

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to University of the West of
England**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 27 January 2010

**Department of Planning & Architecture
School of the Built and Natural
Environment
Faculty of Environment and Technology**

BA (Hons) Architecture and Planning Part 1
Bachelor of Architecture Part 2

Date of Visiting Board: 25/26 June 2009

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture and Planning, 4 years full time

Part 2 Bachelor of Architecture, 2 years full time, 3 years part-time.

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered

Department of Planning & Architecture
 School of the Built and Natural Environment
 Faculty of Environment & Technology
 University of the West of England
 Frenchay Campus
 Coldharbour Lane
 Bristol BS18 1QY

Tel: +44 (0)117 32 83000
 Email: fbe.entry@uwe.ac.uk
 Fax: +44 (0)117 32 83002
 W: www.bne.uwe.ac.uk

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of the West of England

1.4 Name of Head of School

Janet Askew, head of department
 Professor Richard Parnaby, deputy head of department,
 academic leader for architecture

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 25/26 June 2009 were:

Alan Jones (Chair)
 Carl Meddings (Vice Chair)
 Christian Frost
 Peter Wislocki
 Hilary Holloway – Co Professional member
 Elena Tsolakis – Student/graduate member
 Keith Dicken – Regional Nominee, RIBA Wessex

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 July 2003, effective from September 2003 and ‘Tomorrow’s Architect,’ published March 2003, effective from September 2003. More details can be found at www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board Confirmed by the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 27 January 2010

4.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the RIBA Education Committee Continued Validation of: Part 1 BA (Hons) Architecture and Planning, 4 years full-time Part 2 Bachelor of Architecture, 2 years full-time, 3 years part-time.

4.2 The next Visiting Board will 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

8.1 There were no 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.

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

10.1 The School is currently in transition from being a small school to becoming a middle-sized one. Many of the issues raised by the Board are symptomatic of this change and the Board hopes that its comments and recommendations will help the School to manage this transition smoothly. The architecture programmes exemplify the University's ethos of promoting synergies between disciplines and engagement with professional practice. This is an exciting period in the school's

development and there is a good atmosphere in the School. The Board shares the School's positive view of its continued and future development as it moves to the next phase of its existence. Staff and students have a clear understanding of the direction of the school and there is continuity of vision throughout.

10.2 The School's strengths include:

- The uniqueness of the programme in architecture and planning; the Board hopes that these energise each other.
- The willingness to recognise areas requiring improvement and address them, such as representation and technology.
- The passion and commitment of the staff body
- The consideration of context
- The Board was impressed by the School's burgeoning research activities, of which 'Project' and Design Research Bristol are just two examples.
- Purpose-built accommodation which generally appears to be popular with staff and students, and promotes a studio culture

10.3 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.

10.3.1 The Board recommends that the School provide better and more consistent assessment information and feedback for students. More unification of Quality Assurance procedures would be beneficial, which might include simplification of modules and assignments and how they relate to learning. The Board believes that a rationalisation of the process of quality assurance would give students the chance to grow. The Board recommends that the school identify a QA co-ordinator for issues of quality and consistency.

10.3.2 The Board recognises the School's endeavours to improve integration between subject areas at all levels. Whilst it is acknowledged that there is strategic evidence of the integration of technology and environment at Part Two, the Board believes that detailed resolution should be developed further in these areas. The detailed resolution of constructional materiality should remain integral with the design throughout the course. This was acknowledged by students and staff. The Board looks forward to amendments to the programme to ensure that this is addressed.

10.3.3 In order to make clear the final design ambitions, the Board recommends that final portfolios include both third and fourth year work.

