

**Report of the RIBA visiting board  
to the Aarhus School of Architecture**

**1 Details of institution hosting course**

Aarhus School of Architecture  
Nørreport 208000 Aarhus C  
Denmark

**2 Dean, The Aarhus School of Architecture**

Torben Nielsen

**3 Courses offered for validation**

Master of Arts in Architecture

**4 Course leader**

Chris Thurlbourne

**5 Awarding body**

Aarhus School of Architecture

**6 The visiting board**

David Howarth – Chair  
Tina Frost  
Jane Mcallister  
Jack Dunne  
Carsten Primdahl – regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk RIBA Validation Manager, was in attendance.

**7 Procedures and criteria for the visit**

The visiting board was carried out under the *RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria for UK and international courses and examinations in architecture* (published July 2011; effective from September 2011); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

**8 Proposals of the visiting board**

The RIBA Education Committee confirmed on 25 March 2016 that the following course and qualification is unconditionally validated

Master of Arts in Architecture, RIBA Part 2

The next full board to Aarhus School of Architecture should take place in 2020.

**9 Standard requirements for continued recognition**

Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

- i external examiners being appointed for the course
- ii any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA
- iii any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title
- iv submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed

**10 Academic position statement** (Statement written by the school)

*The Aarhus School of Architecture is one of two schools in Denmark that make up the responsibility of Architectural education in the country. (The first and oldest school in Denmark is the Royal Academy in Copenhagen). The Aarhus school of Architecture is located centrally in Denmark's second largest City that is affectionately known as "The World's Smallest Big City". It is also a city that boasts the highest density of design studios per population in Europe. A large number of these are direct spin-offs from having an Architectural School in the City, as many graduates remain and start businesses. The school was started in 1965 by the initiative of one of the best known Architects resident in Aarhus – C.F. Møller, and the school has just celebrated its 50th jubilee.*

*It is within this context that The Aarhus School of Architecture has its exceptional area of activity, namely a strong connection with the city and the practicing designers working within the city. Vocational staff are employed at the school that come from practice in Aarhus and surrounding areas. We also boast some staff living in Copenhagen that commutes to work at the school. Many are employed also as external examiners. Furthermore, design projects often relate to the cities issues and possibilities.*

*The Aarhus School of Architecture has together with six European and Australian schools of architecture and design been granted an allocation of DKK 30 million (approx. £3M) for the research network ADAPT-r giving practicing architects the opportunity to take a PhD (facilitated in our school) in their own practice. The idea behind ADAPT-r is to create a PhD program that directly addresses architects with acknowledged and innovative practice, reinforcing an important connection our school has – and is continually developing – with local practice.*

*The Master's program also operates with a Mentoring program where students are given mentors to coach them through practice related issues concerning their design project. This fosters a rich interest in design through making both in teaching and in research, reinforcing the schools motto "Engaging through Architecture". The school has very good workshop facilities that are well staffed by personnel with a background in making. A recent large investment in digital machinery has been able to facilitate a growing interest in digital fabrication where the possibilities in digital design can be tested through fabrication of large scale mock ups for example. This gives our students and researchers the possibility to develop design work taking the foundation in what Denmark is well known for – Good Design with a clear understanding of material.*

**Distinctiveness**

*What makes the study curricula at The Aarhus School of Architecture distinct is that it is primarily design orientated. Design is the focus of all studies. The Master's program offers students a choice of specialist areas of interest, where they join a modest sized studio that focuses the study program around a specific field of design interest. This may be digital tectonics or tectonics for example, but where the students*

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*work is almost exclusively design studio work. To facilitate this, the school offers all students very good studio spaces with an embedded tradition that students do all their work at the school and not at home for example. Each student is guaranteed good space to work and all have 24 hour access to the studio. Students therefore use each other as sparring's partners and are also very good in working in teams. With a Danish social democratic background students are used to working together so our school encourages group projects and joint discussions to stimulate a fertile working environment, and in reality mimic the working environment they will face when leaving the school.*

*Many facilities are accessible to students 24 hours. The school has a model workshop that is open and students can work outside usual working hours, together with good printing facilities and spaces to work on larger scale constructions.*

