
Royal Institute of British Architects

report of the RIBA Exploratory Board

to

Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade

Bachelor of Architecture (3 years full time)

Master of Architecture (2 years full time)

Date of visiting board: 5 and 6 November 2014

report confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 11 February 2015

Faculty of Architecture
University of Belgrade
Bulevar Kralja Aleksandra 73/II
Belgrade 11000
Serbia
web: <http://www.bg.ac.rs/en/>

Introduction

The board wishes to thank the Faculty of Architecture, University of Belgrade for their invitation to consider their Bachelor of Architecture and Master of Architecture courses in architecture for RIBA candidate course status. The board is very grateful to the staff and students of the school for their work in preparing a comprehensive range of portfolios and well-presented exhibition of work at both levels of the programme, together with making the logistical arrangements for the board's visit.

1 Course/s offered for candidate course status

- Bachelor of Architecture (3 years full time)
- Master of Architecture (2 years full time)

Name of awarding bodies

University of Belgrade

Dean of Faculty

Professor Dr Vladan Đokić

Vice Dean, International Affairs

Professor Branko Pavić

2 Members of the exploratory board

Derek Cottrell	(chair of visiting board: head of architecture, University of Lincoln)
Professor Paul Jones	(vice chair: head of architecture, Northumbria University)
Negar Mihanyar	(practitioner member: Hawkins\Brown)
Sophie Bailey	(RIBA Validation Manager: observer)
Professor David Gloster	(RIBA Director of Education: reporter to visiting board)

3 Procedures and criteria for the visit

The exploratory board was carried out under the current revision of *RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria*, effective from September 2011. For more information see www.architecture.com.

4 Recommendations of the exploratory board

The board was invited by the University of Belgrade to consider its 5 year programme for the award of candidate course status, and equivalence to RIBA part 1 and part 2; part 1 is considered to be the first cycle of teaching and learning leading to an undergraduate Bachelors award (and in the EU context usually equates to 3 years full time study). RIBA part 2 is usually understood as a further 2 years full time study. The designation 'candidate course for recognition' implies that the programme is considered to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria and achieve full validation, if implemented as anticipated.

The board's recommendation was endorsed by the New Courses Group in January 2015.

At its meeting on 11 February 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed

- That Candidate Course Status for Part 1 be awarded to the Bachelor of Architecture programme, 3 years full time
- The Candidate Course Status for Part 2 be awarded to the Master of Architecture 2 years full time.

The RIBA Education Committee also approved the Board's recommendation that a full visiting board consider the programme for initial validation and full RIBA recognition of equivalence to part 1 and part 2 at a date in 2015-16 to be agreed. This will allow the department time to consider the action points recommended by the exploratory board, and a full visiting board to consider the work of the graduating cohort of the academic year 2014-15.

5 Commendations

- 5.1 the strong and sustained culture of research and scholarship in the Faculty achieved through the diversity of teaching inputs, and reflected in the articulate expression of the serious academic intentions underpinning all levels of the courses and programme
- 5.2 the desire of the Faculty to positively reposition itself in the national, regional, and international context through design studio and research outputs which will have unilateral credibility and appeal to future students, researchers, and academic staff inside and outside Serbia
- 5.3 the commitment of both staff and students to a creative agenda for design, particularly well expressed in model making and other 3D work supporting studio design projects
- 5.4 the development of an excellent Faculty website as both a source of information to students and staff, and promotional vehicle for architecture nationally and regionally
- 5.5 the evolving programme of international visiting presenters, exhibitors, and critics, promoting critical thinking about architecture both nationally and regionally

6 Action points

The chair of the visiting board emphasised that the comprehensive list of action points which follow are intended as constructive proposals to the University of Belgrade for enhancing academic standards and student experience. The chair also pointed out that, whilst an exploratory board forms as comprehensive a view of students' work as possible in the time available, the full RIBA visiting board will be yet more rigorous when considering students' work and academic portfolios against the General Criteria and Graduate Attributes.

Detailed preparation for the full board is thus vital; a sample of academic portfolios and the format for the exhibition will be agreed in advance of the visit. As for the exploratory visit, the academic portfolio contains *all* the assessed work produced by a student for an academic year. Again, accompanying the sample of folios for the full visit, comprehensive transcripts of all registered students in rank order should be provided to clarify performance standards across cohorts at each and every level.

