

Royal Institute of British Architects

report of the RIBA full visiting board
to
University of Liechtenstein
Liechtenstein

Institute of Architecture and Planning

introduction

The board wishes to thank the University of Liechtenstein for its invitation to consider their Bachelor of Science and Master of Science programme in architecture for full recognition and equivalence to RIBA part 1 and part 2. The board also thanks the university for the opportunity to consider the architecture PhD programme for RIBA validation.

The board is grateful to the staff and students of the institution for their work in preparing for the board's visit, and their hospitality and patience throughout the visit.

1 details of institution offering courses

University of Liechtenstein
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2 president

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director of BSc architecture

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3 courses offered for full recognition

- BSc Arch: Bachelor of Science in in Architecture (equivalent to RIBA part 1)
- MSc Arch: Master of Science in Architecture (equivalent to RIBA part 2)
- PhD programme in architecture and planning

4 awarding body

University of Liechtenstein

5 the visiting board

Professor Paul Jones

chair

Dr Harriet Harriss

vice-chair

Roger Hawkins

member

Professor David Gloster

reporter, in attendance

6 procedures and criteria for the visit

The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria, effective from September 2011 (current revision). For more information see www.architecture.com.

7 at its meeting on 31 October 2018 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed validation of:

- BSc Arch: Bachelor of Science in in Architecture (equivalent to RIBA part 1)
- MSc Arch: Master of Science in Architecture (equivalent to RIBA part 2)
- PhD programme in architecture and planning

The next visit to the university will take place in 2023.

8 standard requirements for continued recognition

- Continued RIBA recognition of courses/qualifications is dependent upon:
- 8.1 external examiners or external assessors being appointed for the course
 - 8.2 any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA New Courses Group
 - 8.3 any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA New Courses Group so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title
 - 8.4 submission to the RIBA Education department of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed

9 academic position statement

The University of Liechtenstein is a leading university in the international Lake Constance region. It is a place for personal development, interaction as well as critical and creative thought, and a hub of innovation for shaping the future. It has an excellent reputation and outstanding network of contacts. Education and research meet the highest international standards. The University of Liechtenstein is defined by entrepreneurial leadership applied to all levels and areas.

Institute of Architecture and Planning mission statement:

We educate architects of the future, who

- *design and build with social, ecological, economic and cultural responsibility,*
- *are regionally embedded yet globally active*
- *unite theory and praxis within their practice*

This we pursue unconditionally within our teaching and research.

Context = Content

The context the Institute of Architecture and Planning is operating in extends beyond the national boundaries of Liechtenstein. The region it addresses, also

known as the Alpine Rhine Valley, covers parts of eastern Switzerland, western Austria and southern Germany. It is defined by its alpine landscape and by its appreciation of high quality architecture sensitive to its geographic and cultural context. Successful architects work in the region (among them Pritzker Prize winner Peter Zumthor, Gion A. Caminada, Valerio Olgiati, Bernardo Bader or Baumschlager Eberle) and well-known initiatives have established architecture as a successful ambassador for entire regions (for example Holzbaukunst Vorarlberg, Austria). Craftsmanship, and with it a keen

interest in sustainable construction processes are further qualities that are reflected in how the Institute of Architecture and Planning educates its students. We like to think that our context defines the content of what we teach and the values we aim to pass on to our students. It is this coherency that defines our school's identity.

The Institute's distinctive features:

Small and personal *currently there are just under 200 students studying at the Institute of Architecture and Planning. The faculty to student ratio in the design studios currently stands at 1 to 12.*

Project based learning *project-based learning is at the core of our curriculum. In the design studios, students work intensively on an architectural project. All other classes are meant to provide input for work conducted in the design studio.*

Interdisciplinary *additionally, the design studios are co-taught by experts from other professional or academic fields, encouraging design proposals that are at their heart interdisciplinary.*

Close to praxis *in the Bachelors degree programme, taught in German, professional practice is an essential element of the curriculum. The school has established a network of approximately 40 practices in the region where students conduct internships and whose principals participate in various forms of assessment. Teaching projects in scale 1:1 provide ideal learning and making environments.*

International *the Masters degree programme, taught in English, distinguishes itself through its international and multi-cultural student*

body. Currently, students from more than 30 nationalities study in the programme. The programme's third semester is reserved for an exchange abroad, to one of our 40 partner Universities across the globe.

