

RIBA 

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to De Montfort University**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 28 November 2007

**Leicester School of Architecture
Department of Product & Spatial Design**

**BA (Hons) Architecture, Part One
BArch (Part Two)**

Date of Visiting Board: 31 May-1 June 2007

1. Information About the Courses

- 1.1 **Courses offered for revalidation:**
BA (Hons) in Architecture Part One, three years full time,
six years part time
BArch –2 years full time (including year in practice), 3
years part time

1.2 **Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered**

Leicester School of Architecture
Department of Product & Spatial Design
Faculty of Art and Design
De Montfort University
Fletcher Building
The Gateway
Leicester LE1 9BH

T: 0116 257 7571
F: 0116 257 7518
W: www.dmu.ac.uk.

- 1.3 **Name of Awarding Body**
De Montfort University

- 1.4 **Name of Head of School**
Professor Hassan Abdalla

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

- 2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on
31 May-1 June 2007.

Kathy Gal, (Chair)
John Stevenson (Vice Chair)
Elantha Evans
Paul Harrison
Professor Bob Giddings
Pavandeep Panesar – Student/graduate member
Sheila Ryding – Co-professional member
Simon Gratton – RIBA Regional Representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (RIBA) was in attendance as
Secretary to the Board.

Mr Nicholas Smith (Head of Validation, RIBA) attended
the Board as an observer.

Ms Louise Marshall-Nichols (DMU) acted as Institutional
Facilitator.

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, ‘Tomorrow’s Architect,’
published March 2003, effective from September 2003,
and ‘Description & Regulations for the recognition of
courses, programmes and examinations in Professional
Practice and Management, (Part 3) in the UK. For more
information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendation to the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 28 November 2007

4.1 At its meeting on 28 November 2007 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed **Continued Validation** of:

BA (Hons) Architecture, three years full time, six years part time, Part One
 BArch, two years full time, preceded by a year in practice ,
 3 years part time, Part Two

4.2 The next Visiting Board should take place in 2011.

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 Leicester School of Architecture is one of the longest-established schools in the UK and for many years enjoyed a reputation for producing well-trained graduates. It has achieved a good recovery from several years of difficulty, has successfully re-established itself and is displaying a new-found confidence. The School is now in an excellent position to build on its strengths and articulate a clear vision for the future.
- 10.2 The School's strengths include:
- Confidence in the School from senior university management, which has supported the School during its recent challenges and pledged continuing support for the future
 - Commitment to part-time programmes, making architectural education more accessible to potential students
 - Preparation of students for professional practice.
 - Management, Practice and Law elements of the programmes, particularly at Part Two
 - Very strong links with local practice
 - Potential for multidisciplinary working within the Faculty and University through both formal and informal channels.
 - High quality of dissertations at Part Two
 - The availability of a complete suite of professionally-recognised qualifications at Parts One and Two.

- The excellent inhouse and adjacent facilities, providing potential for greater use
- The relationship with architectural technology

10.3 Recommendations

- 10.3.1 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.
- 10.3.2 The Board recommends continued vigilance with regard to standards at lowest pass level, in particular in the area of design.
- 10.3.3 The Board acknowledges the University's continued support of the School in improving staff resourcing, creating new posts as well as ensuring current vacancies are filled. Nevertheless, given the rapidly increasing cohort sizes and the School's ambitions for development at postgraduate level, the Board recommends that the School continue to ensure that an appropriate staff:student ratio is maintained and remains commensurate with student numbers.
- 10.3.4 The Board recommends that the School regularly review course documentation to ensure currency and accuracy.

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;

10.4.2 The Board applauds the School for its response to the challenges of recent years. Now these issues have been successfully addressed, the Board advises the School to form and articulate a clear vision of its future ethos and direction.

10.4.3 The Board advises the School to continue to monitor and analyse student progression.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

11.1 The last full Visiting Board to De Montfort University took place on 21/22 February 2002. The Visiting Board recommended

Conditional Continued Validation of:

Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture (three years full-time)
BA Architecture (five years part-time)

Part Two: Graduate Diploma in Architecture (two years full time preceded by a year in practice)
Diploma in Architecture (three years part time)

Continued Validation of:

Part Three: Post Graduate Diploma in Architectural Practice

11.2 This was followed by a Revisit on 6 June 2003. The Revisiting Board recommended:

Continued Validation of:

Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture (three years full-time);
BA Architecture (five years part-time)

Conditional Continued Validation of:

Part Two: Graduate Diploma in Architecture (two years full time preceded by a year in practice); Diploma in Architecture (three years part time)

11.3 A full Revisiting Board to Part Two took place on 9 June 2004. The Revisiting Board recommended:

Continued Validation of:

Part Two: Graduate Diploma in Architecture BArch (Hons), 2 years full time preceded by a year in practice;
Part Two: Diploma in Architecture BArch (Hons) 3 years part-time

Summaries of the above Visiting Board reports can be found in section 15 of this report.

12. Details of the Conditions in Section 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 Critical Self-Appraisal was drafted by a sub-group of staff in consultation with academic staff, the student body and the Department of Academic Quality.

