1. Objectives

1.1 The AA School is committed to the education of 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 courses, 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 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 Certificate** for students contemplating a career in architecture or related arts subjects. The Foundation Certificate is separate to and does not form part of the undergraduate programme but offers a place in the First Year of the five-year course upon application and interview, and successful completion of Foundation studies.

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 **Experimental and Diploma Programmes** offering the five-year ARB prescribed and RIBA validated full-time course in architecture:

- The AA Experimental Programme leading to the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) and providing exemption from ARB/RIBA Part 1 after 3 years of full-time study;
- The AA Diploma Programme leading to the Master of Architecture (MArch) providing exemption from ARB/RIBA Part 2 after 2 years of full-time study.

Each year of study in the Undergraduate School consists of a year-long design unit/studio resulting in the production of a design portfolio plus the completion of required core studies courses; all the required course submissions must be passed in order to successfully complete a year of study.

The Core Studies courses are an essential and mandatory component of the undergraduate course. Delivered in half and term-long cycles, the course provision enables opportunity for students 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. Communication and Media Studies helps students to develop skills in traditional forms of architectural representation as well as experimental forms of information and communication technology. Environmental and 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. In Second Year, through the Speculative Studies course students address prevalent issues within contemporary culture through the study of a diverse range of disciplines, their respective modes of practice and their relationship to architecture. The course provision is augmented at Third and Fifth Year levels by Professional Practice requirements.

2.2.1 Year One of AA Experimental Programme
Year one of study (equivalent to FHEQ level 5) is a studio-based teaching environment. It offers a broad introduction to the study of architecture and develops the conceptual abilities, knowledge base and skills for students, in preparation for entering the unit based Second and Third-Year study. Integral to the First-Year design studio are the Core Studies courses: History & Theory Studies, Environmental and Technical Studies, Communications and Media Studies.

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 the Core Studies courses.

### 2.2.2 Years Two and Three of AA Experimental Programme

Years two and three of study (equivalent to FHEQ level 6) provides the basis for experimentation and project development within the structure of the unit system. There are 18 units at this level, each of which emphasises specific architectural issues. Integral to the Experimental Design unit are the Core Studies courses: History & Theory Studies, Environmental and Technical Studies, Communications and Media Studies, Speculative Studies (2nd Year only) and Professional Practice (3rd Year only).

Design projects form the core of all studio and unit-based work, supported by lectures, seminars, juries, presentations, workshops and reviews arranged within the studio or unit. All learning is documented in the form of individual portfolios compiled by students throughout the year based upon tutorials and guidance by Unit Masters/Tutors.

### 2.2.3 The AA Diploma Programme

The Diploma Programme (years four and five of study – equivalent to FHEQ level 7) provides the tools and environment for the consolidation of individual students’ architectural knowledge, skills and experimentation towards presenting an individual architectural thesis. There are 21 units at this level organised to provide a diversity of architectural interests, agendas, topics and teaching methods. Diploma students are encouraged to challenge their own preconceptions, as well as build upon their existing knowledge and skills. Integral to the Diploma unit are the Core Studies courses: History & Theory Studies, Environmental and Technical Studies and Professional Practice (5th Year only).

Design projects form the core of all studio and unit-based work, supported by lectures, seminars, juries, presentations, workshops and reviews arranged within the studio or unit. All learning is documented in the form of individual portfolios compiled by students throughout the year based upon tutorials and guidance by Unit Masters/Tutors.

### 2.3 The Postgraduate Programmes

comprising 10 distinct Programmes of advanced full-time studies:

- 9 taught Master level programmes (MA/MSc/MArch/MFA/TaughtMPhil) validated by the Open University (OU);
- A PhD degree. The AA is an Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) of the OU for the delivery and validation of the PhD degree.
Taught provision at postgraduate level is structured subject to the specific degree award.
MA/MSc programmes are 12 months in length and delivered over four terms. The first three academic terms consist of taught courses consisting of lectures, workshops, seminars and writing workshops, with submissions required for each module. The fourth summer term is devoted to the individual work needed to finalise the dissertation thesis (12-15,000 words).

