

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to the University of Nottingham**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Liaison Group on behalf of RIBA
Education Committee 10 March 2010

**Institute of Architecture
School of the Built Environment**

Part One: BArch (Hons) Architecture

**Part One: MEng Architecture and
Environmental Design**

**Part Two: Graduate Diploma in
Architecture**

**Part Three: Diploma in Professional
Practice and Management**

Date of Visiting Board: 18/19 June 2009

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for validation:

Part One: BArch (Hons) (three years full time)

Part One: MEng Architecture and Environmental Design (four years full time)

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (two years full time)

Part Three: Diploma in Professional Practice

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered

Institute of Architecture
 School of the Built Environment
 University of Nottingham
 University Park
 Nottingham NG7 2RD

T: 0115 951 4887
 F: 0115 951 3159
 W: www.nottingham.ac.uk/sbe/

1.3 Name of Awarding Body
 University of Nottingham

1.4 Name of Head of Institute
 Professor Michael Stacey

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on Thursday 18 June and Friday 19 June 2009 were:

Ruth Morrow (Chair)
 Cameron Wilson (Vice Chair)
 Matt Gaskin
 Stephen Brookhouse
 Roz Barr
 Adam Bench
 Stephen Melville (Non-Architect Member)
 James Brown (Graduate/Student Member)

Mansur Admadu (CAA) attended the first day of the visit as an observer.

Sarah Bedding (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) in the UK.

For more information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the Education Committee of the Royal Institute of British Architects

4.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the RIBA Education Committee **Continued Validation** of:

Part One: BArch (Hons) (three years full time)
 Part One: M.Eng Architecture and Environmental Design, (4 years full time)
 Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (two years full time)
 Part Three: Diploma in Professional Practice

4.2. The next Visiting Board should take place in 2013.

5. Recommendation of the Visiting Board to the Commonwealth Association of Architects and the Construction Industry Council & EU Directive

5.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA continue with their accreditation of the Part Two qualification.

5.2 The Visiting Board was satisfied that the Part One courses met the Construction Industry Council Common Learning Outcomes for Degree Courses in the Built Environment

5.3. The Visiting Board recommends to ARB that the Part 1 & 2 courses met all points of the EU Directive.

6. Criteria for Validation

6.1 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).

7. Standards

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

8. Conditions of Validation

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

9. Standard Requirements of Recognition

9.1 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 4.1.

10. Summary of the Recommendations, Advice & Commentary Contained in the Full Report

10.1 Background

The Board encourages the Institute to build on its strengths, which include:

- High calibre of students entering the courses
- Field trips to a diverse range of destinations
- The strong backing that the Institute enjoys from the University
- The research culture relating to sustainability
- The engagement with local and national practice

10.2 Recommendations

The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA expects the Institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendations in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the school and in the mid term review. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

- 10.2.1 In order to assess how the Institute has responded to the Issues raised by the Visiting Board, the Board recommends the Mid Term Monitoring visit is brought forward by a year to October 2010 on a date to be agreed mutually by the RIBA and the Institute.
- 10.2.2 The Board recommends the Institute increases the capability for structural and technology teaching, and consider recruiting more staff in this area in order to embed this subject area more effectively into the studio projects.

- 10.2.3 The Board recommends the Institute make learning, teaching and assessment procedures and relationships transparent to the external and professional examining process
- 10.2.4 The Board recommends the Institute ensures that Technology and Environmental Design are articulated as design drivers within the studio programmes and are fully integrated into the wider curriculum
- 10.2.5 As highlighted by the Visiting Board report of June 2005, the Board recommends the Institute articulates a clear and distinct vision for the direction of the Institute.
- 10.2.6 The Board recommends that the management and professional practice module at Part Two level be strengthened to include more context of professional practice and management, legal studies and professional skills such as reflection.
- 10.2.7 The Board recommends the Institute investigates methods for ensuring that students demonstrate, via a comprehensive portfolio of work, a wider knowledge of professional practice and personal development at Part One.
- 10.2.8 The Board was concerned with aspects of the External Examining process, in particular the lack of clarity in the paper trail relating to the examiners reports. External Examiner QA procedures need to observe a rigorous process to maintain the high standards of the assessment procedures. Responses to the External Examiners should be formalised and any action taken should be transparent to all teaching staff.

