

Report of the RIBA visiting board to The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Date of visiting board: 15, 16 & 17 December 2021
Confirmed by the RIBA: 1 June 2022

1 Details of institution hosting courses

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
AIT Building
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong SAR, China

2 Director and Professor

Professor Hendrik Tieben

3 Courses offered for validation

Bachelor of Social Science (Architectural Studies) BSSc (AS), RIBA part 1
Master of Architecture (MArch) RIBA part 2

4 Programme Leaders

Part 1 (BSSc) Professor Patrick Hwang
Part 2 (MArch) Professor Peter Ferretto.

5 Awarding body

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

6 The visiting board

Professor Sally Stewart (Chair)
Dr Sara Biscaya (Vice Chair)
Luke Murray
Christine Bruckner - regional representative

Dr Jenny Russell – Director of Education – in attendance

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.

The procedures were adapted to allow the board to function remotely.

All requirements for documentation and portfolio samples were exactly as for a physical visiting board but viewed remotely.

All timetabled events took place as for a physical board but remotely.

8 Proposals of the visiting board

On 1 June 2022 the RIBA confirmed continued validation of the following courses:

- Bachelor of Social Science (Architectural Studies) BSSc (AS), *RIBA part 1*
- Master of Architecture (MArch) *RIBA part 2*

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)

Who we are

The School of Architecture at CUHK has significantly contributed to the discipline in the region. Since its founding in 1991, the School has established a reputation for well balanced, highly skilled graduates that are motivated team workers, sought out by the local architectural practices. The Vice Chancellor's pledge to "provide a learning environment for the students to become competent professionals" has certainly been achieved.

The location of the School within the Faculty of Social Science was visionary – and herein lies the mission and future direction of the School – for never before has the need to reinforce its connection to the needs of society been more urgent. It is imperative to propose interdisciplinary solutions to the problems faced by contemporary society and this puts creative thinking – that lies at the heart of architectural design – into new contexts and ever broadening horizons of operation. We will meet this challenge by carefully building onto the professional relevance of our foundations, by connecting teaching to our research and by putting architectural design thinking at the heart of all we do.

We are a diverse body of students and scholars, committed to all levels of learning in architecture - from the first year of the University's general education, through the two professional programmes, to a diverse range of PhD topics and postgraduate courses in urban design. We look outwards, we are eager to connect our courses to cogent disciplines, the profession, to the communities of our cities and places we live. We welcome international exchange and global perspectives.

Our School benefits from its situation in a collegiate university and from its dedicated building where we have expansive studios, exhibition spaces, a dedicated library, a digital lab and wood workshops. There is a vibrant student society and graduation committee. We bring students together for external lectures, we celebrate graduating cohorts - we create a sense of community that benefits from that of our alumni, visiting experts, critics, and our doctoral students who assist in the learning experience.

We balance diversity of interpretation with clarity of focus and intention, aiming to:

- bring the profession, teaching and research together

- put architectural design at the heart of all we do
- connect architectural design to society
- underpin design with our research
- internationalise student experience
- celebrate drawing media, making, materials, the technologies and crafts of place creation
- embrace cross-disciplinarity and intermedial approaches to design

Our Courses

Our professionally accredited courses have been re-evaluated, and re-mapped to better articulate delivery of professional criteria through learning outcomes. Building on an existing curriculum that is considered one of the most rigorous and competent in Asia, the *CUHK:ARCHITECTURE 2020 Revamp* responds to internal, external critical review and quality enhancement initiatives. The revamped curriculum spans both BSSc and MArch programmes. It conceives architectural education as an episodic journey that starts with Exploration (of ideas, of skills, of knowledges, of crafts and technologies), Integration (of those knowledges with the ideas of site and place) and finally Innovation (through the connection with research). *Revamp* aims at creating a world class environment for learning that nurtures its students with an inquisitive mind, through processes of critical questioning and design explorations in interrelated design studios, seminars and lecture-based courses. Our new programmes aim to better prepare our students for the changing terrain of future architectural practice.

The undergraduate studio sequence encourages creative inquiry, exposing the students to a wide variety of processes. They come to understand the societal, political, legislative, regulatory and technical challenges of architecture. They connect architectural design to ethics. Most importantly, our students learn to think critically. They are highly creative graduates, technically skilled and culturally informed, able to synthesise knowledge and deliver human-focused design solutions for tomorrow's world.

The required courses at undergraduate level are organised through the analysis of case-studies that bridge across humanities, technologies, and communication studies. We celebrate the things architects do and make, as embodiments of many forms of knowledge: we explore the technologies, cultures and histories of our discipline through a focused examination of works of architecture.

This reorganised programme mirrors professional development in other disciplines by intensifying skill and knowledge apprehension in the early years which thereby creates time to reflect on application of this knowledge and the complexities of integrated place-making by Year 4. This weighting also allows students to define their own topical interest during the second half of Year 3 and Year 4 via a broad selection of focused electives relating to contemporary practice and faculty research areas. As a result, students will evidence professionally accredited learning outcomes in a comprehensive academic portfolio and develop areas of personal or particular interest: our graduates will have an understanding of specialist as well as fundamental knowledge of the discipline.

