



## Specific Course Designation: report of the monitoring visit of The London School of Architecture, October 2018

### 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 The London School of Architecture (the School) is making acceptable progress since the October 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 The School has 74 full-time students studying at postgraduate levels 6 and 7; the same as in the previous year. All students are aged 21 or more, and there are no international or part-time students. There have been no changes to the programme offered by the awarding body. The School relocated to new premises in September 2018. Two new Design Tutors, a Community and Communications Leader, and an Operations Assistant have been appointed since November 2017. The Institutional Memorandum of Agreement for the Professional Diploma programme was re-approved and signed off in August 2018 by the London Metropolitan University (the University). The University has also approved the use of School's new learning spaces for the 2018-19 academic session. Successful accreditation also includes two professional bodies: the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and Architects Registration Board (ARB). The School has recently merged the Course Forums with Senate meetings, which were originally separate but involved the same staff and therefore duplicated discussion. As all students can attend the Forums, there is the potential for more student involvement in institutional governance.

### 2 Findings from the monitoring visit

3 The School continues to offer the Professional Diploma in Designing Architecture programme (the Diploma) validated by the University. Good practice has been further developed for the support of student employability, promoting student independence, and the use of Practice Networks for engagement in learning. Actions relating to recommendations from the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER(AP)) have been completed, including the formalisation of the assessment process for resolving disagreements within panel marking, and using more transparent module assessment criteria. Affirmations for the last review have also been followed through, including the consolidation of admissions and recruitment information, and ensuring that staff and students are fully aware of the nature and purpose of the role of external examiners. Work still being undertaken includes continuing discussions on the alignment of academic calendar progression points between the School and the University and monitoring the quality and timeliness of written assessment feedback. The School monitors retention and pass rates for cohorts enrolled since the start of the Diploma in 2015 and it has been successfully revalidated and accredited by its awarding and professional bodies.

4 Progress with the three areas of good practice noted in the HER (AP) includes support for employability through the further development of the Practice Network for student placements, the extension of the dispersed campus model where students engage in their learning through the use of offices within architecture design firms, and an increase in the number of practitioner-led design/research think tanks.

There is evidence that the School continues to develop strong networks through its use of a buddy system, links made through practice placements, and the involvement of alumni. The Practice Network also potentially offers access to books beyond the University's library.

5 The School has made progress with the two recommendations from the last HER (AP). With reference to the resolution of any disagreements arising from panel marking of assessments, a more formalised process has been introduced and shared with external examiners. Recent steps have been taken to make module assessment criteria more transparent for all those involved in the assessment process through clarifying grade bandings used for the assessment of portfolios. These criteria have been discussed with students at the Course Forum, and the School has included further assessment details in the Course Handbook.

6 Progress with the four affirmations from the last Review includes ongoing consideration of the alignment of progression points between the School and the University through changes to the academic calendar. The quality and timeliness of written assessment feedback to students has been further developed through the use of individual categorised feedback folders that have been monitored at the Course Forum, with positive comments from students being noted. Admissions and recruitment information, including the addition of a Complaints and Appeals policy, is now included in an online and hard-copy Admissions Handbook. Finally, the role of external examiners has been clarified through the creation of an external examiners' handbook.

7 Applicants attend open days and meet current students, who also take part in the interview panels although they do not make admissions decisions. Candidates for admission are normally expected to have a second or first-class BA Hons in Architecture, as well as the Part 1 award from the ARB/RIBA accrediting professional bodies. The provider accepts a range of possible English qualifications, with a minimum score of 5.5 in each IELTS 6 component. Non-standard applications are handled by the Academic Liaison tutor at the University. The School has not engaged in the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL); no requests have been made from applicants and all modules are regarded as core prerequisites, with their cumulative learning outcomes leading to the Diploma qualification. Any detailed APEL queries would be referred to the University, using agreed procedures and regulations. All applicants are expected to provide a portfolio and a statement about why they want to enter the profession of architecture and are then interviewed in person or by Skype. Admission is conditional on obtaining a placement, which is facilitated by the School. Feedback is provided to unsuccessful applicants and a complaints procedure is in place.

8 Learning outcomes for all assessment tasks are based on the ARB/RIBA Part 2 criteria and attributes, and are explained clearly to the students. Students comment within their assignment work on how they have met the assessment criteria. In addition the School goals of 'intentionality, synthesis and impact' underpin all assessment. Feedback to students is both oral and written, with School plans for staff development and monitoring that ensure more consistency in the use of detailed feedback documentation from all tutors in response to recent external examiner reports. Oral feedback is often given within group settings so that other students can learn from what is said to one of their number, with training and support being given for groupwork and team building. Feedback is usually timely, with the aspiration that formative feedback should be given within one week, and two weeks for summative feedback. These processes are monitored by the Operations Manager, although the Course Handbook does not differentiate between formative and summative stages. There are viva voce examinations at the end of each of the two years for the Diploma, and clear guidelines exist as to the roles of the different participants in panel assessments, who may include external examiners. The School is aware that marks are

rarely given in the top two of the nine grade bandings, and discussions with the University are ongoing on how best to reward excellence by using the full range of marks.

9 Overall retention rates for 2015-18 cohorts range from 91 to 97 per cent, with pass rates for the two cohorts to have completed the Diploma being 90 and 82 per cent for 2015-17 and 2016-18 respectively. The team further noted progression data for the current 2017-19 cohort, with 95 per cent of students continuing to the final year of their studies. There has been a 25 per cent increase in applications since the start of the Diploma three years ago, with an increase in enrolments from 31 to 38 students per annum. The School has an agreed cap of 80 enrolments over two years, based on the number of placements available and agreement with the University.

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

10 The UK Quality Code for Higher Education and FHEQ are used consistently and appropriately for all course design, assessment, validations and revalidations. The ARB and RIBA are the key professional body external reference points for the School, which continues to be validated by these organisations. Guidelines for ARB and RIBA course prescription are used, setting out detailed criteria and evidence requirements, with General Criteria and Graduate Attributes at Part 1 and Part 2 levels included within the QAA's Subject Benchmark Statement.

### **4 Background to the monitoring visit**

11 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.

12 The monitoring visit was carried out by Professor Helen King, Reviewer, and Professor Danny Saunders, QAA Officer, on 16 October 2018.

**QAA2276 - R10301 - Nov 18**

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