The Visiting Board considered that the Critical Self-Appraisal represented a missed opportunity on behalf of the School to analyse and elaborate on both the positive and challenging aspects of its present situation, in particular its vision for the future and how it intends to realise the many opportunities for development it has identified.

There have been many significant developments at the School since the last full Visiting Board of 2002. These coincided with, or were instigated as a result of, major challenges faced by the School. The Board believes that the School has handled the situation well, with the clear support of the University.

At the time of the last Full Visiting Board the School had recently moved from the Faculty of the Built Environment to Art and Design, forming a component of the Department of Product and Spatial Design. A new head of department was appointed in October 2003.

The faculty reorganisation was instigated partly in response to rationalisation of programmes in related subjects but also with the intention of strengthening the design aspects of the architecture programmes. Given recent challenges, synergies with related art and design disciplines have not been explored to the depth which was

anticipated by the School. The School is now in a position to start to take advantage of these opportunities.

The University is investing heavily in resources. Art and Design, which will include Architecture, is due to move to a new, purpose-built building by 2011. In the meantime the University will continue to invest in the present premises which are undergoing continued refurbishment. The new Faculty Design Research Centre provides facilities for 3D modelling, 3D printing and rapid-prototyping, from which students may benefit.

Significant staffing reviews and reprofiling exercises have been undertaken since the last full Visiting Board resulting in some redundancies. Recent recruitment exercises, drawing heavily from the practitioner community, have been undertaken to ensure that specialisms are covered in the curriculum. The University has also committed to supporting existing recently-vacated posts, in addition to which several significant new posts have been created, including a full-time Chair in Architecture; due to be advertised during 2007/2008. The School acknowledges the contribution of the local profession both to teaching in the School and providing work opportunities for its students.

The Faculty of Art and Design is a partner of the recently-established University Institute of Creative Technologies.

The School wishes to strengthen its international dimensions, building on existing informal links with the US and Europe.

13.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The School forwarded the documentation to the Visiting Board in a timely manner. However, there were significant omissions in the advance documentation. Incomplete information before and during the visit gave the Board difficulties in understanding aspects of the information. The Board is particularly grateful to Ms Louise Marshall-Nichols (DMU Institutional Facilitator) for her contribution in helping to obtain and clarify additional information. Teaching staff were also helpful and co-operative in finding the additional documentation and providing additional explanations where necessary.

The portfolios were clearly labelled; however some material was missing and it was necessary to ask the School for additional items. Other administrative arrangements for the visit worked well.

13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

The Board considered the work of the 2005/2006 graduating cohorts. The following portfolios were provided for the Board's consideration (cohort numbers include both full and part-time routes):

BA (Hons) Architecture Part One

1st Year: 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes, 2 high passes form a cohort of 95; 2nd Year: 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes, 2 high passes, from a cohort of 61; 3rd Year: 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes, 2 high passes, from a graduating cohort of 27.

B.Arch Part Two: 1st Year: 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes, 2 high passes, from a cohort of 22;

2nd year, 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes, 2 high passes, from a graduating cohort of 12.

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

The Board confirmed that the School has addressed the recommendations made by the 2004 Revisiting Board in appointing an Academic External Examiner for the Part Two programme. Earlier recommendations and conditions placed on the various programmes by earlier Visiting Boards have all been adequately met and formally discharged.

There are clear institutional mechanisms to ensure that advice in External Examiners' reports and resulting action is noted by all relevant departments. In their meeting with the Board, the External Examiners confirmed that their reports are given serious consideration by the School and appropriate modification to programmes and assessments result.

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

The Leicester School of Architecture is incorporated within the Department of Product and Spatial Design in the Faculty of Art and Design. Alongside its validated programmes, the School also offers a BA (Hons) Architectural Design award (to which students on the BA (Hons) Architectural Studies programme are automatically transferred if grades are not sufficient) and an Architectural Design Technology and Production BSc. The Faculty of Art and Design offers a wide range of courses including Interior Design, Graphic Design, Industrial Design and Product and Furniture Design. The Faculty also offers a Foundation Course in Art and Design.

Although there is great scope for multidisciplinary working, in formal terms this has yet to be fully exploited. The Board believes that the School should clarify its interpretation of multidisciplinary which will enable it to explore the available opportunities to best advantage. This includes making better use of shared workshops and other specialist facilities on site.

The School is interested in developing postgraduate programmes, with a view to offering students a wider choice, capitalising on existing and planned research expertise and synergies between disciplines.

13.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part One qualification

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
BA (Hons) Architecture
The course objectives for the Part One course were seen to be appropriate and clearly being achieved. The programme's strength lies in preparing students for professional practice and this is clearly evident in the work and in the employability of its graduates.

13.5.2 Course design and content
The BA (Hons) Architecture programme is a year-based programme run on a modular framework. It is available in both full-time and part-time modes, the full time programme taking three years and the part-time, six.

In the first and second year some modules are shared with Architectural Design Technology and Production students. Although such initiatives have proved more difficult to arrange with other disciplines, the School is committed to exploring synergies where possible.

