

RIBA 

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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Revisiting  
Board to the University of Bath**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 27 January 2010

**Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering  
Faculty of Engineering and Design**

**Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice, Part Three**

Date of Visiting Board: 16 October 2009

## 1. Information About the Courses

1.1 **Courses offered for revalidation:**  
**Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice, Part 3, 8 months PT**

1.2 **Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered**

Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering  
 Faculty of Engineering and Design  
 University of Bath  
 Bath BA2 7AY

T: + 44 (0)1225 385394  
 Fax +44 (0)1225 386691  
 W: [ace@bath.ac.uk](mailto:ace@bath.ac.uk)

1.3 **Name of Awarding Body**  
 The University of Bath

1.4 **Name of Head of School**  
 Mr Alex Wright, Head of Architecture Group

## 2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Revisiting Board for the visit on 16 October 2009 were:

Benedicte Foo (Chair). Ms Foo provided continuity with the Visiting Board of October 2006.  
 John Regan  
 John Hickey

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk  
 (RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

## 3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

3.1 The Visiting Board was carried out under the 'RIBA Procedures for the Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture,' published September 2003, effective from September 2003, 'RIBA Criteria for Validation', published March 2002, effective from September 2003, and 'Description & Regulations for the recognition of courses, programmes and examinations in Professional Practice and Management, (Part 3)'. For more information see [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

## 4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board

The Visiting Board recommended **Continued Validation of**

**Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice, Part 3, 8 months PT**

4.2 The next full Visiting Board, considering Parts One, Two and Three, will take place in 2010 as part of the normal 4-year cycle.

## 5. Criteria for Validation

5.1 On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined, the Visiting Board was satisfied that all the students graduating from the courses and examinations listed in 4.1 above satisfied all the Criteria for Validation (which are held in common by the RIBA for validation and the ARB for prescription).

## 6. Standards

- 6.1 On the basis of the academic portfolios examined, the work from the previous year of the courses listed in 4.1 inspected during the visit was found to meet the required standards.

## 7. Conditions of Validation

- 7.1 There were no conditions attached to the courses listed in 4.1.

## 8. Standard Requirements of Recognition

- 8.1 RIBA recognition of all courses/qualifications is dependent upon:
- i. external examiners being appointed for the course;
  - ii. any significant changes to the courses and examinations being submitted to the RIBA
  - iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being reported to the RIBA so that, where appropriate, recognition may formally be transferred to the new title by the RIBA
  - iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses/qualifications listed in 4.

## 9. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

- 9.1 The last Visiting Board to the University of Bath took place on 19/20 October 2006. The Visiting Board recommended:

### Continued Validation with Conditions of:

#### Part Three: Examination in Professional Practice

#### 2. Details of condition (2006 Visiting Board)

“Overall the Board was satisfied that the work of the 2005 cohort of the Part Three programme clearly demonstrated that the Part Three Validation Criteria were being met by all graduates from the course and that minimum pass standards were being set appropriately. However in order to have confidence that this would continue to be the case the Board requires that the course be fully validated by the University and approved by the RIBA New Courses & Course Changes Group before any promotion is undertaken for, or candidates are registered on, the next (2007/8) cohort of programme. This is to ensure that there is full compliance with university regulations on external examining, that university appeals procedures are available to candidates and that the course benefits from formal university annual monitoring and periodic review procedures.

The Board thus imposed a condition on the course as follows:

The Department must:

- achieve internal validation for the programme
- gain approval for the revised programme from the RIBA New Courses & Course Changes Group

before any promotion is undertaken for, or candidates are registered on, the next (2007/8) cohort of programme.

“A revisit will be undertaken by a sub-group of the Board when the work of the first cohort of the university validated programme is available to establish that the Part Three validation criteria continue to be met and that appropriate pass standards are being maintained.”

- 10.2 The full report of the 2006 Visiting Board is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

## 11. Recommendations

11. The Revisiting Board made no recommendations.

## 12. Advice

- 12.1 The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards;
- 12.2 The Revisiting Board advises that the detail of the documentation is finalised to take account of revisions and omissions, in particular the programme specification.

## 13. Commentary

- 13.1 **Developments since the last visit**  
The programme was revised taking into account comments of RIBA Visiting Boards in 2001 and 2006 and other external advisors. The course now sits within the University framework and is a university award. It was renamed the Postgraduate Certificate in Professional Practice.

As required the School submitted course documentation to the NCCCG on 2 May 2007. The Group approved the changes at its meeting on 12 September 2007. The documentary submissions to the NCCCG demonstrated that there was full compliance with university regulations on external examining, that university appeals procedures are available to candidates and that the course benefits from formal university annual monitoring and periodic review procedures. The first part of the condition was thus deemed to be satisfied.

The programme was formally introduced in October 2008 and the first cohort graduated in 2009. The Revisiting Board considered the work of this cohort during the visit.

The Revisiting Board was satisfied that all Part Three criteria were met by all graduates and that threshold standards were appropriate. The Revisiting Board therefore recommends to the RIBA Education Committee that the condition be discharged and that the programme be awarded Continued Validation.

The Revisiting Board noted that the present Director of Studies was recently in post at the time of the 2006 Visiting Board. The Revisiting Board commends the improvements that have been made in the programme and examination since then.

The Revisiting Board considered that this was a good, well-run course. All procedures were sufficiently fair, balanced and rigorous. The course papers are very good. The external and professional examiners expressed great support for the programme.

**13.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Revisiting Board thanks the departmental and university staff and external and professional examiners for their assistance during the visit. The Board also thanks the candidates who were able to attend for an informal discussion.

