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**Report of the Exploratory Board Visit 11 March 2009
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee on 27 January 2010**

Joint submission by the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh College of Art who will from September 2009 combine to deliver a single suite of professional programmes in Architecture Parts One and Two under the jointly owned Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture.

Membership of Board: David Howarth(Chair)
Martin Pearce
Professor Stephen Gage
Elantha Evans

Sarah Bedding (Secretary)

1. Recommendation of the Exploratory Board to the Education Committee of the RIBA

Candidate Course Status for Exemption from Part One of the RIBA Examinations of

Bachelor of Arts in Architecture

Master of Arts (Honours) in Architecture

Candidate Course Status for Exemption from Part Two of the RIBA examinations of

Master of Architecture

The designation 'Candidate Course for Validation' implies that the proposals for the course are judged to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not, however, equivalent to Validation, which can only be granted once the standards of the work produced have been assessed and found satisfactory.

2. Advice to the School

The Board thanks the staff and students for their hospitality and openness during the visit.

The Board would like to bring to the School's attention the following issues and queries, which it hopes will be helpful to the staff and students in the development of the course and towards achieving validation.

2.1 The Board recommends the Schools establish a clear and cohesive course vision. The Schools are advised to build on the existing course structure and create a new identity for the School.

- 2.2 The Board recognises the involvement to date of staff and students in the alignment process and recommends that this continue.
- 2.3 The Board was concerned that the relative credit weighting of the final year design project was too low in the MArch course, and suggests that the School look again at the structure of the Part Two. It is noted that there will be a Candidate Course Monitoring Visit during 2010 which will provide further opportunities for discussion and clarification.

3. Background

From September 2009 the University of Edinburgh and Edinburgh College of Art will combine to deliver a single suite of professional programmes. The programmes will be jointly owned by both institutions. The development of the jointly owned programmes is under the current stewardship of the two heads of Architecture at the institutions. The current Heads of School will become Associate Heads of School and will report directly to the Director of Architecture, this post is yet to be filled.

The alignment is a long running strategic objective shared by the institutions to create a strong school which, while retaining the identities and strengths of its component parts, will draw on the resources and expertise of the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot Watt University. Architecture students will have the opportunity to choose from a wide range of elective modules

ECA will discharge Quality Assurance responsibilities for the Course, with the University of Edinburgh acting as the awarding body.

It is anticipated that the existing prescribed programmes will continue in parallel with the introduction of the new programmes and will be gradually phased out as the existing cohorts progress. Resources will be shared and arrangements have been developed for the location of the studios during the transition period.

4. Course structure and content

In total there will be three jointly owned validated and prescribed awards. All undergraduate students will be admitted to the MA (Hons) Architecture Programme.

Students in the two, jointly owned undergraduate validated and prescribed programmes (BA and MA Hons) start with a common two year foundation. During Stage 2, students will be advised of the different routes and will then select the most appropriate route for them. In common with all degree programmes in Scotland, the honours degree is four years full time.

The Schools presented detailed curricula for Stage 1 of the undergraduate programmes with further details of subsequent stages to follow as the programme develops.

Students on the new, aligned programmes will have access to the facilities of both institutions. In addition students will benefit from the institutional specific curricula. For example: the ethos of the creative arts available at ECA with optional courses such as art and design. Whilst electives at level 2 offered by UoE in the humanities and social sciences afford additional opportunities. The joint matriculation of new

students will however create additional requirements for induction to the different facilities at each institution.

Like the BA/MA(Hons) which combines many of the existing curricula and resources of the two institutions, the MArch is a new programme that offers different pathways. This will allow students a range of specialisms and pathways towards Part 2 qualification. The programme leaders felt that considering both institutions run strong Part Two courses currently, jointly they can offer a third, elective, route. There will be complexity however during the interim phase because existing and new programmes will run concurrently

4. Recruitment/Admissions

The University of Edinburgh, College of Humanities and Social Sciences Undergraduate Admissions Office will process all undergraduate applications on behalf of the two institutions to both the BA/MA(Hons) and MArch. For 2009, the target intake is 110 UK/EU students and 20 international students. This target intake is the combined intake of the two departments, so the overall intake remains the same.

Entry to a stage other than Stage 1 is considered on a case by case basis which involves staff from both institutions.

6. Student Meeting

The Board met with 10 students from both Edinburgh College of Art and the University of Edinburgh. The Board would like to thank the students for their contributions to an open and honest meeting.

The Edinburgh College of Art students expressed a sense of trepidation about the merger. They felt that they have had to make themselves heard, otherwise the decisions would have been made without their input.

At the student meeting some students commented that they felt that they would only be temporary occupants of their new premises; it is presumed that this refers to arrangements made for one cohort of eca students who were due to use studio accommodation at the University of Edinburgh during the 2009/10 academic session. The ECA students have been unable to visit the facilities at the University of Edinburgh because a convenient date or all parties to visit the facilities could not be found.

The students felt that the new MArch was an exciting opportunity to choose from two existing pathways, whilst providing variety with the elective options. There was some concern amongst the students that the two universities' library systems and I.T systems do not work together and this may present difficulties for the students next year.

