
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to
London Metropolitan University**

Date of visiting board: 29-30 June 2017

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 20 September 2017

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 London Metropolitan University
 Central House
 59-63 Whitechapel High Street
 LONDON
 E1 7PF
- 2 Head of Architecture Group**
 Signy Svalastoga Head of Architecture
 Sandra Denicke-Polcher Deputy Head of Architecture
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**
 Part 1: BA (Hons) Architecture
 Part 2: Professional Diploma in Architecture
 Part 3: Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in
 Architecture, 24 months
- 4 Course leader**
 Jane McAllister Part 1
 Matthew Barac Part 2
 Gordon Maclaren Part 3
- 5 Awarding body**
 London Metropolitan University
- 6 The visiting board**
 Don Gray Academic & Chair
 Hannah Vowles Academic & Vice Chair
 Lucelia Rodrigues Academic
 Michael McQueen Academic
 Andy Bourne Practitioner + Part 3
 Greg Penoyre Practitioner + Regional Representative
 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.
- 8 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**
 At its meeting on the 20 September 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:
- Part 1: BA (Hons) Architecture**
Part 2: Professional Diploma in Architecture
Part 3: Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture, 24 months

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

Architecture graduates at The Cass are creative, practical and effective professionals who have embedded in them a latent understanding of how to bring their capacities to bear upon the task of being a citizen.

Cass Architecture is committed to the development of socially engaged forms of practice and to the transformative power of things that are made carefully and well across all scales. This 'duty of care' informs a rich variety of teaching agendas, our workshop culture and our practice network.

ETHOS

Our pedagogy is predicated on practice, on doing, thinking, drawing, making, talking and living architecture. Our student community is not elitist or precious about architecture, but continuously questioning how to do architecture, to listening and learning and to draw upon their intellect, their emotions and their intuition. In The Cass the students are surrounded by highly motivated staff – architects, artists, designers and other creative practitioners who are successful in their own fields of practice at the highest level. We feel that this is distinctive about The Cass and sets us apart from equally important but different Schools. It is maintained and renewed without diminishing the importance and role of the School's research agenda and intellectual self-examination.

Since the last Visiting Board awards have accrued to our teaching staff that cover many territories and all at the very highest level (Turner, Stirling, Spink), while others have won or been shortlisted for the AJ Building of the Year, Building Design AYA, YAYA and RIBA awards.

Student successes since the last Visiting Board include Silver Medal and Silver Commendations, Bronze Medal Commendations, Dissertation Medal Commendation and SOM Fellowships at the Presidents Medals. One Part 2 Graduate was also shortlisted for the inaugural European Young Talent in Architecture Award (YTAA), all of which provide further evidence of the excellence and breadth of our teaching.

Our graduate employment rate is very high as evidenced in our DHLE results (Part 1- 91.1%, Part 2- 96.9%, Part 3- 100%), and many of our recent graduates have formed successful emerging practices as featured, for example in the Architecture Foundation 'New Architects 3'(which includes ten practices formed by Cass graduates).

RICHNESS

Our student intake remains diverse and our offering is broad and committed to choice in units and studios, option modules and pathways, but we are united in the challenge of delivering stimulating and thoughtful learning opportunities. We have interpreted the Professional Criteria in a holistic and iterative manner in the Part 1 and Part 2 courses, and are not limiting our ambition to be compliant only.

Whilst our Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 Courses share a common agenda and ethos, the courses also have their own characteristics. We have chosen to organise the Technology and Critical & Contextual and Professionalisms teaching teams vertically, to ensure coherence and dialogue between the Courses. Similarly, we have Design teaching linked between the Extended Degree and First Year, First Year and UG Studios, and between some of the UG Studios and PG Units.

BA Architecture and Extended Degree comprise an academically and culturally very diverse group of students, with an emphasis on the teaching methodologies and agendas to promote curiosity, experiential and hands-on learning, carefully building up the students confidence, aptitude and competence both collectively and individually.

The Professional Diploma in Architecture, RIBA 2 enjoys the reputation as one of the leading Part 2 courses in the UK, attracting highly talented and committed students. Therefore, the strategic position of the Part 2 Course is more on the finesse and sophistication by which the students address complex issues, whilst increasingly taking ownership in curating their own education through choice of units and option modules.

The Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture, RIBA 3 also enjoys great reputation and students come through repeat recommendations from a great variety of leading practices/employers. Consequently we have been able to grow this course significantly since the last Visiting Board. The Architects 'Duty of Care' is again central to the ethos and delivery of the course and is based on the assumption that the professional knowledge employed by good architects is not reducible to 'added value', that it can be developed and shared through action and interaction.

RESOURCEFULNESS

Although we at The Cass are emerging from a brief but difficult time of change, we feel neither weakened nor diminished. The challenge has given us an opportunity to discover that we are in fact a more resilient and hardy School than we knew. There have been losses, but we find that we have been able to bounce back and regroup, and over time we may even discover that we have become stronger in the process. Our immediate challenge has been and will be that of consolidation. As we move the short distance to Calcutta House, our now redefined School will find itself under one big roof – a roof with a place for all the various subject areas and 'clusters' that together constitute The Cass, and also the Library, all the Workshops and the Student Hub.

