

# UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

## REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL: SUBJECT UNIT 2G ARCHITECTURE

24 May 2018

### PANEL:

Professor D Hazlett, Director of the Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice, Ulster University (Chair)

Dr T Murphy, Senior Lecturer, School of Law, Ulster University

Mr K McStravock, President, Students' Union, Ulster University

Professor L Farrelly, Head of Architecture, University of Reading

Professor A Wright, Professor of Architecture, University of Bath

Mr D Fong, Associate Professor, Head of Division of Construction, Property and Surveying, London South Bank University (ATM)

### REVALIDATION UNIT CO-ORDINATOR:

Mr D Comiskey, Belfast School of Architecture and the Built Environment, Ulster University

### IN ATTENDANCE

Mr B McArthur, Academic Office, Ulster University

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the following provision within Revalidation Unit 2G Architecture.

- BSc Hons Architectural Technology and Management (FT/PT) (JN)
- BA Hons Architecture (FT) (BT)
- MArch Architecture (FT) (BT)

1.1 The BSc Hons Architectural Technology and Management would be offered in both full- and part-time modes. All modules would be compulsory. AB and CertHe exit awards would be available. The full-time mode would include a compulsory placement year. The programme was professionally accredited by the Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT).

1.2 Both the BA Hons Architecture and MArch would be offered in full-time mode only. All modules would be compulsory apart from an optional study abroad year (DIAS) in the Honours programme. AB and CertHe exit awards would be available in the Honours degree and PgDip and PgCert exit awards in the MArch. Both awards were professionally accredited by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Architects Registration Board (ARB). The next RIBA accreditation visit is due in 2019, while ARB prescription extends until 2020.

1.3 The Panel met initially with the Faculty Senior Management Team comprising Professor L Maguire, Executive Dean, Dr M Keenan, Associate Dean (Education), Professor P Griffiths, Head of School of Architecture and the Built Environment, Dr Neale Blair, Associate Head of School and Mr D Comiskey, Revalidation Unit Coordinator. The Panel then met with a student group comprising students in each of the current programmes and finally, with the subject team to discuss the programmes in detail.

## 2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Architecture (2010)
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Architecture Technology (2014)
- QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement (2015)
- Preliminary comments provided by panel members
- External examiners' reports for the last two years
- Revalidation documentation

The following report is a summary of responses to Panel questions provided by each of the groups that met with the Panel during the meeting.

## 3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

### *Introduction*

3.1 The Belfast School of Architecture and the Built Environment was a new School established in 2017 following restructuring within the University. At that time, Professor Griffiths was appointed Head of School. Professor Griffiths and the previous Head of School, prior to the reorganisation, had discussed a mid- to long-term strategic vision for the School involving greater integration of Architecture, Architectural Technology and cognate built environment and engineering programmes within the School. The establishment of the School had created the potential of developing "quite a few" multidisciplinary projects within the provision.

3.2 Despite recent changes such as the restricted funding model and reduced staffing levels, recruitment to the provision had remained steady. Currently the School was advertising for a Chair (Professor of Architecture) around whom a team would be built to take the provision forward. The recruitment of a number of lecturers had also been approved. The recent reduction in staff has provided an opportunity to refresh the staffing complement. A different type of person was needed, one who was studio-orientated and research active with a practice background. The new team would continue the discussion around the development of the provision going forward taking account of the RIBA Education Review (RER) recommendations. This will be an ongoing dialogue. Professional body requirements will continue to dominate what the team is able to do in terms of programme content and delivery. The School also recognises an imperative to grow its income through non-MaSN recruitment. Regarding how the School moves to where it wants to be, this is chiefly about people and about the creation of space for people. The School will endeavour to keep the provision outward looking with an art focus while seeking to retain the existing culture of risk-taking and experimentation.

3.3 Regarding staff reduction, the part-time register had helped. The introduction of the 'super-studio' approach in the Architecture provision will create a more even workload across existing staff. Currently, the Honours team were heavily loaded; the Master's team not so much. Further investment was needed although new staff were being recruited. An inherited problem was the large number of modules in the School that the team were now trying to reduce.