10.4 Advice

10.4.1 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;

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- 10.4.2 Although formal systems and process for management and programme development appear to be in place, the Board advises that these are reviewed to maximise the potential of the School.
- 10.4.3 The Board advises that an individual be identified as research co-ordinator for architecture.
- 10.4.4 Whilst the Board was content with threshold standards and coverage of the criteria, the Board concurs with the External Examiners' observations regarding generous marking in the middle ground and advises that the School exercise vigilance.
- 10.4.5 The Board advises that the collection of international journals held in the library be expanded and made more accessible. Any mechanisms to encourage greater use of the library should be considered.
- 10.4.6 The Board advises that Part 2 should be developed to address the requirement for communication of the testing of complex designs.
- 10.4.7 The Board noted students' comments that some were not aware that experience gained before the year out may be recordable against PEDR. The Board advises that the School make students fully aware of methods and types of accruing PEDR.
- 10.4.8 The Board notes the students' comments regarding access to some staff and advises that the School ensure that timetables are issued appropriately early and are adhered to by staff or appropriate cover provided.
- 10.4.9 The Board recognises the good work of the summer school and the foundation course and encourages the school to explore this in the interests of promoting widening access.
- 10.4.10 It is acknowledged that the Part Two course is relatively new and still in a mode of evolution. The School is encouraged to consider the relationships between year 1 and 2 and the clarity of outcomes at each level.
- 10.4.11 At Part Two, the Board encourages the School to investigate a mechanism to indicate to students their achievement within the distinct areas of the 60-credit module. The Board considered that this might apply equally to any large module with multiple submissions.
- 10.4.12 The Board applauds the provision of a part-time route at Part Two. However, taking into account some students' comments, it advises that students may need a greater level of support.
- 10.4.13 The Board applauds the School's wish to develop a cross-studio culture. Although this does not strictly come within the Board's remit, the Board suggests that greater communication between units and encouraging Part Two students to engage in undergraduate programmes and crits may help to foster such a culture.
- 10.4.14 The Board commends developments in the area of design representation and encourages the school to continue with its endeavours in this area.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

- 11.1 The last RIBA Visiting Board to the University of the West of England took place on 30 June/1 July 2005. Board recommended **Continued Validation** of:

Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning (four years full-time) and;

Initial Validation of:

Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture (two years full-time or three years part-time) starting from the 2004/2005 graduating cohort.

12. Details of the Conditions in Item 8.

- 12.1 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 Board thanks the School for the welcoming manner in which the Board was received. Since the last visit a major faculty reorganisation has taken place. Architecture now comes under the umbrella of the School of the Built and Natural Environment, which, with the Bristol Institute of Technology, forms the Faculty of Environment and Technology.

Other significant changes since the last visit include the growth in student numbers at both Part One and Part Two and the recruitment of staff, keeping pace with this growth. There is greater input from practice into teaching,

increasing the level of professionalism and breadth of knowledge in the programmes.

The School has recently established a BEng (Hons) Architecture and Environmental Engineering which holds Candidate Course Status for Exemption from Part One of the RIBA Examinations. This is subject to a separate process and consideration of this programme did not form part of the present visit. The School is also developing a PG Certificate in Professional Practice and Management in Architecture with a view to gaining Part Three validation. Consideration of this programme by the RIBA is also subject to a separate process and did not form part of the present visit.

Construction of the new building has begun and is scheduled to be completed by the 2010/11 academic year. The new building will bring architecture and product design students together, providing further opportunity for cross-disciplinary working. Synergies may also be developed with computing and maths who will move into the same building.

Having successfully established both Part One and Part Two programmes, architecture staff are increasing engagement with research.

13.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

All arrangements for the visit were good. The documentation was clear, accessible, easily navigable and forwarded in timely fashion. The exhibition was well arranged. Staff were helpful in providing clarification and additional documentation where necessary. The Board is particularly grateful to the institutional facilitator for additional assistance.

- 13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*
 Part One: BA(Hons) Architecture and Planning,
 Year 1: 3 lowest passes, 2 middle, 2 high; Year 2: 3 lowest,
 2 middle, 2 high; Year 3: 3 lowest, 2 middle, 2 high from a
 Year 4: 3 lowest, 2 middle, 2 high

Part Two B.Arch (3 vertical units);

Year 1: the lowest pass from each unit (3 vertical units), 2 middle passes, 2 high passes; Year 2: the lowest pass from each unit (3 vertical units), 2 middle passes, 2 high passes.

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

A mid-term visit to the School took place on 3 July 2007 to discuss the School's progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2005 Visiting Board report. The Chair of the mid-term visit was content that the recommendations were being addressed.

