



## Educational Oversight: report of the extended monitoring visit of Inchbald School of Design, September 2017

### 1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Inchbald School of Design (the School) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the May 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

### 2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

2 The annual monitoring visit was undertaken prior to the commencement of the 2017-18 academic year. The team ensured that there was sufficient scrutiny of appropriate evidence, including meetings with School staff, which included staff representation from Glyndŵr University (the University), to have confidence that the good practice would be maintained, and that the recommendations reported at the 2016 HER (AP) visit would be addressed to ensure that the provision meets UK expectations.

3 In June 2017, the School underwent a full approval and validation of awards with the University to ensure that the provision offered has appropriate regulatory and external scrutiny. The in-scope awards validated are BA (Hons), BA (Ord), Dip HE in Architectural Interior Design; BA (Hons), BA (Ord), Dip HE in Garden Design; and Cert HE Design. These newly validated awards are in addition to the existing University-validated awards of MA Architectural Interior Design; MA Garden Design; Postgraduate Diploma Architectural Interior Design; and Postgraduate Diploma Garden Design. The School confirmed that the online delivery of awards will be considered for approval and validation by the University for a 2018-19 start.

4 At the time of the May 2016 HER (AP) visit there were 144 students registered to study at the School. The data submitted by the School reports that 188 students were registered during the 2016-17 academic year, which represents an increase of 31 per cent. At the time of the monitoring visit, the School was unable to confirm projected student numbers for 2017-18 due to the uncertainty of student acceptances and the lateness of issuing confirmation of acceptance to study (CAS) offers.

### 3 Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The School has made acceptable progress in relation to addressing the outcomes from the 2016 review. The work that the School has undertaken, in partnership with the University, to successfully validate the School awards has contributed significantly to addressing the recommendations from the 2016 visit. The approval of the validated awards has resulted in the School adopting the University academic regulations and formalising the internal processes to ensure that the validation, approval and periodic review for awards meet UK expectations (paragraphs 7, 8, 9 and 11); that awards are set at the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ - paragraph 7); that external examining is in line with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code), *Chapter B7: External Examining* (paragraph 12); and that there are clear assessment processes for the validated awards to ensure alignment of

programme learning outcomes (paragraph 10). The School has also established a range of formal engagement activities to involve external practitioners in the development and ongoing enhancement of the validated awards (paragraph 13).

6 The team was able to evidence that the good practice reported at the May 2016 HER (AP) visit has been maintained. This includes maintaining the small group studio approach, the input of practising professionals and the use of live projects, supported by the wide-ranging and effective external partnerships, all of which enhance the student learning experience. The comprehensive support for students and alumni continues to enhance employability and provide effective preparation for graduate employment. The assessment process is supported by comprehensive internal verification and moderation activity, which will clearly support assessment decisions within the new partnership with the University.

7 The 12 recommendations reported at the 2016 HER (AP) visit have been progressed to a stage of implementation and delivery for the 2017-18 academic year. Comprehensive academic regulations for the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design awards have been approved within the University's awards framework and the programmes validated in June 2017. The monitoring team was able to confirm that, as part of the approval and validation process, these awards have been positioned at the appropriate level on the FHEQ.

8 The School has complied with all University administrative and regulatory requirements, including formalising the committees dealing with oversight of academic standards to ensure that all have terms of reference. Staff whom the team met at the visit confirmed that the committees responsible for the oversight of academic standards are the two Faculty Committees. However, the terms of reference of these committees do not make specific reference to academic standards. All School committees have defined membership, and the meetings will be systematically recorded.

9 To reflect the University's requirements, the School has made revisions to the definitive programme records for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design awards.

10 There are clear assessment processes for the new Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design awards to ensure alignment of programme learning outcomes. These include implementing formal recording processes by the School for the agreement of the module marks prior to submission and approval by the University Examination Boards. The assessment process is tracked by means of University documentation, with set periods for the collation and agreement of assessment marks. University Assessment Boards will be held in January/February to consider progression from level 4 to level 5, and Assessment Boards in September to consider progression to, and from, level 6.