### *Super Studio*

3.4 The new 'super studio' approach in the Architecture provision was used with success in other institutions. In addition to the pedagogic positives, the approach makes best use of available resources in terms of both staff and facilities. It has the added advantage of anticipating the recommendations of the RER report. The approach is centred around a series of studio design modules that run through each level of the Honours and Master's degrees and was designed to

replicate the operation of an architecture practice from junior staff upwards. The approach would create a studio environment using all-level (Honours and MArch) student groups within themed study units related to staff research and scholarship and academic enterprise. The relocation of those programmes within the School currently located at Jordanstown to the Belfast campus will widen the scope of the super-studio. The approach will provide a sense of community through joint learning and mentoring whereby stronger students will support weaker students. In addition, students will be able to draw on each other's skills.

#### *Interdisciplinary working*

3.5 Professional alignment whereby students from different disciplines will learn from one another will prepare students for their future careers. For example, in Year 1 of the ATM programme, students would collaborate with other disciplines in a small-scale building design. They would be required to describe how each discipline contributed to the design. Experience indicated that while at the outset, students would be apprehensive, as time goes by, they would begin to question each other about their respective disciplines. This approach, which was designed to replicate the real world, would be continued through years 2 and 3 and would be valuable experience in preparing students for their careers.

#### *Future development*

3.6 In developing the Architecture provision, the Team had put a great deal of thought into what should be taught and when, and how to align with the RER requirements. The overall aim was to prevent students thinking in 'silos' but to take a holistic approach. Currently the Team were keen to explore the development of an integrated Master's degree that would be more attractive to international students who would then require only a single visa to complete the whole programme rather than the current two. There was a desire to develop a part-time route perhaps starting with the MArch. Research into the potential market would need to be carried out. The next step would then be the development of a part-time route for the Honours programme particularly if apprenticeship degrees were introduced in Northern Ireland. One issue to consider would be the absence of large practices in Northern Ireland. Another was the structure, for example, where to place the work placement between the Honours and Master's stages. In the ATM programme, the placement year comes at the end of Year 2. Students would favour that approach. They would benefit by taking placements elsewhere, for example, in London, where there were bigger practices. This would produce "more rounded" students for entry into third year. In a recent meeting with employers, their view had been to embed work placement early in the programme.

#### *Placement - ATM*

3.7 Employability was a prime aim of the programme in regard to which, the compulsory placement year played a major part. Successful completion of placement produced a more confident and able student entering final year. Student feedback indicated that placement provided a better understanding of the underpinning theory taught in the early years of the programme and how it linked to practice. In 90% of cases, placement students were offered graduate jobs in the placement organisation.

3.8 Normally, there was no difficulty in placing all students. This is primarily because of the strong links between the School and local practices. Often more placements are available than there were students. On one occasion only in recent years was a student unable to find a placement. It is students' own responsibility to find a placement but staff will assist where necessary. Preparation for and interviews for placements take place in second year of the programme.

## 4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

4.1 The Panel met with a group of students from the existing provision including two currently on placement in the ATM programme. The following are summaries of their responses to issues raised by the Panel.

### Interaction between Architecture and ATM students

- Currently little interaction between cohorts
- Interaction would be welcomed
- No shared teaching
- Interaction would be beneficial to both student cohorts
- Would reflect practice in the real world

### Studio working – staff support

- Support is provided – a formal meeting unnecessary (ATM)
- Small numbers on the MA so good support but less contact at that level
- Would like more time with professors (MA)

### Staff support - Studies Advisers

- In the part-time programme, if no tutor is available, “rolls on without direction” (ATM)
- Staff will make time if requested (BA)
- Happy with contact time (MA)
- Can request ‘one-to-one’ meeting (MA)

### Feedback

- Very good feedback – also received through Blackboard Learn (ATM)
- Quick feedback helps improve in next project (ATM)
- Written comments can sometimes be illegible (BA)
- Received feedback through Blackboard Learn for the first time last year (BA)
- Only opportunity to talk through feedback is in class (BA)
- If a student misses a class, the feedback is on also available on Blackboard Learn (BA)
- Can request meeting with tutor (BA)
- In the final project, give a presentation when feedback is received from a panel (BA)

### Placement - ATM

- Definitely helped in final year
- Builds on knowledge acquired in first two years
- Realise the importance of the theory learned during first two years
- Experience of practice in real world – can relate back to project work

