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Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Full visiting board to the City School of Architecture - 2023

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Date of visiting board: 29-31 March 2023
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 16 June 2023

1   **Details of institution hosting courses**
       City School of Architecture (Colombo) Limited
       104, Kitulwatta Road, Colombo 8
       Sri Lanka

2   **Courses offered for validation**
       Part 1: Three-Year Full-Time Course leading to the CSA Diploma in
       Architectural Studies
       Part 2: Three-Year Course (First Two Years Part time work and study, Third
       year full time study) leading to the CSA Higher Diploma in Architecture

3   **Head of School**
       Archt. Dr. L.A.S. Ranjith Perera

       Course Leaders
       CSA Part 1: Archt Nandika Denipitiya
       CSA Part 2: Archt. Surangi Gunawardena

4   **Awarding body**
       City School of Architecture
       104, Kitulwatta Road, Colombo 8
       Sri Lanka

5   **The visiting board**
       Sara Biscaya   Academic / Chair
       Jon Phipps   Practitioner
       Ryan Stuckey   Academic
       Jaime Solloso   Validation Manager
       Mano Ponniah   Regional Representative

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 the 16 June 2023, the RIBA Educational Committee confirmed that the
       following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:

       Part 1: City School of Architecture Part 1 course, Diploma in Architectural
       Studies (3 years)
       Part 2: City School of Architecture Part 2 course, Higher Diploma in
       Architecture (3 years)

The next visit to the City School of Architecture will take place in 2028.

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 of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

9   Academic position statement (written by the School)

This **Academic Position Statement**, presented for review by the RIBA Revalidation Panel is intended to portray the distinctive character of the City School of Architecture, (CSA) Colombo, Sri Lanka.

City School of Architecture as an established educational institution has a multi-disciplinary teaching approach with broad-based expertise across the spectrum of professions allied to Architecture, Design, and the Construction Industry, committed to academic and design excellence standards, delivering a high-quality educational experience, through its study programs.

Our core values are based upon the tenet that great architecture grows from creative inquiry, built on a solid technical foundation, research, and reflection on changing socio-economic goals, while safeguarding the integrity of the natural and built environments. They are founded on the principles of respect, sharing, engagement, innovation, and communication, which are highly valued in the academic discourse of architecture. These values and principles are the hallmarks that determine the belief that the foundations of architectural education, are distinctive, immersive, and "seated" within a range of physical, cultural, social, political, environmental and economic dynamics that we confront.

Our academic "culture" stimulates the diversity of thought, together with analytical and critical thinking, fostering the engagement of the student, in a "practice-based" learning process, which supports and encourages a productive learning environment conducive to the student's process of acquiring knowledge and gradually assimilating with an architectural practice.

Our student body, a cross section from both urban and rural Sri Lanka is a "melting pot" of people from a wide spectrum of social, cultural, and intellectual diversity that underpins our vibrant academic position. Attuned to the progressive needs of the Architects of tomorrow and ensuring a competitive edge while being ethically and professionally competent, socially and environmentally responsive, the education and

training of our students are broad-based. We strive to equip them with comprehensive knowledge and the ability to adapt to real world, contemporary trends, and needs of the enlightened populace of our nation.

Our teaching faculty working together with the student body courteously and with integrity, pursues a shared goal of excellence in architectural education, encouraging a learning environment for the student's active exploration of architecture's design, cultural, technical, historical, and aesthetic aspects.

The acquisition of knowledge is a comprehensive and holistic journey. It is associated with training the mind to think freely, critically and creatively, together with acquiring professional practice skills vital for a contemporary professional career, rather than purely learning the

theories, and passing the examinations. Based on the CSA's experience spanning over four decades, the teaching and learning experiences remain decisively grounded on a "practice- based" model promoting interaction between the students and the profession/professionals. Students are introduced to the professional practice of architecture from the very outset and gradually transferred to the "learn while you work" model, that consolidates the "practice- based" model.

