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AA Research Framework

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1. Ambition

The AA Research Framework aims to foster innovative research across the broad community of the AA, to address current challenges and anticipates future needs, while also aligning with the broad topics set out in the AA Strategic Plan. It aims to empower the promotion of substantive ideas and change and aspires to act as an agency that helps AA staff and students to refine, amplify, and disseminate research work. It aims to grow the research culture of the AA that reflect its core values and to provide support for the practicalities of research. Research culture at the AA is developed from the leading role it has taken in historical and contemporary discourses and practices of architecture. The AA has an independent and high-quality capacity to undertake and lead research programmes, demonstrated by AA researchers and their collaborators with a significant number of publications and other outputs that have been subject to the highest standards of peer review. Research is considered essential to academic inquiry, to the generation of new knowledge and to developing architectural design through rigorous investigation and experimentation across diverse methodologies. The AA Research Framework articulates a multi-layered strategy to integrate architecture with other disciplinary fields, and to develop new architectural knowledge that addresses the pressing problems of the world today and that evolve over time, capable of meeting the unpredictable demands of the future. The framework acknowledges the urgency of architectural responses to critical global transitions across cultural, social and ecological thresholds.

2. Objectives, Scope and Values

The Framework's primary goal is to advance architectural knowledge by fostering innovation that addresses cultural, ecological and technological change. In doing so, it emphasises architecture's role as a material and cultural agent, shaped by and shaping the world's evolving conditions. Rooted in the AA's long history of exploration and critical inquiry, research culture at the AA extends beyond the study of historical precedents to focus on understanding architecture's potential to lead in the transformation of society and environments. The aim is to understand the dynamics of human systems as living and evolving phenomena that shape the worlds culture and society and its domains and spaces.

This scope aligns with the larger Strategic Plan of the AA 'Expanding the Horizons of the Possible' that empowers the students, academics, staff, alumni and members of the AA to fulfil their potential, challenging the status quo and advocating independent ideas and radical architecture to shape the future of life, architecture, cities and the environment.

The Framework aims to reflect the core values of the AA and so supports a plurality of voices from across disciplines and societies that represent a diversity of position and outlook. It seeks to reinforce the integrity and accountability of architecture as a very broad field of practice, within which ethical research is conducted, open to broader engagement with an urgent need to address social equity and climate responsibility. It will foster creative potential, critical freedom and radical cultural enterprise, establish new forms of collaboration and interdisciplinary cooperation, encourage the exploration of new methods, tools and technologies and seek to transcend current and traditional social, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries.

3. Research Approaches

The research culture of the AA continues to produce research that has led architectural discourses and practice across the world in thematic areas that include Architectural History and Architectural Theory, Urban Design and Urban Governance, Material Experimentations and Constructions, Generative and Computational Design, Environmental and Sustainable Design, Design as Research together with broader cultural and social research within which architecture has a significant presence. The Framework reinforces these disciplinary affiliations and associations but seeks to fully realise the potential of the critical freedoms and particularities of the AA and its unique collaborative potential in order to facilitate new research that draws together and unites differing thematic areas and empowers the emergence of new research themes and domains.

Humanities Research at the AA focuses on the interpretation and creation of texts, and the exploration of architectural theory as a basis for design analysis and speculation. It benefits from the extensive academic resources and archival collections of the AA. Projects that members of academic staff are currently engaged with include the politics of space, the social evolution of cities, the creation of new media, interdisciplinary performance and futurology. Research in this area may also inform and impact on other research themes.

Radical Pedagogical Agendas in the education of architects has been an ongoing research project at the AA since it was founded in 1847. Globally recognised contributions that the school has made to pedagogical structures and architectural teaching methods around the world include the Unit system, the Visiting School and the full academic integration of Public Programmes. These innovations form a legacy that the school continues to build upon, questioning and reinventing them as an experimental laboratory for learning.

Design as Research is fundamental to the AA, positing design as a unique method of enquiry, not just as an outcome of analysis but as an active process through which architectural questions are explored and new knowledge generated. This is aligned with the broad commitment of the AA to design processes that evolve over time, influenced by the interaction of cultural and scientific domains.

