
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board
to the University of Kent**

Date of visiting board: 20-21 June 2019

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 19 September 2019

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- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 University of Kent
 Kent School of Architecture and Planning
 Marlowe Building
 Canterbury
 Kent
 CT2 7NR
- 2** **Head of School**
 Gerry Adler
- 3** **Course/s offered for validation**
 BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
 M Arch, Part 2
- 4** **Course leader/s**
 Chloe Street Tarbatt BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
 Michael Richards M Arch, Part 2
- 5** **Awarding body**
 University of Kent
- 6** **The visiting board**
 Martin Pearce chair / academic
 Paul King vice chair / academic
 Alison Coutinho practitioner
 Holly Rose Doron academic
 Lucia Medina student
 Sophie Bailey RIBA validation manager
- 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.
- 8** **Recommendation of the Visiting Board**
 On the 19 September the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are awarded full validation
- BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1**
M Arch, Part 2
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2024.
- 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

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- 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

KSAP – the School of Possibilities

KSAP – the Kent School of Architecture and Planning – is a school of possibilities, in which the wide range of expertise and research excellence available is a unique asset, enabling students to explore several facets of architectural knowledge, acquire a varied range of skills, and cultivate their own personal direction. KSAP’s areas of leadership include theories and histories of architecture, sustainable design in its widest sense and urban resilience, and digital architecture; these are not taught in silos but rather we encourage students to explore ‘in between spaces’ with all the resulting cross-fertilisation.

We are strongly rooted in Kent while pursuing a broad outlook. Design projects focus on local situations in order to explore challenges that have a global character. This is in line with one of the research priorities at the University of Kent, to meet global challenges of sustainable development through research and teaching, an ethos that permeates both the University of Kent and KSAP. The School benefits from strong ties with European schools and beyond, enabling cultural exchange with opportunities to participate in international events.

KSAP is one of the strongest schools in the UK for research intensity. We have three research centres: CREAtE (the Centre for Research in European Architecture), CASE (the Centre for Architecture and Sustainable Environments), and DARC (Digital Architecture Research Centre). These are at the forefront of world-leading research, which is reflected in teaching and extra-curricular activities such as open lectures from thought-provoking speakers, symposia and workshops. These activities add greatly to our students’ experience, offer new perspectives on architecture and stimulate creativity. The School believes passionately that architecture – as a discipline, practice, and art form – has a significant role to play in countering and mitigating the effects of the current climate crisis in which we all find ourselves, and the careful stewardship of resources deployed through intelligent design underpins all that we do.

Where we are

We are a green campus school of architecture, one of the very few located in a ‘plate glass’ new university of the 1960s. Although the university is now over 50 years old, the school is relatively new, having been founded in 2005. We now offer the full range architectural education, at Part One, Two and Three levels, have many specialist 12-month Masters programmes as well as a thriving PhD community. Our situation on a hill overlooking the ancient cathedral city of Canterbury means we are very close to continental Europe, while being open to the world, as our new exchange programme with Kogakuin University, Tokyo attests. We are located a short walk from HS1 trains which

speed us to London in less than an hour, so our students are able to benefit from the wide cultural and architectural offers of the capital.

We renamed ourselves KSAP – the Kent School of Architecture and Planning – in 2019, having added a planning Masters to our portfolio. This is due for professional accreditation by the Royal Town Planning Institute in 2021, and cements our position as the leading provider of professional built environment education in Kent. This will also offer apprenticeship places to trainees, and the architecture programmes are due to follow once these are up and running. The School has developed many links with architectural and planning professionals in the county, and beyond, and our students benefit from the wide range of practitioners who teach at KSAP, and who contribute to our crits. Indeed the School is proud to ‘act locally/think globally’, with the great majority of our design projects based in Kent. Design briefs are developed with local stakeholders who are also involved in interim and final reviews of work. Frequently design ‘charettes’ – day-long workshops and sketch design exercises – are held in local venues outside the university: we are keen to involve our students as much as possible in the life of the diverse communities within Kent.

The University of Kent is proud to call itself ‘the UK’s European university’, and KSAP has well-developed links to schools of architecture in continental Europe which will continue to build upon. For example, the Lille School of Architecture and Landscape – our nearest neighbour across the Channel in France – frequently exchanges students with us, and we are also able to benefit from informal visits. Kent students benefit from the on-campus ‘Language Express’ possibility to learn European languages, in addition to the many world languages on offer. Our aim is to send students to their exchange School – wherever it may be around the world – having a good grasp of the local language.

Our facilities

We occupy a fine Brutalist building dating from 1965, that has undergone substantial refurbishment in order to provide well-equipped studios. Most of the staff have their offices within the building, making the School compact, with everyone easy to find and close to hand. BA students have large, well-appointed studios on the first floor of the building, with good quality rooflight, while MArch students have their own bespoke ground floor studio with a ‘shop window’ onto the central campus. Technicians are immediately on hand to maintain these spaces, and to service the drawing, computing and modelmaking equipment they contain. One special feature in these studios is a separate ‘drawing office’, set up with drawing boards for learning the skills and techniques of orthographic drawing, which is a particular feature of our Stage One, year-long ‘Folio’ module. This space also doubles as a life drawing studio.

