
Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board to the Architectural Association

**Date of visiting board: 22-23 October 2020
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 06 January 2021**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** (report part A)

Architectural Association School of Architecture
Architectural Association
34-36 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3ES
 - 2 Senior Management Team**

Michael Weinstock	Chair of the Academic Committee
Mark Morris	Head of Teaching and Learning
Belinda Flaherty	Registrar
 - 3 Course/s offered for validation**

Part One: The Architectural Association Experimental Programme (three years full-time)

Part Two: The Architectural Association Diploma Programme (two years full-time)

Part Three: The Architectural Association Professional Practice & Practical Experience Examination.
 - 4 Awarding body**

Architectural Association School of Architecture
 - 5 The visiting board**

Jenny Russell	chair / academic
Sally Stewart	vice chair / academic
James Lai	practitioner
Virginia Rammou	academic
Daniel Goodricke	academic
Sophie Bailey	RIBA validation manager
 - 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); this document is available at www.architecture.com.
 - 7 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**

On the 06 January 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:

Part One: The Architectural Association Experimental Programme (three years full-time)

Part Two: The Architectural Association Diploma Programme (two years full-time)

Part Three: The Architectural Association Professional Practice & Practical Experience Examination

The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2025.

8 Academic position statement (Statement written by the school)

Post visit note: The visiting board of 2020 recommended that the School revise its academic position statement (action point 11.1). The following statement was incorporated into the report in March 2022.

Founded as an independent school, the Architectural Association remains fiercely so 175 years later. The principles and purposes on which the AA was originally conceived, by students and for students with 'good trust in self-reliance', were intended to provide a place where they may associate freely with each other to carry on as a school of architecture.

The AA provides a place where all may speak freely and be heard. It is democratically organised and provides the intellectual and material resources for individual and collective choices around research and design experimentation, a place where students and tutors formulate their own arguments and positions, and develop and present their bodies of work.

The AA is where the imminence of the future is arrayed against the current consensus and assumptions predicated on the past. Its collective project is the development of future architects and their education, to seek new formulations of architecture as myriad practices that engage with the challenges and cultures of the world not only as it is, but as it might become.

Research at the AA is undertaken out of personal enthusiasm, professional interest, and collaborative support; and is integral to every unit, lecture and seminar. It is supported internally by a residence programme, research publications fellowship, AA publications and exhibitions, the Higher Education Academy fellowship, staff-initiated conferences and lecture series, and externally through staff-led grants and collaborations.

Since its founding, the AA has benefited from its direct engagement with the profession, celebrating the role of practitioners as teachers. Questioning and redefining the nature of practice and how to practice in the future is an integral part of the AA's academic position.

These aspirations – a student-led institution with a duty to the public – are at the core of the AA.

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

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- 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 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 The board commends the staff and students for their wholehearted engagement in the virtual process of RIBA revalidation, within the context of the Covid pandemic.
- 10.2 The board commends the efforts and dedication of the senior management team and recognises all that they have undertaken and achieved regarding TDAP and as a response to the pandemic. In particular, the board acknowledges the proactive response to supporting the mental wellbeing of staff and students during this time.
- 10.3 The board commends the school's continued pursuit of ensuring a democratic structure and culture, which enables students to identify their own position within the context of architecture and the built environment.

11 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.

- 11.1 The school should write an academic position statement which aligns and communicates the overall philosophy of the school and narrates a clear vision for the future, in the understanding that this is integral to the overall RIBA report and will be published online. *[Post-visit note: a revised statement was received and is the one incorporated above].*
- 11.2 Following the school's recent success in achieving TDAP, the board strongly recommends that the school continue to review and refine their academic regulations and practices in relation to the QAA and the Subject Benchmark. In particular, this should include the consideration of the processes of moderation and formative and summative feedback to students. The school should ensure that these processes are communicated clearly to the wider staff and student bodies.
- 11.3 The board recognises the size of the staff body, in particular the number that come from practice and strongly recommend that the school considers how they can be supported in understanding and implementing the pedagogic and academic procedures of the school.

12. Advice

The visiting board offers the following advice to the Department on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

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- 12.1 In light of the specific unit-based nature of the programmes, the board advises the school consider developing a means for students to reflect on their own academic journey to acknowledge both how they meet the professional criteria and how they position themselves within the wider context of architecture.
 - 12.2 The board advises that the senior management team continue to develop a process of succession planning and academic career progression, to ensure that the robust knowledge and understanding of the current team is not compromised in the event of absence.
 - 12.3 The board advises that the process of external examining is reviewed in order to ensure that the scale of the sample available to examiners allows a more rigorous interrogation of student work.
 - 12.4 The board advises the school to consider how candidates from widening participation backgrounds can be supported to consider the school as a viable destination for undergraduate study. This may include articulation with the foundation course and the development of outreach.
 - 12.5 The board advises the school consider what mechanisms it may develop to support critical self-reflection and enhancement given its situation as a small specialist institution focused on the discipline of architecture.

13 Delivery of academic position
Please see action point 11.1

14 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 & 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Architectural Association Experimental Programme and the Architectural Association Diploma Programme.

15 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 & 2 and Professional Criteria at part 3

The Board confirmed that all the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the Architectural Association Experimental Programme and the Architectural Association Diploma Programme. The Board confirmed that all the Professional Criteria at part 3 were

met by graduates of the Architectural Association Professional Practice & Practical Experience Examination.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers

Part One: The AA Intermediate Examination (ARB/RIBA Part 1) (three years full-time) 2019-20 cohort: 306 students

Part Two: The AA Final Examination (ARB/RIBA Part 2) (two years full-time) 2019-20 cohort: 248 students

Part Three: The AA Professional Practice & Practical Experience Examination: 82 students (Autumn 2019 cohort: 38 students; Spring 2020 cohort: 44 students)

16.2 Documentation provided

The faculty provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

17 Notes of meetings

These notes 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 next full visiting board.**

- Budget holder and course leaders
- Online learning and teaching/resourcing
- Students
- Senior Management Team
- External examiners
- Staff