

The ASN: Lines Drawn Press Release 25.03.14

ASN calls for change - students discuss the state of UK architectural education

70 Part 1, 2 and 3 students included those on their placement years across 22 schools of architecture gathered together to address and unify their voice in calling for improvements to the current pedagogy of UK's architectural education to reflect a changing society.

The weekend conference entitled 'Lines Drawn' took place between 15 and 16 March and was hosted by The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) in collaboration with The Architecture Students Network (ASN).

Over the course of the weekend, students were broken up into different workshops discussing the merits and pitfalls of the part 1, 2 and 3 route to qualification, aspirations of a flexible education system, the new EU directive, bridging links between academia and practice and the future of the profession and education system.

The Saturday evening saw Will Hunter, executive editor of the Architectural Review, Oliver Wainwright, architecture and design critic of the Guardian, Pam Cole, head of Portsmouth School of Architecture and Patrick Hannay, CAT tutor take part in an open panel discussion. Chaired by Vinesh Pomal, ASN representative, the panel debated the merits and pitfalls of UK's architectural education and questioned whether the 5+0 or 4+2 was the preferred route in line with the revised EU directive.

Pam Cole put forward a proposal for an alternative route to qualification in line with the EU directive which prompted a positive response by the students.

'You complete two years of undergraduate then at the end you decide - or your tutors decide if you are eligible - to go straight through to the masters level qualification. You can also have a placement year after the 3rd year (EU Directive requirement).

'So 2 + 2, with a placement year after the 3rd year which in effect is 3 + 1 + 1, with only one Part 2 award, and no part 1 (but the 3 is not the Part 1 or degree equivalent). Those who want to exit with a degree would follow a different 3rd year and effectively reroute onto the 3 + 1 + 2 route.

'The current system complies with the EU directive and we should be looking at what we want education to be within the EU'.

Whilst there was a general consensus amongst the panel and students to reduce the amount of years required for qualification, it was agreed that it should ultimately be about how competent you are in becoming an architect rather than the length required.

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Students acknowledged that the current route to qualification had some key merits which needed to be incorporated into any new course structure.

Students commented on the fact that 'the current system has the flexibility to come out of Architecture if you're not sure after three years but with easy access if you later decide you want to continue to become an architect'.

Ruth Jennings, a student from Sheffield School of Architecture said that there was a constant assumption of being an architect as the end goal, gateway into the profession and not a celebration.

Another student said 'the course has given me a wide range of skills and the opportunity to apply myself to other aspects of life/ career paths, this is undervalued and should be realised.'

The ASN believes that the course content throughout part 1, 2 and 3 and the length needs to be re-evaluated to reflect the changing needs of the profession, especially with the rise in tuition fees and associated university costs. Students value the flexibility of the different stages and the various opportunities it gives them to diversify, specialise and develop as an individual.

Views were also expressed by students on the importance of practices playing a role in their academic and professional training. Matthew Murnin, a student from Queens University Belfast (QUB) valued the depth of practical experience part time tutors brought to his education. Discussions also lead to students wanting more emphasis on practitioners attending project crits, reviews and tutorials. Students appreciated that whilst this could dampen creativity, a degree of reality needed to be incorporated to help prepare students for practice.

Live projects, which are prevalent in many schools of architecture today were seen as a positive step in engaging with the real world although the interpretation of what one was differed across the country. Projects ranged from conceptual projects working with a 'real client' to building pavilions and buildings for communities.

Students from the Royal College of Art in London (RCA) are currently engaging in a live project with the London Borough of Brent to design a structure next to Wembley Stadium. They commented that although it has been difficult, it's made them appreciate and develop the other skills required in becoming an architect; most importantly teamwork.

Emily Partridge, a student from Cambridge and former student of CAT echoed the importance of live projects.

'Projects that allow creativity & imagination while being based in the reality of building and within a context is a key strength of architectural education. It allows people to develop a

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moral, ethical and social approach to the built environment, an ideal, that is unfortunately often not in practice, while learning how to design a building, the process of making, presentation & communication.'