The School's responses to all comments from various sources, including external examiners, have been good, as appropriate to the developing nature of all the programmes.

- 13.4 **Context of the courses within the wider provision of the school and Faculty.**

The School of the Built and Natural Environment also houses Civil Engineering, Construction, Environment, Geography, Housing, Planning, Property, Regeneration, Rivers and Coasts, Surveying, Tourism, Transport and Urban Design. A wide range of foundation degrees, bachelor degrees and higher level degrees is available in all areas.

The existing relationship between architecture and planning is viewed positively by staff and students. The newly-established structure provides scope for synergies and collaborative working. The Board concurs with this view and believes that the possibilities for building a relationship with product design are particularly interesting.

The new programme in architecture and environmental engineering is rich with potential and possibilities to make use of connections with disciplines in Built Environment. Although subject to separate validation, it will be interesting to see how this develops.

- 13.5 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part One qualification**

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
 The BA (Hons) Architecture and Planning Part One developed from discussions in the Planning Department and is also validated by the Royal Town Planning Institute. The Board considered that the aims and objectives of the programme were clear, valid and being achieved. Students are encouraged to think creatively but to understand the gap between creativity and reality. Staff reported that the ambition of the students appears to be growing with the increasing maturity of the course.

- 13.5.2 Course design and content

The Board noted the complexity of the structure and the difficulty that some students and external examiners experienced in grasping this, and advised that better communication of this may be helpful

The programme offers ambitious studio projects which have informed student work.

The School reported that integration between architecture and planning, chiefly achieved through modules, has improved in the decade since the course was established. Studio A in the first year is taken by architecture and planning, architectural technology and architecture and environmental engineering students. In the second year, Architecture and Planning students take Studio B with Architecture and Environmental Engineering. In later years, Studios C and D are taken solely by students of architecture and planning, but students from other disciplines continue to share modules in Construction and Technology, history modules and the Development Control Module in year 4. Other interdisciplinary learning also takes place, for example with quantity surveying, some of which is design-based.

In the second year and third year there is a series of small vertical studios lasting 3-4 weeks in groups of approximately 12. The majority of students gain places in their first or second choice of studio.

The first degree is based on some second, third and fourth year work. The Board considered that there was an issue of balance over the four years. In order to make clear the ambition, the Board recommends that final portfolios include both third and fourth year work.

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 portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the BA (Hons)

Architecture and Planning met all Part One criteria in the area of Design.

There is a clear relationship through each year of the programme. The outcome across the four years is well-rounded and of good quality. The fourth year work is informed by but not constrained by the links with planning. The addressing of context is a particular strength of the course.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture and Planning met all Part One criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

Staff noted that some recent appointments have already had a positive impact on this area and this is set to improve further. Technical experts are also involved in studio teaching. By the third and fourth year it is intended that technology is integrated with, but not constrained by, the demands of the design.

The Board considered that good strategic understanding is evidenced in the design work. However, although all criteria are met, the School is advised to remain vigilant with regard to use of materials and process of assembly at the lower end of achievement. Overall improvement would also be welcomed. The Board refers the School to the wording of the criteria.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the BA (Hons)

Architecture and Planning met all Part One criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The programme's and students' handling of cultural context is very good, particularly in the areas of planning and development. This forms a major part of the third year, in which students also write a dissertation.

Extensive use is made of precedent studies.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture and Planning met all Part One criteria in the area of Communication.

Students do not begin CAD until year 2 and its use is reduced again in Year 3 as a deliberate policy to encourage other skills. Comments by External Examiners regarding representation are in the process of being addressed clearly and effectively. The Board was encouraged by the School's awareness of this and looks forward to its continued improvement. The student work shows evidence of this ambition and the Board is confident that the improvement will filter through all years. The Board would have welcomed more evidence of process in the final work.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture and Planning met all Part One criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law.

The whole practice of architecture is addressed in the context of planning. One of the strengths of the course is the use of context and the context of practice.

