
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA exploratory board to
University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

Date of visiting board: 4 and 5 April 2019

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 3 July 2019

1 Details of institution hosting course

Swansea School of Architecture
Pheirrianneg
Faculty of Architecture, Computing and Engineering
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
IQ,
Kings Road,
Swansea, Wales SA1 8PH

2 Head of Architecture

Dr Paul Harries

3 Course/s offered for candidate course status

BSc (Hons) Architecture

4 Awarding body

University of Wales

5 The visiting board

Professor Kevin Singh, Chair
Kate Cheyne, Vice Chair
David Simister

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, validation manager – in attendance

6 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.

7 Recommendation of the Exploratory Board

The Board was invited by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David to consider its BSc (Hons) Architecture programme for the award of candidate course status for Part 1. The designation ‘candidate course for recognition’ implies that the following programme is considered to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated.

At its meeting on 3 July 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that candidate course status for Part 1 be awarded to the:

BSc (Hons) Architecture

The designation ‘Candidate Course for Validation’ implies that the course has been judged to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to recognition, which can only be granted once the standard of work produced by graduating students has been assessed and found satisfactory.

A full visiting board to consider the programme for initial validation and full RIBA validation of Part 1 will take place at a date to be agreed between the RIBA and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. This will allow the department time to consider the action points recommended by the Exploratory Board. It should be noted that a full visit in 2020 could consider the work of the graduating cohorts of the academic years 2019 & 2020.

This proposal will be submitted to the RIBA Education Committee for ratification, and subsequent notification to RIBA Council.

8 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

9 Academic position statement (Statement written by the school)

The location of the University in West Wales is very important in establishing its academic profile and shaping the way architecture will be taught.

The landscapes, climate, settlements buildings and cultural traditions of Wales are a key resource for the development on a unique approach to the study of architecture that is rooted in its community, and responsive to indigenous culture with its students and staff actively engaged with the people of Swansea and Wales. This means that design projects are shaped to equip students with the knowledge and skills that they'll need if they choose to practise in Wales and that whenever possible, student work should contribute positively to the lives of local people. However, this does not mean that all project work must be on a local site - it may well be that a comparative study based on a situation elsewhere in the world would be of great value to both students and local residents. We are in the process of developing an architectural response rooted in the region that embraces social sustainability and creative re-use. We believe that this approach will transfer successfully to other localities and regions.

The Part 1 BSc programme is intended to be the first stage of the three-part qualification cycle that leads to entry to the UK Register of Architects. The professional bodies' criteria require that 50% of the credits in an architecture degree programme should be in design-based modules. This programme is organised around 60 credits of design project work in each of the three years. These modules consist of a

series of varied design projects arranged in a sequence of gradually increasing complexity, culminating in a large integrated project in the final year.

Three strands of context modules that are designed to provide students with a coherent body of relevant knowledge at each stage, support the core design modules. The three themes are: environment and technology (structures, construction and building physics), history and theory (an overview of architectural history and theoretical writing from related fields) and profession and business (basic construction law, building procurement, cost control and business management).

Since its inception in September 2016 the School has been focused primarily on teaching. Therefore, at present, we have no substantial research credentials. The ambition is that the new programme will sow the seeds for the development of a new School of Architecture that would make it a priority to initiate debate in this area and establish a research centre to record, analyse and disseminate knowledge about Wales' historic and contemporary architecture and urban design.

The entry tariff for the BSc Course is 128. While we want to develop new generations of architectural practitioners we are also concerned to develop critical thinking – a questioning attitude. We encourage our students to pursue their own research interests throughout the course, which culminates in the third year in a 10,000 word dissertation, affording our students the opportunity to research and analyse a topic of their choice in some depth.

Within the studio students are encouraged to explore and develop design firstly by working in small groups, and secondly by developing their own individual approach to design. While we do we do not push any particular house style we emphasise the importance of a contextual approach to architectural design.

Our students are encouraged to work within groups and work with other disciplines, we value collaborative design as well as individual expression. Building a studio ethos, a collective workplace, is an important aspect of the course – to provide a shared dynamic.

The University has good links with professional bodies and relevant agencies, including the Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW), the Royal Institute of British Architects organisation in Wales; the Architects' Registration Board (ARB), the statutory body that maintains the UK Register of Architects and is the competent authority for the administration of the EU Professional Qualifications Directive; and the Design Commission for Wales (DCfW), the Welsh Government body responsible for promoting high standards of architectural, urban and landscape design. Of the two full-time architects who teach on the course, one is an RIBA Regional Council Member for Wales and the other is President-Elect for the RSAW.