At the Part 1 level, a large number of professionals are involved in teaching at studios and theory modules. At the Part II level, the same approach is continued while allowing students to work 3 days a week at trainer practices. This academic delivery model of CSA is distinctly different from the other three schools of Architecture in Sri Lanka. As a result, the CSA graduates after completing Part 1 and 2 levels possess more professional practice experience than graduates of other schools. Accolades received by the school and its alumni and the competitive edge that they displayed at award functions are testaments to exceptional outcome results of the CSA's model.

An Education Challenged - Post-2016 in Sri Lanka saw numerous challenging years, characterized by successive crises. The Easter Sunday Bomb Attacks in Colombo and the COVID- 19 pandemic were symptomatic with curfews, isolation, and the tragic loss of lives. These were followed by the declaration of a Food Emergency and Economic Crisis, impacted by fuel shortages affecting transportation, and disruptions to electricity, leading to social unrest, discontent, and disruptions to daily life amongst the general populace of the nation.

Amidst this tumultuous background, student-staff interactions at lectures and studios, peer interactions, and use of school facilities, were severely restricted. Students were isolated and helpless, frustrated, and depressed, leading to distressing psychological fallout. Although "adapting" to social distancing and seclusion seemed to be the "new normal" it was a regressive "creative leap" backward, rather than a headlong "quantum leap" forward, into the future.

Acknowledging the inevitability of successive crises, the CSA moved into the "virtual space". Swift arrangements were made to equip the Staff with enhanced IT facilities at homes so that they could interact with students. Both the theory lectures and design studios were conducted using internet-based platforms such as Zoom and MS

Teams. Online school included "break-out rooms", as the "virtual" replacement for the physical design studio. As such, although not an alternative solution to learning Architecture within a studio, this stopgap methodology was a proactive solution ensuring the continuance of the academic programs during uncertain periods.

Through the virtual platform, few experts virtually conducted a series of curated and targeted workshops on Mind, Body, and Soul. Group physiological wellness sessions were a decisive intervention in the form of a "coping" mechanism to combat depression and were conducted free of cost for the Students and Staff. One-on-one private sessions at pre-arranged times were offered to all while ensuring confidentially. Many students engaging in these sessions commended this timely intermediation expressing their gratitude.

Part I – CSA Diploma in Architectural Studies – This programme enables the students to develop an understanding and attachment to our noble profession. The notion that is embedded throughout is that "architecture" is invested with a "monumental" reality and sensibility to context and the place is cultivated within.

After an initial exploratory year, the programme focuses on the fundamentals of architectural theory and design. Considerable emphasis is placed on creative design and design appreciation through studio projects, research activities, and experiencing architecture expeditions in the second year. The students are guided to create well-informed and context-generated designs by responding to the characteristics of a given physical context, such as environmental sensitiveness, connectedness, climate and socio-economic base. The third year is a year of systematic recapitulation of all learnings in the Part I programme. The ultimate Design Studio is the Comprehensive Design Project (CDP), which unites the progressive teachings and design "ethos". The overall approach to design in the Part I programme is analytical, problem-solving and synthesis, and the outcome is improved ability in decision-making and "crafting" good buildings and thereby producing good architecture.

Since 2021, Part I CDP started paying more focused attention on socially responsive design projects that address specific issues prevailing in most parts of the country. CDP 2021 selected "small industry and community empowerment" as the theme, while in CDP 2022, the theme was "humanizing energy to empower community industries". The outcome result of this focus was increased awareness on national level problems and how architects could contribute to resolve those problems.

Part II – CSA Higher Diploma in Architecture - has its seeds sown in the earlier academic years (1, 2 & 3). Students are training throughout the Year 4. They continue to train part time during Year 5 & 6 and switch to "Study while working" mode when they return to the School to follow the Part II Course. During the Part II, students are expected to mature with a deeper understanding of architecture and develop a personal approach (Philosophy) towards Architectural Design. The design studios in years 5, & 6 encourage a design process that is philosophical in approach, mastered through critical inquiry and "experimentation". This approach would result in a practical design synthesis, which is sensitive, coherent, and well- resolved, aptly considering spatial, visual, environmental, and technological issues.