Focussed *the Doctoral degree programme, taught in English and German, enables students to investigate personal research interests on PhD level within three core competences of the school: architectural design and theory, sustainable design and spatial development. Students from this programme are actively part of research and teaching activities at the school, enabling a direct impact of research on teaching and vice versa.*

The Institute's three programmes:

Workshop *we use the term 'workshop' as a metaphor for the Bachelors degree programme, as it provides the place for students to learn and experience the regional praxis of architecture. The programme tries*

to answer the following question: How is sustainable architecture being produced in the Alpine Rhine Valley? Active knowledge of craftsmanship and a strong sense of responsibility for our environment and society characterise our students. Gaining a Bachelor of Science in Architecture from the University of Liechtenstein enables students to competently practice architecture in the Alpine Rhine Valley and beyond.

Laboratory *we consider our Masters degree programme to*

be a 'laboratory'. It builds upon the knowledge gained in the Bachelor's degree programme and aims to put the expertise and practice of our region into a global context. Why is architecture being produced the way it is? And how should it be done in the future? Interdisciplinarity and internationality enable comparisons with other building cultures, sciences and methods. The programme uses research as a basis from which to develop experimental and visionary design proposals.

Forum *as an extension of our Masters degree programme, the Doctoral degree programme aims to promote and develop researchers in the fields architectural design theory, sustainable design and spatial development. It is geared to international standards and criteria and students are embedded in interdisciplinary research projects and consortia,*

thus the programme becoming as much as a platform of exchange as a research programme; we consider it a 'forum' for scientific endeavours.

10 commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 the very significant commitment the university makes to the quality of the student experience by providing an intimately scaled, open, and informal learning environment supporting academic and pastoral issues
- 10.2 the proposed adoption of a project-based approach to student learning using an architecturally specific pedagogy
- 10.3 the strength, clarity, and flexibility of the three-point plan embracing craft, landscape, and upcycling as a model for architectural education at all levels of the programme
- 10.4 using the campus as a student laboratory for understanding materiality and detail through the testing and making of 1:1 projects

11 action points: BSc and MSc

The visiting board proposes the following action points, a number of which reinforce comments made previously by the exploratory board. **The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points in a strategic plan which must be submitted to the RIBA not later than 1 June 2019, with a view to implementation no later than September 2019.** Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 11.1 there are concerns that the large number of submissions and assessment points at BSc and MSc militates against the development and synthesis of reflective and comprehensive design projects at year 3 and year 5; the student body (correctly, in the view of the board) identified this as 'fractured'. The academic teams must review the structures of the BSc and MSc graduation years to concentrate study around a much reduced module offer. It is strongly recommended that not more than 5 modules overall become the graduation year norm
- 11.2 there are concerns that the balance between core modules and cross-faculty electives must be reviewed, to eliminate the potential for students to navigate through both BSc and MSc courses without reflecting all the validation criteria in their work
- 11.3 whilst anecdotally the strong emphasis on technologies of making is well catered for on site, there must be more specific demonstration in students' design studio projects that constructional and environmental technologies are understood, and closely support (and/or drive) the synthesis of graduation level projects
- 11.4 the board considered there to be an internal paradox in the desire of the university to identify and engage with the unique specificities of Liechtenstein and its region, and a lack of contextual analysis which would enhance and legitimise the development of studio design projects
- 11.5 given the clarity of the three point plan embracing craft, landscape, and upcycling as a pedagogical model, the board strongly recommends that this informs all levels of the programme

12 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.

- 12.1 whilst accepting the premise that a small and intimate learning environment is an asset currently considered intrinsic to the success of the institution, the board would urge the Institute to form a broader basis from which its appeal to future generations of students is defined
- 12.2 the institute is urged to further adopt and endorse the spirit of entrepreneurialism implicit in the business school, exploring inter-disciplinary synergies across the university, and in the communities and businesses beyond the campus; student project work may be advantageously linked to such local engagement
- 12.3 the board advises the Institute to more actively promote internationalisation through the involvement of external reviewers from outside the region, and the development of collaborative research and interschool projects at both BSc and MSc level
- 12.4 as the programme evolves and in the interests of graduating a more inclusive profession, the Institute should develop structures to support and encourage diverse learners

13 delivery of academic position

The school is pursuing a clearly defined programme which, is generally, successfully delivered. However, the board considered that the following points could be more precisely demonstrated in learning outcomes:

- **Context=Content: projects could benefit from more depth in contextual analysis (cultural/environmental/topographical/historical etc.)**
- **Small and personal/International: whilst the emphasis on an intimate campus may be beneficial to learning, the board considered there needed to be a broader pedagogical and geographical focus for project work outside the context of the Alpine Rhine valley**
- **Laboratory: the board applauded the notion of an ‘experimental and visionary’ design culture, but believed this needed to be more explicitly demonstrated in learning outcomes, and specifically at Masters level**

14 delivery of graduate attributes at parts 1 and 2

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 considered that the GAs for part 1 were adequately met.

graduate attributes for part 2

The board considered that there needed to be a more explicit intellectual progression from first to second degree, and that this needed particular expression in the outcomes of design studio projects, and a more rigorous interrogation of technology to qualify and enhance the substance of

