

**The Art Institute at Bournemouth
Wallisdown
Poole
Dorset
BH12 5HH**

**Report of the Exploratory Board to the BA (Hons) Architecture programme
17 January 2008
Confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee 17 September 2008**

Board members: Dr Robert Felix (Chair)
Mr Richard Patterson
Ms Carol Norton

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (RIBA) attended the Exploratory Board as Secretary

David Gloster (RIBA Director of Education) attended the Exploratory Board as an observer

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

At its meeting on 17 September 2008, the RIBA Education Committee confirmed

Candidate Course Status for Exemption from Part One of the RIBA Examinations for the BA (Hons) Architecture programme

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

The purpose of the Exploratory Board on 17 January 2008 was to consider the BA (Hons) Architecture programme for Candidate Course status for Exemption from Part One of the RIBA Examinations. It was not possible for the Exploratory Board to make a decision on the day of the visit as there was insufficient information to allow them to do so. The visit was suspended in order to allow the School to submit further written information to the Board, based upon which the Board hoped to be able to make a recommendation without a further physical visit. The School submitted additional documentation as requested in April 2008, which was circulated to the Board members. This included indicative content of the programme, including a summary of proposed studio projects and more detailed unit descriptors indicating where the validation criteria should be met. The School also submitted updated information about staffing. The Exploratory Board members considered that the revised documentation was comprehensive and well constructed. On the joint basis of this and the physical visit, the Exploratory Board was happy to make its recommendation of Candidate Course status for Part One.

2. Background

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth is a small specialist institution (SSI) offering a wide range of courses including foundation degree courses, Honours degree courses, short courses and postgraduate study.

The establishment of a new architecture degree has been in the strategic plan of the institution for a long time. Accommodation and resource planning were included in the planning process for the new building at an early stage. Experienced academics, including two heads of school, were appointed as advisers to the course.

The programme was internally validated by the University College for the Creative Arts, which is also the degree awarding body, in May 2007. The RIBA was notified in August 2008 that the Privy Council had awarded the Arts Institute full autonomy to award its own degrees. All students joining the Institute from September 2008 will receive a degree from the Arts Institute at Bournemouth. At the time of the visit the appeals process consisted of initial consideration through the through the AIB's own processes and it was anticipated that at the higher levels UCCA would be represented. At the time of the visit QA was conducted chiefly in-house, overseen by UCCA's systems. Subsequent to the Institute being granted its own degree awarding powers, the RIBA was notified that the final right of appeal would reside within the Arts Institute in its own right.

The first cohort of students (the 'pilot year') was enrolled at the end of September 2007 and will graduate in summer 2010.

3. Main comments of the Exploratory Board

The Board thanks the Arts Institute for its kindness and hospitality during the visit. They welcomed the honesty and openness of senior management, the programme leader, staff and students in the various meetings. The Board notes the support that architecture is receiving from the Institute.

- The Board found that there is a will for development but this did not come across explicitly in the Board's discussions with the School. The Board identified a certain reticence and caution. The Board encourages the School to be more ambitious and to have higher aspirations for themselves and their students.
- The course will benefit from the flat administrative structure of a small institution. The Board considered that the staff were well connected internally and externally, having access to the Principal and the Director of Academic Services and Senior Management. Communications between staff and management appear to be very good.
- Although there is no recent history of architecture with the institute and it does not offer any engineering subjects, there is a good base of relevant knowledge and expertise either within the Institute (for example in model making and media) or accessible to the Institute. There are strong links with major architectural and engineering practices.
- The Board noted that the course is being developed from many components that already exist, such as existing course and existing staff. There had only been three new appointees specifically to lead and teach Architecture. Present numbers of staff and expertise are appropriate for the work currently being

undertaken. This will need to be reviewed and reassessed as the programme and student numbers develop. The School will need to ensure that growing cohorts are catered for not only in terms of physical resources but also in staff expertise in specialist areas such as structural engineering, for which staff must be brought in. The Board noted that the model-making expert was jointly shared with product design, which was not being run in present academic session. The Board was concerned whether this was a stable way of running a course.