The Design projects in year 5 aim outcomes that include increased skills to handle urban architectural issues that pose, social, economic and contextual problems and integrate design solutions with the Public Realm. These outcomes were typically assessed through an urban visioning exercise, context generated architecture for a public building and an Urban Housing Project. The design projects in year 6 deal with the architectural character & Conservation needs of a selected regional town, and a high-rise mixed development for a complex function. The expected outcome results of these projects are increased skills to handle sustainability/green issues pertaining to architectural design.

In the final year (Year 7), students are allowed to set a personal agenda. They are expected to assimilate all learnings of previous years and select their own Dissertation Project and individual Comprehensive Design Project (CDP) in a way that enables to demonstrate a wide variety of skills. This year of study is aimed at demonstrating competence in learning management, problem-solving, and acquiring the skills necessary to create built environments at a macro level.

A typical graduate who successfully completes the Part I and Part II program is an emerging young professional who have substantial exposure to the profession and practice of architecture and a fair understanding on the role of architect in society and environment. **Our "Learn While You Work" model** has proven to be an effective mode because it enables the students to acquire skills relevant to modern architectural practice gradually and systematically. We firmly believe that it is the uniqueness of our program and give us a cutting edge over other architecture schools in Sri Lanka.

10   Commendations

10.1   The Board commends the School on its constructive use of links with professional practice and the exposure to practice and the profession to students across all year groups from the start of Part 1 to the completion of Part 2.

10.2   The Board commends the School on its resilience and flexibility of the staff during and post pandemic period, especially in adapting methods to continue to deliver content to the highest levels.

11   Conditions
There are no conditions.

12   Action points
The visiting board proposes the following action points. The RIBA expects the School to report on how it will address these action points. The School is referred to the RIBA's criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring processes. Failure by the School to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

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12.1 The Board acknowledges the progress on moving towards a more theoretical approach to design in the course at Part I. There is stronger evidence on the weight of the design proposals at the current boundaries of professional practice and the academic discipline of architecture at this level. The application of appropriate theoretical concepts to studio design projects, demonstrating a reflective and critical approach should be strengthened.

12.2 The Board commends the breadth of enquiry and integration of the technical curriculum requirements in the projects at Part II, however the School is advised to emphasise the exploratory design projects in the first or second year of the Part II. The Board recognises the efforts and development made by the School, nevertheless, a higher level of design aspiration from that of the Part I, to enable an ability to test new hypotheses and speculations in all three years of the Part II is required.

12.3 The Board recommends that more weight be given to risk-taking and design development and methodology, and the demonstration of this within the design portfolio throughout the School.

12.4 The Board recognises the value and emphasis placed on the practice-based learning ethos of the school within the current Sri Lankan and Global context. The Board welcomes the opportunities of more explorative briefs that encourage critical thinking and architectural design process development at both Part I and Part II.

12.5 The Board recognises the challenges posed to the School in the last two years in terms of delivery. The Board recommends the School aligns its facilities to the programme delivery provision of their Part I and Part II for the future.

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 welcomes a greater emphasis on the substance of the students work revealing the design process, the thought process and the critical thinking.

13.2 The Board welcomes that care is placed on socio-cultural and economic context and the wider community in Sri Lanka within the briefs at Part I and Part II.

13.3 The Board encourages the awareness of regional technologies at Part 1 level and infused within design development.

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 Parts 1 & 2
The Board confirmed that all the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Diploma in Architectural Studies (3 years) and the Higher Diploma in Architecture (3 years).

15 Review of work against criteria RIBA Themes and Values and Graduate Attributes

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion graduate attribute to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion graduate attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion graduate outcome was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

Part 1 Course (leading to Diploma in Architectural Studies): 124
Part 2 Course (leading to Higher Diploma in Architecture): 44

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 budget holder and course leaders
• Meeting with students
• Meeting with head of institution
• Meeting with external examiners
• Meeting with staff