What makes us special

We are a diverse group of some 500 students and approximately 50 teachers, a mix of some 20 academics and a large and diverse group of part-time practitioners, all part of a dynamic faculty within a modern but long-established university. We believe it is the quality of our

teaching, and our innovative teaching methods, that distinguish us. The core group of full-time academics runs our programmes, stages and modules, but this academic direction is augmented by a much larger group of architect-practitioners who teach in the studios one or two days per week. It is this engagement with professional, architectural practice that keeps the School relevant and practice-oriented.

Our Part One and Part Two programmes (BA and MArch) are clearly differentiated, and completely autonomous from each other. We have a year system in the BA, whereas in the MArch we have vertical studios, currently run as four distinct 'units'. These combine students in Stages Four and Five. In the final years of our Part One and Two programmes we carefully integrate Technology and Environment teaching with the design studio, leading to a holistic bringing-together of disparate disciplines under the umbrella of design. This leads to an integrated approach in the final years of the BA and the MArch, one in which the more 'single-subject' approaches to Technology and Environmental Design teaching experienced in Stages One, Two and Four of the course come together to inform design. Both programmes incorporate a dissertation, an opportunity for students to develop their own research interests in architecture, and to hone their writing skills, so crucial for an architect in terms of their communication with other professionals and with the public.

Students are supported in their learning at all stages of the course. In the BA, we run a long-tested peer mentoring scheme, and in Stage Three we participate in the RIBA SouthEast project, in which local practitioners mentor small numbers of final-year students, seeing them once a month in their practices, or on site. We have a widespread deployment of teaching assistants, where Masters and PhD students advise students throughout the BA stages. And finally we have our unique Pedagogy module, in which MArch students learn how to teach, taking on small groups of Stage One students. Their resulting research projects inform the development of teaching practice in the School, and help bolster the University's claim to retaining its Gold rating in the national teaching excellence framework (TEF). We are one of the very few schools of architecture located in a collegiate university, modelled on Oxbridge, and we pride ourselves on our excellent pastoral care of our students.

The School is particularly known for the emphasis it lays on drawing, modelmaking and communication skills in general. It has its dedicated drawing studios, as well as its own well-resourced and staffed workshop. A new development is the provision of a Digital Hub, with an array of 3D modelling machines, and robotic arms investigating modern methods of fabrication and assembly. It is proud of its state-of-the-art Digital Crit Space, a multi-use and highly adaptable exhibition and crit venue, with its array of interactive digital screens. Wherever you position yourself within the broad church that is architecture, Kent offers a challenging and thought-provoking environment to hone your skills and let your creativity take flight.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the research activities of the school. Much of the research into the historic and cultural context of architecture informed the teaching responding to the previous board's comment 14.2. This augurs well for the success of the school in the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework.
- 11.2 The postgraduate programme evidenced students' ability to generate complex design proposals based on clear theoretical positions and an ability to test theoretical hypotheses through design. The projects were thorough and well-founded and the four thematic studios, combining stages 4 and 5, gave a strong and cohesive design education with ambitious and radical outcomes, many of which were of a very high design quality. GA 2.1
- 11.3 The board commended the excellent support provided by the dedicated architecture workshop and digital fabrication facilities supported by a team of staff who were central to the strong culture of model making and digital/physical design and manufacture that is shaping the future of the architecture profession and allied industries. GA 1.2, GA2.2, GC1.1

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 Whilst the teaching and assessment of technology at Part 1 was clear at stages one and two, at stage three the board found very limited evidence that GC 8 and 9 were met in the lower passing portfolios. The school must ensure that all passing students evidence the technology component of their projects.
- 12.2 The board found very limited evidence of the testing or evaluation of the visual, thermal and acoustic performance of buildings in the lowest passing work at Part 1. As for example in the design of the final stage 3 project, which called for the design of a large auditorium space, there was extremely limited consideration of the means to achieve a visual, thermal or acoustic environment that would meet the requirements such a space required (GC 9 and GC 5.1). The school must ensure that sufficient measures are put in place to ensure that these criteria are fully met and evidenced in all of the passing students.
- 12.3 Across much of the work at undergraduate aspects of sustainability, both in terms of environmental design, materials, and social aspects should be significantly enhanced. The ability for students to develop design solutions through an iterative process of testing environmental performance was significantly inconsistent across the undergraduate programme. Based on the evidence presented to the board, the understanding of active and passive environmental systems,

performance of building fabric and matters relating to sustainability in the choice of building materials and their impact on the environment, whilst delivered as isolated subjects in stage two, were at the lower range of marks and were very poorly demonstrated through their integration in the stage 3 design projects. The board strongly advises that the integration of aspects of GC8 and GC9 and the full range of sustainable design practice be urgently reviewed to ensure that all students meet the criteria in these respects.