10.2.9 The different and separate roles of Professional Examiners and the External Examiner(s) be clearly defined at Part 3 and that External Examiner Reports be obtained and responded to.

10.3 Advice

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;

10.3.1 The Board advises the Institute to engage with the RIBA validation process more completely, ensuring that any significant changes to current programmes are sent to the New Courses and Course Changes Group as appropriate.

10.3.2 The Institute may benefit from adopting a strategic and comprehensive approach to the development of staff members, in particular those part time staff who run years and carry administrative and teaching duties.

10.3.3 Following discussion at the student meeting, the Board advises the Institute to review the balance of assessment across the undergraduate programme to ensure that the module tasks reflect the credits given and that consideration be given to co-ordinating the timing of modules hand-in dates. These points were raised as advice in the previous report.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

11.1 The last RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Nottingham took place on the 7 and 8 June 2005. The

2005 Board recommended that Continued Validation be granted to:

Part One: BArch (Hons) (three years full time)

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (two years full time)

Part Three: Diploma in Professional Practice and Management (one year part-time)

“The Institute of Architecture is a large school located within the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. It boasts impressive resources and a strong student intake.

“The Institute is perceived by the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nottingham as a powerful body with a strong research and teaching base, which the University is keen to continue to support and enhance with additional funding. This strong commitment to research informs teaching at all levels. The Head of the Institute is keen to develop the Institute as one of the top schools in teaching and research in the UK.

“After successfully overcoming some recent difficulties, including substantial increases in student numbers and staff turnover, the aim is to stabilise student numbers. The Board believes that the Institute is poised to become a leading school of architecture in the UK

“The Board encourages the Institute to build on its strengths which include:

- A well-led, committed and cohesive staff team with a good blend of full time academics, part-time practitioners and visiting special professors
- Student intake of the highest intellectual calibre
- Student satisfaction and heightened morale

- Excellent resources, including new staff appointments and many state of the art facilities to support teaching, learning and sporting activities
- The strong backing that the Institute enjoys from the University
- The flourishing research culture and its positive impact on teaching
- The well-organised and thoroughly assessed Part Three course.”

The 2005 Visiting Board made no recommendations but offered the following advice to the institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards:

- The Institute should prioritise and edit course documentation so that staff and students have a clearer picture of the particular learning outcomes attached to each course component.
- The Board noted variability in the way that feedback was given to students, particularly in respect of their written work. The Institute should standardise the implementation of feedback mechanisms across all the taught courses.
- The Institute conducts many different assessments of its students at various points of the courses. It needs to take care that these incremental assessments are balanced by appropriate holistic assessment of students.
- The Institute has responded well to the difficulties it faced in recent years and has emerged a stronger body for that experience. The Board believes that it is now time for the Institute to define its identity and its strategic targets so that these changes can be managed with equal success.

- The Institute should integrate part-time teachers more fully into the pedagogy of the School, particularly in Year 3.
- Staff should now take the opportunity to review and articulate pedagogic techniques.
- There should be more linkage between Years 1 and 3 in the B.Arch (Part One).

12. Details of the Conditions in Item 8.

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

13. Commentary

13.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

The Visiting Board found the Critical Self Appraisal useful though more descriptive than analytical. The SWOT analysis in particular was very helpful. Students received drafts of the CSA and were asked for their comments.

There have been a number of staffing changes, including a new Chair in Architecture in 2006. Since 2005 the main priorities for the team recruited to manage the Part One programme have been; a) developing increased integration between technology modules and the design studio work, b) the development of design ‘workshops’, providing for specialist input, in which design leaders offer a design lecture to be followed by students producing something in the studio.

The main changes to the DipArch since the 2005 Visiting Board have included a review of the Part Two which has been undertaken with a particular focus on the mapping onto the RIBA/ARB Criteria. A range of alternative

models has been implemented. There is a particular focus on a revised structure that could ensure compliance with the RIBA/ARB Criteria in year 5 (with some work based learning during the year out) allowing year six to be used for specialist modules, development and adventure.

In terms of facilities, since the last RIBA visit in 2005, a new studio block has been created in the Z-block for Diploma year 5 and masters students. Two CAD rooms have been upgraded; one in Paton House and one in Marmont Centre, the latter has been doubled in size.

13.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The documentation provided prior to the visit was done so in a timely manner but much of the information could have been provided in the base room thus avoiding sending excessive amounts of documentation to the Visiting Board prior to the visit.

