RIBA

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA exploratory board to the University for the Creative Arts

Date of visiting board: 16 April 2021
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 29 July 2021

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1   Details of institution hosting courses
University for the Creative Arts
UCA Canterbury
New Dover Road
Canterbury
Kent
CT1 3AN

2   Head of Schools of Architecture and Crafts & Design
Professor Colin Holden

3   Courses offered for candidate course status
Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

4   Programme Director for Architecture
Sam McElhinney

Postgraduate Certificate Convenor
Suzanne Gaballa

5   Awarding body
University for the Creative Arts

6   The exploratory visiting board
Kate Cheyne - Chair
Peter Williams

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA validation manager – 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.

The procedures were adapted to allow the board to function remotely to comply with government Covid regulations.

All requirements for documentation and work samples were exactly as for a physical exploratory board but viewed remotely.

The timetable and all meetings took place as for a physical exploratory board but remotely.

8   Proposals of the visiting board
On 29 July 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that candidate course status for Part 3 be awarded to the:

Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture

The designation 'Candidate Course for Validation' implies that the course has been judged to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to recognition, which can only be

granted once the standard of work produced by graduating students has been assessed and found satisfactory.

A full visiting board to consider the programme for full validation will take place once the first cohort graduates, at a date to be agreed by the RIBA and the University.

9   Standard requirements for validation
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)
Our School has a distinctive approach to architectural education that originates in its Art School heritage, emphasising critical and engaged models of teaching, learning and research. We foster varied cultures of thinking and making that synthesise traditional hand drawing and making techniques with advanced digital media workflows. We believe that inter-relationships between processes and media provide important opportunities for the architectural imagination to invent and to be enacted. Our pedagogic approach situates such imaginative futures in clearly articulated critical understandings of the present.

CSA has a commitment to providing students with courses where they can develop process-based skills to act as future agents of spatial, social and ecological intervention. Through participation in an integrated programme of Design, Technology, Communications, Creative Practice and Cultural Context units, students develop the tools and skills to shape their own situated responses to architectural contexts and design problems. From the entry to the BA degree onward, we provide immersive studio cultures establishing key skills and aptitudes that allow students to view both courses and the wider school as a testing ground for architecture and spatial design. As students progress through the Part 1 course, they are encouraged to critically question models of spatial practice, in order to take positions in relation to the contemporary condition of the city and society. We encourage our students to behave as activist citizens rather than as passive consumers; to take responsibility for all aspects of their projects' objectives and aims, their iterative development and ultimately their transformative dissemination and use. Our students learn how to test action by commencing at the scale of the body, and then by considering the immediate experiences of the urban spaces of Canterbury. They subsequently progress to consider the complex landscapes and fringe ecologies of our East Kent locality, before eventually engaging with international horizons and agendas. The Part 2 course continues this trajectory starting with an examination of infrastructure and

macro regional conditions, with students framing their own Design Research agendas in the context of studio themes. The course begins with a live competition to encourage interaction with the wider profession, before students join an elective unit system where each unit proposes a distinct research agenda. In both the Part 1 and Part 2 courses, students explore the relations between individual citizens and community groups as users of architecture, alongside critical awareness of the wider issues and forces acting upon the city itself. Such process-based knowledge frames a series of projects, covering small, medium and large buildings and their potentials to act as catalysts for change.

A particular strength of our school is its diverse student body and the level of achievement of our BAME students. In 2017/18 one third of students in the school came from low participation backgrounds (POLAR4), and on the BA Architecture BAME students (including international) outperformed all students by 2%. The latter is unusual across the Creative Arts sector, which shows a significant underperformance of BAME attainment to white attainment. All of our courses are committed to equality of opportunity. We select students by folio and individual interview, taking a 360-degree view of the applicant, rather than relying on simple metrics. Students and teaching staff together curate inclusive spaces for learning, blending inquiry-based learning, discussion and debate and structured learning-by-doing. We support individual learning needs from the outset, with the pedagogic approach concentrating on core skills, before moving incrementally towards an explicitly student-centred approach, enabling each student to develop both an individual voice and also process based abilities as an architect. Our strategy has been influential in achieving excellent results from BAME students, where on the BA and MArch they have outperformed the respective cohort means over the last two years.

CSA is further characterised by the strong connections it has forged with practitioners locally, regionally and nationally. We have built a comprehensive network of diverse sessional staff practitioners as valued colleagues and integral members of the teaching team. In 2018/19 approximately 50% of teaching on the prescribed courses was delivered by such staff, extending reach and influence of current professional practice deep within the school. Our commitment to equality of opportunity recognises the importance of providing strong role models for diverse cohorts and this is reflected in our sessional team, invited guests and critics and local networks. We provide a local hub for the RIBA Canterbury branch, regularly hosting their meetings and evening lectures within our building.

Our combined student and staff teams have engaged with external communities such as local arts and community organisations, regional development agencies and international industry partners. All of our activities consciously face outwards to the world and engage diverse audiences through exhibitions, publications, collaborations and a strong public programme of lectures and events, including our continuing 'MULTISTORY' evening lecture series. Such a focus has inspired studentled initiatives to think more widely about the profession and possibilities to shape it. An example of this is the MArch students film 'Building Her Story', a project that invited shared experiences of female construction industry professionals.

CSA is situated in a dedicated, purpose-designed building that provides a strong sense of subject and personal identity. Our Art School campus provides a supportive wider environment where students can make work in and between the various studio spaces, workshops and the internal and external public spaces. We share a characteristic concern with thinking through making and materiality, pursued across all levels of study in our studios and extensive workshops, fully supported by expert technical teams. Our TrakLab and FabLab, initiated and developed by the school, have set a high standard in the wider institution, giving opportunities for advanced digital media exploration and production.

Our graduates will face major societal and ecological challenges in their future lives and careers. Both Part 1 and 2 courses provide skills for analysis, design and fabrication in conjunction with tactics and strategies of advocacy, activism and entrepreneurship. The approach the school continues to develop equips students with independence of thought, as well as the ability to work collaboratively and collectively as effective and successful future practitioners.

11   Commendations

11.1   The board commends the successful introduction of a distance learning course that offers the student body flexibility in, and ownership of their learning path through Part 3.

11.2   The board commends the design of the course to offer weekly continuity of learning and teaching through the mixed use of synchronous and asynchronous learning supported by embedded student-led study groups.

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   The board recommends developing the students' understanding of the range of procurement routes and contract types such as non-traditional NEC, partnering etc. which the students may need to engage with in practice. This is to encourage the transfer and application of learning between the practice and the Part 3 student, where non-traditional contracts are not commonly employed.

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   Consider how to plan the growth of the course to enable scaling up whilst supporting and retaining the collective and continuous learning embedded in the student-led study groups.

13.2   Consider how the curriculum may develop attitudes towards and awareness of how the use of BIM may change the profession through ownership of information and forms of project management.

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14   Delivery of professional criteria
The Board confirmed that the course had potential to meet the Part 3
professional criteria if developed as anticipated.

15.1   Student numbers (from the School)
8 (2021)

15.2   Documentation provided
The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for
Validation.

16   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
next visiting board.**

- Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students