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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Exploratory Visiting  
Board to Ravensbourne**

**Date of visiting board: 22-23 February 2018  
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 01 June 2018**

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- 1**      **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**  
**Ravensbourne**  
**6 Penrose Way**  
**North Greenwich**  
**London**  
**SE10 0EW**
- 2**      **Head of Architecture Group**  
Layton Reid
- 3**      **Course/s offered for validation**  
BA (Hons) Architecture - Proposed candidate course for Part 1  
  
BA (Hons) Interior Design Environment Architectures (IDEA) -  
Proposed candidate course for Part 1
- 4**      **Course leader/s**  
Richard Patterson      BA (Hons) Architecture  
Idrees Rasouli          BA (Hons) Interior Design Environment Architectures
- 5**      **Awarding body**  
University of the Arts, London
- 6**      **The Visiting Board**  
Martin Pearce          academic/practitioner – chair  
Sally Stewart          academic  
Sheila Ryding          co professional  
Sophie Bailey          RIBA validation manager  
Caroline Gooch          observer (RIBA Education Dept)
- 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**      **Recommendation of the Visiting Board**  
The Board was invited by Ravensbourne to consider its BA (Hons) Architecture and BA (Hons) Interior Design Environment Architectures (IDEA) for proposed candidate course for 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 the 01 June 2018 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that candidate course status be granted to:
- BA (Hons) Architecture - Proposed candidate course for Part 1**
- BA (Hons) Interior Design Environment Architectures (IDEA) - Proposed candidate course for Part 1**
- A full Visiting Board to consider the programmes for initial validation and full RIBA recognition of Part 1 will take place at a date to be agreed between the RIBA and Ravensbourne. This will allow the department time to consider the action points recommended by the Exploratory

Board, and a Full Visiting Board to consider the work of the graduating cohort of the academic year TBC.

**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)

The Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Architecture and the Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Interior Design Environment Architecture (IDEA) are two prescribed architectural qualifications. The BA Hons IDEA was first validated in 2001, followed by the BA Hons Architecture in 2011. Since its inception, IDEA has transitioned from interior to architectural design, with projects predominantly focused on the re-use and alteration of existing buildings. Projects for the BA Architecture are predominantly focused on new build.

Ravensbourne is one of the United Kingdom's leading specialist higher education providers, delivering cutting-edge teaching in digital media and design. For over 50 years, it has offered a future-focused portfolio of creative higher education courses. These courses span fashion, television and broadcasting, interactive product design, architecture and environmental design, graphic design, animation, moving image, music production for media and sound design. Ravensbourne's ethos is defined by a continuous reinvention of its vocationally focused course portfolio, which is aimed at accommodating the ever-changing needs of the creative economy and also shaping their future,

Ravensbourne is a Higher Education Corporation incorporated under the 1988 Education Reform Act. It is an exempt charity under the terms of the Charities Act 2011. It receives grant funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and meets the mandatory requirements for funding, good governance and financial stewardship set out in the Memorandum of Assurance and Accountability between HEFCE and institutions. It delivers higher education courses validated by the University of the Arts London.

Ravensbourne was founded in 1962 with the amalgamation of a number of small art schools. Since its foundation, Ravensbourne has earned the respect of its peer specialist institutions and other universities for championing the creative use of digital technologies and specifically for its approach to industry engagement and employability. Ravensbourne was awarded degree awarding powers in 2017.

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## **Distinctive features of the institution**

### *Location and local community*

Ravensbourne is situated next door to the O2 Arena on a single purpose-built, state of the art campus on the Greenwich Peninsula, having relocated in 2010. On this site, it continues to pursue its mission of contributing strongly to the development of East London and to the capital's technology and creative industry sectors. This practice extends through the architectural programmes' use of local sites, community groups and commercial bodies, and government agencies in the development of design projects. Students also work with local manufacturing companies and workshops in the construction of 1:1 structural and construction studies according to student design and instruction.

