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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board  
to the Manchester School of  
Architecture**

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- 1**      **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**  
 Manchester School of Architecture  
 Chatham Building  
 Cavendish Street  
 Manchester  
 M15 6BR
- 2**      **Architecture Lead/Head of School**  
 Head of School                      Kevin Singh
- Course Leaders**  
 Part 1 Course Leader              Dan Dubowitz  
 Part 2 Course Leader              Sally Stone
- 3**      **Course/s offered for validation**  
 Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture  
 Part Two: Master of Architecture
- 4**      **Awarding body**  
 Manchester Metropolitan University and The University of Manchester
- 5**      **The visiting board**  
 Andrew Wilson              Chair / Academic  
 Christina Godiksen              Academic  
 Musa Garba                      Practitioner  
 Albená Atanassova              Practitioner  
 Sophie Bailey                      RIBA validation manager
- 6**      **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).
- 7**      **Recommendation of the Visiting Board**  
 On the 29 July 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:
- Part One:      BA (Honours) Architecture  
 Part Two:      Master of Architecture
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2026.
- 8**      **Academic position statement**  
 (Statement written by the school)
- The Manchester School of Architecture (founded in 1996) enjoys the unique context of being a collaboration between Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Manchester. It is one of the largest Schools of Architecture in the country with over 1000 students (typically representing some 85 countries) and over 100 members of staff from diverse backgrounds, and is proud to retain both its quality and intimacy despite its size.

The School is characterised by excellence, ambition, boldness, inquisitiveness, innovation, and social responsibility. These facets generate a unique blend and balance between research led teaching, impressive and relevant research outputs, and extensive professional industry links, all of which encourage our students to cultivate their own unique approach to architecture and their careers thereafter. Imagination, we take it seriously!

We are very proud of our roots in this great city with its rich history of industry, revolution, innovation, change, and work ethic as captured by the famous Manchester bee. This passion manifests in our ethos, “from the city, of the city, for the city, and beyond” which acts as a constant prompt of our responsibilities, duty, and role in the city, serving its communities and businesses, as well as a wider global audience.

The Manchester School of Architecture endeavours to be a contemporary school of architecture in its truest and widest sense. We strive to be at the forefront of tackling contemporary societal issues such as diversity and equality, climate change, and the changing nature of the profession and practice.

**Pedagogic structure:** Our students are independent and inquisitive thinkers, professionally skilled, and socially aware and it is this sense of the individual which ensures that there is no school style, no prevailing design language or means of production. The culture of the School enables students to be dexterous, able to engage with sophisticated research agendas as adeptly as they can tackle the challenges of the professional world, but most of all, they are equipped for a life beyond graduation, wherever and however that takes them.

The mechanism of our renowned Atelier system which operates vertically between the final year of the BA and throughout the M.Arch provides a research focused framework within which staff and students explore their preoccupations, agendas, and hypotheses via design studio projects. These fields of interest are supported by relevant approaches to humanities and technologies as well as contributions from tutors from industry and specialist consultants. The Ateliers celebrate difference by exploring a range of agendas including feminism, computational design, difference, infrastructures, and adaptive re-use, ensuring that each student can find their individual place and meaning in the School and explicitly link back to areas of staff research interests and expertise.

**Research:** Research led teaching is at the heart of our philosophy and modus operandi, with a clear relationship between what happens in our design studios, lectures, and seminars and our research activity across both institutions. Our three mature thematic research areas of Built Heritage, Urban Futures, and Citizen Engagement each formed Impact Case Studies in the latest REF and represented one third of the University’s total submission. Furthermore, a 700% increase in staff returning to the REF and the highest research income in the Faculty from a series of prestigious funders convey a clear trajectory in this field. New research areas in architectural pedagogy as well as new technologies are emerging as is a recognition of the importance knowledge exchange moving forward.

