RIBA ⚜

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to Sheffield Hallam University

Date of visiting board: 10/11 November 2016
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 15 February 2017

RIBA

1 Details of institution hosting course/s **(report part A)**
Sheffield Hallam University
The Department of the Natural and Built Environment
City Campus
Howard Street
Sheffield
S1 1WB

2 Head of Department of Natural and Built Environment
Professor Norman Wienand
Head of Architecture Group
Andrew Wilson

3 Course/s offered for revalidation
BSc Architecture   **Part 1**
M Arch Architecture   **Part 2**

4 Course leader/s
Paul King   **Part 1**
Sam Vardy   **Part 2**

5 Awarding body
Sheffield Hallam University

6 The visiting board
Bob Brown   academic / chair
Ben Cowd   academic/ vice chair
Anthony Petrilli   practitioner
Mike Packham   co professional
Stephen Marshall   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 Proposals of the visiting board
On 15 February 2017 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated.

BSc Architecture (RIBA Part 1)
Master of Architecture (RIBA Part 2)

The next RIBA visiting board will take place in: 2021

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

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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
(Statement written by the school)

Learning, teaching and research at Sheffield Hallam School of Architecture pivots on three key themes - the environmental, the social and the vocational - seeking a meaningful position for the Architectural student within their nexus. Our culture is defined as student-centred, valuing pluralism and the development of the resourceful and creative individual facing multiple challenges, ideas and opportunities. We strive to create choice and freedom within a clear and coherent curriculum structure.

Whilst we see our provision as an integrated whole, we have formatted this appraisal to consider each of these three themes through Part 1 and Part 2 in their distinct and differentiated ways.

Environmental focus
Since its inception in 1999, the Part 1 course has pioneered architectural education with a distinct environmental ethos. Environmental considerations inform the design process in studio projects and drive the agenda for the non-studio modules across all three years of our Part 1 course. The need for low energy buildings, the study of microclimate, community, place-making, the internal environment, tectonics and architectural experience come together as a source of inspiration and creativity as well as forming a logistical framework.

Such seeds are sown from day one with our introductory 'learning by doing' project, to construct a woodland shelter using found materials and debris from the site. This project is hugely empowering to new students and opens minds to working with, as opposed to working against, the environment. These attitudes evolve to the point where final year projects require students to demonstrate progressive environmental thinking as the norm, from site analysis, urban and building design through to detailed spatial and fabric proposals.

Whilst a consideration of established passive design principles is both expected and encouraged throughout Part 2 the environmental focus is ambitiously broadened, to the point where merger with social and political agendas occurs. The core taught module 'Sustainable City Ecologies' in Year 5 stretches these boundaries and typically triggers the environmental underpinnings for the final year thesis questions and outcomes.

Social focus

We promote a people-centred and culturally relevant architecture and present a model of the architect as socially informed and responsible professional. Projects are located in real places, with real people, emanating from Sheffield at the outset but reaching out to explore the UK and into Europe.

Part 1 shifts emphasis from the individual to the collective, to community and the wider public across the three years. Year 2 addresses urbanism for people by linking studio to the cultural context module. Projects are typically located in the destination of the overseas trip, which visited Berlin in 2015 and will be in Barcelona in 2016. Final year projects seek out complex and topical agendas that are place specific. Themes of 'Community' in Ancoats, Manchester, and 'Spirituality' in Liverpool were explored in 2015. Brick Lane in London will be the context for 2016. Projects begin with students working in groups to build a body of cultural knowledge to preface their design work. The Part 1 is run in year groups but each student is given freedom to develop an individual project programme within a common theme. These typically generate intriguing and novel typologies for social institutions.

The part 2 MArch course extends awareness of the contexts of architectural production, engaging fully with the current social and political context of the design, production and use of cities. Creative mapping and a spatio-temporal design scenario are used to structure the students' analysis, observation, and proposition while locating their ideas in the social and cultural context of the place in which they are working.

Part 2 projects demonstrate visionary spatial and social-economic proposals that are rooted in a critical, rich and creative analysis of place. We encourage experimentation and exploration in Studio 4; sustainable urban theory and design in Year 5, and the use of rigorous socio-spatial scenarios and a creative integrated approach to professional practice in the Year 6 thesis. We always work closely with local organisations, residents and professionals, either in Sheffield in Studio 4 or further afield in the vertical ateliers. Netherlands was the location in 2015/16, with projects centred in Rotterdam, Delft and Utrecht.

An extension into the political is encouraged and this generates a rich array of projects in the ateliers, which are disseminated as widely as possible via group working. Notable projects have recently addressed Calais and the question of borders and immigration, Scotland and the question of independence and industry and Rotterdam and the question of housing crisis.

