



## Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Architectural Association School of Architecture, May 2019

### Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that the Architectural Association School of Architecture (the School) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [May 2018 annual monitoring visit](#).

### Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The School enrolled 779 full-time students on its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for the 2018-19 intake, which is a slight increase compared with the student number last year. 62 per cent of the current total are Tier 4 Sponsored international students (484). There are 15 full-time and 168 part-time academic staff teaching the provision. Significant changes since the last year monitoring visit include the registration with the Office for Students on 18 March 2019 and the appointment of a new Director who took up the post on 1 August 2018.

### Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The overall outcome of the monitoring visit, that the School has made acceptable progress, has been informed by the following findings. Good progress has been made on completing or further advancing the good practice, recommendations and affirmations arising from 2016 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers), as well as the key matters arising from previous monitoring visits (paragraphs 4-12). Some actions will result in implementation for the 2019-20 academic year, so it is too early to evaluate their effectiveness. There are comprehensive arrangements for the recruitment, selection and admission of students (paragraph 13) The academic regulations and procedure have been revised to ensure fairness and consistency of assessing student work (paragraph 14). Student data indicates high levels of retention and achievement (paragraph 15).

4 Good progress has been made in the alignment of undergraduate programmes to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) through the revision of learning outcomes which have now been approved by the Academic Committee.

5 The School has begun to make more rigorous use of achievement and progression data by training course teams to monitor standards. The School has published an Annual Monitoring Guide and introduced training to help ensure more consistent approaches across courses to the use of data. Annual monitoring pro formas require good practice to be identified and the Teaching and Learning Committee reports on annual monitoring reports to the Academic Board, which has oversight of teaching quality. While acceptable progress is being made, it is too early to comment on the impact of these measures.

6 The School has made effective progress in developing and publishing clear criteria for the allocation of students to programme units. The allocation process has been revised

based on discussions with staff and students and will be introduced during 2019-20. It is, therefore, too early to assess the impact of this development.

7 The School has revised its academic governance during 2017-18 and student representatives now participate in all committees. The role of the student representative is outlined in a role descriptor and a formal process is in place for the nomination and election of representatives. An induction process was introduced during 2017-18, but currently there is no formal training for student representatives. Student representation on all key committees provides students with a means of giving feedback and raising issues. Student participation in a group convened to improve the processes and criteria for the allocation of students to programme units enables academic staff and students to work in partnership to improve the student experience.

8 The School has taken further action to formalise the School's approach to academic staff review and development. In addition to the revision of the Employee Handbook to include information about staff development and training, a Staff Development Working Group is currently designing a framework for staff development which includes an annual appraisal system for academic and administrative colleagues. In 2018-19 a new approach was taken to staff induction with enhanced support for academic staff new to the School. The School encourages academic staff to seek recognition for their contributions to learning and teaching through application to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Again, it is too early to assess the impact of these developments.

9 The School has responded positively to the recommendation to introduce a new policy for the nomination and appointment of external examiners. In addition to clarifying the processes for nomination and appointment, the policy includes the roles and responsibilities of the examiner and requires them to attend an induction session. However, while postgraduate students received copies of the relevant external examiners' reports, undergraduates were unsure where to access them.

10 The School continues to provide and enhance its very high level of support for students, making a significant contribution to their personal, professional and academic development. The on-site provision of a part-time mental health practitioner is welcomed by the students and is indicative of the School's commitment to pastoral care and welfare. Students value highly the opportunities provided by the School to enable them to showcase their work to practitioners in their field, to develop professional networks and to be part of a professional and supportive learning community.

11 The School revised annual monitoring templates in 2018 to ensure that they were more critical and focused on programme improvement. The Teaching and Learning Committee assesses the quality of annual monitoring reports and reports on this to Academic Board. During 2018-19 the terms and reference of the Teaching and Learning Committee were revised to include student membership. In addition, student course evaluations were introduced to provide additional feedback and inform course action plans.

12 The School uses action plans to improve standards and act on feedback from students, external examiners and other stakeholders. The Academic Committee evaluates and monitors the School's action plans. The annual monitoring process requires action plans to be provided for each course. These are monitored by the Teaching and Learning Committee.

13 The School's recruitment, selection and admissions procedures are aligned to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and outlined clearly in its Academic Regulations and Quality Manual. The quality of the School's admissions process is reflected in its high levels of retention, progression and achievement. The Admissions Officer undertakes a preliminary assessment of each application to ensure that all documentation

has been completed and entry requirements met. A further assessment is conducted by a panel of two academic staff and outcomes moderated by the Head of Teaching and Learning. All potential undergraduate students are required to attend an interview with two members of academic staff where their skills, ability and suitability for the course are assessed. Postgraduate candidates are assessed for admission by their submission of a portfolio of work. Responsibility for admissions to postgraduate routes is shared with the Open University which currently validates this level of provision. There is a robust process to ensure that students can communicate effectively in English. Those for whom English is not their first language are required to achieve an overall minimum of 6.5 in the International English Language Testing System, with no category being less than 6.

14 Much of the work undertaken by students is studio based with high levels of ongoing feedback and academic support from tutors. Students value the opportunity to work in small groups in a learning environment where they receive regular formative feedback. The Academic Regulations set out the marking, moderation and assessment processes. Learning outcomes in the Programme Guides have recently been revised in alignment with the Framework of Higher Education Qualifications. To ensure fairness and consistency, summative assessments of presentations are conducted by Portfolio or Course Panels and other coursework is double marked. Internal Assessment Committees have oversight of the assessment procedures and ensure that they comply with the Academic Regulations.

15 The statistical data provided with the annual return show consistent levels of retention and achievement over the three years between 2015-16 and 2017-18. The School's figures for 2017-18 show that overall retention was 97 per cent on the undergraduate programme and 100 per cent across postgraduate provision. The overall pass rate on undergraduate provision, including foundation level, was 96 per cent and postgraduate courses achieved 97 per cent.

## **Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education**

16 The School aligns its policies and procedures to the Expectations of the Quality Code, recognising it as a key reference point to design policies and procedures for maintaining academic standards and quality. The School maintains strong relationships with its professional bodies, the Architects Registration Board and the Royal Institute of British Architects and makes regular use of these professional reference points.

## **Background to the monitoring visit**

17 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Ms Lynn Fulford, Reviewer, and Dr Yue Song, QAA Officer, on 21 May 2019.

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel 01452 557050  
Web [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)