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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the visiting board  
to Oxford Brookes University**

Date of visiting board: 16/17 February 2017  
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 31 May 2017

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s**  
School of Architecture  
Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment  
Oxford Brookes University  
Gipsy Lane Campus  
Headington  
Oxford OX3 0BP
  - 2 Head of Architecture**  
Matt Gaskin
  - 3 Courses offered for validation**  
Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture  
Part 2 MArchD Applied Design in Architecture  
Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management
  - 4 Programme leaders**  
Jane Anderson, Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture  
Charles Parrack, Part 2 MArchD  
Toby Shew, Part 2 MArchD  
Karl Rosenvinge Kjelstrup- Johnson, Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management
  - 5 Awarding body**  
Oxford Brookes University
  - 6 The visiting board**  
Professor Paul Jones – Chair  
Nick Hayhurst – Vice chair  
Bernadette Donohoe  
Ruth Reed PPRIBA
- The student member was unable to attend due to illness. The Board proceeded as constituted with the agreement of the Oxford Brookes University Head of School and the RIBA Director of Education.
- In attendance:**  
Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – 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 Proposals of the visiting board**  
On 31 May 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed, by circulation, unconditional revalidation of the following:
    - Part 1 BA (Hons) in Architecture
    - Part 2 MArchD Applied Design in Architecture
    - Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management

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The next full visiting board will take place in five years' time.

**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)**

***Excellence and Distinction***

*The School of Architecture, Oxford Brookes University has a longstanding global reputation as a learning community that fosters diversity and innovation in architectural design. The School promotes design as a research led activity and consciously harnesses the areas of research excellence, including practice-led research primarily through live projects, to inform student learning. As a result, students are exposed to an exciting array of ways to understand and practice architecture and are encouraged to explore their own preoccupations and thereby to build their own identities over time. This approach results in highly skilled and ambitious global graduates who are valued by the profession, as evidenced by the School's consistent high employability rates, and who have been shortlisted/ commended for the RIBA Presidents Medals and other awards. Mostly recently Andrew Chard was awarded the Serjeant Award in 2015. The school was listed as 51<sup>st</sup> in the QS rankings in 2016.*

*The School's critically reflective ethos ensures that the quality and standards of all aspects of the curriculum at Parts 1, 2 and 3 are kept under constant review; however there are undoubtedly areas of the School's approach to learning and teaching that are particularly innovative including:*

***The Diversity and choice of Design Studios***

*The School focuses on the individual trajectory of the students through the offering of choice of design studios. In both Parts 1 and 2 the range of design studios are diverse. Nine units are offered to years 2 and 3 and six units/pathways to years 5 and eight studios to year 6, all chosen by student vote. The units are chosen to represent issues that are current in the profession adopting a range of design methods, local and global research agendas, and a commitment to individual vision. The majority of design studio and technology staff practice and/or research which demonstrates to the students the integration of theoretical knowledge into design work. A*

*graduate from the Part 1 and Part 2 can exit with a body of work that recognises cultural change, global issues and spatial plus technological and material complexity. Vertical units run in the Part 1 which aid raising the standards of all students through exposure to a wider range of design approaches.*

#### ***The Open Studio Culture***

*The School encourages studio working across all five years to engage both in peer learning and the crossfertilisation of ideas. In years 2, 3, 5 and 6 this work takes place in the open studio, which enables the undergraduate and postgraduate students to work alongside one another. The 24 hour access to these studios plus the open kitchens has engendered a strong connection between students on all programmes.*

*Peer assisted learning is further encouraged through Part 2 students undertaking year one reviews and the student society OXARCH, which runs workshops, building visits, a lecture series, social events and a magazine. OXARCH have won student society of the year for the past two years.*

#### ***Cultural Context***

*The teaching of cultural context is recognised as excellent externally. The external examiner reports regularly compliment both Part 1 and 2 on the quality of the work through all years. The research of the staff in this area informs the content of the programmes. The undergraduate dissertation receives plaudits from the external examiners on a regular basis.*