*There is also a strong tradition to field study trips. The Aarhus School of Architecture acknowledges that Denmark is a small country – rich in good architecture and design, yet nevertheless small. We acknowledge the value of studying beyond a Danish context, to the rest of Scandinavia, and further abroad. All studios in the Master's program tend therefore to make at least one collective study trip a year, sometimes each semester. The study trip is an integrated part of the study program, where assignments are written to engage students into a critical understanding of specific places – and often sites that become the basis for design work. The school encourages, and facilitates, working collaborations with other schools and institutions. One current studio has been working in Mumbai, India, together with the architectural office Studio Mumbai and a local university. Students and teachers have been resident in India for a number of weeks carrying out field work. Another studio has run a joint collaboration with the Architectural school in San Juan, Puerto Rico where both students and teachers from San Juan have come to Aarhus and students and teachers have worked in Puerto Rico. A distinctiveness of The Aarhus School of Architecture is therefore Internationalisation, where we enjoy the mix of many cultures amongst students, but where study activities are supported outside the school's own boundaries.*

*We encourage creative implementation of study curricula and therefore have fostered a Masters landscape that embraces many facets of architecture. These include for example Cultural heritage – the study of transformation of our existing built environment, landscape and urban design, and digital tectonics for example.*

*Denmark and Scandinavia are well known throughout the world due to sensitivity in architecture and design. It has a reputation for well-constructed and well considered design artefacts, both large and small, a sensitivity of a human ergonomic and human interaction. The Aarhus School of Architecture is a place that builds on that tradition and attempts to reinvent it in a study environment to confront issues of today. An overall distinctness of our school therefore is a clear sensitivity to architecture and design that is rooted in crafted, hands on approaches to facilitate knowledge of material, space and human*

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*action that is fundamentally a Nordic tradition – or as the schools motto says “Engaging through Architecture”.*

**11 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the distinctive nature of the studio system underpinned by the excellent workshop and library facilities.
- 11.2 The board commends the agility of the School in anticipating and managing change.
- 11.3. The board commends the breadth of research in the School and the manner in which the platforms inform teaching.
- 11.4. The board commends the School’s symbiotic relationship to the city’s architectural community.

**12 Conditions**

There are no conditions.

**13 Action points**

The visiting board proposes the following action points. The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points in advance of the next full visit. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 13.1 The School should ensure that the course structure allows all students to demonstrate the ability to generate complex design proposals as outlined in Graduate Attribute GA2.1.

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

- 13.2. The School should ensure that the academic portfolio demonstrates the integration of GC8 and GC9 through a complex design proposal. The thesis project might be the vehicle for this.

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

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

**14. Advice**

The visiting board offers the following advice to the School on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

- 14.1 The School are encouraged to review the scope and timetabling of the

written design report to allow students to more clearly and succinctly describe their complete thesis project.

- 14.2. The School should reflect on how GA2.7 of the RIBA Criteria is demonstrated within the academic portfolio.

GA2.7 ability to identify individual learning needs and understand the personal responsibility required to prepare for qualification as an architect

- 14.3. The School are encouraged to fully utilize the 30 credits within the practice report submission to enable the student to evidence an understanding of GC10 and demonstrate the knowledge required by GC11.

GC10 The necessary design skills to meet building users' requirements within the constraints imposed by cost factors and building regulations

GC11 Adequate knowledge of the industries, organisations, regulations and procedures involved in translating design concepts into buildings and integrating plans into overall planning

- 14.4. The School are encouraged to celebrate the richness of activities in the School by improving communication across the School.

- 14.5. The School are encouraged to explore ways in which to promote cross-fertilization between studios.

- 14.6. The School are encouraged to continue to explore the ways in which the design thesis can be extended across 2 semesters through a linked programme of work. This is already evidenced in a number of portfolios.

- 14.7. The School is encouraged to develop ways in which the complete MA academic portfolio is collated and presented in order for the students to clearly demonstrate compliance with the RIBA criteria.

This may have the added benefit of recording the academic development of the School.

## **15 Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted:

- 15.1 The school has strong links to the city, local and international practice. The mentoring program at Masters level formalises this relationship between students and the profession and the design based Phd offered to design practitioners reinforces this connection between the school and the profession.

- 15.2 Research within the school are seen as directly contributing to the development of the profession through practice based, project orientated research. A number of platforms serve as clusters of specific research areas from which teaching themes are developed.

**16 Delivery of graduate attributes**

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered graduate attributes to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or an attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a graduate attribute was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

While the Board was content that the graduate attributes were largely met, action points and advice were offered as follows:

**Graduate attributes for Part 2**

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

Please see action point 13.1.