The Board was interested in mechanisms for refreshing modules and briefs. Briefs are written by module leaders and are intended to be sufficiently flexible to allow for adjustment during their period of currency, following feedback from students, external examiners, the interests of new staff, or adaptation to take advantage of new opportunities. Module templates are designed to ensure that the learning outcomes cover the RIBA/ARB criteria, but retain flexibility.

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 was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

However, the Board considered that there remains a lack of investigation and resolution in design projects and that 3D representation and understanding is still an issue.

There was also little evidence of process, such as sketching, making it difficult for the Board to understand where the concept of a design had come from. The Board encourages the School to continue in its efforts to improve the quality of design in student work.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

Although the Board was confident that the criteria were met, they considered that an overall strategy was lacking and that the two elements needed greater co-ordination and integration with each other. The Board found that technology and environment were heavily weighted towards environmental science. The Board believes that delivery of elements of the programme relating to structures was under supported..

- Cultural Context

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

Although the criteria are being met at an acceptable level, overall the Board found this element hard to pinpoint in the students' work. This appeared to be strong in terms of the academic portfolio, but the Board believes that more integration into the design portfolio is needed.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

This aspect of the programme was adequate, with a good range of skills demonstrated in the portfolios. In particular there was a good display of model-making. Written work was of an acceptable standard.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

Coverage of management, practice and law was found to be very good and well supported. It begins in the second year with a series of introductory lectures and is carried on through the third year through practical experience supported by further lecture programmes. The School has implemented the Office Adoption Scheme, through which students monitor an office for five months, at the end of which they submit a report for assessment in the third year. Many students subsequently are offered internships with their adopted practice. As part of the same module, third year students' learning is assessed through the Office Simulation project which is undertaken in groups.

- Preparation for Professional Experience, (Part 1 only)
Preparation for professional practice (as described under 'Management, Practice and Law' above) is similarly good and equally well supported. The Board particularly commended the School's long-standing and flourishing links with local practice, which is enthusiastic in its support of the School and enables such initiatives as the Office Adoption Scheme and the Office Simulation project to flourish.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

The Board observed, from the information available, that the attrition rate appeared to be high. However, from the lack of information available the Board was unable to explore this issue with the School. The Board advises the

School to continue to monitor and analyse student progression. In discussion with the staff, the Board learned that University support for weaker students had increased substantially.

- 13.5.5 Assessment: methods, content and coverage, relative weightings, standards achieved (commenting separately on examinations, course work, dissertations, design projects as appropriate),

The School employs a broad range of formative and summative assessment methods, including oral presentations, group work, portfolio reviews and submission of written work. These all appeared to be appropriate to the task being undertaken.

Compensation is not permitted. Students who do not achieve a 40% grade in each module of the validated BA (Hons) programme transfer to the BA (Hons) in Architectural Studies which does not carry exemption from Part 1.

Some students expressed concern about the consistency and nature of feedback. The Board's discussion of this issue with staff and students is recorded in paragraphs 13.9 and 13.10.

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

Demand for places at Part One has risen greatly. However, the School wishes to manage its growth realistically, maintaining the intake at approximately 90. Although numbers have increased, these are kept at a level which the School can accommodate appropriately given its

present resources. Its policy of controlled growth is also intended to enhance the quality of the intake. The School requires 240 UCAS points including one art and design subject and also considers equivalent UK and overseas qualifications. Mature students are encouraged to apply and each application is considered on its own merits, with opportunities to take prior experiential learning into account.

The programme documentation states that candidates normally attend a personal interview and portfolio review. The Board learned during the visit that interviewing all candidates is no longer possible given the increasing number of applicants. Applicants attend an open day during which portfolio reviews are undertaken, and individuals may be called for interview.

Application procedures to the part-time route are identical; however applicants must be employed in an architectural practice. The School will consider direct applicants to Year 2 and occasionally to Year 3. All such applicants are interviewed with portfolio, evidence of educational attainment and a referee's report. The School then decides which year the candidate may enter.

13.6 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Two qualification**

- 13.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The aims and objectives of the B.Arch Part Two were adequately articulated in the Board's documentation and evidently being achieved.

- 13.6.2 Course design and content

The B.Arch programme is available in both full and part-time modes. The full-time programme is delivered over two years, preceded by a year in practice, during which students assemble and are assessed on the Architectural Practice Portfolio. The part-time route takes three years. The Board's understanding of the course was helped by an excellent diagram which described the course content and structure, of both the full and part-time pathways. Part-time students take the same modules, but in a different order. Crits and assessments are undertaken at the same time as full-time students. All modules are compulsory and must be passed.

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 was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) programme.

The School gives rein to students' creativity by giving them freedom in selecting their projects. Design options are kept flexible in order to accommodate the interests and needs of the intake. The Board acknowledged that supporting such freedom is demanding and commended the School's commitment to this. The Board considered that such exercises are valuable when done well, as at DMU.

Although the Board was formally considering the work of the 2005/2006 graduating cohort, the exhibition included work from the present cohort (2006/2007). This showed

commendable and encouraging progress in achievement and the Board hopes that this continues to improve.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) programme.

