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Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Full visiting board to Metropolitan College, Athens.

Date of visiting board: 3 – 4 July 2024
Confirmed by RIBA: 5 November 2024

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1   **Details of institution hosting courses:**
Metropolitan College Athens
School of Architecture
Sorou 74, Marousi 151 25,
Greece

2   **Courses offered for validation:**
BArch(Hons) Architecture

3   **Head of School & Course Leads:**
Yiannis Kerabos
Dean of Faculty-school of Engineering & Architecture

Dr. Elena Douvlou
Associate Dean-School of Architecture

Andreas Kourteridis
Course Leader BArch(hons) Architecture

4   **Awarding body:**
Oxford Brookes University

5   **The visiting board:**
Virginia Rammou – *Chair/Academic*
Harbinder Birdi – *Practitioner*
Cindy Walters – *Practitioner*
George Savaides – *Practitioner (Regional Representative)*
Joshua Brooks - *RIBA Validation Manager*

6   **Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education:**
The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture (published September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

7   **Proposals of the visiting board:**
On 5 November 2024, the RIBA confirmed initial validation of the following course:

BArch(Hons) Architecture.

The next visit to Metropolitan College will take place in 2029.

8   **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

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v   In the UK, standard requirements of validation include the completion by the
     of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

9   Academic position statement (written by school)

Programme Philosophy
The two major aims of the programme are the exploration of architecture's
social role and purpose and the holistic way of thinking on architectural
design, encouraging students to integrate knowledge and skills gained in the
Technology, Sustainability, Environmental Design, History &Theory,
Professional Practice & Law, Digital Culture and Representation into the work
of the Architectural Design Modules and Dissertation Module.

The exploration of architecture's social role and purpose

to provide solutions to our local context through worldwide issues
(glocalization), therefore we bring the serving purpose of architecture into the
heart of the design agenda based on our existing context's characteristic and
social challenges / concerns in order to increase the student engagement,
motivation and responsibility on social awareness as much as possible.
Students are exposed to issues of social inequalities, the challenges of
climate crisis, city planning and law, as well as issues relating to Equality,
Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).The impact of financial recession as a result of
previous decades along with the recent global health crisis and the current
cost of living crisis in the wider social and cultural urban context, constitutes
the main concerns during the formulation of design agendas, in terms of the
potential benefits they could offer to local communities.

Furthermore, the RIBA's Themes and Values offer the opportunity to broaden
/develop further our curriculum in terms of professional ethics and values in
the design through the sustainable goals principles, the study of Greek
Building Code in terms of accessibility, health and life safety, fire safety, the
development of EDI principles through the notions of Social Economy and
Sustainability as stated by the EU directives and the familiarization of students
with the basic principles of profession and ethics towards the community
according to the Greek and European Deontological Code for providers of
Architectural Services. The aforementioned will support our aim to develop
further an identity with a strong social approach in architecture with an
emphasis placed on students understanding, that it is their ethical obligation
as future professionals in the built environment and that the architectural
solutions that they propose should form and help build a fairer, more inclusive
and resilient society in the service of people
Holistic way of thinking on architectural design.

The holistic way of thinking in regards to studying architectural design
education, is another major pursuit of the programme, expecting from
students to develop the ability to integrate knowledge gained in the modules
of Technology (construction, materiality, sustainability, environmental design)
History &Theory, Professional Practice & Law, Digital Culture and
Representation into the work of the Architectural Design Modules and
Dissertation Module. For example, the requirements of Technology module,
are integrated in the Main Design project of the 2nd and 3rd year respectively.

More specifically, the coursework of Technology modules (Year 2 and 3) as well as the Professional Practice & Law (Year 3) are directly connected to the Architectural Design project. Consequently, the knowledge gained from lectures being delivered in the respective modules are expected to be embodied into the architectural design. Furthermore, there are direct and indirect synergies between theoretical modules and design modules eg Cities, Culture & Society module (Level 5) focusing on the analysis in area of investigation per Unit Agenda. At Level 5 Module - Issues of Architectural History & Theory, the students can define their own central question of research that is being developed further at the beginning of Level 6 Module – Dissertation, aiming at the development of critical thinking and participation in the architectural discourse.

The vertical studio system offers a great peer-to-peer learning opportunity in the holistic way of thinking, allowing students from different level of studies (Levels 5 and 6) to join the same design Unit. Each unit has its own distinctive position within the school based on certain theme derives from the approach that teaching staff would like to promote, addressing contemporary issues based on our programme's philosophy.
This integrated way of architectural design thinking, through direct and indirect synergies between modules is an important academic dialogue for architectural studies that also distinguishes the programme from other schools of architecture in Greece where all modules work independently within their programme.

Programme Outline
Students have a great opportunity to be in a programme that responds to UK standards but also reflects the Greek context and professional reality.
In the first year, the primary goal is to introduce the fundamental concepts of architectural design through studio-based learning and applying knowledge for spatial exploration, to form architectural proposals rooted in a particular place. Students are introduced to the basic principles of technology and sustainable design. In the Theory Modules, along with a series of scheduled lectures, the curriculum is enhanced with workshops and seminars for strengthening areas such as academic reading, writing and critical thinking. In the Representation module, the curriculum has been organized with the following classes of Drawing, CAD Drawing, Digital Imaging, Digital Graphics in order to develop the necessary analogue and digital representational skill set to support the architectural design projects.

