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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to  
The London School of Architecture**

**Date of visiting board: 15-16 June 2017**

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 20 September 2017**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**  
 Somerset House  
 New Wing  
 Strand  
 London  
 WC2R 1LA
- 2 Head of Architecture Group**  
 Will Hunter
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**  
 Professional Diploma in Designing Architecture programme (part 2)
- 4 Course leader**
- |               |                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Will Hunter   | Founder / Director            |
| Nicola Read   | Deputy Director               |
| Deborah Saunt | Director of Inter-Practice    |
| James Soane   | Director of Critical Practice |
| Clive Sall    | Director of Proto-Practice    |
- 5 Awarding body**  
 London Metropolitan University
- 6 The visiting board**
- |                    |                         |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Harbinder Birdi    | practitioner/chair      |
| Pepper Barney      | practitioner/vice chair |
| Toby Blackman      | academic                |
| Christina Godiksen | academic                |
| Charlie Follett    | student member          |
| Sophie Bailey      | 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](http://www.architecture.com).
- 8 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**  
 At its meeting on the 20 September 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following course is unconditionally validated:
- Master of Architecture (Part 2)**
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in: 2022
- 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**

The London School of Architecture was established with the awareness that both the profession of architecture and the wider world are undergoing profound changes. Our postgraduate programme seeks to empower future leaders of the profession to design a built environment that responds to the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

At both institutional and programme level, the LSA has a unique offer in relation to other architecture schools. While the vast majority of the UK's Part 2 courses are located within a larger university, the LSA is an independent institution, constructed as a professional network, and using the city as its campus. In contradistinction to an ossified ivory tower, our school is – as an organisational principle – nimble and porous to the world outside.

We offer a two-year programme that is validated by London Metropolitan University and supported by some 50 firms in our London Practice Network. Three pillars underpin the programme's First Year: an emphasis on architecture's relationship to the city; a close relationship with practice; and collaboration as a working method.

In the first module, Urban Studies, students make a group reading of a particular quarter of London, which forms the territory for the design portfolio for the next two years. As a critique of object buildings, the LSA pursues architecture that integrates with and forms the urban fabric. Furthermore, we believe that the design of our cities – where half of humanity now lives – will be of paramount importance to the world achieving true sustainability.

In the twinned Critical Practice modules, each student produces a Manual about the practice they are currently in and a Manifesto about the future practice they seek. During a part-time work placement within our Practice Network, students operate within the office as both active participant and critical observer. By running the practice and school components in parallel we create a dynamic feedback loop between the two spheres.

This embedded research methodology seeks to give students professional judgment to make ethical choices about their architecture, and professional acumen to articulate its worth. Students explore their agency at scales from the personal, the professional, and the planetary, in order to establish their own co-ordinates and direction of travel.

In the Design Think Tank Project, half a dozen students and practices collaboratively produce a design/research project. Our lecturer, Peter Buchanan, says 'Architecture is the nexus where all disciplines and fields of knowledge converge' and we encourage these groups to explore the spatial consequences of the rapid expansion of knowledge in other arenas.

The DTTP is an opportunity to address pressing issues beyond questions of personal expression. Where conventional models of architectural education have sometimes nurtured the idea of the architect as creative individualist, we agree with Malcolm Gladwell that 'The 20th century was about lone geniuses, whereas 21st is about smart people working together.'

The final module of First Year is called Architectural Design: Direction, which is an individual project that sets up the trajectory for two main design projects in Second Year: Architectural Design: Speculation and the Comprehensive Design Project.

We seek to develop in each student their own purpose and identity – we want them to become the best version of themselves, not mini-versions of us. We do not have a unit system because we want students to have a free period of design experimentation. Mentored by tutors, students construct their own Community of Practice, which equips students with a range of design strategies and tactics that they could employ.

In the autumn term, students undertake History of Design Methodologies, where they make an investigation into a selected historical hero. This exploration informs the studio culture, and so we assess this work through the design portfolio rather than in an essay format. The technical criteria are largely assessed in CDP: Resolution, which takes the form of an Invitation to Tender and Design Principles Document, to give the students a simulacrum of how a project could be delivered once they graduate.

As the only discipline with spatial intelligence, we have a deep-seated belief that architects have a critical role to play in shaping the world. Our school has been established to explore and promote all the ways that architects can contribute positively to the built environment – to create work that is propositional, relevant, innovative, metropolitan and entrepreneurial.

In *The Future of the Professions* (2015), Richard Susskind and Daniel Susskind wrote that: 'The challenge for architects is ... to anticipate the new tasks that will have to be done, to identify those that require their unique talents, and to develop the skills that will therefore be required in years to come.' Our programme is predicated on the idea that the future will belong to those who are creative, adaptable and comfortable at synthesising complexity. Students are exposed to an extremely wide range of inputs, and given strategies and tools to make propositions informed by multivalent forces.

The entrepreneur Stewart Butterfield says: ‘The best – maybe the only? – real, direct measure of “innovation” is change in human behaviour.’ We want the architecture that our students – and ultimately our graduates – produce to be intimately related to the shifts in human behaviour that are emerging in this era of rapid change, and to design new forms of spatial organisation that are triggered by – and in turn provide an armature for – new patterns of living. Ultimately, our vision is that people living in cities lead more fulfilled and more sustainable lives.

## **11 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the enthusiasm and engagement of trustees, practitioners and students that are part of the LSA.
- 11.2 The board commends the critical content and representation of the history of design methodologies module AR6036.
- 11.3 The board commends the sense of empowerment and independence that the students demonstrate and their considered view of the future of the profession.

## **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 school should encourage the students to use the second year in particular as an opportunity to test and develop their designs through the greater use of sketching and 3D model making. This output should be clearly demonstrated in the portfolio of work.
- 12.2 Whilst the board is aware that students meet GC9 (technology) during the practice placement, there needs to be greater evidence within the supporting documentation AR6W32 (Critical practice) and year 2 Comprehensive Design Project .
- 12.3 The school should ensure that external examiners are provided with complete academic portfolios and documents for individual candidates during the examination process.

## **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 The school should continue to develop the network of creative engagement by maintaining connection with alumni.
- 13.2 The school demonstrates a rich and diverse range of briefs, however greater methodological diversity should be encouraged in the development of student proposals.

13.3 The school should continue to interrogate and develop the collaboration across modules to support the student experience, evolving outcomes and research.

**14 Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted: The board felt that the position statement could better reflect the school's areas of activity and the features of teaching and learning that characterise and distinguish the course when considered against other schools of architecture. The board commented that areas of the Executive Summary better reflected the school's aims and objectives.

**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 Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the programme of architecture.

**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 Part 2**

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the programme of architecture.

**17 Other information**

**17.1 Student numbers**

Y1 - 28  
Y2 - 27

**17.2 Documentation provided**

The School 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**