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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA visiting board  
to the National University of Singapore**

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

National University of Singapore  
School of Design and Environment  
National University of Singapore  
4 Architecture Drive  
Singapore 117566

**2 Head of Architecture**

Wong Yunn Chii

**3 Course/s offered for revalidation**

Part 1: The first three years of the four year, full-time, course and examinations of the BA (Arch), Honours programme

Part 2: The final year of the four year, full-time course and examinations of the BA (Arch) Honours programme together with the one year, full-time, course and examinations of the MArch programme. Both as giving exemption from Part 2 of the RIBA Examination in Architecture

**4 Course leader/s**

Tsuto Sakamoto, Part 1  
Tan Teck Kiam, Part 2

**5 Awarding body**

National University of Singapore

**6 The visiting board**

Professor Lorraine Farrelly, Chair  
Musa Garba, Vice Chair  
Pepper Barney, Practitioner  
Mr Joseph Cheang, regional representative

One Board member had to withdraw before the visit due to unforeseen circumstances. The Board remained quorate.

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, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

**8 Proposals of the visiting board**

At its meeting on 3 February 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

Part 1: The first three years of the four year, full-time, course and examinations of the BA (Arch), Honours programme

Part 2: The final year of the four year, full-time course and examinations of the BA (Arch) Honours programme together with the one year, full-time, course and examinations of the MArch programme. Both as giving exemption from Part 2 of the RIBA Examination in Architecture

The next Visiting Board will 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
- 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)

*NUS Department of Architecture*

*Academic position @this moment of global fluxes and uncertainties*

*Our mission is to produce critical practitioners and thinkers in architecture, under the evolving ambit of national manpower training. However, we are cognizant that matters of environment surely extend beyond narrow national agendas. Under the present milieu of practice, the global reach, dimensions and influences are inescapable. For this reason, our vision aimed towards appropriately stage our graduates' attention to the nascent and emerging issues of the Asian environments (urban, rural, edges) and to become thought leaders and designers in the process. The issues they confront are at once economic, social, technological and cultural. To this end, our academic positioning is investigative, comprehensive and integrative rather than narrowly technological, technocratic or stylistic.*

*Design is the focus and primary activity of our educational purpose. Design is framed under the urban milieu that has historically and culturally shaped us. It is envisaged to be a living and evolving entity replete with human problematics and potentialities – for the everyday to creative activities, for community and contemplation. Yet we often recognize that the workings and cultures of the city are at odds with the rhythms of nature and its natural cycles. Thus, the ethics of power and sustainability in particular, are vital values underpinnings of our creative quests: in thinking, making and experiencing. It means besides promoting responsive designs, we inculcate intelligent and responsible designs: the latter demands rethinking and insights into how we choose to inhabit the world, how this inhabitation consumes our resources, and*

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*how the totality of design order creates, pays forward to future generations. Design should aim at a safer, happier, freer and healthier world.*

*Our Design pedagogy is anticipatory and prospective; that is, it is not merely fulfilling the needs of the world as we know it. Rather, it affirmatively imagines the possible workings of the world that we “want it to be”: namely, to be inclusive and emancipatory. Design (and design theory), if it matters at all, we contend, should be “enjoyed,” “experienced” and “accessible.” Further, the production of design, if at all possible, should involve the “participation” of many. This respect for the users and stakeholders of designs, shape what we recognize as the conviviality of design.*

*Our theory courses cultivate the practice and mentality of integrating all pertinent knowledge; recognizing the inter-disciplinarity of methods and ideas. Beyond knowledge and technical skills, we encourage interlocutions and publications among faculty and students, to develop comprehensive knowledge and shared values. We leverage this collective knowledge using our associated programs in urban design, landscape architecture, urban planning and integrated sustainable design. Through collaborative “vertical” organization of design projects, we obtain new synergies. Architecture and the design, thus, in these instances, are not mere art objects; neither is the process of teaching mere instructions or technical skilling. And as processes in ordering and aligning the material, social and cultural “materials” of the world, we treat design as integrative knowledge. Its value is as good as the synthesis of art and science.*

*We crystallize the broader knowledge by treating the enterprise of design as a program of works. We continually endeavour to align this program in the field of questions raised in our midst, calibrating and altering the course strategically and responsively. We maintain dialogical conversations and working ties with national agencies that affect policies on design futures. We translate these dialogues into a framework of our four Design Sections that constitute the program of works and research.*

