Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA exploratory board to the University of Reading
School of Architecture

Date of visiting board: 5 & 6 October 2017
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 9 February 2018
1 Details of institution hosting course/s
University of Reading
Whiteknights
PO Box 217
Reading
Berkshire RG6 6AH

School of Architecture
The Old Library
Building L046,
London Road
Reading
RG1 5AQ

2 Head of Architecture
Professor Lorraine Farrelly

3 Course/s offered for candidate course status
BSc (Hons) Architecture

4 Course director
Oliver Froome-Lewis

5 Awarding body
University of Reading

6 The visiting board
Andrew Wilson, Chair
Angie Pascoe, Vice-Chair
Tania Love

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA Validation Manager, was 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.

8 Recommendation of the Exploratory Board
The Board was invited by the University of Reading to consider its BSc (Hons) Architecture for candidate course status for 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.

On 9 February 2018 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed, by circulation, that Candidate Course status for Part 1 be awarded to the:

BSc (Hons) Architecture
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 Reading. This is likely to be when the first full cohort graduates.

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 University of Reading has a strong existing reputation for its built environment provision. This reputation includes current undergraduate and postgraduate programmes not only in Construction Management and Engineering (CME), but also in Real Estate and Planning (REP) within Henley Business School (HBS). Of particular note is the University’s strong discipline-specific research profile as evidenced in the REF 2014. The University submitted to UoA 16 covering Architecture, Built Environment and Planning with 83% of research rated world-leading (4*) or internationally excellent (3*). The advent of Architecture has already enhanced the vitality of the School’s research environment, with increasing activity ‘across the scales’ relating to urbanisation and smart cities.

It is therefore the existing strengths of the University of Reading which makes architecture such a compelling addition. Hence we have a pre-determined competitive advantage in entering the market place for architecture. We are especially well-placed to respond to the recommendations of the Farrell Review in respect of more professional models of education. Of further relevance is Farrell’s proposal that towns and cities should have an ‘urban room’ - a place for discussion and debate around the quality of the built environment. The new School of Architecture is already actively involved in the civic conversation around Reading – not least the Reading 2050 initiative- a group of business and civic leaders working in partnership with the University to Vision the future of the region. We are further actively developing plans for an urban room through the School of Architecture.

The proposal to launch Architecture at Reading has from the outset been developed in parallel with the University’s strategy. There is a particular strong resonance with the three overlapping and interdependent themes of the strategy:
**Educating the 21st Century lives**
Urbanisation is without doubt one of the key global themes of the 21st Century. Half of the world’s population now lives in urban areas, and the other half is increasingly dependent upon cities for their economic progress. Educating for the 21st Century must therefore engage with changing aspects of the built environment, and the view was taken that the University’s coverage could not be complete without architecture. Design by definition is about the creation of the future, and the quality of life in increasingly shaped by the buildings, neighbourhoods and cities within which we live.

**Securing and sustaining societies**
Understanding complex societal challenges and questions undoubtedly requires cross-disciplinary expertise. But finding creative solutions requires design skills. Given current global trends of urbanisation, many such solutions will inevitably relate to the design of the built environment. Indeed, the human experience of societal change is inevitably mediated through their interaction with the architecture of the built environment. This applies to the past in the same way that it applies to the future. Architecture and the built environment are of central importance in ensuring the security of future societies. The built environment is also of central importance to the sustainability agenda – not least because it accounts for such a high proportion of greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable societies and designing for resilience will be strong themes within the new School of Architecture.

**Advancing policy and practice**
Design is an essential component of the UK government agenda across a range of policy areas, including housing, health, education and transport. Recent years have seen an increasing emphasis on the importance of good design in meeting strategic policy objectives. This is true not only within the UK, but also internationally. The addition of architecture to the University of Reading portfolio can only serve to strengthen our voice within key policy domains. Existing built environment provision has a strong orientation towards professional practice and consequently close relationships with professional institutions. Examples include the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB). This close connectivity with the professions accords well with the aspiration to influence policy and practice. The advent of architecture will extend the University’s coverage to the architectural profession, and its governing body, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

**Proposed special features of course**
The rationale for the proposed School of Architecture is strong and distinctive. We are developing a model of architectural education that encourages and facilitates the interdisciplinary nature of modern building design. Architects increasingly operate within the context of interdisciplinary teams; they need not only to understand architectural design, they need to understand how to interact collaboratively with other building professionals in an increasingly digital age. They need to understand architecture as a business. The designed curriculum builds
thematically on existing expertise in areas such as commercial management, construction law, digital representation and construction technology. It will be important that Architecture is not isolated from current degree programmes within CME (and REP). The new curriculum creates significant synergies with existing teaching and learning, especially in the context of construction technology and joint studio-based project work. The co-location with current activities within the larger School of the Built Environment is a distinguishing characteristic. Joint project work with surveying and construction management students will contribute to the richness of the overall student experience.