### Placement – Architecture

- No opportunity for WBL (BA)
- Guest speakers from industry very helpful (BA)
- Undertake a placement year between UG and PG (MA)
- Placement year better placed in third year – would help with final year in UG programme(MA)

### Assessment load

- Overall fair (ATM)
- Depends on yourself – told at the outset what is required (ATM)
- Tutor absent for 2 or 3 weeks but extensions were no problem (ATM)
- Professor on sick leave for half the semester – had to catch up during the last 2 or 3 weeks (MA)

### Positives

- Rapid Industry Feed Forward (RIFF) session is very good (opportunity to receive feedback from industry people on project work) (ATM)
- Staff approachability and support – “they want you to thrive” (ATM)
- Good guest lecturers (ATM)
- Field trip to Edinburgh (BA)
- Staff responsive to suggested changes (BA)

### Negatives

- One class and two tutorials per week – creates a big gap in teaching if staff do not turn up (BA)
- If half the class miss a lecture, spend the next class covering the same ground – unfair (BA)
- More contact time needed - “a lot of us but only three off them and one part-time” (MA)
- Too much flexibility allowed in meeting assessment deadlines – undermines self-discipline which will be required in practice (MA)
- Staff dedicated but “not enough of them” (MA)
- Facilities generally poor, in particular plotters – had to pay for ink out of our own pockets
- Designated area needed for plotters
- Plotters need to be constantly maintained and always available

## 5 MEETING WITH SUBJECT TEAM

5.1 At the outset of the course team meeting, Professor Griffiths gave a presentation to the Panel on the development of the provision for revalidation and the factors that informed that development. (See annex to report).

### *Interdisciplinary working*

5.2 The *BIM Foundations* module in the ATM programme will provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary working. The module assessment includes a group assignment requiring students from different disciplines such as quantity surveying and architectural, construction and structural engineering, to work together on a design challenge. Much the basic legislation and the drivers of BIM as well as obstacles within industry will be covered in the module. Lectures will be delivered using the flipped classroom approach. The approach will be reflective of practice in industry and will assess the process adopted by students rather than the output.

5.3 The Panel noted that the disciplines referred to did not include Architecture students. The Team stated that in preparing for revalidation, the Architecture and ATM teams had worked closely together. Both teams were open to collaboration in the future, particularly in first year, undertaking projects in the design modules. The teams recognised the potential benefits for both student cohorts. The technology modules running through the BA programme linked directly to ATM. Areas could be identified where collaboration would be possible in each year. Some discussion had already taken place. However, currently, the prime difficulty was logistics given that the two programmes were located on different campuses. While this prohibited progress now, when the ATM programme moves to the Belfast campus, this will open the way for collaborative working. The introduction of the super-studio approach in the Architecture provision includes an architectural technology theme that presents a good starting point for discussions on collaborative working.

5.4 The Panel suggested that with the bigger number of programmes in the now enlarged School, using available technology, collaboration should be able to take place now. The Team stated that they recognised the potential within the School for collaborative working. However, the School had only been established in 2017. Currently there was duplication of effort in some areas whereby some programmes were doing the same things. This needed tightening up. Staff often move between subject areas so have a great deal of knowledge and experience and there was a willingness to explore greater collaboration across the disciplines. Within the next year, further

discussions will take place on what can be done in the immediate future. For example, joint field trips during induction was one option. Face-to-face interaction was imperative; students needed to learn the strengths and experience of working with other disciplines. This did not always come through in delivery. However, currently there was a very small Architecture team and further collaboration at this stage would present a major challenge.

5.5 It was pointed out that revalidation was not the end of review and development; it would continue throughout the approval period. The potential the development of part-time provision in the Architecture programmes would be kept under review. The main issue in the short term would be how best to draw together and enhance the ATM and Architecture programmes when ATM moves to the Belfast campus. There will be a new building with different spaces and decisions will have to be taken on how best to use the space to the benefit of both programmes.