- Preparation for Professional Experience, (Part 1 only) Preparation for Professional Experience is appropriate. Students have a meeting with the Professional Studies Adviser and a lecture before embarking on their year out. Some commented that they would welcome this earlier in the programme so that they might record their summer placements in their PEDR if appropriate, hence the Board's advice that students be made fully aware of different methods of accruing PEDR.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

There is a strategic relationship between all four years of the Part One course. There is a certain intellectual progression and an appropriate balance. There were some concerns that a high number of BME and female students leave the course during the first two years. The Board encourages the School to develop appropriate support mechanisms to address this and to encourage greater retention. The Board learnt that those who left architecture and planning were not lost to higher education but transferred to different programmes. The length of the course at Part One does not appear to deter students or have any influence on retention rates.

13.5.5 Assessment:

A range of assessment methods are used appropriate to the exercise. However, the Board learned that detailed comment in examination scripts is not being communicated to students. It was also noted that there appeared to be no standardised feedback sheet and students were confused about the system. While the Board

is confident of the robustness of assessment, it believes that a rationalisation of the system and better feedback to students as described in 10.3.1 would benefit the students.

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

At present there are 200 applicants for approximately 70 places. Architecture and Planning students achieve the best A levels in the faculty and the tariff has been increased: applicants must now have 300-360 points. The School's ambition is that the new Architecture and Environmental Engineering programme will attract similar numbers to those of Architecture and Planning; this may involve a slight reduction in cohort sizes for Architecture and Planning as the School's desire for quality over quantity will not result in uncontrolled expansion.

Architecture and Planning admissions are managed centrally. Applicants to Part One are not interviewed, but may attend one of a series of 6 open days in which architecture staff are involved. Admissions is considered purely on points; staff are unable to request provision of a portfolio and there is no requirement for art or drawing skills or qualifications, although this does not appear to be a disadvantage, judging from the work in the portfolios provided for the visit.

The University is keen to develop diversity within the student body and to offer flexibility of opportunity. The Department realises that this could be improved within the subject area several initiatives have been launched with the aim of broadening the intake and engaging schools in the general Bristol area. The summer school in particular is aimed at engaging students in areas of low participation.

The School also offers a foundation year, which is broad – based across all disciplines and includes an Introduction to Architecture module. Graduates of the foundation year must achieve 50% overall and 60% in the introduction to architecture programme to be eligible for the architecture degree programmes. This has succeeded in attracting non-traditional students. The Board advises that BME and other entrants from areas of low participation be made fully aware of additional support provided once they have gained a place on the course.

The Board commended the School's positive attitude to open access and diversity and the provision of a summer school and foundation programme. However, as the School evolves, the Board believes this too will evolve and that admissions policy needs to be kept in focus and under review. The Board suggests that the School identify a subject admissions co-ordinator with a view to developing a strategy for admissions.

13.6 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Two qualification

13.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The Part Two is a young course and it is still maturing. Both Part One and Part Two are designed to adapt and evolve in line with evolution in the profession. B.Arch is intended to be open as a course, not forcing a style on the students but encouraging different approaches. It is intended to promote integrated thinking which crosses module boundaries.

While the B.Arch is not a planning course, it is informed by planning. The School wishes also to build links with the

masters in Urban Design. The School's vision for Part Two is ambitious and the Board considered that the quality of the work demonstrates that the School is on the way to realising its ambitions. The Part Two range has recently been broadened by the introduction of a third vertical unit.

The School may wish to consider the communication of course objectives and linking of learning outcomes to assessment and feedback, clarifying how they relate to the overall marks to help students to understand their strengths and weaknesses, enabling students to plan their own personal development more effectively. The School is also encouraged to consider the relationships between year 1 and 2 and the clarity of outcomes at each level.

The students commented that the end of year exhibition under-represented the capabilities of the programme. While not strictly within the Board's remit, the Board did note that such events provide a valuable opportunity to present the programme to a wider audience. The creation and promotion of such events would be a worthwhile investment.

13.6.2 Course design and content

The B.Arch runs in full-time and part-time mode. Part-time students are fully integrated with full-time students. Part-time students attend two days per week for briefing and are advised of the challenging nature of the programme. On completion of a dissertation (60 credits) students can receive the award of Master of Arts in Architecture.