GA2.7 ability to identify individual learning needs and understand the personal responsibility required to prepare for qualification as an architect.

Please see advice point 14.2.

**17 Review of work against criteria**

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

**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.

Please see action point 13.2.

**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.

Please see action point 13.2.

**GC10 The necessary design skills to meet building users' requirements within the constraints imposed by cost factors and building regulations**

GC10 The graduate will have the skills to:

- .1 critically examine the financial factors implied in varying building types, constructional systems, and specification choices, and the impact of these on architectural design;
- .2 understand the cost control mechanisms which operate during the development of a project;
- .3 prepare designs that will meet building users' requirements and comply with UK legislation, appropriate performance standards and health and safety requirements.

Please see advice point 14.3.

**GC11 Adequate knowledge of the industries, organisations, regulations and procedures involved in translating design concepts into buildings and integrating plans into overall planning**

GC11 The graduate will have knowledge of:

- .1 the fundamental legal, professional and statutory responsibilities of the architect, and the organisations, regulations and procedures involved in the negotiation and approval of architectural designs, including land law, development control, building regulations and health and safety legislation;
- .2 the professional inter-relationships of individuals and organisations involved in procuring and delivering architectural projects, and how these are defined through contractual and organisational structures;
- .3 the basic management theories and business principles related to running both an architects' practice and architectural projects, recognising current and emerging trends in the construction industry.

Please see advice point 14.3.

**18 Other information**

**18.1 Student numbers**

Master of Arts in Architecture: 200

**18.2 Documentation provided**

The School provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

**19. Notes of meetings**

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings.

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**These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request. The full set of notes will be issued to the mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.**

### **19.1 Budget holder and course leaders**

The Board met the Dean, the Director of Administration, the Leader of the Master's programme; and Vice Dean for Internationalisation and PG projects and relations to practice].

The meeting discussed: the School's current and future direction and vision; implications of imposed reduction in numbers; resourcing; changes following the 2014 RIBA Exploratory Board; management of change, both external and internally-instigated; management of the relationship between the course leaders and the studio clusters; course structure with particular regard to the inter-relationship between different elements of the course; the cross-over between the studio and the Critical Written Reflection (CWR); parity across the programme; the role of external examiners; the School's view of its national and international position in terms of teaching offer and research activities; the breadth of the Master's programme in terms of the RIBA Part 2 graduate attributes; the management of weaker students in comparatively large studios; professional studies and links to practice. The following represents the main points raised.

- Both schools in Denmark (Aarhus School of Architecture and the Royal Danish Academy) must reduce student numbers by 20% and 30% respectively. In the case of Aarhus, this will entail a reduction of 30 students per year, beginning in summer 2016. It is likely that the School will implement the reduction immediately, although it could also be phased.
- The programme is currently more orientated by design but this will no longer be the case after the summer (2016). The School's vision is to increase the focus on architecture with greater emphasis on the digital and on state of the art fabrication. It will retain its landscape, urban, building design and architectural heritage.
- The reach of the School has grown; interest from international students has grown from 50 per year to 250 per year. 20% come from Norway and Sweden (there is an agreement between Scandinavian countries for freedom of movement and free education).
- Aarhus wishes to be an international school with more international staff and international research. At present 20% of the staff body is international. Danish staff are encouraged to work elsewhere to broaden their experience, undertaking at least 1 semester's exchange. At the same time, the Scandinavian direction remains important and a balance is sought between this and other influences.
- Academic regulations form the basis of the course which is then enhanced with different specialisms, known as 'platforms' and taught by field specialists. Dialogue between course leaders and platform leaders prevents the formation of silos. Inter-studio working is encouraged; trips, collaborations and projects and the rotation of

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staff between the Bachelor's and Master's programmes encourage cross-fertilisation.