#### *ATM – assessment strategy*

5.6 The rationale for the absence of written examinations in the revalidated programme's assessment strategy was that examinations simply test students' recall ability. This was not reflective of practice. For example, given the amount of building regulations and legislation, it was impossible to remember everything. It was therefore more important that students were aware of their existence, know where to find them, and apply them accordingly. This approach is trialled in new module, *Technology, Structures and Environment 3*, where students will be required to produce technical design reports relating to sound and energy performance and the provision of lighting and services with reference to building regulations. Student performance in this module will provide an indication of what works.

5.7 There had been discussions within the subject team and with employers and students regarding the assessment strategy. The prevalent view was that in the interests of employability, practice alignment should be the dominant feature of the provision. A good example was provided in new module, *Professional Practice and Management Processes*, where professional practice and employability skills underpinned assessments that were designed to reflect real world practice. This was considered a more appropriate approach to the assessment of student learning rather than testing "memory recall".

5.8 It was pointed out that where appropriate, class tests would be employed. In module, *Construction Law*, an online class test would be used to test knowledge. The other assessment in the module would be a problem-based learning scenario where students would work in groups and work through "the journey of the contract", identifying problems, and providing advice to clients. Throughout, the tutor would informally discuss progress and provide feedback. The module would have a learner-centred focus and the assessment strategy was considered more appropriate given its relevance to practice.

5.9 The move away from written examinations has helped to address the issue of 'bunching' of assessments at the end of the semester. Instead, the emphasis would be on regular testing throughout the semester and adherence to the Curriculum Design Principles, where possible, in relation to a norm of no more than two assessments per module.

#### *Architecture - RER Report*

5.10 A number of conversations had already taken place with students regarding the RER recommendations and their impact on the provision. RER places an emphasis on professional practice experience (PPE). PPE had been built into the *Thesis Design Studio* module and had been "fleshed out" in the other design modules. One issue had been how to build in management skills and construction knowledge in the early years. The new vertical teaching model will provide a more professional atmosphere. In addition, the relatively small pool of local employers were willing to support students through the provision of practice placements. Consultation with employers would form part of the ongoing process which bodes well for the future.

### *Architecture – assessment strategy*

5.11 Regarding 'bunching' of assessments, the overall number of assessments had been reduced thus reducing the likelihood of 'bunching'. In addition, there would be no end-of-semester written examinations. Staff were aware of the need to stagger assessment deadlines. The aim was to include no more than two assessments per module in line with the Curriculum Design Principles and to have an adequate gap between deadlines. This approach had been implemented across the School and would be managed by the School Office. Another initiative, given the absence of written examinations in the provision, was to bridge the Christmas holiday gap between the autumn and spring semesters by utilising the January examination period for assessment.

5.12 In response to a student comment that there was too much leniency regarding non-adherence to assessment deadlines, the Team stated that normally a strict approach was adopted and where leniency was applied in an individual case, there was a good reason for it. The Panel stated that students should be made aware of circumstances in which deadlines would not be enforced.

### *Architecture – RIBA/ARB standards*

5.13 The provision was mapped against the RIBA/ARB standards. The structure diagram at page B2/19 of the revalidation document details where the standards have been mapped to the modules. Within years 2 and 3 of the undergraduate programme, all the standards would be covered (as well as duplicated across other years).

### *Content – optionality*

5.14 All modules in the ATM programme were compulsory. With a bigger staff complement, more modules could be offered. However, the current structure worked well. In addition, employers wanted a generic approach as far as possible, rather than specialisms. The addition of management in the programme was the programme's unique selling point. The programme was the only architectural technology programme to include 'management' in its curriculum. Information management was a key strength of the programme. To some degree, students would have some latitude regarding specialisation. In the project modules, they would have an opportunity to explore design in different ways. In addition, in the final year research and technical design projects, students would be able to engage in specialised areas of interest to them.

5.15 No optionality was available in the Architecture provision. However, the super-studio model was designed to research practice that, in the Master's modules, would allow students to develop their own specialisms. A lot of informal collaboration would occur at this stage creating opportunities for specialisation within the modules themselves. The programme structure would facilitate that approach.

### *Distinctiveness of the provision*

5.16 The Architecture provision was tightly prescribed by the professional body. However, distinctiveness could still be achieved. The development of the super-studio model of delivery was a distinctive feature of the provision. The aim in the medium term would be to continue to develop integrated vertical studios but within an integrated Master's programme and ultimately expand the approach by incorporating different strands of study involving different disciplines within the studios. Regarding the ATM programme, its distinctiveness lay in the inclusion of 'management' in the curriculum and the compulsory placement year.