The Board applauded the input of practice in this aspect of the course, as at Part One. The Board was particularly impressed with the contribution made by local practices to the teaching of construction, again available also to Part One students.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) programme.

The Board considered that this element of the course was very good and very well managed. In particular, students' dissertations were of high quality. Dissertations are prepared and supported by earlier pieces of writing, which the Board considered a healthy approach. This part of the course is very well-managed. Dissertations are related to the final design project wherever possible, although this is not compulsory. The students also enjoyed this element of the programme and found it a positive experience.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) programme.

The Board considered that the students demonstrated a good range and level of communication skills; however, in some cases presentation and illustration of concept, design process and final scheme were poorly communicated.

As noted in the earlier paragraph, the dissertations in particular were of a high standard. Overall the Board found the students to be an articulate body.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture (BArch) programme.

The Board considered this part of the programme to be very good and well supported. Part Two coverage of these criteria starts during the year out and is carried through the formal taught course, going beyond the requirements for Part Two to anticipate requirements for Part Three. The chief vehicle for Management, Practice and Law at Part Two is the Architectural Management, Practice and Law module, which is run in parallel with the Integrated Design Project.

These criteria are very well integrated into the programme as a whole. During their year out, DMU students who

intend to take the DMU Part Two are required to undertake a 15-credit module, comprising a profile of the practice in which they are employed, a reflective diary including samples of work and a critical appraisal of a project in which they have been involved.

This, in its turn, overlaps with the Part Three programme. Students who gained their Part One at another university are required to have completed a 'year out', for which they receive APL credits.

13.6.4 Progression within the course

At present Part Two cohorts are very small although they are growing. Progression was difficult to analyse from the statistics available. The School believes that the increasing quality of the intake will improve progression.

13.6.5 Assessment: methods, content and coverage, relative weightings, standards achieved (commenting separately on examinations, course work, dissertations, design projects as appropriate),

An appropriate range of assessment methods are employed. Compensation is not permitted. All modules are compulsory and must be passed. Students are not permitted to enter year six (the final year of the B.Arch, Part Two) if they have not passed all elements of year five.

Some students expressed concern about the levels of feedback received. This appeared to vary between years. The Board agreed that there are some inconsistencies in approach and methods between different staff. The School acknowledged that this had been difficult due to staff shortages. However, the intention is that students receive feedback in a form appropriate to the activity

being assessed, whether written or verbal, graded or non-graded. It was clear that students appeared to prefer receiving grades; however, under the present system work can only be formally graded when it has been moderated. As the increase in student numbers has not yet been matched by an increase in staffing, the system is clearly under pressure. The Board considered that there needed to be a consistent system of feedback and grading. The staff believe that students do not always recognise or understand the value of informal feedback and perhaps steps could be taken to engender the students' wish to take part in discussions and exchange of ideas.

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

The Board noted that the qualifications on entry of Part Two students were improving. At present about two thirds of Part Two applicants are De Montfort Part One graduates. DMU Part One graduates holding at least a second-class degree are admitted directly. Those holding a third-class degree must undergo an interview and portfolio review. A second interview may be required.

Approximately one-third are external applicants. Those with a First Class or 2.1 degree may be made a conditional offer or may be interviewed with portfolio. Those with a lower class of degree are automatically interviewed. The Board noted that the school offers direct entry into Year 6 (that is, the second year of the Part Two). Such applicants must also have a minimum of six months' supervised practice experience.

Part-time students are not required to do the year in practice as their prior experience is credited. They must

normally be employed under the supervision of an architect in a design office throughout the programme.

The number of applicants to the part-time route has grown significantly, and numbers in the two modes are now about equal. Student numbers are recovering encouragingly, apparently doubling year on year. To date numbers have been capped at 40 but the School anticipates eventual cohort sizes of approximately 50.

13.7 **External examining arrangements**

The Board was pleased to meet five External Examiners (representing Parts One, Two and Three) and two Part Three professional examiners. There are presently three External Examiners attached to the Part One programme and two at Part Two.

The Externals' role is to determine whether the university's standards are acceptable and comparable, with a view to maintaining the top level of excellence as well as the threshold standard and considering appropriate bandings. At present, as cohorts are small, the Externals are able to look at the work as a group. External examiners attend the B.Arch interim review and remain in touch with the School throughout the year. There are robust training sessions for External Examiners and they also appreciated the close links with the QA office, the head of school and the course teams.

External examiners value the invitation to a review session halfway through the year, which enables them to see at first hand how their comments are being addressed and the progress of the cohort.

The External Examiners expressed confidence and faith in the School and in its present and future health. The School sees itself as a strong regional provider serves its community well. The improvement in the School following recent challenges was described as ‘meteoric’. Those of several years’ standing reported that improvements were evident year on year.

