Report of the RIBA visiting board
to the Canterbury School of Architecture
University for the Creative Arts

Date of visiting board: 12/13 June 2014
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 1 October 2014
1 Details of institution hosting course
Canterbury School of Architecture
University for the Creative Arts
New Dover Road
Canterbury
CT1 3AN

2 Head of Architecture
Allan Atlee

3 Course offered for revalidation
BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture, Part 2

4 Awarding body
University for the Creative Arts

5 The visiting board
Roger Hawkins—chair/practitioner
Derek Cottrell—vice chair/academic
Andy Usher—practitioner
Jamileh Manoocherhi—academic
Sharon Wright—co-professional
Stacey Smith—student/graduate
Kasan Goh—regional representative

Jenna Quinn (RIBA Education) attended as secretary
Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (RIBA Education) and Mirella Jenei (RIBA Education) attended as observers.

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 Proposals of the visiting board
At its meeting on 1 October 2014 The RIBA Education Committee confirmed continued validation of:

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
Master of Architecture, Part 2

The next visiting board to the Canterbury School of Architecture will take place in 2019.

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
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.

9 School's academic position statement (written by the School)

The Canterbury School of Architecture (CSA) is situated within the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), a leading specialist university that offers courses from pre-degree Art Foundation to PhD research in its Art, Design & Media disciplines. Our founding colleges and campuses at Canterbury, Epsom, Farnham, Maidstone and Rochester have a history dating back to 1866. Our validated courses in Architecture are located at our campus in Canterbury city centre where students benefit from generous and dedicated purpose-built studios and a range of specialist technical workshops, library collections and exhibition spaces.

Our School has developed a distinctive approach to architectural education and research that is informed by its rich Art School heritage. In particular we emphasise activist models of teaching, learning and research; cultures of thinking and making that synthesise traditional techniques with advanced digital media and workflows; and a pedagogic culture that situates imaginative futures in clearly articulated critical understandings of the present. All of our activities consciously face outwards to the world and engage diverse audiences through exhibitions, publications, collaborations and a strong public programme of lectures and events. Our School is a laboratory for architecture and spatial design. We explore the potentials of our discipline through individual and collective actions and agency. This requires a commitment on the part of our students and staff to take positions in relation to the contemporary condition of the city, to take responsibility for its transformation and ultimately to take action. This activist approach informs all of the design projects that we set for our students, demanding that they take responsibility for aspects of the projects objectives and aims, their development and trajectory and ultimately their dissemination and use. We share this mind-set with the wider community of artists, designers and designer-makers at UCA where there is a strong tradition of valuing professional and creative practice and agency. This Art School tradition makes the Canterbury School of Architecture an ideal place for the exploration and production of ideas as things.

We provide opportunities for our students to develop distinctive approaches to architectural design and its representation through integrated curricula and projects that introduce a wide range of skills in Design Thinking, Design Making and Design Doing. (see figure 1) As students progress through the School they are supported to develop an increasing number of skills and direct these towards their own interests and ambitions. Where many schools of architecture have either abandoned traditional methods of design communication, including hand drawing, or conversely resisted the transformations in both information technology and computational design, we believe that it is the inter-relationships between these processes and media that provide the spaces for architectural imagination to be enacted.

Our Art School campus provides a supportive and permissive environment where our students can make work in and between the various studio spaces, workshops and the internal and external public spaces for exhibition and engagement. We also work in an explicitly networked way across all of our projects with external communities and organisations and our exceptional team of full and part-time teaching staff see themselves as implicated collaborators in the work of our students, providing opportunities through their own networks in practice to develop models of live project locally, regionally and internationally.
Our School increasingly acts as a new kind of architecture centre for the region hosting conference and networking events and generating audiences for our work. Our public programme of lectures and events, ‘Multistory’, has grown significantly to become the most extensive lecture series dedicated to architecture in the region with more than 30 speakers at Canterbury and a further 6 at special events in London during 2013/14. We have also become the official Key Partner in a new initiative, ‘Kent Design’, that brings public and private sector organisations and stakeholders together to debate and consider the future of the region and the impact this will have on its communities and places. All of this activity exposes our students and staff to the dynamics of the modern profession of architecture, as well as the associated construction and development industries and critically the arts and culture sector. This flow of course works in both directions, injecting the rigorous optimism of our students work into debates and discussion that are shaping policy and strategies locally.