MArch programmes are delivered 16 months in length and delivered in two Phases. Phase 1 is delivered over three academic terms of lectures, design workshops, seminars and writing workshops, with submissions required for each module. There is a break for the summer following term 3, and then Phase 2 (the fourth and final term) is devoted to the individual work needed to finalise the dissertation thesis/main project.

The MA, MSc and March all consist of 180 credits at FHEQ Level 7, each credit equating to approximately 10 learning hours split between different courses of varying credit values and submissions.

The MPhil/MFA programmes are delivered over a 20 month (MPhil)/18 month (MFA) period. Like the MArch degree, the MPhil and the MFA are also made up of two Phases. Phase 1 consists of three taught terms, a summer break follows the third term and then 2 further terms (Phase 2) are devoted to individual study (the writing up of the dissertation in the MPhil and the development of the independent project in the MFA).

The MPhil awards consist of 240 credits at FHEQ Level 7 (plus 120 at FHEQ Level 6 for prior learning). Each credit equating to approximately 10 learning hours split between different courses of varying credit values and submissions. The MFA awards consist of 240 credits at FHEQ Level 7. Each credit equating to approximately 10 learning hours split between different courses of varying credit values and submissions.

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 are open to anyone who has successfully obtained their Part 1 and Part 2 qualifications (or equivalency from overseas schools of architecture) and also 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.

2.5 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 50 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

3.1 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 and specifications which set the teaching, learning and assessment parameters for staff and students alike.

3.2 The AA School is committed and adheres to a resource-intensive staff-student ratio. 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.

3.3 The Teaching & Learning Committee reviews changes to existing, and development of new courses and degree programmes in the context of wider higher educational standards, ARB, and architectural education’s unique academic profile. The Head of Teaching and Learning fields students’ curricular questions and concerns, liaising with teaching staff when necessary; likewise consulting with teaching staff referrals regarding struggling students.

3.4 Engagement with practice is essential to the education of the architect. Many of the School’s teaching staff are also active in practice, and the contribution of visiting tutors and critics is invaluable.

3.5 The School Director and Head of Teaching and Learning annually review teaching and related research goals with teaching staff, providing guidance and mentorship particularly for new appointments.

4 Outputs

4.1 All students of the Foundation Course, Experimental and Diploma Programme 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 are supported and enhanced by the courses and required submissions provided by the Core Studies Programme.

4.2 The course requirements in the Postgraduate Programme 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.

5 Processes of Assessment

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

5.1 In the Foundation Course, Experimental and Diploma Programmes 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.

5.2 At postgraduate 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.

5.3 The School commits to providing written feedback to summative assessment in a timely manner, all students should receive written feedback on their assessment no later than the first week of the next term, following submission.

5.4 The role of the external examiner at award years is to confirm that the national threshold standards; the internal academic standards of the award; and the professional criteria (ARB/RIBA Parts 1, 2 and 3) are being met, and help us to assure ourselves that the level of learning is consistent with that of students from programmes at the same level.

Examiners also review the extent to which the School’s assessment, marking scheme, examining and award making processes have been fairly and consistently implemented.

6 Monitoring and Review

6.1 At the core of how we study architecture strong emphasis is placed on enhancing and assuring high standards and qualities of learning experience. All programmes and courses in the AA School are subject to systematic internal and external review on a regular basis. This includes review by the School’s academic committees and board: the Academic Committee, the Teaching and Learning Committee, and the Academic Board chaired by the Director of the AA School. Students hold representative positions on all these bodies.

6.2 Review is also informed by internal annual monitoring and periodic review for each programme, annual feedback from the External Examiners, and from student feedback.

6.3 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), and the Office for Students.

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 academic governance structure 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 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 Teaching and Learning Committee for its continuing appropriateness and effectiveness, with approval of changes from the Academic Board.