The Board was concerned at the apparent lack of involvement of the student bodies in the process of combining the programmes. There seemed to be a failure to communicate the rationale and benefits of the merger and there was failure to sufficiently address student concerns as to the pragmatic issues as they would affect students' studies.

The Board learned from the School that alignment process had been reported and discussed at Programme and School and Staff/Student Committees since the process began in 2004. Special meetings had been held with student representatives since the Change Leaders' appointments.

The relocation of eca students to UOE for the 09-10 session was communicated to the students as soon as the numbers for the new intake were agreed between the two institutions and the implications for accommodation became clear. Obviously, the affected students were unhappy with the decision and its timing.

While the Board noted that procedures had been adhered to, matters of communication were raised as issues of concern at the student meeting. The board urges the two schools to address these matters of communication with the students as soon as possible to keep students informed of the process.

The Staff Student ratio at ECA is 1:18, and 1:17 at the University of Edinburgh.

7. Staff Meeting – The board met with staff from both institutions.

The staff were enthusiastic about the new structure of the MArch programme and this was an exciting opportunity to retain the best elements of the old programmes whilst including more options for the students. The approach to teaching has not radically changed but they are now in a position to give students more options. Students will have an introduction to the Part Two options and will be invited to make pathway choices based on that. Students would be allocated their first pathway choice as far as is possible, the staff acknowledged this would raise a question about resources in order to accommodate this.

The undergraduate duties have mostly been divided up amongst the staff, although not all. The staff explained there had been discussions about how best to run each year of the undergraduate course and it has been decided that there will be 2 joint co-ordinators for each year of the course to incorporate the philosophies of both Schools. One tutor will be responsible for Semester One, and one tutor for Semester Two.

The staff explained that throughout the process they have received updated bulletins regarding the merger but have not been directly involved in decision making. There remained uncertainty and some anxiety amongst some of the staff that their individual roles and responsibilities under the new operational structure had yet to be defined.

The history of the alignment has made it hard to define an identity but it is hoped that the new Director of Architecture might help provide this. The staff considered that there is trust and a mutual respect amongst them and this will help define the vision of the programmes in the future. The current conversation has been dominated by the technical logistics of the course rather than the architectural ideology.

The Board urges the School to ensure the staff body are involved in the development of the identity of the new programmes, allowing them to contribute to a cohesive vision for the joint delivery.

8. Resources

The RIBA is familiar with resources at both Edinburgh College of Art and Edinburgh University from visits in 2006 and 2008 and is confident of the range and quality of provision across both institutions. These are described in detail in the Visiting Board reports of 2006 (www.architecture.com).

Studios

The Schools stated that facilities across both institutions will be available to all students on the joint programmes and each year group will be allocated studio space at one or other institution. The studios at ECA are situated within the Architectural Tower with first year studio space allocated to the ground floor. The studio space appeared to be lively and well used. The School are aware of environmental issues with the building which will need addressing in the future by the institution.

Library

Students will have access to three libraries; the Main University of Edinburgh Library, Main Edinburgh College of Art Library and the Art and Architecture Library, School of Arts Culture & Environment. The University of Edinburgh library is the largest in Scotland, housing over 2 million periodicals and other printed works. In addition to the main library the students have access to the Art and Architecture library which is housed in the University's Architecture Building. This contains over 15,000 books and over 100 journal titles. The slide library has a large collection of slides and database of digitised slides is maintained. This library is open from 9.00-17.00. Within the School library there are a number of PCs and scanners.

The Edinburgh College of Art library is set within the newly developed Evolution House. This library houses 85,000 books and more than 350 periodical subscriptions.

School of Arts, Culture and Environment

The labs, studios and workshops all have wireless internet coverage. There is an open access multimedia lab in Chambers Street which has 27 Apple Mac and 2 Dell PC workstations. The lab has A3/A4 Scanners and Card Readers. There is an A3 and A4 Mono laser printer and a photocopier. Adjacent to the lab is the McGovern Media Centre. The Media Centre has two bookable Apple suites.

The workshops at UoE are of a high standard and central to some of the activities and qualities of the institution.

Edinburgh College of Art provides seven computer workshops and extensive internet and wifi access. There are also facilities for digital imaging and video editing. Scanners and printers are also provided. Many facilities are available to students on open access.

There were some concerns amongst the students regarding access to both institutions' facilities, particularly in relation to student induction to non centralised resources including merger of data bases, catalogues and so forth. It was not clear to the Board how resources would be shared. These arrangements should be made more explicit within the documentation and in information given to students, with particular regard to whether students will be inducted and have access to all facilities and whether there were plans to integrate databases, catalogues and similar resources.

9. Documentation

Prior to the visit the School supplied complete programme specifications. The Board was disappointed by the lack of detailed course description, course handbook and unit descriptors at a stage so close to the launch of the joint programmes. The School responded to the Board's request for further information throughout and following the visit.

10. Conclusion

The RIBA recognises the potential benefits to both institutions of the alignment and understands the difficulties involved and wishes the Schools well in what will be challenging times.