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- graduation projects at Masters level. There were a number of specific observations re the part 2 Graduate Attributes:
- .1 *ability to generate complex design proposals showing understanding of current architectural issues, originality in the application of subject knowledge and, where appropriate, to test new hypotheses and speculations;*
MSc studio projects tended to normative solutions, and whilst the attention paid to research supporting the final synthesis of design solutions was reassuring, the board believed that final year students should be encouraged to more closely reflect this attribute in their work
- .3 *ability to evaluate materials, processes and techniques that apply to complex architectural designs and building construction, and to integrate these into practicable design proposals;*
Live projects executed on site had clearly been excellent vehicles for student learning. However, there were concerns that the principle of technology-driven projects could be more widely diffused to better emphasise the material and constructional agenda of architecture
- 15 review of work against criteria for parts 1 and 2**
The board considered that the BSc and MSc programme met the criteria at parts 1 and 2. However, there were a number of specific observations regarding the criteria which the school should note.
- criteria for parts 1 and 2**
- GC2 **adequate knowledge of the histories and theories of architecture and the related arts, technologies and human sciences**
Whilst students have a reasonable all-round understanding of histories of architecture, the board believed that - particularly at part 2 - there was scope for projects to develop from a more theoretical basis which allowed students to state a personal thesis tested against other pedagogical approaches
- GC3 **knowledge of the fine arts as an influence on the quality of architectural design**
Students have a good all round knowledge of architecture and other related built environment disciplines. However, project work did not generally reflect the cultural milieu of the artist as providing theoretical and conceptual, and technological and material perspectives on studio design work or its means of representation
- GC7 **understanding of the methods of investigation and preparation of the brief for a design project**
The board considered that - particularly at part 2 - students would benefit from far fewer assessment points and a more sophisticated academic framework which allowed for self-directed learning under general themes unifying the work of small groups of collaborators, possibly in a studio/atelier-based system
- GC8 **understanding of the structural design, constructional and engineering problems associated with building design**
Given the extraordinary topographical context of the Alpine Rhine Valley and the very particular structural, constructional, and material responses that have developed to respond to extreme weather conditions and

challenging sites, the board considered that - particularly with part 2 graduation projects - students should be encouraged to develop a greater enthusiasm for the use of a technology as a creative driver

GC9 adequate knowledge of physical problems and technologies and the function of buildings so as to provide them with internal conditions of comfort and protection against the climate, in the framework of sustainable development

Building on the commentary against GC8, the board considered that - particularly with part 2 graduation projects - students should be encouraged to explore the agenda for energy and resource efficient design as a driver for architectural conceptualisation and expression

16 doctoral programme architecture and planning: general requirements

The board recognised that the doctoral programme in the Institute of Architecture and Planning is new, and will continue to evolve as the cohort size increases. It is acknowledged therefore that forms of best practice - even in the short term - will be reviewed by the supervisory team in response to candidate feedback, and a growing confidence in those scholars involved with their doctoral studies.

The board has three principal areas against which the PhD programme is reviewed, and which together form a quality framework for determining its appropriateness for formal RIBA recognition. These are:

- general requirements for doctoral degrees
- types of PhD offered by the institutional programme
- PhD validation criteria

general requirements for doctoral degrees

The board considered that the programme had provided sufficient evidence to meet these requirements.

16.1 Doctoral degrees will be awarded to candidates who demonstrate:

- *creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research and advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication*
- *systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of an academic discipline, or area of professional practice*
- *general ability to conceptualise, design, and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications, or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, adjusting the project design to reflect unforeseen problems*
- *detailed understanding of applicable methodologies for research and advanced academic enquiry.*

Comments candidates provided good evidence of a systematic and disciplined approach to the structure and content of their extended writing, demonstrating a thorough approach to literature review, and firm command of the technical requirements of scientific writing at doctoral level.

Typically, holders of the qualification will:

- *make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, communicating their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences*
- *undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.*

Comments all candidates are actively encouraged to test the robustness of their research themes and underpinning methodologies by engaging with conferences, interim publication, and peer review. The explanations of this process by the programme leader as an intrinsic part of candidates' learning provided adequate evidence that two pints were met.

Holders will further have:

- *the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring exercise of personal responsibility and autonomous initiatives in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.*

Comments in discussing their experience of the PhD programme both with those who had completed their doctorates, and those currently undertaking doctoral studies, the board had confidence candidates were properly supported both academically and pastorally. The close environment of the Institute allowed for the development of both confidence (when needed), and for autonomy as a self-directed learner.