We are also developing close links with the Centre of Alternative Technology (CAT) in Machynlleth. Currently this takes the form of informal teaching exchange, but in future we hope to organise

exchange student visits. We are in the process of developing our MArch course, and the Head of Architecture is also external advisor to CAT in the development of their MArch course. We anticipate further collaboration once the MArch in Swansea is established.

We have had a number of guest speakers in the first two years of the course, including Chris Loyn our visiting professor in practice, Patrick Hannay, editor of Touchstone Magazine and John Carter, who runs the Diploma in Architecture at the Centre of Alternative Technology at Machynlleth. This year it is our intention to run further guest lectures in conjunction with the RSAW and open up these talks to a wider audience, including local practitioners.

We intend to equip our students for a lifetime of practice and learning in architecture. Our two full-time architect lecturers have extensive experience in practice, and the part-time academic lead and Head of Architecture is a practicing architect with a long track record of architectural design, and a partner in the RIBA Chartered Practice Baart Harries Newall Architects. We also have various inputs from lecturers on the Environmental Science and Natural and Built Environment courses. In addition to the above, we have practising architects who teach on the course on a part time basis.

To give our students a taste of architectural practice, we arrange one-week placements for our first and second year students.

We have two large studio spaces well equipped with workstations with various CAD programmes. The larger of the two studios has sufficient headroom to construct full-scale architectural elements. It is set adjacent to a further workshop area, which our students can use to construct models and full-size representations of architectural details. We also have the possibility of utilising the Construction Wales Innovation Centre, which is adjacent to our new building.

10 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 The Board commends the vision and commitment of the University and senior management team to developing and supporting a sustainable School of Architecture with a focus on producing architects for Wales.
- 10.2 The Board commends the attitude towards the curriculum areas of professional studies and technology and environment but with reference to 11.3 and also specifically the integration of technology with design.

11 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. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

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- 11.1 The School should better articulate a narrative of the student journey through the course with a view to declaring the type of graduate the School wishes to produce.
 - 11.2 The School should undertake a comprehensive review of the proposed new Faculty to understand where future opportunities and challenges lie, particularly in light of the stated importance of collaboration.
 - 11.3 Once the 2018-19 academic year is complete the School is advised to undertake a review of the current course content, appropriateness, and delivery and undertake any modifications needed ahead of the anticipated full RIBA visit. Areas which the School may wish to consider are conceptual and theoretical genesis, free hand drawing, the iterative design process, making as part of the design process, spatial complexity and planning, the relationship between design and technology, multi-media and exploratory presentation techniques, and formats of assessment outputs. An exercise such as this will ensure that the course is refined for its particular context ahead of a 5-year validation period.

12 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.

- 12.1 The Board strongly advise the School to engage the services of a new “critical friend” with significant experience of RIBA Visiting Boards to mentor the School through the process, protocols, and logistics of a full Visiting Board to ensure compliance and best practice, especially the preparation of curated student portfolios.
- 12.2 With reference to 12.1, the School is advised to send a member of staff on a RIBA Visiting Board as an observer.
- 12.3 The School is encouraged to ensure that the mission statement derived from the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 is more explicitly linked to the philosophy, curriculum, and spirit of the course, and should be more explicit in the School’s Academic Position Statement as this will further clarify the interest in regenerative design and reinforce the potential USP’s of the School.
- 12.4 The School is encouraged to ensure that the philosophy of Placemaking is explicitly linked to the School’s Academic Position statement and course content, including the appropriateness of locations for student study trips.
- 12.5 The School is strongly advised to revisit its criteria mapping with a view to being more confident and thus focused in where criteria is met. This review and purge could free up valuable time and space in the curriculum to bolster some of the areas which need more development and maturity.

- 12.6 The School is advised to ensure that all staff are aware of the attitude to criteria mapping and reflect on its day to day implementation and the impact on the student and staff experience.
- 12.7 The School is advised to develop a plan for staff development in terms of pedagogy and awareness of higher education trends, as well as personal development such as research opportunities to help create a more inquisitive and ambitious academic environment.
- 12.8 The School is advised to develop an approach to peer to peer learning.

13 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 Part 1

The Board confirmed that the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme had the potential to meet the Part 1 graduate attributes, if developed as anticipated.

14 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 confirmed that the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme had the potential to meet the RIBA validation criteria, if develop as anticipated.

15. Other information

15.1 Student numbers

BSc (Hons) Architecture: 26

15.2 Documentation provided

The School provided all required documentation before and during the visit. However, the School is referred to advice points 12.1, 12.5 and 12.6 to help it to refine its documentation in anticipation of a full visiting board.

16. Notes of meetings

Copies of the minutes taken from 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 the Vice-Chancellor
- Meeting with the Head of School
- Meeting with Students
- Meeting with Staff