

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to the
University of Hong Kong School of
Professional and Continuing Education
(HKU SPACE) & University of Plymouth**

**Date of virtual visiting board: 13, 14 & 15 July 2022
Confirmed by the RIBA: 21 October 2022**

1 Details of institution hosting courses

The University of Hong Kong School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE)
Architecture Subject Group
College of Humanities and Law
HKU SPACE
Island East Campus
23/F, 494, King's Road
North Point
Hong Kong

University of Plymouth
Drake Circus
Plymouth
PL4 8AA, UK

2 Courses offered for candidate course status/Part 1 validation

BA (Hons) Architectural Studies

3 Senior Programme Director, Architectural Studies, HKU SPACE

Mona Yeung (at the date of the visit)
Chris Yien (current)

Programme Lead BA (Hons) Architecture + BA (Hons) Architectural Studies Hong Kong, Lecturer in Architecture
Andy Humphreys

4 Awarding body

University of Plymouth, UK

5 The visiting board

Daniel Goodricke – Chair
Felicity Atekpe – Vice Chair
Hannah Durham
Kelvin Chu – regional representative

In attendance:

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – RIBA – validation manager

6 Procedures for the virtual visit

The visiting board was carried out under the *RIBA procedures for validation (2011 & 2021)*; these documents are available at www.architecture.com. The procedures were adapted to allow the Board to take place remotely.

On 21 October 2022 the RIBA confirmed unconditional validation for Part 1, with effect from the 2020/2021 graduating cohort, of the:

BA (Hons) Architectural Studies

The next visiting board will take place in 2027.

7 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

8 Academic position statements

8.1 University of Plymouth

(Extracted from Section 1 of the Documentation for the Royal Institute of British Architects Visiting Board 28 and 29 April 2022)

Since its earliest days, the city of Plymouth has been outward facing. During its history it has been the city from which Cook, Darwin, Drake, the first ship to travel to Japan (the Clove), and the Mayflower all set sail. It has equally been home to Antarctic explorers Scott and Bickerton. Echoing this spirit, the University of Plymouth has long advanced its own outward orientation, being committed to social mobility and opening up greater access to higher education through its widening participation agenda; this outward orientation is also reflected in its engagement with the region over its 150-year history, and more recently being one of the 30 initial institutions to sign up to the Civic University Agreement pledging to work with local communities. Also like the city's historic explorers, the University has long been concerned about the well-being of the sea and landscape and is a world leader in the environmental and marine sciences.

The ethos of the Architecture School¹ at Plymouth is equally framed by its outward orientation, and championing, exploration and implementation of a co-joined social-civic-ecological agency. This agency is not newly emergent, extending back beyond 20 years. It continues to frame teaching content, project briefs, and student work within the School. It is further reflected in research activity of staff, and in the types of students and staff who we attract. Moreover, it is how we are recognised by others as reflected in comments from our external collaborators, external examiners, the architectural press, and national and international awards (e.g., RIBA MacEwan Award 2020, the Creative Conscience Awards 2018-2021; “you celebrate working with the everyday with real issues and make it extraordinary”²). This co-joined social-civic-ecological agency remains central to our pedagogy and is a primary focus of Design Studio work in both the BA Arch (Part 1) and M Arch (Part 2) Programmes and is underpinned in parallel by co-joined Technology modules; further exploration of these issues is encouraged in Critical Context coursework, stimulated by lectures which examine relevant theoretical discourse and professional practices. Civic engagement is present through all years of the School and at a range of scales from small-scale co-designed, built projects on behalf of external partners in the BA Arch, to urban scale propositions in the context of live urban regeneration projects with external partners and in dialogue with

University partners. Increasingly central to this work is a focus on climate change responsiveness, introduced with vigour in 2017, particularly around themes of global sea level rise and recycling. This focus has fostered links with external collaborators on live projects across the School, for example with Plymouth City Council on the Future Parks Accelerator Project. It has also generated further outcomes, such as an invited presentation by selected M Arch students and a studio tutor at a Government of Macau international conference on coastal development.

