RIBA

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University for the Creative Arts
Canterbury School of Architecture

Date of visiting board: 13 and 14 June 2019
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 19 September 2019

1   **Details of institution hosting course**
        UCA Canterbury
        New Dover Road
        Canterbury
        Kent
        CT1 3AN

2   **Head of School**
        Colin Holden

3   **Courses offered for validation**
        BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
        MArch, Part 2

4   **Course leaders**
        BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1 – Sam McElhinney
        MArch, Part 2 – John Bell

5   **Awarding body**
        University for the Creative Arts

6   **The visiting board**
        Professor Norman Wienand – Chair
        Paula Craft-Pegg – Vice Chair
        Patrick Monaghan
        Jonathan Braddick
        Lucia Medina Uriarte – student/graduate member

        Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance.

        Ilona Hay of the University of Hertfordshire attended to observe the RIBA
        validation process.

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 19 September 2019 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed
        unconditional validation of the following courses:

                BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
                MArch, Part 2

        The next full 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
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)

The Canterbury School of Architecture (CSA) has a history dating back to the 1860's as a philanthropic public arts and crafts educational institution. It received full recognition by the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1958 and today is part of the University for the Creative Arts (UCA). UCA is a specialist creative organization rooted in the Art School tradition, with an ambitious contemporary outlook. It has recently been recognized as Sunday Times Modern University of the Year 2019 and ranked as the leading creative specialist in the Complete University Guide 2020.

Our School has a distinctive approach to architectural education that originates in its Art School heritage, emphasising critical and engaged models of teaching, learning and research. We foster varied cultures of thinking and making that synthesise traditional hand drawing and making techniques with advanced digital media workflows. We believe that inter-relationships between processes and media provide important opportunities for the architectural imagination to invent and to be enacted. Our pedagogic approach situates such imaginative futures in clearly articulated critical understandings of the present.

CSA has a commitment to providing students with courses where they can develop process-based skills to act as future agents of spatial, social and ecological intervention. Through participation in an integrated programme of Design, Technology, Communications, Creative Practice and Cultural Context units, students develop the tools and skills to shape their own situated responses to architectural contexts and design problems. From the entry to the BA degree onward, we provide immersive studio cultures establishing key skills and aptitudes that allow students to view both courses and the wider school as a testing ground for architecture and spatial design. As students progress through the Part 1 course, they are encouraged to critically question models of spatial practice, in order to take positions in relation to the contemporary condition of the city and society. We encourage our students to behave as activist citizens rather than as passive consumers; to take responsibility for all aspects of their projects' objectives and aims, their iterative development and ultimately their transformative dissemination and use. Our students learn how to test action by commencing at the scale of the body, and then by considering the immediate experiences of the urban spaces of Canterbury. They subsequently progress to consider the complex landscapes and fringe ecologies of our East Kent locality, before eventually engaging with international horizons and agendas. The Part 2 course continues this trajectory starting with an examination of infrastructure and macro regional conditions, with students framing their own Design Research agendas in the context of studio themes. The course begins with a live

competition to encourage interaction with the wider profession, before students join an elective unit system where each unit proposes a distinct research agenda. In both the Part 1 and Part 2 courses, students explore the relations between individual citizens and community groups as users of architecture, alongside critical awareness of the wider issues and forces acting upon the city itself. Such process-based knowledge frames a series of projects, covering small, medium and large buildings and their potentials to act as catalysts for change.

A particular strength of our school is its diverse student body and the level of achievement of our BAME students. In 2017/18 one third of students in the school came from low participation backgrounds (POLAR4), and on the BA Architecture BAME students (including international) outperformed all students by 2%. The latter is unusual across the Creative Arts sector, which shows a significant underperformance of BAME attainment to white attainment.

All of our courses are committed to equality of opportunity. We select students by folio and individual interview, taking a 360-degree view of the applicant, rather than relying on simple metrics. Students and teaching staff together curate inclusive spaces for learning, blending inquiry-based learning, discussion and debate and structured learning-by-doing. We support individual learning needs from the outset, with the pedagogic approach concentrating on core skills, before moving incrementally towards an explicitly student-centred approach, enabling each student to develop both an individual voice and also process based abilities as an architect. Our strategy has been influential in achieving excellent results from BAME students, where on the BA and MArch they have outperformed the respective cohort means over the last two years.