Across the courses a common concern with processes of Urbanisation manifests itself in different scales and complexities. At Part 1, students begin by testing space and the potentials of architecture from their own experiences of the spaces of the city. A persistent concern with the relationship between individuals and groups as users of architecture and the city and the wider issues and forces acting upon the city frames a series of projects that explore complex landscapes, urban fringes and edges as well as small and medium sized individual buildings and their potentials to act as catalysts for change. At Part 2 these concerns often start with an examination of infrastructure and macro regional conditions, with students framing their own Design Research agendas in the context of common themes, sites and topics that the course can develop an expertise in over a single year or a number of years. Our Part 2 students also work alongside the wider postgraduate community of students studying on one of the Schools MA courses in Urban Design or Architecture.

Our future graduates will face major change-dynamics – from resource scarcity and climate change to increasingly turbulent work patterns and demographic shifts. We are committed to providing courses at both Part 1 and 2 that provide both the hard skills (designing, making and representing) and the soft skills (advocacy, activism and entrepreneurship) needed to be effective and successful agents of spatial, social and ecological change.
10 **Commendations**
The visiting board made the following commendations:

10.1 The successful year-based structure, committed staff team and student centred approach.

10.2 The extent and range of facilities available in the school and on the campus.

10.3 The schools holistic approach to *thinking, making, doing* and their focus on providing students with opportunities for engagement and enterprise.

11 **Conditions**
There are no conditions.

12 **Action points**

12.1 The board notes the external examiners’ view that standards are improving and that technology is integrated in the project work. The school should be more explicit about criteria compliance for technology in project assessments.

12.2 The school should ensure that adequate resource is made available to lead the teaching and assessment of cultural context.

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 The school is encouraged to continue developing the CSA identity and ethos as a way of confidently marketing the school nationally and positioning itself regionally. Initiatives such as Kent Design and the Multistory lecture series are welcome as ways of encouraging greater engagement with practice and industry.

13.2 The school is encouraged to establish more formal links with other disciplines on the campus, such as fine art and graphics to take greater advantage of the opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

13.3 The board welcomes the integration of management, practice and law (MPL) into the Future Practice unit and the plans to enhance staffing to support this approach.

14 **Meetings**

14.1 **Meeting with budget holder and course leaders**
The meeting was attended by the Head of School and Course Leaders for Part 1 and Part programmes. The following reflects the main points of discussion:

- The last RIBA visiting board took place at a time when the University was establishing itself as an independent institution. Since the merger, the School has found it challenging to form part of a University that does not have its name of place located in the title.

- The School has established a good balance between new and experienced members of staff across Part 1 and Part 2.

- Staff viewed the academic position statement as an update rather than a reinvention of the School. The statement suggests a future horizon for the School that focuses on engagement with local communities.

- The School is developing activist ideas about practice, teaching and research. Students are being encouraged to take a more radical approach to architecture and to form their own distinctive ambition.

- The Head of School informed the Board that the School’s activist approach is not intended to be a narrow political statement. The programmes require
students to look at highly experimental aspects of the City, and students are encouraged to take a position at all stages of the design process.

