

**Report of the RIBA visiting board
to the Aarhus School of Architecture**

1 Details of institution hosting course

Aarhus School of Architecture
Nørreport 208000 Aarhus C
Denmark

2 Dean, The Aarhus School of Architecture

Torben Nielsen

3 Courses offered for validation

Master of Arts in Architecture

4 Course leader

Chris Thurlbourne

5 Awarding body

Aarhus School of Architecture

6 The visiting board

David Howarth – Chair
Tina Frost
Jane Mcallister
Jack Dunne
Carsten Primdahl – regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk RIBA Validation Manager, was in attendance.

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; effective from September 2011); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

8 Proposals of the visiting board

The RIBA Education Committee confirmed on 25 March 2016 that the following course and qualification is unconditionally validated

Master of Arts in Architecture, RIBA Part 2

The next full board to Aarhus School of Architecture should take place in 2020.

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

10 Academic position statement (Statement written by the school)

The Aarhus School of Architecture is one of two schools in Denmark that make up the responsibility of Architectural education in the country. (The first and oldest school in Denmark is the Royal Academy in Copenhagen). The Aarhus school of Architecture is located centrally in Denmark's second largest City that is affectionately known as "The World's Smallest Big City". It is also a city that boasts the highest density of design studios per population in Europe. A large number of these are direct spin-offs from having an Architectural School in the City, as many graduates remain and start businesses. The school was started in 1965 by the initiative of one of the best known Architects resident in Aarhus – C.F. Møller, and the school has just celebrated its 50th jubilee.

It is within this context that The Aarhus School of Architecture has its exceptional area of activity, namely a strong connection with the city and the practicing designers working within the city. Vocational staff are employed at the school that come from practice in Aarhus and surrounding areas. We also boast some staff living in Copenhagen that commutes to work at the school. Many are employed also as external examiners. Furthermore, design projects often relate to the cities issues and possibilities.

The Aarhus School of Architecture has together with six European and Australian schools of architecture and design been granted an allocation of DKK 30 million (approx. £3M) for the research network ADAPT-r giving practicing architects the opportunity to take a PhD (facilitated in our school) in their own practice. The idea behind ADAPT-r is to create a PhD program that directly addresses architects with acknowledged and innovative practice, reinforcing an important connection our school has – and is continually developing – with local practice.

The Master's program also operates with a Mentoring program where students are given mentors to coach them through practice related issues concerning their design project. This fosters a rich interest in design through making both in teaching and in research, reinforcing the schools motto "Engaging through Architecture". The school has very good workshop facilities that are well staffed by personnel with a background in making. A recent large investment in digital machinery has been able to facilitate a growing interest in digital fabrication where the possibilities in digital design can be tested through fabrication of large scale mock ups for example. This gives our students and researchers the possibility to develop design work taking the foundation in what Denmark is well known for – Good Design with a clear understanding of material.

Distinctiveness

What makes the study curricula at The Aarhus School of Architecture distinct is that it is primarily design orientated. Design is the focus of all studies. The Master's program offers students a choice of specialist areas of interest, where they join a modest sized studio that focuses the study program around a specific field of design interest. This may be digital tectonics or tectonics for example, but where the students

work is almost exclusively design studio work. To facilitate this, the school offers all students very good studio spaces with an embedded tradition that students do all their work at the school and not at home for example. Each student is guaranteed good space to work and all have 24 hour access to the studio. Students therefore use each other as sparring's partners and are also very good in working in teams. With a Danish social democratic background students are used to working together so our school encourages group projects and joint discussions to stimulate a fertile working environment, and in reality mimic the working environment they will face when leaving the school.

Many facilities are accessible to students 24 hours. The school has a model workshop that is open and students can work outside usual working hours, together with good printing facilities and spaces to work on larger scale constructions.

There is also a strong tradition to field study trips. The Aarhus School of Architecture acknowledges that Denmark is a small country – rich in good architecture and design, yet nevertheless small. We acknowledge the value of studying beyond a Danish context, to the rest of Scandinavia, and further abroad. All studios in the Master's program tend therefore to make at least one collective study trip a year, sometimes each semester. The study trip is an integrated part of the study program, where assignments are written to engage students into a critical understanding of specific places – and often sites that become the basis for design work. The school encourages, and facilitates, working collaborations with other schools and institutions. One current studio has been working in Mumbai, India, together with the architectural office Studio Mumbai and a local university. Students and teachers have been resident in India for a number of weeks carrying out field work. Another studio has run a joint collaboration with the Architectural school in San Juan, Puerto Rico where both students and teachers from San Juan have come to Aarhus and students and teachers have worked in Puerto Rico. A distinctiveness of The Aarhus School of Architecture is therefore Internationalisation, where we enjoy the mix of many cultures amongst students, but where study activities are supported outside the school's own boundaries.

We encourage creative implementation of study curricula and therefore have fostered a Masters landscape that embraces many facets of architecture. These include for example Cultural heritage – the study of transformation of our existing built environment, landscape and urban design, and digital tectonics for example.

Denmark and Scandinavia are well known throughout the world due to sensitivity in architecture and design. It has a reputation for well-constructed and well considered design artefacts, both large and small, a sensitivity of a human ergonomic and human interaction. The Aarhus School of Architecture is a place that builds on that tradition and attempts to reinvent it in a study environment to confront issues of today. An overall distinctness of our school therefore is a clear sensitivity to architecture and design that is rooted in crafted, hands on approaches to facilitate knowledge of material, space and human

action that is fundamentally a Nordic tradition – or as the schools motto says “Engaging through Architecture”.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the distinctive nature of the studio system underpinned by the excellent workshop and library facilities.
- 11.2 The board commends the agility of the School in anticipating and managing change.
- 11.3. The board commends the breadth of research in the School and the manner in which the platforms inform teaching.
- 11.4. The board commends the School’s symbiotic relationship to the city’s architectural community.