A new vertical unit has been introduced, bringing the total to three. This is partly due to the increase in staff and

student numbers. New modules and options have also been introduced, lately 'Research Through Design' and, next year 'Architectural Representation.'

The Board considered that design, technology and cultural context could be better demonstrated within the module structure. In discussion with the staff the Board learned that the School is aware of the need for a greater level of detail at Part Two (an issue also raised by students) and is planning to address it in a more explicit manner. The lack of appropriate experience gained in offices during the year out may have contributed to this. Although students are encouraged to gain breadth of experience this is not always possible.

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 portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) met all Part Two criteria in the area of Design.

Whilst content that all criteria were met, the Board draws the School's attention to the requirement to 'generate and systematically test, analyse and appraise design options, and draw conclusions which display methodological and theoretical rigour' due to its links with the Communications criteria, discussed below.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the Bachelor of

Architecture (B.Arch) met all Part Two criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

Whilst content that students met the criteria, the Board draws the School's attention to the requirement that students demonstrate the ability to

- Devise structural and constructional strategies for a complex building or group of buildings, employing integrative knowledge of
 - Structural theories
 - Construction techniques and processes
 - The physical properties and characteristics of building materials and components and the environmental impact of specification choices
 - The provision of building services

The Board considered that structural theories are handled well enough but advises the School to remain vigilant with regard to the other issues covered by this criterion. The School is referred to the Board's recommendation in paragraph 10.3.2.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) met all Part Two criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The Board considered that cultural context and history are too closely tied into the design module. Whilst there is some evidence of history and theory with cultural context aspects of the integrated design proposal, there may be some advantages to developing the themes outside the design proposal.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) met all Part Two criteria in the area of Communication.

A wide variety of representational techniques were seen, including some interesting work at the high end of achievement. The Board encourages the School to continue to develop what seems to be an evolving area. More evidence of design process would be welcomed.

The Board draws the School's attention to the requirement that students demonstrate the ability to

“Use visual, verbal and written communication methods and appropriate media (including sketching, modelling, digital and electronic techniques) to represent the **testing [Board's bold]**, analysis and critical appraisal of complex design proposals and their resolution to a range of professional and lay audiences.” The Board wishes to emphasise the requirement to test and refers the School also to the Part Two Design criterion that students demonstrate the ability to ‘...generate and systematically test, analyse and appraise design options, and draw conclusions which display methodological and theoretical rigour’ as these two criteria are necessarily linked.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) met all Part Two criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law.

This is chiefly delivered through the two modules ‘Professional Practice: Client and User’ and ‘Professional Practice: Project and Office.’

13.6.4 Progression within the course

Students commented that the second year of the B.Arch appeared to be a repeat of Year 1. The Board advises the School to consider how it can define clearly what is expected of students at each level. The Board noted, however, that this is still an evolving course and that the relationship between year 1 and year 2 will continue to develop.

13.6.5 Assessment

The Board’s comments with regard to assessment at Part One, particularly feedback, also apply to Part Two. At Part Two, the Board encourages the School to investigate a mechanism to indicate to students their achievement within the distinct areas of the 60-credit module. The Board considered that this might apply equally to any large module with multiple submissions.

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

Applications for Part Two for the 30 places are healthy. Having launched with 12 students, there are now 50-60 students overall. In the early years Part 2 students were graduates of the UWE Part One; now, as well as attracting more of the higher achieving of its own graduates, a greater proportion are graduates of other schools, creating a healthy mix.

The Board was impressed with admissions arrangements for Part Two and pleased to learn that the School had regained control of admissions for Part Two from central university administration as it believes it is necessary to interview applicants. Several initiatives are helping to raise the profile of the Part Two course: the redesigning of the website; the publication of the Project journal which the School hopes to disseminate widely; increasingly exhibiting student work locally, nationally and internationally (sometimes at the invitation of external persons) and the increasing quality and higher profile of speakers in the lecture series.

13.7 **External examining arrangements**

The School has engaged an experienced and highly credible team of examiners. The meeting with the external examiners was very positive. They were candid in discussion and supportive of the architecture programmes.

The School clearly responds to the external examiners’ reports and comments. It conscientiously identifies and addresses any weaknesses.