#### ***Digital Teaching and Submissions***

*The digital literacy of the students is another notable area, with a range of 2D and 3D software offered through an in-house online teaching resource, and the utilisation of plasma screens for tutorials. This resource is unique to the School and allows students to choose from an extensive range of means of communication to suit their individual needs. In the years since the last visiting board, the Part 1 and Part 2 programmes offered a mixed media portfolio submission, which enabled students to submit films, computer models in digital form, accompanied by design prints, sketchbooks, essays, and reports. This initiative encouraged students to think creatively about their submission. Since the last visiting board the School has actively encouraged the process of making in design units.*

#### ***Research Linked to Teaching***

*At the Part 2, teaching and research are closely linked, particularly through the optional 80 credit design specialisations (urban design, regeneration, advanced architectural design, sustainable architecture, development and emergency practice, and research led design) where students are taught by active researchers and practitioners. This enables students on the Part 2 to experience a wider working context for the discipline of architecture and to gain essential specialist learning that both informs their subsequent*

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*architectural design and enhances their employability. At Part 1 active researchers, including practice based researchers, with pedagogical research inform the design of the curriculum and delivery of teaching.*

*The School significantly increased its REF results in 2014.*

### **Live Projects**

*Since the last board the school has continued promoting student engagement with 'live' projects in the undergraduate programme. This 'live' work enables students to gain a deeper understanding of the world of practice and integrates technology with design, allowing students to gain first-hand experience of ethical issues and learn collaborative and participatory design techniques. Staff and students showcased their work at the 'Live Projects Pedagogy International Symposium held in the School in May 2012. The School will host the next AAE conference in 2017, which will focus on live projects. This is an area that has been grown to further enhance the students' awareness of modern practice and has been selected as one of the School's thematic research priorities.*

### **The Aims and Outcomes of the Awards**

*The school uses programme level learning outcomes to define the aims of Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3. These learning outcomes, which are set out in the student programme handbooks, subsume but are not limited to the RIBA Validation Criteria. Below the distinction of the Part 1 and Part 2 programmes are explained.*

#### **Part 1**

*The learning outcomes for Part 1, the BA (Hons) Architecture, require students to produce work that exhibits a broad base of relevant knowledge, understanding and skills, as defined by the Part 1 Validation Criteria, at Levels 5 and 6. The problem-based and integrative nature of the curriculum, which works within a modular framework, results in many students producing work that demonstrates much higher levels of cognitive behaviour. The undergraduate curriculum has been designed to enable students to apply their learning as directly as possible. Strategies to achieve this include integration of design and academic work, design of coursework assessment that includes practical and applied elements, live projects and delivery of teaching through an extensive range of practical workshops. Technology is learnt and assessed through application to design project work in Part 1 and practice employs real-world scenarios to enable students to apply what they have learned.*

#### **Part 2**

*The learning outcomes for Part 2 require students to produce work that exhibits relevant knowledge, understanding and skills, as defined by the Part 2 Validation Criteria, at Level 7, and Masters Level. Part 2 is also delivered through a problem-based, integrative curriculum, which works within a modular framework and technology*

is learnt and assessed primarily through design project work. However, the structure of the modular programme allows students to add 80 credits of specialist knowledge, a subset of modules from a specialist Masters programme, to the core curriculum, which distinguishes the Part 2 from the Part 1. The curriculum is structured so that students engage with their chosen specialism (urban design, regeneration, advanced architectural design, sustainable architecture, development and emergency practice or a research led design). Students who graduate from the MArchD are highly employable because they are equipped with core professional skills as well as skills in a specialist area. Primary research skills are also taught in year one of the programme.

### **Part 3**

The learning outcomes for Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management follow the Part 3 Validation Criteria reflecting the demanding requirements of the criteria and the nature of the examination. Candidates taking the Part 3 Examination are supported in their preparations through block seminars and clinics. The School is currently looking to enhance the Part 3 programme in terms of online offer, which will provide enhanced learning support for students.

