

## LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT STRATEGY

### 1 Objectives

- 1.1 The AA School is committed to the education of young architects delivered to the highest standards. Students of the AA School are supported through all levels of their architectural education by teachers and staff with appropriate experience, ambition and creativity. The flexible and largely self-directed curricula constantly challenge teachers and students alike to discover, communicate and disseminate new and innovative architectural ideas and projects, all contained within the prescriptions, criteria and regulations of architecture's professional bodies. This strategy document presents the context for the unique educational environment that is the AA School. It seeks to make all students, teachers and staff aware of their position and role within this environment and the context for the range of activities, materials and documents which comprise a supportive integrated whole.
- 1.2 Exploration of a diversity of approaches and agendas within the discipline is the fundamental pedagogic approach of the AA School. The range of issues taught and explored within the Studios, Units and Programmes aims to empower students to shape architecture through their own highly focused, dedicated and personal approach. The AA School promotes architectural teaching beyond the known, understood and expected form to raise valuable questions and engage open minds in anticipating, speculating and documenting methods and modes of address.
- 1.3 Learning, teaching and assessment develops understanding, produces knowledge and deepens awareness to equip all students with a breadth of relevant skills. Each student is supported to demonstrate personal responsibility and initiative in making judgements, identifying problems and communicating why and how decisions have been made in visual, written and verbal formats.

### 2 Academic Levels

Learning, teaching and assessment takes place at four distinct levels:

- 2.1 A one-year **Foundation Course** for students contemplating a career in architecture or related arts subjects. This is a full-time, studio based delivery providing hands-on instruction in creative design and thinking, giving students the means to develop skills in drawing, digital video, photography, installation and a variety of media. The studio setting provides an intimate learning environment in which to develop and experiment individually and collectively with new ideas, skills and techniques. Peer assessment is an essential part in helping students to develop a sense of constructive critique in relation to their own and each other's work, supporting the assembly of a portfolio that clearly represents individual interests, experiences and intellectual ambitions. Students engage in weekly tutorials, discussions and presentations with Course staff and visiting practitioners.
- 2.2 The **Undergraduate School** offers the five year ARB/RIBA recognised course comprising the AA Intermediate Examination providing exemption from ARB/RIBA Part 1 after three years full-time study and the AA Final Examination providing

exemption from ARB/RIBA Part 2 after five years full-time study. The AA Diploma / AA Diploma with Honours is achieved upon the successful completion of the Fourth and Fifth Years of study.

The Complementary Studies Programme is an essential and mandatory component of the Undergraduate School. Delivered in half and term-long cycles, the course provision enables opportunity for students approaching architecture from the different agendas of the First Year studio and the Intermediate and Diploma units to come together in shared seminar and lecture settings. History and Theory Studies offers courses that develop historical and theoretical knowledge and writing related to architectural discourses, concepts and ways of thinking. Media Studies helps students to develop skills in traditional forms of architectural representation as well as experimental forms of information and communication technology. Technical Studies offers surveys as well as in-depth instruction in particular material, structural, environmental and other architectural systems, leading to technical projects and theses that build upon the ideas and ambitions of projects related to work within the studio and units. The course provision is augmented at Third and Fifth Year levels by Professional Practice requirements.

- 2.2.1** The **First Year** is run as a single year-long studio that introduces and grounds students with a range of fundamental skills, knowledge and design principles. In a single, shared studio, students are immersed in an intellectual environment that fosters their interests and explorations in architecture. They learn how to acquire the practical and theoretical knowledge that will enable them to relate design to theory and discourse. Short projects extensively explore architecture as a creative way of thinking; a focused response towards current and speculative conditions. The portfolio is organised around the combination of these projects and required courses and submissions in History and Theory, Media and Technical Studies.
- 2.2.2** The **Intermediate School** is the collective term for the Second and Third Years of study on the AA School's five year ARB/RIBA recognised course in architecture. Students work within the structure of the unit system which presents a diversity of questions, explorations and innovative approaches to material, craft and techniques of fabrication. In parallel to the unit work, skills are developed through required courses and submissions in History and Theory, Media, Professional Practice and Technical Studies.
- 2.2.3** The **Diploma School** is the collective term for the Fourth and Fifth Years of study on the AA School's five year ARB/RIBA recognised course in architecture. Students work within the structure of the unit system which presents opportunity for architectural experimentation and consolidation across a broad range of interests and methods. Students enhance their creative independence within complex intellectual approaches, learning to articulate individual academic agendas. Skills are further enhanced through courses and required submissions in History and Theory, Architectural Professional Practice and Technical Studies.

