

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to the University of Hong Kong**

Date of visiting board: 5, 6 & 7 July 2022
Confirmed by the RIBA: 21 October 2022

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Department of Architecture
Faculty of Architecture
The University of Hong Kong
Knowles Building,
HKU, Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong

2 Courses offered for validation

Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies, BA(AS), 4 years
Master of Architecture, MArch, 2 years

3 Head of the Department of Architecture

Dr Eric Schuldenfrei

Deputy head of department

Dr Cole Roskam

Programme Directors

Dr Olivier Ottevaere: BA(AS)
Mr Thomas Tsang: MArch

4 Awarding body

The University of Hong Kong

5 The visiting board

Lindesay Dawe - Chair
James Lai – Vice Chair
Dr Athena Moustaka
Alida Bata
Ms Sarah Lee – regional representative

In attendance:

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – RIBA – validation manager

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

On 21 October 2022 the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following courses:

Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies – BA (AS): 4 years, Part 1
Master of Architecture – MArch: 2 years, Part 2

The next visit to the University of Hong Kong will take place in 2027.

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)**

Department of Architecture, University of Hong Kong

Ranked amongst the world's best architecture schools, the Department of Architecture offers students a unique, dynamic environment for high-quality teaching, research, and professional development. The teaching faculty is composed of practitioners and professionally trained educators with a diverse range of expertise in relation to architectural design, structures, visual communications, environmental performance, history and theory, and professional practice. Collectively, we seek to offer the strongest architectural education available in Hong Kong and the region at large.

Our curriculum is influenced by our geographical position within the Greater Bay Area—one of China's leading centres for manufacturing, technological innovation, and international finance, and the epicentre of the most massive rural to urban migration in human history. These unique and complex conditions inform all aspects of our programme, from studio teaching to field work to public outreach and knowledge exchange. The Greater Bay Area provides an important cultural, social, and environmental context that shapes our community of students, teachers, and alumni and their many design-related contributions to Hong Kong, Asia, and the world at large.

Rigorous methods of design experimentation—iterative prototyping, material investigations, and ground-breaking studies on robotic assembly, among others—form the core of our programme. The department prioritizes academic diversity and a culture of innovative thinking and making that complements more traditional modes of academic production of the University. Education takes place both through a broad range of studios, lectures, and seminars and our variety of public programmes and reviews. Above all, we encourage the testing and exchange of ideas and practices through our research and fabrication facilities, including the waterjet cutting workshops, laser cutting, robotics, and three-dimensional printing labs. Our capacity in this regard increases each year and now figures as an important hallmark of a student's intellectual development.

HKU educates the professionals who will tackle the world's many growing challenges. Climate change, current and future risks posed by global pandemics, diminishing natural resources, unprecedented urbanization—these represent only some of the daunting problems facing humanity as the world moves toward an urbanized population of more than 70%. All of these challenges are anchored in where and how we occupy the planet, making architecture and the built environment a vital part of the search for solutions that will emerge in the years and decades to come.

The Greater Bay Area is currently at the forefront of this search, with a population of 50-100 million people that is placing increasing strain on ecological systems, economic management models, and material resources. Having long been a pioneering site in high-density living, the Greater Bay Area thus offers insights and opportunities for architects to contribute to the development of new, more sustainable ways of living and working in the twenty-first century.

Housing, transportation facilities, social spaces and programmes, among other design-related services, remain an urgent concern. Of these, housing is arguably the most important, particularly as Hong Kong's population continues to struggle to secure affordable homes for its rapidly aging population. Hong Kong requires more architects to answer the housing crisis, to aid in the design of new developments, and to address greater equity across society associated with housing.

HKU will continue to focus on increasing its capacity for teaching architectural heritage and natural environment conservation; better equipping students to contribute to the general growth of creative industries in Hong Kong and broadening their educational base, where possible, beyond their specific professional focus.

HKU Architecture takes these responsibilities seriously and as we look ahead to create opportunities to contribute towards refining how we occupy our planet over the coming decades we will continue to design our curriculum around both critical questions impacting society today and in the future. Architects have an important role to play not simply in leading the public debate on how society invests in urban infrastructure, but in what such infrastructure looks like, how it performs, and the ways in which it supports and inspires. Technological change poses its own distinctive set of cultural and social challenges, and here, too, architects will participate in current and future debates regarding how to best take advantage of these innovations.

There also exists urgent demand both in Hong Kong and greater China for architectural expertise capable of addressing environmental crisis. According to the UN, buildings account for 39% of energy and process-related CO2 emissions. Hong Kong is committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2050 and China by 2060—obligations that require more research in relation to how buildings produce and contribute to CO2 emissions. In considering the embodied energy used to create a building, however, whole-life design for energy and carbon optimization requires that all materials, structural components, construction practices, operation, demolition, and recycling costs be determined during the design process itself. Architects need to be involved in identifying and resolving these problems. These possibilities will test architects, but they also have the potential to transform how architects offer intellectual services in a highly competitive international market.

