
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the visiting board
to Oxford Brookes University**

- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s**
School of Architecture
Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment
Oxford Brookes University
Gipsy Lane Campus
Headington
Oxford OX3 0BP
- 2 Head of School**
Christina Godiksen

Dean of the Faculty
Joe Tah
- 3 Courses offered for revalidation**
Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture
Part 2 MArchD Applied Design in Architecture
Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management
- 4 Programme leaders (PL) & subject coordinators (SC)**
PL& SC, Jane Anderson, Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture
Part 2 Masters in Applied Design in Architecture (MArchD)
PL Scott Sworts, joint SC Charles Parrack & Toby Shew
Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management
PL Karl Kjelstrup-Johnson, SC Peter Garstecki,
- 5 Awarding body**
Oxford Brookes University
- 6 The visiting board**
Andrew Wilson – Chair
Paul King
Athena Moustaka
Jayesha Fernando – validation manager
- 7 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).
- 8 Proposals of the visiting board**
On the 06 September 2023 the RIBA confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated

Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture
Part 2 MArchD Applied Design in Architecture
Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management

The next full visiting board will take place in 2027.

9 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 institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

10 Academic position statement (written by the School)

Welcome to the School of Architecture at Oxford Brookes University.

Founded in 1927, the School of Architecture at Oxford Brookes University is a collaborative learning environment that fosters innovation and diversity. Studio culture and design units are central to our School, providing a broad selection of architecture and choice for each student. Our research groups in Architectural Engineering, Low Carbon Building, Emergency Practice, Place, Culture & Identity, and Design Theory Practice are key to the School's culture and expertise. Students are encouraged to experiment and to build their own sense of agency. This approach results in highly skilled and ambitious graduates who are valued by the profession, as evidenced by the School's excellent employment record. Our graduates have been shortlisted/commended for the RIBA Presidents Medals and other awards, most recently Elliott Afoke was awarded the RIBA Serjeant Award for Excellence in Architectural Drawing at Part 2 in 2021 and Oliver Rash won the Architects Journal Undergraduate Highly Commended Design Award in 2021. The School was listed as 51st in the QS rankings in 2021 and 13 in the Guardian League Table for Architecture in 2021. The School's critically reflective ethos ensures that the quality and standards of its curriculum at Part 1, 2 and 3 are continually monitored and evaluated. Knowledge is tested and practiced to build confident and professional graduates. Our graduates from parts 1, 2 & 3 exit with a breadth of skills and experiences relevant to architectural practice and beyond.

Open Studio Culture & Agency

The School encourages working in the studio across all five years. For all design units we have dedicated unit spaces, and our computer suites and printroom are fully integrated with a central shared area. The studio culture expands beyond the studio into our dedicated workshop. The studio culture allows a natural engagement in peer learning, the cross-fertilisation of ideas and friendship. Undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as interior architecture students, work together. At the end of the year, the studios transform to showcase all the work of the students in our end of year show. Peer-assisted learning is further encouraged through a Buddy System, Part 2 students undertaking Part 1 reviews and the student society OXARCH, which runs workshops, a lecture series, social events and a magazine OSA. OXARCH have won Student Society of the Year several times. Students and staff co-

organise & co-create important work through our Oxford Human Rights Festival, which will be celebrating its 20th Anniversary this year. The festival is an excellent way to bring important issues right to the centre of our students' experience and key in local engagement with the city of Oxford. Signing up to 'Architecture Declares' led Students and staff to set up our Climate Action Group last year, which positively reinforces our ongoing commitment to our environment along with sustainability featuring more prominently in our curriculum and our research achievements. This year, one of our PHD students initiated the Black in Architecture reading group and hosted the Race in Architectural Education 2021/22 Symposium. The School is proud of and strongly encourages diversity in project outcomes as much as in School culture. We continue to actively seek to widen participation in architecture across a number of initiatives. We encourage student involvement in curriculum development and foster ongoing dialogue through Forums, Focus Groups and weekly Open Doors. In June 2022 the School will celebrate its 95th anniversary. Our Alumni group is very active and recently published a book of the history of the School of Architecture.

Architectural Design Units, Contemporary Practice & Innovative Research. The School is centred around design units (studios) that aim to reflect contemporary practice. Each year, these units reflect the most current issues in society and expose the students to a variety of design methods in diverse contexts. Our excellent staff are drawn from innovative practice and research. The dynamic relationship between practice and research ensures high quality and current content. We are able to provide a wide variety of architectural design studio choices each year, which give students both breadth and depth of knowledge. Each Design Unit consists of two design tutors and a design technology tutor as the core team, with input from a structural engineer and a practice tutor. The individual trajectory of each student will facilitate deep learning in their own projects, while broader learning is occurring by experiencing the work of their peers. Vertical studios in year 2+3 further nurture peer to peer learning, critical discourse and camaraderie, propelling each student to go far beyond their own expectations in a supportive learning environment. Supporting it all are our administrators, student support coordinators and technical staff who are as dedicated to our students as any of the academic staff. In MArchD, our RIBA part 2, we uniquely offer our year 5 students the option to study in a 'specialisation' (80cr) directly linked to one of our Masters courses and research groups to develop a strong research lead inquiry before their 2nd year final design project.

