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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

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

Date of visiting board: 16 & 17 November 2017  
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 9 February 2018

- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s**  
School of Architecture and Built Environment  
University of Westminster  
35 Marylebone Road  
London NW1 5LS
- 2 Head of the Department of Architecture**  
Professor Harry Charrington
- 3 Courses offered for validation**  
Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
Part 2 M.Arch Master of Architecture  
Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice in Architecture
- 4 Course leaders**  
Julian Williams, BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1  
Samir Pandya, MArch Part 2  
Professor Stephen Brookhouse and Alastair Blyth, Postgraduate  
Diploma in Professional Practice in Architecture, Part 3

- 5 Awarding body**  
University of Westminster

- 6 The visiting board**  
Professor Karim Hadjri – chair  
David Howarth – Vice Chair  
Ruth Reed  
Nick Humes  
Oliver Hall – student/graduate

One board member withdrew before the Board. The Board remained quorate.

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – was in attendance

#### **Observers**

The School kindly agreed to allow the following individuals to observe the visit:

- Tom Ebdon - Falmouth University
- Peter Garstecki – Foster & Partners
- Clem Brohier, RIBA Executive Director Finance and Operations

- 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 9 February 2018 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed, by circulation, continued unconditional validation of the following programmes:

- Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
- Part 2 MArch Master of Architecture
- Part 3 Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Practice in Architecture

The next full visiting board will take place in 2022.

**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 (written by the School)**

*Our school dates back to 1891 when the Polytechnic Institute on Regent's Street began evening classes in Architecture and Building Trades. Now part of one of the world's most diverse and international universities, we maintain the inclusive Polytechnic ethos of making an ambitious, transformative higher education accessible to all, with exceptional professional engagement, diversity of design approaches, and commitment to experimentation, reflection and fabrication. We continue to build on the innovative teaching, research and practice of past students and staff. Our alumni include Gordon Cullen, Ralph Erskine and Chris Wilkinson, tutors have included Robin Evans, James Stirling, and David Greene. In REF2014 65% of our research was judged as world-leading or internationally excellent, and our students have won several major international awards; including in the RIBA Presidents' Medals for the past three years.*

**Who we are**

*Westminster sustains a critical mass of students at every level of architectural education, Part 1, 2 and 3; creating the largest student body of any UK school of architecture. Our commitment to each stage of architectural education reflects our duty of care to all facets of an architect's education, from opening-up the possibilities of architecture, through nurturing a creative commitment that balances experimentation with rigour, to developing ethical and innovative forms of practice. Our students are drawn from diverse backgrounds; a mix of perspectives that is a major factor in the distinctive heterogeneity of our work. Many Part 1 students are London-based, whereas the Part 2 attracts students who took their first-degree around the country, and the Part 3 is truly*

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*global in its mix. Each course has a distinct culture, but share our studio spaces and facilities, as well as many of our tutors, while PALs (peer assisted learning) from the Part 2 foster the education of Part 1 students. Our students have created a flourishing Westminster Architecture Society WAS, which organises guest lecture series and events, and the work of the school is shared as it is produced through the [openstudiowestminster](#) OSW platform.*

### **Where we are**

*Our school is characterised by a unique triangulation of teaching, research and practice, and we are defined by our external links outside the university. Based in Marylebone, with some 40% of UK architectural practices within 40-minutes travel time of our campus, we are embedded in London's architectural culture. Our level of professional engagement, familiar in other parts of Europe, is unusual in the UK. Of 64 staff, 44 are part-time, and together with 75 contracted visiting lecturers, and numerous occasional guest lecturers, experts and critics, engage students with live practice. In turn, we offer practitioners an experimental academic space in which to explore things that are important to practice, but which practices can rarely afford to do. All Part 1, Year 3, students undertake a 2-week practice placement, and through the West London chapter of the RIBA we offer mentoring by local practices to students as well. Beyond practice, we have fruitful relationships with neighbouring schools, institutions and museums, and the RIBA itself, as well as incorporating the city itself into our teaching and research. Our end-of-year exhibition [OPEN](#) is a firm part of the city's architectural calendar, and, with our [catalogue](#), a celebration and showcase of our students' work.*

### **Where we work**

*Within our Department of Architecture, our successful BA Interior Architecture cross-pollinates with the Part 1 course with shared modules, and the benefit of expert staff. We benefit from the cross-disciplinary environment of the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, exploring synergies in construction, urban design and infrastructure, while the innovative [Latitudes](#) Programme enables us to share ideas about design and climate change with schools of architecture around the world. Our growing Erasmus and exchange network also fix us in a global architectural education network. We have use of [Ambika P3](#), a world-leading exhibition space which displays work from within and without the university. Our purpose-built studios, fully renovated in 2015, are expansive, robust and flexible. Our [Fabrication Laboratory](#) enables our students to exploit advanced fabrication and prototyping technologies in combination with traditional techniques. The Digital Fabrication Laboratory, opened in 2015, and our wood-, metal- and casting workshops have been renewed and expanded in 2017, along with the creation of new environmental laboratory, photographic studio, print room and materials shop. The affordances of these resonate through our students' output and our research.*