### *Commercial orientation and success*

Ravensbourne enjoys an enviable reputation with the industries it serves. The employment rate of its graduates is currently 97.2% and has consistently been amongst the highest in the sector. This places us 10<sup>th</sup> out of all Higher Education Institutions in the UK for graduate employability. In March 2015, Ravensbourne was shortlisted for the Guardian Entrepreneurship Award for its Self-Employment and Enterprise Diversity Scheme (SEEDS), which focuses on neurodiverse students. Ravensbourne was ranked as one of the top 100 European design schools by *Domus* in December 2013. In March 2014, CentreForum (an independent think tank seeking to develop evidence based, long term policy solutions to the problems facing Britain) ranked Ravensbourne third on its Social Mobility Graduate Index (SMGI). This is a measure of professional graduate outcomes placing particular emphasis and recognition on the differential resources and actions required for success with disadvantaged students. In the QS World University Rankings by Subject 2015 - Art & Design, Ravensbourne was ranked 27<sup>th</sup> in the world and 9<sup>th</sup> in Europe, based on academic and employer reputation. In October 2014, it was ranked in the top 25 UK Higher Education Institutions for Media Professionals by LinkedIn. It was one of 17 higher education Institutions in England designated as a Creative Skillset Media Academy (industry skills body for the Creative Industries) in 2007. Most recently Ravensbourne put forward an entry for the Queen's Anniversary Prize for its broadcasting courses.

Ravensbourne students and graduates are consistently over-represented in their success rate in national and international competitions and awards in their disciplines (e.g. D&AD, Graduate Fashion Week, Free Range, World Architecture Festival, Promax, Royal Television Society, Royal Society of Arts and others).

## **Distinctive features of the Courses**

Adhering closely to the institutional ethos, the Department of Architecture is rooted in a practical analysis of the *existing*, that is, on an understanding of materiality, form and context, along with client identity and models of practice. Our objective is to develop a creative and entrepreneurial, integrated practice capable of integrating the range of creative disciplines represented in the institution. In this way we seek to explore and subsequently integrate techniques, methods and material

understandings in order to make real our ambitions, objectives and intentions.

Architecture at Ravensbourne has traditionally embraced digital media, in both its conventional mixed and virtual reality formats, in order to inform our focus on commercial and research led space manufacture. Through the mediation of material and human relationships, it is our intention to produce buildings responsive to need and to inspire interlocution. To this end, we hold that there are no absolute givens, but there are precedents both in the commercial and entrepreneurial as well as historical and theoretical worlds. Through an understanding of societal changes in the human condition in a fast moving contemporary setting, we intend that our work negotiates the three motivators of built form, construction and theory.

At Level 4, students are introduced to design process, underpinning skills professional context and architectural history. The three studio units focus on structure, construction and environment. At Level 5 there is a greater emphasis on reference to theory and the interpretation of client and user values, including an urban design project. At Level 6, students develop individual, independent lines of enquiry culminating in a comprehensive Major Project and written dissertation. Key aims of the programmes include the development of transferable skills, including the critical articulation of objectives, appraisal of available data, identification of manageable problems, implementation of appropriate working methods, teamwork and communication. Throughout, there is an emphasis on the use of digital media.

Ravensbourne currently offers a MArch along with a variety of MAs, including Environmental Design. An MA in Housing and BA/MA in Landscape Design to complement the existing architectural provision are presently under development.

## 11 Commendations

The Visiting Board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The Institution has a clear mission to offer an education that is creative, integrated and inclusive. This mission is exemplified by the Ravensbourne building which offers a strong sense of creative community and shared collective endeavour amongst the students and staff. The building and resources offer excellent facilities for the study of architecture with a clear investment in computer aided modelling and fabrication. GA 1.2, GA 1.3.
- 11.2 Ravensbourne offers opportunities for widening access to the profession by encouraging a diverse student intake. There is a strong outreach programme that seeks to better reflect in the intake the local population and educate future practitioners whose diversity better reflects the society they serve.
- 11.3 The ethos of an independent art school gives the Department a unique context for the study of architecture and a clear emphasis on inter- and cross-disciplinary working across the creative disciplines. GC3

