

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to the Architects' Professional
Examinations Authority in
Scotland (APEAS) Ltd**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 30.11.05

**The Examination in Professional Practice and Management
(Part 3)**

Date of Visiting Board: 13 July 2005

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

The Examination in Professional Practice and Management (Part 3)

1.2 Address of the Body administering the examination:

APEAS Ltd.
Room 21
Grangemouth Enterprise Centre,
Falkirk Road,
Grangemouth,
FK3 8XS.

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

Architects' Professional Examinations Authority in Scotland (APEAS) Ltd

1.4 The role of APEAS

There are six Schools of Architecture in Scotland. Until recently each was individually validated for Part 3, although the central administration was handled by ASSA (the Association of Scottish Schools of Architecture).

The Part 3 in Scotland is now operated by APEAS (the Architects' Professional Examinations Authority in Scotland) which was set up in 2003, following ARB's expressed concerns about the ownership and quality assurance of the system. APEAS's predecessor ASSA believed that as Part 3 is the gateway to the profession, it should be monitored by the profession. APEAS also holds this belief and is developing the examination on the foundations established by ASSA over many years.

In 2004/5 each Scottish School formally notified the RIBA and the ARB that they wish their individual Part 3 awards to be removed from the list of validated/prescribed courses. The courses themselves still exist but responsibility for the administration and conduct of the professional examination rests with APEAS. APEAS and the schools are wholly independent of one another.

1.5 Name of Chief Executive

Dr Peter Kahan

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 13 July 2005 were:

Professor Neil Taylor (Chair)
Ms Caroline Gould
Mr Gordon Davies (RIAS Regional Representative)

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 the '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 Confirmed by the Royal Institute of Architects Education Committee 30 November 2005

4.1 The RIBA Education Committee at its meeting on 30 November confirmed:

Continued validation of:

The Examination in Professional Practice and Management (Part 3).

4.2 The next Visiting Board should take place in 2009.

5. Criteria for Validation

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

6. Standards

6.1 On the basis of the sample of candidate work examined, the work from the previous year of the examination listed in 4.1 was inspected during the visit and was found to meet the required standards.

7. Conditions of Validation

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

8. Standard Requirements of Recognition

8.1 RIBA recognition of all courses/qualifications is dependent upon:

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

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

9.1 The Board was greatly impressed with the system APEAS has developed and felt very confident about the standards achieved. The Examination is well structured and the quality assurance framework is thorough and robust. All involved are committed to promoting transparency and fairness, and encourage rigorous and open debate, without complacency. The process and the examination itself are constantly evolving as feedback from all involved is considered and changes implemented where necessary.

9.2 The strengths of the APEAS system include:

- Its independence

- Its ownership by the schools and the profession. The Board believed this might serve as a useful model.
- The high level of self-criticism, identifying weaknesses, openness to criticism from others, and the flexibility and adaptability that allow constant evolution. All the issues the Board raised during the course of their meetings had already been acknowledged and were being addressed. There is a high level of healthy debate and no complacency.
- The calibre of External Examiners.
- Its recognition of the benefits of collegiality.
- Its ability to build upon the already strong traditions of Professional Architectural Education in Scotland.
- The bringing together of expertise from practice and academia to achieve this in a short space of time.
- The considerable effort involved in producing exceptionally clear documentation for Part 3.

10.1 Recommendations

10.1.1 There were no recommendations.

10.2 Advice

10.2.1 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.

10.2.2 The Board would advise more substantive Examiners' reports which are collated by the Examinations Committee for feedback to schools and candidates. The Board believes that this will to develop the courses run by the schools, and to address issues that are identified by the profession. Additionally, such feedback may also usefully inform Part 1 and Part 2 courses in the six Scottish Schools of Architecture.

10.2.3 The Board also advises a more formal approach to the relationship between APEAS and the professional examiners, extending to the training they receive.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

There are no previous Visiting Board reports as this was the first visit to APEAS under the new system.