- Staff have adopted a structured approach to teaching, however, students are responsible for making their own choices and decisions. As a result, the School is producing capable graduates who are well prepared for practice.
- The School should be internationally recognised as a small and distinctive school of architecture.
- A unique aspect of the School is the amount of space that is dedicated to Architecture; the staff team is reluctant for student numbers to increase above 110 in order to maintain this space. The small size of the School enables staff and students to form strong personal relationships.
- Many Part 1 graduates choose to apply to architecture schools based in London. The Part 2 programme would benefit from a manageable increase in student numbers; this would enable the School to recruit a more diverse range of students and to test a wider range of positions.
- The Part 2 programme appeals to students who wish to gain a specialist art school experience.
- There is a strong community of staff and students within the School. Student numbers are steadily increasing, and the School is obliged to accept a higher number of students if they apply to the Architecture programmes.
- The Head of School reported that Architecture as a subject is traditionally viewed as a highly academic degree, and the School is keen to offer more diverse routes of entry into the discipline. Historically, the foundation students at UCA have developed into highly successful graduates.
- Staff are discussing the development of a Year 0. The Board was informed that Year 0 would be aimed towards recruiting students who do not have a strong academic background or portfolio based experience. Year 0 students would be offered direct entry to year 1 of the Part 1 programme.
- The School has a serious and consistent engagement with the immediate context of Canterbury and the Cathedral. The archive of the School demonstrates a close involvement and engagement with the vernacular of Kent. Students are also involved with more complex places located in London and overseas.
- The School considers it important for students to understand their immediate locality and their location on the edge of London. Students projects gradually progress from local sites to sites outside the region; this progression helps to provide a basis for comparison and broaden the students experience and scope of work.’
- The Future Practice module enables the School to form a dialogue with local communities and students are encouraged to take their work to a public forum. Students work in small groups and are becoming more adventurous every year. Many projects involve working with arts organisations.
- Part 1 graduates acquire a wide range of ambitions and have a strong loyalty to the School. They also develop a strong sense of place through the programme.
- The first year of Part 1 mainly focuses on local sites. Students also study sites in Margate and East London.
- Students articulate a clear research agenda through their thesis and they develop methodologies to approach increasingly complex issues.
- There have been disruptions in terms of the staffing for management, practice and law. Staff are encouraging students to think dynamically about ways to
practise. The Part 1 programme enables students to acquire team building and entrepreneurship skills.

- The University has a sensible approach towards research and staff are being encouraged to focus on developing distinctive types of practice based research.

14.2 Meeting with students

The meeting was attended by approximately 30 students who were representative of all years of the Part 1 and Part 2 programmes. The following reflects the main points of discussion:

- Projects vary throughout the programme and enable students to use a range of different skills. Students are taught to showcase their skills, talent and ambition.
- The studio units offer a range of different briefs and scales. Project briefs and requirements are very clear and specific, but also offer freedom to take the project in a different direction.
- Student interests drive project work. Students are given freedom to make decisions on how to develop and evolve their concept with guidance and support from tutors.
- Structural engineers and architects visit the School on a regular basis and offer one-to-one tutorials with students.
- Students feel supported by the lecture series (in year 2) that helps them to develop their research and analysis skills in preparation for the thesis project. In the third year there are one-to-one tutorials that offer specific support for dissertation subjects.
- Students are made aware of the RIBA criteria at the start of the programme.
- The student representatives confirmed that they had used feedback from the student body to produce the course appraisal document that formed a part of the Board’s pre-visit documentation. A small number of students confirmed that they had read the document.
- Students expressed different viewpoints about cultural context; first year students reported that the subject was not as exciting and engaging as project work. In comparison, third year students reported that their experience of cultural context was more focused and engaging.
- Students also expressed different viewpoints regarding the timing of the dissertation. Some considered that the dissertation deadline should be extended (into the following semester) in order to enable their theory work to underpin their design rather than being seen as separate pieces of work.
- Staff do not set prescriptive briefs and students have the freedom to forge their own identities. This is attractive to employers, and graduates stand out as individuals.
- The School enables students to develop confidence in talking about their work and presenting themselves as designers.
- Graduates forge their own identities and are able to interact confidently with the profession.
- There is a good mix of UK and non-UK students on the programmes.
- The majority of students confirmed that they would return for the Part 2 programme.

Students identified the strengths of the school as the following:
- The community atmosphere and the small size of the School which enables staff to support students on a personal basis. Staff contact time is excellent. Tutors and staff from both the School and other departments are approachable and supportive.
- The School is located in a historical city and is well linked to London and Europe. Canterbury Cathedral adds grandeur to the idea of architecture.
- The specialist, arts-school context is an inspiring environment and enables students to acquire a creative mind-set.
- Students are encouraged to develop their own ambitions and push boundaries.
- Graduates of Canterbury acquire personal identities as designers.

