
Royal Institute of British Architects

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

1 Details of institution hosting course/s **(report part A)**

School of Architecture and Built Environment
University of Westminster
35 Marylebone Road
London
NW1 5LS

2 Head of Architecture Group

Harry Charrington

3 Course/s offered for validation

BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design

4 Course leader

Benson Lau

5 Awarding body

University of Westminster

6 The visiting board

Andy Bourne	chair/practitioner/academic
Andrew Wilson	academic
Holly Rose Doron	practitioner/academic
Sophie	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.

8 Recommendation of the Exploratory Board

The Board was invited by the University of Westminster to consider its BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design programme for the award of candidate course status at RIBA Part 1. The designation 'candidate course for recognition' implies that the programme is considered to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. At its meeting on the 14 June 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that candidate course status should be granted to:

BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design

A full visiting board to consider the programme for initial validation and full RIBA recognition of Part 1 will take place at a date to be agreed between the RIBA and the University of Westminster. This will allow the department time to consider the action points recommended by the Exploratory Board, and a full visiting board to consider the work of the graduating cohort of the academic year 2019/2020.

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)

The School of Architecture and Cities is characterized by its distinctive triangulation of teaching, research and practice, and we are defined by our external links outside the university in particular, drawing on an extraordinary number of part-time tutors and visiting lecturers who engage students with live practice issues. 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 offers RIBA validated Part 1,2 and 3 courses to talented students. 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 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 Open Studio Westminster (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 School of Architecture, our new BSc(Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design Course 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 School of Architecture and Cities, exploring synergies in construction, environmental design, 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 outside 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, material Lab, 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 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. BSc Architecture and Environmental Design progresses from educating students in architectural concepts and competencies to developing Evidence Informed Design, 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.

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

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The relevance and ambition to deliver an architectural course with an overt environmental focus.
- 11.2 Positive and supportive studio culture between the undergraduate architectural programmes.

12 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.

- 12.1 Criteria Mapping to better highlight where criteria are introduced and when they are assessed.
- 12.2 Ensure that portfolios for the full board include 2nd/3rd year work to demonstrate the full range of mapped criteria.

13. 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.

- 13.1 Ensuring complete academic portfolios also contain process work to demonstrate the 'evidence design process' common throughout the course.
- 13.2 The board welcomed the confirmation that appropriate support will be provided by the University as the course grows, in order to maintain the subject expertise relevant to this course.
- 13.3 The board advises the school to devise project briefs for the final year that engage with the physical as well as the environmental context.
- 13.4 The board advises the programme team to work with the students to understand and better manage perceptions of the student workload.

14 Delivery of academic position

The visiting board noted the adapted academic position statement for the new course and look forward to seeing a more holistic approach at a later date (when all RIBA visits are aligned) which will encompass the school and all of its courses.

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.

Graduate Attributes for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were to be met by graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design.

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.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate criteria were to be met by graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design.

17. Other information

17.1 Student numbers

The total number of the BSc (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Design first cohort in the academic session 2017/18 is 22 and the gender balance is 60% female and 40% male students. The second cohort (2018/19) is 35 and the gender balance is 60% female and 40% male students.

17.2 Documentation provided

All required documentation was provided prior the visit to the University of Westminster.

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**