Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Cambridge
Department of Architecture

Date of visiting board: 12/13 November 2014
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 17 April 2015
1 **Details of institution hosting course/s**
Department of Architecture
University of Cambridge
Scroope Terrace
Cambridge
CB2 1PX

2 **Head of Architecture**
Dr Wendy Pullan

3 **Course/s offered for revalidation**
Part 1  BA (Hons) in Architecture
Part 2  MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design
Part 3  Examination in Professional Practice

4 **Course leader/s**
Mary Ann Steane - Part 1
Ingrid Schroder - Part 2
Miranda Terry - Part 3

5 **Awarding body**
University of Cambridge

6 **The visiting board**
Professor Lorraine Farrelly, Chair (academic)
Stephen Brookhouse – Vice Chair (academic)
Dr Ivana Wingham – (academic)
Sheila Ryding (co-professional member)
Dr Nick Humes (student/graduate member)
Ian Bramwell (regional 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](http://www.architecture.com).

8 **Proposals of the visiting board**

8.1 On the 17 April 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

Part 1  BA (Hons) in Architecture
Part 3  Examination in Professional Practice

8.2 On the 17 April 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed revalidation with conditions of:

Part 2  MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design

The revisit to the Part 2 MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design will take place in October 2015.
The next full Visiting Board to the University of Cambridge will take place in 2019.
In accordance with the RIBA Procedures for Validation a revisiting sub-group will visit the Department in 2015 following the graduation of the next award level cohort (see paragraph 12).

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)**

*The Cambridge Department of Architecture continues to focus upon a contextualised approach to design, both in terms of studio teaching and learning, and in wider terms throughout the work of the Department. Urban themes enrich and unify our approach and help to ensure that students do not rely only upon overly theoretical or abstract solutions. Across the Department there is engagement with challenging issues that are of concern in today’s world, such as: rapidly changing cities, increased mobilities, new environmental needs, heritage and conservation, urban migration, conflict and informality, structural adaptations to global zones of risk, and the reuse of traditional material in new forms to address twenty-first century challenges. Undergraduate students are exposed to these issues and post-graduate students are expected to actively relate to them in their own research and design.*

*From our Tripos (undergraduate Part 1) students to our new MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design (MAUD – Part 2) and our Part 3 course, we endeavour to combine staff design and research expertise to inform teaching throughout all of our programmes. We take advantage of Cambridge University’s supervision system that allows exceptional small group teaching and learning, as well as the University’s libraries and collections, multi-disciplinary research resources and its increasing outreach efforts to establish a broad-based student body. Our relatively small size allows personal attention and an interactive learning experience. This combines well with the diversity of the University and its College system. Our Tripos and MAUD courses prepare students primarily for architectural practice, yet also offer routes into related fields of research, public service, construction, environmental studies and other professions. Our Part 3 course is professionally oriented.*

**The BA Architecture Tripos (Part 1) Course**

The design studio is central to teaching and learning. Through three years studios are structured in clearly defined ways to encourage both individual growth and collective initiatives and cooperation and to achieve learning outcomes. A Year Coordinator ensures continuity between the Design Fellows (studio tutors) and the rest of the
Departmental staff. The first year studio is common to all students and the choice of project sites and briefs focuses on providing a unified learning experience. At the same time, with one-to-one studio supervision (one hour/week/student), students begin to explore their own interests and learn to ask questions that are appropriate to their work. The manageable scale of Cambridge provides an excellent setting for the early projects where comprehension of site and brief are important. Later in the year, sites may be further afield and projects grow in complexity and in scope. The annual fieldtrip (last year to Naples) forms an important learning experience.

The second year studios are organised jointly on a common site in order to compare and integrate urban responses. However three separate studios develop briefs within the larger site in order to allow students to address specific concerns that interest them and to learn to work more intensively with smaller groups. This system prepares students for greater independence and decision-making in the third year where studios stand alone on distinct themes. Team work remains important in the initial stages of research, but each student must exercise their own judgment to develop their design responses in a context that they develop. In second year, a year-wide voluntary fieldtrip, usually to a foreign city, helps the students to analyse architectural and urban situations together. In third year, specific study trips - which are again voluntary - are used to augment the themes of each studio.

The act of ‘making’ remains an important part of our teaching ethos. In first year students are encouraged to learn to draw by hand well before they focus upon CAD. Handmade models are used throughout the three years; an on-site workshop allows experiments in materials and different forms of modelling, including 1:1 scale. In third year a joint architecture and engineering design course partakes of the neighbouring Engineering Department’s expertise and facilities and further strengthens teamwork in an interdisciplinary setting. Various forms of media are encouraged, including drawing and painting, CAD, 3D work, photography and film. The variety of individual responses and making skills, as well as collective efforts, are evident in both the students’ design portfolios and in their ability to organise and mount their own annual degree show each year in London.

The studios are supported by lectures, seminars, classes and supervisions in two broad areas: history, theory and cultural studies and building science and technology. As students mature and become better able to integrate their studies, our lectures respond with a greater focus on professional practice instruction in third year. Cultural studies move toward expanding upon the role of architecture at the centre of multidisciplinary concerns. Technical studies accompany studio work and in third year students document and develop case studies deriving from site visits. Final year students produce 9000 word dissertations on a topic of their choice, researched independently with the support of an individual supervisor.

