

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to the Mackintosh School of
Architecture**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 30.11.05

**The Glasgow School of Art/University of
Glasgow**

**Part One:
Bachelor of Architectural Studies**

**Part One:
Bachelor of Architectural Studies
(Honours)**

**Part Two:
Diploma in Architecture**

Date of Visiting Board: 20 and 21 October 2005

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for validation

Part One: Bachelor of Architectural Studies
(Full time mode: Part One achieved at Year 3
Part time: Part One achieved at Year 4)

Part One: Bachelor of Architectural Studies (Honours)
(Four-years full-time, Part One achieved at Year 3)

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (comprising the 4th
year of the Mackintosh/GSA BA (Hons) Architecture
plus the single Diploma year; or two years full-time for
Part One graduates of other institutions, or three years
part-time)

1.2 Address of the institution where the course is delivered

Mackintosh School of Architecture
The Glasgow School of Art
167 Renfrew Street
Glasgow G3 6RQ

Tel: 0141 353 4686

Fax: 0141 353 4703

W: www.gsa.ac.uk

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of Glasgow

1.4 Name of the Head of Architecture

Professor David Porter

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

Mackintosh Confirmed Report 30.11.05

The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 20 and 21 October 2005 were:

Robert Hutson	Chair
John Stevenson	Vice-Chair
Mary Jane Rooney	
Diana Leitch	
Sandy Halliday	Non-architect Member
John Ashton	Graduate Member
Gordon Smith	Regional Representative

Kevin Harte (Validation Co-ordinator, RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

3. Procedures and Criteria for the Visit

The Visiting Board was carried out under the “RIBA Procedures for Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture”, published September 2003, effective from September 2003, and the “RIBA Criteria for Validation”, published March 2002, effective from September 2003.

For more information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board Confirmed by the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 30 November 2005

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

Continued Validation of:

Part One: Bachelor of Architectural Studies
(Full time mode: Part One achieved at Year 3
Part time: Part One achieved at Year 4)

Part One: Bachelor of Architectural Studies (Honours)
(Four-years full-time; Part One achieved at Year 3)

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (comprising the 4th year of the Mackintosh/GSA BA (Hons) Architecture plus the single Diploma year; or two years full-time for Part One graduates of other institutions, or three years part-time)

4.2. The next Visiting Board should take place in 2009.

5. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the Commonwealth Association of Architects, the Construction Industry Council and the EU Directive

5.1 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 One and Part Two courses met all points of the EU Directive.

6. Criteria

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 the 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 special conditions of validation 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 4.1.

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

10.1 Background

- 10.1.1 Full-time architecture courses in Glasgow were introduced in 1969 when the MSA was founded by the GSA together with the University of Glasgow. Full-time study is now predominant but part-time study, integrated into the courses, continues on a small scale as the only part-time architecture course in Scotland.
- 10.1.2 In recent years there has been growing collaboration between schools within the GSA. The MSA contributed to a combined Research Assessment Exercise submission under “Art and Design” which attracted an award of 4 and, for the first time, provided the MSA with funds towards a research infrastructure. The establishment of a new first-year programme in architecture and design at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing provides a further example of this inter-school collaboration. The MSA hopes that the programme, taught in English and with learning outcomes that match those of students based in

Glasgow, will provide a route for high calibre Chinese students into the second year of the degree programmes of the GSA.

10.1.3 The particular strengths of the MSA included:

- Its international reputation both in Scotland, the UK and overseas
- Its physical and cultural location both within Glasgow and the Glasgow School of Art.
- A well-led, committed and cohesive staff team with a good blend of full time academics, practitioners and visiting professors.
- The extremely well-qualified students from a diverse range of backgrounds recruited by the School to all of its courses.
- Student exchange programmes operated with other architecture schools overseas.
- Growing collaboration with other schools in the GSA, which includes the establishment of a new first year programme in architecture and design at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing.
- A vibrant studio culture.
- Excellent model workshops benefiting from a professional model-maker
- A strong relationship with Glasgow and urban design
- The strong backing that the School of Architecture enjoys from the University and the GSA
- The designation of the GSA as a small Specialist Institution in Scotland benefits the School of Architecture in terms of status and resource.
- The developing research culture with the aim for this to impact positively on teaching.

- The innovative approach to Professional Studies and the excellent preparation this affords students entering their first stage professional practice.
- The size of the School which allows teachers to have real knowledge of their students.
- Excellent studio facilities for students.

10.2 Recommendations

10.2.1 There are no recommendations.

10.3 Advice

The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course developments and/or raise standards:

10.3.1 Whilst the School has worked hard since the last Board on strengthening the teaching of technology and students develop a clear competence in this area, the Board advises that more emphasis be placed on positive and creative aspects of technological studies so that they can infuse and inspire the design process. At Part Two level the Board would encourage the School to develop a more critical approach to tectonic and environmental issues and to ensure that technology teaching is a coherent and evidenced thread throughout the Diploma course.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

11.1 The last full RIBA/ARB Visiting Board to the Mackintosh School of Architecture took place on 1 and 2 March 2001.

The Visiting Board recommended **Continued Validation** of:

Part One: Bachelor of Architectural Studies (three years full-time and four years part-time)

Part One: Bachelor of Architectural Studies with Honours (the first three years of the four-year full-time course)

Part Three: Examination in Professional Practice

The Board recommended **Conditional Continued Validation** of:

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (two years full-time or three years part-time or one year subsequent to Year 4 of the Honours degree)

Part Two: Master of Architecture (one term extension to final year of diploma course for selected students. Part Two exemption at June examination diet of diploma final year)

The Visiting Board imposed the following condition on the Part Two courses:

“That a sub-group (two members including the Chair) of the Visiting Board revisit the School at the time of the

summer exhibition to ensure that the concerns noted in paragraph 13.4(iii) have been addressed.”

The relevant paragraph stated:

“Environment Design, Constructional and Architectural Technologies”

“The Board was concerned that there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the criteria relating to Environmental Design, Constructional and Architectural Technologies were being fulfilled. Whilst the Board was satisfied with the ‘buildability’ of student design work the Board was concerned that the detailed technical studies and the development sketch books that should accompany the final 5th year design projects were not available. It was agreed that representatives of the Board would revisit at the time of the summer exhibition when all the evidence would be made available.”

11.2 Summary of the 2001 Visiting Board report

“The Board identified many strengths including: the School’s ability to retain excellent staff who work well as a team and are clearly supportive of students, a vibrant studio culture, and a committed management team. The Board had also been impressed by the enthusiasm and commitment of staff and students and the positive and productive atmosphere which pervaded the school. The School benefits from very good facilities and strong support from its parent institutions. A new Head of School had been appointed in June 2000. The Board found a clear vision for developing the School based on its existing strengths and agreed that the School was well placed to meet its aspirations for the future. The Board welcomed the plans outlined in the Strategic Plan to form a closer working relationship with the rest of the School of

Art, to strengthen links with the University of Glasgow, and to internationalise the School.

The Board welcomed the School’s intentions outlined in the Strategic Plan to strengthen the links with the other departments within the Glasgow School of Art (GSA) and Glasgow University and to internationalise the School.

The Board highlighted a number of issues for further consideration by the School including equal opportunities and IT. Whilst the Board welcomed the School’s significant investment in IT in recent months it was aware that continuing investment would be required to keep up with this rapidly developing field. The Board welcomed the School’s strong awareness that the use of IT had significant teaching implications (over and above the technical) which needed to be explored and urged the School’s staff and students to engage fully in this debate at a national and international level.

The Board noted that the Part One course met the appropriate Criteria for Validation. There was clear evidence of development through the three years both in terms of design skills and critical thinking and students achieve a high level of competence at the conclusion of Part One.

Though the Board was satisfied that students achieved good standards in design at Part Two the Board expressed some concern that the portfolios presented did not represent the variety and extent of design development work undertaken by students and seen by external examiners. As a result the Board could not satisfy itself that the criteria for environmental design, constructional and architectural technologies were fully met. The Board

recommended that a subgroup of the Board should return at the time of the Summer exhibition when all the evidence will be available for the current cohort.

The Board found that the Part Three course/examination met the appropriate Part Three criteria.”

11.3 **Revisit to Part Two in June 2001**

The Revisiting Board to the Mackintosh School of Architecture took place on 19 June 2001. The Revisiting Board recommended:

Continued Validation of:

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (two years full-time or three years part-time or one year subsequent to Year 4 of the Honours degree)

Part Two: Master of Architecture (one term extension to final year of diploma course for selected students. Part Two exemption at June examination diet of diploma final year)

11.4 **Summary of the June 2001 Revisiting Report**

“The visit was held at the time of the 2000/2001 end-of-year assessments.

The Board was able to examine the portfolios of all final year students on the Diploma in Architecture. The Board was able to meet with five of the external examiners for the course.

On the basis of work from the Part Two course inspected during the visit, the Visiting Board offered the following comments under the headings of the RIBA Outline Syllabus and the equivalent headings of ARB Standards and Criteria for Registration:

The Board found that the criteria in relation to Architectural Design and Constructional and Architectural Technologies were being met. The Board was pleased to see evidence of a satisfactory level of technical competence in thesis projects: structure, environment, and sustainability all being addressed in projects that have been passed. The Board was also encouraged to note that there was a good level of technical awareness across all projects in the diploma show, and students have clearly been well tutored in achieving a satisfactory level of ‘buildability’.

Notwithstanding the above, there is still scope for the school to encourage more in- depth technical studies, perhaps exploring a single technical issue in relation to the thesis project. Furthermore, the School should ensure that students have software programmes available to them to analyse technical aspects of buildings, such as their energy performance.

The Visiting Board was satisfied that the criteria relating to Environmental Design, Constructional and Architectural Technologies were being fulfilled.”

12. Commentary

12.1 **Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit**

The Critical Self-Appraisal provided by the School was a well-written, honest and thoughtful document which proved helpful to the Board in its deliberations. The

Board also appreciated the provision of a critical appraisal produced by the student group.

Changes since the last full visiting Board in 2001 have included:

- The introduction of a Common Academic Framework across the GSA in the current session that will provide a common language for course documents, and a common code of assessment and timetable.
- Modification of the Year 1 Studio course in 2001 to include longer projects and enable students to achieve fluency in a wide range of media to represent and test their architectural ideas including 3D digital modelling and other CAD skills.
- Continuing investment in CAD within a shared computer strategy.
- The development of a more integrated approach to learning technology with a greater emphasis on the exploration of the material character of proposals.
- An effort to make the role of history and theory more apparent in the Part One and Two courses.
- Revision of the pacing and methodology of Stage 5 to assist in the clarification of thesis objectives and integration of technical studies.
- Development of a new first year programme in architecture and design at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing which started in autumn 2005.
- The creation of the Architects' Professional Examinations Authority in Scotland (APEAS) Ltd to administer the Part Three examination for all six architecture schools in Scotland. The MSA now provides a refresher course to help prepare candidates for this examination.

12.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The School provided all the documentation required for the visit in timely fashion. The documentation provided the Board with ample information to understand the studio work but the generic nature of the descriptors for the other taught courses made these difficult to understand without more detailed explanation. All additional documentation requested was supplied promptly.

The meetings and activities required by the Board were well organised. The work in the exhibition showcased the final outcomes of the courses as required by the RIBA, although the Board would have found it helpful to have had more of a focus on the educational experience of the students. All the portfolios required by the Board were available and were well organised particularly for Years 1 and 2, though many of those in Years 3 to 5 tended to lack a narrative thread.

12.2.1 **Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the Visit**

Part One: Bachelor of Architectural Studies

Bachelor of Architectural Studies (Honours)

Year one: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle, 2 high

Year two: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle, 2 high

Year three(full time mode): 3 lowest pass, 2 middle, 2 high

– Part 1 achieved at this point. The portfolios were all drawn from the 2004/5 cohort of 57.

Year four (part time mode): A representative sample from the part time mode was also reviewed. Part-time students undertake the same work as those on the full-time mode.

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture

Year one: 3 lowest pass , 2 middle, 2 high drawn from both the first year of the Diploma and the final year of the Bachelor of Architectural Studies with Honours.
 Year two: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle, 2 high.
 All drawn from the cohort of 67 graduating in 2004/05

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

The School’s Critical Self –Appraisal provided a clear account of developments since the last full Visiting Board to the School in 2001. The Revisiting Board later that year commented that the concern expressed by the earlier Board had been addressed. Since the Revisiting Board in 2001 the School has been incrementally reviewing its curriculum to ensure that the new Validation Criteria were being met. It has also (as set out in paragraph 12.1) made structural changes to ensure that all graduates from all courses have to meet all Validation Criteria.

The External Examiners confirmed that the School responded to issues raised in their reports and that they did see changes as a result of their comments. Although robust systems of reporting and feeding back information to concerned parties exist within the School, the Board shared the External Examiners’ disappointment about the level of staff debate about developing and promoting the ethos of the School.

12.4 Context of the course within the wider provision of the School and the Faculty

The Glasgow School of Art (GSA) is one of three designated Small Specialist Institutions in Scotland and is an accredited institution of the University of Glasgow which validates all of its degrees. Founded in 1845 as a

Government School of Design, the GSA is one of the oldest independent art schools in the UK. Academic provision is organised around three schools - the Mackintosh School of Architecture (MSA), the School of Design, the School of Fine Art - and the Digital Design Studio.

Currently the MSA has 314 full-time BArch and Diploma students, 36 part-time, 57 on their “year-out” and 20 postgraduate. The total student population of the GSA is 1665.

The MSA enjoys strong links with the University of Glasgow and its sister schools in the GSA. Alongside its validated courses the MSA offers other non-validated taught Masters programmes: the M.Arch (Conversion) and M.Arch (Taught). It also runs two joint courses with the University of Glasgow: providing studio-based modules for their undergraduate course leading to the degree of Bachelor Of Engineering In Civil Engineering With Architecture and a graduate course leading to the Master Of Engineering In Civil Engineering With Architecture. The School also provides a similar contribution to the University of Paisley , but here it is in the form of a module within their undergraduate degree programme, the Bachelor of Engineering/ Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) in Civil Engineering with Architectural Studies.

12.5 Detailed commentary on the Part One course:

Bachelor of Architectural Studies
 (Full time mode: Part One achieved at Year 3
 Part time: Part One achieved at Year 4)

Bachelor of Architectural Studies (Honours)
 (Four-years full-time, Part One achieved at Year 3)

12.5.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The aim of the Part One course is “to produce confident and independent designers, with a grasp of intellectual and aesthetic rigour demanded by the discipline of architecture, an appreciation of it as a creative, scholarly activity and with a growing maturity in making judgements.” The Board thought this aim, and the more specific aims set out for students, to be clear, comprehensive and appropriate. The School also provided a detailed and helpful mapping of the Part One programme onto the RIBA/ARB Part One Validation Criteria.

12.5.2 *Course design and content*

The Part One course reflects the School’s philosophy of teaching architecture as a subject with principles that provide the basis for the rigour of designing. The course is predominantly studio and project-based and is supported in the first three years by lectures in four assessed subject areas: Architectural Science, Structural Design, History of Architecture and Built Environment Studies. These lectures explain the principles that underlie architectural designing and provide the intellectual and cultural context for the study of architecture. There is a separate menu of other lectures, seminars, presentations and other events that provide stimulus for the Studio Work, which lies at the heart of the Part One course. It is within the studio projects in each year of the course that these principles are applied in practice.

Practical advice is imparted in the Skills Sessions while the theoretical background delivered in the Themes and Perceptions unit in Year 1 supports and stimulates the studio projects.

There are three main projects in Year 2 that have the objective of exploring themes concerning landscape and the city, energy and scale, lighting and interior quality, public visibility, threshold, materials and assembly techniques.

The Honours Option Studies, where students organise and present a programme of special study, are introduced at the beginning of Year 3 and are completed in Year 4. They comprise two topics, one of which is usually Studio Work. The other topic is chosen and, supported by an organised programme of study, submitted for approval to the Honours Option Panel. The Honours Option may take the form of individual or group work. Typically studies have included written dissertations, predictive science-based computer modelling and historically researched measured drawings or models. The Board was impressed by the intellectual robustness of the work it saw in the Honours Option and indeed in its equivalent unit the Special Subject which is undertaken by those without the Mackintosh School of Architecture B.Arch (Hons) (please see paragraph 12.6.2).

The School clearly emphasises its design work and there are very strong lecture courses supporting and underpinning the undergraduate course. However the School will benefit from continuing the dialogue between curricular developments in specialist areas and the studio.

Students are keen to establish greater connections with the Glasgow School of Art both relative to resources and the curriculum so that they can ‘talk to other disciplines’. They felt that the synergy was not as established or fluid yet

between the Glasgow School of Art and the School of Architecture as they would wish.

One of the design projects in Year 3 is Interact, which provides students with the opportunity to work as a team member with students of Civil Engineering and Quantity Surveying from other Glasgow universities. The result of this collaborative venture is presented to a professional audience. The Board commended this project which enables students to learn to work as a team member, to collaborate and negotiate with members of other disciplines and to make presentations at a professional level. At the end of Year 3 all full-time students are eligible for the award of Part One degree and if successful are required to spend one year in an architect's office. Part-time students are scheduled to complete their degree after four years.

12.5.3 *Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design/ non-design work)*

- *Design*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all students completing the Part One programmes.

The Board saw evidence of a well structured programme of design projects focusing primarily on how buildings work and are experienced through experimentation and observation. This was particularly prevalent in the imaginative work being undertaken in the design studios in Years 1 and 2. The First Year programme and portfolios should be commended as excellent, showing evidence of imaginative and inspired teaching, with Second Year work

which was strong in both investigation, development and synthesis. Third Year portfolios clearly evidenced the criteria; however the Board wondered if more scope could be made available in Year 3 projects for the very able cohort of students to test their powers of investigation and experimentation in a similar way.

It seemed to the Board that the Part One course was developing a more theoretical approach, particularly in Year 2, where more contemporary design issues were being introduced for debate. The Board welcomed this approach.

The Board was impressed by the strong team-working ethic in the studio. This included Part Two students who were on hand to help their peers on the Part One course.

- *Technology and Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all students completing the Part One programmes.

The Board was impressed by the quality of the architectural science submissions. A significant effort was being made to integrate the principles of building designs, environmental design and construction methods with design work, and this was complemented by good lecture coverage. It appeared to the Board that studio work was being intelligently focused to allow sensible integration in Part One.

A significant proportion of the Technology and Environment criteria are covered in the Built

Environment strand with some also found in the Professional Studies 3 course.

- Cultural context

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all students completing the Part One programmes.

The Board noted the strong cultural context to the Part One course with the emphasis very much on the city of Glasgow.

The Board was pleased to see that the School was placing a greater emphasis on history and theory.

The History lecture programme in Part One has been restructured with the aim of emphasising the importance of theory and an analytical approach. Changes to the second year course have introduced a more critical and analytical dimension to a lecture series which places case studies in dialogue with history of ideas.

The Board considered that the School could capitalise more on knowledge of histories and theories of architecture and urban design, specifically developing understanding of urban issues in preparation for the strong urban emphasis at Part Two. The students were positive about the way this was integrated with the related disciplines of art, cultural studies and landscape studies.

It will be interesting to review the impact of changes on the course as students move through the course.

- Communication

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all students completing the Part One programmes.

The Board was impressed by in activities within the studio to support skills development in this area; in particular the use of models was exemplary and followed in the excellent tradition of the School.

The written work viewed by the Board was of a high standard, including some impressive essays. The Part One students who attended the Board's meeting were confident and highly articulate. Board members were impressed by the overall standard of the Part One academic portfolios presented, even at lowest pass standard.

- Management, Practice and Law

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all students completing the Part One programmes.

The Professional Studies 3 unit provides comprehensive and coherent coverage of these areas, examining in particular:

- Administration of information, examining the information sources and methods of information acquisition, organisation and presentation used in architectural practice.

- Information about the construction industry, analysing that required for implementation of architectural designs.
- The regulatory frameworks and health and safety considerations that guide design and building construction, related to a design project.
- The principles of business management and how a small business operates.
- How buildings are designed and built in the context of architectural and professional practice and the framework of the construction industry within which it operates.

The Board considered this to be an excellent course, imaginatively delivered, and commended the large number of local practitioners who contributed to it. The Board welcomed the inventive way that the School had linked professional studies to design work.

- Preparation for Professional Experience

To prepare students about to embark on their first stage professional practice, the School organises a one-day workshop in the third term of Year 3 where students have the opportunity to meet the current “year-out” cohort and to share their experiences.

Vacancies in appropriate architects’ offices are published on the school noticeboard once they have been approved by the Professional Studies Advisor (PSA). These are regularly updated. The PSA is also involved in providing advice on the production of CVs and portfolios, as well as on interview techniques.

Students on their “year-out” are given a Record of Experience Handbook, normally in the form of a Personal

Development Record. This is monitored every three months by the PSA.

The PSA maintains contact with “year-out” students via email and often the students may visit the School to report back on their placements.

12.5.4 *Progression within the course*

The School provided detailed progression data that included information on students that had transferred between courses. Overall progression rates on the BArch course were impressive with normally 90% of students following both the full time and part-time modes graduating within the standard period.

12.5.5 *Assessment*

The Board found a wide range of appropriate summative and formative assessment measures in place across the Part One course. From the 2005/06 session the School will operate under the new GSA Code of Assessment which will require all students to pass each course (previously termed a “unit”). The assessment system in operation at the time of the Board’s visit allowed a student in Years 1 to 3 to progress to the next stage of study provided that they had passed Studio Work and the overall weighting of their marks was above the pass mark of 50%. Thus a student with a mark in one unit of 40%, or in two units of 45% plus, and an overall weighting of 50% and above, would progress to the next stage. In all cases the pass mark for Studio Work is 50%. The School informed the Board that the rationale behind this is that the learning outcomes for the course are not regarded as unit-specific, and students have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the learning outcomes elsewhere in their portfolio of work.

The students told the Board that they understood the assessment process and in general received constructive and timely feedback. However there were some pleas for greater clarity about the depth of work required in some units such as “Structures” in Year 1.

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

The target student intake figures for the Part One course in 2005/06 is 75, comprising 60 UK, 10 overseas and 5 part-time students.

Applicants are required to have the following academic qualifications; either 4 Highers at a minimum of BBBB in one sitting to include English and Mathematics, or 3 A-levels at a minimum of BBC with GCSE level Mathematics, English Literature and either English Language or use of English. Selected candidates are invited to interview, and are required to produce a portfolio of creative work for discussion. This opportunity was highly prized by the current student body.

Candidates with overseas and non-standard equivalent entry qualifications are also considered. Those whose first language is not English are expected, before commencing the course, to demonstrate a suitable level of competency in both spoken and written English.

The School will allow advanced entry to Years 2 and 3, subject to the following requirements. For entry to Year 2, candidates must satisfy the School that they have completed a course equivalent to the MSA Year 1 course and attend for interview with a portfolio of work. For exceptional entry to Year 3, candidates must satisfy the

School that they have completed a course equivalent to the MSA Year 2 course and attend for interview with a portfolio of work.

12.6 Detailed Commentary on the Part Two course:

Diploma in Architecture (Two years full-time or three years part-time)

12.6.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The aim of the Diploma course is to produce students who can develop a coherent body of work that demonstrates the skill to organise, design and present a range of architectural projects and studies of different types and with increasing rigour leading up to the Final Design Thesis. That is, a sustained and thoroughly researched building of reasonable complexity and ambitious architectural intention, encapsulating a critical architectural position and maturity of judgement”. The Board thought this aim, and the more specific aims devised for Diploma students, to be clear, comprehensive and appropriate.

The School also provided a mapping of the Part Two programme onto the RIBA/ARB Part Two Validation Criteria. This was found to be helpful by the Board, though members did note instances (for example, in the areas of Technology and Environment and Communication) where the Validation Criteria was covered more widely in the course than was suggested in the School’s mapping.

12.6.2 *Course design and content*

In Year 4 BArch (Honours) students are taught alongside students joining the Diploma course from other architecture schools in the UK and abroad. Ordinary Degree students from the MSA may complete the Diploma course either at the Mackintosh or another school. The main objectives in Year 4 are to extend design skills within a rigorous creative studio environment and to explore architecture as a response to the contemporary city. The city of Glasgow is used as a key reference point for the projects which typically include urban design, housing and the design of cultural buildings within the inner city. The projects are supported by advanced technology workshops, theory input on the socio-economic aspects of the urban environment, urban design, housing design, sustainability and on contemporary architecture and urbanism – Urban Studies, Housing Studies and Architectural History.

Both intakes complete the same course of study except that the Honours students submit their Honours option during Year 4 and, as they are receiving a graded Honours degree, are seen by an External Examiner at their Year 4 final assessment. Diploma students also undertake a Special Subject that is equivalent to the Honours Option undertaken by Honours students. The topic is related to one of the main subject areas within the MSA – Architectural Design, Architectural Science, Structural Design, Built Environment Studies, History of Architecture or Architectural Theory. Alternatively they may elect to undertake a related study within one of the disciplines offered by the Schools of Fine Art and of Design.

The second year of the Diploma comprises one major project, the Final Design Thesis, that constitutes a new

programme of work chosen by the student, or may be a continuation of the Urban Study, Housing Study or Special Subject/Honours Option already undertaken in the course. Typically thesis projects range from the detailed resolution of an individual building of modest scale to large-scale urban master-planning. The Final Design Thesis takes the form of an exhibition of drawings, models and other relevant materials to demonstrate and support the proposed thesis without the need for verbal explanation and justification. Students who gain a Distinction in the final year are automatically offered a place on the Master of Architecture by Conversion course.

The Board thought the Special Subject had a strong intellectual rigour and would encourage a closer relationship between it and the Final Design Thesis.

12.6.3 *Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design/non-design work)*

- Design

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the Part Two course.

The Board found copious evidence of coherent and well resolved architectural designs specifically geared towards engaging with urban issues and testing design proposals.

The Board thought that the Special Subject allowed students more freedom to develop a deeper understanding of theory in a cultural context. Its intellectual rigour merits a closer and stronger relationship to the Final Design

Thesis in Year 5, enabling the final design to draw on a deeper understanding of the issues involved.

In general the Board was disappointed by the body of evidence it saw in relation to the testing, analysis and appraisal of design options. It would encourage the School to seek to develop different approaches to, and therefore allow students more scope for, critical testing in this area, the aim to be to stretch the more able students and to stimulate a more experimental aspect of contemporary design.

Students could be encouraged to record their design proposals more extensively through their sketch notebooks, by photographing all their models and by recording within their portfolios aspects of development work.

Students could be encouraged more to explore material and experiential aspects of the final thesis project, to use their imagination vividly and to picture themselves in relation to their design propositions.

- Technology and Environment

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the Part Two course.

Whilst the integration of technology with design work at Part Two level is not one of the strengths of the School, the Board found good evidence that students were being encouraged to engage with technological issues in the Diploma course. The Board would wish to see more emphasis being placed on positive and creative aspects of

technological studies so that they can infuse and inspire the design process. It would also encourage the School to develop a more critical approach to tectonic and environmental issues to ensure that technology teaching is a coherent thread throughout the Diploma course.

The Board believes that the School had showed initiative in inviting external consultants to deliver teaching on building technologies, environmental design and construction methods and applauded its ambition, within an orthodox strategy, to develop appropriate and individual attitudes to building structures, using structural engineers to assist in this process.

The School is to be commended for bringing consultants from major firms into the studio, but students could benefit from additional formal technology inputs, particularly those students who may come from other schools for the Diploma course.

- Cultural Context

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the Part Two course.

The Special Subject furnishes students with a range of options in which to specialise and to explore their own interests, and this is exemplary. The excellent piece of work 'Joyce: Ulysses and Models of Mapping' is the kind of research which could open dramatic possibilities in studio work. An attempt is made towards the end of the Final Design Thesis to encourage students use their imagination vividly and to picture themselves in relation to a building. The Board would encourage the School to

develop and integrate interior studies that explore the experience of habitation.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the Part Two course.

The Diploma students who attended the Board's meeting were highly articulate, and the written work viewed by the Board was of a high standard.

Students showed fluency in a wide range of communication skills. However the Board considered that there was scope for a more critical and distinctive approach to representation at Diploma level.

- *Management Practice and Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios considered, the Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the Part Two course.

The main vehicle for delivering the relevant issues in these areas is the Professional Studies units in Years 4 and 5. The Board considered this aspect of the Validation Criteria in the Part Two course to be well managed and up-to-date.

12.6.4 *Progression within the course*

The cohort analysis for the Diploma course revealed impressive progression rates in excess of 90% for all years.

As mentioned in paragraph 12.6.2 the BArch (Honours) and the Ordinary Degree Diploma students undertake the same course of study in Year 4, except that the Honours students submit their Honours Option Study during this year and, as they are receiving a graded Honours degree, are seen by an External Examiner at their Year 4 final assessment. For that reason the Honours students told the Board that they felt under increased pressure during this year, while some students who had been awarded an Ordinary degree were not particularly motivated by this fact. Conversely, those students denied Honours because of their third year performance saw this as potentially demotivating. The Board believes that the Diploma course needs to be managed so that the additional pressure on the Honours students and the prestige associated with this pathway does not detract from the student experience of either intake. The School is aware of this disparity and is actively seeking ways of ensuring that the workload of both streams is more equitable.

12.6.5 *Assessment*

The Board found a varied and appropriate range of assessment procedures in place across the Diploma course. Part Two students had a clear appreciation and understanding of these procedures, and expressed no concerns about their fairness nor indeed about the quality and timeliness of the feedback they received on their performance. However, there is a heavy assessment load on Honours students who are examined in the fourth and fifth year with major exams in both years.

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

The School anticipates 35 new entrants to the Diploma course in 2005/06, comprising 27 UK, 5 overseas, and 3

part-time students. In addition it is projected that 24 BArch Honours students (4 of them from overseas) will continue on the Diploma course.

Applicants for the Diploma course are required to have obtained exemption from Part 1 of the Examinations in Architecture of the RIBA, and must submit a portfolio of architectural design work which is of a standard approved by the Professor of Architecture. Applications for entry to Year 5 may be accepted from candidates with an equivalent degree to the Bachelor of Architectural Studies (Honours) awarded by the University of Glasgow. These candidates will be expected to attend for interview with a portfolio of their work.

12.7 **External examining arrangements**

The School had originally arranged for the Board to meet 5 of its 8 External Examiners. Unfortunately due to a road traffic accident and travel difficulties two of the five were unable to attend the Board's meeting. The 3 External Examiners who were present had specific responsibilities in respect of both the Part One and Two courses. The Board was impressed by their positive and helpful responses and was satisfied that these provided adequate coverage of the courses under review.

The External Examiners were very supportive of the School, and were very clear about their remit in terms of assessments of the students' work. They seemed less clear about the relationship of the studio work to the subject areas and to have less of an overview of the relationship of the parts of the curriculum to the whole. This is something the School could clarify in the ways in which it assigns subject areas and responsibilities to its External Examiners.

There was some concern that the ability of External Examiners to form a view on the performance of students as a whole was limited by the compartmentalisation of studio work and written work. This mirrored the Board's own experience.

The External Examiners confirmed that the School had responded promptly and appropriately to issues that they raised in their reports and that generally action followed.

12.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

The arrangements for monitoring professional experience are described in detail in paragraph 12.5.3 under Preparation for Professional Experience.

In terms of the key areas of the professional knowledge base required for architectural practice, the Professional Studies unit in Year 3 provides a broad introduction. This base is built upon by the Professional Studies units which students undertake in Years 4 and 5.

In the light of these arrangements, students told the Board that they felt well prepared for and well supported during their practice placements.

12.9 **Students**

The Board met 18 representatives of the student body, principally the student representatives, two from each year. These included members from all years of the courses together with part-time students, students on their first stage professional practice and those following the M.Arch degree course. The arrangements for the meeting were made by the students themselves. The Board

appreciated this, although they would have liked to have met more students. The student body had provided members of the Board in advance of the visit with a written appraisal of the School from the student perspective. In both their report and in the comments made during the meeting the students were almost entirely positive about their experience at the School. They identified the particular strengths of the School as being:

- Excellent studio facilities and space
- Strong links with the GSA
- The opportunity for collaboration with other architectural schools in project work
- The diversity of the student population
- Its distinctive design ethos
- Good workshop and laboratory facilities
- Its policy of interviewing selected applicants and reviewing their portfolio of work
- Close relationship between staff and students
- Good support systems provided through the tutorial system
- Excellent preparation for and support provided to students on their first stage of professional practice
- The opportunity to undertake periods of study overseas through SOCRATES and other student exchange schemes (these opportunities were decreasing but the students were keen to encourage their continuation).

Specific concerns raised by the students included:

- Problems in obtaining key architecture books from the GSA Library
- The need for earlier feedback on some Part One courses (e.g. “Structures” in Year 1)

- The need to ensure that the workload of the BArch and Ordinary Degree Diploma students in Year 4 is more equitable (see paragraph 12.6.4)

The Board was impressed by the highly articulate and self-confident student body.

12.10 **Staff**

The Board held a lively meeting with 21 members of staff. The Board found the staff to be a strong, cohesive and thoroughly engaged team. There was a good spread of ages across the staff team. The key strengths of the staff team were seen to be:

- A broad spread of expertise
- The substantial involvement of practitioners in studio teaching
- A collective commitment to supporting students from many different backgrounds (60% of the current student population come from outside Scotland).

With a current student full-time equivalent of 362.8 and a staff full-time equivalent of 25.51, the student: staff ratio is 14.22:1.

12.11 **Research**

The School acknowledges that historically it has been primarily a teaching institution. This is still very much the case but the award of a 4 in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise in a combined submission with the GSA had resulted in a significant stream of research funding. This was been used to strategically to develop research infrastructure and activity, including the appointment of a Research Developer and the establishment of an annual £20,000 research culture fund to support staff activity and publication.

A Strategic Research Development Grant has been allocated by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to the MSA to undertake a feasibility study into establishing a network to research place-making. This will provide a framework for increased collaboration between the disciplines within the GSA. The MSA's pedagogy research group will play a significant role in plans for a new GSA Centre for Creative Education which in turn will drive the continuing development of learning and teaching methods.

The Board saw clear evidence of research feeding into teaching, and pointed to the clear link between history and theory research and the delivery of specialist subject teaching.

The Board encourages the School in developing its research programme but noted that many areas of its research seemed to relate to work being undertaken in the studio. The Board hopes that the School will continue to look at ways of developing more creative synergy between these two domains, while safeguarding the School's strong teaching ethos and connections with practice.

12.12 **Equal Opportunities**

In advance of the Board, the School provided a detailed breakdown of its student population by age, gender and ethnicity. Board members were also issued with a statement of the MSA's equal opportunities policy taken from the GSA Staff Handbook. It was clear that both the GSA and the MSA take the issue of equal opportunities very seriously indeed. The MSA's percentage of female students is 45%, which is above the national norm, but the Board would encourage the School in its continuing

efforts to attract and recruit more students from minority ethnic groups.

The School was pleased to report to the Board that it had increased the proportion of female full-time staff from 1 at the last visit in 2001 to 4 in 2005. The number of female part-time teachers has also increased, as have those for female guest speakers, critics and External Examiners.

12.13 **Resourcing and Facilities**

- General

The MSA is housed in the Bourdon Building next to the GSA building. The studios are on the first, second and third floors, with the workshops in the basement. The MSA general office and lecture theatre are on the first floor along with a computer laboratory and a light and photography laboratory. The reprographics base is on the second floor. The main GSA Library is housed in the same building.

