Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the Arts University Bournemouth

Faculty of Art, Design & Architecture

Date of visiting board: 16/17 October 2014
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 11 February 2015
1 Details of institution hosting course/s
Arts University Bournemouth
Wallisdown
Poole
Dorset
BH12 5HH

2 Head of Architecture
Professor Oren Lieberman

3 Course/s offered for validation/revalidation
Part 1  BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2  MArch

4 Course leader/s
Simon Beeson, BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Ed Frith, MArch, Part 2

5 Awarding body
Arts University Bournemouth

6 The visiting board
Carl Meddings - Chair
Frosso Pimenides - Vice Chair
Ben Stringer
Luke Murray
Michelle Pepin
Oliver Hall
Andy Ramus

Yiannis Kerbos - Observer
Sophie Bailey – 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 Proposals of the visiting board
At its meeting on 11 February 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

   i.  Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture
   ii. Validation of Part 2 MArch with effect from the graduation 2013 cohort.

The next full Visiting Board to the University Bournemouth will take place in 2019.
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

Academic position statement

(Statement written by the school)

The Arts University Bournemouth makes explicit the importance of collaboration, and at the centre of its study strategies, for students developing their careers in the creative industries, is ‘making’. This focus on what broadly can be located in ‘studio’ practice is shared by all courses, including those in architecture, each of which explores both the unique, as well as the commonly held, aspects of their “maker culture”. The scale of the institution is of particular value in establishing these shared values and for encouraging specialist, collaborative, interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary practices. The visibility and tangible nature of making allows us to learn and critically respond to the uniqueness of our practices and the opportunities to collaborate. Part of our exceptionality is a willingness to explore what this might mean in architectural education and practice. Architectural study has a particular concern for the idea that design requires a critical engagement with *the things we make to think about the things we make*. For instance, a knowledge of drawing underpins creative making/thinking: a dialogue between the maker and the made-idea through the act of drawing. The study of architecture expands this field of exploration. Our courses actively engage in this question of methods (and their inherent methodologies) of both representing and transforming the inhabited, material forms of our practice, connecting students with real materials and the creativity of thinking through making, in analogue and digital media, in models to scale or at ‘1:1’, in speculative design as well as in real-time live spatial transformation.

The role of creative education is to nurture an understanding of the methodologies of each of our making practices and the opportunities to innovate. Live projects are common across the courses and we are keen to explore and develop this area both as specialist and collaborative practices. The connection between making and thinking in architecture is actively encouraged from the first studio briefs, and continues throughout the BA and MArch courses in design projects, workshops, collaborative projects, research by design, exhibitions, live transformations *in situ*, and in student initiatives.

The BA course philosophy consists of four main components: a “working definition” of the discipline, embedding a methodology of architectural
design, the pedagogy of studio practice and AUB’s unique context of creative complementarity. The course investigates a particular understanding of the practice and theory of architecture as being grounded firstly in the making of works of architecture (our “maker culture”), with theoretical interrogation articulating a familiarity with the material nature of architectural ideas. A working definition of architecture explored is *the thoughtful making of tangible, inhabited places that mediate between the individual, the world and others*. Through a process of making and thinking the course explores works of architecture that both ‘house’ us and challenge our expectations. Form is never arbitrary and neither is design methodology. Architectural form and concept are informed by issues of realisation, location, culture, climate, economics, use or any combination of a multitude of contingencies. An understanding of architectural design is referenced to some recurring themes: that a work of architecture is inhabited, material (made), located (sited and it ‘cites’ in terms of history and precedents), can be analysed based on tectonic principles and that making architecture is a cultural /political /social practice. Exploration underlies the student-centred approach to acquiring knowledge and skills. The studio acts as a laboratory for experimentation. This learning environment encourages risk-taking, innovation and entrepreneurship.

The MArch explores ‘making and thinking’ in a dialogue between performative, transformative practices and projective, speculative design thinking. In line with postgraduate study across AUB, the MArch raises questions of individual (studio) practices, and how these are situated in communities of practice. Whereas the BA considers the broader skills and knowledge of architectural design methodology, the MArch clearly articulates and asks the students to position their own practice, in response to the interplay of transformative and speculative practices. In the MArch there is a focus on a holistic design methodology which incorporates speculative and transformational practices, the latter being in the form of both immediate, improvisational spatial interventions as well as more designed and considered material interventions. The course incorporates and anticipates emerging modes of professional practice, and supports a focus on the ethical, political, sustainable and humanitarian dimensions of architectural practice. This course’s distinctive focus on practices that transform space in ‘real time and place’, making explicit embodied and improvisational practices, sharpens students’ skills in management of contingencies, broadens the architect’s range of activities in a time when the role of the architect is contested, and empowers and encourages the students through their growing abilities to fabricate and actually make a difference.