The Externals were impressed by the energy of the head of the school and the willingness to resolve problems. A change of culture had been effected, helped by improvements to and rationalisation of courses and refreshment of the staff profile. The Externals were also impressed with willingness to map criteria rigorously and design elements of courses, such as the Integrated Design project, as enabling frameworks and route maps. The concentration on this and establishing an appropriate threshold standard have been key factors in the improvement of standards. In their view real quality is now evident in the work.

The External Examiners confirmed that the School does respond positively to comments in their reports, acting upon them as far as possible. Improvements in IT provision, studio accommodation, methods of teaching, pedagogic structure, integration of technology, the balance between CAD and hand-drawing, evidence of process, and the formerly prescriptive nature of some projects are all cases in point. The External Examiners particularly mentioned the quality of dissertations at Part Two and the Office Adoption Scheme at Part One, which they considered an exemplar of good practice, giving students great confidence in their work.

While pleased with the improvement in the School and the corresponding growth in numbers, they remain concerned that resources (both physical and staffing) may not remain adequate, echoing the students’ concern about Third Year studio space. The provision of part-time courses is highly commendable and valuable, but places pressure on staff and must continue to be adequately supported. They commented that the diversity of the student body in all senses has a great deal to offer the profession.

The External Examiners were optimistic that the School could form a strong and distinctive identity. They commended its ambition to revitalise itself and establish itself as an excellent regional school of architecture.

13.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

For DMU Part One graduates who intend to return to the School for Part Two, the ‘year-out’ is an integral part of the course. Students are expected to find their own placements, but their search is often facilitated by the School’s existing connections. If students register with the School during the year out, they are monitored by the Professional Studies Adviser (PSA) who also keeps in touch by email and phone. If students are based in the UK, the School undertakes to visit them at least once. Students also attend a Recall day at the School.

13.9 Students;

The Board was pleased to meet full-time and part-time students from all years of all validated courses. Part One was particularly well represented. The Board thanks the students for the candid and constructive discussion that was held.

Among the School's strengths students noted:

- The significant improvements in all areas over the last few years, particularly noted by Part Two students who had taken Part One at the School. .
- Its location, which appeared to be a significant factor in students' decisions to apply.
- The availability of part-time routes which made it more accessible.
- Support and encouragement from tutors
- The quality of external tutors and visiting practitioners
- Students are stretched and encouraged in their individual styles. Integration of construction and design is a strength. Creativity is encouraged and the balance between practical issues and the artistic is attractive. Students welcomed the freedom to choose their own dissertation topics and link it to their design work.
- Part One graduates were interested in returning to DMU for Part Two because of the location, familiarity (for those who had gained Part One at the School), the facilities and the enthusiasm of the staff.
- The small size of cohorts at Part Two cohorts was attractive, as it is conducive to a friendly, co-operative atmosphere and close working relationships.
- The School's position in Art and Design provides great opportunities for interdisciplinary working, which are not yet used to full advantage. It also provides access to a range of facilities and the support of various technicians.

- The workshops and the technical support were considered excellent, but access could be a problem.
- The introduction of rapid-prototyping equipment was a positive step as it encouraged experimentation.
- The quality of the library facilities were noted as excellent by the students.
- The diversity of the student population at Part Two creates a positive studio culture.
- The interaction between full-and part-time students, as much as their schedules will allow.

Amongst concerns raised by students were:

- Students would welcome more printing and other IT facilities, although they believed that longer access hours would help. They were appreciative of the support they received from the four full-time IT and technical support staff..
- There might be better co-ordination of handin times, to help students manage their time more effectively.
- Group tutorials are good and work well; however, Part One students would welcome better and more co-ordinated information about the availability of their tutors. The students believed that the School could communicate more effectively and offer better direction to the practitioners who also teach in the School to ensure consistency of approach.
- The lack of studio space for third year and Part Two students. Students would appreciate dedicated space that would allow them more

opportunities to interact and learn from each other. At present the studios are dual purpose and are out of action when used for presentations.

- Apart from the occasional shared module, architecture students do not work with students on other courses.
- There appeared to be inconsistencies between the nature and timing of feedback, particularly for projects or written work.
- Students are currently trying to revitalise the student society but there was a perception of lack of support from the university.

13.10 Staff.

The University has invested in improving the staff profile in recent years. The School has taken a strategic approach to recruitment, undertaking a skills-mapping exercise three years ago and focussing subsequent recruitment accordingly. In particular the School has tried to recruit registered architects with a strong skills set. There are presently 15 full time or FTE staff and 15 hourly paid staff, supported by four full time technical and support staff. There are also many visiting reviewers and visiting lecturers.

Five new staff have been appointed to strengthen the staff profile and the four new posts (including that of Chair) have been approved by the University. The most significant newly-created post is that of Chair in Architecture. This will be a full-time appointment with a significant amount of delegated responsibility. The University wishes to improve subject leadership and increase external visibility of the School and it is envisaged the post-holder will play a key role in this.

The School has made significant use of part-time staff in order to cover specialisms where these are not represented in the full-time staff body.

The School intends that the involvement of specialists early in the courses will not only be of immediate benefit to students but will also match the School's future strategy in research and directly influence teaching.