The action points fall into two categories; i) organisational and pedagogical issues and ii) commentary against the RIBA Graduate Attributes for part 1 and part 2, and the RIBA General Criteria.

The first category is summarised below:

6.1 Faculty structure and departmental roles; integrated architectural design

Although not a complete inhibition to student enquiry, there is evidence of tensions between the concerns of the three departments of Architecture, Architectural Technology, and Urban Planning. Despite the opportunities academic staff from all three departments have for framing briefs together, the administrative separation of the delivery of these curricular strands, each of which informs the development of architecture appropriate to a place, culture, and function, is an obstacle to students resolving design studio projects in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

- the Faculty is strongly recommended to fundamentally review its structural/departmental organisation, with the aim of producing a single integrated curriculum aimed at graduating holistic designers

6.2 Architecture department

Referring back to point 6.1, at the highest end of achievement at M level, there were projects providing evidence of sophisticated conceptualisation, good understanding of the histories and theories underpinning architectural design, and genuine formal invention. However, the limited demonstration of detailed structural and constructional resolution of some projects resulted in a sense that the potential of students' design aspirations was not being fully realised.

With respect to **Graduate Attribute GA2.3: ability to evaluate materials, processes and techniques that apply to complex architectural designs and building construction, and to integrate these into practicable design proposals**, the following is to be considered:

- the M9 project is to include a detailed review of technological precedents, including an improved representation through drawings and models of the project's materiality, its structural, constructional, and environmental agenda, and key strategies for resource efficient and sustainable design

With respect to **General Criterion GC6: understanding of the profession of architecture and the role of the architect in society, in particular in preparing briefs that take account of social factors**, the following is to be considered:

- the strong interest in architectural and urban morphology and typology throughout the programme was both noted and commended by the board, but it is strongly recommended that design briefs include more reference to, and proactive strategies for, communities and those living within them

With respect to **General Criterion GC10: the necessary design skills to meet building users' requirements within the constraints imposed by cost factors and building regulations**, the following is to be considered:

- although the spatial and formal exuberance of many schemes was commendable, normative projects also clearly have their place in the urban fabric; in both cases however, it is important students are provided with course material allowing them to acknowledge project finance as a key resource to manage, and to express this in the final presentations for projects at both semester 6 and semester 10.

6.3 Architectural Technology department

Referring back to point 6.1, the board considered the rigour of architectural technology inputs to the programme vital to students' understanding of the tectonic and material realisation of architecture. However, there was evidence in some portfolios at Masters level of an overdependence on technical resolution of the project at the expense of creative architectural design. With respect to **Graduate Attribute GA2.1: ability to generate complex design proposals showing understanding of current architectural issues, originality in the application of subject knowledge and, where appropriate, to test new hypotheses and speculations**, the following is to be considered:

- significantly more evidence in Masters level design studio projects that students are aware of the complex contemporary discourse in architecture, and are testing their own position within this through the vehicle of integrated design

6.4 Urban Planning department

Referring back to point 6.1, the board was encouraged by the depth and breadth of students' understanding of what urban design constituted, and how this was communicated in design studies and projects making proposals for contemporary civic space. However, with respect to **Graduate Attribute GA2.1: ability to generate complex design proposals showing understanding of current architectural issues, originality in the application of subject knowledge and, where appropriate, to test new hypotheses and speculations**, and **General Criterion GC5: understanding of the relationship between people and buildings, and between buildings and their environment, and the need to relate buildings and the spaces between them to human needs and scale** the following is to be considered:

- there is an urgent need for better demonstration in design studio projects of theories of place and place making, and the evidence in drawings, modelling, and simulation media of the range of modern means of contextual analysis

6.5 Course structure and module design; responsibilities for coordination

To encourage the progressive process of curricular modernisation, the board recommends that more responsibility for the development of academic modules is devolved to module coordinators. Each module needs to be carefully analysed and refined with a view to better integration of the intellectual, practical, and professional strands of the architecture curriculum, a reduced number of assessments for students, and larger aggregations of credits

6.6 Digital and analogue technologies for design and fabrication; on site workshops

Despite limited financial resources, students have developed an inventive and very diverse range of model making techniques; the board was impressed by this work. However, with the evidence of this in mind, it is clear that the architecture programme can now develop in a direction where the entire Faculty is defined as a contemporary workshop.

The board therefore strongly recommends that investment in workshop facilities allowing medium and large scale design, production, and manufacture is investigated in the short and medium term. This will enable students to qualify and support graduation level design proposals with materials handling and technological investigations realised on campus. There should be ample scope offered for an inclusive analogue and digital production, with both traditional and emergent materials represented.

