

**Royal Institute of British Architects**

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

Confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee 4 June 2008

**University of Manchester  
Manchester Metropolitan University**

**Part One: Bachelor of Arts with Honours  
Architecture  
Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture**

**Date of Visiting Board: 7- 8 February 2008**

**1. Information about the courses**

**1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:**

University of Manchester & Manchester Metropolitan  
University: Bachelor of Arts with Honours Architecture,  
Part One, three years full-time

University of Manchester & Manchester Metropolitan  
University: Bachelor of Architecture, Part Two, two years  
full-time

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

Manchester School of Architecture  
Chatham Building  
Cavendish Street  
Manchester  
M15 6BR

Tel: 0161 247 6950 (UM) 0161 247 6950 (MMU)  
Fax: 0161 275 6935 (UM) 0161 247 6810 (MMU)  
Web: [www.man.ac.uk](http://www.man.ac.uk) (UM) [www.mmu.ac.uk](http://www.mmu.ac.uk) (MMU)

**1.3 Name of awarding bodies**

University of Manchester  
Manchester Metropolitan University

**1.4 Name of head of school**

Professor David Dernie

**2. Membership of the Visiting Board**

**2.1** The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on Thursday 7 to Friday 8 February [2008](#) were:

David Porter (Chair)  
Tony Watson (Vice Chair)  
Patrick Monaghan  
Richard Parnaby

Michael Wilford  
Peter Farrell (local nominee)  
Gillian Lambert (Student/Graduate Member)  
Shelia Ryding (Co-Professional Member)

David Gloster (Director of Education, RIBA) was in attendance as secretary to the board.

**3. Procedures and 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 and effective from September 2003, and the *RIBA Criteria for Validation*, published March 2002, and effective from September 2003.

For more information see [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

**4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board**

**4.1** At its meeting on 4 June 2008, the RIBA Education Committee confirmed:

**Continued validation of:**

Part One: Manchester School of Architecture, Bachelor of Arts with Honours, Architecture, three years full-time

Part Two: Manchester School of Architecture, Bachelor of Architecture, two years full-time

Both qualifications are awarded jointly by Manchester University and Manchester Metropolitan University.

**4.2** The next full Visiting Board will take place in 2012.

**5. Recommendation of the Visiting Board to the Commonwealth Association of Architects, the Construction Industry Council, and ARB**

- 5.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA continue with their accreditation of the Part Two qualification.
- 5.2 The Visiting Board was satisfied that the Part One course 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 two courses met all points of the EU Directive.

**6. Criteria for validation**

- 6.1 On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined, the Visiting Board was satisfied that all the students graduating from the courses and examinations listed in 4.1 above satisfied all the criteria for validation (which are held in common by the RIBA for validation and the ARB for prescription).

**7. Standards**

- 7.1 On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined, the work from 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**

- 9.3 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 the recommendations, advice, and commentary contained in the full report**

- 10.1 The Manchester School of Architecture was formally established on 1 August 1997 as a result of the merger of the separate schools of architecture of University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University. The Manchester School of Architecture is now owned by both universities; students' awards are jointly granted. A memorandum of understanding effective from 1 August 2005 defines this relationship. The operation of the school (now identified in literature as MSA) is subject to a periodic review, with the next due to take place during the academic year 2008/09.
- 10.2 A new head of school (Professor David Dernie) was appointed in 2005. Since his appointment, there has been significantly more research activity among the academic staff, the development of a structured programme of events for students and staff, a number of excellent publications, and the definition of a new role and character vital to sustaining the future of the MSA.