The Board found the information provided at the time of the visit to be fragmented and at times difficult to navigate. Board members were reliant on staff to assist them in locating some additional information they needed, this was made particularly difficult due to low levels of staff on hand to assist the Board. Some portfolios were incomplete; there were missing feedback sheets and incomplete module boxes.

The exhibition area where the portfolios were displayed was open to the public; Board members were disturbed by visitors whilst carrying out the confidential process of sampling the portfolios. It would have been more straightforward for the Board to build a comprehensive picture of the progression of the course if the portfolios had been displayed in one or two rooms.

For future Visiting Boards the Institute would benefit from using an Institutional Facilitator to assist both the School and the Board with the practical arrangements of an RIBA Visiting Board.

In future The Institute is encouraged to avoid the situation where the quality of its teaching and student output is obscured by the procedures and documentation associated with a Visiting Board.

13.2.1 Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit

The following sample was provided.

Part One, B.Arch: 98 portfolios from a cohort of 475

Part One, M.Eng: 24 from a cohort of 120

Part Two, Diploma in Architecture: 16 from a cohort of 116

Part Three, Diploma in Professional Management: 6 from a cohort of 66

13.3 Responses made to the previous Visiting Board report (and to reports of any revisits) and external examiner comments.

There were no items for recommendation in the 2005 Visiting Board report. The Board acknowledges a lot of changes have taken place since the previous Visiting Board and in the main the School have responded to the advice in the 2005 report. The issue of identity of the Institute was raised in 2005 and the 2009 Board considered this was yet to be adequately addressed. Throughout the visit the Institute responded with differing definitions of the ethos and vision for the Institute and whilst the Board appreciates the pluralistic nature of the programme, the Board would urge the Course leaders and Chair of

Architecture to resolve this matter with a clear identity for the Institute.

The Institute should formalise its responses to the External Examiner comments to maintain a rigorous approach to assessment procedures. The procedures need to include a mechanism for ensuring clear action is taken in response to External Examiners reports.

13.4 Context of the courses within the wider provision of the school and Faculty

The Institute of Architecture is within the School of the Built Environment in the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The existing School was formed in 1997 through the merger of the Architecture with Building Technology and Urban Planning. This was further expanded in 2003 with the creation of the Institute of Sustainable Energy Technologies.

13.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the BArch Part One qualification

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The vast majority of the specific programme aims were common to the Part One and Part Two programmes. These were clear, comprehensible and appropriate. The programme has been designed to meet the requirements of the RIBA and the ARB and this was reflected in the detailed mapping of the programme learning outcomes onto the RIBA/ARB Part One Validation Criteria.

The Board considered there was strong thread of creativity and a good energy in the course. The objectives were clear and achieved.

13.5.2 Course design and content

All years are organised into studio units to enable efficient management of each cohort. Each unit is co-ordinated by a unit leader who is responsible for the efficient management of their own unit and who is also supported usually by two 1 day per week tutors. Unit leaders are in turn ‘managed’ by a year head and or course director who is responsible for the overall organisation of the year.

At first year level, students in the studio module initially undertake a series of projects with focused objectives, expanding by stages to the design of a small building. At second year level, students design within the wider context of human settlements and environmental and engineering concerns. At third year level the urban context generates more complex design projects.

The Board found the course content to be clear with a notable emphasis on design.

13.5.3 Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design/non-design work)

- Design

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BArch programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of design. There is a good range of design projects, the part-time teaching staff add energy and the design ambition is strong. The Board considered there to be a strong sense of vitality and life with in the Institute in the area of Design and this is to be applauded and encouraged.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BArch programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of technology and environment. The Board would echo the comments of the External Examiners; in some respects the creative ability and detail is lacking; whilst the Board considered the work to be competent, they were concerned that the integration of technology and construction was not as sophisticated as one would have expected given the expertise in the school.