- 12.4 The iterative nature of design and the recording of the design process was not clearly shown in the portfolios which, whilst some portfolios showed process work, was in general defined by finished presentation drawings and representations. In meeting criteria 1 and 4, the School might consider how this process work might be better recorded and valued in the portfolio as a record of the creative process beyond the highly edited 12-slide submission artefact and the importance of the recording of such process work was corroborated by the views of the external examiners.
- 12.5 The teaching of management, practice and law at part 1 and part 2 showed good practice in its link to the design project work. However, the board noted that some of the legislative codes and requirements had been superseded. Whilst the students were aware of the requirements in GC11, the board felt that students might develop a greater critical position in respect of the future of architectural practice and their careers, built on a greater understanding of the current issues facing the professional and construction industry.

13. Advice

The visiting board offers the following advice to the Department on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

- 13.1 The school should consider rewriting the academic position statement, for whilst it provides a description of the activities of the school should better reflect the distinctive qualities of the school and courses and narrate a clear vision for the future.
- 13.2 The evidencing of group work in the portfolios was not clear and as such the advice point 14.3 of the previous board's report stands.
- 13.3 The approach of an integrated design project for module 558 was clear and the board noted the mandatory pass requirement for both design and technology components the weighted allocation of 80% design and 20% technology did not give sufficient value to this aspect of integration.
- 13.4 The design briefs at undergraduate were largely determined for the students and the board felt here was scope for the students to develop skills in brief preparation, which although developed in the stage 2 might be further enhanced in pursuit of more speculative and radical proposals in the stage 3 (GC 6). Here the board noted that there was good practice in engaging real clients at the briefing stage however the

development of design proposals could more fully represent the potential of live projects and their budgetary and legislative constraints.

- 13.5 At Postgraduate level, the board noted the practice module was relied on as a primary vehicle for the year out experience or the evaluation for the emerging design project. This made for a lack of parity and, whilst the board supported the structure and content of the programme, the assessment vehicle might be reconsidered. GC11 GA2.5
- 13.6 The school has good student representation mechanisms and the processes for articulating and responding to the student voice were well established. However, the student experience was often marked by a perceived lack of coordination, planning and organisation on the part of the school. As for example the late notification and planning of field visits in stage 3 final design project.
- 13.7 The board noted both the school's and students' critical reflections on the provision of space. In achieving the future success, the school is in need of more dedicated studio space to maintain and enhance the creative culture of the school. The studio is a laboratory of design ideas and investigation, the vitality of which is central to the reputation and future recruitment prospects of the institution.
- 13.8 IT provision is good in respect of the dedicated computer laboratory. However, the model of a computer suite separate from the design studio might be developed or reconsidered, particularly with regards to the postgraduate studio provision where a modest increase in the IT provision in the studios left students, who were being expected to use complex parametric systems, were under-resourced with regards their needs for IT provision.
- 13.9 The module descriptors should be rationalised such that there are consistent learning outcomes and the assessment criteria might be better constructively aligned with the outcomes. In particular for some of the modules e.g 558 the number of outcomes seemed to the board excessive and the opportunity for students to adequately meet these required greater clarity and succinctness. The school should consider mapping the learning outcomes across the programmes to provide a greater level of consistency in module requirements and patterns of assessment and feedback, to enhance the effectiveness and clarity of both formative and summative feedback. This view was corroborated by the students and external examiners.
- 13.10 Recent changes in the contractual arrangements for PTHP staff were noted by the board. The board and students felt that the bridge between academic study and practice achieved through the inclusion of practising architects with the design studio through the PTHP serves the school well in demonstrating the GA1.6 and GA2.7.
- 13.11 The board noted the school's aspirations with regards new masters programmes and apprenticeship provision along with the aim of delivering a Part 3 architecture programme and RTP1-recognised programme. The operational plan review 2018, annex B of the documentary submission sets out these challenges along with several

other opportunities and difficulties that the school foresees. The school may wish to consider prioritising the matters listed therein in order to mitigate risk and enhance opportunity over the coming period and in ensuring that the professionally recognised courses continue to find adequate resources to continue to meet the requirements of the professional and statutory bodies for the extant part 1 and 2 programmes.

13.12 The teaching of the history and theory of architecture was well covered in the undergraduate course, and the evidence of the dissertations showed students were able to research and construct arguments demonstrating a critical understanding of the historical and theoretical context of architecture and supporting and continuing this strength is advised.

13.13 The undergraduate stage one programme was broad and well-structured offering students a wide-ranging and engaging introduction to architecture, and in particular, the board felt that the 'Folio' project was an example of good practice at this beginning stage. This followed through into stage 2 where the educational progression was well established and provided students with suitably challenging design vehicles which delivered sensitive and thoughtful solutions in the areas of landscape and housing. The quality and effectiveness of this progression should be carried through into stage 3 of the course.

14 Delivery of academic position
See advice point 13.1

15 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.

Graduate Attributes for Parts 1 & 2
Please see advice points 13.5 and 13.10

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.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1 & 2
Please see action and advice points: 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.5, 13.4, 13.5

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers
Part 1 (BA Architecture)
Stage 1: 110

Stage 2: 120

Stage 3: 125

Part 2 (MArch)

Stage 4: 35

Stage 5: 35

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**