Both underpinning and enabled by this ethos is the development of independent learners able to identify, pursue and follow through on student-led critical inquiries. It is a hallmark of teaching across the School, and the absence of a distinct house style has long been commended by external examiners, and by M Arch students who come to us from other universities. This commitment to enabling, rather than enculturation, is central to our pedagogy. “The students greatly value the opportunity to find their own voice and point of entry into the world of architecture.”³ Intrinsic to fostering these student-led critical inquiries is allowing for a critically balanced professional and discursive approach that aims to “(re)consider architecture and architectural praxis. The mode by which this is accomplished is as distinctive as it is innovative.”⁴ This student-centred pedagogy evidences Disraeli’s proposition that “the greatest gift you can give to another is not just to share with them your own riches, but to help them to reveal their own”. This is further evoked in our use of the validation criteria. We acknowledge the RIBA advocates not directly using the validation criteria; at the same time, we value that they have a purposeful ambiguity. In referencing the validation criteria in our learning outcomes, we are embracing their ambiguity and aim to foster a creative interpretation by our students in their response to the criteria and understanding of how the criteria apply both to their architectural praxis and their daily learning practice.

Within this shared pedagogy there are a number of distinctions between the BA Arch and M Arch programmes. At an overarching level within the BA Arch, students’ development and resultant work aims at clarity of intention⁵, in which work has coherence, comprehensiveness and convergence; the latter reflects an aim of students bringing together both development of pertinent knowledge and skills relevant to the design studio and non-studio elements of the curriculum. This includes not only an expressive communication, but also an integration of technology, a grounding in history and theory, and understanding of the professional context in which their work would be generated / situated. In the M Arch, students’ development and resultant work aims at orientation;⁶ this work should point students towards future practice. Integral to this is that the work should advance some form of agency beyond the work itself, and that it is pursued as part of a sustained critical (i.e., research-led) inquiry.

Other distinctions between the BA Arch and M Arch are reflected in propositions of increasing scale and complexity as they move from BA Arch Year 1 (small dwelling structures) through BA Arch Year 2 + 3 (buildings within a neighbourhood context) to the M Arch (buildings within a wider urban strategy). Similar gradation is present between the co-joined spring semester BA Arch Year 2 + 3 and M Arch Year 1 + 2; the lower years in each instance focus more on knowledge and skill acquisition, while the latter

year in each emphasises the application of that knowledge and skills. Civic engagement is present throughout all years, though there is equally gradation in the scale of engagement; i.e., from direct engagement with a specific client in BA Arch Year 1 (e.g., a local nursery or primary school), to a client and a number of other stakeholders as well as input from another University partner in BA Arch Year 2 + 3, to a range of clients and broad range of other stakeholders and University partners in the M Arch. Team working also transitions from assigned groups in the BA Arch (to afford a range of skills and knowledge within a team) to students having a choice of working in a team of their own choosing in the M Arch. The nature of Design Studio practices represents another shift, with a focus on the articulation of a design proposition (with development of the design process) in the BA Arch to a focus on the identification and pursuit of a research- informed critical inquiry (i.e., a design praxis) recorded within a critically reflective document in the M Arch. This is reflected in project presentations that shift from an emphasis on representation of the proposition in the BA Arch to an emphasis on the critical understanding and representation of a working praxis in the M Arch (note that converse is also present in each other).

The course provides skills relevant to modern professional practice beyond the criteria with a focus on five key themes. First, learning how to learn is advanced through students working with open-ended projects and coursework in all modules, encouraging students to take ownership of their work through identifying the focus of, and critically reflecting upon, their study. This is extended in the M Arch Program where students take ownership over the working program and practices of their study, as well as the running of events within the Design Studio. Responding to change is crucial for future professionals, and students are afforded opportunity to gain experience of engaging with social and ecological change; the open-ended nature of projects and coursework exposes students to a fluid context in which work is set and dynamic circumstances that defy simplistic answers. Engagement with discursive practices enables students to explore with and work a range of analytical methodologies, conceptualisation (through for example, dialogue with various stakeholders, referencing the fine arts, authoring theoretically grounded narratives, and/or acts of making), development practices and languages of representation. This is advanced in both studio and non-studio modules – e.g., the use of film in Design Studio and Critical Context modules, and a range of 3D making practices in the Design Studio and Technology, or the crafting of narratives in Design Studio and Professional Studies. Collaborative working both with colleagues (including from architecture and other disciplines) and external collaborators is enabled through live-project work, particularly in the Design Studio, but also in some non-studio modules. The team working of students is celebrated through an award that historically has been given by BDP to the best teamwork in the BA Arch Year 2 or 3 and M Arch Year 1 or 2 cohort. Leadership is enabled through the collaborative working noted above, including in inviting students to take on leadership positions within the Design Studio; this includes for example students taking on responsibility for communal studio activities in the BA Arch Year 1 community-based project design and construction (e.g., construction manager) to BA Year 2 / 3 within collaborative live build projects in Technology to M Arch Year 2 acting as thematic inquiry leaders during the initial stages of projects.