External examiners view a sample of work. At the present session, a sample of approximately 2/3 of Part One and Part Two graduates was considered. Although External Examiners are detailed to lead on specific modules, other work is also reviewed and they are confident that an appropriate overview is gained. At present they see each graduating students’ final year work only. Examiners also return for the summer boards. Externals do not get an opportunity to discuss their experiences together before the exam board.

The Examiners mentioned the complexity of the induction process and the extent of written information provided and suggested that this might be simplified to a verbal introduction.

The School has a clear and consistent philosophical stance. It was commented that the student experience is largely positive, but it can seem rather disaggregated and discrete. However, the Part One programme is becoming more coherent as it evolves. The synthesis of architecture and planning is achieved well.

The Board concurred with the Examiners' view that there is potential for polarisation and that compliance and innovation may conflict with each other; however this seems largely to have been avoided. Staff are conscious of the risk of programmes being 'safe' and encourage innovation: one examiner commented that students can feel caught between compliance and being driven to be innovative. The overriding opinion was that if the confidence and stature of the course grow it will provide a context in which rules can be broken and innovation can take place.

The quality of work has a freshness, with students producing a different and more appropriate end-product. At the top end of achievement, schemes are of high quality. The planning element and focus on context ensures that even weaker students perform relatively well in this area.

As noted elsewhere, students' knowledge of technology is good and it remains only to improve integration. The School's shows strength in context. The work exemplifies good physical contextual relationship.

It was suggested that the programme could be underpinned to a greater extent by sustainability. The external examiners considered that the appointment of a research fellow should improve this.

Assessment processes are appropriate and fair. External examiners were unsure of any one reason for previously high failure rates, but thought it might be ascribed to low attendance or perhaps the timing of the elements of a long and ambitious course. .

The Board commented that as the architecture programmes grow, responses will need to be more formalised.

The Board noted the external examiners' comments that they were consulted when tutors seemed unsure of marks. With the increased confidence of the staff, the School may benefit from assessing the appropriateness of external examiners moderating marks based on a sample; for example, considering whether it is necessary to continue with moderation. The Board advises the School to continue monitoring external examining arrangements to ensure parity.

13.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

Arrangements for monitoring professional experience are appropriate. There are two 'year out' modules; Professional Experience for Stage One which covers the year out between Part 1 and Part Two, and Professional Experience Stage 2, which is for post-Part 2 students. Students receive individual feedback and there are two callback days. Students felt supported during the year out but would appreciate earlier briefing about professional

experience that might count toward PEDR, for example in vacations.

The School's relationship with the local profession is constantly evolving. The Advisory Group is no longer functioning but the school is discussing the various ways in which it can engage with the world outside the university, perhaps through a panel that organises a series of events, rather than a more committee-like organisation.

13.9 **Students;**

The Board was pleased to meet students from both Part One and Part Two, year out students and recent graduates. The Board welcomed their articulateness and candour. They expressed support for the School and their experiences were largely positive. The following reflects the major themes of the discussion. Students were attracted by:

- Its location in Bristol
- The opportunity to study architecture and planning jointly, which lent an additional dynamic. The Part One programme is challenging but ultimately rewarding. Architecture and planning sit well together rather than acting as mutual constraints. Students found their knowledge of planning to be of use during the year out. This expertise in planning also influences the Part Two.
- The friendly atmosphere and environment, particularly the vibrant studio culture
- Returning Part Two students liked the familiarity. The fact that Part Two is a young course is also attractive as they felt it afforded them more freedom.
- The variety offered by vertical studios at Part Two and the opportunity to change studio

- Student union is very good.
- Tutors are readily available and supportive, although some problems were reported contacting staff who work in practice. The system of rotating tutors in the fourth year had benefits and drawbacks; while some found it frustrating to explain a project several times they also appreciated the opportunity to see different people.
- The quality of the guest lecturers.
- The quality of facilities. The present space is under pressure and some tensions have arisen, although there is normally sufficient space for those who wish to use it. The present situation has probably helped engender the vibrant studio culture, although they were looking forward to the new building.