**Community and Social Responsibility:** As our strapline proclaims, “from the city, of the city, for the city, and beyond”, we cherish our role within this great city, and supporting its citizens and communities. MSA Live is a key component of this approach with student led projects working with many organisations, charities, community groups, social enterprises, community interest companies, researchers, practitioners and educators for social impact. Working in teams within and across year groups and programmes MSA students participate in peer-to-peer learning and collaborators, participants and students engage in the transfer of tangible and intellectual property, expertise, learning, and skills for their mutual benefit.

This collaborative and team working approach is supplemented by the All School Project which launches each academic year via a topical issue, and encourages students to work across years, programmes, and disciplines, emphasising the importance of a community of learners as well as collaborative listening learners.

An integral and influential part of our community is the MSSA student society (Manchester Student Society of Architecture), the largest of its kind in the UK, which works closely with students, tutors, lecturers and collaborators inside and outside the school to deliver an improved student life for its members. The society encourages and promotes new ideas within the School, providing students with the opportunity to host events which address their interests and concerns alike. MSSA has a number of specialist sub groups, one of which, the Black Lives Matter group was instrumental in working with us to develop an EDI code of practice, a framework to deliver change via a focus on ensuring equity, diversity and inclusivity in access, coverage and application to all who we build relationships with.

**Career readiness:** The School has a multi-faceted and holistic approach to employability, career readiness, preparation for practice, and life beyond graduation. The curriculum at both BA and M.Arch levels provides a clear and robust platform for students to tackle professionally focused design projects which are supplemented by lectures and workshops within the sphere of professional studies. The daily links with practitioners on our extensive staff team, as well as specialist consultants expose students to real-world views which are reinforced by events such as the M.Arch Open Reviews where practitioners from around the world are welcomed into the School. Our innovative Provocations debates generate a further influx of ideas, whilst strong links with our alumni provide students with role modelling opportunities, all of which ensures graduates are ready to make a difference in their careers ahead.

This is Manchester. We do things differently here... (Anthony H Wilson)

- 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 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 The board commends the vibrancy and ambition of the school of architecture where students are presented with a rich and diverse set of opportunities to learn from each other, professionals, the city, societies, and nations around them.
- 10.2 The board commends the dedicated staff team, who foster a profound sense of community for students, with many positive benefits to learning, student success and pastoral support.
- 10.3 The board commends the school for their clear, balanced, and progressive courses, that are unified by a forward-thinking approach to professionalism and the preparation for future architectural practice.

## **11 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.

- 11.1 The school should continue to provide sufficient staffing, support, and physical resources during an ambitious phase of growth to ensure that the quality of the student experience is not compromised.
- 11.2 The school should place greater priority on the inclusion of raw process work to better explain the critical idea forming in the architectural and spatial design process.

## **12. 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.

- 12.1 The school should encourage extended experimentation during the design phases of BA3 and MA2 studio. This could include making and testing as a core practice.
- 12.2 The school could add greater emphasis to the presentation of student projects within the physical context that forms the basis of design.

- 12.3 The school should take steps, wherever appropriate to make sure that the administrative burden on staff does not impact on the student experience and validated courses.
- 12.4 The school should continue to embed environmental priority across the curriculum whilst maintaining the specific priorities of ateliers. This could be expanded to embrace interior spatial quality, atmosphere, and materiality.
- 12.5 The school could explore the potential of working with other built environment disciplines, consistent with their ambitions to provide a contemporary professional education.
- 12.6 The school should continue to extend the integration of BA3 technology and studio to enhance the quality of outcomes in the studio module.
- 12.7 The school is encouraged to promote difference within the MA2 ateliers and to explore more flexible ways of marking to allow the differentiation to be made explicit.

**13 Delivery of academic position**

The board felt that the academic position statement accurately reflected the school's ethos and identity.

**14 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**

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the BA (Honours) Architecture and the Master of Architecture

**15 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**

The Board confirmed that all the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the BA (Honours) Architecture and the Master of Architecture.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers**

| Programme              | Total Enrolments (2020/21) |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| BA (Hons) Architecture | 525                        |
| Master of Architecture | 445                        |

**16.2 Documentation provided**

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

**17 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.

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