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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA visiting board  
to the Universidad de Belgrano**

Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism

**Date of visiting board:** 1 and 2 July 2019

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee:** 19 September 2019

**1. Details of institution hosting course/s**

Universidad de Belgrano  
Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism  
University Tower, Zabala 1837  
Postal Code: C1426DQG  
Buenos Aires  
Argentina

**2 School of Architecture and Urban Planning**

Arq. Mónica I. Fernández  
Dean

Arq. Ricardo C. Asin  
Degree Programme Director

Arq. Liliana Bonvecchi  
Academic Secretary

**3 Courses offered for validation**

The five and a half years of the degree of architecture, including the final thesis project, leading to the title of architect

**4 Awarding body**

Universidad de Belgrano

**5 The visiting board**

Matt Gaskin  
James Lai  
Carol Norton  
Kate Cheyne  
Jorge Enrique Mandachain - regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance.

The Board expresses its gratitude to Estela Herrera who acted as interpreter during the visit.

**6 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); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

**7 Proposals of the visiting board**

On 19 September 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of the following course:

*The five and a half years of the degree of architecture, including the final thesis project, leading to the title of architect: Part 1 and Part 2*

The next full visiting board will take place in 2024.

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

**9. Academic position statement**

*Our philosophical approach to architecture centres on: Interpretation of Place; Regionally Transformative Architecture; Architectural Regeneration of our Built Heritage; Human Experience of Space and Professional Practice. These practices contribute to a socially responsible conscience, by linking education and economic growth, challenging ways of thinking, and disseminating knowledge. Simultaneously, the school establishes a link between applied research and academic training to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to society from laboratory experiments. The engagement of active researchers has had positive effects in the teaching of city planning and urban design, sustainability, structures and technology, and in architectural history and theory. Among the research activities, the ALFA and Erasmus + Programs with funding from the European Union are to be noted.*

*We believe in a dynamic approach to education, not as the transmission of a set of truths, but as an on-going process of inquiry in which staff and students are both participants. We also acknowledge many types of work don't exist yet and that we must prepare students to face the coming world with the research skills they need to stay ahead of a changing professional environment.*

*Alongside our research culture, our greatest strength is our enthusiastic and industrious students, and we value and support the sense of community and the studio culture they share with staff. Generally speaking, the Curriculum is based on a prior analysis of social demands, the evolution of labour demand, and university offerings at the local and international levels as well as UB's position in such university offering. To update the Curriculum, a continuous process is followed to analyse and assess the relevance of the degree program given its curricular features and its insertion in the demands of the productive sectors. Upon successively updating the contents and organization of the School's curricular structure, increased focus was placed in the various contexts resulting in the addition of four-month courses to facilitate flexibility in student*

*mobility in the event of exchange with foreign universities and the creation of Optional Courses of General Education that complement the course of studies as regards the student education.*

*The teaching process involves academic duties that enrich the training: inclusion of English and Information Technology as part of the Curriculum, an obligation to engage in 300 hours of Professional Social Work through internships or professional assignments that favour the integration of theory into practice. Students are required to participate in Workshops, Seminars, and Conferences with the attendance of external local and foreign professors in order to improve the knowledge acquired through training.*

*The Curriculum includes an undergraduate degree of Architectural Design Assistant, on completion of the third year of the degree course.*

*Additionally, students are encouraged to pursue a comprehensive education and therefore professors apply teaching strategies that tend to develop the following competencies: autonomy, critique, initiative, flexibility and a predisposition towards continued learning in addition to fostering commitment to community needs, thus readying students for improved placement in the labour market.*

*Said Curriculum presents a clear structure of four theme areas: Project and Planning; Form and Communication; Basic Sciences, Technology, Production and Management, History, Criticism and Theory of Architecture and Urban Planning. From a cross-sectional perspective, the Curriculum deals with practice, and that includes: Professional Practice, Professional Qualification and Construction Safety; the above mentioned academic obligation involving 300 hours of Professional Social Work plus the practice hours included in Project workshops, this being the area that combines technical, aesthetic and sustainable development related competencies.*

*The Final Degree Project (FDP) integrates acquired knowledge, stimulating the creativity and innovation of projects proposing a technical resolution that meets national and international standards. This allows for the homologation of Diplomas and student mobility. The 2008 Curriculum introduces a semester devoted to the production of the Thesis papers for its subsequent defence, favouring the individual propositional and resolution level of future graduates.*

*A Curriculum Adjustment approved by CONEAU (the National Committee of University Evaluation and Accreditation) Resolution 306/17 and ARCA-SUR (Regional Accreditation of University Programmes for MERCOSUR) Reference 804-0740/16R (see attached supporting document) was implemented in 2017. Such adjustment is a proposal to update and bring 2008 Curriculum teaching methodologies into line with the latest Accreditation Resolution.*

*In that regard, the intention was to respond to the new scenarios arising as a result of social changes, globalization and technological development and, therefore, to address strategic urban and environmental planning issues incorporating a new course, Bioenvironmental Design Concepts, to the then current Curriculum.*