Over the next decade, HKU students and faculty will contribute their skills and insight to addressing the radical changes taking place around the world. AI, data science, and automation have already transformed how we communicate with each other and the machines that enable so much of what we do. Our students are being equipped with the knowledge necessary to accommodate where these new technologies will take us in the future.

Through our shared institutional goals, generated in coordination with students and faculty, we are defining and designing the future of architecture across Asia and the world at large.

*Eric Schuldenfrei
Head of Department and Associate Professor*

Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies [BA(AS)] for RIBA Part 1

The BA(AS) undergraduate programme offers an approach to architectural design that is rooted in the human condition and the spirit of making. It promotes design innovation, conceptual rigor and technological expertise to address the issues facing Hong Kong and the region.

The programme is organized into four tracks: Design Studio, History and Theory, Building Technology and Visual Communication. Each track develops an independent trajectory over the course of four years. As knowledge is acquired, it is applied within the studio on scenario-based problems that intersect each track.

The design studios are organized to offer a progression in terms of challenge and complexity. They begin in Year 1 with Tectonics, continuing on to Year 2 and Year 3 with Architecture and City, and culminating in Year 4 with an Integrated Project that brings together the knowledge gained in the three preceding years. Students work on projects that build knowledge from the fundamental principles of space-making, material form, and abstraction before going on to explore the impact of contextual relationships and pressures on an urban site. They conclude with working on developing a complex, multi-programmed building. The specific locations and problems investigated relate to critical issues facing the region; including rural development in China, urban regeneration in Hong Kong, and housing development in various cities throughout East Asia.

The aim of the programme is to develop the core abilities necessary within the architectural profession including a strong connection to the historical and cultural foundation of the discipline. Skills and knowledge are complemented with an awareness of contemporary architectural issues, perceived from the unique intersection of global and regional perspectives that define Hong Kong.

*Dr Olivier Ottevaere
BA(AS) Programme Director and Associate Professor (Practice)*

Master of Architecture [M.Arch] Programme for RIBA Part 2

The Master of Architecture programme aims to influence architectural and urban discourse regionally and internationally. It is committed to taking on the most pressing issues affecting architecture and urbanism today. The creation of unique spatial conditions brought on by the interplay of urban dynamics between political, social, cultural, and environmental forces, have led to a diversity of challenges that must be addressed by a new generation of future architects.

This is intensified in the context of Asia, as rapid and expansive forms of urbanization re-shape the ground, alter communities, build infrastructure, and change ecological systems. These urgencies act as a framework for the curriculum that drives the content of design studios, technology workshops and history and theory seminars. Issues and urgencies directly correlate to the research initiatives of teachers. The projects are broad in scope and ambition; including the impact of digital craft, informal settlements, affordable housing; extreme density, peripheral urbanization, rural transformation, and our changing ecology.

Over the course of the MArch programme, students will delve into a range of these topics and acquire techniques for design and research inquiry, building up expertise in order to formulate and test their own unique position. This culminates in the thesis project that synthesizes the student's approach and critical contribution to the discipline. It operates both as a conclusion and more importantly as a beginning of the student's future career as an architect.

The Department's location in Hong Kong enables it to be a hub connecting academics and practitioners from across the globe. Forums for discussion and debate bring together multiple voices from the US, China, UK, Brazil, Australia, Europe and Asia. This together with our international lecture series and exchange programme with leading institutions, maintains the Department's unique position as a leading voice and interface for the exchange of ideas.

As the world around us transforms, the MArch programme aims to enrich and influence the future of the discipline as it responds to these new challenges.

*Joshua Bolchover
MArch Programme Director and Professor*

10 Commendations

The Board commends the following:

- 10.1 The dynamism and ambition of the course, its enthusiastic staff and wide academic diversity of their backgrounds and expertise.
- 10.2 The Department's international outlook: its connections with a wide range of schools around the world; its global ambitions and response to global challenges.
- 10.3 The Department's comprehensive response to the conditions and challenges in the local context during the COVID pandemic and corresponding adjustments made to teaching and learning. Students have remained engaged, and the quality has been maintained.

11 Conditions

There are no conditions.

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 The Department should consolidate delivery of history and theory into a more discursive and reflective piece of work at conclusion of study and demonstrate how it is more clearly embedded both in the MArch and particularly in the BA(AS).
- 12.2 Building on the progress the Department has made during the pandemic, the Department should recognise the need for continued and individualised student support.

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 To carefully build personal and professional resilience of students and provide them with the skills and support to undertake a wide range of roles in industry and practice in preparation for a rapidly changing profession.
- 13.2 Consider future recruitment opportunities for increasing gender diversity among the staff body.
- 13.3 Consolidate recent positive course and curriculum development which builds on recent appointments and a strong HKU identity.
- 13.4 Develop a more clearly integrated strategy for electives and their relationship to the core areas of study in both the BA(AS) and MArch programmes.

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 Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies (BA(AS)), 4 years

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

Master of Architecture (MArch), 2 years

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.

- 15.1 The Board made no further comments.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers

Bachelor of Arts in Architectural Studies (BA(AS)) - 280 approx.
MArch - 164 approx.

16.2 Documentation provided

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

17 Notes of 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 the Dean
- Meeting with external and professional examiners
- Meeting with staff