

Report of the RIBA full visiting board to the Metropolitan College Athens - 2022

Date of visiting board: 22 & 23 September 2022
Confirmed by the RIBA: 24 November 2022

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Metropolitan College Athens
 School of Architecture
 Sorou 74, Marousi 151 25,
 Greece

2 Courses offered for validation

MArch Architecture and Urban Design (in collaboration with Oxford Brookes)
 for full part 2 validation
 The BArch (Hons) Architecture (in collaboration with Oxford Brookes) for
 candidate course status for Part 1

3 Head of the Department of Architecture

Mr Yiannis Kerabos – Dean of Architecture & Engineering
 Dr Elena Douvlou – Head of Architecture

BArch(Hons) Architecture

Eliana Voutsadaki - Programme Leader

Marilia Trogada - Design Studio Tutor-Year 1 coordinator

Chrysi Nikoloutsou- Architectural technology- Module Leader

Yianna Siapati- Architectural History & Theory- Module Leader

Maria Stefanidi- Digital Representation- Module Leader

Mary Skouloudi- Environmental Design Module Leader, Design Studio Tutor

MArch Architecture & Urban Design

Dr Elena Douvlou – Programme Leader

Nikos Kazeros - Research Methods Module Leader, Year 2 design tutor and
 Coordinator Year 2

Dr Ioannis Giannoutsos - Design Studio Tutor and Module Leader-Year 1

Vassilis Kapareliotis -Year 1 coordinator, MPL (I & II) Module Leader,

Environmental Design Leader, Design Tutor MArch 1

Dr Stefanie Leontiadis - Advanced Architectural Representation Module
 Leader, Research Methods tutor

Eva Sklavou - Advanced Technology for Design- Module Leader

Marissia Deligiorgi- Advanced Architectural Representation tutor, REVIT
 instructor

4 Awarding body

Oxford Brookes University

5 The visiting board

Dr Jenny Russell - Chair

Dr Liana Psarologaki

Frazer Bufton

In attendance:

Jaime Solloso – RIBA – validation manager

George Savaides – Regional Representative

6 Procedures and criteria for the online 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.

7 Proposals of the visiting board

The Board recommends to the RIBA Education Committee continued validation of the following course:

MArch Architecture and Urban Design (in collaboration with Oxford Brookes)

The Board recommends to the RIBA Education Committee candidate course status of the following course:

The BArch (Hons) Architecture (in collaboration with Oxford Brookes)

The next visit to the Metropolitan College of Athens will take place in 2024 for the BArch (Hons) Architecture and in 2027 for the MArch Architecture & Urban Design.

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
- 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 the School)

BArch (Hons) Architecture

The BArch (Hons) Architecture course (validated by Oxford Brookes University in March 2020) was introduced at Metropolitan College in September 2021. Level 4 was launched in the academic year 2021-2022 and Level 5 is due to commence in 2022-2023.

The Academic distinctiveness of the programme is developed through the focus that the BArch (Hons) Architecture programme places on:

- providing design studio briefs that promote radical creativity by challenging students to be inspired by sites charged with history. Taking advantage of this unique setting that the Athenian capital offers, students are encouraged to address contextual issues (social and geographical) that are of personal interest to them and to use these to create their own unique architectural language. They are motivated to value their initial observations of the site so that they become the backbone of the design process. By generating architectural decisions specific to their initial observations which reflect all aspects of design (choice of function, structural system, sustainability strategy and architectural aesthetics) the students are able to enhance their architectural narratives and to critically evaluate their synthesis approach and how all aspects are connected;

- a good staff-to-student ratio with small studios that provide an enhanced learning environment which supports the complex and multi-disciplinary understanding of multiple inter-connected subjects;
- allowing students to understand the importance of communication in relation to architectural concept via the representation modules which provide students with the opportunity to critically understand the role of physical and digital representation plays in complex design synthesis;
- embedding the importance of professional ethics and values in the design, sustainability, technology and history and theory modules. 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). Important emphasis is 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 in forming a fairer, more inclusive and resilient society.

