Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Visiting Board to RIBA Studio

Date of visiting board: 26 & 27 November 2020
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 7 July 2021

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1 Details of institution hosting course
RIBA Studio
School of Architecture
Oxford Brookes University
Headington Campus
Gipsy Lane
Oxford UK
OX3 0BP

Royal Institute of British Architects
66 Portland Place
London
W1B 1AD

2 Director of RIBA Studio
Dr Maria Faraone

3 Course/s offered for validation
RIBA Certificate in Architecture, Part 1
RIBA Diploma in Architecture, Part 2

4 Awarding body
Royal Institute of British Architects

5 The visiting board
Albena Atanassova – Chair
Prof. Doug King
Jane McAllister
Anthony Petrilli
Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance

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; www.architecture.com).

The RIBA is exceptionally conducting remote cyclical revalidation visits during 2020 only. The format and procedures were modified with the agreement of the RIBA and the RIBA Studio team to facilitate remote operation. All requirements for documentation and portfolio samples remained the same as for a physical visit. All standard meetings were conducted as for a physical visit.

7 Recommendation of the Visiting Board
On 7 July 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of the:

RIBA Certificate in Architecture, Part 1
RIBA Diploma in Architecture, Part 2

The next visiting board will take place in 2025.

8   Standard requirements for validation
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

9   Academic position statement (statement written by the school)
This document has been written by the Programme Director of the RIBA Studio, the RIBA Director of Education and Head of Professional Education, the Head of School of Architecture at Oxford Brookes University, the Programme Manager, the Design and Subject Leads and members of the Programme Management (PMC), and Programme Education (PEC) Committees. The sections below provide an overview while highlighting the exceptional aspects and outcomes of this programme.

Origins:
The RIBA Studio, although pedagogically unlike any studio and lecture based programme in architecture, leads to an equivalent award with respect to Part 1 and Part 2; this is the original examination from which validated qualifications offered by schools of architecture were exempted. RIBA Studio is an evolution of architectural pupillage which was formalised through establishment of the 1863 Examination in Architecture. In 2002 the RIBA awarded Oxford Brookes University an initial ten year franchise to deliver the RIBA Studio qualifications (then known as the RIBA Office-based Examination); this partnership was renewed in 2012 with continuation of the franchise agreement for a further ten years. The RIBA Studio qualifications meet the requirements of Article 46 of the EU Professional Qualifications Directive EC/2005/36. Its participants, although predominantly UK based, are located throughout the European Economic Area (EEA), Switzerland, Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

Contemporary response to the profession:
The programme syllabus, delivery and student work are regularly reviewed through PMC, PEC, Periodic review, ARB prescription and RIBA validation similar to other schools of architecture. Our academic agenda evolves to reflect the significant issues in our industry along with feedback from key partners including subject leads, personal tutors and office mentors, external examiners and importantly our students in practice.

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Who this programme is for:
This programme is for people who prefer to combine working in practice and continuing their education, and for those who would find full-time studies challenging due to financial, geographic or situational constraints. Students range from partners in architecture practices to new parents or those with family responsibilities. The aim is to enable students to pursue their life goals while becoming registered architects.

Geographic distinction & virtual accessibility:
Students live and work where they choose to, within the remit of RIBA Studio location requirements, including rural areas where there is no nearby university; while progressing in the profession. This makes this course perhaps the most accommodating route to registration even if also the most challenging given the high standards and reliance on student-led motivation. Facilitated by the emergence of a variety of online learning tools, online engagement with students serves to break the critical barriers of affordability, location and circumstance. Recent Covid-19 restrictions have encouraged complete remote access of the programme. Converting the limited number of face to face exchanges has served to increase participation on the courses between students and the RIBA Studio team as well as peer support exchanges.

Partnership with Personal Tutor:
The critical learning partner, chosen by the student, is the personal tutor who must also satisfy criteria set out by the RIBA Studio regulations. The focus of this pedagogic tutelage is on conceptual and academic work which contrasts with the work in practice where the student is employed. At its core the pedagogic exchange evolves student confidence to think beyond the making that occurs within practice. In particular they utilise the design project as a tool for research, design exploration and to showcase their learning. The Design subject lead has critical landmark points of engagement from brief interpretation until the final design examination overseeing this relationship.

Student-directed focus in academia:
In their studies most of the briefs for the four subjects areas (design, cultural context, technology , and professional studies) are conceptually framed to interpret ARB & RIBA criteria while also set to inspire and encourage students to decide on their own academic agendas which pique imaginative inquiry. The student has a full range of control and it is the reference point of their work with the tutor which is meant to enable this capacity.

Role of Office Mentors and practice:
Students elect to remain at the practice where they work or are free to seek work elsewhere depending on opportunities for a range of experiences. Students select an office mentor who will support their professional studies work and who will guide their progress towards registration from within their employing office. Mentors also significantly ensure that students have the study time and workload demand that compliments their studies. Mentors importantly also encourage students to

take advantage of the obvious connections with other consultants in practice with regards to their academic work.

Impact of academia on practice:
Practices look favourably on RIBA Studio students because of the evolving value they bring from their academic research work. Students also inspire long time employees to re-think and challenge themselves on new themes sparking conversation and fresh thinking in the firm. Students contribute to the important changes and adaptations taking place in areas of sustainability, material studies, life safety, heritage conservation among others. While their work experiences contribute to their studies, the academic excitement comes through in students being able to focus on other important matters that are also contemporary and globally relevant areas including the climate emergency; inequality and human rights issues; food poverty; autonomous and smart cities; mental health, physical well-being and ageing; refugees and integration; economics and social inequality; technical innovations, social mobility and inclusion among others. These theoretical studies inspire the academic project which has far reaching implications and which serves to expand their work in practice.