A plurality of practice is actively explored at AUB, encouraging our students to find/create their niche in diverse forms of creative practice. In the BA, professional practice is continually and explicitly explored in the Personal Development Portfolio (PDP), as well as in units such as Research by Design and Dialogues with Practices. The MArch engages with practice through intersections of methodologies, sharpening students’ understanding of their own identities as architects entangled in the world. The course, often by going *elsewhere* in various ways (e.g., physically, culturally, virtually), affords students possibilities to engage in what they will be working with in professional practice, i.e., other peoples’ desires, ways of thinking, inclinations, landscapes, cultures, identities, and predilections. Students develop a critical understanding of how the business of architecture functions. They learn how
to work both tactically and strategically with potentially short-lived and particular economic or cultural conditions, evolving work practices appropriate to the specific task or project, whilst incorporating over-arching disciplinary practices which allow for longer-term trends. Through both the unit that covers Management/Practice/Law ARC757 and those that attend to more discursive and transformative design engagement, students encounter alternative models of practice. For both the courses the noon Friday open lectures bring students at all levels together to hear guests and see a range of modes of practice in action.

The validation criteria are embedded in the courses. The MArch was written with the 2011 Criteria. In 2012 the BA learning outcomes were mapped directly to the Part 1 Graduate Attributes. Five of these follow accepted areas of specialist knowledge: design methodology, representation, technology, contextual studies and professional studies. The sixth GA, focuses on student learning, introduces an assessed PDP for collaborative projects and enhancement activity. The opportunities found in these new criteria were essential aspects of the course philosophy and structure. The acknowledgement of architectural practice as covering a range of possible professional practices is foremost. The value of an architectural education and the wider perception of practices provide a context that allows a critical engagement with the idea of practices (plural) and the particularity of architectural skills and knowledge.

11 Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The inspirational leadership provided by the Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor and the way that this is translated into the physical attributes of the campus, permeates through the academic provision across all courses and is translated into a clear mission and vision for the future in the new strategic plan.

11.2 The commitment of the whole course team, including academics, visiting lecturers, technical staff and the admin team.

11.3 The confidence and ambition of the course team to challenge students to be innovative and to engage with realistic personal development that recognises the changing role of the architect and new and emerging forms of practice.

11.4 The aspirations of the Part 2 course to allow individual students to explore their personal design and research interests in architecture at masters level.

11.5 The creative connection between courses and departments within the institution and the strengths of collaboration and dialogue at student level.

11.6 The level of enthusiasm and engagement of the students to explore and exploit the opportunities offered within the institution and beyond.

11.7 The strong regional connections that the school has developed, and is developing, with architectural and other professional practices.
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 At Part 2 the Board strongly recommends that the course team provide robust guidance to students to ensure that they achieve an appropriate level of complexity and parity across the cohort, whilst maintaining their own particular interests.

13.2 At Part 2 the Board strongly recommends that the course team provide robust guidance to students to ensure that students at award level clearly present and articulate the breadth, depth and complexity of their design proposals in their portfolio submissions.

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 In the light of the two proposed new academic appointments, the course teams should review the provision and delivery of both ‘History and Theory’ and ‘Technology’ at all levels and how these are embedded within the courses, particularly in relation to input at an early stage to underpin students’ cultural and contextual studies (GC2).

14.2 The Board advises that at Part 1 the processes of investigation and design development could be more clearly evidenced in the student portfolios.

14.3 The Board advises that at all levels, students are encouraged to explore the atmospheric qualities of inhabitation to enrich design proposals.

14.4 The Board advises that at Part 2, learning agreements need to articulate the Graduate Attributes and show how these are addressed and clearly expressed throughout the portfolio.

14.5 The Board advises that the subject team articulate and make explicit the potential within the new strategic plan to develop a research framework for the subject area that sets an agenda to support the academic trajectory of the courses and of individual staff.

14.6 The Board advises that the subject team make explicit the unique nature of the courses and the institution and their relationship with the people, industries and the environments of Bournemouth and the wider locality.

14.7 The Board advises that, as the Academic Position Statement will become a public document as part of the full report, the team should take the
opportunity to ensure that it more clearly describes the nature and aspirations of the courses and of the institution in clear and unambiguous language.

15 **Delivery of academic position**
The following key points were noted:

15.1 Please see advice on the Academic Position Statement in 14.7

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.

16.1 **Graduate Attributes for part 1**
The Board confirmed that all graduate attributes for Part 1 were met by graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture.

16.2 **Graduate Attributes for part 2**
The Board confirmed that all graduate attributes for Part 2 were met by the graduates of the MArch.

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.

Please see section 14 (Advice).

18 **Other information**

18.1 **Student numbers**
Part 1  BA (Hons) Architecture: 102
Part 2  MArch: 13

18.2 **Documentation provided**
The School provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

*Notes of meetings*
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