- While the Board appreciated that space was under review, it was concerned about the lack of forward resource plan. The Board is concerned that space allocation should remain commensurate with student numbers, in particular if they reach the projected 120.
- The Institute wishes to adopt a distinctive approach to architecture, establishing a practice-based architectural programme with links to and cross-collaboration with other programmes. At the time of the visit, the Institute was reviewing its entire offer and portfolio of courses and how synergies might work across the institute. The course will benefit from the art college environment, its strong institutional links with practice and institutional understanding of the nature of practice, professional courses and applied knowledge. However, the Board considered that the School did not seem to have yet grasped the possible synergies between architecture and adjacent subjects and needs to bring these into focus.
- The Board welcomed the contribution to the programme made by external professionals and firms, which appear to be working well.
- The Board is content that the quality assurance of the course on an internal level will be appropriate.

3. Course structure and content

The BA (Hons) Architecture programme is a year-based programme built on a modular framework. The School will be emphasising to students the cumulative nature of the learning process. The course is broken down into a preparatory phases leading ultimately to an integrated design project in the final year. The course intends to integrate all areas of knowledge from the beginning. The input may be discrete but students will be assessed on application of knowledge. Units are sufficiently flexible to allow projects to change as long as they enable students to address the learning outcomes.

As a small specialist institution programmes are focussed on the creative, linked strongly with practice. The programme is intended to be practice-informed as opposed to practice-based, offering projects which are based in reality but providing the freedom to be highly speculative. Architecture wishes to attract students who are imaginative, creative and driven, but able to apply knowledge gained through theory and practice to their projects. The programme leaders hope that students will help to shape and flavour the course, hence their reluctance to be too prescriptive early on about the later years of the course. Staff hoped that inspiration for this will come from the students themselves, allowing the course to be tailored to their needs and aspirations. The School also has a regional agenda and intends to make use of its location, including Bournemouth and Weymouth, which has been chosen as a 2012 Olympic venue.

At the time of the visit the first year of the programme had been completely mapped out and staff were working on the second and third year. Updated mapping was subsequently forwarded to the Board and the NCCCG. Detailed courses had been set up already in terms of themes. The year themes are Roots of Invention in Year One, looking at rural interventions on a small scale. Year Two focuses on Urban Interventions and Year Three Social Practice.

The main focus of the final year is the Extended Major Project which carries 60 credits. This is the final comprehensive 'design thesis' and will take the theme of the Pedestrian City. This final project should have all the elements to give the students the opportunity to demonstrate that they have met Part One. Some content will be delivered earlier but it will be demonstrated in the final year.

Students will also undertake a special study in the third year which will comprise an investigation led by the student, bound by learning agreement. It is expected to be experimental and to allow students to set their own agenda. Although the School had ideas about possible sites and the aim and scale of the project, it was anticipated that sites would be brought to the school by practices. The Professional Practice unit will run in parallel with a design unit and is also intended to be function as a professional mentorship and practice unit.

Professional practice is part of the course, taking advantage of and developing the Institute's existing links with practice. The School would, in particular, like to establish a link between the third year project and the year out. The School is discussing the possibility of a mentoring scheme in the third year, perhaps with students working on projects as a member of the team. This may possibly lead to students spending their year out working with the firm which had mentored them. The School hopes that by the time students have reached the third year it will be possible for them to work in pairs and perhaps establish a link between the final year project and the year out.

The Board found with the original mapping documentation that there was no sense in which it focussed on the outcomes of the criteria. The Board was concerned that there might be insufficient cultural context from the outset. The Board considered that it would be advisable to strengthen this aspect of the programme from the first year onwards. There was also a relatively generic level of presentation.

The Board noted that year 3 (level 6) has a large proportion of self motivated study. This may prove too much of a challenge for weaker students.

3.1 Assessment

It appears from the documents that assessment methods will be appropriate to the task. All units are required and must be passed. There are no optional studies. There is an apparent contradiction/inconsistency in the documentation regarding compensation; page 129 refers to an 'aggregate' mark. The Group learned that this is an institutional phrase which occurs in the standard document templates, but was assured that in the BA (Hons) Architecture compensation is not permitted. Unit descriptors overrule the programme specification. The School will be able to arrange for a special clause to be included in the documents to make this explicit. Two External Examiners have already been appointed. The Institute decided to appoint two, even at this early stage, due to the additional professional load.

The pass mark is 40%. Second year marks carry 25% of the final degree marks with the third year accounting for the remaining 75%.

