Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the Kent School of Architecture, University of Kent

Date of visiting board: 11/12 December 2014
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 17 April 2015
1 **Details of institution hosting course/s** (report part A)

University of Kent
Kent School of Architecture
Marlowe Building
Canterbury
Kent
CT2 7NR

2 **Head of Architecture Group**
Professor Don Gray

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

4 **Course leader/s**
Professor Gerald Adler - Architecture, Part 1
Michael Richards - MArch Architecture, Part 2

5 **Awarding body**
University of Kent

6 **The visiting board**
David Howarth – Chair, Practitioner
Professor Norman Wienand – Vice Chair, Co-professional
Jane Mcallister – Academic
Peter Williams – Practitioner
Roosje Barr – Practitioner
Nick Eldridge – Regional representative
Thomas Aquilina – Student representative

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](http://www.architecture.com).

8 **Proposals of the visiting board**
On the 17 April 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

Part 1  BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2  MArch

The next full Visiting Board to the University of Kent will take place in 2019.
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)

Kent School of Architecture (KSA) was established in 2005. The school is located in the Marlowe Building and is part of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Kent, alongside the Faculty of Sciences and the Faculty of Social Sciences.

When the school was founded, it was established as a “teaching only” school, with no substantial research credentials. It did not, for example, submit to the 2008 RAE. From 2007, the development of research became a major focus for the school, and the increase in staff research appointments allowed the growing body of research expertise to be incorporated into teaching in an accretionary manner. We made a strong submission to REF 2014

There is now a thriving research community of fifteen members who organise events open to all our students. The engagement of active researchers has had positive effects in the teaching of sustainability, structures and technology, architectural history and theory (with an emphasis on European history) and in city planning and urban design.

Academic Focus: BA (Honours) Architecture

The school attracts particularly bright applicants. The average UCAS entry tariff for students entering stage 1 is 400 points, the second highest of any programme in the University. Our humanities focus stimulates excellence in critical thinking and our students are confident and articulate presenters as a result. At undergraduate level we operate a year system promoting individuality and architectural ambition over house styles. This gives students the freedom to explore, experiment and choose how they develop their ideas about space, materiality, form, functionality and the user experience. We empower our students and trust them to represent the school: they curate the end of year exhibition and design, edit and publish the catalogue.
Academic Focus: MArch

We operate a unit system of widely diverse practices and theoretical interests, each with their own dedicated teams of technical tutors founded in a strong studio culture with dedicated unit spaces. Our MArch students participate in live research projects and use their experience to act as teaching assistants in Stage 1 as part of their dedicated pedagogy module. In addition, the programme capitalises on opportunities for international engagement: New York, Venice, Paris.

KSA Offer

The school obtains its distinctive offer through its activities in five main areas:

**Europe and the region:** Europe - The University prides itself on being “the UK's European University” and the school evidences this commitment through its Masters in Urban Design taught in Paris, its offer of field trips to a wide range of locations on mainland Europe and an increasing number of Erasmus exchange opportunities. We make full use of our Study Centres in Athens, Brussels, Paris and Rome. Our strengthening relationship with the British Council resulted in our presence this year at the Venice Biennale.

The region - KSA is committed to the region in which it is located, and offers students the opportunity to engage with design projects of local significance. The school is fully engaged with RIBA-SE. Apart from hosting events, we are committed to our relationship with RIBA, organising the participation of Stage 3 in the RIBA-SE mentoring scheme.

- Our design projects are located in the region, addressing contemporary issues and real project situations
- To satisfy overseas demand for the BA, the school contributes to a Foundation programme in design. KSA also runs outreach programmes for schoolchildren and a summer school
- KSA runs public lectures featuring speakers invited by our research centres: CREAte (the Centre for Research in European Architecture) or CASE (the Centre for Architecture and Sustainable Environment). A lively series is organized by the student association, KASA (Kent Architecture Student Association).

**Grounded in practice:** We equip our students for a lifetime of practice and learning in architecture, starting with their first job in practice: we are ranked second in the UK for employability.

- We are grounded in practice: all of our design Assistant and Associate Lecturers (AALs, our term for visiting tutors) are engaged in a wide range of private practice
- We have maintained high levels of design tutoring, almost doubling the number of AALs in line with an equivalent increase in full time staff.
- We equip our students for practice: 96% of our students are in professional employment within 6 months of graduation
**Fine art embedded with digital technology teaching:** Following the last RIBA Visiting Board, the school successfully lobbied for additional presentation space. Our success allowed us to further strengthen our commitment to a variety of communications media supported by corresponding space allocations. Our design studios and Digital Crit Space are fundamental to the student learning experience. The popularity of the studios has led to intensive use of the space.

- We teach and value fine art practices at all stages in the programme
- We use digital technology creatively in teaching and presentation, and provide significant resources to support digital learning

**World-class researchers teach at all levels:** Our researchers work out of two research centres: the Centre for Research in European Architecture (CREAte) and the Centre for Architecture and Sustainable Environments (CASE). Our post-graduate programmes support and strengthen teaching at undergraduate level. KSA runs Masters programmes in Urban Design, Sustainable Environments, Conservation and Architectural Visualisation. All post-graduate Programme Directors are intimately involved with the validated programmes.

**Students engaged in teaching:** through the MArch ‘pedagogy’ module. This is an emerging aspect of the reputation of KSA in the sector. It is one example of the way in which KSA empowers its students by engaging them in the developmental activities of the school. Students organise, design, publish and print the End of Year catalogue. Students participate in our recruitment events in the UK, and have recently begun to contribute to OS recruitment activities. Our students will help to develop, design and deliver our BYOD environment. They are actively involved with the Architects’ Student Network – ASN. The confidence we invest in our students enables them to stand out in an increasingly competitive graduate careers market.

11 **Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The appointment of key research staff.

11.2 The engaged and articulate student body.

11.3 The potential opportunities offered by the exchange programme to both the individual and the student body.

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 The Board understands the need for open and interpretable briefs, however recommends that the School more clearly define the content and output of the modules and the relationships between them.

13.2 The School should review how students more clearly demonstrate the process and integration of history and theory, context and social and political thinking within design portfolios.

13.3 The Board recommends that the School reviews the way that MArch briefs are developed to ensure parity across the units.

13.4 The Board acknowledges the development of technology within the course. However, it recommends that the School continues to review the way technology is integrated and assessed at Part 1 and Part 2.

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 The Board advises the School to encourage greater use of large scale physical modelling and material investigations in teaching and design explorations, and to ensure this is evidenced in the academic portfolios and repeats the advice of the previous visiting board (10.4.5.)

14.2 The Board recognises the quality of research expertise in the School. However, it advises that research in its wider form becomes disseminated through the course as evidenced by developments in the delivery of module AR547.

14.3 The Board advises that the School more clearly evidences group work in the academic portfolio.

14.4 The Board advises the Department to redraft the academic position statement to more clearly articulate the identity and vision of the School and reflect more clearly the course values and ambitions.

15 **Delivery of academic position** *(report part B)*
   The following key points were noted:

15.1 see 14.4 for key points (Advice)

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 was content that all graduate attributes for Part 1 and Part 2 were met.

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 was content that all general criteria for Part 1 and Part 2 were met.

18 **Other information**

18.1 **Student numbers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA Part 1</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MArch Part 2</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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