Material Experimentation plays a pivotal role linked to Design as Research, with emphasis on developing materials in spatial configurations that are not static but responsive, with potential to create architectures that contribute positively to and are integrated responsively in their social, climatic and ecological context. This is complemented by explorations into the reuse of existing materials including the reconfiguration of existing materials with digital fabrication that can open new forms and processes for sustainable regenerative practices.

Climatic and Ecological Design (Artefacts, Buildings, Settlements, Cities and Landscapes) is situated in and responds to the dynamics of climate and ecological change that are accelerated by human activities. It also includes the investigation of the consequences of large-scale changes to the Earth systems that are impacting on society and the natural world. The production of sustainable urban and land systems and their architectural artifacts are pursued through rigorous analysis, generative design computational experiments and simulations to explore to spatial and material forms that are adaptable and resilient in the face of environmental stressors. The threats posed by climate change and environmental degradation necessitate new ways of thinking about energy flows, materials, resource use, and ecological resilience. By emphasizing adaptive and regenerative imperatives in research the AA seeks to orientate itself to the future of significant changes to climate, ecology and society and the role of architecture in engaging with those changes.

Computation and Fabrication (including Prototyping and Robotics) explores the widest possible range of design tools, and interrogates how manufacturing technologies, virtual reality and 1:1 modelling can be hybridised, manipulated and reinvented. The use of computational tools for data-driven design and cross-cultural studies in fabrication and construction also enables a holistic and inclusive approach to evolving generative development of iterative and experimental computational processes. Research in this theme proceeds through experimentation that utilises the Digital Prototyping Lab, the facilities of the Workshop and fabrication facilities in Hooke Park.

4. Research Areas (Labs)

The AA focuses academic development on key areas of teaching and research that benefit students and staff across the undergraduate and post graduate offering and provide opportunities for the advancement and dissemination of staff research. The following outlines the projected growth of existing initiatives and the creation of new ones.

Each programme follows a 'lab' model that brings together the work of AA staff, post graduate research, undergraduate teaching, intra-institutional collaboration, and public outreach (through AA publications and public programme). The labs provide a collective framework for discussion across the school, to generate new ideas and approaches to shared areas of concern with the potential for significant wider impact.

AA Action lab establishes a platform for community-led projects and participatory practices initiated by AA units and post graduate programmes. The lab engages with the surrounding London context and extends the platform provided by the public programme and exhibitions to sites outside the AA. The work of this group will tackle current policy measures, sustainability initiatives, issues of social equity and housing need.

AA Archive Lab examines alternative organisations of history and artefacts to challenge received narratives and the role of the AA school in the perpetuation of abiding Western European centred readings of history and culture in architectural education. The Lab brings together individual and unit- and programme-wide initiatives that explore strategies for decolonisation and the diasporic experience and their impact on the built environment and cultural production.

Existing Things of Relative Value explores the changing value attributed to objects, materials, spaces and places and how this determines approaches to their reuse and preservation. This Lab brings together ongoing work from individuals, units and programmes across the AA to challenge existing designations and cultural hierarchies within the context of the climate crisis.

AA Land Lab is a collaborative framework for work between academic institutions in East Asia and the AA. The objective is to lead an extensive regional network to support research into sustainable approaches to materials, fabrication, landscape, infrastructure, and community. The framework will support a series of symposia, shared projects and programmes, and publications, leading to intra-institutional funded research.

Imagined Things of Future Value provides a forum for speculative worldbuilding programmes, areas of material innovation and the development of new technologies at the AA. It draws on the work of various units and PG programmes such as EmTech and DRL to pool knowledge and resources around the intersection of material science, digital frameworks, and artificial intelligence. The lab confronts questions of radical advancement in the face of climate change and the existential risk posed by AI and other advanced digital technologies. It focuses these concerns on the effects on the built environment, infrastructures, and the future role of the profession.

