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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board  
to the Arts University Bournemouth**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**  
 Arts University Bournemouth  
 Wallisdown  
 Poole  
 Dorset  
 BH12 5HH
- 2 Director of Design and Architecture**  
 Russell Gagg
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**  
 Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
 Part 2 MArch
- 4 Course leader/s**  
 Channa Vithana      Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
 TBC                      Part 2 MArch
- 5 Awarding body**  
 Arts University Bournemouth
- 6 The visiting board**  
 Sally Stewart      Chair / Academic  
 Daniel Goodricke      Academic  
 Olive White      Academic  
 Peter Williams      Practitioner  
 Sophie Bailey      RIBA Head of Validation
- 7 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](http://www.architecture.com).
- 8 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**  
 On 19 December 2024, the RIBA confirmed continued validation/s of the following courses:  
  
 Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture  
 Part 2 MArch  
  
 The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2029.
- 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

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- 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

**10 Academic position statement**  
(Statement written by the school)

BA and Master of Architecture (MArch) are part of a wider community of study at Arts University Bournemouth (AUB), an institution with origins dating back over 140 years (firstly as the Bournemouth Government Art School). Within this context, Sir Peter Cook initially studied architecture and worked in Bournemouth (from the 1950s). BA Architecture began in 2007, MArch in 2011 and, since 2022, both have been central to the creative mission of the School of Design & Architecture.

Central to our ethos, and in alignment with AUB Strategy 2030's Connected and Collaborative values, are the shared opportunities and networks with both internal and external stakeholders: across the School, the University, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP Council) and the wider areas of the New Forest, the Purbecks, Hampshire County Council, and parts of the Jurassic Coast. From the beginning of 2024 AUB Architecture is consolidating these valuable associations to form new knowledge exchange and research opportunities benefitting both the student and staff experience as part of AUB 2030's Innovative values.

Considering the context of being a relatively small, non-metropolitan university, AUB Architecture has always positioned itself to attract a cohort which evidences exceptional diversity in terms of location, educational background, gender, ethnicity and age.

The region remains an important driver for the structure of the curriculum and AUB Architecture continues to site student outputs within the local area to explore both specific regional questions as well as prototypical ones. The BA considers: "Coast" at Level 4; "Edge" (suburban, industrial, rural) at Level 5 and "Civic" (the centre) at Level 6. MArch at Level 7 also works locally (urban-rural-coastal) using the region as a laboratory for experimentation. The resulting BA and MArch outputs are distinctive and combine the experience of the local area seen by our students with their own creative drive and larger questions within the profession.

AUB instils an ethos where students are supported to develop their individual voice and practice inclusive of intellectual ambitions, and, in the BA and MArch, this enables a diverse range of portfolios that satisfy the requirements of RIBA and ARB. Students work through an integrated approach which combines appropriate selections in each unit from the main subject areas: contextual and critical studies; technology; professional and ethical studies; communication, and design. This type of integration enables a more holistic architectural methodology and understanding, which is further ensured by the

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consistency of advice from course staff, visiting tutors and industry professionals (architects, engineers, surveyors, urban designers and planners) who state that good teamwork contributes to more in-depth project development.

In the BA, each year is segmented into three interlocking terms, each adding to the next, whilst MArch has two connected semesters per year that add to year 1, and year 2 thesis outputs. From the first year of degree onwards, AUB Architecture balances the context of creative arts and making with support from expert staff and external architects, engineers and specialists in sustainability and technology. This integrated approach is important in the context of an arts university, and it helps students define specialist and distinctive architecture informed by these creative opportunities. This integration is inclusive of professional mentoring from architectural practices (an enterprise the course started in 2009) which in recent years has also become an RIBA initiative.

These strategies in technology and professional and ethical studies provide balance and grounding for architecture, attributes which are important within the context of AUB's arts community. These are conscientiously supported by specialist staff who are chartered architects (inclusive of PSA roles) within both BA and MArch. The course staff as a whole offer invaluable academic guidance and pastoral care to support students and graduates alike. With a dedicated subject librarian and exemplary academic support from AUB's Study Skills and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) departments, the architecture students gain additional highly skilled support which helps them to achieve higher quality work within the rigours of the integrated approach that AUB Architecture takes.