Studios

The School has excellent studio spaces for all courses, together with dedicated crit. spaces. Students have access until 11p.m. on weekdays and to 5p.m. on Saturday and Sunday. The Board was told that the School used to operate 24 hour access but this was discontinued in the interests of personal security and to decrease the level of stress on students.

A studio fee of £100 is charged to all students at the beginning of each session to cover the cost of materials and print credits.

The Board was impressed by the lively and vibrant atmosphere in the studios but could not fail to notice how noisy the environment was.

- *IT*

The School has continued to expand and upgrade its IT facilities since the last full Visiting Board. The MSA has a bank of computers located in the studios supported by a scanner and printers. There is a range of word-processing, drawing and desktop publishing software as well as industry standard software for architects including: AutoCAD, AEC, Accrender, Microstation Triforma and Rhino that are used in conjunction with specialised visualisation software allowing for computer representation of form and space in design projects.

Performance analysis software is also available: DEFLECT for structural analysis, LUMENMICRO for lighting analysis and ODEON for auditorium acoustics and ECOTECH for environmental analysis.

Students have access to an A0 black and white plotter, A1 colour plotter and A3 colour printer to plot out drawings, while 3D models can be animated using software for recording on videotape.

The computer facilities have a T3 connection to the Local Metropolitan Area Network and to the Internet and can obtain their own email address by applying to the GSA Library.

- *Laboratories and workshops*

Two darkrooms are available to students to develop, print and enlarge black and white photographs, while modelscope facilities (still and video) are available for

visualisation of space from physical models. Students also have access to a Heliodon to record the effect of day lighting on architectural models

The School also has well appointed and well equipped workshops to enable students to create 3D objects in wood, metal and other materials. There is a dedicated model-making workshop and additional facilities for paint-spraying models and for welding with gas or mig welders.

Specialist technicians are on hand to help and advise students, usually between 9.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. Monday to Friday during term time.

- *Library*

The Board noted the comprehensive collection of architectural books and journals in the Main GSA Library. There was also an impressive selection of DVDs and videotapes and an extensive IT suite with approximately 50 PCs with Internet access and two technical support staff. The Library boasted two specialist librarians, one of whom is dedicated to architecture.

The Library budget is £20,000 per year on architecture books and £6,000 per year on architecture journals. The Library was well stocked with journals and books; however, in some cases there was only one copy of key texts.

During term time the Library is open from 9.30 a.m. to 7.45 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 9.30 a.m. to 4.45 p.m. on Friday and from 12 noon to 4p.m. on Saturday.

Although the stock is excellent, the School readily admits that the main problem with the Library is the lack of

working space. The Board was informed that plans are being drawn up to redevelop the entire Bourdon Building where the Library is housed in the near future. This will alleviate the cramped conditions which users currently endure.

The 2001 Visiting Board had noted the loss of borrowing rights at the University of Glasgow (a decision forced upon the Library as it had previously been required to hand over 45% of its budget to the University) had been reflected in increased funding for the GSA Library and reference rights to all libraries in the Glasgow universities. However, students told the Board that they still encountered difficulties in obtaining sought-after architecture books, though they were appreciative of the efforts being made by Library staff to order extra copies of these books or to secure them on inter-library loan.

13. Attachments

13.1 Prior to the visit the Board was provided by the School with the following documentation:

- Critical Self Appraisal
- Student Views
- Response to Questionnaire
- Supplementary Information
- Student Course Handbook 2004/05 including information on the content, structure and assessment of the courses to be validated
- Year Books Stages 1 to 5 2004/05
- Mapping of all Course Content and Learning Outcomes onto RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria for all courses to be validated
- External Examiners' Reports

- External Examination Board Minutes 2004/05
- ACME Report on Examiners' Reports 20003/04
- External Examiners' CVs
- Admissions policies
- Staff profile
- Staff Development Plan
- Equal opportunities policy and information
- Student Progression data
- Cohort Analysis
- Research profile of School
- Teaching and Learning approaches
- Quality Assurance Procedures
- Physical resources

13.2 The Board was provided with the following additional information in the base room and during the visit:

- Unit assessments in Architectural Science, Structural Design, History of Architecture, Built Environment Studies, Honours Option/ Special Subject, Urban Studies, Professional Studies (examined through a variety of means including written exam papers, essays, course work, studio work, technical study and CAAD).
- QAA Subject Review Self-Evaluation and QAA Report December 2001
- Periodic Review MSA Validation Event March 2003
- Enhancement Led Institutional review
- MSA Annual Course Monitoring Report 2003/04
- External Examiners' Reports 2004/05
- External Examiners' Handbook 2004/05
- Staff Handbook
- MSA B.Arch mark sheets 2004/05

- MSA B.Arch (Honours) Options and Diploma in Architecture Special Subject mark sheets 2004/05
- GSA Strategic Plan 2004/08, including 2005/06 Update
- GSA Academic Handbook 2004/05
- GSA Prospectus 2005/06 and 2006/07
- Staff CVs
- Extended Yearbook- Stages 1 to 5
- Weekly Timetable session 2005/06
- Library and information Services – A User's Guide.

13.3 Board members also had access to a networked PC allowing access to a wide range of additional MSA and GSA documentation.