Funding is student-number driven and therefore it is anticipated that staffing numbers will rise as the cohort sizes increase. Ensuring that staff numbers remain adequate will be of increasing importance, not only as student numbers rise but also if the School is successful in fulfilling its future ambitions. The School wishes to develop a suite of MAs which provides potential for more specialist directions and revitalise research programmes. It was noted that investing in postgraduate programmes and research will place greater demands on staff time. The Board concurred with the staff's view that more administrative support is needed.

The staff are supportive of and enthusiastic about the head of architecture's ambition to raise the profile and standing of the school. They believe the present strengths of the school to be the provision of a complete suite of validated programmes, and its approach to the teaching of Management, Practice and Law throughout the school, and the possibilities for interaction with architectural technology, fashion, and interior design. They wish to develop the School beyond its reputation for technical and professional education, developing a different creativity taking advantage of the opportunities in the Faculty of Art and Design. Pressure on staff time has, to date, made this more difficult.

The University provides opportunities for staff development, provided both internally and externally. The School is also encouraging secondment to practices and short sabbaticals. External funds are invested in staff to allow them time to research.

The Board found the divergence of opinion between staff and students interesting particularly with regard to the level of interdisciplinary working, assessment procedures, assessment and feedback.

The Board learned that the Faculty staff:student ratio benchmark is 1:21.4, or broadly 1:20, which is being achieved by the School.

The Board acknowledges the University's continued support of the School in improving staff resourcing, creating new posts as well as ensuring current vacancies are filled. Nevertheless, given the rapidly increasing cohort sizes, the Board recommends that the School continue to ensure that an appropriate staff:student ratio is maintained and remains commensurate with student numbers.

13.11 **Research;**

The University has a significant and growing research profile. Although research groups will submit to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, and the research group in the Leicester School of Architecture currently has a rating of 4, this is only one facet of the University's activities. Research-active architecture staff will submit to the Art and Design Unit of Assessment in 2008. The University wishes research in any particular field to develop with integrity towards its own subject and profession. It also

aims to maintain and develop its strengths in third stream funding.

The School's main priority in recent years has been addressing various issues of validation and prescription. Now these are being successfully resolved, staff are able to re-engage with research activities and develop research that underpins the School's teaching. The number of research active staff is relatively small, and they are chiefly working as individuals. There are presently nine PhD students.

The focus of research activities has been clustered around existing expertise and strengths at institutional level, chiefly sustainability, but broadly in the fields of humanities, sustainable urban design and architectural conservation, built environment and building design, the developing world built environment and sustainable product design and development. The School has attracted extra funds from various research councils and other external bodies.

The Board considered that the links with the Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development has clearly had a positive impact on environmental design in students' work. The impact of teachers' research into history, theory and urbanism is also evident in coursework.

13.12 **Equal Opportunities:**

De Montfort University has clear Equal Opportunities policies underpinning its activities. The School itself is highly conscious of equal opportunities for both staff and students.

The School wishes to improve the accessibility and affordability of architectural education. The part-time routes offered at both Part One and Part Two make a significant contribution to this. In addition, the School, and the regional profession wish to develop an integrated part-time course, which will be centred around work-based learning. It is intended that this will provide opportunities to take previous experience and knowledge into account. The School also intends to offer bursaries to high-flying students and is exploring the possibilities of sponsorship from regional practices.

The present gender balance at Part One stands at 70/30 between male and female students, slightly below the national norm. The balance at Part Two is variable. There has tended to be a predominance of male students but an equal split was achieved in 2005/2006. About one third of students describe themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority.

The staff profile has improved in recent years to represent wider demographic of both age and gender.

13.13 **Resourcing and facilities;**

The Board considered that the School has a large and wide range of resources at its disposal, although it acknowledged students' concerns about access to workshops and the increasing pressure on space caused by the growth in student numbers. The Board noted the support received by the School from the Dean, the ongoing refurbishment of its present premises and the commitment by the University to provide purpose-built accommodation in a new building.

- *Studios*

The architecture studios benefited from the ongoing programme of refurbishment. However, the pressure on space is already considerable and increasing. Students in particular are concerned and anxious that the lack of space may result in loss of cohort identity. Year One and Two in the BA (Hons) Architecture share space with Architectural Technology. The Third Year Part One students also find space tight. At Part Two years five and six operate on a timeshare basis. The School is aware of these problems and has tried to create more space in its present premises by rehousing the Art and Design Foundation Course.

IT

Software, hardware and IT support are commendable. This has been improved on the written recommendations of the External Examiners. The majority of the facilities are provided in a central studio, which includes a purpose-designed teaching area providing 18 flat-screen CAD workstations (funded by a grant from HEFCE) and a further 49 PCs and 10 Apple Macintoshes which students may use. Most students also have their own laptops. This facility is open until 8.45pm three nights a week, with earlier closing on other weekdays. There are also smaller satellite facilities. IT facilities are supported by four IT and technical support staff, and evening sessions are supervised by suitably experienced final year students.

The Board considered that the provision of software was at a very high level, while acknowledging that the packages available in the Design Centre are exceptional but unfortunately not for student use. Available software included Autocad, Archicad, Vectorworks, Sketchup, AdobeCreative, Photoshop and ECOTECT.