The area of Environmental design would benefit from a raised ambition. This area was particularly difficult for the Board to understand due to the lack of information provided in the academic portfolios.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BArch programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of cultural context. The Board considered that the BArch programme consisted of a strong set of modules. However, some clarification is needed with regards to the modular structure of this curricular area and how it maps against the criteria. The module leaders may benefit from a dialogue about how each module links together to demonstrate a clear progression through the learning outcomes.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BArch programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of communication. The Board was

impressed by the range of media and representation methods used in this area. Students appeared very competent at representing product, and the use of models is to be applauded. This area could be improved by more evidence of evolution of ideas and process, through 3 dimensional exploration in physical or CAD modelling. The Board would have liked to see more sketchbooks and workbooks. The Board did find it difficult to navigate the work and would encourage the Institute to think of more appropriate formats to show work to future visiting boards.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BArch programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of management, practice and law. The Board consider the fifteen minute oral examination to be interesting and worthwhile practice. The Board would have wished to see more demonstrable knowledge of professional practice, business management and personal development in the Part One programme.

- Preparation for Professional Experience, (Part 1 only)
The students considered that they were well prepared for the first stage of professional experience and found the Management, Practice and Law module very useful.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

The Institute provided progression data for all of its students on the validated courses. The Board noted the very impressive completion rates, particularly over the last three academic years. There is an option for students who are registered on the BArch course who decide that they do not want to become professional architects or those who find they are struggling with any of the non-

compensatable modules. Such students are able to transfer to onto the School's BA (Hons) in Architectural Studies, which is a non-accredited degree course, subject to the University's standard progression regulations.

13.5.4 Assessment

The Board consider that the current arrangements were satisfactory. The Institute uses standard assessment formats generally; essays, studio projects CAD exercises, and individual research projects. The students would like to receive more feedback about written scripts.

13.5.6 Admissions and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course

The BArch requires students to have AAA at A level. The School requires that one of the A levels be in an Art or a Design and Technology subject or the submission of a portfolio. Offers are currently made for the BArch course at a ratio of 3.6 per place. The current number of applications received for the BArch course is 940, a ratio of 5.7 per place.

Direct entry is considered onto Year 2 of the course. Applications are considered on an individual basis subject to relevant qualifications and experience.

13.6 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to M. Eng Part One qualification

13.6.1 Clarity, Validity and achievement of course objectives

The programme has been designed to meet the requirements of the RIBA and the ARB and this was reflected in the detailed mapping of the programme learning outcomes onto the RIBA/ARB Part Two

Validation Criteria. The Board considered the course objectives to be clear and valid.

13.6.2 Course, Design and Content

The Board was impressed with the energy of the staff on this course and the overall high level of output. The Board would urge the School to address the issue of timetabling and in particular examination timetabling to avoid clashes for M.Eng students. The Maths examinations for M.Eng students was on the same day as the final review for their studio work; students had to apply to get this changed. The course management and timetabling issues could be improved through better communication between the staff bodies of the M.Eng and Architecture programmes; the move to the faculty of engineering may facilitate this.

The third year M.Eng students commented that they found the 7,000 word dissertation, a design project and examination in the second semester to be a challenge. In addition there seemed to be a contrast with the BArch programme in that the credit weightings did not accurately reflect the amount of work students were expected to complete.

The M.Eng programme has considerable overlap with the BArch course and seeks to integrate engineering content from its CIBSE accredited BEng Architectural Engineering course. Of the 480 credits that constitute the M.Eng programme, 330 are common with those taught on the School's BArch programme.

Holistic building design is the major theme throughout the M.Eng programme, and as such it delivers content on five main teaching streams 1) Design studio 2) Architectural humanities 3) Environmental design and tectonics 4)

Architectural practice 5) Engineering fundamentals and Engineering applications.

13.6.3 Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design/non-design work)

- *Design*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the M.Eng programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of design. The Board was pleased that consideration was given to the development of design within the M.Eng course. However, this would have been more evident if the students' sketchbooks had been available. Overall design standards were high and there was a good energy amongst the staff.

- *Technology and Environment*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the M.Eng programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of technology and environment. The programme address some of the concerns about the disconnection between architecture and engineering, but the Board had similar concerns about the M.Eng as it did about the BArch programme; in some respects the creative ability and detail is lacking; whilst the Board considered the work to be competent, they were concerned that the integration of technology and construction was not as sophisticated as one would have expected given the expertise in the school.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the M.Eng programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of cultural context.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the M.Eng programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of communication. Students' grasp of both written and graphic communication is very good.

- *Management, Practice and Law*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the M.Eng programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of management practice and law.

13.6.4 Progression

The aim of the M.Eng course is to produce graduates who are able to pursue the remainder of their academic and professional architect status, or enter engineering practice and gain the industrial experience necessary to qualify as a chartered engineer.