The 2nd year structure similarly allows students to develop upon their first-year knowledge and apply this to a larger scale design project. It encourages students to be more confident in their observations and the design process. Technology, environmental and sustainable strategies are taught at a more advanced level. There is a stronger link between the Technology and Design modules through the technical and environmental coursework that is based on the design proposal. The Greek building code is introduced to students in terms of accessibility, health and life safety, fire safety, as well as the basic principles of profession and ethics towards the community based on the Greek and European Deontological Code for Architectural Services. The Sociocultural context is studied by incorporating EDI principles, per Unit agenda, through the prism of Social Economy and Sustainability as stated by the EU directives.

We also reinforce the visual communication of design concepts and spatial arrangements, technical resolution through 2D and 3D visual representation composites, time-based media, photography, 3D modelling and rendering, BIM software, digital fabrication processes, appropriate use of AI tools. In the 3rd year, we further enhance the holistic way of thinking in architectural design, as developed in the 2nd year, at a more advanced level with more complex and demanding architectural projects in terms of size, building program, inclusion, requiring more sophisticated building systems and sustainability strategies.

The Management Practice and Law module enables students to learn the basic principles and ethos of architectural professional practice. Emphasis is also placed into the nature of the relationship between the professional practice and the design studio. The Dissertation module provides a unique opportunity for in depth exploration to the existing knowledge, by expanding the student's ability in research and writing skills, challenging prevailing theories and literature, with the aim to develop their personal view in the theory of architecture.

Visiting Guest Lecturer
A number of guest lecturers contributes with their expertise in various fields of our curriculum (eg. fire safety, artificial intelligence, sustainability, various theoretical subjects) with the aim to enhance and broaden student experience as well as to expand the external network of our school.

Generative AI
Current advancements in the field of Generative AI are discussed through the lens of social and environmental values in the Level 5 Module of Digital Culture and analyzed by AI design experts in Levels 5 and 6 Design Modules – Unit system. Similarly, History and Theory Modules incorporate presentations by researchers that discuss the use of Generative AI as a research tool in academic writing, while the journal of notes and tutorials on a weekly basis monitor the students' research as well as writing process and boost critical thinking. GenAI Guides are currently organized for the aforementioned modules and will be included in next academic year's Module Handbooks, setting an appropriate framework for using Gen AI as a research and design tool. Additionally, class presentations will be included in next academic year's schedule to ensure the originally of thought in students' written assignments.

10 Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

10.1 The RIBA Visiting Board commends the hard work evident in terms of expanding the school and improving the student facilities.

10.2 The RIBA Visiting Board commends the care and dedication demonstrated by the staff with regards to student welfare and learning.

11 Conditions
There are no conditions.

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12   Action points
The RIBA expects the college 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 college to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

12.1   The previous RIBA Visiting Board actioned appointing an additional external examiner. Now that the cohort size has increased and will continue to do so, it is imperative that an additional external examiner is appointed before the next examination process.

12.2   The RIBA Visiting Board requests that the school develops a clear strategy to implement the ethos of the course, that is evident within the student output and their designs. As per the previous full visiting board report (2022), the Academic Position Statement should be revisited to ensure that it truly reflects the school's ethos and distinctiveness.

12.3   In accordance with the RIBA Themes and Values, the Visiting Board strongly suggests that staff set briefs that demand a range of creative responses and aid critical thinking to encourage projects which reflect the current challenges within Greece and the wider global context. Although the academic content is driven by the OBU curriculum, the school should make sure that their own distinct identity is evident within the students' work.

12.4   The Visiting Board would encourage the promotion of a vibrant studio culture that will enable cross-fertilisation of ideas across all levels of study, which in turn will improve the quality and creative output of the work across the school and allow use of the higher end of grades.

12.5   The RIBA Visiting Board proposes that more academic content is evident within the course. Given the global climate emergency, approaches to sustainability need to be embedded into the ethos of the school and every aspect of the teaching, as well as student outputs. This could be complemented by inviting a range of industry practitioners, from within Greece, Europe or the UK.

13   Advice
The RIBA 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.

13.1   The RIBA Visiting Board recommends that the new external examiner is familiar with the student work of the OBU course in order to promote parity.

13.2   The RIBA Visiting Board notes that there was previously a student society. This Board would encourage the school to reinstate this society, in order to bring a diverse range of voices to the school, which will benefit all year groups. The school could look to the OBU student society for guidance, both to build relationships between different year groups and to build connections between the MCA and the Oxford Brookes communities.

13.3 The RIBA Visiting Board would recommend the undertaking of activities to promote student collaboration and cross disciplinary engagement. This could be design charettes, site and building visits, peer review sessions, competitions etc

13.4 Due to the continued expansion and growth of the cohort, the school should provide additional space and facilities, as well as additional resources when required.

13.5 The RIBA Visiting Board appreciates that the studios rotate between different years, however we would recommend that there are dedicated spaces for student to populate, to allow for the development of improved studio culture.

13.6 The RIBA Visiting Board encourages all opportunities for cross fertilisation of research outputs between OBU and AMC.

14 **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 all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Part 1 BArch(Hons) in Architecture.

15 **Review of work against Themes and Values**
It should be noted that where the Visiting Board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Themes and Values for Part 1
The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 1 BArch(Hons) in Architecture.

16 **Other information**

16.1 **Student numbers (from the School - 2023/2024)**
Year 1 – *45 students*
Year 2 – *26 students*
Year 3 – *16 students*

16.2 **Documentation provided**
The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

17 **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.

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- Budget holder and course leaders
- Students
- Head of Institution
- External Examiners
- Staff