RIBA

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA exploratory board to the University of Reading

Date of visiting board: 29 June 2021
Confirmed by RIBA Board: 17 November 2021

RIBA

1   Details of institution hosting course
University of Reading
School of Architecture
London Road Campus
27 London Road
Reading RG1 5AG

2   Head of the School of Architecture
Professor Lorraine Farrelly

3   Course offered for candidate course status
Master of Architecture, MArch

4   Awarding body
University of Reading

5   The visiting board
Professor Karim Hadjri (Chair)
Dr Sara Biscaya (Vice-Chair)
Frazer Bufton

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, validation manager – in attendance

6   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.

The standard RIBA exploratory board timetable was modified exceptionally to allow all the visiting board to take place online.

All requirements for documentation and portfolio samples were exactly as for a physical exploratory board but viewed remotely.

All timetabled events took place as for a physical exploratory board but remotely.

7   Recommendation of the Exploratory Board
The Board was invited by the University of Reading to consider its Master of Architecture MArch for candidate course status for Part 2.

The designation 'Candidate Course for Validation' implies that the course has been judged to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to recognition, which can only be granted once the standard of work produced by graduating students has been assessed and found satisfactory.

At its meeting on 17 November 2021 the RIBA Exploratory Board confirmed that Candidate Course Status for Part 2 be awarded to the following course:

Master of Architecture, MArch

A full visiting board to consider the programme for RIBA Part 2 validation will take place when the first cohort graduates on a date to be agreed between the RIBA and the School.

8   Standard requirements for validation
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

9   Academic position statement (written by the school)
We are developing a model of education which is informed by the debate around contemporary practice and research. The idea of the MArch is to provide a professional course informed by research and practice – with themes and topics shared by academics and practices, explored and informed by students. The vision is to offer our students a suite of options to engage in professional education in the built environment, utilising the extensive expertise of academic staff in the School of Built Environment in subjects such as BIM, energy and environment. Students have dedicated studio spaces directly simulating the working environment of the modern architectural practice. The students are actively encouraged to manage their space in a professional way. There is also a module within the new Masters' course that offers students an option to work in practice- applying their learned research methodologies, or to work as a studio teaching assistant on our undergraduate course, thereby resonating with a further aspect of the University Strategy around employability, providing students with knowledge and experience that prepares them for three interdependent career paths: practice, research and education.

Relationship to practice
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 and in 2017 Communities of Design and in 2018 Making Architecture Making Communities which was run by our student society. 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. We also host a series of lectures – Reading 2050to encourage debate around the future vision for the region. The idea of an 'Urban Room' to invite the local community to debate and engage in ideas around the Built Environment has informed the design curriculum using local sites and issues for our students to test design proposals. 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 in architectural education. In the first instance, the School of Architecture offered a three-year full time BSc Architecture degree (Part1). This has been prescribed by the ARB from September 2016 when the first cohort of 43 started the course. 7 In 2017 we had a first-year cohort of 55 students, in 2018 a cohort of 64 students, in 2019 72 students, in 2020 78 students. A two-year full- time Master of Architecture (Part 2) programme started in September2020 with 15 students. This is a research informed approach with studios offered to connect with the University's research expertise in our research groups in the School of Architecture.

Relationship to Research
The intention is to build relationships and establish connections with the extant strong research ethos across the broader School of the Built Environment relating to the research groups, all staff are members of one or more research group within SBE. The studio design projects in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses relate to a range of relevant themes connected to live research interests with the School providing an environment of applied research and debate. The research of the Urban living group in particular is informing our curriculum content in undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses and design studio.

Resources
The School of Architecture is housed in a 1910 former library building on the London Road campus of the University, which has been refurbished for sole use for Architecture staff and students. It comprises a set of studio spaces with an associated workshop and CAD facilities to offer students a unique environment within which to learn and study. When the MArch course started in 2020, additional studio spaces adjacent to our initial spaces were refurbished as dedicated studios. There is a financial plan to support continued staffing for the School; this started in 2014 with the appointment of the Head, a Research Professor in 2015 and the course director in April 2016.Newlecturer posts started in August 2016 and January 2017 and in August 2017. In 2018 we recruited 3 pro-rata staff who are running their own practices and bringing that practice knowledge

to our students. In Autumn 2018 we appointed 4 more staff starting with a range of expertise from History and Theory to Construction technology, studio design and representation of architecture. There are also staff with existing expertise in construction management, building technology and BIM (Building Information Modelling) in CME. The School of the Built Environment has a broad diversity of expertise, including economists, sociologists and anthropologists in addition to the core construction disciplines. In addition, eleven specialist design tutors and practice-based tutors have been employed alongside academics to drive the studio culture within the new School. We also appointed two visiting professors, Bob Allies and Stephen Greenberg in February 2017, and a Royal Academy of Engineering funded visiting professor, Gillian Horn, in 2018, who was a director of Peynore and Prasad Architects, in particular to support the interdisciplinary and practice ethos of Architecture in our new School. For the new Master of Architecture course we have engaged 2 practices: Invisible studio and Haworth Tompkins to develop our Design Research Units agendas and design projects in collaboration with academic staff. We look forwards to developing our new MArch course with the practices who are partnering with us to add to the specialist expert academic knowledge already within the Architecture School.

10   Commendations

10.1   The Board commends the School for the opportunities for employability offered to students through the two options of practice and teaching, and the ambition of adding a research pathway.

10.2   The Board commends the School for the breadth of knowledge covered by the technology module and its content, particularly with regard to issues related to the climate crisis.

10.3   The Board commends the research-led teaching, the clarity with which it is communicated to students and the standard of the output generated.

11   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.

11.1   There are no action points.

12   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.

12.1   The Board advises that the studio project shows more evidence of research around technology and its resolution, given the breadth referred to in Commendation 10.2.

12.2   Especially given the ethos and emphasis on design methodology, the School should encourage and support students to reflect on their design process eg design iterations and exploration, and evidence this in their portfolios.

12.3   The Board advises the School to provide support to early career academic staff to ensure that the research-led ethos of the School is sustained, that staffing levels remain commensurate with the size of the cohorts and the student experience is maintained.

12.4   In view of potential growth of practice numbers, the Board advises the School to develop a mechanism to maintain effective collaboration with the practices in the design research units.

13   Delivery of graduate attributes
The Board confirmed that the MArch programme demonstrated the potential to meet the Part 2 graduate attributes if developed in the way anticipated.

14   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.

15   Other information

15.1   Student numbers
MArch - 14

15.2   Documentation provided
The School provided all documentation as required by the RIBA Validation Procedures.

16   Notes of meetings
Copies of the minutes taken from the following meetings 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 the Vice Chancellor
- Meeting with the Head of School
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with staff