The course is therefore designed to develop the students' cognitive processes, providing, among others, conceptual and procedural framework and metacognitive experiences, which collectively promote creativity through research, analysis, and critical evaluation. The programme thus aims to train future professionals that create innovative and unique projects which are functionally, aesthetically and technically articulate. Students are encouraged to apply critical thinking to their work and redefine design and technology to contemplate on challenging and state-of-the-art areas which reflect on local social and environmental conditions. The curriculum is aligned with the RIBA's criteria and will develop in order to meet the new "Educational and Professional Development Framework" to ensure that it addresses climate change and raises awareness on the importance of procuring safe buildings, whilst promoting ethical practice, as well as transferring knowledge to students on how to develop adequate practice and research skills.

Students meeting the entry criteria for the BArch (Hons) Architecture programme study a series of interconnected modules which form a web-like educational experience, in the core of which, is the design studio, promoting critical thinking, individuality, experimentation, and creativity, and preparing students to become competent professionals.

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.

Design, creativity, and intellectual rigour are all at the heart of the BArch (Hons) Architecture programme. They are integrated into all aspects of the curriculum, informing its content, delivery, and assessment. Students will experience learning that brings together all academic subjects into a portfolio of design work that showcases their achievements and opens the doors to professional work. The programme offers many opportunities to connect exemplary research and practice through live projects, site visits, field trips and active research methods.

The design studio requires the course work to be generated through applied theoretical and contextual research, integrating evidence of sustainability, architectural technology and management and practice. Students will learn how to organise this knowledge into one coherent system and then to communicate it using digital and non-digital representation tools and written media. The final coursework for the design modules is a creative portfolio of works which forms a narrative of the

thought-processes and unique architectural proposals. Students will also be expected to be assessed on written essays and reports on other key modules.

In the first year, the course aims to stimulate the student's learning experience at higher education level by issuing briefs that stimulate the imagination process and critical thinking. Consequently, the selected sites are within the historic district in Athens with characteristics of diverse multicultural neighbourhoods, scales and materiality which offer an extensive palette for experimentation.

Students are also introduced to the basic principles of technology, sustainable design and theory of architecture which have a reference to the design project.

The second-year structure similarly allows students to develop upon their first-year knowledge and apply this to a slightly larger scale design project. It encourages students to be more confident in their observations and the design process.

Technology and environmental strategies are taught at a more advanced level. There is a stronger link between these modules and the design module because a technical and environmental report is required to be part of their design proposal. Planning Legislation is also introduced and students are asked to participate in workshops that discuss local planning regulations and how they would impact their design proposals following a relevant lecture.

In year three, students are introduced to public building architecture. The Management Practice and Law module enables students to relate theory to the ethos of architectural professional practice. Emphasis is also placed into the nature of the relationship between the professional practice and the design studio. Practicing Architects both from Greece and the UK are invited to participate in both the design module, as reviewers, and the professional practice module as mock interviewers for job interviews. They are also invited to provide comments on portfolios and CVs which includes a mapping of their output with the 2020 RIBA Plan of Work. There is no equivalent or similar course with such characteristics in the curriculum of other architecture schools in the national context.

Years 2 and 3 are intended to run as a vertical studio once the course is in full deployment. Then second year brief has been written with this in mind and is expected to be adjusted to meet Year 3 students learning outcomes.

All academic staff are registered architects with an educational background from various national and international institutions, offering a diverse approach to architectural education and design. As this is a franchise course, in its collaborative basis, it adopts the Oxford Brookes University School of Architecture framework and specifications with adjustments to assure contextualisation to local legal and environmental requirements.

Intended learning outcomes developed for the overall programme by Oxford Brookes University School of Architecture are included in the Module Briefs. Only Level 4 and Level 5 module briefs have been included in this Exploratory Visit submission document.