### *Staff resources*

5.17 In the short term, people on the part-time register and practitioners would cover staff shortages. The downside was that it would not be known what part-time support was available

until September. The School was currently working on what resources will be needed for the next academic year. In that regard, there was a need to map replacements for staff who have recently left the University. It was suggested that interdisciplinary teaching was resource intensive. For the super-studio approach to work, three, four or five staff were needed in those modules simultaneously. A strategy was therefore needed to build up the School's staff complement over the next two to three years.

#### *Physical resources – plotters*

5.18 The provision of plotters was acknowledged as a critical issue. They were an expensive resource and numbers were limited. Currently, most plotters were located on the Jordanstown campus where they were maintained by a technician. Students have been trying to look after their operation and maintenance themselves. A dedicated, secure location was needed on the Belfast campus to house plotters. To try to alleviate the problem, digital submission of assessments had been encouraged with hard copies to follow later but with staggered deadlines. It was pointed out that in architecture, people still need to work on paper as well as with physical models. The underlying issue was the funding problem.

## 6 FEEDBACK TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT

6.1 Professors Wright and Farrelly provided feedback to the Senior Management Team regarding the Architecture provision. They fully supported the development of the super-studio model that they considered genuinely innovative and distinctive. However, consideration had to be given to what was possible within current staffing levels in the delivery of an integrated vertical teaching model across all years. The first consideration was, what was essential at this time? This needed to be resolved before moving forward towards the ultimate aim of introducing a multidisciplinary approach. This did not however mean losing sight of collaborative working. There would still be opportunities in this regard within some modules. At this point, a focus on priority areas for collaboration in the undergraduate programme was needed and how that can be made to work. Discussion with colleagues across the School would be required. In order to achieve ultimate success, the first steps needed to work. When successful collaborative working had been achieved, and the time was right with all necessary support in place, the task then would be to identify clear priorities for expansion into multidisciplinary working.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The Panel commended the Subject Team on the following:

- Quality of the documentation
- Involvement of course teams in the constructive and critical evaluation of programmes developing enhancements to existing delivery
- Distinctive and valuable feature of 'management' in the ATM programme
- Clear, well-structured progression and pedagogy applied in all programmes
- Relevant industry-focused modules including placement, BIM and inter-professional learning in the ATM programme
- Successful development of the provision to meet professional body requirements
- Student commendation of the Rapid Industry Feedforward (RIFF) session and accessibility of staff in the ATM programme
- Student commendation of the accessibility of staff in the undergraduate Architecture programme
- Employment of field trips, projects and placement in the ATM programme
- Wide range of assessment methods employed across the provision

7.2 The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within Subject Unit 2G Architecture be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018/19 – 22/23 inclusive) subject to the conditions and recommendations of the

Panel being addressed and a satisfactory response and a revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by 30 June 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

### Conditions

- 1) that those issues detailed in the appendix to the panel report be addressed;
- 2) that, in regard to the Architecture provision, confirmation is provided by the Executive Dean that all outstanding physical resources and staff appointments will be in place prior to the start date for delivery of the provision.

### Recommendations - Architecture

- 1) that, the management team should at this time give consideration to the delivery of and relationship between RIBA Parts 2 and 3 in line with the RER criteria;
- 2) that there is a need at this stage to identify the priority areas for interdisciplinary collaboration at that point in the development of the programme when this becomes feasible;
- 3) that greater clarity is developed around the philosophy and approaches to inter-professional learning through staff and student dialogue;
- 4) that a partnership approach be taken in the development of greater collaborative engagement as part of initial induction and the first year student experience;
- 5) that review of delivery modes and their relevance to industry and practice continues (particularly regarding the potential for part-time provision in the Architecture provision);
- 6) that the Panel recommends and fully supports the proposed development of an integrated Masters in Architecture programme which is aligned to the 'super-studio' delivery model proposed in the current provision and, to that end, that early consultation take place with the ARB regarding design of the programme.

## 8 APPRECIATION

8.1 The Chair thanked the Panel members and in particular, the external members, for their valuable contribution to the revalidation process.