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 Developments in Scottish Part Three provision

There are six Schools of Architecture in Scotland. Until recently each was individually validated for Part 3, although the central administration was handled by ASSA (the Association of Scottish Schools of Architecture).

The Part 3 in Scotland is now operated by APEAS (the Architects' Professional Examinations Authority in

Scotland) which was set up in 2003, following ARB's expressed concerns about the ownership and quality assurance of the system. APEAS's predecessor ASSA believed that as Part 3 is the gateway to the profession, it should be monitored by the profession. APEAS also holds this belief and is developing the examination on the foundations established by ASSA over many years.

APEAS is committed to the quality assurance of the entire examination process, stressing rigour, consistency and fairness. It is managed by a Board of Directors who set policy and objectives, and administered by the Chief Executive. The Board of Directors comprises equal numbers of Academics (usually current or former Heads of Schools of Architecture) and practitioners. There is also a lay member. The Board of Directors oversees the Examinations Committee, which is responsible for the examinations. All Professional Studies Advisers are members of the Examinations Committee. The Examinations Committee's work is supported by the Regional Examination Boards, Senior Examiners and Practice Examiners. The operation of the examination is monitored by External Examiners. Senior examiners are highly experienced examiners who, in addition to examining candidates, chair the Regional Exam Boards and are responsible for their team of practice examiners. This role may adapt as the examinations function moves to one centre rather than three. Practice Examiners are not academics, but must be registered architects with seven years' practice experience. There are formal and informal channels for feedback to and from each level of administration.

In 2004/5 each Scottish School formally notified the RIBA and the ARB that they wish their individual Part 3

awards to be removed from the list of validated/prescribed courses. The courses themselves still exist but responsibility for the administration and conduct of the professional examination rests with APEAS. APEAS and the schools are wholly independent of one another.

The Executive seeks to encourage rigorous and open debates between all involved. The Executive has commissioned an evaluation of gradings to monitor if, and how, gradings changed through the entire assessment process. Debate over the function and usefulness of the oral and the moderation process is ongoing.

13.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Board would like to express its thanks to the Department of Architecture at the University of Edinburgh School of Arts, Culture and the Environment, who kindly hosted the visit. All practical arrangements were excellent; the documentation was well-structured, informative and easily understood. All candidates' work was clearly labelled and easy to navigate.

13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

The Board reviewed all the assessed work from 3 lowest passes, 4 low passes, 6 middle-level passes and 5 strong passes from the 2005 examination session (118 successful candidates in total). All three 2005 examination centres were represented (Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Glasgow).

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

This was the first visit under the new system as stated above. There are no previous Visiting Board reports. The APEAS Executive promotes a culture of openness and self-criticism, as described elsewhere. Careful consideration of and responses to External Examiners' reports are a central tenet of this approach to quality assurance.

13.4 Detailed Commentary on the Examination leading to the Part Three Part One qualification

The Part 3 Examination consists of the Practice Study, Written Paper, Log Book/PEDR, Evaluation of Experience and an Employer's Appraisal, followed by the oral examination. Assessment of documentary submissions and the oral examination is undertaken by Practice Examiners, who are experienced architects appointed by APEAS. The Practice Paper is written by Question Setters, who are also experienced architects.

The criteria are laid out in the guidance booklet for candidates. Candidates are not expected to present themselves unless they are confident that they have covered all the criteria. The Examination Committee reviews the criteria each year when setting the examinations, making adjustments in coverage where appropriate.

The Professional Studies Advisers from the six Scottish Schools of Architecture are on the Examination Committee, but legally there is no connection between the APEAS and the schools, who are independent of one another. Some schools continue to offer the Part 3 courses as these are considered excellent and the natural preserve of academia, whereas it was considered more

appropriate for the profession to administer the examination itself.

To date the examination has been held in several locations but it has recently been agreed that in future it will only be held in one. The management hopes that this will be simpler and more practical.

