synthesise various types of knowledge assimilated throughout the course of their studies with the support of a series of higher-level optional classes into an expanded design process that seeks to integrate formal and technical abilities into a comprehensive design thesis.

In this way Strathclyde's creative delivery of architecture courses is dependent on key pedagogical aspects that include:

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- Sustaining efforts to integrate and embed technology, environment, and culture into design practice;
- Instilling in students the sense of independence as well as collaboration from Year 1 all the way to Year 5;
- Practicing the research process as part of design endeavours to learn from past examples or to explore new visionary ideas;
- Offering students multiple learning opportunities through a wide spectrum of thematic option classes.

11   Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1   The Board would like to commend the Department which despite the significant constraints of accommodation and high student numbers has maintained the staff's extraordinary commitment to teaching excellence which is so evident in the work of the students.

11.2   The Board would like to encourage and applaud the School on its international outlook and links to overseas institutions.

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 Board understands that two new appointments have been made this year to the Department but would advise that staffing is continually monitored to ensure that this resource is adequate to meet the appropriate student experience and current and projected size of cohort.

13.2   The Board recognises the School's relocation and that the Department is still settling in to its new building, but the Board still sees the requirement for adequate studio space and this is something that should be urgently addressed. This would greatly support the requirements of teachers and students to develop a more creative environment, encourage peer group learning and enhance the student experience.

13.3   Following the previous report of 2010 and comments of the mid-term visit in 2012, there is still an inadequate provision of IT facilities (software, hardware and teaching) and this point must be addressed urgently.

13.4   The Board strongly recommends that the School needs to provide evidence of process working throughout the portfolios in respect of the graduate attributes (GA1 and GA2).

13.5   The Board noted the strengthening of management, practice and law at part 2 level but encourages the School to make more explicit the requirements for, and demonstration of technological considerations, particularly in respect of sustainability.

13.6   The design projects at years 1, 2, 3 and 4 provide a strong structure, but being very prescribed do not allow for brief development and exploration of broader architectural concerns. In order to equip students with independent critical thinking skills required for fifth year thesis and master's programme the rhythm and scope of these earlier design projects should be further developed.

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 the ambitious and growing research department developed over the last five years. We look forward to this being a strength of the School and to encourage the potential of this work to inform and assist in teaching the Part 1 and 2 programmes.

14.2   The Board strongly advises the Department to more fully respond to the supportive critical advice of the external examiners.

14.3   The Board would strongly advise that greater focus is given to the student portfolio to ensure that it fully demonstrates the range of the student outputs. The quality of work should be better documented and presented at the end of each academic year.

14.4   The Board recognises the way the Department develops learning outcomes and would advise the Department to review how this is communicated to students in years 1, 2 and 3 to ensure that all students understand the aims of module assessments.

14.5   The Board notes the vision of the Department in its Academic Position Statement. However, the Board advises the Department to consider how this vision is realised and reviewed with all staff that contribute towards its delivery.

15   Delivery of academic position
Please see advice point 14.5.

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.

While the Board was confident that all Part 1 and Part 2 graduate attributes had been met, see recommendation 13.4 in respect of evidence of process work.

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.

The Board made no further comments.

18   Other information

18.1   Student numbers
Part 1
Year 1   85
Year 2   120
Year 3   75

Part 2
Year 4   95
Year 5   65

18.2   Documentation provided
The School provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures. Please see action point 13.4 and advice point 14.3 with regard to the complete academic portfolio.

19.   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.

    19.1   Budget holder and course leaders
    19.2   Students
    19.3   Head of institution
    19.4   External examiners
    19.5   Staff