### **Oxford Graduates Fit for Contemporary Practice**

The School is constantly reviewing its academic offering with the help of internal and external stakeholders to ensure that its graduates are highly employable. This includes working with the University Careers Office, the RIBA and ARB, practitioner staff teaching in the School and Local Practices via the RIBA Southern Regional Group mentoring programme, site visits and field trips. In addition, the emphasis on real 'live' problems in the design studio and the explicit links to research ensures that students are engaged and equipped to deal with contemporary issues beyond the boundaries of the design studio. Last year the employability statistics provided by the University (based on employment six months after graduation) demonstrated an employment/further study rate of 86.2 % for Part 1 and 85.9 % for Part 2. One alumni and now academic member of staff was appointed as an RIBA role model.

### **Partnerships and Future**

The School is part of the Faculty of Technology, Design and Environment with the School of Arts, the School of the Built Environment, the Department of Computing and Communication Technologies, and the Department of Mechanical Engineering and Mathematical Sciences. This provides the School with opportunities to develop cross-disciplinary collaborations. The School has already collaborated with the School of Arts on an all-year student design project which resulted in a pavilion at the entrance of the John Henry Brookes Building and hopes to expand the research and teaching synergies in future. In 3-5 years the Department of Computing and Communication Technologies, and the Department of Mechanical Engineering and Mathematical Sciences will move to the

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*Headington Campus. It is hoped that this will enable a new studio and workshop building to be realised.*

*Over the past three years the School has actively promoted itself in China, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, India and Thailand. The School will continue to build on the research and progression agreements in order to further diversify the type of students entering both the Part 1 and the Part 2.*

*In June 2017 the School will celebrate ninety years with an alumni event, which will bring together some 60 years of graduates together from all around the globe. A history of the school book will be published in 2017.*

**11      Commendations**

The Board commends the following:

- 11.1    The tremendous energy within the school apparent in both the staff and the students.
- 11.2    The delivery of a high quality of student experience at Oxford Brookes University through nurturing a strong community of practice and studio culture, and a commitment to outstanding pastoral care.
- 11.3    The development of a curriculum and educational environment that promotes and encourages independence in student learning.
- 11.4    The comprehensive and aspirational nature of Part 1.
- 11.5    The ambition of the school to develop specialist knowledge within the discipline at Part 2 level.

**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. The university is referred to the RIBA's criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring processes. 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 supports the school's ambition to test new hypothesis and speculations in architectural technology of the MArchD, however the school should ensure that graduates are equally equipped with the requisite knowledge and understanding of the full range of building and construction technologies in accordance with GA2.3.
- 13.2    The Board considers the marking standards of Design and Technology at MArchD level to be too generous and strongly recommend that the School develops a more robust marking system and moderation sequence to ensure both parity of marking but also to reflect the range of standards of work.

- 13.3 At Part 3 level, the school should ensure it has appropriate Quality Assurance procedures and conforms to best practice. In particular with reference to the academic review of examination papers and communication between the academic staff, professional examiners and external examiner.
  - 13.4 At Part 3 level, the school should ensure that the examination papers rigorously assess all the Professional Criteria and in particular procurement and contract issues such as those set out in PC5. The school should also review the format and range of question types in the examination papers in order to fully test candidates' professional judgement as well as knowledge and understanding.
  - 13.5 At Part 3 level, the school should ensure that candidates demonstrate the full range of their knowledge and the ability to apply understanding of the Professional Criteria in the PEDRs or CoPE.
- 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 programme team should consider how to exploit the connection between the two years of the MArchD so that the students can better apply the specialist knowledge developed in year 1 to their final design studio project.
- 15 Delivery of academic position**  
The following key points were noted:  
The board felt that the academic position statement might more explicitly identify the strengths of the School and the distinctive characteristics of both the vertical unit system in Part 1 and the specialisation at Part 2.
- 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.
- 16.1 BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1**  
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.
- 16.2 MArchD , Part 2**  
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.  
  
Please refer to action point 13.1.
- 16.3 Examination in Practice and Management Part 3**  
The Board confirmed that all Part 3 Professional Criteria were met.

Please see action point 13.4.

**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.

Please see the action points and criteria.

**18      Other information**

**18.1    Student numbers**

Part 1 - 370

Part 2 - 208

Part 3 - 32

**18.2    Documentation provided**

The School provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

**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.**

- Meeting with Head of Department and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Global Partnerships
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff