

**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board  
to the Edinburgh College of Art  
Confirmed by the RIBA Education  
Committee 27 September 2006**

**ECA School of Architecture**

Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time)

Part One: Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (4 years  
full time)

**Part One is achieved at Year 3.**

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture and Architectural  
Conservation

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design

Dates of Visiting Board: 22-24 June 2005 and 23 June 2006

## Information about the Courses

### 1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

- Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time)
- Part One: Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (4 years full time: Part 1 is achieved at Year 3.)
- Part Two: Diploma in Architecture, consisting either of the Honours year of the Bachelor of Architecture course plus the final diploma year or the two year diploma course
- Part Two: Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation; consisting either of the Honours year of the Bachelor of Architecture course plus the final diploma year or the two year diploma course
- Part Two: Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design; consisting either of the Honours year of the Bachelor of Architecture course plus the final diploma year or the two year diploma course

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

Edinburgh College of Art  
Lauriston Place  
Edinburgh  
EH3 9DF

T: 0131 221 6000

F: 0131 221 6006

W: [www.eca.ac.uk](http://www.eca.ac.uk)

### 1.3 Name of Awarding Body

Heriot-Watt University (students registered before 2004)  
University of Edinburgh (students registered after 2004)

### 1.4 Name of Head of School

Leslie Forsyth  
(Ernie Anderson and Derek Fraser were Acting Head: Undergraduate and Acting Head: Postgraduate respectively at the time of the 2005 visit)

## 2. Membership of the Visiting Board

### 2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 22 - 24 June 2005 and 23 June 2006 were:

Graeme Jennings (Chair)  
John Stevenson (Vice-Chair)  
Richard Patterson  
Stuart Barlow  
Colin Ross (Regional Nominee)  
Malcolm Macourt (Non-Architect Member, June 2005)  
Henry Shaftoe (Non Architect Member, June 2006)  
Peter Williams (Graduate/Student Member)

Peter Williams was unable to attend on 23 June 2006, but the Board remained quorate throughout.

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (RIBA Acting Head of Validation) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board in June 2005. Chris Ellis (RIBA Acting Director of Education) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board in June 2006.

### 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 RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria, published March 2002, effective from September 2003. For more information see [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

### 4. Course Structure

- 4.1 The Part One comprises the first three years of the four-year Bachelor of Arts in Architecture with Honours course, or the three-year Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (which does not carry Honours).
- 4.2 Part Two is awarded on the basis of the Honours year (year four) of the Bachelor of Arts in Architecture with Honours plus one of the year long diploma course, or, for students with a three year honours degree and Part 1 exemption, an additional year of study (diploma 1) prior to one of the three year-long diploma courses:
- Diploma in Architecture
  - Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design
  - Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation.

### 5. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the RIBA Education Committee.

- 5.1 The Visiting Board recommends Continued Validation of

- Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time)  
 Part One: Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (4 years full time: Part 1 achieved at year 3)  
 Part Two: Diploma in Architecture  
 Part Two: Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation  
 Part Two: Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design

- 5.2 The next full Visiting Board should take place in 2009.

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

- 6.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA continue with their accreditation of the Part Two qualifications.
- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 The Visiting Board recommends to ARB that the Part 1 & 2 courses met all points of the EU Directive.

### 7. Criteria for Validation

- 7.1 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 5.1 above satisfied all the Criteria for Validation (which are held in common by the RIBA for validation and the ARB for prescription).

## 8. Standards

8.1 On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined, the work from previous year of the courses listed in 5.1 was inspected during the visits and was found to meet the required standards.

## 9. Conditions of Validation

9.1 There were no special conditions of validation.

## 10. Standard Requirements of Recognition

- 10.1 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 5.

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

11.1 The School of Architecture and Edinburgh College of Art have undergone significant change during the last few years. Ambitious plans for the future are intended to enhance its international standing, develop its research profile and provide an even better student experience. It is to the School's credit that it has continued to deliver education of a high quality to its students in the midst of these changes.

In addition to this the School has been subject to rigorous internal and external reviews, in which it has performed very well.

The School has responded systematically to the issues raised by the last Visiting Board. This is an ongoing project, as the School reviews the impact of its changes and amends them accordingly. Tremendous improvements are already evident and the Board has every confidence that these will continue as courses and systems evolve. The Board wishes the School every success in fulfilling its ambitious plans for the future.

11.2 The School's strengths include:

- Its situation in a College of Art, alongside several art and design courses, with all the opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas that that provides. This is very attractive to students.

- Its policy of building links with other disciplines represented in ECA through the introduction of interdisciplinary studios in the first year.
- Its initiative in attempting to integrate facilities, which is greatly appreciated by the students.
- A dedicated body of staff who are committed to teaching.
- Its relatively small size (year groups of approximately 60), which fosters a strong studio culture aided by a good staff:student ratio.
- Its vision of the future and ambitions for the alignment of architectural education in East Central Scotland in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, whilst retaining the unique provision afforded by the College of Art culture.
- Its participation in international exchange programmes and links with schools overseas.
- Producing students who are well-regarded by employers
- Continuing to provide education of a high quality through periods of institutional change.
- Very robust and stringent Quality Assurance procedures.
- The calibre of its External Examiners who are supportive of the School and its aims.

### 11.3 Recommendations

- 11.3.1 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.
- 11.3.2 The Board recommends that the School review the mechanism via which the Part Two Validation Criteria in all five areas are met across the two years of the Part Two programmes to ensure that these operate in a consistent and transparent fashion, especially given the ambition of the School to meet the majority of the Part Two Technology and Environment criteria in the honours year freeing up the final year for specialisation.
- 11.3.3 The Board commended the process the School had introduced via which students were required to undertake mapping of their own assessed work against the RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria. The Board would recommend that the School continue to develop this process and, in particular, establish methods of providing staff feedback to students as to the accuracy of their mapping.
- 11.3.4 The Board recommends that Professional Studies is reviewed at Part One to provide more evidence of its integration with the course. More practical support and guidance in preparation for the ‘year out’ and during the year out would be welcomed by the students. (It was clear in June 2006 that this work was well underway.)

## 11.4 Advice

- 11.4.1 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;
- 11.4.2 The Board advises that the changes at the lower end of the School are maintained and followed through, for example its policy of building links in the first year with other subjects in ECA through the introduction of interdisciplinary studios.
- 11.4.3 The Board commends the intention and commitment towards developing interdisciplinary studies. It hopes that this is sustained and expanded and encourages the School staff in their further efforts.
- 11.4.4 The Board advises the School to improve the availability of the workshop by providing adequate levels of training to students and support staff to assist the students in using the facilities.
- 11.4.5 The Board generally supported the School's plans for the development of the diploma dissertation, but advised that there should be clearer guidelines as to the educational objectives of the dissertation and more support for weaker students in selecting an appropriate topic. The Board also felt that students appeared to need clearer guidance on proper referencing conventions.

## 12. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

- 12.1 The last RIBA ARB Visiting Board to Edinburgh College of Art took place on the 15/16 March 2001. The Board recommended **Continued Validation** of:
- Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (three years full-time)  
Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (four years full-time)
- Part Two: Diploma in Architecture  
Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation  
Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design  
  
(consisting either of the final year of the Honours degree course plus the final Diploma year or alternatively of the two year Diploma course)
- Part Three: Examination in Professional Practice
- 12.2 **Summary of March 2001 Visiting Board Report**  
“The School of Architecture benefits from committed staff, supportive students, external examiners and local practitioners. The Board was aware that the School had experienced a number of staff changes since the last visit and that the relationship with its degree-awarding University had entered a period of uncertainty which had yet to be resolved.

“The Board had been particularly impressed by the clarity and openness of the documentation and the staff’s co-operative assistance during the visit. The Board commended the School, under the leadership of its new Head, in making more explicit its organisational structures for example through its Annual Report and School Development Plans and School Research Strategy. This spirit of honest self-criticism also pervaded the arrangements for the visit.

“The Board found that the courses met the Part One criteria for validation. The Board welcomed the range of design projects which included, in the first and second year, opportunities for collaborative work with students in the Faculty of Art and Design and work in the University laboratories. The Board was however concerned about the apparent lack of evidence of the integration of technology, in particular in the design projects in the third year. However, the Board was satisfied that technology was adequately covered in the course as a whole. The Board acknowledged the School’s desire to ensure that concepts and knowledge were mastered by students but expressed concern about the separation between design and non-design work. Feedback from students and examiners indicated that many areas of the curriculum could more effectively be learnt and assessed through studio-based design projects. The Board recognised that the teaching team was already beginning to address this issue, noting the work done in bringing history teaching into the design projects, and encouraged the staff to continue with this work. The team is particularly asked to look at the integration of technology in the design projects in the third year.

“The Board found that the Part Two course met the criteria for validation. The Board welcomed the involvement of consultant engineers in projects set in the studio, which students reported that they too had found a useful part of their programme. The Board noted that there had been a number of changes in the Honours year which had addressed and were continuing to address the previous Board’s concerns about intellectual engagement at this level.

“The Board noted that some aspects of the Part Two programme delivered in year 4 were not necessarily inspected by the external examiners for the Part Two course, as it was not a requirement for these external examiners to see all the work carried out in the Honours year. The School may wish to review this policy.

“The Board found that the Part Three course/examination met the criteria, although there was some concern that the respective roles and responsibilities of the various parties involved in the delivery of the course/examination were not fully identified. The School is asked to address this issue.

“Whilst course design and objectives were agreed to be appropriate the Board was aware that institutional objectives were under review. The School is urged to continue to re-evaluate its mission and aims at all levels to reflect both its distinctive strengths and its national and international aspirations.

“The Board was satisfied that the School was both meeting standards and making appropriate plans for the future. It was conscious of the fact that the School had entered, and was to an extent still in, a period of transition.

Whilst clear organisational structures had been developed for the areas under its own control, the Board was aware that there were other areas which were less clearly controllable by the School. The School should, as far as it is able, ensure that any decisions taken are in the best interests of the School and its students.”

### 13. Commentary

#### 13.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

As the last visit to the School took place in 2001 under the former 5-year system, the next RIBA visit was not due until 2006. The School invited the RIBA to visit a year ahead of schedule and the first stage of this visit took place in 2005. At this point in time, the improvement in the School was particularly impressive given the reduced timescale available to implement changes. Further developments were apparent by the time of the 2006 stage of the visit.

The critical self-appraisal was a comprehensive, honest document which outlined all developments, in administration, staffing, course structure and content and resources, which have affected the architecture syllabus at the College, directly or indirectly, and its ambitious vision for the future. An early draft was discussed at a student meeting and amended in the light of the comments made by the students.

The School and College are presently in a state of evolution. There have been several major developments since the last visit and more are planned.

The College achieved Small Specialist Institution (SSI) status in 2001. As a result it assumed responsibility for

internal quality assurance and became an accredited associated college of Heriot Watt University. The Faculty structure was dissolved and the School of Planning and Housing transferred to Heriot Watt. The School has taken steps to minimise any impact this had on the architecture courses.

From 2004, responsibility for accreditation was transferred from Heriot Watt University to the University of Edinburgh. Students enrolled on courses from that date will receive degrees from Edinburgh University, although the School’s collaborations with the School of the Built Environment at Heriot Watt University continue.

A graduate research school has also been created. This is part of the College’s initiative to reassess its research portfolio in preparation for the Research Assessment Exercise of 2008. The School has appointed a professor, with a particular interest in sustainability, to lead the School’s research activities.

Further significant developments are at an early stage of planning. The School has received SHEFC funding to explore the feasibility of closer collaboration with Architecture at the University of Edinburgh. This would not involve a break with the College of Art, but the alignment of architectural education in East Central Scotland, jointly administered by both institutions, with continuing close collaborations with Heriot Watt University. The aim of this initiative is to build a centre of expertise in Edinburgh which will be able to compete on the international stage. According to current projections this should be established by 2009/2010. By 2006 ECA and Edinburgh University had already established joint teaching in the professional practice area. The Board

applauds the School's visions for the future and looks forward to seeing how the proposals develop.

In 2005, the Head of School, Leslie Forsyth, had been seconded to review the current ECA academic structure. Ernie Anderson and Derek Fraser were joint acting heads for the period of the secondment. Leslie Forsyth had resumed his role as Head at the time of the June 2006 visit.

The School and the College of Art have also undergone numerous rigorous external and internal quality reviews since the last visit, all of which had positive outcomes.

Part Three in Scotland is now administered by the Architects' Professional Examinations Authority in Scotland (APEAS) Ltd. This is validated separately. The present Board therefore did not inspect Part 3 work.

First Year Studies has been introduced for Part 1 students which is intended to introduce architecture students to the broad culture offered by a college of art. This has proved very popular with students and the School wishes to increase the opportunities for students to collaborate with other design disciplines if possible.

The School has also introduced, from September 2004, the BA in Architectural Studies. This can be awarded to students who cannot be awarded Part 1 but have obtained the required credits for a BA award. The Board welcomed this step as it enabled students who do not necessarily want a professional qualification to receive a sound knowledge of architecture at first degree level which will be valuable in many professions.

### 13.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Board would like to thank the staff and students for their kind hospitality during the two visits.

The School provided extensive documentation for the visit and this was forwarded to the RIBA in a timely manner. The documentation detailed precisely all changes which have taken place since the last Visit and future plans as far as they can be known at present, given that the internal restructuring and possible closer collaboration between the Architecture School with that of Edinburgh University await confirmation.

The RIBA would also like to thank the School for its efforts to find solutions to the logistical difficulties posed by the present layout of the college buildings, whilst alterations to provide better access are carried out.

Both visits were arranged to coincide with ECA's end of year exhibition. This was used to guide the Board through the structure of the course instead of arranging a specific exhibition. The work of every student was available for inspection and year tutors were available to talk the Board through the structures and aims of the courses and specific projects.

#### 13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

As mentioned previously, all student work at ECA is available at the end of year exhibition.

In 2005 for Part 1, the School identified the three lowest, two middle and 2 high passes from each year of the BA (from a total number of 155 across the three years).

In 2006 for the Part 2 courses, the School provided the lowest pass portfolios from each of the five units on offer plus 2 middle and 2 high passes portfolios from any unit of the Diploma in Architecture. In each case the portfolios contained work from either the honours year or diploma 1 year in addition to the diploma work itself. The Board reviewed all three portfolios of students completing the Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design course. There were a total of 46 students in the Diploma year in 2005/6.

In 2005/6 there were no students on the Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation, but the Board had examined work from this course in 2005. The Board was grateful to the School for responding quickly to a late request to examine work from the MSc in Architectural Conservation given the absence of students on the Diploma in Architecture & Architectural Conservation.

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

The Board found that the School had taken the report of the previous Board very seriously and made great efforts to address the issues raised therein. These steps were described in detail in the Critical Self-Appraisal and the attendant documentation.

The main concern of the previous 2001 Visiting Board was the integration of technology into design. From 2004, level co-ordinators now introduce the principles of technology in easy and broad terms in the first year. Staff found that this has already had a significant and positive impact on students' work. Some specialism takes place in

the second year and in the third year the level co-ordinator has taken a firmer control of the way the inputs to projects are given and the outputs delivered. The School and Board are confident that the positive impact these changes have already had will be sustained and developed. At Level 5 the School had devoted more resources to this area and written explicit learning outcomes. The standard expected of the lowest pass has also been increased. The Board's views were corroborated by those of the External examiners, who were now much more content about this aspect of the course.

The 2001 Board recommended that the Diploma External Examiners also view students' Honours year work to gain a complete picture of the students' Part 2 work. This has now been implemented.

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

The School of Architecture's position in a College of Art offers great potential for collaboration with related disciplines. Other schools in the college include Drawing and Painting, Visual Communication, Design and Applied Arts and Sculpture. ECA is also home to a School of Landscape Architecture, which offers an MArch in Landscape Architecture and a range of postgraduate qualifications. The Board welcomes the introduction, from September 2004, of the BA in Architectural Studies. While not carrying exemption from professional examinations, this does give students the opportunity to obtain an architecture-based first degree which would be of benefit in many careers. The School and College have made some progress towards fully exploiting all the cross-disciplinary

possibilities (for example, by introducing First Year Studies). They would like to develop this further and this is a significant factor behind the present review of academic structure. (Secretary's note: following the Board visit the RIBA was notified that this has now been put on hold).

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

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The Part 1 course objectives were fairly clear. The Board considered that the concept of First Year studies could be an exemplar for best practice. They also commended the clarity of presentation and ordering of the first year work, which they also considered exemplary. The School has made great efforts to crystallise their vision and objectives and the Board commends these efforts.

The School has sought to map the criteria onto learning outcomes to ensure coverage of criteria. The School accepted constructive criticism from the external examiners regarding gaps in the initial mapping exercises and tightened the system. There is enough flexibility in the system to identify any shortfall in this respect and direct students to modules which would help them ensure that they had met the criteria.

13.5.2 Course design and content

The Part 1 course is designed as a year-based structure within a modular framework. The Part One comprises the first three year of the four-year Bachelor of Arts with Honours course, or students can exit with the three year

Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (which does not carry Honours).

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 examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time) and the first three years of the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (4 years full time) are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design. Although a major building design in the BA (Hons) is undertaken in Honours year, which counts towards Part 2. The Board was content that projects in years 2 and 3 provided sufficient coverage to ensure that the Part 1 criterion for design was being met. The Board commends the good range of design projects in years 2 and 3. The third year is the first time that the students are expected to produce a coherent, integrated building design. There are a number of challenging design projects within short timescales in the third year. The Board considered that the policy of introducing short, sharp projects, one of which could then be developed into a larger and more considered study, was an exemplar of good practice. The Board appreciates that the course is evolving and encourages the School to continue in the vein adopted.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time) and the first three years of the Bachelor of Architecture with

Honours (4 years full time) are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design.

The School has channelled more resources into the Honours course specifically to tackle this area of the curriculum. The Board recognises the School's efforts to integrate technology into design. Students are required specifically to write reports describing the integration of technology with design studies. The course has moved to greater integration at levels 1 and 3, and the Board encourages the School to continue to pursue this at level 2. The Board encourages the School to continue with further developments in environmental issues.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time) and the first three years of the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (4 years full time) are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context. The Board found some of the students' work in this area very interesting and was pleased to see successful integration into the studio work. The Board considered that the discursive element bringing cultural context into the studio work was very good. Project work was often set in challenging cultural settings.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time) and the first three years of the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (4 years full time) are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of communication.

The Board found that the students employed a good mix of media. Despite a lack of a properly functioning workshop facility, the models were very good. The Board was pleased to see hand drawings and looks forward to seeing enhanced computer skills.

In First Year studies students are introduced to software as an expressive visual medium rather than a draughting tool. The architecture students are more integrated with students studying other arts subjects in the first and second terms of the first year, which presents good opportunities for cross-fertilisation of ideas and exposure to related design disciplines. Students are placed in groups which rotate around all tutors, which the Board considered commendable.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture (3 years full time) and the first three years of the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (4 years full time) are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law. Since the last visit the School has integrated this aspect of the curriculum into all three terms of the third year.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience*

The 'year out' takes place after the third year. The Board considered that the preparation for the year out needs to be enhanced and reviewed. In particular more time should be devoted to this in order that the students feel they are better prepared. This issue was also discussed in the meeting with students, who, in general felt confident about entering the first year of professional experience but would welcome more information from staff to prepare

them better. Some felt that a greater level of feedback on their logbooks and improved communication between the School and employers would be helpful.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

The School supplied detailed student statistics which demonstrated that progression rates within the Part One are strong. Many students opt to take their Part Two at the College (see paragraph 13.7).

13.5.5 Assessment: methods, content and coverage, relative weightings, standards achieved

According to its programme catalogues the School employs a variety of assessment methods (coursework, portfolio reviews, tutorials, essays, and some examinations); however the Board found it difficult to ascertain what methods were used when viewing the work. The Board considered that there was a tendency to overmark, which had also been noted by the External Examiners, but that this did not compromise threshold standards which they found to be appropriate. There was no doubt that the best work was first class standard. The Board considered that the BA first year work was of a very high quality.

The Board believes that more formal feedback in crits would be advisable. At present students have to rely on their colleagues to keep notes for them. The Board would advise that crits are more formally noted and observations kept on file.

The School of Architecture and the College of Art are subject to rigorous internal and external quality assurance inspections.

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

At undergraduate level, the School recruits mostly through the traditional Scottish Highers/A level route. Further Education qualifications are also considered. All applicants must demonstrate an ability to draw, usually by submitting a portfolio at interview. The College has established AP(E)L systems for admitting students later than year 1. All such students are interviewed and submit a portfolio and academic transcript. In 2004/2005 there was 1 direct entrant to both year 2 and year 3; in the recent past there have been between 3 and 5. There are approximately 60 entrants into the first year.

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

13.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The course objectives are clearly defined in the three Programme Catalogues and mapped clearly onto the RIBA/ARB criteria. On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board considered that the course objectives were being achieved.

13.6.2 Course Design and Content

The Part Two qualifications offered by the School comprise the Honours year of the Bachelor of Architecture degree or the 'diploma 1 year' plus the single year Diplomas:

- Diploma in Architecture
- Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design
- Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation.

13.6.3 Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design/non-design work)  
The School deliberately sets out to achieve all of the Part Two criteria in the areas of design and technology & environment in the honours year or diploma 1 year. Management practice & law is addressed by dedicated courses in the final diploma year. The cultural context criteria are addressed in both years, but particularly via the dissertation in the final diploma year. The communication criteria are covered across the two years. The aim of this structure is to allow substantial flexibility in the coverage of the diploma year.

The Board commended the process the School had introduced via which students were required to undertake mapping of their own assessed work against the RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria. This was in its early stages having first been introduced as students assembled their 2005/6 portfolios. The Board sees real potential in the idea that students might take ownership of their progression towards achieving the criteria. The Board would recommend that the School continue to develop this process and, in particular, establish methods of providing staff feedback to students on to the accuracy of their mapping. It is important that when the process becomes iterative students get some feedback on the accuracy of their personal mapping.

- *Design*

The Visiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the three Diploma programmes. The major building design project is undertaken in the Honours/ diploma 1 year for all three courses, thus allowing a substantial level of specialisation in the

Diploma year. The wide choice of projects on offer within the diploma units was commended. The Board encourages the School to continue to offer such a wide selection, but also to respond to students' comments that it was not always possible to take either their first or second choice. The Board was impressed by the intellectual qualities of the work being displayed by students based in the 'Locus Architecture' and the 'Architecture for the Arts' units. It felt that project briefs and the level of challenge being presented in some of the other diploma units were perhaps not fully meeting students' needs and abilities.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Visiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Technology & Environment were being met by all graduates from the three Diploma programmes. The technology and environment criteria are primarily mapped onto honours/diploma 1 year, but the school operates an informal system where students still felt to be weak in these areas are steered into two diploma units (currently "Contemporary Architecture Interventions" or "Transport, Technology & Environment". These are chosen as units which have the potential to allow students to demonstrate further work in the technology and environment area. (The Board was not sure that this was necessarily the case with the 'Transport, Technology & the Environment' unit given the scale at which most students were working.)The School did not publicise this option for fear that students would deliberately defer serious consideration of technology issues whilst in the honours year of the BArch or the diploma 1 year.. The Board felt that there was a problem with this approach since students who had been allowed to progress to the diploma year

might reasonably expect that they had satisfied technology and environmental requirements and be resistant to suggestions that further detailed attention in this area was required. The Board thus recommends that the School review the mechanism via which the Part Two Validation Criteria in all five areas are met across the two years of the Part Two programmes to ensure that these operate in a consistent and transparent fashion, especially given the ambition of the School to meet the majority of the Part Two Technology and Environment criteria in the honours year freeing up the final year for specialisation.

The Board particularly commended the really strong technology underpinning in the Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation where there was evidence of a really sophisticated engagement with issues of materials and technological issues in the projects undertaken.

- *Cultural Context*

The Visiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the three Diploma programmes. The Board felt that that there was the clearest possible engagement with contextual issues in the work of the 'Locus Architecture' unit. The two specialist diplomas also displayed real strengths in this area. The Board felt that the work in other units would have benefited from more engagement with site, historical context and theoretical critique and would generally have expected to have seen in the schemes presented more interaction between people, buildings and the environment.

Recent appointments have strengthened the School's provision in this area and the School also wishes to develop its research profile in this sphere. The Board welcomes this and the School's intentions to make greater connections between teaching and research.

The Board felt that there was an issue regarding the students' demonstration of an ability to 'critically appraise and form considered judgements about the spatial, aesthetic, technical and social qualities of a design...'. The Board felt that the diploma dissertation, a key vehicle for achieving this criteria, needed more thought. The Board generally supported the School's plans for the development of the dissertation, but advised that there should be clearer guidelines as to the educational objectives of the dissertation and more support for weaker students in selecting an appropriate topic.

- *Communication*

The Visiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the three Diploma programmes. The School's mapping made it clear that the criteria in this area were met across the two years of the Part Two. The Board felt that both the hand-drawn and computer generated work seen was of a good standard, although perhaps not capitalising fully on the unique design and art facilities at ECA. The Board supported the School's plans for the development of the dissertation, particularly the proposal that reduced length dissertations should be structured as a paper for a particular academic journal in that journal's house style. The Board felt, however, that the some of the weaker dissertations it saw lacked structure, were rather rambling and discursive and

that students appeared to need clearer guidance on proper referencing conventions.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Visiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice & Law were being met by all graduates from the three Diploma programmes. The criteria in this area are essentially met through two courses in the final diploma. The Board commended the collaborative group design project undertaken in conjunction with students from the School of the Built Environment at Heriot Watt University and the contract game simulation, run for the first time in 2005/6 as a computer based activity. The Board also commended the joint activity in this area undertaken with the University of Edinburgh. This had resulted in a clearer mapping of learning outcomes against the Validation Criteria in this area and has also improved the specialist input. The Board found that knowledge from the taught programme was being particularly well integrated into some of the design units.

13.6.4 Progression within the course

As at Part One, progression rates are strong. The Board would like to offer its congratulations to the students who achieved distinctions at Part 2 in 2005, these were the first distinctions awarded in 3 years. Progression from Diploma 1 to Diploma 2 is stringently controlled (see paragraph 13.6.6).

13.6.5 Assessment: methods, content and coverage, relative weightings, standards achieved

The Board's comments in paragraph 13.5.5 may also be applied to the Part 2 courses.

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

Entry standards for the Diploma year are stringent. The School does not allow students who have failed the Honours year to undertake the Diploma year, nor is it possible to resit Honours. Those who have achieved a third class Honours pass must apply directly to the Head of School. Those who have achieved a 2.2 are carefully advised. There is now a formal 'handover' system for those progressing from Honours to Diploma, with tutors and students reviewing coverage of the criteria and identifying omissions. It was not clear to the Board whether this applied to all students or just those who were seen as borderline. If the process does not already apply to all students the Board felt that it would be helpful for it to do so.

Applicants with Part One awards from three year honours degrees are required to enter a 'diploma 1' year which is run in parallel with the Honours year four.

Applicants from other Scottish institutions who have Part One awards and have completed four-year honours degrees are allowed to enter the diploma year direct.

Prior to admission, the School undertakes a careful AP(E)L mapping of the applicants work against the Part 2 criteria concentrating on those aspects which ECA seeks to meet in the final honours year. External Examiners see the honours year work of such students alongside their diploma work.

13.7 **External examining arrangements**

The meeting with the External Examiners took place on the first day of the visit in 2005. This was an exceptional arrangement requested by the School, as several of the External Examiners come from overseas. The Board was

able to meet all the external examiners attached to the course at a meeting on the first day of the visit. It was agreed that if the Board members had further questions relating to the courses having inspected the work, Examiners would be available for consultation by telephone. In the event this was not necessary, but the Board would like to thank those who kindly made themselves available.

The School retains the services of eight or nine External Examiners at any one time. All bring a wealth of experience and expertise and an international dimension to the role.

The External Examiners were generally satisfied with the system which operated within the School, which they found flexible and open. They moderate but may not change marks and see specific samples of work in each course, which always includes the lowest pass. They also sample the earlier years of Part 1. All portfolios are retained for inspection if necessary. The School produces a report each year considering each external examiner's comments on particular programmes rather than replying to individual reports.

The Board found the meeting with the External Examiners very positive as it confirmed that the School has taken measures in response to examiners' comments. The Examiners were supportive of the School and the sound education it offered to students. The Board had noted that over several years some issues would recur repeatedly, for example, the integration of technology and the tendency to overmark. However during this meeting the External Examiners said that they were satisfied that the School is considering their comments carefully and

making appropriate adjustments. They have seen increasing improvements in recent years. In their opinion, technology has been extremely well integrated into design in the third year of Part 1.

The External Examiners confirmed that the School had addressed very strongly the monitoring of compliance with the criteria through learning outcomes; some even felt that such stringency might be relaxed. The Diploma external examiners told the Board that they now review level 5 (Honours year) to ensure coverage and meeting of criteria across the Part 2.

The Examiners were concerned that students' focus peaks at Level 4, which might result in the diploma year becoming too relaxed, which may be the reason for a lack of resolution in students' work. At the same time the Examiners felt that the positive side of this was the freedom afforded to students to take more risks in their final year. The School may wish to monitor this.

### 13.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

Students register with the School during their 'year out' and complete logbooks which are signed by a designated tutor. In addition to this, some students commented that it would be helpful to be visited in their practices by a staff member, as there was concern that some practices may not fully understand the purpose of the year out, resulting in some students being asked to undertake tasks that they considered to be of limited educational value.

The Board was pleased to see that the education the students receive at the School is respected in the profession. The students are evidently highly employable.

However, the students expressed concern about the level of preparation and support during the second professional experience year, particularly if they had difficulties in their place of work.

13.9 **Students;**

The Board would like to thank the students for their candid, honest reflections on the course and the entire student experience. In some ways the timing of the meeting was unfortunate as students had just received their examination results; however the Board is grateful that a fully representative range of students was able to attend.

The students' experience of Edinburgh College of Art was predominantly positive. They chose the College because they were attracted by the possibilities provided by studying architecture within an art and design institution. The size of the College was a deciding factor, with many students preferring to join small cohorts. Students were also attracted by the scope for interdisciplinary studies provided by the First Year studies module, but were disappointed that after the first year it did not seem to be possible to continue with this.

It is difficult for students to continue to work in the workshops assigned to other areas unless they had personal contacts. The present first year also commented that they had only received workshop-induction training halfway through the year which prevented them from making full use of the facilities. The School and College management are aware of the issues surrounding workshop use. They are keen to address it as they see interdisciplinarity as a key skill and also wish to encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas.

The students' views of the courses are chiefly positive, in particular during the undergraduate years of study. They would prefer more control over their choice of units at diploma level, where there is no guarantee that they will be able to take their first choice. However they did acknowledge that there has been improvement of late. They felt that those who were deemed not to demonstrate certain abilities in the Level 5 were steered towards a specific unit. In June 2006 it was confirmed that there were two units on offer, 'Interventions' and 'Transport, Technology and Environment', the first being small scale and the latter large scale. Although not compelled to link their final dissertation with their units, most students found this a useful support to their design work. Some would appreciate more formal guidance about choosing topics.

The students confirmed that they were made fully aware of the criteria throughout the course. This is particularly the case with technology and environment, in which tutors have been very specific about what was to be achieved. Part Two students were fully aware that the Honours year was deliberately loaded to allow most of the technology and environment criteria to be met, leaving the Diploma year relatively free for them to explore their own interests. This illustrates the School's determination to address the concerns raised by previous Visiting Boards and External Examiners.

The students believed that feedback mechanisms (that is, comments on their work) could be improved, although comments from students in various years demonstrate that progress has already been made in this area. They would also appreciate formal feedback from crits and juries; at

present they make their own notes or rely on their colleagues to make them. Feedback questionnaires completed at the end of modules and units were carefully considered and discussed at subsequent meetings. Students are also represented on all committees apart from the staff committee.

The students felt that they were quite well prepared for their year out by the professional studies module. Logbooks (i.e. PEDR records) are submitted for signing by a named member of staff. However they felt that it would be useful to be visited by staff members when in practice, because several complained that there was a lack of understanding of the students' experiences in practice with some being allocated menial tasks which they felt were of little or no educational value.

The students described the studios as 'fantastic' apart from at Level 6 where there is a shortage of space. The School is also happy to accommodate working from home if students wish. Computing services were generally considered good but insufficient at pressure points. Students reported that although money had been spent on hardware, there had been problems with Autocad which had taken a long time to resolve.

#### 13.10 **Staff**

The Board was pleased to be able to meet many of the School's staff, both full time and part time.

The School has been able to make use of recent retirements and recruitment opportunities to try to address the age profile and gender balance of the staff, but acknowledges (in its Critical Self-Appraisal) that further readjustments would be desirable when the opportunity

arises. The current staff:student ratio (taking into account both permanent and sessional staff) is 1:12.86, which compares very favourably on a national scale.

The Board wishes to congratulate the staff on their ambitions for the courses and the College as a whole. The Board found a committed staff body that fully supports the aims of the College. The Board was impressed by the various staff fora used to discuss the future direction of the School. Their loyalty to the School and interest in its future good health are marked. The staff provides a wealth of experience and expertise, although there are gaps which the School might wish to address. The Board believes, for example, that the School could draw more on the staff's strengths and reinforce staff expertise in environmental studies. In accordance with the evolving emphasis on research in the institution, staff are encouraged to develop research expertise.

The staff believes staunchly in the ethos of architecture as a studio based subject in a college of art and design. They want the students to take advantage of and draw inspiration from the work of the other students; in textiles, ceramics, painting, sculpture and so forth, whilst ensuring that the core provision is strong. They considered that previously there was not enough tangible cross-over experience but this is now changing and the intention is to develop this further. To this end they are committed to preserving the studio culture of the school as this helps students to learn from one another. Since becoming a small specialist institution the College's has become more focussed on integration. Staff are fully aware of the problems with access to other disciplines' workshops after the first year, and hope this will be improved following the

internal review. Its future course will become clearer once the structural changes have been agreed.

The staff were concerned about the dislocation of the library from the studios, as this made it more difficult to use as a learning resource than previously. They expressed the hope that the review of the College's estate might allow for a proper learning resource centre which was designed to support studio based subjects as well essay-based learning.

The Board encourages the training of workshop staff to offer a full service to the students and academic staff.

**13.11 Research;**

Architecture was rated 3b in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) of 2001. The College wishes to revitalise the research culture within ECA, drawing on the experience gained from ECA's links with Heriot Watt University. Previously the School had not fully explored the research agenda, recruiting staff whose main activity was teaching. This is now changing and new recruits are expected to have a research profile. The Graduate research centre established in 2000 and in 2001 the School appointed a professor of architecture, whose duties included research development, with an established track record and special interest in sustainability. They are currently considering under which unit of assessment they should submit in 2008.

The School has benefited from a strong cohort of research students completing PhDs recently, with much research focussed on issues in Islamic culture and urbanism. The future development of research within the School, with regard to both staff research and the RAE, is focussed on

inherent staff strengths, across four areas, and developing practice based research and knowledge transfer. There is an active mentoring process encouraging staff to develop in research, and links are made between School research themes and tutorial support for student dissertations at Level 6.

**13.12 Equal Opportunities:**

The gender balance among the student cohort is fairly evenly spread, in particular in the lower years. Initiatives to increase the diversity of the student body are underway. The School is proactively seeking to encourage widening participation through a series of initiatives; for example, a one week summer school for school pupils to introduce them to the work of a school of architecture;

The School has also taken the opportunity to redress the balance of the staff demographic when recruiting for vacant posts.

The Board looks forward to the full implementation of the College's disability strategy.

**13.13 Resourcing and facilities;**

The Board considered the resourcing of architecture as it stands at present. The effects of the internal restructuring and the proposed alignment of architectural education in East Central Scotland will, of course, have an impact. It is not yet known how the restructuring of the College will affect space allocation or collaborative working.

Budgeting is chiefly driven by student numbers, with an increasing target for overseas students. This presents a challenge for the School which it is seeking to address. The reliance on student numbers may change in the future

if the drive to increase the School's research profile reaps dividends.

*Studios*

A refurbishment programme is currently underway. Students considered the studio facilities excellent until the fifth year, in which space is limited. This was corroborated by staff. The School rightly prizes its studio culture; the students see a great advantage to working in the studios and they and the staff wish to preserve this. The staff would also welcome more seminar rooms.

*Workshops*

The School has a new architecture workshop which unfortunately is often inaccessible or unavailable due to lack of full time staff support. During their first year students were unable to make full use of it as they did not receive induction training until relatively late. Students enjoy using the full range of the College's workshops during First Year Studies. It is unfortunate that students cannot follow this up in later years at present. The Board was glad to see that the School is actively pursuing arrangements to allow this in later stages of the course.

*Information Technology*

At present there are not enough computers and students have to be taught in groups. Students also mentioned problems with CAD which took some time to rectify. Whilst noting the ongoing debate within the School about the place of CAD as a design tool, rather than simply a means of presentation, the Board encourages the School to look at more effective software support. Staff and students also were concerned about the expense of printing. A project to network all the studios is nearing completion.

*Library*

The College of Art had two libraries, one on site in Lauriston Place and another a short distance away at the Grassmarket Campus, although at the time of the 2006 visit, the process a process of consolidation was underway with the Grassmarket library scheduled for closure. The Library is excellent and School benefits from excellent support from the librarian. The extensive collection includes books, periodicals, slides and a growing audio-visual collection. Students also have access to many databases. Physical resources are good with many workstations, printers, microfiche stations, video and audio playback facilities. There are photocopiers on site but most printing is undertaken by the Repographics service.

Students already have access to University of Edinburgh library, other research libraries in Edinburgh and the National Archives of Scotland.

**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).

Prior to the visit the School provided:

- Critical self-appraisal
- Questionnaire and supplementary information
- Letter to ARB confirming future conferring of degrees from Edinburgh University
- ECA Strategic Plan 2003/2004 summary document
- Visiting Board Report March 2001

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Architecture Year Book 2001/2002	External Examiners' Reports 2000-2001
Year Book 2002/2003	External Examiners' Reports 2001-2002
Programme Catalogue 2003/2004: BA (Hons)	External Examiners' Reports 2002-2003
Programme Catalogue 2003/2004: Diploma/Masters	External Examiners' Reports 2003-2004
Programme Catalogue 2003/2004: Diploma MSc in Architectural Conservation; Diploma in Architecture & Architectural Conservation	Heriot Watt University Course Monitoring and Review Report for First Degree Courses Academic Year 2000-2001
Programme Catalogue 2003/2004: Diploma MSc in Urban Design/Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design	ECA Annual Monitoring and Review of Undergraduate Programmes Academic Year 2002-2003
Programme Catalogue 2004/2005: Bachelor of Architecture with Honours	ECA Annual Monitoring and Review of Undergraduate Programmes Academic Year 2003-2004
Programme Catalogue 2004/2005: Level 5 Diploma 1/Level 6 Diploma in Architecture	School of Architecture Research Plan 2004-2005
Programme Catalogue 2004/2005: Diploma in Architecture/Diploma in Architectural Studies/Master of Architecture	QAA Subject Review: Architecture, Architectural Technology and Landscape Architecture May 2001
Programme Catalogue 2004/2005: Diploma in Architectural Conservation, Diploma in Architecture and Architectural Conservation, MSc in Architectural Conservation	ARB/RIBA Criteria 2003
Decades Alumni Newsletter Issue 1 Spring 2004	Minutes of School Committee Meeting 22 September 2000
Decades Alumni Newsletter Issue 2 Autumn 2004	Minutes of School Committee Meeting 26 September 2001
Decades Alumni Newsletter Issue 3 Spring 2005	Minutes of School Committee Meeting 11 September 2002
An Introduction to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework	Minutes of School Committee Meeting 24 September 2004
Programme Catalogue 2004/2005: Diploma in Urban Design, Diploma in Architecture and Urban Design, MSc in Urban Design	Minutes of School Committee Meeting 23 March 2005
International Design Studio of Architecture and Urbanism (IDSA+U) Information Sheet	SHEFC Strategic Funds Full Proposal Form
ECA Institutional Review of Academic Programme Report, School of Architecture February 2004	Mapping of courses against criteria
Institutional Review of Academic Programmes, Self-Evaluation Document February 2004	CVs of External Examiners
ECA Reflective Analysis December 2004	Assessment & Examinations: Examination Board Guidelines: Academic Session 2004/2005
	External Examiners' documentation: nomination templates, report templates, school's comment and action form templates; extension of external examiners' appointment templates.
	Information Pack for Part 1 students; Preparing for professional training experience

School & ECA Committee structures  
 Annual Programme Monitoring and Review of  
 Postgraduate Taught Programmes Template  
 ECA School of Architecture Admissions Information  
 Student Guide Book 2004/2005  
 Postgraduate Taught Programmes Design Studio Unit  
 Outlines

In the Base Room the School provided:

Strategic Plan 2004-2007  
 Repro: Guide to Reprographic Services

Graduate Research School Biennial Review 2001-2003  
 ECA Research – Guide to Research at Edinburgh College  
 of Art  
 ECA Prospectus 2006  
 Higher Degrees by Research at ECA (brochure)  
 Student Guidebook 2002/2003  
 Student Guidebook 2003/2004  
 Student Guidebook 2004/2005

International student arrival guide 2005/2006  
 International student arrival guide 2004/2005  
 First Destination Survey 2003 (graduating year 2001/2002)  
 Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey  
 2004 (graduates of 2002/3)  
 ECA Strategic Plan 2002-2006  
 ECA Strategic Plan 2003-2006  
 Staff CVs June 2005  
 ECA Library Service  
 ECA/University of Edinburgh Undergraduate Assessment  
 Regulations September 2004  
 Graduate Research School Code of Practice v.3 February  
 2005

ECA/Heriot Watt University Regulations 3, 4, 5, 6  
 (degrees, assessment, progression board module board)  
 ECA/University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Assessment  
 Regulations September 2004  
 ECA and University of Edinburgh Memorandum of  
 Agreement: Accreditation of Edinburgh College of Art by  
 the University of Edinburgh  
 Ordinance 28 ECA (Recognising ECA as associate college  
 of the University)  
 Annual Report to Heriot Watt University 2003/2004  
 Annual Report to Heriot Watt 2002/2003  
 Programme Briefs Levels 1 and 2  
 Programme Briefs Levels 3 and 5  
 Level 3 Additional Handouts  
 Level 5 Additional Handouts  
 Selection of staff publications, exhibition brochures,  
 refereed journal articles, research student publications.