Live Projects, Cultural Context & Sustainability

All undergraduate students participate in at least one live project via the OB1 LIVE programme. Several vertical units use live elements in their teaching such as Unit B's collaboration to design workplaces for civil society organisations, and Unit E's collaboration with local community groups in Westway, London. Live projects give students a deeper understanding and first-hand experience of ethics, collaboration, practice, and making. Both curriculum and teaching practice are informed by staff pedagogical research and activity. The School hosted the Association of Architectural Educators 2017 Conference, Architecture Connects, which explored strategies for the co-production of architectural knowledge. Large numbers of teaching staff and students

contributed papers, case studies and workshops to the conference.

Design projects are supported by contextual studies. Our dissertations are often highlighted by practice and external examiners. Since the last visit, a new lecture series has been introduced to students in MArchD/Riba part 2. The School places great focus on field trips and hands-on experiences (learning from doing) to complement theory. Students go on trips locally as well as further afield. They visit architecture, manufacturers, building sites and much more.

We are proud to be one of the few schools that pioneered sustainable education in architecture. Our Sustainable Architecture: Evaluation and Design MSc (SAED) was established in 1994. Our long history of sustainability gives us fertile ground to develop new knowledge and innovation. We are a core partner of a major Innovate UK funded smart local energy system demonstration project in Oxfordshire (LEO), as part of which we have installed six Vehicle2Grid chargers on campus that enables Electric Vehicles to store renewable energy which can be discharged back into the grid during peak periods. Recently we also won a national Inside Housing award for the deep energy retrofit of a 1950s block of flats in Great Yarmouth that led to a significant reduction in space heating and energy bills for the residents.

Digital Literacy & Making

As a School, we firmly believe in teaching analogue and digital methods of representation and making. We have recently introduced the teaching of 2D CAD in year 1 intertwined with hand drawing and making. Students are given a variety of opportunities to apply and experiment across all levels and modules. We encourage making at all scales across the School. We continue to evolve our mixed media portfolio submission, which enables students to submit films, computer models in digital form, accompanied by printed drawings to scale, sketches, hand drawings, artwork and physical models. In the past two years, staff and students have excelled at using online teaching and learning tools. We introduced an online exhibition last year and have since made use of Dezeen Exhibitions to communicate student work internationally. Since the last visiting board, we've also updated our Plasma screens, added web cams, and upgraded our speakers. Our workshop and print room continue to improve and expand our 2D and 3D printing capability, and our testing lab continues to play an important role in our research.

The Aims and Outcomes of the Awards

The School uses programme level learning outcomes to define the aims of Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3. These learning outcomes, which are set out in the student programme handbooks, subsume but are not limited to the RIBA Validation Criteria. Below the distinction of the part 1, part 2 and part 3 programmes are explained.

Part 1

The learning outcomes for Part 1, the BA (Hons) Architecture, require students to produce work that exhibits a broad base of relevant knowledge, understanding and skills, as defined by the Part 1 Validation Criteria, at Levels 5 and 6. The problem-based and integrated curriculum works within a modular framework. The undergraduate curriculum has

been designed to enable students to apply their learning immediately into their coursework. Strategies to achieve this include integration of design and academic work across all subject strands, coursework assessment that includes practical applied elements and engagement with real world situations and contexts, live projects and delivery of teaching through an extensive range of practical workshops. Technology is learned and assessed through application to design project work. Practice employs real-world scenarios to enable students to apply what they have learned to their design projects.

Pandemic measures: We prioritised live delivery in line with the normal timetable as far as possible and facilitated access to recorded material and added extra resources to moodle. Miro and Google Classroom have become popular. All staff would meet regularly to exchange best practice and lessons learned in informal lunch time drop-in sessions. Positives were the discovery of virtual field trips allowing visits to vulnerable buildings for instance. Another positive has been external input from further afield. Both of these will be retained moving forward.

Mandatory competences roadmap: our strategy involves all subject areas working together so that delivery is integrated with the evidence of our students' mandatory competences being found in the final portfolio of work. Particular areas for emphasis and improvement have been identified. These include professional and academic ethics; accessible design; sustainability (particularly resources, climate and ecology); fire safety; policy and regulation.