11 As part of the approval and validation of awards by the University the School has adopted the University policies, procedures and processes for the validation, approval and periodic review for awards, including a formal and systematic annual monitoring process. These policies, procedures and processes clearly align with the relevant chapters of the Quality Code. For example, the evidence presented to the team has clear alignment with *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*, and *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*. The University Academic Quality Handbook outlines the processes for six areas of quality and standards within the University, with which the School is required to be compliant. These include the validation and programme periodic review process; the processes surrounding collaborative provision; the annual monitoring process; the recognition of prior learning process; and the processes surrounding external examining. The School and University staff confirmed that students have access to essential information online through institutional websites. Key information includes academic regulations and policies and procedures, such as admissions policies and academic appeals and complaints.

12 The University will have responsibility for the appointment of external examiners for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design awards. Engagement with, and notification of the outcomes of, the external examining process will involve students, who will be made aware of how to access external examiner reports. The School confirmed that external examiner reports will be formally discussed and recorded at Faculty Committees and progressed to the Management Committee. Previous external examiners reported that the quality of teaching and learning at the School is unique, in that the students have a close and positive relationship with the course team, who tailor support for each student individually. This is supported by the Academic Link Tutor reports, which record that the student body were unanimous in their praise for the quality of teaching and extremely high level of support that they receive.

13 External academic and subject specialist views were formally sought in the development and approval of the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design awards. The School confirmed that it will continue to engage formally with external expertise to maintain the professional standing of the awards. This includes continuing the Professional Advisory Panels, an expert group of current external practitioners, to assist in the further development of the awards.

14 The School does not have its own admissions policy; however, the School has operational processes in place that are compliant with the University's admissions policy. The School follows a rigorous process to ensure that applicants are suitable for their programmes. Students transferring or continuing study from a previous educational institution are required to present transcripts of marks, certificates and portfolios where relevant. For international qualifications, the University checks qualifications with UK NARIC to ensure level. The language requirements for applicants for whom English is not their first language are detailed in the course information available on the website, and applicants for study for the level 6 awards require an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 6.0. Initial enquiries mainly come through emails and the website. The School website holds the list of course descriptors for all Inchbald courses currently available, with explanations of content, duration, and modes of study. However, at the time of the monitoring visit the website was under review to provide greater clarity for applicants.

15 The Admissions Secretary or School Secretary initially contacts applicants, and provides further information and arranges an interview with the Course Director. Prospective students complete an application form that provides non-EU students with information relating to visa requirements and helps the Course Director to determine intention to study. Recognition of prior and experiential learning is well developed within the School. Subject to awarding body regulations, applicants' experience of academic levels 4 and 5 may allow credit to be awarded. Students will be considered for advanced standing onto the master's programme, dependent on a previous qualification at PGDip level and subject to awarding body regulations.

16 Following the validation by the University, all the School's higher education programmes will be included within the awarding body's systems for monitoring and review. There has not yet been a periodic review of the newly validated awards; however, the University confirmed that when this is due the School will follow the awarding body's procedure. Students' opinions of modules are surveyed at the midpoint of delivery. The results of these surveys are considered at Faculty Board Meetings. Annual review for the newly validated awards will follow the University's annual monitoring procedures with the submission of the Annual Monitoring Form (AMR) for each programme. The AMR requires consideration of student feedback, external examiners' reports and other externality. However, for the AMRs supplied, which relate to the 2015-16 academic year, consideration of these key indicators of quality lack detail. Both the School and the University recognise

that further collaborative work is needed to ensure that the AMRs make more use of key qualitative and quantitative evidence to inform action planning.

17 The data provided by the School indicates that retention and pass rates continue to be high, with pass rates at 100 and 95 per cent for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 academic years respectively, and retention at 91 per cent for both years.

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

18 The School's engagement with the Quality Code has continued to be strengthened through participation in the recent validation process with the University. The curriculum and the monitoring and evaluation processes of the School meet the Expectations of the Quality Code, as reflected in the programme specifications and regulations of the University. Staff are aware of the potential significance of the Quality Code as a guide to good practice, as indicated in paragraphs 5 and 11.

19 The staff of the School continue to play an active part in a range of professional organisations in both Interior and Garden Design, including the British Institute of Interior Design, the Interior Design Educators' Council Inc, the International Interior Designers Association, and the Society of Garden Designers. The School continues to attract support from a wide range of external, professional, and commercial organisations and individual practitioners, as indicated in paragraph 13.

#### **5 Background to the monitoring visit**

20 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.

21 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Peter Hymans, Reviewer, and Mr Robert Saynor, Coordinator, on 7 and 8 September 2017.

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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)