A significant number of students transfer to the BArch at the end of first and second year. The School believes this is due to the first year of the course being heavily weighted towards architectural modules. Some students decide to focus on this area rather than the multi-disciplinary M.Eng.

13.6.5 Assessment

The pass level for the M.Eng programme is 50%. Students must attain this to progress to Year Three. This has to be achieved at the first attempt, there are no re-sits.

13.6.6 Admissions

Applicants to the M.Eng are required to attain a BBB at A-level with subjects that include mathematics and a numerate science. An A level in art or design is preferred although the School will consider students presenting a portfolio of representative work. The intake target for the M.Eng is 35 home students plus additional overseas students. Typical cohort sizes are 40 students in year one. The School does not accept direct entry students on to the M.Eng. Students with the relevant qualifications may be considered for transfer into Year One of the M.Eng from within the University. Requests to transfer into Year Two of the M.Eng are considered from BArch students who have successfully completed Year One.

13.7 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Two qualification

13.7.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The Diploma in Architecture is in a transitional period with a new structure introduced into Year 1 and Year 2 changing for the 2009/10 session onwards. The first year is designed to allow students to develop their core professional character whilst Year 2 students currently undertake a year long design thesis with related modules. The School intends for the new structure to culminate with students demonstrating their independence and research-led attitude to design through the production of a semester long self-set design thesis or written dissertation.

The School must ensure that the course includes 50% design work and manage the transition into the new modules within the course structure.

13.7.2 Course, Design and Content.

The current briefs are good, in particular those in Year Five e.g 'Tall Buildings' and 'Z cars'. The Board considered that the new structure should bring a clearer distinction between Part One and Part Two. The External Examiners commented, as they did in 2005, that the School may wish to review whether the focus on technology is appropriate.

13.7.3 Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design/non-design work)

- *Design*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of design

The Board considered the group working element of the programme to be strong. Some of the briefs and project sizes could have been more ambitious to encourage experimental work and really stretch the highest achieving students.

Despite the Institute's perception that it loses some of its best undergraduates to other schools, the Board witnessed a good proportion of innovative yet rigorously executed final thesis projects, addressing a wide variety of themes. The engagement of the staff in supporting the individual students was tangible and commendable.

- *Technology and Environment*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment. Whilst the Board considered the work to be competent, they noted that the integration of technology and construction was not as sophisticated as one could expect from a school aspiring to expertise in these areas.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context. As with Part One, the Board was impressed with the Cultural Context modules, in particular the dissertations and the Design Thesis.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication. The Board applauded the presentation skills of the students, and was impressed by the use of a wide variety of media within the projects. The use of digital representation was clearly of a very high standard. The written work was also very strong and the students the Board met with were articulate.

- *Management, Practice and Law*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting

the Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law. The fifth year students commented that the first semester in practice was really useful. The set exercises were thorough but there is also an opportunity to expand on the context for management, practice and law at postgraduate level.

13.7.4 Progression

Progression rates for the Part Two course are very good.

13.7.5 Assessment

In general the Board found a varied and appropriate range of assessment procedures in place and across the Part Two programme. Lowest pass standards were found to be appropriate. The Board considered there was scope for further communication between the units to ensure parity of feedback for students.

13.7.6 Admissions

Student who hold a Nottingham B.Arch degree at 2.2 level or above and who have achieved a minimum 2.2 standard in design-based modules are automatically offered a place on the Diploma programme. Students who have obtained a degree elsewhere are normally required to have achieved a minimum 2.1 degree standard. Candidates who do not meet these criteria are invited to submit a portfolio of design work and promising candidates may be invited for an interview. Direct entry into the second year of the Diploma is not permitted for students outside the School. There is a concern within the School that some of its high achieving undergraduate students are attracted to other schools for their postgraduate studies, causing a reduction in numbers between the Part One and Part Two courses.

13.8 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Three Qualification

The course deals with the core criteria for practice, management of architecture, the management of construction, practice management and business administration. A major review of the Course was undertaken in 2005, and has been refined annually to relate to current developments in practice.

The Part Three course continues to be run in conjunction with the Leicester School of Architecture at De Montfort University and Sheffield University School of Architecture. The three universities share the teaching on the programme and the setting of examination questions.

