

## **Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Cambridge**

**Date of visiting board:** 7/8 November 2019

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee:** 13 February 2020

**1 Details of institution hosting course/s**

University of Cambridge  
Department of Architecture  
1 Scroope Terrace  
Cambridge  
CB2 1PX

**2 Head of the Department of Architecture**

Dr James Campbell

**3 Courses offered for validation**

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
Part 2 MPhil in Architecture & Urban Design (MAUD)  
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

**4 Programme Directors**

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture – Mary Ann Steane  
Part 2 MPhil in Architecture & Urban Design (MAUD) - Ingrid Schröder  
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture –  
Miranda Terry

**5 Awarding body**

The University of Cambridge

**6 The visiting board**

Roger Hawkins – Chair / practitioner  
Sara Shafiei – Vice-Chair academic  
Nick Hayhurst – practitioner  
Gul Kacmaz Erk – academic  
Charlie Follett – student/graduate member

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA 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**

At its meeting on 12 February 2020 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed continued validation of the following programmes:

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
Part 2 MPhil in Architecture & Urban Design  
Part 3 Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

The next full visiting board will take place in 2024.

**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 of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

**10 Academic position statement (written by the School)**

The Cambridge Department of Architecture has managed to firmly establish itself as a research institution within Cambridge University with fulltime teaching officers actively engaged in research providing the academic lead while the link to the profession is provided by studio teachers (in Cambridge termed “Design Fellows”) who are qualified architects, actively engaged in practice. The ethos of the school continues to be based on a contextualised approach to design, both in terms of studio teaching and learning, and in research. There is a strong emphasis on understanding the socio- political context and on a realistic and sustainable approach to construction emphasising the grounding of projects in the real world rather than overly theoretical or abstract solutions. Across the Department there continues to be an engagement with the challenging issues that are of concern in today’s world: 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 throughout the course and post- graduate students are expected to actively relate to them in their own research and design and to be able to defend their positions.

In our Tripos (undergraduate Part 1), in our MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design (MAUD – Part 2) and in our Part 3 course students benefit from Cambridge University’s supervision system that allows exceptional small- group teaching and learning, as well as the University’s facilities in the form of libraries and collections, multi-disciplinary research resources. We are committed to 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 and its excellent welfare support. 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**

While Cambridge offers a challenging set of examination courses covering all aspects of the criteria and beyond, design studio is absolutely 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 Tripos Studio Coordinator ensures continuity across the years. 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 to 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 fully-funded annual fieldtrip (last year to Naples, this year to Venice) 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 sciences 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.

### **MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design (ARB/RIBA Part 2)**

The MPhil in Architecture and Urban Design course is a professional degree designed to provide a secure grounding in research methodology so that students can, if they wish, proceed directly on to a PhD. It is the clearest demonstration of the Department’s commitment to combining design and research and feeds into the growing understanding in the profession that

research is increasingly important for successful practice and the future of the profession. The course is currently two years long, with a 6-9 month intersession 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 and to develop their written research dissertation in tandem with their design portfolio.

Students benefit from lectures and seminars in a variety of topics (some in conjunction with MPhil in Architecture and Urban Studies, our one-year wholly-research MPhil), individual studio supervision in design and research supervisions from experts available in the Department related to their specific topic and approach.

### **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 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.

### **Further Developments**

The poor workshop and digital fabrication facilities were noted in previous reports. The University has provided the ground floor of the new Dyson building which will be handed over on 2 December. It is hoped that this will become a new Digital Fabrication Laboratory, with funding being sought from donors and the University to equip it in the coming year. We plan to move to zero cost to students for materials in the coming year as a target both for sustainability but also as an important part of our widening-participation agenda. Plans for a new jointly-accredited Masters in Architecture Design Engineering course (MADE), if successful will lead to the acquisition of a two-storey building workshop transferred from Engineering, while it is hoped that a new Architect Apprenticeship (Part II and Part III ARB/RIBA) which will begin in September 2020 will further increase our scope for offering degrees without cost to students. There are also plans to investigate the provision of CPD courses and a Masters in Building Conservation. The Department is keen to improve and change its courses and welcomes suggestions.

## **11. Commendations**

- 11.1 The Board commends University and Departmental outreach efforts that have clearly been successful in broadening the architecture student body, who are enthusiastic, committed and driven individuals.

- 11.2 The Board commends the improvements made to Part 3 by the Programme Director, resulting in diversity in case studies, candidates and associated practices. The introduction of PSAs embedded in practice is to be commended as it offers further support to candidates.

**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 processes. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 13.1 Action Point 13.1 of the 2014 Visiting Board report that *“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.”*

The present visiting board recommends that the School obtain exemplars of mapping documents to help them to simplify and focus their mapping.

The Board remained concerned about the integration of key criteria into the Part 2 programme. It is vital that all Part 2 passing students can demonstrate in their work that all graduate attributes and professional criteria have been met. Clearer mapping may help in identifying these key omissions.

- 13.2 Immediate provisions in AV, IT and workshop facilities need to be addressed. The 2014 Validation Board action point 13.2 still applies: *“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.”*

The Board believes that this has not been adequately addressed and further delay may disadvantage current students.

- 13.3 Although in-depth research and individuality in the Part 2 student work is recognised as a strength, there is a lack of ambition in spatial design and resolution in some Part 2 work. The exploration of structural, environmental, construction, and management practice and law need to be demonstrated and further strengthened in all student thesis projects.

**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 Design process is underdeveloped in the Part 2 portfolios. Visual representation of process is required.

- 14.2 More experimentation and diverse modes of representation, such as film-making, VR and variety of scales of high-quality model-making are recommended.
- 14.3 The acquisition of the Dyson building ground floor is welcome additional space. How this is best used needs urgent careful analysis, linked to the strategic ambitions of the School and potential increase in student numbers. Use of the workshop facilities will need consultation with students and specialists in the field of design and fabrication. There is also a lack of social space for staff and students for informal learning which needs to be addressed.
- 14.4 Better advertise the existing architecture-specific employment and career advice available for students at Part 1 and Part 2 level, as although it existed, it was not known about by the students at the time of the visit because it happens later in the academic year when practices are beginning to think about recruitment.
- 14.5 The School should consult the students, staff and wider University about developing a clear, reflective and forward-looking academic position statement, to represent the values of the student body and members of staff.
- 14.6 The Board welcomes the growing interest in the Cambridge region, and looks forward to further developments in this.
- 14.7 The Board welcomes the developing University initiatives interdisciplinary and collaborative working between departments and would urge the Architecture department to take advantage of these unique opportunities.
- 14.8 We recognise and applaud efforts in making free materials available to all students, with on-going reviews ensuring equality of student experience is maintained.
- 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.
- 15.1 Part 1**  
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.
- 15.2 Part 2**  
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met. However, please see Action Points 13.1 and 13.3.
- 15.3 Part 3**  
The Board confirmed that all Part 3 professional criteria were met.
- 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.
- 16.1 Please see Action Points 13.1. The Board made no further comments.

**17 Other information**

**17.1 Student numbers (from the School)**

Part 1 – 113 students

Part 2 – 42 students

Part 3 – 27 students

**17.2 Documentation provided**

The Department 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. The full set of notes will be issued to the mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.**

- Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the head of institution
- Meeting with external and professional examiners
- Meeting with staff