3.2 Links with cognate disciplines

The programme leaders have not yet established how synergies with other disciplines will happen. Links between the BA (Hons) Architecture programme and the Foundation Degree in Interior Architecture and Design are much clearer. Interior architecture and design and architecture were established at roughly the same time and revalidated at the same time. This allowed the School to link them from the outset, purposefully allowing for shared elements and resources. In the first eight weeks of the programme, architecture and interior architecture students work together a great deal after which they undertake their own designs. It is possible that modelmaking and architecture may combine forces and share workshops. Architecture students will join interior architecture, model making and other disciplines in a joint seminar/lecture series in history and theory. The AIB also offers a 3D design course, currently being recast as a Product Design course. There are established and growing links with architecture practices from links with the Foundation Degree in Interior Architecture. Art and Design and the BA Modelmaking programme, which focusses chiefly on presentation models. Architecture students will also benefit from the links with Gifford Ltd whose engineers have given lectures and participated in crits.

3.3 Links with practice

There are existing established links with architectural practice through programmes such as BA (Hons) Modelmaking and the Foundation degree in Interior Architecture and Design. Interiors students have a compulsory placement at the end of their first year, and it is hoped that the links established through this will also be used by architecture students. The Enterprise Pavilion provides students with real contact with current practice, being home to two architecture firms, photographers, graphic design and on-site business support. The Pavilion provides business mentoring and support resources to aid development of new businesses and ideas. It also contains exhibition space and teaching space which is used by the school. The Board welcomed the School's intention to capitalise on its existing links and develop them yet further. However, the Board would advise the School consider carefully the implications of basing significant parts of any course in practice in the event of a difficult economic climate.

3.4 Programme development

Programme content and development is discussed at both formal and informal levels. Programme development meetings happen frequently and the Course Board of Studies happens once a term. During the first year of a programme's operation the Course Board of Studies is also attended by the Director of the School, the Registrar and other senior managers. Communication between staff appears to be good, facilitated by the size of the Institute and the positive attitude to staff and student feedback of the Course Leader and other senior staff.

4. Admissions

At the time of the visit the admissions requirements were either 200 UCAS tariff points (2 GCE A levels at Grade B or equivalent), although it is anticipated that this will rise once professional recognition is obtained. The School also accepts BTEC National Diploma in an Art & Design related subject (MMP), Diploma in Foundation Studies in Art & Design, BTEC National Certificate in an Art & Design related subject (DM), International or European Baccalaureate, other relevant and equivalent

international qualifications or a previous Honours degree or other experience which gives evidence of suitability. Applicants are not expected to have completed a foundation course, but it is anticipated that this is the kind of student who will apply and this should encourage a diverse range of entrants.

The Foundation Degree in Interior Architecture and Design also provides a route into architecture. Graduates of the Foundation Degree may be accepted onto Year Two of the BA (Hons) Architecture. The appropriate APEL procedures are in place for students entering from other programmes. Applicants are considered on a case by case basis. Some foundation degree students have expressed an interest in studying architecture. In the first eight weeks foundation degree and BA (Hons) architecture students undertake shared projects in order to embed certain ideas and skills, particularly technical and visual skills. The second years are taught independently. This allows foundation degree graduates to enter the second year of the BA (Hons), taking four years in total. The foundation degree cannot be used as a short-cut.

All applicants to the Institute are invited to an Open Day. Those who receive an offer are also invited to a Taster Day, which includes, in addition to talks, a taster studio session. The Institute has found that this provides an excellent introduction to studio based learning and aspects of the course. Whether this continues will be subject to annual review and demand. The Institute hopes eventually to operate a system of interview with portfolio. The Institute is committed to Widening Participation and is developing its activities in this area.

At the time of the visit 18 students were enrolled in the 'pilot year'. The target intake for 08-09 is 30 and the ultimate target is 40. Target numbers are discussed and agreed on an annual basis, in order that they remain appropriate. Growth will be carefully managed. While in development the programme receives a faculty subsidy. At the time of the visit, 60 students had been invited to interview and the School anticipated being able to make sufficient offers to reach the 2008/9 target of 30.

5. Student meeting

The Board enjoyed meeting the first cohort to be enrolled on the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. They were clearly enjoying the programme so far and their experiences to date seemed entirely positive.