There are 4 A0 printers, a significant number of A2 printers and many A3 printers. Three 3D printing machines are accessible to students through technicians. Students are already able to use some of the newly-acquired rapid prototyping facilities. These are not yet formally linked to architecture due to the need for appropriate training and software licences and are presently chiefly used for commercial purposes. When staff have been trained students will be able to use them (it is anticipated in approximately 2 years' time).

Despite the significant investment in IT, students believed that more was needed as they were clearly under pressure, particularly the shared resources. Printing, as in most schools, can be problematic. The School is considering greater use of digital presentation, which may help to reduce costs and delays.

The Board observed that use of Blackboard by staff and students could vary, but it was acknowledged as an excellent tool when used effectively.

- *Library*

The School is fortunate in having access to two excellent resources; the in-house Department Resources Centre and the main University Library.

The Department Resources Centre is intended to replicate resources found in a practice. The Board considered this an excellent idea which was well executed. The Centre houses key journals, key texts, dissertations, databases, slide and video collections and a product/samples library. It is permanently supervised with dedicated staff and paid student monitors. This is resourced by the Faculty and is

chiefly used by architecture and interior design students, although all students are free to use it if they wish.

Students may borrow material, including periodicals, on an overnight basis; part-time students may sometimes borrow items for longer periods. There is a comprehensive list of periodicals, which is reviewed every two to three years. The acquisition policy is flexible, with books being suggested by staff, students and the librarian. The Centre has also benefited from donations. If an item is expensive, the School may ask the central University library to buy it. The main University Library (the Kimberlin Library) houses the central architecture collection. It is purpose-built and is undergoing extensive refurbishment. The library is very good and offers 24-hour access.

The Board found that the main library housed a very comprehensive selection of books. The architecture collection numbers 113000 titles, including books, pamphlets, videos and DVDs. The Library also subscribes to over 50 architecture and construction print journals, and a significant number of architectural titles among the 150000 electronic journals in all subject areas to which it subscribes. The Library also subscribes to a wide range of electronic databases.

Architecture is allocated its own budget within the Faculty of Art and Design Allocation. In 2006/2007 this was £17,025, with an additional £6481 for electronic resources. The budget allocation includes stress funding to accommodate unexpected developments. Resource allocation is partly student-numbers-led, but other factors also come into play. There is a lot of commonality between architecture and interior design which broadens the scope of resources.

The acquisition policy is flexible. Items on reading lists are automatically purchased, academics make suggestions and the architecture specialists also look out for appropriate purchases. Regular meetings are arranged with staff and the subject librarian also attends the Subject Authority Board.

The building is open for 24 hours a day. Study-space and IT provision in the Library is generous and expanding. The recently-refurbished “Learning Zone” provides group learning space and bookable syndicate rooms. It is fully wireless, enabling staff and students to use their own laptops. Laptops can also be borrowed from the Library. There is also desktop IT.

There are presently 200 PCs on each floor. The Library is expanding to the adjacent building which will include an IT lab with specialist software in 2008. The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) can be accessed at the Library although it is managed on a Faculty basis. All reading lists are on-line.

All students undergo an induction to Library and printed guides are available.

Workshops and Laboratories

The Board believed that the School is very well equipped. There is an impressive range of workshop facilities available to the School covering metal and woodworking, plastic and vacuum forming, soft-modelling, prototyping and 3D printing, together with two materials science laboratories and very well equipped and supported environmental science facilities.

Workshops are provided on a Faculty-basis and have also recently been refurbished. These are staffed by experienced technicians. Students commented that access can be a difficulty, partly because the workshops are shared with other departments and partly because opening times are limited for security reasons.

There are technicians on hand to operate the more technical equipment.

14. Documentation Provided

Record of the documentation provided before and during the visit. Course structure diagrams for courses recommended for Validation (as provided by the school prior to the visit).

- BA Hons Years 1, 2 and 3.
- Module files.
- Module template
- Module handbooks/project briefs
- Teaching material/ lecture plan
- Examination papers/phase tests
- Attendance/reviews
- Student record samples
- Record of marks
- Student feedback
- Module reports to Subject Authority Board.
- 1st year 2004/2005, 2003/2004, 2005/2006
- 2nd year 2003/2004, 2004/2005, 2005/2006
- 3rd year 2003/2004, 2004/2005, 2005, 2006
- B Arch 2003/2004, 2004/2005, 2005/2006
- Undergraduate prospectus
- Alumni scholarships
- Faculty undergraduate prospectus
- International undergraduate prospectus

International postgraduate prospectus
 PG Dip coursework 2005/2006
 Examples of publications
 2005/2006 BA dissertations
 Publicity for courses
 Postgraduate Employability guide
 Staff CVs

15. Summaries of Previous Visiting Board Reports – 2002 & 2003

15.1 The last full Visiting Board to the Leicester School of Architecture took place on 21 and 22 February 2002. This Visiting Board was conducted under the former joint ARB/RIBA procedures.