Students suggested the following improvements:
- The School should deliver more formal inductions as a way to introduce first year students to the wide range of creative facilities available at UCA. Students informed the Board that allocated time to use the wider facilities is not formally integrated within the structure of the timetable. As a result they felt that they had discovered the facilities at a much later stage in the programme, and that opportunities had been missed to interact with other disciplines.
- Students felt that they would benefit from more in-house technology support and clearer guidance on construction and environmental engineering.
- Students considered that the University’s recent change to the UCA brand had taken away the School’s sense of belonging to Canterbury: which historically was a strong part of the School’s identity. The majority of students confirmed that they supported the CSA brand and valued independence as a school of architecture within UCA. However they also felt that the identity of CSA could be more strongly marketed and promoted by the University.
- Some students felt that there had been missed opportunities in visiting the building sites on campus as part of the course.
- Students acknowledged that the open studio space enabled interaction with other year groups, however they also felt that they would benefit from a small amount of dedicated private space for 2nd and 3rd year students. Some students felt pressured in claiming ownership of their own studio space.
- Students also felt that the School should deliver more workshops on model-making techniques.

14.3 Meeting with head of institution
The Board held a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor of UCA. The following reflects the main points of discussion:
- The University is focusing on refreshing the CSA brand and asserting singularity as an institution. UCA is seen as a sign off identity for the programmes within the University rather than an umbrella identity.
- Student numbers are increasing steadily across the university, however the School is committed to ensuring that the student experience is protected by maintaining the SSR. Recruitment remains challenging due to the close competition in London.
- There has been a major restructuring of technical provision across UCA. The Maidstone Campus has now closed and the courses have been relocated to other campuses at UCA. As a result, Architecture has gained more dedicated technical support and students have greater access to other technical areas on campus.
The School held a series of meetings with students to discuss the restructuring of technical support. The decision-making process was consultative and effectively managed by the staff team.

The Vice-Chancellor confirmed that there had been discussions with the School regarding the development of a Year 0. The following points were discussed:

- The University acknowledges that there is a market for a Year 0 particularly for students who do not have a traditional academic background.
- The staff team envisage that Year 0 would be an integrated cohort within the Part 1 programme. At present, the School is not pressured in terms of space and resources, and there is space to grow. Space within the current building (rather than additional space) would be provided.
- The staff team consider that Year 0 would help to establish a stronger relationship with the local community.

The Vice-Chancellor informed the Board that the University is committed to strengthening the Canterbury campus and will increase student numbers across the range of disciplines to create vibrancy and dynamism within UCA.

The appointment of a Professor has given the School confidence in appointing a high profile figure. The new post holder has expressed a strong commitment to architecture being located within an art and design environment. Fine Art and Architecture will benefit from engaging with other disciplines on campus.

The University is content with the formation of the School, but is keen for the quality of work exhibited in the end-of-year show to be reflected in the recruitment and profile of the School.

The University recognises the benefits of the School’s particular scale and its ambition to be recognised for the greater profile and impact which it deserves.

The University would like to generate greater mixing within the campus so that students interact and engage with other disciplines on a natural basis.

14.4 Meeting with external examiners

The meeting was attended by three external examiners attached to the Part 1 and Part 2 programmes. The following reflects the main points of discussion:

- CSA attracts a diverse range of students from a broad range of educational backgrounds. The small size of the school is a benefit as it offers opportunities for students to define their own programme of study and to take an individual approach to developing their projects.
- CSA has established links with other disciplines including landscape, photography and film. The programmes are benefiting from the diverse range of art and design courses that surround the school.
- The established staff team work well together and are supported by a strong core team of sessional staff. The School ensures that members of sessional staff feel involved with the full-time team.
- Examiners confirmed that the staff team are responsive to the feedback they receive from external examiners in their reports.
- The third year of Part 1 is a strong cohort and progression through the course is improving. The Part 1 course team are choosing sites that students are able to manage.
At Part 1, the choice of sites has improved so that students are more involved with a range of technical issues, however, examiners informed the Board that they had concerns regarding students’ ability to communicate and evidence their awareness of environmental and technical issues.

The School is growing in confidence. The Part 2 course team has shown particular confidence in developing its own methodologies in teaching and learning. The programme would benefit from attracting a stronger body of students which will help develop greater diversity across studio projects.

Part 2 has a unique investigative research aspect that encourages graduates’ curiosity. Graduates develop an activist approach to architecture.