*Likewise, another subject, Heritage and Urban Recovery, was incorporated to the Curriculum in order to optimise the capacities referred to intervention and administration of urban architectonic and cultural heritage as well as to showcase cities' design, cultural and social qualities and exploit heritage buildings potential for the development of economic, social, environmental and historical aspects.*

*As regards Construction Control and Planning System issues involved in the professional practice, it has been of major importance to update training in new strategies of works management and administration. Therefore, Works Construction and Management has also been incorporated as a core course.*

*With reference to the Form and Communication area, although it has covered standards as to hour load and contents, the technological progress in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) field has presented us with students who apply these tools as an intuitive means of communication since the earliest stages. Therefore, the five courses in this area comprise Form and Integrated Media, including analogic as well as digital systems, which in turn improve basic and instrumental abilities and skills for representation systems and form operations*

*Simultaneously, the School of Architecture has a Research Centre composed of five groups that receive incentives from the University itself and financing from the European Union through different programmes. Among the research activities, the Erasmus + Program and Capacity Buildings Projects in the field of Higher Education E+CBHE CITYLAB Partnership Agreement 2015-3208/001-001 is to be noted. Within the framework of Erasmus+ Program, we work with a pilot experience in contents and practice of morphology, urban planning and final project. According to the experience results, we design the management tools suitable for the requested implementation. Online training for professors was contemplated at the initial stages through international experts in Project Based Learning (PBL).*

*In the first stage (year 2016), we complied with contract terms with respect to allocation of tasks, assignment of roles of project leaders and attendance to consistency meetings. Working teams, integrated by students and professors, in the Form and Communication, Urban Planning and Final Project areas were created at this stage.*

*The second stage (year 2017) contemplated professors and students training in management tools referred to Problem Based Learning. Such training is applied to the monitoring of projects related to sustainable urban developments in a specific area of Buenos Aires city which raises conflicts to be solved by the areas involved. At this stage, we received advisory support from local governmental agencies' officials.*

*In the third stage (year 2018), we implemented the dissemination of results in every area of the programme, tending to improve education quality. Additionally, conclusions were drawn from experience gained at international level with the educational institutions involved.*

*Another aspect to be noted is the Final Degree Project which contributes to maintain a high graduation rate and, at the same time, summarizes the advantages of having a solid education focused on the upcoming professional development. The Final Degree Project is a graduation work that integrates in a one-year-exercise, divided into two four-month terms, the academic curriculum four major areas: Form and Communication; Project and Planning; Basic Sciences, Technology, Production and Management; and History and Theory of Architecture. It is a multiple and complex work which promotes bibliographic studies, formulation of concrete grounds and conclusions and students' self-evaluation of their project commitment related to the urban response, and the design and technical requirements associated to the construction reality.*

*Involvement in the production world through Assisted Professional Practice constitutes one of the programme strengths. The Academic Unit is in permanent contact with other related parties outside the University (Architectural Studios, Construction Firms, Public and Private Technical Agencies) to favour students internship in professional practice assisted programs. As from the 2017 Adjustment, this practice has also included the follow-up and certifications of sustainable aspects involved in environmental protection.*

*In conclusion, the highlights of the academic policy of the School of Architecture at the University of Belgrano are:*

- The inclusion of creativity and innovation criteria in Project practice and technical problem resolution to meet sustainable development requirements.*
- Research as a tool for scientific growth applied to teaching.*
- Internationalization of studies.*

## **10. Commendations**

- 10.1 The Board commends the engagement of the School with the city of Buenos Aires and Vicente Lopez through contextual analysis, live/real projects and research. This includes the strength of linking buildings with urban planning.

- 10.2 The Board commends the culture of collective learning (group projects) throughout the School, which benefits from the spirit of mutual respect between staff and students.
- 10.3 The Board commends the excellent vocational teaching practice, particularly the underlying principle of motivation to engage with the profession.

**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 Board recommends that the School provide evidence of the design process and critical reflection through the inclusion of sketchbooks and process models in the academic portfolio.

**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 noted that the orthographic drawings lacked evidence of inhabitation and spatial articulation in both interior and exterior space. The Board encourages greater resolution of the designs to reveal an understanding of the relationship between the built environment and the needs of the end-users (GC5).
- 13.2 The Board encourages the School to draw on a broader range of arts and design references in informing the design intent and process (GC3).
- 13.3 The Board would encourage through the use of problem-based learning (PBL) more variety in the architectural resolution and language to further demonstrate the academic freedom of the programme.

**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 The Board confirmed that all Part 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the programme.

**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.

16.1 The Board made no further comments. Please see advice points 13.1 (GC5) and 13.2 (GC3)

**17 Other information**

**17.1 Student numbers**

700

**17.2 Documentation provided**

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

**18. Notes of meetings**

The RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings on request. These notes will not form part of the published report but will be issued to 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