Among improvements students would seek were the following:

- Some students would appreciate more emphasis on detail and technology in Part Two.
- Part Two students commented that marking could be confusing and would prefer more formalised feedback sheets, demonstrating the calculation and breakdown of marks in simpler form than that given in the student handbook. Students can request to see written comments on exam papers.
- Part 1 students would welcome a greater indication of areas of strength and weakness, although they did acknowledge that they can receive breakdowns on request. Other students present were content with the level and nature of feedback.
- Students did feel supported during the year out but felt that advice earlier in the programme, enabling

them to make use of summer placements if appropriate, would have been useful.

- Although the Board learned that local employers were invited to attend the School's exhibition, the students' perception is that this was not promoted as much as it could be. They would also welcome greater involvement in its the organisation.
- Improvements could be made to the part-time provision at Part Two, making the two days' attendance contact days rather than briefing days.
- Workshops need to be improved, although it was acknowledged that this would form part of the developments involving the new building.
- The Board learned from the School that there is a Student Experience Committee on which students are represented. The School reported that students are also represented on Faculty Board. Student reps do have informal meetings but there reportedly had not been any in the current academic session.

The Board learned from the staff that, although there is no architecture-specific meeting or group there is a student experience committee chaired by the Head of School, which meets four times year. A graduate Development Programme, in which students will meet on a regular basis, is being rolled out.

13.10 **Staff;**

The staff meeting was very well attended by full-time and part-time staff. The Board welcomed the attendance of planning staff at the staff meeting, who contributed fully and gave further insights into the programme. The meeting was very helpful to the Board in clarifying issues that had arisen in the course of the visit so far and in understanding the staff's present and future ambitions for

the development of architecture at UWE. There is now a core team of approximately 12 architects. Many people are from practice.

The achieving of a critical mass of staff and students has facilitated a growth in extra-curricular activity. The school hopes to continue to increase the quality and encourage energised studios.

There are formal and informal mechanisms for staff to discuss and implement developments in the programmes. As a new school, staff feel that ideas are not entrenched and there is much flexibility. There is sufficient flexibility in the system for staff to create new modules reflecting and contributing to the evolution of the disciplines and the programme.

Although students had commented about the difficulty in contacting tutors, it appeared to the Board that every effort is made on behalf of all staff (full-time, part-time, fractional) to be available to the extent of publicising days of attendance, core hours, phone numbers and email addresses. The students' reported average contact time of one hour with tutors far exceeded the head of department's calculation. The Board considered that the staff were remarkably generous with their time.

The Board learned from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor that the University wishes for more development in HR regarding career pathways, to acknowledge excellence in all areas.

13.11 **Research;**

UWE is primarily a teaching institution that is developing a research agenda. There is good University support for

encouraging young researchers and developing funding bids. Built Environment is heavily engaged in both research and consultancy, not only at international and national level but also with a strong commitment to the region. Built Environment performed very well at the 2008 RAE, receiving a significant increase in funding. In its present form the School is home to ten research centres: including Environment and Planning, the Centre for Research in Environmental Science, the Centre for the Study of Sustainable Buildings, the Construction and Property Research Centre and the Cities Research Centre, among others.

Architecture staff focussed on teaching for the early years of the programmes' existence and research was conducted on an individual basis. Researchers are now beginning to emerge as a group; with colleagues in other disciplines 'Design Research Bristol' has recently been established, with the aim of putting design 'at the heart of its research endeavours'. There are plans to establish a mini-conference, which would be open to the students and ultimately expand to a wider audience. The Board was impressed by 'Project', the Journal of the Department and Planning and Architecture, another staff initiative launched in 2009.

The Board noted that this is a supportive environment for researchers and research does inform the teaching. The correct balance between research and teaching needs to be struck in practical terms. Theoretically staff have 20% of their time allocated to research but no specific time has been allocated. In the staff meeting, some staff expressed doubts about the university system for calculating the balance between research and teaching time, there being a

conflict between studio teaching and the faculty workload model.

The Faculty Research Director is very supportive, having interviewed all architects and has begun to focus on the development of architectural research. The Board considered that this needs to be supported and developed through time allocation. The Board considered that as there is now sufficient critical mass of staff to develop research, the School should look to formalise the role of the director of research in order to champion emergent architectural research. The Board recommends that an individual be identified as research co-ordinator for architecture. Personal research had a very positive impact on teaching, demonstrating the benefit of the interrelation of teaching and research.