### **What we do**

*The diversity of who we are extends into the diversity of our approaches to architecture. We don't see architects as supplicants and*

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*we cherish experimentation – innovation and testing – in both the formulation and execution of projects. Grounding these often high-wire acts are shared values and rigorous standards, as well as supportive peer groups in individual Design Studios. We fortify our students’ explorations, but expect the same level of imagination and commitment in their substantiating their projects, and we encourage the practice of design as an informed artistry that can contribute to architecture’s distinct ethical and environmental responsibilities.*

*Our teaching offers students the opportunity to develop their individual design practice within a context of continually expanding theoretical and critical knowledge. In structuring our studies, we do not try and integrate everything with the Design Studio – which might limit a student’s exploration of an area of study to the limits of their design ability. Rather, we aim for a synthesis, in which our teaching of technical and environmental studies, fabrication, cultural context and professional studies enables students to research and substantiate discrete pieces of work which, as well as informing studio work, have their own value. We continue to innovate, most recently in our new Part 1 BSc. in Architecture and Environmental Design that began in September 2017. We compliment regular semester-based teaching with events and intensive-workshops, including an all-school PLAYweek, [Megacrits](#) and [FabFest](#), as well as various open lecture series.*

### **Course structures**

*BA Architecture (Part 1) progresses from educating students in architectural concepts and competencies to developing creative and reflective practice. Year 1 undertake shared projects, that dovetail with cultural and technical sketchbook-based studies. Year 2 participate in elective design studios within architecture’s formative environmental and social (urban) ecological contexts, complete a live site diary, and formulate a critical position in relation to diverse architectural cultures. Year 3 take responsibility for a specialist design studio project, its technical research and substantiation, and writing an extended essay (dissertation). Fabrication and representation workshops are woven throughout the three years.*

*The MArch (Part 2) builds on students’ diverse practice and undergraduate experience. Students join a ‘vertical’ Design Studio combining students from both years of the course. Each Design Studio has its own way of doing things, prioritising themes to research through advanced design and making methodologies. The Dissertation, arranged into seminar groups, enables students to match their creative achievements with a reflective research project. Students forge a culminating academic portfolio containing their design and reflective theses, combined with technical, environmental, representational and professional studies.*

*The Part 3 course educates some 40% of all architects in this country, and has an unprecedented reach into the architectural profession, with 32 professional tutors guiding students in critically investigating the sui generis discipline of, and innovations in, architectural practice in the workplace.*

**Research**

*As practice informs our teaching, so does our research, while, in turn, Design Studios generate critical positions that test research and explore practice, as our [Studio as Book](#) series evidences. Staff research activities include large-scale ERC- and RCUK-awards such as [Monsoon Assemblages](#) and [Public Space Research](#), personal scholarship, books, fabrications, exhibitions and film, as well as collaborative and inter-disciplinary projects. Researchers are based in one of five research groups, and our fortnightly Research Forum and [openresearchwestminster](#) platform enable staff to disseminate on-going research to peers and students as they undertake it. For the past 4-years we have been part of the EU Marie Curie-funded [ADAPT-r](#) PhD by Practice programme; we are now developing our own programme aimed at reflective practitioners wishing to engage in high-level research as part of their developing practice.*

**11. Commendations**

- 11.1 The Board commends the exceptional facilities which will be critical in enabling the strengthening of the culture of making in the Department.
- 11.2 The Board commends the engagement and energy of the students and the staff.
- 11.3 The Board commends the exceptional scope and delivery of the Part 3 programme, the appointment of a Chair in Professional Practice and dedicated administrative support.

**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 At Part 1 the School must ensure that contextual studies are evident in student design work (GC4.1).

**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 At Part 1 and Part 2 the School is strongly advised to ensure that the design proposals are resolved to an adequate depth of scale and complexity (GC1).
- 14.2 At Part 2 the School is strongly advised to ensure that the development of structural and construction proposals has a suitable degree of depth in relation to the project (GC8.2).

14.3 At Part 2 the Board advises the School to ensure that moderation is robust across design studios.

14.4 The Board advises the University to provide adequate professional service support to the Department of Architecture.

14.5 The Board strongly advises that, in the process of the proposed restructuring, the excellent studio facilities are maintained.

14.6 The Board encourages the University to provide support for staff development, in particular in relation to scholarship and research.

**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 Part 1**

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

**15.2 Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.

**15.3 Part 3**

The Board confirmed that all Part 3 professional criteria 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 further comments. Please refer to advice points 14.1 and 14.2.

**17 Other information**

All required information was provided prior to and during the visit.

**17.1 Student numbers**

Part 1: 378

Part 2: 204

Part 3: 460

**17.2 Documentation provided**

The School provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

**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.**

- 18.1 Budget holder and course leaders
- 18.2 Meeting with students
- 18.3 Meeting with the Interim Vice-Chancellor
- 18.4 Meeting with external examiners and professional examiners
- 18.5 Meeting with staff