The main changes since the 2005 Visiting Board have been:

- Numbers of Part Three candidates have increased. The current cohort size is over 40.
- The recruitment of the PSA and Part Three course tutor from Leeds Metropolitan University to provide additional support for the programme.
- A restructuring of the taught material so that there is a common theme to each of the recall sessions.
- The taught materials are being developed with a greater breadth introduced to make them more interesting.

The course is supported by two Professional Studies Advisors and a number of allied external professionals contribute to the delivery of the Course content at the recall sessions, in conjunction with University of Sheffield and De Montfort University but all assessment for

Nottingham students is undertaken within the Institute of Architecture.

The Board made the following observations and suggested amendments for the Part Three programme:

- The Institute should consider introducing a system of two professional examiners and replacing the internal assessor and recruit external examiners to serve an appropriate term
- The Institute may wish to review the programme to ensure the work based model is integrated into teaching
- The assessment procedures should be made explicit to students
- The Board advises the School to review whether there is adequate support for students on the programme. Students may benefit from further guidance notes on the Self-Appraisal component.

13.9 External examining arrangements

The Board found the external examiners to be very supportive of the Institute and appreciated the responsiveness of the Institute to their comments.

The Board was disappointed to meet with less than 50% of the External Examiners and would urge the Institute to ensure the minimum requirement is met for future Visiting Boards. Only one out of ten undergraduate examiners attended the meeting with the Board.

The External Examiners explained that they do not read each others reports, the proforma for their reports is web based and requires the examiners to answer a specific set of questions. The examiners commented that these online

questionnaires are too prescriptive and the categories need to be expanded to allow more thorough responses. The response from the Institute is received a lot later and answers the general points raised by all the External Examiners.

As part of their induction to the Institute the examiners receive a document and they commented that this could be improved with a more comprehensive induction process, perhaps better tailored to Architecture.

The M.Eng examiners meet with all students from the course. The examiners believe the course produces valuable students who had a good hold on the environmental and sustainable questions.

The examiners considered that there has been a lot of development in the Institute, with numbers growing rapidly. The First Year is very vibrant, well balanced and well integrated. This is coupled with an exciting progression into Year Two; the South African project is particularly exciting, and demonstrates the Institute's ability to be outward facing. The examiners considered some of the studio briefs in Year Three to be too complex for students to grasp.

The Part Two course produces very good work at the top end, in particular the Digital Architecture. The Fifth Year has developed well; the Brayford Pool project has been a success and Exchange Students have informed the course in a creative way. The examiners were concerned that the synopsis of the modules in the Course Handbook stated that the criteria are met in years five and six, but there appear to be some projects in year six that do not meet the criteria. These areas could provide potential opportunities

for students to meet the criteria more effectively. In addition the high use of computers and 3D imaging results in a lack of skill in 'plan, section and elevation'.

The Board was concerned with some aspects of the External Examining process, in particular the lack of clarity in the paper trail relating to the examiners reports. The Institute should reconsider their procedures to ensure the External Examiners reports are reviewed in a clear and careful way. In particular reports should be compared to previous years reports. Responses to the External Examiners should be formalised and any action taken should be transparent to all. The Head of the Institute should take the lead in wider engagement with the External Examiners and the traceability of responses across all the courses offered by the School.

13.10 Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience

The School maintains a Year Out website on the School intranet which includes a list of practices, advertising jobs available, listing employers in previous years and additional useful information to assist students undertaking this part of their training.

Students undertaking their Year Out professional practice will register with the University and remain linked to the School by email and the School's year out web page. Students will normally return for three recall days throughout the year. PEDR sheets are monitored and signed by the School's Professional Studies Advisor.

13.11 Students

The Board would like to thank the 36 students who attended the meeting with the Board for their open and lively discussion. The Board was disappointed to find that the student body was poorly represented at this meeting; in particular the Board did not meet with any Year Six students.

The staff student ratio is 1:15

Among the strengths of the Institute the students highlighted the following:

- The third year students enjoyed the choice of units available to them and were all allocated either their first or second choice.
- The community feel of the Institute of Architecture buildings; and the interaction with other years this facilitates
- The field trip opportunities

In support of Architecture, the students commented on the following areas which could be improved:

- The second year Architecture students considered a more formal CAD teaching programme, which is tied into the Design Studio, would be useful
- There is a perceived lack of clarity between the agenda of the school and the agendas of the part-time tutors (some of who also teach at other schools); the students highly value the input of the part time staff. The studio space is too small to accommodate the large numbers in the student body; the students tend not to use the studio space provided and work at home instead.
- The current workshop provision is inadequate for the students needs.