- The Aarhus programme necessarily expands upon what might be considered 'architecture' elsewhere and therefore includes elements not required by the RIBA criteria or graduate attributes. Planners, landscape and interiors professionals in Denmark will have had an architectural education as these are not seen as opposing or competing disciplines. This is the strength of the Scandinavian system. It is recognised that the School embodies the Scandinavian tradition of an understanding of architecture that lies in the structure; however, the School believes that in order to have the opportunity to be outstanding it is necessary to retain the Scandinavian approach, while also focussing on architecture. Aarhus is a small school in Scandinavia and needs to be the best architects, rather than doing what everyone else is doing. The students' choice of studio enables the School to identify what the students want and need; the basis of architecture, architecture not only as a way of thinking but also as practice and how to build well as a process of design are recognised by students as important. Reflection of practice is necessary and the different areas are starting to merge. Platforms [specialisms] are established in order to strengthen the research. At present there are 10 platforms, which are in the process of merging into three research laboratories. Larger groups will have the capacity of discussing architecture from different points of view. The next step will be to take this into teaching. The diversity will be somewhat narrowed because research will be more focussed.
- The Critical Written Reflection (CWR) is a recent innovation. The aim of this is "to present and discuss the student's approach to and understanding of his/her project work" and counts 20% of the final grade award for the semester. Staff running the CWR negotiate the subject matter with the students. The Aarhus education is project based; there are no examinations. CWR needs to have at least a substance in their written work. There is a culture of working in teams and studios are quite small.
- Aarhus graduates are able to work in many different fields of architecture. The graduates' broad perspective makes them popular with international firms. Adaptability will be the main issue in future and this is an ability already possessed by Aarhus graduate. Their open-mindedness and collaborative approach complement their artistic approach. The School firstly tries to reflect the Danish system; as a publicly funded institution, this is an obligation. Secondly, it provides an education for an international profession.
- Some choose to do the integrated internship as a sabbatical. It is not compulsory but strongly encouraged. Students have a free choice of firm, the School having power of approval. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that the transfer between practice and academia is relevant. When students return, the time in practice does not appear to have had an impact on their artistic approach in any negative sense. The recently introduced mentoring system aims to strengthen further the contacts of students to professional practice. Mentors to coach them through practice related issues concerning their design project. The School wishes to introduce an internship in the BA but

are under pressure from the government to graduate students as quickly as possible.

- The Board was interested in support for less able students. The School replied that while studios appear quite large, the numbers given include those on internships. Some studios have more than 30 students, others fewer. The teaching:time ratio is generous and teachers are familiar with the students' abilities. Studio staff meet students on an individual basis to discuss progress and ways of improvement. Students too are encouraged to write a report for this meeting. Staff also have the opportunity to discuss issues in a larger forum.
- The number of applicants has grown considerably but the number of admissions has not. A new admission system at BA seeks to identify talent rather than offer places based on an average mark.
- Students must work in studio; they are not permitted to work at home. This is seen as essential to the studio culture, particularly for the international students.
- The body of knowledge residing within the research platforms informs the studio. A platform day is held each spring, at which each platform presents its work and its ambitions. This is an opportunity for discussion and reveals the connections between research and teaching. The Research Day allows researchers to present their work. 10% of staff time allocated to personal development, even if the individual is not a researcher.
- Assessment and moderation processes are thorough and inclusive, involving all staff and external examiners. Close dialogue between the external examiners and the staff body facilitates an exchange of views.
- Management of change, both external and instigated internally, is facilitated by the School's small size and democratic culture, which enables it to respond rapidly. Being an independent small school is useful; the link between the Dean and the government is short.
- RIBA recognition is an international benchmark, which will help Aarhus to set up collaborations with others schools and attract very high calibre students.

## **19.2 Meeting with head of institution**

The Board met the Dean and Head of Master's again on the second day of the visit. While this meeting covered some similar ground to that covered in the budget holder meeting on the first day, it focussed chiefly on the School's strategic direction in terms of course development and academic emphasis, and included further discussion of resourcing and student numbers.

- The School's focus is engagement in society and finding solutions to problems through architecture. In order to do this, the School needs to focus on practice and how to build. The School is addressing the three big global issues, namely, habitation, sustainability and transformation. While narrowing down in some ways to a more classical approach to architecture, it will continue to develop its strengths in architecture, planning and landscape, all of which form

part of the Danish heritage. Planning, cultural heritage and landscape are important issues in Denmark and therefore form a greater part of architectural education in Denmark than elsewhere and are not treated as separate disciplines. In the Bachelor's degree, students must be educated in these areas before they choose their Master's studios. They cannot be singly focussed on 'architecture' as other countries may see it.