- a) *Housing & Community is defined by interests in user-centric needs from the banal to the sublime; it finds creative reconciliation between privacy and community and democracy; it explores techniques to realize convivial and resilient communities. The section is theoretically underpinned by participatory methods, post-occupancy studies, and the quest for open society.*
- b) *Climate & Territory is defined by macro-scale physical and environmental/natural potentialities and constraints in design; it deploys traditional and anticipatory techniques to deal with topographies, natural and built elements, open spaces and connectivities between them. The section is theoretically underpinned by issues of sustainability.*

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- c) *Mobility & Urbanism is defined by the phenomenon of urbanization, metropolitanism and cosmopolitanism; it is deployed in temporal frames that are contemporaneous, futuristic, apocalyptic and heterotopics. The section is theoretically underpinned by projections, provocations, breaks and continuity in cultures.*
  - d) *Techniques and Tectonics is defined by materiality, emerging processes and, systems of assemblies, and management. The section is underpinned by empirical observations, simulations in explorations and experimentations.*

*These Design Sections are in terms guided by a truth claim: Good architecture tacitly depends on good research. Recast in another way, good architecture is architecture that research and questions current dogmas. Passing through these Design Sections, our students “do the program of works” of a research-driven university. They also collate the acquired skills for various problem sets, comprehensively equipping them for the variegated needs of our vastly transforming landscape of practice. They recognize the multiple pathways of excellence in holistic thinking; the meaning and potentialities of design activism; the power of design envisioning and collaborative intelligence. However, our real impact, measured in long-term success, will be to demonstrate how their academic experience(s) have enlivened them towards the processes and values in good architecture.*

## **11 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The Board commends the excellent preparation of work presented both in the exhibition and portfolios, including analogue and digital presentation, physical models at a range of scales and a clear description of student work and staff research outputs, providing a comprehensive overview of the School.
- 11.2 The Board commends the diversity of the student design work and its relationship to the regional context of Singapore.
- 11.3 The Board commends the design embedded studio which offers students an opportunity to work in practice while studying their design thesis. This gives them valuable exposure to practice and experience in the development of their future architectural careers.
- 11.4 There is an impressive range of staff research outputs which has potential to inform the student learning experience at all levels.
- 11.5 The Board commends the relationship the School has with local professional practice which appears to be very positive, informing the curriculum and student experience, particularly design studio work.

## **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 Board appreciated that the examination and assessment process had been developed since the 2010 RIBA Visit; however, there is still some need to further clarify the process so that external examiners can understand their role in and contribution to the process. In addition, to ensure that students are clear about the marking methodology and its relationship to their work. For the design projects, it may be useful to offer students more formal written commentary as is current practice for written and other assessed course work.

**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 range of influential international and local visitors to the School for lectures and design crits, who bring new ideas to the student experience is an essential characteristic of the School and should be continued to inform the student experience to bring new perspectives to their work.
- 14.2 There is a need for staff to be supported to continue to relate their research to their studio and pedagogic practice. Staff should be encouraged to explore emerging alternative ideas for research outputs relevant to the discipline which may be related to studio and pedagogical practice as well as traditional journal and paper outputs.
- 14.3 There is excellent evidence of student group work, both in the first year building projects and in the MArch where the group work informs subsequent design. This is very good practice and should be further developed to encourage student participation.

**15 Delivery of academic position**

The School is well placed to deliver qualified & well trained professionals with a range of relevant design practical skills relevant to future employment. They have experience across the courses of a range of design projects that respond to the regional issues around use of materials, climate and environmental control and design. The “Embedded Studio” project in particular was seen to be a distinguishing characteristic of the course and prepares students for a practice and work environment.

**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.

Part 1: The Board confirmed that the first three years of the four year, full-time, course and examinations of the BA (Arch), Honours programme met the Part 1 Graduate Attributes.

Part 2: The Board confirmed that the final year of the four year, full-time course and examinations of the BA (Arch) Honours programme together with the one year, full-time, course and examinations of the MArch programme met the Part 2 graduate attributes.

## **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 all graduates and made no further comment.

## **18 Other information**

### **18.1 Student numbers**

Part 1 total – 385  
Part 2 total – 261

### **18.2 Documentation provided**

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

## **19. Notes of 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.**

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