

**COU.24/25:59**

<b>Meeting:</b>	Council OGM
<b>Date:</b>	Monday 19 <sup>th</sup> May 2025 – 6.00pm
<b>Venue:</b>	33 Bedford Square & Via Zoom

<b>PRESENT</b>	Catherine du Toit ( <b>CduT</b> )	President & Chair
	Ravin Ponniah ( <b>RP</b> )	Vice-President
	Mark Bassett ( <b>MBa</b> )	
	Sara Biscaya ( <b>SB</b> )	
	Trevor Bolton ( <b>TB</b> )	
	Alison Brooks ( <b>AB</b> )	
	Mark Burch ( <b>MBu</b> )	
	Pui Quan Choi ( <b>PC</b> )	
Via Zoom	Omotayo Emdem ( <b>OE</b> )	
	Susannah Hagan ( <b>SH</b> )	
	Béné Jakel ( <b>BJ</b> )	
	Caspar Llewellyn Smith ( <b>CLS</b> )	
	Simine Marine ( <b>SMa</b> )	
	Ingrid Schroder ( <b>IS</b> )	School Director
	Ben Stirling ( <b>BS</b> )	
	Cindy Walters ( <b>CW</b> )	
Via Zoom	Steven Ware ( <b>SW</b> )	
<b>IN ATTENDANCE</b>		
	Mike Aling ( <b>MA</b> )	Head of Teaching
For item 3.1	James Chung ( <b>JC</b> )	
	Anna Font Vacas ( <b>AFV</b> )	Head of Learning
For item 4.1	Alex Lorente ( <b>AL</b> )	Head of Membership
Up to item 3.4	Tehmina Mahmood ( <b>TM</b> )	Head of HR
	Chris Pierce ( <b>CP</b> )	Head of Part Time Studies
	Rob Scully ( <b>RS</b> )	Head of Finance
	Louise Wilkins ( <b>LW</b> )	Company Secretary
	Amanda Vidler	Assistant to the Company Secretary

### 1. Welcome and Apologise

CduT welcomed all members of Council and attendees.

Apologies were received from Steve Mertz who has submitted detailed comments on the papers via email.

Two members of Council joined the meeting via Zoom.

CduT invited Council to declare any new conflicts of interest, no new declarations were declared.

## **2. Minutes and Action Points**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025 were approved.

Actions from previous meeting were noted as completed, on the agenda or were due to come to a future meeting.

## **3. School Director's Report and Strategy Implementation**

The School Director's report being paper COU.24/25:48 was received by Council and questions were welcomed, IS noted the report is set out to relate to each section of the Strategic Plan and remains broadly on track. IS gave an overview of the report and highlighted some very positive media coverage from the Venice Biennale.

Council noted the Conservation and Reuse programme has had 31 offers accepted. The conversion of these offers will likely lead to between 9 to 14 students starting the programme which is positive for the first year of the programme. PhD offers stand at 29 and should convert to 10 students.

### **3.1 Conversion Programme – ARB Reforms**

A presentation on the AA's Graduate Access Programme (AAGAP) was provided by James Chung.

Council heard how the School is planning to meet the changes proposed by ARB to the current academic route for qualification and registration as an architect. The reform removes the requirement for an undergraduate degree in architecture with the aim of diversifying the profession.

The ARB reforms will allow graduates with a non-cognate degree so long as there are demonstrable transferable skills. The AA has elected for a plug-in approach for the access course over one year, which will lead into the 2-year masters. This was chosen over a fast-track route which would create a parallel competing diploma and become a drain on resources. JC added that the plug-in approach appears to be the preferred option for other HEI providers.

The initial target for the first year will be 10 to 14 students at a fee of £24K. The course is to be resourced from within the existing Unit structure avoiding any significant additional costs. Council discussion focused on entry requirements, which will require a candidate to hold an undergraduate degree (2:1 minimum), provide a 1500-word statement of intent alongside an in-person interview, and review of a portfolio. JC set out how the course will be structured and the modules that will form the duration of the course.

It was noted that alignment with the EU and rest of the world in terms of architectural education and registration requirements will be kept under review. Noting that not all jurisdictions currently accept a route to registration that does not include an undergraduate degree in architecture. The course is proceeding through the validation process with a meeting with the ARB taking place the following week.

The Chair thanked JC for a very interesting presentation and suggested any further questions from Council could be sent to JC via email. Council agreed that the course was a good response to the ARB reforms and look forward to receiving updates as the course proceeds through the validation and recruitment processes. The presentation was shared with Council after the meeting.