This proximity will not compromise on space, indeed Cass Architecture will benefit from better Unit and Studio spaces, and from a gathering space (the atrium) that promises opportunities for social and public-facing activities as a continuity to what we built up in Central House. We will stay in Calcutta House until at least September 2020, which gives us time to develop and prepare for the eventual move to the Holloway Campus.

This sense of resourcefulness is evidenced in both the continuity and renewal of our Unit and Studio offer; two new Studios (Part 1) and two new Units (Part 2) in 2016-17, each of the highest level and attracting enormous enthusiasm

from our students. We had several more PhD completions building upon the legacy of Prof. Peter Carl who retired in 2016, having delivered a new culture of commitment to research with an emphasis on deep consideration to the give and take between the doing and the thinking of architecture; on practice and philosophy.

RELEVANCE

Our students are facing unprecedented pressure of student loans, cost of living and uncertain cultural, political, environmental and economic futures. Our 'duty of care' to the wider society, the environment, and the care of production are at the heart of how we engage with complex realities of contemporary society and try to improve it, wherever possible. We emphasise the testing and application of proposals in the context that made them. Students often work directly with users and clients through live projects, engage with social, economic and political structures, prototype elements of their buildings and in some cases build full scale buildings. In doing so our students develop a resilience, robustness and optimism necessary to both inhabit the landscape of contemporary practice and in many cases define new ones.

The RIBA Education Review is calling for Schools to develop proposals for offering an integrated professional framework 'the principal pathway' and the recent Apprenticeship Initiative. On the other hand the DCLG's review of architect regulation and the Architects Registration Board concluded in March 2017, that the ARB review of routes to registration should be put on hold until the UK leaves the EU, which would suggest that we are expected to retain the courses in their current form at least until 2020.

The nature of the Cass Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 courses, with the very strong relationships between teaching, practice, live projects etc. would be able to adjust to the new model(s) with relative ease, and we are starting the process of exploring the Cass model for the Integrated Framework.

Our exhibition *School/Work: Architectural Conversations between Pedagogy and Practice*, focused on the relationship between the theoretical world of university and the applied world of practice and making in architecture.

The exhibition was curated by Rita Adamo, a former architecture student at The Cass who recently curated the Invisible Architecture exhibition at Museo Carlo Bilotto in Rome, Italy.

Takero Shimazaki: "Teaching, researching and discussions with students mean that you keep restudying architecture, This inevitably has an important impact on what a practice can pursue. The dialogue with students shapes their projects and also gives us more focus on how the practice can influence wider society, architecture, landscape, cities and the built environment. It's an inspiring cycle."

Rita Adamo: "Each generation of architects is aware of its predecessors; at The Cass, the interaction between the generations invigorates both the established architect's work and the learning journey of the up-and-coming architects. The collection of selected works in this show will reveal this dialogue between tutors and students, demonstrating how highly these successful practices value their teaching."

The concern and engagement with the real world issues as described above does not preclude imaginative and irreverent proposals that question the various current orthodoxies of society and practice. The combination of our ethos, richness and resourcefulness are fundamental to the relevance of future

architects and architectural practice arising from the distinctive staff and student community at The Cass.

11 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The resilience and leadership demonstrated by the head, staff and students of the school of architecture in a period of intense change
- 11.2 The school continues to promote a strong ethos and spirit that cultivates constructible architecture combined with substantial social enquiry
- 11.3 The distinctive, provocative and successful Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in Architecture (Part 3)
- 11.4 The school “Celebration Week” that promotes architectural debate and the work of the school and students to the school community and a wider public

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 Enhance the usefulness of the external examination process by providing specific written responses back to external examiners
- 12.2 Course Committee Meeting minutes should “close the loop” by incorporating clear indication of actions agreed, individuals responsible and a timescale for resolution

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 recognizes the strong and positive relationship between studio accommodation and school culture. The Institution is therefore encouraged to:
 - Undertake a post-occupancy evaluation with staff and students following a year of occupation of Calcutta House to strengthen and enhance the learning environment
 - Explore opportunities to extend workshop opening hours to satisfy the demands of students and staff
- 13.2 Seize the opportunity of the imminent move to new accommodation to strengthen and enhance the culture and identity of the school in the look, feel and utility of the space
- 13.3 The school should actively encourage students to edit their portfolios to become more succinct and with less duplication

14 Delivery of academic position

The board felt that the position statement accurately reflected the ethos, direction and academic agenda of the school.

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 Parts 1 and 2

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 and Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates.

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 Parts 1 and 2

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 and Part 2 criteria were met by graduates.

Professional Criteria for Part 3

The Board confirmed that all Part 3 criteria were met by graduates.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers (2016-17)

BA(Hons) Architecture, RIBA 1: 245
Professional Diploma in Architecture, RIBA 2: 196
Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice in
Architecture RIBA 3: 153

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**