- Digital fabrication will be an important part of architecture in the future, hence the investment in machinery, enabling students to work directly with fabrication and sketching with digital machinery
- Programme development takes place through a series of negotiations. There is consensus among the leadership team about the direction the School should take. The School has a flat structure and all staff are given the opportunity to express their opinions. The Design Realisation project is a case in point, having been tested as a pilot project to establish its benefits. A current pilot project running in several studios is testing the feasibility of closer relationships between the internship and studio work. At the end of the pilot staff will report on the benefits and drawbacks. In the same way, the School is developing how it will teach digital fabrication. In 2020 it is hoped that the new building will have a workshop, which will enable all to participate.
- The School is autonomous and tries to be as agile as possible. At present, the School receives most of its income from the State. The funding for teaching and staff will not change from the present level. Resources will increase in future as the School will have additional funds from different income streams. The staff:student ratio is set by the state. There is a fixed budget and a fixed number of students. At present, the School may decide how its money is allocated between students and research. This may not be the case in the future. The new building will provide more effective use of space with the same level of funding as at present. The leadership team's greatest power is in terms of recruitment; here too it can decide where to invest and this is its greatest opportunity influence the direction of the School. In this way it can ensure that it can increase the amount and level of research and that this is delivered into the teaching. 30 appointments have recently been made, with an emphasis on more research-focussed staff as this will bring in more external funding. As teaching is research-based, additional monies from research will have a positive impact.

### **19.3 Students**

The Board was pleased to meet a group of students representing semesters 7, 8, 9 and 10 and a variety of studios within those semesters. A large number of those present had completed an internship and about half had come to the Aarhus Master's programme from another school. The Board was interested in discussing: why students chose the Master's at Aarhus; awareness of the School's mission statement or vision; their understanding of the course; communication from the School with regard to course structure; the studio system including range and student choice; contact time; pastoral care; their awareness of the RIBA process and thoughts on its significance; assessment processes (formative and summative, parity of assessment and the quality of

feedback); communications between staff and students; placements; facilities; students' involvement in the new building brief; suggestions for improvements and any other issues the students wished to raise. The following represents the main points discussed:

Among the reasons students chose Aarhus were the following

- The city of Aarhus and its diverse architecture
- The cultural and academic diversity; the breadth and understanding of design.
- The variety of units and the artistic component, which covers a broad field. In some cases students were drawn by a specific unit, rather than the School itself. Many of those present had chosen Aarhus after researching different Master's programmes. Students who had completed their Bachelors at other schools, often in different countries, were seeking a different experience and new opportunities. Many felt that the Aarhus School provided choice and potential that may not be available elsewhere. It was commented that it offers the breadth of a unit system but without the streaming that some believed happens elsewhere.
- The fabrication facilities and the tectonic culture
- The opportunities for placements.
- Career opportunities
- The more process-driven nature of the programme, as compared with some other programmes.
- Opportunities to undertake projects abroad, supported by funding. Students have the chance to work internationally and responsibly within different contexts.
- It is a cost effective option for many students.
- While students were aware of the RIBA and the validation process it was considered to be more important for the Bachelor's graduates from the UK than for Danish Bachelor's graduates.
- The process for choosing studios is clear and most students get first choice. Processes and general requirements are easy to understand. It is possible to change studios, but more than one change is not recommended. Some students mentioned that there was some perception of an imbalance between studios, chiefly concerning narrow focus.
- Working in studio is fundamental to the ethos of the School. Studios are dynamic as all students share studio space. Learning is not linear. There are great opportunities for peer learning, benefiting from each other's different experiences, skills and strengths. Students can gauge their own achievement against that of their peers.
- While the amount of contact time could vary between studios, all were happy that this was sufficient. Maintaining a good dialogue with staff is essential. Students appreciated the democratic ethos; staff are approachable and accessible. Formal assessment processes and feedback are clear. In practice, students can get as much feedback as they want. Differing views were expressed about the importance of grades, some students feeling that although grades may be important in an academic context they were of little importance in the professional world.
- Students welcomed the opportunity to present their work to external companies, which allowed them to gain a more external, commercial

feedback. The contribution of practitioners provides a seamless bridge between the School and practice that strengthens the School.