### **3.2 AA Incubator – Discussion**

IS provided Council will provide an update on the ideas for the AA Incubator which has developed out of the recognition that recent graduates need support in starting out. The idea now is to have a series of short

courses which would be useful for recent graduates and those in practice. This could eventually lead to a part time degree, involving a credit structure and covering 30 topics, set over six parts and run as a part time evening course. Initially it will start as evening seminars that fulfil CPD requirements. The topics would cover topics such as:

- How to start a practice - risk and investment, management, and managing reputational risk etc;
- Global practice – general considerations when working across borders e.g. international employment law, visa restrictions, tax and income implications working in Asia, Gulf States, EU, and USA and working in conflict areas;
- What is real estate - 6-part series to include land value, mortgage and finance, property as investment, supply and demand, study and inflation, material value of property, finance, and valuation;
- Advanced section on macroeconomics, data, analysis and investment, typological difference, financial material sustainability, design, and asset value;
- Financing projects - understanding the constituents of cost, mapping scenarios, building, a business plan, approaching funders, compromise and phasing, and funding applications;
- Working with developers, negotiation, compromise etc;
- Legal for international property development;
- Council and planning – working within the system, navigating heritage challenge, working with government, and shaping policy in government,
- Winning competitions, or learning from losing;
- Sustainability;
- R&D, grants, and funding.

IS noted this is currently a long wish list, but the aim is to start a few in September with a real estate course and then look at finance and law. Work is underway to identify the individuals to deliver the course, using contacts developed through the School and visiting school. Other ideas are being considered for a series of juries to share projects, with the aim of building an architecture community, developing ongoing practical skills, and keeping the AA at the centre of the conversation and raising the profile of the AA.

Council discussion focused on whether these courses lend themselves to becoming an alternative revenue stream and whether if delivered in person, this would help develop the AA network further. IS commented that the courses would all be in person, not online. All agreed this is a very exciting opportunity and Council look forward to future updates.

CduT thanked IS for the update.

### **3.3 Office for Students**

#### **IDAP Update**

Council heard that the extension to the Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP) has been officially confirmed by the OfS to run to 29<sup>th</sup> September 2028. The OfS will resume the process of reviewing applications for Indefinite TDAP on the 1<sup>st</sup> August 2025 and applications will be staggered with priority given to providers who have been paused. The AA should be early on the list of applications to be reviewed.

Conversations are ongoing with HEI providers in the same position as the AA and their submissions to OfS on changing how the OfS assess HEIs moving from temporary to indefinite. Communication is being maintained with the OfS, through IS and CP.

#### **OfS Roadshow for HEI Chairs**

At the last meeting CduT had made Council aware of a meeting that chairs of Higher Education governing bodies had been invited to by OfS, and that CduT would attend.

CduT provided a brief overview of the meeting and noted that the experiences of other institutions applying for indefinite degree awarding powers reflect those experienced by the AA. A key point raised was to remain in communication with the OfS and this becomes key if the provider believes they may be experiencing or might be about to experience a reportable event. The group of Chairs will also be reviewing the new initial registration condition around Effective Governance (E7) and contact with the School Director, the senior management team and then the board of trustees will be forming part of this condition. This condition would not immediately apply to the AA as it is already registered.

### **3.4 Staff Survey Report and Action Plan**

Council received the Staff Survey Update being paper COU.24/25:49 with an introduction provided by the Head of HR, Tehmina Mahmood noting that the report sets out the findings from a series of staff focus groups, completed at the end of Term 2 which focused on seven critical areas which had returned lower scores in the survey results being:

1. Leadership & Management
2. Reward & Recognition
3. Enablement
4. Wellbeing
5. Inclusion
6. Change Management
7. Communication.

Council heard four staff focus group meetings were held in order to focus on the seven topics at which detailed discussions were held and feedback collected on what staff want to see in terms of actions. Meetings to discuss wellbeing have also taken place and the actions that staff want to see are summarised in the paper. TM noted that across all the topics communication underpins each topic. Communication is a key area for administrative staff and changes are being considered as to how SMT can better communicate decision making.

Feedback from all the focus group sessions is to be collated into a broader action plan with a clear set of objectives, with actions that can be implemented immediately and longer-term goals which will be shared for consultation with staff at the start of next term. There will be a 'You said, We did' campaign. Feedback given at the wellbeing sessions has identified actions that can be quickly implemented alongside longer-term improvements. A full action list with an update on progress will be brought to Council in September 2025. ACTION

The Chair thanked TM and IS for the update, TM left the meeting.

## **4. Corporate Governance, Compliance and Committee reporting**

### **4.1 Membership Report**

Council received the Membership Report being paper COU.24/25:50 which set out proposed changes to the membership categories for discussion. The membership list for Council approval will be presented at the July meeting.

Council heard that the membership structure proposals, currently being costed, include streamlining the membership categories, setting out of membership benefits which had become too London centred when the majority of alumni are international. It was noted that the proposed fee increase was significant given

due to no increases for over 10 years and that the membership has to be consulted to a change on the level of fees so this needs to be carefully considered before further action is taken.

Council agreed that clear, targeted communication is essential, and suggestions were provided on the key themes for approaching these changes:

- Clarification of the added benefits and value for both existing and prospective members, highlighting events, receiving copies of AA Files and digital resources;
- Emphasis to be placed on implementing incremental annual fee increases to avoid substantial fee increase and potential membership cancellations;
- As alumni membership remains de facto and free, but the perception of value must be improved with clarification of membership benefits;
- To consider an opt-out model, rather than an opt in and tiered fees/discounts for younger alumni members and survey alumni on desired benefits;
- Benchmarking fees and benefits against peer organisations.