Documentation was forwarded in a timely manner. The Revisiting Board drew the School’s attention to several omissions which will be rectified before the forthcoming full Visiting Board in October 2010. Overall, however, the administration of the programme was very much improved.

**13.2.1 Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit**  
The School provided the 3 lowest, 2 middle and 2 high passes from the 2009 graduating cohort.

Of the present cohort, 25 offered for examination from 31 who enrolled on the programme. Five of the original cohort will present for examination next year.

**14. Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the Part Three examination**

The course is taught within an intensive 5-day lecture series delivered by specialist contributors as well as the Director of Studies. The taught course covers

- The construction industry and the context for practice
- Practice and Construction Law
- Legislation and Constraints
- Project administration and management
- Practice management and administration

An Introductory Seminar is offered in October after enrolment. The taught course is offered in June of each year, with written examinations in August and the oral examination in September. A Revision Seminar takes place in August before the written examination.

Scenarios are issued a fortnight before the examination and are discussed at the revision seminar held before the examination. The written examination comprises two closed papers of three hours’ duration. The oral examination is conducted by two professional examiners.

The Director of Studies visits candidates in practice and can discuss matters with Office Mentors when necessary. Testimonials are sought from practices regarding candidates’ suitability for Part Three. This is intended to ensure that practices are aware that the candidate is taking Part Three and should give them sufficient appropriate experience.

All guidance offered through taught courses and discussion with the Director of Studies is supplemented by information on Moodle, the University’s Virtual Learning Environment.

Proposals to reschedule the programme to sit better within the academic year were due to be discussed at an internal course committee meeting in the week following this visit.

**14.1 Assessment**

The Board considered that assessment processes were appropriate.

Eligibility to present for examination is based upon a qualitative assessment of a candidate's PEDR by the Director of Studies. The School is aware of the need to advise appropriately candidates affected by the economic downturn.

Candidates who fail the written examination once may not proceed to the oral on that occasion but may resit the written examination. They must submit for the oral examination within 18 months in order to ensure currency and relevance of experience. Those who fail twice are not permitted to retake the examination. The qualification is pass/fail. The pass mark has been set at 50%.

The School is aware of impending revisions to the RIBA PEDR system and the joint RIBA/ARB criteria and the need to take these into account when revising the programme or procedures.

#### **14.2 External and professional examining arrangements**

A team of 6 professional examiners conducted the examination this year, overseen by the external examiner. The Board was pleased to meet the External Examiner and two of the professional examiners in a helpful and positive meeting.

Both types of examiners were clear about their role and about the assessment process. They were confident that all comments were noted and acted upon.

Questions are set in-house and considered by the external examiner to see whether the paper will provide a broad spectrum across the criteria. The examiner considered

that the questions had improved over the last few years and being set in-house assured consistency and balance. The external examiner samples written papers and observes many of the professional interviews. The External Examiner was content that university processes for determining who might present for oral examination were fair and appropriate. He confirmed that the professional requirements of the programme appeared now to sit well with the University's requirements for its programmes.

Every element of the examination must be passed for an overall Pass. Professional examiners conduct the interview and have the power to fail a candidate at this stage. Failure in the oral examination means an overall fail. Professional examiners are not empowered to moderate marks which have been awarded and confirmed in the university marking process. However, examiners were confident that any issues identified by examiners would be investigated by the university.

In noting improvements to candidates' submissions, the examiners mentioned in particular the consistency between internal marking and the examiners' expectations with regard to case studies. There was a better attempt this year to convey comments and observations separately from descriptions and a much better transfer of findings and conclusions.

Difficulties common to all Part Three programmes, such as variable support in practice, the difficulty of acquiring appropriate experience and encouraging mentors to provide appropriate feedback in PEDR were also experienced. Candidates were reportedly philosophical

about difficulties which had arisen due to the economic downturn.

The examiners considered that the field of candidates at this session was strong. It was their opinion that numbers on the programme were increasing because the quality had improved. The Board agreed with the examiners' view that the examination was challenging but balanced. The Board was pleased to see the process becoming richer and more robust.

#### 14.3 **Quality assurance**

The discussion with the Director of the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Office was useful and informative.

There are clear processes for programme validation, review and amendment with much responsibility devolved to Faculty level. All programmes are subject to annual review, taking into account statistics, external examiners' reports, unit leaders' reports, staff-student liaison committee meetings and other feedback. The annual monitoring report is written by the Director of Studies. As this is the first year the course has run in its present form, it will be scrutinised by the Faculty Teaching Quality Committee. Minor amendments, identified as necessary or desirable during the first year of operation, will be made. Several omissions in the present programme documentation will be rectified before the next full Visiting Board in 2010.

The Board learned that the Architecture and Civil Engineering department is proactive in engaging external professionals to contribute at all levels and to a greater degree than other subject areas.

#### 14.4 **Students;**

The Course Director considered that the ideal cohort size is 30 candidates; in earlier years the target cohort size was 15-20. It had been anticipated that this number would not be achieved for several years, whereas in fact it was achieved immediately. The Department does not want to exceed 30 as it becomes difficult to administer. Many prospective candidates receive recommendations by word-of-mouth and it is normal to receive many applications towards the closing date.

#### 14.5 **Staff, Resourcing and Facilities**

The Part Three director of studies also teaches Management, Practice and Law at Parts One and Two. He is supported by two other members of staff. The services of specialist tutors and lecturers are engaged to deliver some of the formal teaching.

#### 15. **Attachments**

The School provided all necessary documentation before and during the visit as required under the procedures for validation.