- Students appreciated having the freedom of choice in practice placements and the support offered by the School. The choice of unit could have some implications for the timing of the placement period, but all practices were aware of the School's systems.
- In-house pastoral care systems are good; in addition to these, students have access to Aarhus University support systems.
- The studio system ensures a high degree of awareness among students of staff's research activities and professional interests. The proximity to research and opportunity to consult experts brings elasticity to students' learning opportunities. The programme schedule, while clearly laid out, is sufficiently flexible to afford students much independence.
- The School is receptive to suggestions for improvement from the students. There is a system for feedback to the School. Students are encouraged to participate in discussions about the proposed new building and are kept informed about developments.
- Students would welcome more crit space and pin up space.
- Mixed views were expressed about the proposed new school; there were some fears that something essential could be lost in moving to a purpose-built facility. It was suggested that existing spaces could be used as crit-space and provide an opportunity to exhibit work in process as well as the final result. This is a valuable part of learning and the diversity should be taken advantage of.
- While diversity is clearly one of the strengths of the School, it is not always visible. Some felt that there could be a feeling of isolation in units. There is some working in year groups but not a great deal. Despite the proximity of students from different studios and the generally good communications within the School, some felt it could be difficult sometimes to be aware of the work of the others studios. A central point, or hub, was suggested. Theoretically, however, everything is open to all.

#### **19.4 External examiners**

The Board met a large group of external examiners currently or recently examining at Aarhus. The external examiners are drawn from academia and a range of practice; several were also external examiners at other schools of architecture in Denmark. The meeting discussed: the role of the external examiner; Danish regulations and the RIBA process, graduate attributes and criteria; the School's response to external examiners' reports; their observations of the School's vision and increased focus on architecture; parity between studios in terms of content, ambition and assessment; issues raised in the external examiners' reports; the thesis project; the internship; and any other issues the external examiners wished to raise. The following represents the main points made.

- The external examiners commended the high quality of the graduates produced by the School.
- Briefing for external examiners is thorough. The strengths of the process lie partly in the combination of external and internal examiners and the connections the process creates to events and developments in the current profession. The Ministry of Research and Culture has proposed a series of regulations, which may stipulate that the external examiners' period of office will be four years. The School presents a list

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of examiners that is verified by the Ministry. The examiners believed that reducing the number would change the conversation. The external examining panel is now comprised solely of architects, whereas previously the expertise was broader.

- The examination system works very well. Broad discussion is encouraged. The examination is, in fact, part of the education as other students may attend and use it as a learning opportunity. The growing tendency to present two semesters' work (one formally) provides useful additional evidence for the examiners, provides useful additional evidence for the examiners, particularly in the case of weaker students or if there is discussion about the appropriate grading.
- The external examining system in Denmark is relatively informal. The external examiners are looking to see that the student works independently, displays aesthetic talents, produces good architecture and communicates these ideas well, in line with the philosophy of the School. While technical matters are also considered, the degree to which the work covers this will depend upon the individual student and studio. Process work is strong and appropriate credit is given for it. The external examiners also discuss with staff the extent to which studios should influence the final project and the fact that allowing Master's students to change studio may result in a lack of depth.
- There is no tradition of responding to or acting on external examiners' reports but this is set to change. However, comments are taken very seriously even if the School is not in the position to change things or cannot do so immediately.
- External examiners are keen to maintain the distinctive features and qualities of the School. There is a great deal of debate about the scope of architecture education. The breadth is seen as conducive to creativity; however, there is external pressure to be more measurable. Some believe that focussing on different aspects is right, particularly if funding is to be reduced. It could be of benefit to different institutions to develop a specific focus. There is much discussion about whether to educate an artist in technical skills or to educate a technician. The Aarhus School tends towards the artistic and wishes to maintain its tradition of learning by doing. Other skills can be taught by the profession. While a greater degree of organisation is good, too much may stifle other aspects.
- There is much discussion about parity between studios. Some students (particularly international students) were able to change studios, which led to discussions about depth. Studios and student work can be measured for overall quality but not how much students got [find a different word] from each subject. Students have freedom of choice and can adopt their own ideology. There are no concerns that any studios are weaker than others, but the dynamics can change year on year. Studios do have an individual agenda but the aims could be more explicit to the external observer. Studios are reviewed frequently and this ensures that they do not become too narrow.
- Applying a grade (which is a system from the universities) to a discipline such as architecture is difficult and often misleading. Aarhus wishes to maintain its own way of doing things, which works very well. Grades are not significant when seeking employment.
- The timing of the written report during the final project was raised. It was felt that at present the written document is effectively incomplete and it was suggested that it might be preferable to write the report on

completion of the project. This would enable external examiners to have information in its entirety at the final review.