Subject Leads & Examiners; academic-practitioners:
Students submit work and receive feedback from respective subject leads. With design exams, students present to a combination of academic and practice-based architects. This group along with subject leads draw from people with a range of demographic and professional backgrounds.

Differences between the aims and outcomes of the first and second award levels:
Part 1 The programme challenges Part 1 students by requiring them to develop projects from a conceptual basis, to consider architecture in an expanded field, and to develop projects that might require a greater level of innovation in determining appropriate design and technological solutions. Students are required to develop awareness of architectural precedent, in particular through reference to contemporary projects and emergent ideas; to learn how to evaluate design projects including their own, being aware of their individual position in the sphere of architecture. There is an emphasis on expanding their methods of developing, testing and presenting ideas, placing high value on the design process. Emphasis is placed on the cultural context (history and theories of architecture) in which their proposals are made, along with the need to devise technological solutions that are appropriate to their design intent and outside their normative practice.

Part 2 students come from a range of backgrounds including Part 1 of this programme, and most frequently having completed a Part 1 degree in architecture at an academic institution. The dissertation is a key element in Part 2, enabling students to raise their cultural, technological or professional understanding of architecture and encouraging a culture of research based work. Students sit a formal written examination in professional studies. The final design project brief which students are

expected to critically reinterpret for their chosen context, is inherently complex and evaluated through more demanding assessment criteria which are defined by the higher level of Graduate Attributes assigned to Part 2. Students are encouraged to be speculative, critical, or even polemical in their project work, testing their own ideas about possibilities that can exist within the field of architecture and how this can be developed and subsequently communicated.

Demographic & professional diversity
In recent years RIBA Studio has seen an important shift in demographic and professional makeup of its student cohort groups. Where once the students on the programme were technologists seeking to enrol as architects, the cohort has become recognized as a viable route to registration in parallel with full time studies so that students are coming onto the Diploma course directly from a full time Part 1 course or seeking employment in the first instance in order to qualify to apply to the Certificate course. There is a strong gender balance of students on the programme. There is a strong conversion rate of our Part 2 graduates becoming registered architects, thus serving to counterbalance the immense disparity with the student statistics in full time education especially with regards to the ratio of women qualifying.

Affordability & opportunity is critical for widening access:
RIBA Studio course fees (under £3,000/a) and the forthcoming RIBA Foundation (under £1,500/a) are often paid for by the practice or in another affordable arrangement. The tutor fees are often paid too as part of a similar arrangement. Tutors and Mentors must satisfy specific criteria for approval. The programme incorporates timeschedule flexibility arrangements. Our staff and examiners inspire students by acting as role models across their own diverse backgrounds.

Responding to RIBA's Themes and Values for Architecture Education
Specific themes have been highlighted as a priority for the RIBA in response to contemporary national events and global phenomenon. As ever, this leadership is welcome and will be used to continue sharpening the syllabus and delivery. These themes have been fundamental principles and RIBA Studio will continue to address these real-life challenges as priorities.

Finally, the distinct merging of full time practice experience with the rigors of part-time academic study are the pillars upon which this programme prepares students for registration in the profession. While RIBA Studio may be one of the most challenging routes given the requirement to balance work, life and study, it has also proven to be one of the most viable.

10   Commendations
        The Board commends the following:
10.1   The quality of the course information, identifying its unique character and operation and the requirement for student self-direction. In particular the clarity on the assessment criteria, which was acknowledged by both

students and personal tutors as allowing them to benchmark their work against expectations.

10.2   The RIBA Studio team's enthusiasm in embracing the changing nature of the course, teaching methodologies and student needs and the strong ethic of review

10.3   The students' tenacity and drive to succeed in relation to their commitment to the profession.

11   Conditions
There are no conditions.

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 Course Team should continue to build upon the excellent work done in expanding the digital presence. This is clearly enabling the students to engage more fully with the course and with each other. Further extension of the digital platform should include additional opportunities for peer learning. For instance, this could include the creation of a digital repository for student generated resources, exemplar coursework with attainment against the criteria and even examples of the student experience.

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 Board advises that the RIBA Studio team stress to the students the importance of exploration at a range of different scales (GC5) and through different media and techniques of representation (GC3) and the need to clearly narrate their process within the design portfolio.

13.2   The Board advises that the RIBA Studio Team explore the opportunities that might arise if the RIBA Studio were to have transferrable Credits

13.3   The RIBA Studio team is advised to continue to monitor course delivery in relation to candidates' workload

14   Delivery of graduate attributes; criteria
14.1   The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met by the graduates of the RIBA Certificate in Architecture

14.2   The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met by the graduates of the RIBA Diploma in Architecture

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15.   Other information

15.1   Student numbers
The RIBA Certificate in Architecture: 38 enrolled
The RIBA Diploma in Architecture: 109 enrolled

15.2   Documentation provided
All documentation was provided as required by the RIBA Procedures for Validation.

16.   Notes of meetings
Copies of the minutes taken from the following meetings 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.

- 16.1   Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- 16.2   Meeting with students
- 16.3   Meeting with Dean
- 16.4   Meeting with external examiners
- 16.5   Meeting with tutors and mentors
- 16.6   Meeting with staff