- 11.4 The granting of Taught Degree Awarding Powers to the Institution marks a significant achievement and moment of development for Ravensbourne. Any significant changes resulting from this must be brought to the RIBA New Courses Group.
- 11.5 The Board welcomes the development of Masters course/s and the opportunity this affords to extend the portfolio of the architecture offer and enable students to progress towards qualification within the Institution.
- 11.6 Live projects and extra curricula activities along with the strong links with business and industry partners ensure that the students experience offer a relevance for their future role as creative professionals. GA 1.5

**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 The academic position statement repeats much of the background to, and foundation of the Institution but little of the unique character and distinctiveness of the architecture courses. As this will be a headline aspect of public document in future RIBA validation reports the academic position statement should reflect its unique and distinctive educational offer and should be rewritten for the next full RIBA Visiting Board.
- 12.2 The Board was unable to identify a clear distinction between the Architecture and IDEA courses. The Exploratory Board felt that the stated distinction between existing and new built forms did not offer sufficient differentiation as either an underpinning rationale or as evidenced in the work. There is a high degree of congruence between the units across both courses at all levels and in some cases, these are only differentiated by the learning outcomes and whilst the unit descriptors are more focussed, the pattern of learning and taught inputs to each course seem to be very similar.
- 12.3 The Institution's matriculation requirements enable a wide range of students to enter the courses. However, this can create significant challenges in respect of retention and progression. Whilst the Board noted provision for student support, the external examiners reports drew attention to this range of abilities at the final point of assessment and the Department should make explicit the measures undertaken to ensure that the weaker students are able to adequately demonstrate the standards required in meeting the criteria. GA1.1
- 12.4 The integration of materials, structures and environmental design within the design studio projects is a strength of the courses, however the Board encourages the Department to ensure that the students are able to clearly demonstrate the meeting of the criteria in respect of explicitly demonstrating these technological requirements. Here the assessment and feedback mechanisms, including aspects of mandatory pass

components need to be made explicit in ensuring that where assessment artefacts meet a range of criteria these can be clearly identified and measured. GC8, GC9

- 12.5 Whilst acknowledging the Department's ambition to deliver integrated comprehensive design projects that bring together architectural considerations (technology, history, representation, management practice and law), through a single artefact/project, the Department should consider its strategy for the aggregation of learning outcomes in being able to clearly meet individual criteria in an identifiable manner. GA1.3, GC8, GC9
- 12.6 The ambition of the Institution to foster and encourage entrepreneurial activities and prepare students to be independent practitioners is a strength. However, how entrepreneurship is manifest within the field of architecture should be investigated, whilst a clear focus needs to be maintained as to the particular requirements of the architectural profession, legal obligations and the requirements of the protected title GA1.5, GC11
- 12.7 There is little evidence of the teaching of representational skills as identifiable and assessed learning outcomes in the curriculum. Whilst there are some considerable strengths in the resources and approach to digital representation, modelling and prototyping, the course documentation should make explicit the teaching and demonstration of the learning outcomes in this respect. GA 1.2
- 12.8 From the documentation provided the strategy for progression from level 4 to 5 and 5 to 6 is not clear. The Department should make clear the pedagogic developmental principles that enable students to understand and demonstrate meeting of the thresholds at different progression levels and grades across these levels. Central to this are the clear articulation of the education rational and delivery methods employed at each level and their sequence of progression.

**13. Advice**

The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Department on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

- 13.1 The space availability although flexible in its usage and collaborative across disciplines does mean that each cohort has limited dedicated studio space and the Department is advised to consider the provision of studio space and its usage in light of the potential Masters courses and the interaction of those students with the undergraduate students.

**14 Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted: see action point 12.1

**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**

Please see action point 12.3, 12.5, 12.6 and 12.7

**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.

**Graduate Criteria for Part 1 only**

Please see action point 12.4, 12.5 and 12.6

**17 Other information**

**17.1 Student numbers**

At the time of the 2018 RIBA Visiting Board:

**BA (Hons) Architecture**

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
64	45	35	<b>144</b>

**BA (Hons) Interior Design Environment Architectures**

Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
28	18	35	<b>81</b>

**17.2 Documentation provided**

All required RIBA documentation was provided prior the visit.

**\*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**