The sense of ownership over their own praxis and learning we aim to enable is paralleled by the co-joined social- civic-ecological agency students pursue in their work. We identify and celebrate this agenda, but it is really the students who enact it in their own outward orientation toward the world and their future praxis within it.

¹ Though not used by the University within its own lexicon, the term School has been utilised here to describe the BA Architecture (Part 1) and M Arch (Part 2 Programs owing to its common currency outside the University and to align with the RIBA's lexicon.

² BA Arch External Examiner Dr. Rosie Parnell.

³ M Arch External Examiner Dr. Jonathan Charley.

⁴ M Arch External Examiner Dr. Nathaniel Coleman.

⁵ Acknowledgement is due here to Peter Salter.

⁶ Acknowledgement is due here to Prof. Dalibor Veseley.

8.2 HKU SPACE

HKU SPACE, a school of the university and an incorporated subsidiary of the University of Hong Kong, contributes to the university's mission to provide a comprehensive education for the community.

HKU SPACE aspires to be a world-class centre of excellence for the provision of professional and continuing education serving Hong Kong, Mainland China and the region.¹

The mission of the school is; to collaborate with the university and other institutions locally and globally in expanding lifelong learning opportunities for personal development, academic progression and professional and career advancement, to engage with stakeholders to deliver high quality education and training programmes to meet the needs of society in Hong Kong, Mainland China and the region, be a strong advocate of lifelong learning for all to realise an educated citizenry and quality of life, excel in the provision of professional and continuing education in Hong Kong, Mainland China and the region, and to foster strategic partnerships locally and globally to promote international outlook and opportunities.

The Reform Proposals for Education System in Hong Kong (September, 2000) prepared by the Education Commission of Hong Kong have the following aims and objectives:

“To provide opportunities for learners to acquire the necessary academic, professional and vocational training and qualifications to fulfill their personal aspiration and the requirements at work.”

“To ensure that there are flexible and diversified channels for everyone to pursue learning at different stages of their life in order to broaden their knowledge base and strengthen their competitiveness.”

“To assure the quality, diversity and flexibility of the higher education system and to ensure its relevance to the changing needs of the community.”

Since September 1998, The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education (HKU SPACE) has offered the Professional Diploma

in Architectural Studies (PDAS) programme. It is a 3-year part-time programme with classes scheduled on weeknights and on weekend catering to students with full-time employment.

In 2000, the full-time mode of this programme was launched for secondary school graduates. The programme title of the full-time Professional Diploma in Architectural Studies was changed to Higher Diploma in Architectural Studies (HDAS) in 2011 in line with the Hong Kong Government's policy to standardize all full-time sub-degree programme award titles.

The HDAS and PDAS curriculum are designed to achieve the Government's targets and the long term need within the local labour market. Students will gain the requisite foundation architecture knowledge and skills in technical drawing, computer-aided drawing, building structure, construction technology, building services, building design, architecture history and theory and project administration. Both programmes are pitched at QF Level 4 and are delivered entirely in English.

With no advance standing granted to the sub-degree curriculum by local universities, graduates of higher diploma or associate degree will apply for first year studies of a bachelor degree through the Hong Kong government's non JUPAS system. Hence, to continue on the career path to becoming an architect, graduates of a higher diploma or an associate degree in architecture, with financial means will pursue further study overseas for a bachelor degree. Most of them prefer to attend universities in the UK where they are admitted into the second or third year of their bachelor degree.