MArch allows experimentation through dissertation, research and fabrication in the first year, including landscape led by a specialist, experienced member of staff. Thesis-level work through research by design and synthesis with integration of design, technology, history, theory and professional practice is completed in second year. There is a focus for MArch student design projects on local and regional landscape with learning through direct experience incorporating key social, cultural and environmental issues at micro, meso, and macro scales. As part of the integrated approach the MArch students complete PDP (Professional Development Portfolio) that recognises individual and wider learning beyond the course and interconnected disciplines. In year 1, the PDP is intended to support students' reflective practice that is key to the transition to more independent learning at master's level. Along with the MArch students leading their work, which is process focussed (iterative design development) there is a strong professional integration to the second-year final thesis project to understand the different processes of procurement inclusive of sustainability implications and net-zero policy developments.

In the 23/24 academic year new smaller teams of synergistic staff in Level 6 BA created a well-received (from encouraging NSS comments) level of engagement with the students and good overall achievement in all subject areas. This was particularly apparent in the contextual and

critical studies dissertation led by a specialist member of staff supported by a strong team of visiting tutors. Professional and ethical studies and technology and design staff, across Levels 4 and 5 as well as both MArch levels, all worked well together in smaller teams with students noting a positive staff attitude and that their voice was listened to and respected.

Whilst it is challenging to pursue an integrated approach and allow individual portfolios to be completed at all levels, it is rewarding for the course staff, who are as diverse as the students they tutor, to see this distinct AUB Architecture pedagogy continue to flourish. Well-rounded graduates who become ethically responsible and critically engaged architects (appropriate materials making architecture built to last in spaces and contexts that enhance and protect life) rather than just competent, trained employees is key to all at AUB Architecture.

## **11 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The Board commends the available studio space and resources for students across both validated programmes.

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

- 12.1 For future RIBA Visiting Boards, the School must provide current documentation ahead of the visit to ensure board members are appropriately briefed.

The list of documentation required for a full Visiting Board can be found on page.32 of the RIBA Procedures for Validation.

- 12.2 The School should broaden students' understanding of History, Theory, and Cultural Context at Part 1 across all years, and consider decoupling the delivery and assessment of the dissertation in ARC665 to provide greater focus. This would allow students to undertake research that complements their design portfolio without duplication, and clearer recognition of performance in extended writing.
- 12.3 The School should ensure a closer constructive alignment of subject themes within individual units and across years to better consolidate and enhance knowledge and skills, with expectations more explicitly outlined within the syllabus.
- 12.4 The School should ensure the full rollout and consistent use of the learning management system (CANVAS), providing a single point of access to learning resources and timetabling, and communication amongst students, peers and tutors.
- 12.5 The School should collaborate with professional services colleagues to better utilise the full functionality afforded by the learning management

system. All staff should receive appropriate technology enhanced learning tuition to support learning on their units and/or courses.

- 12.6 The School should consider the allocation of the assessment criteria within the individual units to achieve more proportionate distribution across the different subjects represented while also demonstrating the requirement for 50% design content.

**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 School should review the academic position statement to better align with and represent its ambition, ethos, and identity more accurately in relationship to the validated programmes.
- 13.2 The School should more clearly articulate its distinctive features and the unique opportunities it offers, acknowledging its geographical setting and related economic and social context. The courses should further consider how these opportunities can be used at both Part 1 and Part 2 and become reflective due in course documentation and admissions literature.
- 13.3 The Board advises that, within the context of a creative arts institution and community, the School team consider how the campus and its physical facilities can be used to support the development of the curriculum, through full size build and prototyping, opportunities to exhibit and share work, and through the identification of collaborations with key discipline areas.
- 13.4 The Board advises that the School demonstrate a deeper understanding of environmental analysis, structural design, and materiality across all years, particularly at Part 1, and explore how these can be used as drivers for design investigation during the brief development and initial design stages, rather than as retrospective tools for testing design outcomes.

**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 Part 1**

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

**Graduate Attributes for Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Part 2 MArch Architecture.

**15 Review of work against Themes and Values**

It should be noted that where the Visiting Board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

**Themes and Values for Part 1**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture.

**Themes and Values for Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the Part 2 MArch Architecture.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers (from the School)**

BA (Hons) Part 1: TBC  
M Arch Part 2: 16 students

**16.2 Documentation provided**

Please see Action Point 12.1 for information.

**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.

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