When the students were asked what they valued most about their education, the design studio and its culture came high on the agenda. Students saw the diversity and talent of their student peers as an inspiring driving force with one-to-one tutorials seen as a good opportunity for critical dialogue and self critical analysis.

Roisin McDonald, a student from Dublin School of Architecture said 'I value being taught how to develop an idea. To start a design process and being asked to think in a way that allows you to develop a finished product that has so much integrated in. I value that I am being forced in my education to learn to think like this.'

However, whilst the design studio is seen as a place for critical dialogue and sharing ideas, Eleanor Grair, a student from Newcastle University felt there was a real lack of design methodology in architecture schools. Olly Wainwright expands on this.

'It was interesting to hear how many students felt that the design process itself is so absent from the courses – not that there is a single approach that can be taught, but that the discussion of different design methodologies goes strangely unspoken, with such an emphasis on superficial presentation rather than how to make good buildings and spaces.

It really felt like momentum for change has finally reached a tipping point. I look forward to hearing what will come next and how the ARB and RIBA – and ultimately DCLG – will respond to the collective cry for radical reform. Otherwise, with such brilliant and affordable education available overseas, we risk losing our best students.'

The intense weekend of debates and discussions will be compiled into a detailed report which will be published on the ASN's website in April. This report will be presented to the Architects Registration Board (ARB), Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), The Standing Conference of Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA) and other influential bodies within the built environment to ensure the student voice is heard and addressed.

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Note to editors:

- Lines Drawn 2014 was hosted by The Centre for Alternative Technology in Wales in the Wise Building designed by Pat Borer and David Lea. CAT offers a unique Part 2 qualification where students learn the art of building and materiality through sustainable design. Students attend residential weeks throughout the course. The conference was a good opportunity to showcase an alternative model for a part 2 course.
- The conference was organised by: Vinesh Pomal, ASN representative and co-founder, Architect at Levitt Bernstein Associates; Zlatina Spasova, ASN administrator, Masters student at Manchester School of Architecture and Duncan Roberts, Programme Leader, Professional Diploma in Architecture: Advanced Environmental and Energy Studies (Part 2) at the Centre for Alternative Technology.
- The following schools of architecture were represented at the conference: Birmingham, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), Dublin, De Montfort, Glasgow, Huddersfield, Kent, Lincoln, Manchester, Newcastle, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Queens University Belfast (QUB), Ravensbourne, Royal College of Art (RCA), Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam, Ulster, West of England and Westminster.
- The Architecture Students Network (ASN) is an independent network of student representatives from schools of architecture within the United Kingdom. It was established in 2011 to replace the former national student society Archaos. The aims of the network are to work to support and promote architecture student events, harness student opinion, and engage with other established, relevant educational organisations both nationally and internationally.
- The ASN works with The Standing Conference of Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA) in raising student issues and sit on the RIBA's Equality and Diversity committee Architects for Change (AfC) committee promoting Equality and Diversity in the profession in both academia and practice.

Full quote from Olly Wainwright, architecture and design critic of the Guardian:

- 'Architectural education has stagnated as an arcane, inward-looking pursuit for far too long – a situation now made all the more questionable by the exorbitant rise in fees – and at the ASN conference there was a palpable sense of urgency for change.
- It was really encouraging to see such an engaged and articulate group of students coming together from such a wide range of schools to really question the value of the education they are receiving and discuss alternatives for how the current

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model might be adapted – particularly to make it relevant for a world in which the role of the architect has radically departed from the 1950s, when the three-part system of architectural education was first established.

- It seemed there was a general consensus that the length of the course could be considerably compressed, with many frustrated by the amount of wasted and misdirected time, along with a feeling that they were graduating without the necessary skills to be useful in practice. It was interesting to hear how many students felt that the design process itself is so absent from the courses – not that there is a single approach that can be taught, but that the discussion of different design methodologies goes strangely unspoken, with such an emphasis on superficial presentation rather than how to make good buildings and spaces.
- It really felt like momentum for change has finally reached a tipping point. I look forward to hearing what will come next and how the ARB and RIBA – and ultimately DCLG – will respond to the collective cry for radical reform. Otherwise, with such brilliant and affordable education available overseas, we risk losing our best students.'