13.12 **Equal Opportunities:**

Appropriate equal opportunities policies are in place. The university is keen to attract a diverse student and staff body. Each faculty and school has a plan to support the university's widening participation strategy. Across the university the number of mature students is growing and currently stands at 30%. 12% are from areas of low participation. The Board learned that architecture is one of the best performing areas in the University for female recruitment. The University works with schools in the wider Bristol area to try to encourage those from areas of low participation. Architecture's initiatives in this area are described in paragraph 13.5.6. The Board advises continued vigilance with regard to the diversity of the staff body.

13.13 **Resourcing and facilities;**

Although recruitment is healthy, the university is considering non-HEFCE income streams such as recruiting international students and developing activities such as CPD as part of its commitment to build external connections and support local professions. The Board learned that the Faculty's CPD short course unit has one of the biggest short course programmes in the country.

Present resources are good but under pressure; the University is investing £10.5 million in a new building to be built adjacent to the present one. The Board was pleased to note that head of architecture has been involved in all design meetings.

- *Studios*

The quality of the studios is good. Students reported pressure on space but a vibrant studio culture. This should be alleviated by the new building, which Architecture will share with Product Design.

- *Library*

The University Library at the Frenchay Campus (the Bolland Library) was under refurbishment and expansion at the time of the visit. The architecture collection is still being developed, given its relatively recent establishment. The architecture collection is located close to cognate discipline such as construction and planning. At the time of the visit much of the architecture collection was held in the area under immediate refurbishment. Such of the book collection as could be seen (given that much was inaccessible due to the refurbishment works) indicated that it was appropriate but loans on particular books suggested heavier use of book resources could be encouraged.. Many journals are available electronically and

the Library holds 16000 electronic books (across all disciplines). Videos and dvds are interfiled. Image and slide collections tend to be held by individual members, rather than as a University resource, and some digitisation is taking place.

The Board considers that the list of journals is light, mainly concerned with urban planning and tending to be UK based.

There is a dedicated Built and Natural Environment Librarian. The acquisitions policy is flexible, both through formal and informal routes. Suggestions are welcomed from staff and students in addition to regular review of catalogues by subject-specialist staff. Staff are proactive in teaching library and information skills and in establishing innovative ways to help students find material, such as architecture bookmarks are provided to help students find material. The University has developed ISkillZone which provides online help and support for study skills. An assistive technology area is also provided for students with special needs.

The Library is open 24 hours a day in term time.

- *Workshop*

The current onsite workshop viewed by the Board was a temporary arrangement pending the completion of the new building. These contained hand-tools and some small machines. There is also a woodworking workshop and metalworking workshop, both controlled by technicians. Students can use the workshops at any time if the technicians are present. Under the new arrangements, the GIS room will merge with the workshop to form one room to be shared with product design.

The Faculty also provides a CNC Lasercutter (which is very popular), CNC router, a windtunnel, artificial sky and heliodon, and Digimap Ordnance Survey digital map resources. The Board anticipated that sharing the new workshops with product design would have a positive impact in respect of the tools and machines available to architecture students.

With larger workshops and a greater number of technical staff to assist requires careful consideration to allow maximum usage. For the maximum benefit of new facilities the appointment of key support staff is essential.

- *IT*

The Board considered that software provision was appropriate; including AutoCAD, Photoshop, ArchiCAD, Vectorworks, SketchUp, Rhino, Flamingo and Ecotect. The number and coverage of licences varies but appears to be adequate, based on comments from students and staff. Hardware is updated on a 3-year cycle. Students have 24 hour access to IT both from within the campus and externally. Students also have access to the building data gathering, enabling study of the present building.

Specialist groups include a faculty multimedia group providing digital video editing facilities, sound recording facilities and a photographic and digital imaging service and a graphics group. There is a fully-functioning film laboratory.

14. Documentation

The School provided all documentation as required by the procedures in advance of the visit and appropriate supplementary documentation in the board's Base Room.