Part 2 students have a strong sense of the broader practice of architecture outside of design.

Examiners informed the Board that they were aware that the School is considering establishing a targeted Year 0 that would offer direct entry to Part 1. They raised concerns regarding securing funding for Year 0 as this would not be considered a foundation course by the government.

Examiners reported that the subject area of cultural context had been unstable over the past four years due to changes in staffing. The School is currently advertising for a post in this area.

The School is using the full range of marks and staff are willing to reward students higher marks where deserved.

Students’ dissertations are adopting different formats, and examiners were pleased to learn that some students were reflecting on architects’ practice. Students are starting to regard their written work as being as much of a creative activity as their studio work.

The School has adopted a themed strategy that is promoting a sense of enquiry in students. The School’s objective is to enable students to understand the processes of research and investigation.

Examiners considered that the broader Institution needs to establish a better recruitment strategy. Examiners informed the Board that the biggest challenge the School faces is uncertainties in staffing and a contextual studies appointment should be made as a priority.

Examiners felt strongly that the School should prioritise raising its profile as an independent school of architecture. They anticipated that over the following year the School would feel the real impact and benefits of the appointment of a high profile professor.

Examiners also felt that there was a certain degree of ambiguity as to how much the School should be marketing its activities and how much the Institution should be promoting them.

14.5 Meeting with staff
The meeting was attended by 13 members of staff. The Board was interested in exploring the following areas: the CSA brand, technology syllabus, cultural context, marking and process, and the School’s engagement with the region. The following reflects the main points of discussion:

The brand launch of CSA remains in transition and the School is moving towards forming a stronger identity. Staff and students strongly believe in the importance of having a ‘place-based’ school of architecture. Staff understood that new Vice-Chancellor was supportive of the CSA brand as a school with an independent identity.
• The architecture school forms part of a wider arts school. UCA is a multidisciplinary creative environment and there are opportunities for students and staff to access other disciplines. The School is strengthening its access to the wider facilities, particularly Fine Art’s.

• The work exhibited in the recent end-of-year show was of a high standard and reflects confidence of the student body.

• Sessional staff confirmed that they felt involved in the School’s overall approach and direction. There are opportunities for them to discuss ways to develop and improve the programmes that they deliver. There are also opportunities for sessional staff to progress into full or part-time roles.

• There is a strong team of sessional staff in the third year of Part 1, however it is challenging for sessional staff to communicate across different years. Members of staff would benefit from establishing stronger engagement across the school as a team in a more formalised way.

• Staff confirmed that the marking is shared throughout the staff team, and everyone is involved in the process. At both Part 1 and Part 2, all of the work is double marked.

• Part 2 projects have a diverse range of studio agendas that use different locations and scales. Students begin with a small intensive project then progress to large scale work.

• Throughout the two years of the Part 2 programme, the School offers students opportunities to resolve complex architectural issues.

• Many students are securing employment through the RIBA Mentoring Scheme, however the programme is oversubscribed. The scheme is the School’s formal route of engagement with practice, and staff acknowledge that there is potential for this to develop. Some students are experiencing difficulties in securing work with a practice that they can afford to travel to on a regular basis.

• The University is supportive of research, however staff are unable to dedicate a significant proportion of their time to research. Staff share their research and practice interests informally. At Part 1 there could be more collaborations between staff members. Staff would like to make a stronger connection between their research and teaching.

• The School should consider how to better utilise its communal meeting places to enable students to form a community that encourages integration with other courses across the wider landscape of UCA.

The Board considered that the staff team should consider how to utilise the opportunities presented to the School through the appointment of the professor.

15 Delivery of academic position
The Board made the following comments in relation to the academic position statement:

• The statement clearly positions the School, however, the Board considered that it was time-limited and should convey the overall direction and ambition of the programmes.

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.

The Board considered that the BA (Hons) Architecture and Master of Architecture programmes address the Graduate Attributes at Part 1 and Part 2 respectively.

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.

The Board considered that the BA (Hons) Architecture and Master of Architecture programmes address all criteria at Part 1 and Part 2 respectively.

18 **Other information**

Total student numbers Part 1: 181
Total student numbers Part 2: 38

19.1 **Documentation provided**

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