- The internship is essential. Some opinions were expressed that timing or length might be adjusted for maximum benefit, perhaps taking place later on and taking a year rather than six months. The Bachelor degree includes shorter breaks that are also valuable for students and practices alike. Students are encouraged to exercise their creative powers on return to the School after the internship as it sometimes can have an abrading effect.
- One expressed the opinion that the diploma project was too pressured.
- Some external examiners' reports had commented that students had spent too much time on process and not on the final product and that there was insufficient variety of form. At the meeting it was suggested that the apparent 'simplicity' of the work might be cultural. Teachers focus on process, whereas practitioners want to see a result. The School and examiners should be open to breadth and different levels.

### **19.5 Staff**

The Board was pleased to meet a large group of staff teaching on the architecture programme. The Board was interested in discussing; parity of assessment; changes in the School since 2014 and the culture of embracing change; feedback and assessment; internships; cross-pollination between studios; staff induction and development processes. The following represents the main points raised:

- Changes in the curriculum are evident; it has become more theoretical and practical in a more advanced way. Change is viewed positively, even when changes are rapid. Given the number of new staff, communication between staff, management and colleagues can be challenging, as the staff body does not meet frequently as a group. However, the majority are adaptable. Overall, the continuity of staff is good. Constant evolution is normal for the School and this has ensured that it remains relevant. There is increasing internationalisation of the staff body, in response to the globalisation of the profession. Many staff are drawn to the School by the possibility of exploring digital fabrication. The School's equipment is rapidly coming up to date and is improving, having perhaps overtaken practice in some areas.
- The relevance and the quality of the School's research (including PhDs currently being undertaken) is gradually developing and improving.
- The School continually seeks best practice. The Design Realisation is purposely kept as broad as possible, to provide the greatest degree of flexibility to the studios and to attract students to the School. It will be subject to review in order to establish whether it is appropriate for all studios.
- The experimentation period is extremely valuable and of benefit to all. Some would welcome more experimentation and acceptance that time to test and conceive constructive ways of operating is needed.
- Staff are aware of the RIBA graduates attributes and criteria; a learning outcomes document was developed to link to the criteria and courses adjusted correspondingly. Systems are in place for developing and discussing briefs, money for collaborations and guest professors. Open discussion about work, assessment and parity is frequent and collective. Open studio days are one such vehicle for discussion and are useful for calibrating the work.

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- Different models of internship are being piloted in studios in a bid to develop a closer relationship between the two and to explore what can be expected from a practice, what kind of practice may be involved in addition to the traditional and to create a sense of responsibility within the practice towards the education of the intern.
  - Cross-collaboration can be challenging and difficult to achieve, although the intention is there Studios and staff do collaborate to test new ideas; there is more cross-pollination across some studios than others, depending upon the focus and activity. Some collaborate for competitions. There are 14 days of common workshops across the 10 studios. Much cross-collaboration takes place in discussion and grading.
  - Work (including developmental work) is viewed and discussed by all staff before marks are proposed. External examiners also view the work. This ensures parity across the studios. The comparability of standards with other institutions is essential in a competitive environment.
  - Project-based learning, although a challenging mode of education, succeeds as Aarhus students are highly self-motivating, autonomous and able to take the initiative. Self-direction is a feature of all Danish education from the beginning. The opportunity for project-based study is one reason students choose the Master's at Aarhus. Aarhus is a city rich in knowledge and expertise. Students can participate and interact with researchers and practice. There are collaborations with vocational schools and colleges which provide technical expertise and connections with the city architect.
  - While there is little formal induction for new staff, help is always available from current staff. Some more formal induction might be appropriate, particularly for international staff. The School affords staff the freedom to develop. External critique is welcomed.
  - Systems for accumulating and preserving knowledge are needed in order to build a body of knowledge, which can underpin future research.
  - Improvements to the intranet are needed. Although there are many individual blogs a unified teaching web is essential.
  - There has not been much discussion about the new building as staff have the right to enter the competition.
  - Staffing can be vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy. Concern was expressed that government cuts may lead to changes in staff contracts and difficulty in gaining research funding. Some rationalisation has already taken place. As part of the trend towards globalisation more change may be experienced in the future; it may be that more staff are engaged for specific periods only. The Faculty dynamics will change and this, in turn, will change the culture. The enrolment of more fee-paying students may also have an effect.