5. Research Infrastructure

5.1 Research Repository

The Framework prioritises the establishment of the AA Research Repository. The proposed Repository will be developed to bring together, curate and make accessible the architectural knowledge that has been generated within the school over its history. The Research Repository will consist of a wide range of materials including AA PhD's, catalogues and publications of AA Exhibitions, appropriate AA publications, Theses and Dissertations of Distinction in physical and digital forms, and details of experimental Pavilions and material constructions, reflecting the school's historical and ongoing contributions to the field of architecture. This will become a vital resource for both historical study and contemporary research, expand the intellectual resources available to academic staff and students and will add to the AA's culture of critical enquiry, and help to make the AA a compelling location for researchers and scholars. It will also expand the intellectual resources available to academic staff and students and will add to the AA's culture of critical enquiry. The Head of Research, together with the Research Review Panel, under instruction and advisement from the Director, will oversee the development of the Research Repository. The Repository will be hosted in the Cloud, and under the management of the AA Library with custom designed interface to a cross referenced and searchable index that follows the Library's current catalogues (Library of Congress) with added sub domains where more specificity is needed.

5.2 The Research Review Panel

The Panel consists of the Head of Research (Chair), Chair of Academic Committee, Chair of History and Theory, Chair of History and Theory, Head of Visiting Schools, and Head of the PhD programme. The Panel makes decisions on all external grant and other funding applications submitted in the name of the AA and that make use of AA resources, reviews sponsorship proposals (where appropriate), and facilitates the internal dissemination of funding and award opportunities. The Panel's work is coordinated with Company Secretary, is subject to ethics review procedures, and a summary of all Panel decisions are reported to the Director and to the Academic Committee and Academic Board. It provides guidance and feedback of developing grant applications, makes regular reports to external funding bodies and sponsors as required, and ensures that all information about AA projects with funding/sponsorship attached are centralised.

5.3 Grant Funding

At least one of the named applicants submitting either a grant/funding/sponsorship application or being considered for inclusion in an internal or external competition or award must be either a current AA academic or consultant staff member, or an AA full-time registered student on a degree programme, or a former member who intends to seek funding for an AA Exhibition, Symposium or other event that is demonstrably to the benefit of the AA cultural programme and to staff and students. Anyone satisfying the criteria may submit an application/proposal to the Research Review Panel and/or be considered for a competition or award. In general, no preference will be shown between individual or collaborative applications and there are no quotas for different types of applications.

Staff and students seeking funding of their projects or other initiatives are encouraged to seek guidance from the Grants Writer. Applications are received throughout the year in writing to Head of Research for immediate circulation to the Research Review Panel and must include the completed application along with the relevant criteria and a short cover note addressing the Panel's assessment criteria. Applications to be considered by the Panel must be submitted at least three weeks before the application deadline.

5.4 Visiting Scholars

The AA welcomes emerging scholars, emeritus practitioners and academics as visiting scholars to participate in the life of the school and make use of its extensive facilities. Visiting Scholars will be one of the following:

An Honorary Fellow of the AA, a senior role for a distinguished scholar across disciplines who will be associated with the AA and contribute to a wider discussion. Names are to be submitted to the Academic Committee and by the Academic Board. Candidates will be self-funded.

A Visiting Lecturer who will participate in the teaching programme of the AA for one year providing contributions to seminars, unit and programme teaching and public lectures. This position is accompanied by a modest honorarium.

An AA Visiting Scholar who will be a post-doctoral or equivalent status who will visit the AA, typically over the duration of one or two academic terms, in order to carry out research using the AA's archival and bibliographic resources. This role is subject to the standard membership fee.

A Visiting Doctoral Scholar is a PhD candidate from another institution who would like to participate in the AA Post Graduate programme for a short period, and or make use of the AA resources. The AA may charge tuition fees at the nominal annual PhD rate pro rata.

5.5 Collaborations

Collaborations with other Institutions and networks will help to enable access to funding, and the AA seeks to build an extended system of external collaborations across the world and with Practice.

Partnerships with other Institutions will enable architectural research that can draw on the most advanced tools and insights available and push forward experimental work. Partnerships within technology- driven sectors and Climate and Ecology sciences will be critical in pushing forward experimental projects that cross disciplines and domains. An important criterion of the Research Infrastructure is the emphasis on open-source knowledge exchange with other institutions. By creating platforms where data, methodologies, and findings can be shared freely across disciplines, the framework encourages a collective intelligence approach. This will also democratise access to architectural knowledge, making it possible for a wider range of voices to contribute to the development of architectural research.

Establishing and participating in collaborative networks both within academia and with industry is vital for accessing funding, fostering innovation, and ensuring that research has a broader societal impact.