The Board considered that the three Regional Examination Committees have been an important component in the organisation. The Regional Examination Committees were set up at each regional examination centre to consider the assessments made by the Practice Examiners for each candidate, and make recommendations on results to the Central Examination Committee. At present no formal reporting system operates, and much of the feedback relies on Professional Studies Advisers reporting to their particular schools.

The Board considered that the introduction of student evaluation against the RIBA/ARB criteria is a positive development which will provoke meaningful discussion in the oral examination, and contribute significantly to ensuring coverage of the criteria.

The striving for consistency and continual adjustments to the process in order to achieve a level playing field are also commendable.

Methods of assessment and grading have been extensively debated, in particular whether to have a simple pass/fail system or several graded levels. At present Grades A-D represent varying levels of pass, with A excellent and D satisfactory. There are also two fail grades; namely E Marginal Fail, and F Clear Fail.

The Board considered that the standards of the lowest passes were solid. At the top level candidates' responses were extremely articulate.

13.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Three Qualification

The Board did not review the content of the individual courses that are available to APEAS candidates, as its remit was to consider the outcomes of the examination itself. Candidates must be registered at an institution but there is no obligation actually to take a course.

There are also update/refresher courses run by the profession, although these are not formalised.

APEAS acknowledges the work done by the Scottish Schools of Architecture who have traditionally displayed a strong vocational bias. The Professional Studies Advisers at each school also meet regularly.

The work the Board reviewed was representative of all participating Schools. The Board was content that parity was achieved across the various institutions, as the pass rates were roughly the same overall, although variances could occur. The Board noted that pass rates, and levels of pass, are naturally heavily influenced by the practice experience and calibre of individual candidates, and hence are difficult to predict. They found the lowest passes competent and the highest passes enjoyable to read.

13.6 Professional and External examining arrangements

During the visit the board met Board met Practice Examiners (who conduct the examination) and External Examiners.

The Practice Examiners and External Examiners appreciated the rigour generated by the separation within the system with the examinations being run by the profession and the courses run by the academics. They felt greater clarity had been achieved and that the process has become tighter and more consistent in quality assurance terms

The Practice Examiners considered that the examination questions are well spread across the criteria, and that there was sufficient flexibility to ensure that all areas and a wealth of issues could be covered. Again the emphasis is on fairness, and a desire to avoid idiosyncratic questioning.

There has been some discussion about the precise role of the External Examiners. At present, the role is chiefly to report on the execution of the process. However, in addition they also focus on the lowest pass and borderline candidates, and comment on individual candidates and the pass level. External examiners observe the oral examinations but they do not participate, as their role is primarily to offer feedback on the process. External examiners' reports are sent to the Central Examination Committee. Professional Studies Advisers are also involved in reviewing marginal papers.

The Board considered that APEAS has appointed a strong, diligent team of External Examiners who have

entered willingly into the debate and whose comments are heeded carefully by the APEAS. The reports are detailed and thorough and there is clear evidence that their advice is acted upon. When the opinions of the External Examiners, Practice Examiners and APEAS may not concur, there is always a credible explanation.

External Examiners and Practice Examiners also identify areas of apparent weakness in candidates, and notify the participating schools of issues which need further attention; recently, dispute resolution and health and safety have been cases in point. They appreciate the opportunity to observe fellow examiners conducting examinations. External examiners obtain a copy of all written submissions, which at that point are 'failed' standards, and a cross section of others to establish the baseline and the general standard achieved. They considered that centralisation of the examinations will help them further in achieving this. External Examiners' reports to the Board are made available to the Examinations Committee and to the Senior Examiners. Senior Examiners are also pro-active in seeking feedback from External Examiners by informal discussion.

The Board considered that it would be useful if the senior examiners and Professional Studies Advisers could help to provide practical case studies, rather than theoretical questions, as students usually find these particularly interesting.