Around a third of our undergraduate students progress to our Master of Architecture (MArch), a two-year programme focused on design innovation and connected to specialised research. The MArch programme stresses the importance of architecture as a humanistic discipline. Students engage in spatial practices that address the physical, social and environmental conditions of urban and rural territories.

MArch Studios are structured as two year-long projects, organised into ‘vertical’ studios where students learn from their peers and work collaboratively. The projects are keyed to the School’s research directions and benefit from a balance of academic agendas and studios led by practice-based research. All studios are clustered around three themes: *social/sustainability* (spatial agency, heritage, self-build, community design, public participation, adaptive architecture, disaster relief, sustainable construction, open architecture, rural architecture, social inequality); *technology/craftsmanship* (lightweight tensile structures, computational and integrated design, mass customisation, building information modeling, parametric and algorithmic design, environmental technologies, robotics, rapid prototyping, fabrication technology); *environments/culture* (climate change, ecological urbanism, productive environments, resilient communities, cultural histories, philosophies, narrative space, material imagination, perception and sensorial experience, design anthropology). The intellectual direction of the studios is supported by two required courses: *Architectural Theory and Criticism*, the vehicle for dissertation delivery; and *Urban History and Theory*, that addresses the history and fundamental theory of urban planning. We have introduced a Technical Report - integrated into a final project report - into the studio to encourage students to ground their design thinking with an understanding of technologies.

Advanced Building Systems I and II are designed to reinforce our commitment to professional excellence in the MArch community. Together, these courses equip students with an understanding and literacy of building systems and an understanding of how architects coordinate with a team of consultants and specialists. They enable and evidence students’ ability to design comprehensive and integrated design projects, covering all statutory compliance regulations and codes. This then combines with *Professional Practice and Management* to cover all aspects of statutory control for the design, construction and completion of buildings in Hong Kong. The integrated MArch programme connects our research to the profession through design innovation.

Students and teachers in the Architecture Programmes benefit from the School’s extended scope resulting from the launch of the BSSc in Urban Studies and the MSc of Urban Design Programmes in 2012, substantially enriching the choice of courses and enabling us to tackle more complex built-environment issues through cross-disciplinary research and outreach activities.

11 Commendations

- 11.1 The Board commends the School’s commitment to develop both physical and digital facilities supporting studio learning, making and fabrication, testing, and modelling. This includes the ongoing consideration of how best to support studio practices during the ongoing and extended pandemic.

- 11.2 The Board commends the School for undertaking the Architecture REVAMP 2020 as a means to reflect on and enhance the curricula of both the BSSc and MArch programmes.

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 School should pursue and interrogate the outcomes of the REVAMP 2020 in order to reflect on its successes and identify the next stages of a continuous process to better meet its potential.
- 13.2 The School should ensure that the External Examiners have access to content across all modules in order to have a comprehensive overview of student attainment at each level, and to allow the School to have confidence that there are robust systems in place ensuring that all graduating students meet the General Criteria and Graduate Attributes at Part 1 and Part 2
- 13.3 The School should review the academic position statement to better align with the School's ambition and ethos, and to identify, with confidence, the differentiation and distinctiveness that the MArch units allow.
- 13.4 The School should better articulate how their location within a Social Sciences context informs and frames their ethos, behaviours, teaching, and research, in order to make this clear to both internal and external audiences.
- 13.5 The School should ensure that technological aspects including structure, construction, environmental design, and tectonics are integrated within the MArch advanced design studios to amplify the exploration and realization of each unit's aims and objectives.

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 that the School identify subject leads to provide strategic leadership and overview to the progression of each subject area throughout Part 1 and Part 2.
- 14.2 The Board advises the School to consider using the RIBA Graduate Attributes at Part 1 and Part 2 to develop GA's for the two programmes to better distinguish between the demands and expectations on students at all levels.

- 14.3 The School should recognize their existing commitment and practices in social sustainability and community engagement as powerful tools for social change, and consider how it may intensify this through engagement with the UN Sustainable Development Goals to better articulate its distinctiveness and expertise in this area.
- 14.4 The Board advises the School to consider any differentiation between the learning outcomes within studio units in Years 5 & 6, and articulate this within programme documentation.
- 14.5 The board advises the School to consider where MArch students are given the opportunity to provide a critical self-reflection in their academic portfolio to evidence critical judgement and effectiveness in communication to support their ongoing professional development.

15 Delivery of graduate attributes

The Board confirmed that both the BSSc and MArch programmes met the graduate attributes.

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.

All criteria were considered to have been met.

17 Other information

17.1 Student numbers

BSSc – 203
MArch - 133

17.2 Documentation provided

The School provided all documentation as required by the RIBA Validation Procedures.

18 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.

- Meeting with the Head of School/Budget Holder/Course Leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the Head of Institution
- Meeting with External Examiners
- Meeting with staff