AL and CP confirmed a sample group of membership will be contacted for feedback before any changes are implemented with a detailed proposal being presented at the next Council meeting. ACTION.

The Chair thanked CP and AL for the paper and update. AL left the meeting.

#### **4.2 Finance and Audit Committee Report**

Council received the Chair's Report being paper COU.24/25:51 which was taken as read.

The Chair thanked BS, RS and IS for the update.

Council noted that the budget comes to Council for approval in July when a detailed discussion would take place. The Finance & Audit Committee recommended that any shortfall of student numbers below the budgeted target would be covered by the 5% contingency included in the budget (equivalent to c.£1.2m or 38-50 students depending on course). However, the Council would receive detail on the scenario planning with mitigation measures for any shortfall in student numbers at its next meeting via the Committee.

It was also noted that the plan is for the contingency to be split into two, one element relating to admissions and the other related to ongoing operational matters.

Council heard that there remain many factors which affect, and make, accurate student number forecasting a challenge. Many students are currently trying to find work placements, which is impacting the known numbers for fourth years. It was noted that the School has no control of English language tests, which are a requirement of student visa applications and are taken in country at official centres.

The Chair thanked BS and RS for the update.

#### **4.3 Legal and Regulatory**

##### **Immigration White Paper**

Council received the Immigration White Paper report being paper COU.24/25:52 which sets out the key changes from the government's announcement regarding UK immigration in relation to student visas. Further work is to be carried out to understand impacts, risks, and preparation for a worst-case scenario. This will include:

- Analysis of the impact and model the scenarios of a 6% levy including impact on the static fee, and overseas vs UK student fee;
- Engagement with Independent Higher Education to ensure appropriate influencing of the government policy development, and identify any additional mechanism for influencing the Policy;

- Identify the impact of the reduction in the length of the graduate visa.

A detailed report on the analysis, impacts and risks and mitigation measures will be brought to the next meeting of Council. Council heard that the AA was already meeting the standards of compliance set out in the White Paper for visa thresholds. The announcement of the outcome of consultation on the White Paper will come in October when the government presents the autumn budget.

The Chair thanked LW and IS for the update and noted this will form part of the agenda for the next meeting. ACTION.

#### **4.4 Nominations, Remuneration and Governance Committee Report**

Council received the Chair's Report being paper COU.24/25:53. The following resolution was passed by Council:

##### **Resolution**

- Council appoints Cindy Walters as Chair of the Estates and Infrastructure Committee from 1 June 2025

##### **Matters to note**

- Alison Brooks will be deputy chair of the E&I Committee going forward, this does not require a formal appointment by Council and is a decision for each Committee
- Council was reminded that for 1<sup>st</sup> June 2025, Sara Biscaya will join the Finance & Audit Committee and Ravin Ponniah will be Chair of the Nominations, Remuneration and Governance Committee which were approved at the last meeting of Council.
- Steven Ware has agreed to act as the link person between the Estates & Infrastructure Committee and Finance & Audit Committee. Although it is not proposed at this stage that he is appointed as a member of the F&A Committee, but rather to be an observer for 3 meetings a year and will be invited to speak as required. This can be kept under review to see how the informal link works in practice.
- All Committees are encouraged to appoint someone as their deputy chair, but this does not need Council approval.

#### **4.5 Academic Assurance Committee**

Council received the Chair's Report being paper COU.24/25:54

The Nominations, Remuneration and Governance Committee has recognised that there is a need for additional skills and experience in academic quality and standards, architectural education, and higher education on Council, and that this is particularly important for the Academic Assurance Committee. A person specification for this recruitment of new Council Members has been approved and the recruitment booklet will be circulated.

The Chair encouraged Council to utilise their networks to get applications for academic vacancies and also to begin thinking about any other upcoming skill sets required on the Committees. It was noted that a new Council member with relevant HR experience is also required.

#### **5. AOB**

##### **En bloc items:**

55/ Annual Legal and Regulatory Assurance Report – COU.24/25:55 was received

56/ Legal and Regulatory Update (and Risks) – COU.24/24:56 was received

CduT thanked everyone for their contributions.

RP, on behalf of Council, gave thanks to Catherine du Toit for the service given to Council, the generosity of spirit, giving her time so freely and her immense commitment to the School. IS provided thanks on behalf of the School and staff, noting that a lot has changed and CduT leaves a much stronger Council. As there was no other business the meeting concluded at 19.56hrs.

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**Action arising from previous AA Council meeting on 3 June 2024**

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>A3</b>	Discussion at a future Council meeting to be held on the strategy for research at the AA	RP/LW	July 2025

**Action arising from AA Council meeting on 19 May 2025**

	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
<b>A1</b>	Staff survey action list and progress report	TM	September 2025 meeting
<b>A2</b>	Further report and conversation to be held on membership categories, its criteria, payment and right to vote. And to include a consultation with group of members about proposed changes	LW	September 2025
<b>A4</b>	Analysis on the impact of the Immigration White Paper policy decisions, and scenario planning where appropriate	RS	On Agenda

**Chair: Ravin Ponniah**

**Signed: 14<sup>th</sup> July 2025**