**2.3 The Graduate School** comprises eleven distinct Programmes of advanced full-time study validated by The Open University. Enrolled students attend studies according to the length of course and specific degree award: 12-month MA/MSc, 16-month MArch, 18-month MFA, 20-month Taught MPhil and the PhD Programme.

Taught provision in the Graduate School is structured subject to the specific degree award. MA/MSc Programmes are delivered over three academic terms of taught courses followed by a dissertation writing period to conclude the year-long provision. MArch Programmes are delivered in two Phases; Phase 1 is delivered over three academic terms of taught courses and studio design work and Phase 2 over one academic term for the production of the design thesis project. The MPhil and MFA Programmes operate on a similar and further extended Phase structure.

The PhD Programme comprises a minimum of three years full-time study with doctoral candidates electing to produce the traditional scholarly text-based written dissertation or the pursuit of a studio based option for those who wish to engage with design as a research tool of the doctoral thesis.

**2.4 The AA Professional Practice and Practical Experience Examination** leading to exemption from the ARB/RIBA Part 3 Examination, the entry requirement to professional registration as an architect. The course and examination is also open to qualified practitioners for the purpose of Continuing Professional Development. The taught component of the Professional Practice Course and Examination is provided in seminar format delivered over two weeks in September or one-day-per-week January to March annually. Examiners who set and assess the final Examination also provide some of the taught seminars. Students enrolled on the taught component can present themselves for examination within the cycle or defer to the examination component of the next cycle to allow for greater preparatory time. The examination presents four papers, one of which is open-book and completed over a three week period and the remaining three undertaken in 'exam hall' conditions. The written examination process is followed by an oral interview which determines the assessment outcome.

The AA School's activities extend beyond the Bedford Square premises it has occupied since 1917: the 350 woodland campus at Hooke Park, Dorset provides extensive workshop and fabrication space for the construction of models and 1:1 prototypes; the AA Visiting School offers a worldwide network of circa 60 short courses, research and design workshops delivered across five continents; and the AA Public Programme presents lectures, exhibitions, symposia and publications to an extensive audience with a shared interest in architectural ideas, discourse and practice.

### **3 Learning and Teaching: setting the parameters**

The AA School sets a challenging and ambitious agenda for its students, in particular encouraging experimentation and innovation satisfying and exceeding professional boundaries. Equally, the AA School recognises the need for students to have a clear sense of security and guidance; each programme and element of study has clear, published expectations or specifications which set the teaching, learning and assessment parameters for staff and students alike.

The AA School is committed and adheres to a resource-intensive staff-student ratio (1:3). The academic and personal support made available to all students of the AA School, and made real by a School-wide open-door policy, provides at one level a secure safety net in a challenging environment but also a rich educational and personal learning experience.

## **4 Outputs**

**4.1** All students of the Foundation Course and Undergraduate School are required to compile a portfolio that comprehensively documents their research and designs, inclusive of historical and theoretical research, precedents, exercises, design tests, studies and projects. The portfolio is seen not only as a final, required submission assessed at the end of the academic year but also as a critical tool in the organisation and mapping of work outputs throughout the year. The portfolios in First to Fifth Year are supported and enhanced by the courses and required submissions provided by the Complementary Studies Programme.