- The size of the School sometimes compromises the quality and quantity of feedback that students receive. Tutors often teach large groups of students and it is difficult for individual students to ensure they get the required contact. Whilst the students appreciated the tutor's willingness to provide 'one to one' assistance if asked, the sheer numbers mean this is not always possible and written feedback is variable.
- The M.Eng students felt aggrieved that they did not get to choose their unit and were not given as much time as the Architecture students. The perceived lack of communication between the two staff bodies' results in a lack of connection between the Maths and Studio based work. Overall the students considered the course would benefit from clarity of management.

13.12 Staff

The Board was very disappointed to not meet with more members of the teaching staff, 15 members attended the meeting.

The Staff members considered there had been a lot of change since the previous Visiting Board. Student numbers have increased in the Part One course, and now a formal framework has been put in place to handle this and has resulted in a vibrant course. The staff has spent a lot of time focusing on integrating the lectures with the studio work, the three new studio leaders have helped add a layer of complexity to the studio work.

The Board was concerned at the lack of resourcing and time reserved for staff development. Staff members were very clearly committed to their subject and their subject areas but are left little time for exploration and reflection in order to assist their professional development. There

currently is little mechanism for developing the design work of the Part Time staff as research to be integrated into the Institute. The Board members and staff agreed that this was a potential missed opportunity and suggests the Institute address the matter of Part Time staff development.

The Staff were also concerned about studio space provision. They want to encourage studio working and studio culture but the limited space inhibits this ambition. The space is currently not well used and this is frustrating for the staff body, the third year students in particular suffer from not being in the studio, the staff believe they are missing out on a vital element of studying Architecture.

In addition to this the staff body consider the current workshop provision to be affecting the students work. The Board would urge the University to address this issue.

The Board would encourage the Institute's staff to continue their discussions through the Internal Symposium forum, to establish a clear identity and ethos for the Architecture programmes within the Institute. The Board felt that greater dialogue amongst staff would ensure unity between the courses.

13.13 Research

The Board was impressed by the research strategy and output of the Institute and in particular the onsite 'Eco House' projects.

There are 80 PhD students within the School of the Built Environment and about half of those are in Architecture.

The School is currently advertising for three new professors in Architecture and Tectonics, Urban Design and Sustainable Building Technologies. It is hoped that these new professors will also contribute significantly to teaching in the Institute and address concerns of the Board, echoed by the External Examiners reports, of the perceived disconnection between research and the teaching activities in the school.

13.14 Equal Opportunities

The number of female students on the course is over 40%. The Board was disappointed that there were not more female members of staff at management level. The School may wish to consider addressing this matter.

13.15 Resourcing and facilities

- Studios

The Board considered that studio provision within the Institute is not adequate for the numbers of students. The students do not have allocated space and most choose to work at home. There is also a lack of storage space. Addressing this issue would help the students develop a sense of belonging within their Department.

- Workshops

Despite the tight management of the workshop spaces, they are currently too small for the student members. Only 12 students at one time are allowed access. The Board would encourage the Institute to use the move to the Faculty of Engineering to facilitate a renewal of the workshop facilities.

- Library

The main architectural Library, 'Hallward' is now a comprehensive and up-to-date collection of architecture books and journals; with opening hours 8am- 9pm and 24 hours during the exam period. Architecture has a dedicated subject librarian. The physical facilities in the library are good with a film viewing room and a bookable study room. The Institute continues to invest in e-journals which are accessible from networked computers on campus and also off campus. A Reference Library has also been established in EEC Studio and this has been doubled in size to accommodate a wide range of books and magazines accessible directly for students working in studio. There are four other libraries in University Park and Jubilee Campuses.

- I.T

There has recently been a large investment in and overhaul of the School's I.T provision. New software has been introduced, core packages have been updated and the School is now wireless. The School carried out a survey of the packages which are currently being used most in practice and are aiming to keep up with industry requirements for packages. The CAD room provides enough space for all the students the majority of the time. The Board was impressed with the overall I.T provision.

- Student cohort statistics
- Correspondence between the Institute and ARB regarding changes to Diploma

14. Documentation

Prior to the visit, the board was provided by the school with the following documentation:

- Questionnaire
- Critical Self Appraisal
- Supplementary Information