The Visiting Board recommended:

Conditional Continued Validation of:

Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture (three years full-time)
 BA Architecture (five years part-time)

Part Two: Graduate Diploma in Architecture (two years full time preceded by a year in practice)
 Diploma in Architecture (three years part time)

Continued Validation of:

Part Three: Post Graduate Diploma in Architectural Practice

15.1.1 The following conditions were imposed on the Part One and Part Two programmes:

- That the school provides a statement to the RIBA and ARB by June 2002 demonstrating how it has responded to the required changes to course titles and marking schemes requested in this report
- That the school provides a strategic statement and action plan addressing the concerns of the visiting board with regard to Design and Cultural Context at Part One and Design, Cultural Context and Environmental Design, Constructional and Architectural Technologies at Part Two by October 2002 to the RIBA and ARB
- That the school, in consultation with the RIBA and ARB, appoint an advisor to assist in the development and implementation of the strategic statement and action plan. The advisor will provide reports to the RIBA and ARB in July 2003 and July 2004.
- That a sub group, (three members), of the Visiting Board revisit the courses in 2004/5

The recommendations of the 2002 Visiting Board in relation to the Part One and Part Two courses were rejected by ARB Board. After the submission of additional documentation by the School and attendance of key university staff at a formal meeting, ARB Board took the decision on 20 February 2003 that prescription should be withdrawn from both the Part One and Part Two courses.

The RIBA Education Committee approved the general recommendations that were contained in the 2002 Visiting Board report, but required that the last of the conditions be strengthened. Specifically they required that a revisit should be undertaken by a fully constituted Visiting

Board in June 2003. This should examine the standard of work at the lowest pass level of the Part One and Part Two courses and monitor output of the courses in relation to the concerns raised by the Visiting Board of 21 and 22 February 2002.

15.2 Revisiting Board June 2003

The Revisiting Board took place on 6 June 2003. The Revisiting Board recommended:

Continued Validation of:

Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture (three years full-time)
BA Architecture (five years part-time)

Conditional Continued Validation of:

Part Two: Graduate Diploma in Architecture (two years full time preceded by a year in practice)
Diploma in Architecture (three years part time)

15.2.1 The Board was satisfied that all the conditions attached by the 2002 Visiting Board to the Part One course had been completely satisfied and recommended that these courses be granted Continued Validation with a next Visiting Board in 2006/7. The following condition was imposed on the Part Two programmes:

“The Visiting Board recommends that the Part Two courses retain Conditional Continued Validation status. The Board was satisfied that the validation criteria were now being met in the areas of Cultural Context and Environmental Design, Construction and Architectural Technologies. The Board was not satisfied that the

conditions imposed by the 2002 Board in respect of Architectural Design had been fully met. The failure to satisfy all the conditions attached by the 2002 Visiting Board has resulted in the recommendation that a full Visiting Board considers the Part Two courses. The Board recommends that this should take place immediately following the summer 2004 assessment board.”

15.3. The full Revisiting Board to Part Two took place on 9 June 2004. The Revisiting Board recommended:

Continued Validation of:

Part Two: Graduate Diploma in Architecture BArch (Hons), 2 years full time preceded by a year in practice
Part Two: Diploma in Architecture BArch (Hons) 3 years part-time.

15.3.1 Summary of 2004 Visiting Board Report

“The Board congratulates the School on its recent achievements. This revisit took place at the end of a year of great uncertainty and challenges for the Leicester School of Architecture. In addition to the questions of validation, the staff and students have experienced major restructuring within the School as well as relocation. Since the last Board in 2003 the School of Architecture has joined with Product Design and Interior Design to form a new Department of Product and Spatial Design. The School has also welcomed a new Department Head, a new Part 2 Course Leader, a new external adviser and an ongoing staff restructuring exercise which has resulted in some redundancies and new appointments. This process of change is not yet complete.

“The University is aware of the 150 year heritage of the Leicester School of Architecture and wishes to preserve that, re-establishing a clear identity for the School.

The Head of Department explained that the restructuring has been undertaken in order to respond to what is happening in the world outside academia. The School aims to prepare students for a broader future, especially after the first degree. Through restructuring, the Faculty intends that architecture, interior design and product design will be able to share resources, good practice and experience.

The School is working closely with Leicester City Council in the areas of urban planning and urban regeneration. They are also developing closer interaction with local practices and engagement at national and regional level.

“The School’s strengths include a clear commitment to architecture from the University which is investing heavily in architecture. Restaffing and refurbishment exercises are either planned or underway. Previous uncertainty about the School’s location and premises has been lifted. The Head of Department and his staff are committed to raising standards and developing a unique profile for the School. The School is also developing close links with the region, both with private practice and with Leicester City Council. Having successfully addressed issues which have held it back in the past, the School is now able to review its strategy and further develop its own niche in architectural education.

“The position of architecture within the Department of Product and Spatial Design, and at a higher level within the new Faculty of Art and Design, provides many opportunities for interdisciplinary learning. It is intended

that links with the De Montfort University Institute of Energy and Sustainable Development will also be developed and exploited.”