Students were attracted to the Arts Institute by its reputation. Some had already studied there on foundation courses; others were there on the recommendation of friends who were already students. Its location in Bournemouth is also attractive. Students appreciate being in a creative environment, surrounded by related subjects. The size of the Institute, giving it a homely and friendly atmosphere, is also appealing to many.

Students appreciated the number of tutorials and the individual contact with staff. They also appreciated the level of freedom they were afforded in their work.

The Board found the students to be enthusiastic and eager to become engaged and involved in working in practice. They had not yet used the model-making machinery and were looking forward to doing so. They were also looking forward to the field trips to Barcelona and Venice. Some had already done work experience in architecture or interior design practice and were keen to do more. Nonetheless, students had varying aspirations, which the Board found interesting given that the staff anticipated that these would have a bearing on the future direction of the course.

The Board found that although the students had clearly established a rapport with each other and with staff, the staff had not yet helped them to develop their aspirations. Students had a general idea of the kind of work they would be doing in the second year but not in any great detail. The Board found the students to be a keen and teachable group, but believed that an initial pilot cohort in such a situation probably needed more structured projects. Students are not yet in a position to lead the course as the staff would wish. The Board considered there is great potential within the cohort and within the staff to exploit that potential but believes that the School needs to do more to inspire ambition in students from the outset.

The AIB has existing SOCRATES links with partner colleges in Iceland, Munich and Copenhagen, and is actively developing further links.

6. Staff

The School presently has 18 students and 1 full time member of staff. The course leader had been provided with the staff he wanted for the second and third year and two additional .5 posts. The two .5 senior lecturers had been appointed to address specific issues, namely professional practice and technology. Most teaching will be shared by staff chiefly engaged with other courses. Senior lecturers will be responsible for one level but will be responsible for a specialism across all three years.

The next appointment will be a technical demonstrator for IT. There is not a great deal of technical content in the first and second term but there is more in the third term in which students learn graphics programmes. The School intends to bring in a specialist for specialist design software. Specialist input is already provided from practice, for example Gifford Ltd staff have given lectures in their offices about the work of consultants and visited the studios. The course leader was aware that specialist assistance would have to be bought in as necessary and had always been assured that he would be given resources contingent on student numbers. The visiting lecturer budget will increase in line with student numbers.

Additionally, since the January visit, the School had made a further appointment by converting one of the existing .5 staff into a full time post. Beyond that, future staffing numbers were difficult to predict as staffing is student-number driven. It was anticipated that the SSR will be 12:1.

The Institute inculcates a culture of staff development, providing a comprehensive and demanding compulsory induction programme for all staff. In addition to this, official time is provided for course development. Architecture staff believed that they were provided with sufficient time and resources to develop the course.

7. Resources

The Board considered that resources at campus level were outstanding. Architecture is housed in a new building, shared with the central administration and graphic design. Additionally, there is a new workshop and new library. Some student union resources are shared with the Bournemouth University.

The Institute wished to make use as far as possible of existing resources. The Board understood that at the time of the visit not all architecture resources, whether physical or staffing, would yet be in place but would be provided as time progressed. The staff were content with the resources as they stand at present. Physical resources are well provided for, budgets appear reasonable and systems are good.

- **Studios**

Being an art and design institution, the Arts Institute understands the concept of studio-based teaching. Architecture students share studios with the 2-year foundation degree (Interior Architecture and Design), in order to help them feel part of a community. The present studio will hold 60, which is Architecture's formal space allocation for the next two years. At the time of the visit the Institute was undertaking a space audit and could not commit more space to individual subject areas until this was completed. In time, Architecture will have to accommodate 120 students. The School hopes to be able to accommodate all students, ideally in one studio, even when they are up to strength. However, they acknowledge that it may not be possible for all architecture students to work in one studio. There are, however, no plans for hot-desking.

Seminar rooms have IT facilities. DVDs, VHS, computers, internet links allowing staff to make multimedia presentations. At present the building closes at 21.00 Monday to Thursday, with shorter opening hours on Fridays and Saturdays. It is closed on Sundays.