Part 2

The learning outcomes for Part 2 require students to produce work that exhibits relevant knowledge, understanding and skills, as defined by the Part 2 Validation Criteria, at Level 7, and master's Level. Part 2 is also delivered through a problem-based, integrative curriculum, which works within a modular framework and technology is learnt and assessed primarily through design project work. The structure of the modular programme allows students to add 80 credits of specialist knowledge, a subset of modules from a specialist master's programme, to the core curriculum, which distinguishes the Part 2 from the Part 1. The curriculum is structured so that students engage with their chosen specialism (Urban Design, International Architectural Regeneration and Development, Advanced Architectural Design, Sustainable Architecture: Evaluation and Design, Development and Emergency Practice, Research Led Design or the Design Studio Specialisation). Primary research skills are also taught in year one of the programme. We have created a vertical system to link the two years, allowing students to build connections between their first year specialisation and their second year studio. Students who graduate from the MArchD are highly employable because they are equipped with core professional skills as well as skills in a specialist area. **Pandemic measures:** No significant modifications were made to the coursework due to the pandemic, although there was much less emphasis on physical modelling, due to constraints on use of the School's facilities. The final presentation was eliminated and replaced with a video presentation that students would record and submit with their final portfolio. Studio teaching mostly occurred in person, when allowed by government guidelines, while most lectures

were delivered in synchronous online presentations. Mandatory competences roadmap: We have expanded the technology module to include a lecture series related to building construction, materials, methods, and regulations. Embedded in this technology series are discussions around sustainability and life safety, with a requirement that these issues be clearly addressed and documented in the final portfolios.

Part 3

The learning outcomes for Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management follow the Part 3 Validation Criteria reflecting the demanding requirements of the criteria and the nature of the examination. Candidates taking the Part 3 Examination are supported in their preparations through full day seminars during which topics such as contract law, procurement, planning, CDM and professionalism; are covered. Over the past few years, the makeup of the seminars has been changing with less lectures and more direct discussions with candidates; both are run by the academic team and guest speakers. The discussion sessions provide a platform to explore legal matters with leading industry experts, which ultimately sharpens the candidate's professional judgment and behaviour. In addition, candidates present and review their Case Study projects with the academic team and other candidates during seminars. In between seminars, candidates meet regularly as Study Groups - peer learning encourages collaborative and proactive attitude which strengthens candidate's confidence. The School is currently looking to enhance the Part 3 programme in terms of online offer, which proved to be successful during the pandemic especially from the accessibility point of view. Since 2021, Part 3 candidates are joined by apprentices, which enhances diversity of experience and peer learning. Pandemic measures: No modifications were made to the documentation submission or the assessment. Before the pandemic, the written exam was taken from the office or home so there was no change. All seminars and the final interviews were conducted online.

Mandatory competences roadmap: There has been a stronger focus on Health and Safety with additional sessions about CDM, Building Regulations and Fire Safety - all sessions explore the future of the role of an architect. Mandatory Competencies are closely linked to Part 3/ MPL curriculum and therefore it will be essential to examine how the Part 3 training can be better integrated with Part 1 and Part 2 programmes.

University, faculty and support

The university has through its campus development (still ongoing) facilitated improved internal and external areas for study and socialising. The John Henry Brookes building is the hub for much activity through its food outlets, markets. External recreational grounds are popular and the square and quad have become popular hangouts. The library is the crown jewel of it all which for the School of Architecture is further enriched by Paul Oliver's library of Vernacular Architecture and our very own dedicated librarian. The School is part of the Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment (TDE) with the School of Arts (SoA), the School of the Built Environment (SoBE), School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics (ECM). This provides the School with opportunities to

develop cross-disciplinary collaborations. The School of Arts contributes to our Oxford Human Rights Festival. Our RIBA Part 2 (MArchD) students are also able to opt for Urban Design as their specialisation in year 5, which is part of the School of Built Environment. We are building

improved progression links with Foundation in Art. The Schools in TDE are currently discussing opportunities to share expertise further. ECM offers opportunity for our students to join Oxford Brookes Racing and the design and build team for the Formula Student Competition. We are still evolving plans for a shared building with further workshop facilities for the faculty. Academics provide pastoral care. The School shares with built environment two student support coordinators. Students have the opportunity to access Wellbeing, Inclusive Support and the Centre For Academic Development, all offer important services that improve year on year. The School has continued to develop relationships externally and have a number of bursaries and project awards that are given to students each year.