Both Practice and External Examiners considered that one particular benefit of the involvement of professional practice in the curriculum is the understanding of the role of case studies. Confidentiality has always been a difficult and sensitive issue, as some architectural practices are

adamant in requiring that case studies are presented anonymously. This makes issue-based discussion problematic, as Professional Studies Advisers find it difficult to persuade students not merely to write a diary. Examiners would also prefer students to be more self-critical and analytical, another issue they will raise with the PSAs. Overall, however, under the present arrangements, they consider that candidates are presenting at Part 3 in a much stronger position than previously.

The Board discussed the assessments sheets, which they had considered somewhat bland. The Examiners agreed that it did fulfil its present function, but could be improved.

13.7 Candidates

The Board met four candidates who had attended courses at two different schools. The Board considered that the students displayed a high level of confidence and professionalism. Overall it was evident that their experience with APEAS had been very positive.

The students found the APEAS administration very helpful. When they registered for Part 3 they were sent detailed instructions. Employers allowed them study leave to attend courses and some received financial assistance from their employers.

The students were very supportive of the courses they had undertaken at the participating universities and the system in general. In particular, they noticed that they already felt well equipped by the education they had already received and continued to receive in practice, and the updates they attended were therefore genuine refresher sessions. This

helped them to feel quite confident when embarking on the Part 3 examination. Some schools offer one to one sessions with students, in which they can discuss whether or not they feel ready to present.

The students valued the professional training they had received at Parts 1 and 2 which they felt had provided a solid grounding for their work in practice and their preparation for Part 3.

APEAS offers guidance on Employment Mentors but does not appoint them. Students can either choose or are assigned an Employment Mentor in their practices. The Employment Mentor is responsible for signing off projects, reviewing comments on log sheets and monitoring progress. The range of projects to which a candidate is exposed during practice can vary depending on the mentor.

The students were aware that the role of the external examiner during the oral examination was to assess the performance of the professional examiners, and not the students.

They would prefer a more secure and faster method of issuing results, and on a specified date. At present results are sent by normal mail service. The students suggested that electronic means (such as email or a password protected internet site) might be preferable; however overall they considered that the process had run very smoothly. The Board considered that it was evident that channels of communication are effective; however it concurs with the students' view that mechanisms for submitting documents and issuing results could be refined.

13.8 **Staff**

The Board held interesting and informative discussions with the Chief Executive of APEAS and members of the APEAS Board during the visit. The Visiting Board did not meet staff members involved in the Part 3 courses as they are attached to the individual participating institutions.

13.9 **Research;**

The impact of any research on the courses will vary between participating institutions and was not considered by the present Board.

13.10 **Equal Opportunities:**

The APEAS Regulations state that professional examiners shall take account of the Equal Opportunities Acts and Statutes in their use of language and the general conduct of the examination. This is covered in more detail in the Guide to Examiners. The Guide for Candidates also describes procedures in the case of illness, extenuating circumstances, learning difficulties or disability.

Candidate statistics (gender, nationality, ethnicity, disability) are tracked and reported in the Annual Monitoring Report. Pass rates are also monitored. The 2004 monitoring also reported separately on percentage of passes at the three examination centres; in future this will not be necessary.

13.11 **Resourcing and facilities**

The Board did not review physical facilities for the courses as these are provided by the individual participating institutions, and, for the examination, are hired.

14. Documentation Provided

Prior to the visit APEAS provided:

Guide for Candidates
Guide for Examiners
2004 Annual Monitoring Report for ARB
Quality Assurance Framework
Examination Regulations

Documentation provided in the Base Room:

Criteria mapping document
Presentational material describing structure
Guidance notes and declaration for 2004 examinations

Scenario for practice examination 2004
Questions for candidates 2004
Registration form
Grades sheets signed off by Examination Convenor and
External Examiners
Central Examinations Committee 2004 Agenda & Minutes
Minutes of Aberdeen Regional Examination Committee
2004
Minutes of Edinburgh Regional Examination Committee
2004
Minutes of Glasgow Regional Examination Committee
2004
Aberdeen, Edinburgh & Glasgow final results