- *Library*

Library provision at the Arts Institute is held in one central Library, which specialises in art, design and media holding 45000 volumes. As the Institute offers programmes in related areas, the existing relevant collection was already considerable. Architecture will receive a budget of £3000 for books for the first three years in order to expand the collection. At present, the acquisitions policy is focussing on reading lists and other key texts. Purchasing will broaden out later once the essential core is established. In particular, the Library wishes to develop the collection of journals. There are separate budgets for journals and online material. There is a dedicated subject librarian, who attends all course boards and course yearly reviews. All professional staff are assigned to specific subjects, but as the institution is small, all staff are able to help with most enquiries. Interlibrary loan services are available.

Journals are kept adjacent to the books, with the intention of encouraging students to consider the subject more broadly. There was a substantial core collection in building design and an expanding collection of town-planning and city planning. The head of architecture is keen to expand the material sciences collection. The marketing collection will help to underpin management, practice and law. The collection includes a slide library but increasingly library users are turning to the electronic and digital collections. A dedicated audio-visual librarian records TV programmes and buys DVDs. The library houses 2000 videos of off-air recordings (including approximately 200 architecture programmes) and is currently identifying what to transfer to DVD.

A learning support unit provides 1:1 support for students with learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, and there is a dedicated library assistant.

The Library also provides group discussion space and dedicated semi-quiet space. There are plans for a student reading-room; however at present the acoustics are difficult. Staff and postgraduate students have a dedicated, wireless reading room. 30 Macs and 5 PCs are available for student use, along with printing, photocopying and scanning facilities and bookable audio-visual viewing rooms.

The Library is open until 20.00 Monday to Thursday in term time, with shorter opening hours on Fridays and Saturdays and in vacation time.

The Library also houses the Museum of Design in Plastics. This was founded in 1988 in order to provide real objects for students as a resource. It has been formally registered as a museum since 2001. The collection now comprises 8.5 thousand items including textiles, ephemera and domestic items. A consultant employed to identify significant items identified a heavy plastic theme. The collection is in constant use supporting teaching and learning. Students are able to discuss items with staff, photograph them and sometimes borrow them. The logo was designed by students. Staff are discussing how the museum might take an architectural angle.

The Board was content with library provision. The collection is well curated and supported by knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff.

- *Workshops*

Existing workshop provision is very good. The workshops have long experience in model making for design and media, working closely with major architectural and construction firms. They also work closely with other courses such as animation. The workshops are divided into dedicated sections according to the material used or the specific function. These include a wood machine area, assembly area, spray room, paint room, digital machine room, metal machine, assembly area, plastics room, clay and plaster room, resin casting room, glass fibre lay-up room. There is equipment for machining, milling, lathing, soldering, casting rooms, plastics and moulding. There are four members of staff, two on each floor.

The Board found that the workshops were very well set up for training. Students receive an induction in the first four to five weeks of the term. Inductions are prioritised according to subject. All students receive a health and safety induction and are able to use some tools at staff's discretion. There are two laser cutters, one of which is mobile and can therefore be taken into the studios. Ultimately the laser cutters will be housed in a projected digital manufacturing centre. Ideas are already being developed about how architecture students might make use of this equipment at all levels. However, as yet there is no materials library or plan to establish one.

- *IT*

Although most students have their own laptops, there are currently 12 desktops for designated use by BA (Hons) Architecture Students. There is also access to Pentium II Suite (20 PCs), a dedicated printer and wireless network access. Software includes Sketch Up, Adobe Creative Suite 3 (Indesign, Illustrator, Photoshop), Microsoft Office (under campus agreement) and Autocad. This is in addition to the IT provision in the library. Sketch up is introduced as a design tool but Autocad is not introduced until the second year as the School wishes to emphasise drawing and improve students' drawing skills. At present students may print on A4 and A3 but it is not anticipated that A1 printing facilities will be provided until next year. As yet there is no plotter Increasingly students are able to submit files of work rather than hard copy. Ideally the IT staff would wish for Smart Boards. Students learn digital photography in the first year. The Arts Institute also offers a film course with all the attendant technology.

8. Documentation

The School provided all documentation submitted to the University College for the Creative Arts for internal validation. This was supplemented later by a Summary of Proposed Studio projects and updated mapping.

ERROR: invalidrestore
OFFENDING COMMAND: restore

STACK:

-savelevel-
-savelevel-
(2)