MArch Architecture and Urban Design

The MArch Architecture and Urban Design programme was introduced at Metropolitan College in September 2020. The course delivers a high-quality student learning and teaching experience in an environment of a strong student community and benefits from the shared understanding of the UK approach, enriched also by the breadth of international experience among the academic staff.

The integration of Urban Design distinguishes the MArch Architecture & Urban Design at Metropolitan College from the other architecture programmes in Greece;

the rigorous methodological approach informs the (teaching, learning and designing) transition from the urban to the building scale, in a structured and ordered manner. In addition, the contextual integration of the broader Athenian landscape, mainly with respect to the palimpsest qualities of the designated design sites, not only ensures that the OBU programme is adapted to the local particularities, but also stimulates the overall creative process and provides an intellectually challenging learning framework for students. At the same time, the course ensures that students acquire knowledge regarding the ethos of the practice of architectural profession which is a unique approach in the Greek architectural education. This is accomplished, through a creative pedagogic delivery of the Management, Practice and Law modules, which actively engage students to address the challenges and opportunities of our times. Through this process, students develop their own identity with a professional portfolio and learn how to meet their personal and professional aspirations. Various methods of teaching are employed to forge connections between supporting subject and design studio to strengthen integration; including presentation, history and theory, technology, management, practice and law – increasing the students' understanding that synthesis is core and encouraging them to find their own identity.

In the first year, the course aims to actively engage students with the urban scale: to provide a lens through which to view and interpret the urban context and to be critically engaged in the research and practice of creative and rigorous design proposals. Students are invited to carry out urban analysis and translate it into physical Urban Strategies and Masterplanning. They establish design criteria for developing projects, designing public spaces, while accounting for built, human, and natural systems within the direct and indirect context of their sites. Furthermore, students will advance their knowledge and skills through the modules of research methods for design, management practice and law, as well as the creative application of advanced representation methods.

The second-year structure allows students to critically engage in an individually chosen design project and the pragmatic application of technology, environmental strategies as well as the role and ethos of the architectural professional practice. The Design Studio modules, engage students in developing projects iteratively towards a level of completion that encapsulates their individual design philosophy. The ever-changing social dynamics, the topography, nature, and landscape, the historical past and the current challenges of the architectural profession are researched, analysed, and debated. Consequently, students are requested to pursue their own original and rigorous architecture, integrating their knowledge and skills acquired in other modules into their design module portfolio. This also distinguishes the course from other architectural schools in Greece where each module has an independent role within its programme structure. Enabling students to develop their own briefs related to the subject and scale of their chosen Thesis Project and the requirement to relate this to a research output, results in a specialization within the course and highly diverse range of projects.

Through an intensive series of design studio and theory-related briefs, students are required to follow a curriculum in which the aim is to stimulate their critical thinking and creative powers through a sequence of problem-solving exercises. Students are expected to demonstrate a critical position through thorough research, to explore ideas and create narratives and to represent them creatively; this distinguishes the MArch course from the Part 1 course delivered at MC. The change of design projects between the undergraduate and post-graduate courses facilitates the process of developing independent thinking and resolving design issues in a different scale. A key emphasis of the course is the encouragement of the development of a range of transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, independent learning, as well as teamwork that will be of value to students in employment, in society and in

their individual lives as architecture practitioners. Lectures and workshops have also been revised and integrated to respond to the newly introduced RIBA new Themes and Values, and specifically related to address issues such as climate change, social equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) and how these societal issues can be incorporated into an architectural programme as elements that can enhance design skills and the discipline of architecture.

Metropolitan College's long-term strategic aim is to develop and enhance its identity as a School of Architecture, creating synergies that extend beyond local, promoting and extending current European and U.S. Architecture Schools and Universities collaborations as well as our current franchise collaborations within the discipline.