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 in advance of the next full visit. 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 should ensure that the course structure allows all students to demonstrate the ability to generate complex design proposals as outlined in Graduate Attribute GA2.1.

GA2.1 ability to generate complex design proposals showing understanding of current architectural issues, originality in the application of subject knowledge and, where appropriate, to test new hypotheses and speculations

- 13.2. The School should ensure that the academic portfolio demonstrates the integration of GC8 and GC9 through a complex design proposal. The thesis project might be the vehicle for this.

GC8 Understanding of the structural design, constructional and engineering problems associated with building design

GC9 Adequate knowledge of physical problems and technologies and the function of buildings so as to provide them with internal conditions of comfort and protection against the climate

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 School are encouraged to review the scope and timetabling of the

written design report to allow students to more clearly and succinctly describe their complete thesis project.

- 14.2. The School should reflect on how GA2.7 of the RIBA Criteria is demonstrated within the academic portfolio.

GA2.7 ability to identify individual learning needs and understand the personal responsibility required to prepare for qualification as an architect

- 14.3. The School are encouraged to fully utilize the 30 credits within the practice report submission to enable the student to evidence an understanding of GC10 and demonstrate the knowledge required by GC11.

GC10 The necessary design skills to meet building users' requirements within the constraints imposed by cost factors and building regulations

GC11 Adequate knowledge of the industries, organisations, regulations and procedures involved in translating design concepts into buildings and integrating plans into overall planning

- 14.4. The School are encouraged to celebrate the richness of activities in the School by improving communication across the School.
- 14.5. The School are encouraged to explore ways in which to promote cross-fertilization between studios.
- 14.6. The School are encouraged to continue to explore the ways in which the design thesis can be extended across 2 semesters through a linked programme of work. This is already evidenced in a number of portfolios.
- 14.7. The School is encouraged to develop ways in which the complete MA academic portfolio is collated and presented in order for the students to clearly demonstrate compliance with the RIBA criteria.

This may have the added benefit of recording the academic development of the School.

15 Delivery of academic position

The following key points were noted:

- 15.1 The school has strong links to the city, local and international practice. The mentoring program at Masters level formalises this relationship between students and the profession and the design based Phd offered to design practitioners reinforces this connection between the school and the profession.
- 15.2 Research within the school are seen as directly contributing to the development of the profession through practice based, project orientated research. A number of platforms serve as clusters of specific research areas from which teaching themes are developed.

16 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.

While the Board was content that the graduate attributes were largely met, action points and advice were offered as follows:

Graduate attributes for Part 2

GA2.1 ability to generate complex design proposals showing understanding of current architectural issues, originality in the application of subject knowledge and, where appropriate, to test new hypotheses and speculations

Please see action point 13.1.

GA2.7 ability to identify individual learning needs and understand the personal responsibility required to prepare for qualification as an architect.

Please see advice point 14.2.

17 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.

GC8 Understanding of the structural design, constructional and engineering problems associated with building design

GC8 The graduate will have an understanding of:

- .1 the investigation, critical appraisal and selection of alternative structural, constructional and material systems relevant to architectural design;
- .2 strategies for building construction, and ability to integrate knowledge of structural principles and construction techniques;
- .3 the physical properties and characteristics of building materials, components and systems, and the environmental impact of specification choices.

Please see action point 13.2.

GC9 Adequate knowledge of physical problems and technologies and the function of buildings so as to provide them with internal conditions of comfort and protection against the climate

GC9 The graduate will have knowledge of:

- .1 principles associated with designing optimum visual, thermal and acoustic environments;

- .2 systems for environmental comfort realised within relevant precepts of sustainable design;
- .3 strategies for building services, and ability to integrate these in a design project.

Please see action point 13.2.

GC10 The necessary design skills to meet building users' requirements within the constraints imposed by cost factors and building regulations

GC10 The graduate will have the skills to:

- .1 critically examine the financial factors implied in varying building types, constructional systems, and specification choices, and the impact of these on architectural design;
- .2 understand the cost control mechanisms which operate during the development of a project;
- .3 prepare designs that will meet building users' requirements and comply with UK legislation, appropriate performance standards and health and safety requirements.

Please see advice point 14.3.

GC11 Adequate knowledge of the industries, organisations, regulations and procedures involved in translating design concepts into buildings and integrating plans into overall planning

GC11 The graduate will have knowledge of:

- .1 the fundamental legal, professional and statutory responsibilities of the architect, and the organisations, regulations and procedures involved in the negotiation and approval of architectural designs, including land law, development control, building regulations and health and safety legislation;
- .2 the professional inter-relationships of individuals and organisations involved in procuring and delivering architectural projects, and how these are defined through contractual and organisational structures;
- .3 the basic management theories and business principles related to running both an architects' practice and architectural projects, recognising current and emerging trends in the construction industry.

Please see advice point 14.3.

18 Other information

18.1 Student numbers

Master of Arts in Architecture: 200

18.2 Documentation provided

The School provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

19. 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.

- 19.1 Budget holder and course leaders
- 19.2 Meeting with head of institution
- 19.3 Students
- 19.4 External examiners
- 19.5 Staff