Types of PhDs

- 1 traditional, by research (80-100,000 words)
- 2 by design
- 3 by publication
- 4 practice-based (design research)
- 5 professional (pedagogy; practice; scholarship)

The board noted the current preference for the traditional form of PhD, identified locally by the descriptor of monograph. Whilst the monographic approach was being undertaken by the (small) cohort of current candidates in a professional and careful manner, the external appeal of the programme in the future is likely to be determined by the diversity of approaches supervisory teams in the Institute offer in the medium and long term – although it should be noted that the university also currently supports cumulative PhDs (i.e. a series of papers).

The board urges the PhD team to fast track the introduction of design- and practice-based doctorates, which it was noted the Institute was committed to. There was a consensus that the virtues of a small and intimate learning environment at the University should, desirably, be balanced by significant intellectual ambition.

PhD validation criteria

In addition to the general requirements set out above – and the imperative to offer a diverse range of approaches to completing a robust PhD - the specific criteria an RIBA-recognised doctoral programme must satisfy will address are as follows:

1 doctoral training

- *taught courses supporting candidates' independent research*
- *compulsory and optional modules*
- *formal and informal training, e.g. seminars, conferences*
- *content of courses*
- *quality of courses*

Comments the board considered that the 4 semesters of the preparation phase of the doctorate were well organised, and provided appropriate support for candidates

2 supervision

- *timescale of supervision*
- *quality and frequency of candidates' engagement with supervisor*
- *type and quality of feedback*
- *robustness of ethical and methodological approaches*
- *candidate: supervisor ratio (1:6 desirable)*

Comments – the board were satisfied that the timescale, quality, and frequency of supervision was appropriate, and that candidates felt properly supported throughout their studies. Staff: candidate ratios were good, and the nurturing atmosphere of the Institute clearly contributed to satisfactory study and completion.

3 quality of theses

- *originality of methods and/or outputs*
- *quality of research data*
- *contribution to knowledge*
- *rigour and innovation in research methods*
- *potential impact*

The board identified a lack of synthesis in the narrative of completed doctorates and those in an evolutionary state. The principal strength of candidates appeared to be in description, rather than a rigorous interrogation of analytical and propositional work capable of practical transfer to other areas of scholarly activity. This limited the impact of the thesis, and necessarily questioned the ability of the writer to consolidate knowledge for the next investigation. The intention of the programme must be to produce research-active staff who understand the distinction between process and product, and limited the potential for both originality and thus contribution to knowledge.

The explicit emphasis on traditional scientific methods appeared an inhibition to both diversity of outputs and types of doctorate, and the requirements for speculation, innovation, and propositional synthesis.

4 environment

- *training for supervisors*
- *internal QA and supervisor mentoring*
- *candidate mentoring; opportunities for candidates in research and teaching*
- *integration of programme to supporting discipline-wide teaching, research, and scholarship*
- *premises and technology*

The board considered that the usual model of the candidate as a teacher or scientific researcher in the Institute for 50% of their study time might limit the appeal of the PhD programme to other potential candidates (who of course have a choice of institutions to engage with). The programme team should review the possibility of a more open structure where a candidate enrolls only to undertake research and extended writing, and without any expectation to teach.

Additionally, whilst the programme is well-structured the inputs to candidates appear conditioned by the occasionally hermetic environment of the university. The board recommends that a group of external reviewers, critics, and supervisors be introduced to the PhD team; this will broaden the critique of the work, diversify lines of intellectual enquiry, and create a wider network in which the programme may be promoted. The development of a porous, agile, and more provocative supervisory team supported by international critique will advance the ambitions and desirability of the programme.

5 completion rates

- *statistics on annual completions*
- *success rate*
- *feedback from external examinations*

Whilst the board were mindful that the group of scholars was small, there were concerns that a further two candidates were reported as having not progressed their studies; vigilance in supporting candidates at all stages of their study is thus vital. The issue of a critical mass and cohort size also becomes extremely important, and the board considered that a larger and more diverse cohort pursuing less familiar lines and means of enquiry would raise the level and temperature of debate, as well as providing more pastoral support when studies proved especially demanding.

In conclusion, the board commends the PhD team for the fine and carefully considered introductory phase of a demanding doctoral programme which must find an identity to appeal well beyond the region, and support the internationalisation also at the heart of the university's current strategy.

The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points in a strategic plan which must be submitted to the RIBA not later than 1 June 2019, with a view to implementation no later than September 2019.

17 other information

17.1 student numbers

There are currently around 200 students studying at the Institute of Architecture and Planning, across all three levels of the programme.

17.2 documentation provided

- Validation of Bachelors and Masters Degree programme in Architecture: version 1.2
- Validation of Doctoral Degree programme in Architecture and Planning: version 1

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 next full visiting board.

18.1 president

18.2 head of architecture

18.3 students

18.4 staff