10 Commendations

- 10.1** The board commends the Institution for its commitment to the development of the architecture facilities and
- 10.2** The Board commends the Architectural Representation modules, recognising the variety of communication techniques being taught and in particular how different communication techniques, like photo montage, are being utilized and contextualised appropriately. In addition, the board commends the School on a set of well curated and compiled portfolios.
- 10.3** The Board commend the use of Sketchbooks in the Part 1 programme, however would encourage both Part 1 and Part 2 programmes to reflect a broader and more substantial demonstration of project development, from initial ideas to project realisation.
- 10.4** The Board commends the Management Practice and Law modules, notably the pedagogic delivery and outputs which clearly engages the students.

11 Conditions

There are no conditions/ etc

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. 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.

- 12.1** While the programmes are currently small, the board would recommend bringing in another External Examiner to ensure continuity in the examination process.
- 12.2** The School must reflect on the RIBA Themes and Values and Graduate Attributes, as per the 2021 Validation Procedures published on Architecture.com, and review both the Part 1 and Part 2 programmes against these.
- 12.3** The School should develop the spectrum of precedents presented to students, both in terms of currency and relevance and also with regards to

diversity. In addition, the school should review modular reading lists to better reflect a more diverse and current position.

(12.4 relates to the Part 2 Programme)

- 12.4** The School should further develop the Masters Programme with regard to the Thesis project both in terms of the critical thinking required, research methods utilised towards the development of a thesis position. The Board strongly encourage the School to make use of the staff research expertise which has the potential to set a robust foundation for this programme.

(12.5 – 12.6 relate to the Part 1 Programme)

- 12.5** As a priority, the School must develop an overall strategic plan for the Part 1 programme, most particularly in the Design Studio, which reflects the programme aims and identity. This must be disseminated to the wider staff and student body to ensure that there is clarity from all parties. This is critical to the successful validation of the Part 1 programme.
- 12.6** The School should fully understand the process of student appraisal as outlined in the 2021 RIBA Validation Procedures to ensure that students work together to produce an appraisal for the full validation visit. In addition, it is vital that Part 1 students are in attendance at the student meeting.

13 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.

- 13.1** The Board recognises the developments made since the last visit with the development of a student society, however the board would encourage the school to nurture this development, both in building relationships between different year groups in Athens but also, in the building of connections between the Athens student community and the Oxford Brookes Student community.
- 13.2** The board would encourage the School to further develop the Masters Programme with regard to the Thesis project both in terms of the critical thinking required and the development of a thesis position.
- 13.3** The School should develop the spectrum of precedents presented to students, both in terms of currency and relevance and also with regards to diversity. In addition, the school should review modular reading lists to better reflect a more diverse and current position.
- 13.4** While the Academic Position Statement reflects the structural distinctiveness of the offer at MC Athens, the School should further develop the academic position statement through the emphasis of academic distinctiveness.
- 13.5** The Board would encourage a deepening of the relationship between MC Athens and Oxford Brookes University, building on what is already in place. There is opportunity for staff and student exchange and cross-institutional

design projects along with opportunities in shared research and research mentoring which should be actively pursued.

13.6 The School are advised to fully understand the process of student appraisal as outlined in the 2021 RIBA Validation Procedures and to ensure that students work together to produce an appraisal for each of the programmes being validated.

13.7 The Board advise the school to review its feedback processes to ensure that comments provided to students follow a clear structure, reflecting marking criteria.

13.8 While the Board commend the use of Sketchbooks in the Part 1 programme, it would encourage both Part 1 and Part 2 programmes to reflect a broader and more substantial demonstration of project development and process, from initial ideas to project realisation and consider these as part of the final assessment.

13.9 The Board would advise the School to be mindful that it doesn't set unrealistic expectations with regard to student contact time, when the programme is in its infancy, which may prove a challenge to maintain as the course grows.

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.

14.1 Part 1

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

14.2 Part 2

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.

15 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 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

BArch(Hons) Architecture- 22 students
MArch Architecture and Urban Design- 19 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. The full set of notes will be issued to the mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.

- Meeting with senior management
- Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with professional and external examiners
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with academic staff