**4.2** The course requirements of the Graduate Programmes include essays, design exercises, project work and a final dissertation/project. Credits apply for each ten hours of learning time which is inclusive of lectures, seminars, course reading, workshops and tutorials as well as the time spent on projects, essays and other assigned tasks. Each Programme presents a full statement of the output required which is monitored centrally by the Graduate Management Committee (GMC) to ensure equivalency across the Programmes.

## **5 Processes of Assessment**

A range of formative and summative assessment methods are adopted to test the delivery of teaching and the progress of learning.

**5.1** In the Foundation Course and Undergraduate School, formative assessment is undertaken by portfolio reviews during the year with the summative assessment of Pass or Fail undertaken at the end of the academic year. Every student is required to present, explain, justify and argue for their work to a panel of teachers and staff. Review panels pose questions and invite justification, not only of each portfolio but of colleagues' teaching agendas and methodologies. This form of assessment not only tests the learning outcomes but is a regular and intensive peer review of the teaching provision.

Ultimate responsibility for the award of the professional qualifications where appropriate, rests with the External Examiners who conduct an intensive review of every recommended portfolio at Third and Fifth year levels as well as a general review of teaching provision in the Foundation Course, First Year Studio and the Complementary Studies Programme.

**5.2** At Graduate School level, all coursework is marked by two internal assessors whose marks are averaged to establish a moderated result. To qualify for the degree award, students must attain the pass mark threshold on both coursework and final dissertation/project output and the overall final mark is calculated as the weighted

average of both. The degree award is made 'with Distinction' when the overall final mark is 70% or higher.

Each Programme has an Examination Board which makes the final decision regarding the students' work with External Examiners nominated by the GMC. The role of the External Examiner is to provide annual overview and monitoring of the Programme conducted by reviewing a range of design projects, media and documents, written coursework and internal assessments as well as the Programme facilities.

## **6 Monitoring and Review**

All taught provision at the AA School is subject to internal and external review on a regular basis; by the academic committee structure (Undergraduate Management Committee/UMC and Graduate Management Committee/GMC) and the Academic Board chaired by the Director of the AA School; students hold representative positions on all these bodies.

Review is also informed by feedback from External Examiners and the annual external examination processes and from the wider student and staff community.

External monitoring, review and recognition are conducted by the relevant regulatory and professional bodies; the Architect's Registration Board (ARB), the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Open University (OU) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

## **7 Related publications and information**

**7.1** The AA Prospectus is updated and published annually, available at the outset of the academic year:

<http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/APPLY/PROSPECTUS/programme.php>

The Prospectus provides extensive detail on the AA School, structure, teaching provision and academic endeavours.

**7.2** The annual schedule of business, learning, teaching and assessment activities of the AA School are presented in the detailed AA Academic Calendar widely circulated to all students and teachers and staff in hard, on-line subscription and downloadable formats:

<http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/calendar.php>

The School Registrar is responsible for the planning and co-ordination of the calendar in consultation with the UMC and GMC for annual approval by the Academic Board. The structure allows for ongoing review and debrief, facilitating the presentation of an annual schedule of business, teaching, learning and assessment in a form that underpins student and staff induction in the activities therein.

**7.3** The AA School Academic Regulations presents the academic regulatory framework applicable to all courses and programmes of study and to all students registered thereon for the duration of the academic year. The definitive information is provided to students and staff alike to ensure that all have an equal basis for their interaction.

The document seeks to define the regulatory context in which teaching, learning and assessment take place, leading to the approval of awards:

<http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/STUDY/>

It should be read in conjunction with individual Undergraduate and Graduate Programme Guides issued at the outset of the academic year.

**7.4** Recruitment, selection and admission is guided by clear and rigorous procedures made available to all prospective applicants:

<http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/APPLY/ADMISSIONS/undergradApp.php>

<http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/APPLY/ADMISSIONS/postgradApp.php>

This Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is subject to annual review by the Academic Board for its continuing appropriateness and effectiveness.

<b>Approved:</b>	<b>30<sup>th</sup> November 2016</b>
<b>Review / Approval:</b>	<b>Academic Board</b>
<b>Responsible Person:</b>	<b>School Registrar</b>