An articulation programme is needed to cater to these graduates for their continuing education aspirations. By partnering with an overseas university, and having the HDAS and PDAS curriculum mapped to their curriculum for credit grant, the remainder credits of the bachelor degree can be offered and taught in Hong Kong. This is particularly important to those sub-degree graduates who may not have the financial means to study abroad or who wish to continue to study while retaining their employment.

In 2019, HKU SPACE partnered with the University of Plymouth to bring their Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Architectural Studies to Hong Kong as a top-up degree. The University of Plymouth mapped the curriculum of the HDAS and PDAS programmes with the curriculum of their Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Architecture and confirmed the curriculum is on par with the level 4 modules (first year of their BA(Hons)Arch degree), hence graduates of the HDAS and the PDAS programmes will be exempted from 120 out of 360 credits of the programme and articulate directly into year 2 of the BA(Hons) AS. This top-up bachelor degree successfully provided a direct and readily available option to HKU SPACE's PDAS and HDAS graduates and sub-degree graduates from other local educational institutes (with additional assessment) for the past 3 years

¹ quoted from HKU SPACE homepage at hkuspace.hku.

9 Commendations

- 9.1 The Board commends the widening participation agenda of the partnership in providing an alternative route into the profession to the benefit of local industry and student mobility.

10 Conditions

There are no conditions.

11 Action points

The visiting board proposes the following action points. The full visiting board will follow these up formally during the next visit. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 11.1 The partnering institutions ('School') should rewrite a single, joint Academic Position Statement to more accurately reflect the individuality of the degree programme and benefits of the partnership, identifying those areas of activity and specific outcomes which the School would wish to be considered as exceptional.
- 11.2 The School should establish an Assessment Policy and Practice. This will comprise a set of principles for good assessment and feedback, recommended good practice, and enabling requirements underpinning these principles.
- 11.3 The School should ensure that students and staff are aware and can readily access the full range of expert, professional services to enable academic and student success. This includes student life and wellbeing, as well as academic support. Guidance on how to access such services should be included within Programme and Module Handbooks.
- 11.4 The School should undertake an audit of the existing curriculum against the RIBA Themes and Values to identify and devise a plan to address any potential shortfall(s) in meeting criteria. As part of this, the School may choose to pursue opportunities to decolonise the curriculum. The final map should be presented in a visually accessible format at the next visit.

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 the School to strengthen the reciprocal working relationship between HKU SPACE and Plymouth University, both at course management and staff interaction level.
- 12.2 The Board supports plans to further formalise links with professional practice through the introduction of a mentoring programme and a professional placement module, when appropriate.
- 12.3 The Board believes that the introduction of clubs and/or societies at HKU SPACE would help to connect likeminded students and enjoy shared interests. An Architecture Society might facilitate social activities, lectures and

talks, welfare and sports beyond the curriculum. Student societies at HKU SPACE and Plymouth University might collaborate on such activities, as far as practicable.

- 12.4 The Board advises the School to ensure that academic portfolios contain sufficient process and development in order to ascertain the rationale for the students' design project decision-making. These academic portfolios could also demonstrate a broader range of representation techniques and might contain the students' mapping of their individual attainment against professional criteria.
- 12.5 The Board advises the School to adopt a more student-led approach to assessment (e.g. peer-to-peer) as afforded by the recent alignment of teaching timetables.
- 12.6 The Board reminds the School that for all subsequent RIBA visits, an academic portfolio consists of all assessed work produced by a student for an academic year (please refer to the most recent RIBA Procedures for Validation).
- 12.7 In recognition of the range of employment contracts (high reliance on fractional contracts for practitioners), the Board recommends that all staff should be supported through teaching and scholarship opportunities.

13 Delivery of graduate attributes

13.1 BA (Hons) Architectural Studies, Part 1

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met by the graduates of the BA (Hons) Architectural Studies.

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.

- 14.1 The Board made no further comments.

15 Other information

15.1 Student numbers

30

15.2 Documentation provided

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

16 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.**

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