CSA is further characterised by the strong connections it has forged with practitioners locally, regionally and nationally. We have built a comprehensive network of diverse sessional staff practitioners as valued colleagues and integral members of the teaching team. In 2018/19 approximately 50% of teaching on the prescribed courses was delivered by such staff, extending the reach and influence of current professional practice deep within the school. Our commitment to equality of opportunity recognises the importance of providing strong role models for diverse cohorts and this is reflected in our sessional team, invited guests and critics and local networks. We provide a local hub for the RIBA Canterbury branch, regularly hosting their meetings and evening lectures within our building.

Our combined student and staff teams have engaged with external communities such as local arts and community organisations, regional development agencies and international industry partners. All of our activities consciously face outwards to the world and engage diverse audiences through exhibitions, publications, collaborations and a strong public programme of lectures and events, including our continuing 'MULTISTORY' evening lecture series. Such a focus has inspired student-led initiatives to think more widely about the profession and possibilities to shape it. An example of this is the MArch students film 'Building Her Story', a project that invited shared experiences of female construction industry professionals.

CSA is situated in a dedicated, purpose-designed building that provides a strong sense of subject and personal identity. Our Art School campus provides a supportive wider environment where students can make work in and between the various studio spaces, workshops and the internal and external public spaces. We share a characteristic concern with thinking through making and materiality, pursued across all levels of study in our studios and extensive workshops, fully supported by expert technical teams. Our TrakLab and FabLab, initiated and developed by the school, have set a high standard in the wider institution, giving opportunities for advanced digital media exploration and production.

Our graduates will face major societal and ecological challenges in their future lives and careers. Both Part 1 and 2 courses provide skills for analysis, design and fabrication in conjunction with tactics and strategies of advocacy, activism and entrepreneurship. The approach the school continues to develop equips students with independence of thought, as well as the ability to work collaboratively and collectively as effective and successful future practitioners.

11.   Commendations

11.1   The Board acknowledges and supports the School's inclusive approach to student admissions and its success in nurturing rounded and well-prepared students through its links with practice and the professional studies modules.

11.2   The Board commends the School for taking full advantage of its location to ground Part 1 year 1 and 2 students' work in local cultural and geographic contexts. Furthermore, the continuing exploration and development of 2D and 3D representation and fabrication skills reinforce the art school identity across both Part 1 and Part 2.

11.3   The Board commends the School's ability to produce confident and articulate students who are highly appreciative of both academic and technical staff support.

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 mapping of environmental design and technology criteria across multiple units in the MArch to promote creative and speculative opportunities for the students. The School should review how this is delivered through the unit briefs and evidenced in the students' portfolios and major projects.

13.2   The Board notes the continued improvement regarding integration of technology generally into the project work at Part 1. However, compliance with all aspects of GC9 (9.1, 9.2 and 9.3) should be more clearly and

holistically demonstrated throughout the design project development and final output.

13.3 The School should ensure that adequate resource is made available to lead the teaching and assessment of GC9 across both validated courses.

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 School is encouraged to establish formal communication links with the student body to maintain a positive learning experience during the current period of structural change within the staff body.

14.2 The School is encouraged to be more explicit about assessment criteria for technology in project assessments to ensure clarity and understanding for all students.

14.3 The Board reiterates the 2014 Board's advice encouraging the School to establish more formal links with other disciplines on the campus to take greater advantage of the opportunities for collaboration and sharing.

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.

15.1 BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met by all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

15.2 MArch, Part 2
The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met by the graduates of the MArch programme.

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.

16.1 Please see Action Points 13.2 and 13.3 for remarks about GC9.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers
BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1 - 220
MArch, Part 2 - 47

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

18. Notes of meetings
The following minutes will not form part of the published report but will be made available by the RIBA on request. The full set of notes will be issued to the next full visiting board.

- Meeting with budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with head of institution
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with staff

Canterbury confirmed report – for publication