The proposition also builds on the School of the Built Environment’s strong existing connectivity with the construction and property sectors. Of particular importance is our strong reputation for professional education. It is this focus on professionalism which will be a cornerstone of the new programme in architecture. We have already developed strong links with architectural practices based within the Thames Valley and beyond. Feedback has already been highly positive and bodes well for a robust programme of placements and internships. We have an Industry Advisory group which comprises a range of architectural practices, including Allies Morrison, Barton Wilmore and Broadway Malyan together with construction companies such as Wates and Bouygues.

**Academic position statement**

The long-term vision is to develop a linked suite of options through studio projects to engage in professional education in the built environment. These options will connect to specialisms across the School of the Built Environment, such as BIM and energy and environment. Students have a dedicated studio space directly simulating the working environment of the modern architectural practice. The students are actively encouraged to manage their space in a professional way. The undergraduate degree will feed a range of post-graduate courses offering alternative career directions within the School of Built Environment. There is also strong potential for CPD programmes for mid-career professionals, thereby resonating with a further aspect of the University Strategy around employability.

**Relationship to practice**

A key ambition for the new programme is to engage with practice. We will offer our students a range of career options within the construction industry and built environment professional sectors. The School is developing a work experience programme to align with the good practice established in CME, placing second year students in short-term work experience in a range of companies associated with architecture and the construction industry. We have already hosted a series of practice-based events inviting practitioners to engage in a debate around architecture education and also the possibilities of practice-based research and future collaboration with the University.

The relationship to the local regional debate around architecture and the built environment is important for the new School. We have developed a series of public lectures starting in October 2016 around
the theme of Innovative Practice in Architecture. We have worked with the local authority to help establish a local design review panel to encourage debate around design of the public realm and architecture. We are also hosting a series of events around environmental design and the vision for the city of Reading to encourage our students to participate in the debate around current issues affecting architecture. For 2017/18 our student group is organising a series of public lectures entitled Communities of Design. We will also host a series of lectures – Reading 2050 to encourage debate around the future vision for the region.

**Collaborative Education**

We are proposing a new paradigm of collaborative architectural education, providing students with the opportunity to learn across a range of built environment disciplines. Such an approach answers many of the criticisms of the Farrell Review and has been welcomed by architectural practice. Moving towards more a practice-focused model of architectural education with more emphasis on collaboration between different built environment professions aligns strongly with current thinking on architectural education.

In the first instance, the School of Architecture offers a three-year full time BSc Architecture degree (Part 1). This has been prescribed by the ARB from September 2016 and the first cohort of 43 students has been admitted. A two-year Masters in Architecture (Part 2) programme is proposed to start from 2020, with studios offered to connect with the University’s research expertise in our research groups in the School of the Built Environment including: (i) Urban living and (ii) Energy and environmental engineering.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The Board commends the University for the degree of investment in setting up the new course and for the quality of staff appointments made at all levels.

11.2 The Board commends the School of Architecture for the distinctiveness and relevance of the programme in its ambition to create a new generation of architects. This has been integrated across the curriculum in an effective and coherent way.

11.3 The Board commends the School of Architecture for creating a strong student-centred and student-led culture from the start.

11.4 The Board commends the School of Architecture for the quality of the design projects set and the topical issues that they investigate.

11.5 The Board commends the School of Architecture for the quality of the documentation provided and the overall organization of the Exploratory Visit.
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 At this early stage there are no action points.

13. Advice
The 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 of Architecture and the student body are clear in their wishes for authentic interdisciplinary learning and the Board advises that this is actively implemented as soon as is practically possible.

13.2 The Board notes the School of Architecture’s commitment to addressing environmental issues and advises that this is clearly demonstrated in graduate outcomes.

13.3 The Board notes the revision to the teaching of technology and advises that the School of Architecture continue to monitor this as the course evolves.

14 Delivery of academic position
This is commended in 11.2

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 the programme demonstrated the potential to meet Part 1 graduate attributes if implemented as anticipated.

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.

Criteria for Part 1
The Board confirmed that the programme demonstrated the potential to meet the criteria for validation if implemented as anticipated.

17. Other information

17.1 Student numbers
First Year 2017 entry: 55
Second year 2017 entry: 42

17.2 **Documentation provided**
The School provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

18. **Notes of meetings**
On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings. These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request.

18.1 Head of Institution
18.2 Meeting with the Head of the School of the Built Environment and the Head of the Department of Architecture
18.3 Meeting with students
18.4 Meeting with staff