

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board  
to Royal College of Art**

**Date of visiting board: 04-05 April 2019**

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 14 June 2019**

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- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**  
 School of Architecture  
 Royal College of Art  
 Kensington Gore  
 London  
 SW7 2EU
- 2** **Head of Architecture Group**  
 Adrian Lahoud          Dean of School of Architecture
- 3** **Course/s offered for validation**  
 MA Architecture, Part 2
- 4** **Course leader/s**  
 Beth Hughes          Head of Programme
- 5** **Awarding body**  
 Royal College of Art
- 6** **The visiting board**  
 David Howarth          practitioner & academic / chair  
 Hannah Vowles          academic / vice-chair  
 Alice Gordon          practitioner  
 Carlos Sanchez          academic  
 Julian Manev          graduate member  
 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](http://www.architecture.com).
- 8** **Recommendation of the Visiting Board**  
 At its meeting on the 14 June 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are awarded full validation
- MA Architecture, 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
  - iv submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed

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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**  
(Statement written by the school)

MA Architecture at the RCA sets out to inspire design innovation. The programme expands the possibilities of architecture and its agency in the world by encouraging a critical, speculative and independent ethos among its students.

The School of Architecture (SoA) at the Royal College of Art (RCA) can trace its history back 66 years to a programme in Interior Design initiated by Sir Hugh Casson in 1951. By 1972, five years after the RCA received its Royal Charter, the programme was renamed 'Environmental Design' by Professor John Miller. In 1983, it evolved into the Department in Architecture and Interiors on receipt of its first RIBA/ARB II accreditation. Notable alumni include Sir David Adjaye, Stephanie McDonald & Tom Emmerson (6a architects), Stephen Bates (Sergison Bates), members of Assemble and Sir James Dyson. However, it is perhaps many of the RCA alumni outside of the SoA, such as David Hockney, Tracey Emin and Ridley Scott that attract our student body.

Our vision for the School builds on this legacy, especially through an emphasis on conceptualisation and materialisation. At the same time, it aims to enrich it by expanding the scale of inquiry to include environmental, urban and social themes that resonate beyond the institution. As a post-graduate only fine-art and design context, the RCA has ranked number 1 on the QS rankings for 5 years in a row and is a truly exceptional context for architectural studies. With a total student population across the College of 2000 students (3000 for 2021) the RCA provides an intimate environment and a very unique context for attaining a RIBA/ARB Part II degree. We can say with confidence that the programme offers a transformative experience, at a minimum every student is pushed, challenged and inspired and at its best, some of the most innovative student work in the world emerges from the RCA unique to the institution.

The SoA is field-focused, design led and project based. It works across a rich variety of scales, contexts and problems. It sets out to develop and disseminate new and relevant knowledge through propositional forms of thinking and practice. The studio model of teaching is fundamental to our culture as it embeds processes of collaboration, discussion, making, review and critical engagement as everyday practices. Alongside the core studio activity, the programme is accompanied by complementary studies, some of which are offered College-wide (CHS) and School-wide (Media Studies).

The formats and settings of learning and teaching are as diverse as possible in order to engage students with different skills, backgrounds and abilities. In all cases, regular written feedback is recorded in crit forms. In addition, cross-year opportunities for assessment and

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feedback are provided to assure parity across studios. With recent growth, MA Architecture now offers 12 different Architectural Design Studios (ADS) with a diversity and plurality of voices offering rich moments of intersection and shared conversations that resonate with the key research themes of the SoA: Architecture and Social Movements, Institutional Forms and Practices, Intergenerational Cities, Automation and Manufacture, Re-use and Climate Justice.

The SoA is organised around these research themes, which act as drivers of institutional form, points of coordination between different activities, and support structures for the maturation of ideas and people. The structure acknowledges knowledge production occurs at different tempos and levels of attainment. It provides a model for research led teaching, which balances agility in the short term with longer-term strategic aims. These themes focus SoA activity, resourcing, recruitment, and support. By committing to themes over a multi-year period, we are able to take advantage of knowledge exchange opportunities and improve research outcomes.

The 'Live Project' programme opens up questions of engagement and collaboration, while also challenging definitions of practice. It allows each ADS to align with their agenda and ambition as a way of distinguishing between commercial and non-commercial opportunities, increasing project funding, aligning projects with pedagogy and multiplying the number of potential external partners. These collaborations have been quite exceptional with students recently having opportunity to build projects for British Land, participate in the London Design Festival and Manifesta12 Palermo.

The practice mentor scheme strengthens links between academy and practice and helps students to attain professional skills. In the first two-years of the scheme, over 90 different practices have joined, with several students later gaining practice experience with their mentors.

Professional Practice Studies (Radical Practice Studio) and the Technical Studies curriculum are tailored to reflect the innovative culture of the school. The courses reveal to students how engaging with expert knowledge in the discipline provides the means to innovate and effectively harness their energy and enthusiasm toward architecture. Both curriculum includes a series of speakers and experts who are working innovatively within practice, demonstrating ways in which professional and technical knowledge can be instrumentalised and are essential to design excellence.

The RIBA general criteria and graduate attributes are creatively interpreted through all units of studies in MA Architecture. The focus of the education is not on a series of skill-sets or technical abilities, although we do also deliver this teaching, but rather a series of methodologies that equip students with the rigorous criticality to be able to define their own practice. Supporting and provoking students to identify and develop their own independent voice within the field is at the core of everything we do at the RCA.

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## 11 **Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the School in how they have embraced the opportunities and challenges arising from the new academic framework and increased student numbers since the last visiting board.
- 11.2 The board commends the innovative format and delivery of the newly unitised courses, in particular the culture of making in Technical Studies and History and Theory studies.
- 11.3 The board commends the College's commitment to providing individual student workspaces, reinforcing the vibrant studio culture of the course.

## 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 acknowledges the positive changes to the external examining process since the last RIBA Visiting Board. However, the school should further review their external examination procedures to ensure examiners have an overview of the complete course. This is to enable them to have confidence that all graduates are meeting the General Criteria and Graduate Attributes.

## 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 board acknowledges that the targeted expansion of the school has been well managed and has now stabilised. The College should ensure that any further expansion in numbers is appropriately resourced and supported to maintain a positive student experience.
- 13.2 The school should ensure that all students have access to accurate information about routes to professional registration.

## 14 **Delivery of academic position**

The board commented that the position statement clearly described the way in which the vision for the school builds on the legacy of notable alumni through the emphasis of conceptualisation and materialisation, delivered through the plurality of the design studios.

## 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.

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**Graduate Attributes for Part 2**

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

**17 Other information**

**17.1 Student numbers**

2018/2019 Cohort enrolled in the programme at the time of the visit:  
85 Yr 1 and 72 Year 2

**17.2 Documentation provided**

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

**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**