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Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board  
to the University of Portsmouth**

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|---------------|---|
| <b>Part 1</b> | <b>BA (Honours) Architecture</b>                  |
| <b>Part 2</b> | <b>Master of Architecture</b>                     |
| <b>Part 3</b> | <b>Final Examination in Professional Practice</b> |

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** (report part A)  
 Portsmouth School of Architecture  
 University of Portsmouth  
 Eldon Building, North Wing  
 Winston Churchill Avenue  
 Portsmouth  
 PO1 2DJ
- 2 Head of Architecture Group**  
 Pamela Cole
- 3 Course/s offered for revalidation**  
 Part 1 BA (Honours) Architecture  
 Part 2 Master of Architecture  
 Part 3 Final Examination in Professional Practice
- 4 Course leader/s**  
 Part 1 Huw Heywood  
 Part 2 Dan Blott  
 Part 3 Paula Craft-Pegg
- 5 Awarding body**  
 University of Portsmouth
- 6 The visiting board**
- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Neil Lamb             | chair/academic          |
| Ruth Reed             | vice chair/practitioner |
| Nic Clear             | academic                |
| Jenny Thomas          | co professional         |
| Oliver Hall           | student rep             |
| Richard Rose-Casemore | regional rep            |
| Sophie Bailey         | RIBA Validation Manager |
| Angie Pascoe          | withdrawn               |
- 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); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).
- 8 Proposals of the visiting board**  
*On the 7 October 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:*
- Part 1 BA (Honours) Architecture  
 Part 2 Master of Architecture  
 Part 3 Final Examination in Professional Practice

## **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**

Welcome to Portsmouth School of Architecture.

Portsmouth is an island bounded by water and strongly connected to the sea; it is a place from where great journeys of discovery have begun. We recognise the particulars of this place, the boundaries and horizons it brings, of that which has gone before, the horizon which calls and the future which lies beyond.

We believe that architecture is particular, concerned with the nature of place, site, and the act of making; yet beyond this it is also connected to the global imperatives that form our horizon. This horizon connects the unique design project with responsibilities to the world and future generations.

To design is a deeply ethical act and an acute awareness of both the narrow and broader context in which architecture is made guides us. Our architectural endeavour is necessarily complex and multi-layered and as a school we embrace this difficult whole. We are clear about this balanced approach from the very outset, and how this governs our ability to cope with change and innovation that lies ahead.

If the complex is not to become the chaotic it must be grounded in organisational structures of absolute clarity. The established fields of context, technology, the skills of professional practice and our core activity of design remain valid, and they are the basis of the professional undertaking we engage with. The orchestrated, integrated and balanced concern with these architectural foundations, through a process of creative rigour, is our objective, ensuring our graduates are properly equipped for the coming professional journey.

Context is a key imperative for design; when we think of design we think firstly of place. Whilst quantifiable analysis is a necessary skill, reading and adopting a position that states values is more. To read a context requires a position and the stance we take determines how we understand the meaning of place and in turn make meaningful places ourselves.

Thus to study architecture at Portsmouth involves a creative, critical and socially responsible endeavour. Innovation and radical thought are not just theoretical

exploration; they address our reality, our society, our place. Our vision is to maximize the potential of our students as individuals, build on their abilities and enable them to be successful professionals; capable to face future cities' problems and environment, with tough, grounded and realizable solutions.

Social responsibility pertains to the way we teach and perform as a team, the content we teach, and the ethos that we communicate to our students. We build strong links to the local communities, aided by the collaborative work of our Project Office that underpins the experiential learning we engage with and forms a focus for both academia and practice. Engagement with live projects brings opportunities to work within diverse teams, understand the concept of inclusive design, and provides a challenge driven environment requiring skills beyond that of a single discipline.

Located in the creative hub of the University, architecture is aligned with the arts yet maintains its autonomy and distinctiveness. The Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries, provides access to a broad range of facilities, and encourages students to seek new and creative alliances that stretch innovation, visioning and active engagement with ways of making and linking cultural theory to architectural practice.

Design as an activity requires us to evaluate; to progress we need to know how to choose the ideas that are worth keeping and those to discard. The Part 1 course engages with reflective practice and through analysis of the paradigm, skills of evaluation and critique are developed. We cultivate the practice of drawing, and the use of models to test the how and why of decisions both to ourselves and to others. Art and technology are recognised as complementary strengths in the design process, integration developing a holistic balanced approach through each year. Aiming for prudent, thoughtful design is the basis for our design studio; coming to recognise what it is that can be valued in design, that for the sake of the whole must not be lost.

The final year of undergraduate study brings into sharp focus the identity of the School, where we tackle authentic problems in real yet lyrical places, and where our city and the region are the laboratory for considerations of the convergence of people, place and planet. Supporting inclusive design thinking, analysis of and relationship with the user is key. Integrated studies in technology build the notion of energy literacy and we explore the pivotal role that architects play in achieving design excellence, through technical resolution, environmental design, and consideration of the urban realm.

Actively connecting academia and practice brings exposure to real and current issues and ensures high levels of employability, demonstrating that students understand the complex challenges within the built environment, and reflecting the value of our approach within the professional forum. The basis of learning through problem solving ensures students can utilize skills within and outside of traditional practice.

At Part 2, vertical studios provide a test-bed to reflect and analyse theories of design process. Six thematic studios provide platforms underpinned by staff specialisms, research and external networks, and offer opportunities to engage with physical and cultural conditions both within and beyond our horizon,

furthered by an active programme of Erasmus exchange and Sino UK initiatives. Reflexive practice drives transformative learning and challenges preconceptions, recognising and utilising the diversity of experience, seeking to create a culture of innovation and enquiry, always framed within the professional context. The Learning experience is enriched with collaborative endeavours across Masters programmes, research initiatives within industry, together with embedding visiting specialists to support multidisciplinary design. Substantial lines of enquiry are developed through the thesis study, advancing the potential of our students as individuals.

The Part 3 completes the professional learning that is embedded throughout the courses, and the innovative approach to learning through game playing ensures experiential learning builds upon practice.

The School builds strong mutually beneficial connections with practice, providing students with a rich, integrated programme of learning that maximises their employability. Our focus on the city, through studio and the Project Office, ensures the School has value within the community. Overall we are mindful of the need to engage with architecture that is meaningful and speaks of where we are upon the earth, the nature of our time and the values we hold.

## **11 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the collegiate nature of the staff and students across the school.
- 11.2 The board commends the delivery of professional studies throughout the school. It is an exemplary preparation for students entering architectural practice.
- 11.3 The board commends the school for delivering its ambition to engage with the region at a contextual and social level.
- 11.4 The board commends the provision of the new building and the opportunities offered by its facilities.

## **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 develop a stronger culture of making and experimentation throughout the design process, at all levels, using a variety of scales and media.

13.2 The school must strengthen the support and delivery of critical writing in the part one course.

**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 In appointing the new professorial post(s), the board advises that consideration is given to both research and design leadership.

14.2 The board strongly advises the development of further opportunities for students to challenge and explore creatively across the second year of part two.

14.3 The board encourages the school to develop creative linkages in teaching and research provided by the new building and its environment.

14.4 The board advises that the course develops a more innovative approach to exploring technology at part two.

14.5 The board supports the provision of the part-time route at part two but advises continual monitoring of the mode of delivery.

**15 Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted:

The board felt this was a good academic position statement that clearly articulated the academic agenda of the school.

**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.

The Board was content that all attributes were met by graduates of all validated programmes and offered no further comment.

**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.

The Board was content that all criteria were met by graduates of all validated programmes and offered no further comment.

**18 Other information**

**18.1 Student numbers**

Part 1: 355

Part 2: 105

Part 3: 25

**18.2 Documentation provided**

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

**\*Notes of meetings**

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings:

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