Vocational focus

The overarching focus for our provision is the vocational, an ambition that encompasses both the environmental and the social. By extension we see our mission as ethical. We seek to produce graduates who are aware, responsible and willing and able to make a positive difference to society. At both Part 1 and Part 2 level, we aim to deliver this through

fully integrated studio projects and the promotion of visionary, thought-provoking yet thoughtful and tangible architecture and place making.

There are inevitable differences in the priorities for professional awareness and engagement in the two awards. Part 1 graduates from SHU acquire a range of skills that prepare them well for practice. The environmental focus in itself sets them apart and this is highly valued. They receive a rigorous taught introduction to CAD and BIM and this too is valued prior to working in practice. Study alongside BSc Architectural Technology is beneficial in raising awareness and respect for fellow professionals and helping to blur boundaries at an early stage. Year 3 students visit practice and share experiences at a symposium alongside their Architectural Technology peers. The Year 3 Cultural Context module has also widened its scope to allow students to more closely appreciate architectural practice and new modes of working. This is in part to improve continuity from Part 1 to Part 2.

The Part 2 at SHU is overtly vocational and pioneering in its conception of valuing learning in practice alongside university, and addressing real challenges of finances and career trajectory for Architectural students. The MArch course employs an innovative structure that provides a stimulating learning experience where the opportunities as well as tensions between academia and practice can be explored. Students typically work 3 or 4 days per week in practice and attend university one day per week. Students demonstrate significant competencies in motivation, organisation and management to undertake the challenges of the course whilst working. In many cases, this enables students to tackle Part 3 soon after completing their course. Beginning with staff experience, and their practice networks, and reaching out to our links with regional and national practices and organisations, we encourage and support an on-going, rich dialogue within the school about the relationship and tensions between experiences of professional practice and the intellectual academic environment.

We explore the diversity of the contemporary (and future) roles of the architect in collective and collaborative scenarios and students are introduced to the notion of expanding practice, a strand of enquiry which explores future trajectories for architectural practice. Our network and dialogue with practice will get stronger, and with this the school aims to be a nexus between academia and practice. A 'Mapping Practice' workshop involving group work and discussions between part 1 and part 2 students took place in spring 2016. We are well placed to develop and deliver a 7 year integrated award by 2019.

11 Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The comradery evident in the student/staff relationship and the overall atmosphere within the school, and particularly the enthusiasm and support provided by the programme leaders.

11.2 The School's beginning engagement with city, region and regional schools of architecture.

11.3 The University's and Department's support of staff research activity and professional development.

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 visits. 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 recommends the School support students at Part 1 in exploring, documenting and celebrating their understanding of the alternative materials, processes and techniques that apply to architectural design and building construction, with particular emphasis on design processes. The Board recommends the School to support Part 2 students in exploring, documenting and celebrating their ability to evaluate materials, processes and techniques that apply to complex architectural designs and building construction, and to integrate these into practicable design proposals, with particular emphasis on design processes.

13.2 The Board recommends the School support students at Part 2 in developing critical understanding of how knowledge is advanced through research to produce clear, logically argued and original written work relating to architectural culture, theory and design.

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 Board advises the School to revisit its academic position statement and reconsider and update its delineation of the environmental as a key theme within the school

14.2 The Board advises the School to continue and enhance engagement with and celebration of the pursuit of new hypotheses and speculations in student work within the Part 2 programme.

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14.3   The Board advises the School to consider its engagement with other disciplines within the faculty (e.g., art and design, building surveying, construction and construction management). Concurrently, the Board advises the School to reconsider its engagement with the workshop facilities available for students, in order to enable more discursive/speculative work related to technology and environment.

14.4   The Board advises the School to reconsider its generosity of marking at the upper end of the marking band in Cultural Context modules in Year 2 and 3 of Part 1, and the following modules in Part 2: Social Regeneration and Community; Critical Study; and Sustainable City Ecologies.

14.5   The administration has a stated intention of supporting departmental / subject leaders (and by extension programme leaders) in taking greater autonomy in leadership decisions at the local level. In this context, the Board advises the departmental/subject/programme leaders to consider how they might be more proactive in the utilisation, (re)configuring and appropriation of space in order to give the School a greater physical and visible presence in the University on a permanent basis.

14.6   The Board advises the University to reconsider its space strategy for the School, both in terms of providing more space, and better quality of space relevant to the spatial needs of the School. Additionally, the University should consider its utilisation of space in order to give Architecture a greater physical and visible presence in the University, as warranted by a subject with growing student numbers and new programmes.

15   Delivery of academic position
The following key points were noted: see advice point 14.1

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.

Graduate Attributes for Parts 1 and 2
The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

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.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1 and 2
The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate critera were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

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18   Other information

18.1   Student numbers
Part 1 year 1 - 80
Part 1 year 2 - 32
Part 1 year 3 - 36

Part 2 year 4 - 15
Part 2 year 5 - 13
Part 2 year 6 – 8

18.2   Documentation provided
The School provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

Notes of meetings

*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**