6. Dissemination and Impact

Research culture at AA is predicated on the view of research as a fluid interaction with the world that may take many different kinds and formats, recognising the complexity and instability of modern systems and seeks to intervene thoughtfully within them, with the ambition to make architectural research at the AA tangible and interactive, visible and actionable both within the academic realm and in broader cultural and professional contexts. Research activities at the Architectural Association are conducted in multiple domains, and research methods cover a wide range of experimental as well as traditional modalities, with design as the central activity for the creation of new knowledge. Design research is recognised as a unique method of enquiry specific to the architectural discipline, generating new theoretical frameworks and incorporating innovative and multifaceted modes of analysis and synthesis of knowledge that challenges perceptions of fundamental

architectural issues, unfolding new perceptions and understandings that contribute to knowledge.

Design research that contributes to knowledge leads to new perceptions, to new spatial and material forms and processes, to the development of new architectural, urban and ecological systems, and to new constructs that advance the existing understanding and quality of natural and built environments.

Design research is increasingly expressed through interactive and responsive media environments and may include computational visualisation simulations that involve open-source platforms, experimental material prototypes and situated interventions, and narratives, mappings, and performative installations. The diverse outputs of design research require a distributed system of open access and engagement. This includes local communities and users who are essential stakeholders in spatial and ecological research projects, especially those that interface with climate adaptation, informal urbanism, and social infrastructure. It also includes academic peers and interdisciplinary collaborators who extend and refine research propositions through critical discourse and methodological exchanges. Public audiences and cultural institutions are essential loci whose participation situates architectural research within wider debates. By situating itself within this expanded field of dissemination, the AA affirms its role as an active participant in public culture, as well as a generator of advanced research. Digital technologies provide the connective tissue for this engagement, enabling the school to act as a node within a broader networked world.

To support this approach the AA promotes open access to research outputs across multiple platforms, and offers support to staff and students in producing and curating digital content, including videos, podcasts, interactive models, and digital exhibitions. It is developing partnerships with online repositories and cultural platforms to increase the reach of AA research and embeds digital dissemination strategies into research project planning and funding applications.

Publications, Exhibitions and Symposia are key dissemination tools, but the Framework places a particular emphasis on exhibitions, community engagement and on active engagement with social media and open access publishing. Traditional publication of monographs, books and articles in scholarly journals remain important, but dissemination has been significantly changed, enhanced and reconfigured in recent decades by digitally networked technologies. Dissemination is now understood as an active process, one that involves engaging diverse publics and stakeholders, from local communities to global networks. The AA recognises that digital dissemination has the potential to achieve audiences and wider participation by the general public who would otherwise not be reached by traditional methods of dissemination.

Most scholarly journals are online today where they usually retain their functions and formats inherited from their print versions, but there are new online archives and digital networks, such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate and other emerging platforms are accessed by millions. New digital publication systems enable broader access, faster publication cycles, and integration with digital indexing and citation platforms. These platforms support not only the publication of peer-reviewed research but also the sharing of preprints, catalogues, and data sets.

The AA recognises Open Access as a strategic approach to extend beyond traditional boundaries of knowledge and to participate within a broader system of interdisciplinary feedback, social learning, and cultural imagination. The Framework encourages the adoption of open access journals and repositories as preferred publishing platforms for faculty and researchers, and offers Institutional support for publication fees where required, including alignment with national and international mandates. To this end the AA has enabled an open access publishing facility with Taylor Francis, operated by the AA Library.

Lectures and presentations at Symposia are livestreamed to far more widely dispersed audiences than those that can physically attend and are archived on digital platforms such as YouTube and so remain accessible and gather audiences over much longer periods.

The AA YouTube platform has a growing archive of more than 3,500 videos, with 59,000 regular followers. The platform has to date 5,600,00 views in total, with almost 1,000,000 hours of viewing. It retains individual

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lectures (from the moment of live streaming) permanently. It also has curated playlists, for example the lectures and presentations of the AA XX 100 Conference 2017 which has had 250,000 views.

The AA will seek to actively integrate its research, in all its diversities of topics, methods and outputs, into the curriculum at all levels, ensuring that students can see the through-line of research from foundational knowledge to advanced inquiry. This through-line connects students' learning directly to wider architectural discourses, giving them a sense of participation in the ongoing redefinition of the field, and creating a feedback loop between education, research, and practice, making each a source of innovation for the others.