MAUD (Part 2)
The MAUD course (known as MPhil B for its first three years) is in its fifth year, bringing designers together to develop a research theme and project of their own choosing. The course has developed in the belief that design and research must be symbiotic in order to properly address the rapid change and complexity that now characterises the profession. The course is two years long, with a nine month intercession in practice or doing work in the field that enhances the student’s chosen area of work. Students work on a wide variety of individual projects. They are expected to document and analyse their research, link it to their design work through procurement studies, and to
develop their written research dissertation in tandem with their design portfolio. Examination at the end of two years focuses on the joint endeavour.

Students benefit from lectures and seminars in a variety of topics (some in conjunction with MAUS, our research MPhil), individual supervision in design as well as from experts available in the Department, across the University, and beyond. The course is special and unusual in that it prepares Part 2 students in design skills and professional practice through on-the-job or 'in the field' training and, at the same time, encourages them to be curious in their topic of enquiry and to probe areas in which design requires research knowledge and multidisciplinary experience.

Post Graduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture (Part 3)
The Part 3 professional course is formed by three intensive sessions held over several days in Cambridge; as such, it offers greater interaction and group support due to the sustained teaching and learning environment. A variety of lecturers have been sourced in order to deliver sessions in several main areas that lead to professional qualification, including: clients, users and delivery of services; legal framework and processes; practice and management and building procurement. Successful candidates demonstrate authorship, knowledge and effective communications skills, reasoning and understanding in all issues to do with professional criteria. Small study groups augment the lectures and benefit from the sustained nature of the course.

The coherent structure of the programme was vindicated in 2013-14 when the course director was changed in the middle of the year and students felt little disruption. The Part 3 course is fully integrated into the University through the Institute for Continuing Education and successful candidates are awarded a University of Cambridge Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture.

11 Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The rich and diverse research culture in the School and across the University and its potential links to the student experience at all levels.

11.2 The ambition to integrate a social and political brief and agenda into an urban context and the studio design projects.

11.3 The diversity in the research interests of the staff and their commitment to the students’ experience on the courses.

11.4 The ambition to engage in real-time research projects on the Part 2 course. The level of enquiry and the staff and students’ ambitions to engage with the social, political and economic drivers that underpin the course.

12 Conditions
The following conditions of recognition apply:

12.1 The course did not meet the following criteria for validation:

GC 10.1, 10.2, 10.3
GC 11.1, GC 11.3
The Part 2 course MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design (MAUD) must be mapped to demonstrate that it successfully meets all the validation criteria and this must be adequately and clearly evidenced in the work.

The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these conditions. In accordance with the RIBA Procedures for Validation a revisiting sub-group will visit the Department in 2015 following the graduation of the next award level cohort (see paragraph 12).

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 All courses at Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 must be accurately mapped against the validation criteria and this must be adequately demonstrated in the student work presented.

13.2 The resources for the School in terms of space and particularly workshop provision needs to be addressed to accommodate students’ needs in the short term as well as long term planning for the School, and offer a range of alternative approaches to model-making using a wider range of materials, fabrication and three dimensional representational techniques

14. Advice
The visiting board offers the following advice to the school on desirable but not essential improvements, which, the visiting board considers, would assist course development and raise standards.

14.1 For the Part 2 course: The exploration of the construction, structure and environmental techniques explored in essay 4 would be beneficial to be also demonstrated and further developed in the final design thesis.

14.2 The School is advised to encourage students to explore the full range of representational physical models and CAD models as well as other techniques in their studio design work.

14.3 The design fellows are an important resource for the school with extensive professional practice expertise which could inform design research within the School further. The visiting board considers that this has great potential to inform the development of the teaching work of the Department.

14.4 For future validation visits the Department should ensure that all external examiners representing each award level of the course are invited and encouraged to attend the external examiners’ meeting.

14.5 The strategic plan for 2014-15 identifies objectives for a new building project. In the short term the Department also needs to consider planning for the
more immediate provision of space so that research, studio and teaching spaces can be adequately accommodated.

15 Delivery of academic position
The Board commended the ambition of the School (paragraph 11.2).

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 Part 1 graduate attributes were met by the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

16.2 Graduate attributes for Part 2
Please see paragraph 12.1.

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.

GC10 The necessary design skills to meet building users' requirements within the constraints imposed by cost factors and building regulations
GC10 The graduate will have the skills to:
.1 critically examine the financial factors implied in varying building types, constructional systems, and specification choices, and the impact of these on architectural design;
.2 understand the cost control mechanisms which operate during the development of a project;
.3 prepare designs that will meet building users' requirements and comply with UK legislation, appropriate performance standards and health and safety requirements.

Please see paragraph 12.1.

GC11 Adequate knowledge of the industries, organisations, regulations and procedures involved in translating design concepts into buildings and integrating plans into overall planning
GC11 The graduate will have knowledge of:
.1 the fundamental legal, professional and statutory responsibilities of the architect, and the organisations, regulations and procedures involved in the negotiation and approval of architectural designs, including land law, development control, building regulations and health and safety legislation;
the professional inter-relationships of individuals and organisations involved in procuring and delivering architectural projects, and how these are defined through contractual and organisational structures;

the basic management theories and business principles related to running both an architects’ practice and architectural projects, recognising current and emerging trends in the construction industry.

Please see paragraph 12.1.

18 Other information

18.1 Student numbers

Part 1: 122 students
Part 2: 32 students (Yr 1 – 18 students progressing; Yr 1 – 14 students graduating)
Part 3: 21 students passing (Sept. 2014)

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

19 *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