6.7 Critical thinking and design based research; extended structured writing

The board commended the serious approach to the conceptualisation of architecture, and the developed use of research terminology to define the various curricular areas. However, there was an apparent contradiction in that, at Masters level, the M9 project was accompanied only by a design report. Whilst this attempted to place the completed design studio project in a proper theoretical context, it was clear from conversations with both research staff and students there can be better understanding of research methodology throughout the programme, and especially at Masters level to inform the substance and content of the final design studio projects. Equally, this can facilitate graduates who are considering joining the university's PhD programme – and may then continue a professional career in research.

The board recommends the Faculty consider the introduction of an item of extended, structured writing at Masters level (i.e. a dissertation) that will give students a vehicle to investigate an area of personal interest separate from their other submissions; it will also facilitate better understanding of research sources, methodologies, referencing, and literature searches.

6.8 Assessment procedures; internal moderation and external examinations

Whilst students were satisfied that they received adequate feedback on their work, they expressed the view that their choice of studio was sometimes driven by a concern for grades, rather than overall educational criteria. Although accepted that this may be an exaggeration, the board strongly recommends the immediate implementation of a semesterly internal review process, whereby marks across all studios can be discussed and reviewed by all studio staff to ensure parity in outcomes. Staff from other curricular areas should also be invited to contribute their perspective. For all three departments, it is recommended that the moderation be led by a member of the Architecture department.

The board also recommends the implementation of an external examination system.

6.9 Reducing administration and bureaucracy; reducing submissions

The board is aware that there is good administrative support for the programme, but was concerned that the large number of assessment points was both burdensome to students, and militated against a properly reflective and self-critical attitude to the work they were completing. Each academic module thus needs to be carefully analysed and refined, with a

view to better integration of the intellectual, practical, and professional strands of the architecture curriculum, and a larger aggregations of credits.

6.10 Engaging all staff with transitional arrangements; micro and macro scales

The timing of the RIBA visit is clearly coincident with an ongoing transition in the culture and operation of the Faculty; it is understood that this process is politically sensitive, and that change management is always likely to be a concern for academic staff. The board recommends that to mitigate some of the inevitable problems with curricular modernisation, the faculty forms small consultative groups at both Bachelors and Masters levels; these groups should include student representatives. These consultative groups will meet regularly, and relay progress on curricular and programme redesign to both academic colleagues and the student community.

7 Consideration of course content against validation criteria

The chair of the board emphasised that RIBA validation is an evidence based process; material in students' academic portfolios must demonstrate they have met (and, hopefully, exceeded) both the graduate attributes and validation criteria.

This section of the report, which provides a commentary on the course relative to RIBA validation criteria, is mostly included in section 6 preceding. However, given the potential of project work at the highest levels of achievement, the board advises that particular attention is paid to the following General Criteria (and their subsets), particularly at Masters of Architecture level.

GC8 Understanding of the structural design, constructional and engineering problems associated with building design

GC8 The graduate will have an understanding of:

- .1 the investigation, critical appraisal and selection of alternative structural, constructional and material systems relevant to architectural design;
- .2 strategies for building construction, and ability to integrate knowledge of structural principles and construction techniques;
- .3 the physical properties and characteristics of building materials, components and systems, and the environmental impact of specification choices.

GC9 Adequate knowledge of physical problems and technologies and the function of buildings so as to provide them with internal conditions of comfort and protection against the climate

GC9 The graduate will have knowledge of:

- .1 principles associated with designing optimum visual, thermal and acoustic environments;
- .2 systems for environmental comfort realised within relevant precepts of sustainable design;
- .3 strategies for building services, and ability to integrate these in a design project.

The board was satisfied that students understood the requirements to meet these criteria, but considered that projects at graduation level could and should use technological, environmental, and material considerations as drivers of the design process. The compartmentalisation of assessments into subject areas within the curriculum - rather than seeing the curriculum as an holistic entity - was seen to compromise the admirable ambition to envisage the entire Faculty as a contemporary workshop (referred to in section 6.6). If physical making as a means to progress design thinking is to be refined and extended (especially at the upper levels of the programme), the board recommends that graduation projects develop a stronger sense of architecture as a constructed art, with a more explicit technical presence apparent in all drawings, models, and other media representing design studio projects.