Oxford Graduates Fit for Contemporary Practice

The School is constantly reviewing its academic offering with the help of internal and external stakeholders to ensure that its graduates are highly employable. This includes working with the University Careers Office, the RIBA and ARB, practitioner staff teaching in the School and Local Practices via the RIBA Southern Regional Group mentoring programme, site visits and field trips. In addition, the emphasis on live problems in the design studio and the explicit links to research ensures that students are engaged and equipped to deal with contemporary issues beyond the boundaries of the design studio. Our end of year exhibition is well attended by both practice and the press which enables students to actively promote themselves and to build their professional network. We have in the past two years invested in an online exhibition and have featured our students' work in Dezeen (a renowned design and architecture magazine) on various occasions. A new initiative is coffee mornings for students in their graduating year with alumni to exchange employment tips and experiences. Employment statistics provided by the University (based on employment six months after graduation) demonstrated an employment/further study rate of 94% for Part 1 and 88% for Part 2. One alumni and now academic member of staff was appointed as an RIBA Journal Rising Star.

Partnerships and Future

Since the last visit the School has successfully launched its level 7 apprenticeship course and it is popular with our own RIBA part 1 graduates. In September 2022 we are hoping to launch an MA in Interior Architecture, which will also be offered as a specialisation route to our MArchD students. There are several other initiatives on the drawing board, which speak to the highly motivated staff and our supportive faculty. We continue to run RIBA Studio, which is a Brookes/RIBA partnership and have expanded with a foundation that is designed to widen participation into architecture. The university actively promotes itself internationally and we have acquired LAM accreditation. We have also recently set up a partnership with Metropolitan College in Athens who run a RIBA part 1 and 2, which opens up opportunities for student and staff exchanges. The School maintains collaborative provisions with

international organisations such as the Red Cross. Essential to our curriculum and our research are our external relationships. Staff actively seek to build relationships with architectural practice, manufacturing, NGO's, community organisations and much more to enrich the student experience and to prepare them well for practice. Two academic

members have been members of the jury for RIBA President's awards for research. One academic member was invited to be an external examiner of MArch dissertations at the Graduate School of Design in Harvard University in 2021.

Pandemic

The university and the School of Architecture followed government guidelines throughout the pandemic. After the first lockdown we taught in person and socially distanced in semester 1, 2020. In semester 2 2021, when we were allowed to, we opened up for the students to use the studios, whilst teaching still took place online. Whilst in lockdown and for those students who were unable to join us in person our librarian, our technical staff and student support coordinators were available for live zoom meetings in addition to academic staff. Course specific measures are listed above.

11 Commendations

The Board commends the following:

- 11.1 The Board commends the School for high levels of care, creativity, and effectiveness in the design of learning experiences for their students. This is centred on a strong studio culture and a diverse and current set of thematic units. The courses are accessible, well rounded and deliver high skills for all students.
- 11.2 The Board highly commends the ambition and success in creating a student-centred educational culture in the School. The School instils choice, independence, criticality, specialisation, ownership, respect, and self-motivation as essential attributes to become successful future practitioners.
- 11.3 The Board commends the deep commitment to enhancement, evolution, currency, and progress, all to the benefit and opportunities afforded to their students. This spans across many aspects of the School provision, but notably includes critical emerging themes of social justice and inclusion.

12 Conditions

There are no conditions.

13 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 visits. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

13.1 The School must rewrite the academic position statement to better reflect the mission and ethos of the School, as clearly articulated during the visit.

14. 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.

14.1 The Board advises the School to continually review the balance of time students allocate at Part 2 level to the development of their architectural proposals alongside their research specialisations. This will ensure parity of architectural output across the course.

14.2 The Board advises the School to give ongoing consideration to the value of and location for messy, low precision methods of working within the pioneering digital pedagogical culture across the School.

14.3 The Board advises that the renewed emphasis on life and fire safety is evidenced and assessed in a final submission.

14.4 The Board advises that going forward the student projects further evidence by design the need for sustainable material selection, passive technologies, the use of renewable energy, and sustainable building technologies/mechanisms.

14.5 The Board advises the School to take full advantage of the apprenticeships route to integrate their experiences with the other students in the School, at all levels.

14.6 The Board advises the School to maintain dialogue with the student body on matters where additional course costs are incurred.

14.7 The Board advises the university to ensure that physical resource is maintained through future phases of course expansion or new provision."

15 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.

15.1 BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1

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

15.2 MArchD, Part 2

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

15.3 Examination in Practice and Management Part 3

The Board confirmed that all Part 3 Professional Criteria were met.

16 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. Please see the action points and criteria.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

Part 1 - 411
Part 2 - 197
Part 3 – 5-10

17.2 Documentation provided

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

18 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.

- Budget holder and course leaders
- Students
- Head of institution
- External examiners
- Staff