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- 10.3 The School's strengths include:
- the recruitment of students with a high level of traditional academic skills
  - an experienced body of staff (including local practitioners), now complemented by new appointments
  - the establishment of a substantial and ambitious research base, enhanced by the appointment of Professor Simon Guy to the Directorship of the Manchester Architectural Research Centre (MARC)
  - student access to the technical, academic, and social facilities of both parent universities
  - an emphasis on diverse design teaching in the B Arch through the college system of design studios
  - the recent extension of this system to include the MSA-P college
  - the development of Event Month to enhance the academic offer to BA students
  - a central location within the city of Manchester
  - good pastoral support for students
  - established links to local practices and the RIBA NW region (including access to the part 3 course hosted by this branch)
  - impressive library facilities
  - impressive workshop facilities
- 10.4 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendation. The RIBA expects the institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendation in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the school and in the mid term review. Failure by an institution to act on the recommendation, or provide the RIBA with a clear rationale for not doing so, may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.
- 10.4.1 The Visiting Board wholeheartedly supports the vision and further development of the MSA outlined to them by the head of school. The Board recommends that the head of school articulates his vision along with an action plan for its realisation, and disseminates this to the staff, student body, and external examiners for discussion so that progress on its implementation can be monitored at the mid term visit. This plan should consider the balance the school wishes to strike between compliance with criteria and the drive for excellence that builds from it. Consideration of this balance in the development of ambitions for design and technology teaching should be evident.
- 10.5 The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the school on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and raise standards.
- 10.5.1 The Board advises that the head of school and academic community of MSA have the earliest possible input to the detailed planning of the projected refurbishment and rebuilding programme. This should seek to ensure an improved provision that can encourage interaction between different learning groups and between students and staff, along with adequate dedicated presentation and teaching spaces, maximising the opportunities for creative dialogue between the disciplines present in the Faculty of Art and Design.
- 10.5.2 The Board advises that academic staff are reminded of the possibilities for staff development and provision of sabbaticals stated in the joint memorandum of understanding between Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Manchester.

**11. Summary of previous Visiting Board reports**

11.1 The last full Visiting Board to the Manchester School of Architecture took place on 18 – 19 March 2004. The Board recommended continued validation of:

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

Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture (two years full-time)

11.2 In its report, the 2004 Visiting Board recommended that ‘the universities respond to the pressures clearly identified by staff, students, and external examiners and, particularly given the high student staff ratio in the school, make the additional staffing appointments identified, including that to the research professorship, as a matter of urgency’.

The advent of a new head of school together with the appointment by the University of Manchester of Professor Simon Guy (and visiting professor Dalibor Veseley) has addressed the matter of senior appointments. These new roles are complemented by a significant number of full and part time lecturer appointments made in 2005-07, and newly engaged associate lecturers working on an hourly basis.

**12. Conditions**

12.1 There were no special conditions of validation attached to the courses listed in 4.1

**13. Recommendations**

13.1 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendation. The RIBA expects the institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendation in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the School and in the mid term review. Failure by an institution to either act on the

recommendation, or provide the RIBA with a clear rationale for not doing so, may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

13.2 The Visiting Board wholeheartedly supports the vision and further development of the MSA outlined to them by the head of school. The Board recommends that the head of school articulates his vision along with an action plan for its realisation, and disseminates this to the staff, student body, and external examiners for discussion so that progress on its implementation can be monitored at the mid term visit. This plan should consider the balance the school wishes to strike between compliance with criteria and the drive for excellence that builds from it. Consideration of this balance in the development of ambitions for design and technology teaching should be evident.

**14. Advice**

14.1 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:

14.2 The Board advises that the head of school and academic community of MSA have the earliest possible input to the detailed planning of the projected refurbishment and rebuilding programme. This should seek to ensure the improved provision both of effective social space for students and staff, and adequate dedicated crit and teaching spaces, and maximise the opportunities for creative dialogue between the disciplines present in the Faculty of Art and Design.

14.3 The Board advises that academic staff are reminded of the possibilities for staff development and provision of

sabbaticals stated in the joint memorandum of understanding between Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Manchester.

## 15. Commentary

### 15.1 Critical self-appraisal; developments since last visit

The critical self-appraisal set out many of the recent developments at MSA, notably the establishment of the Manchester Architectural Research Centre (MARC) under the leadership of Professor Simon Guy, the collaborative venture with the Manchester Society of Architects (MSA Squared), and the MSA Professional Advisory Board chaired by Stephen Hodder. The growing emphasis on developing world class research in and around MSA was particularly evident, as were changes in programme delivery. These centred around the reintroduction of a year system in the BA (Hons), and the broadening of the college (design studios) base within the B Arch; a flexible route through the B Arch (essentially a part time mode) is also being piloted for review in 2009.

The use of teaching assistants in BA (Hons) years 1 and 2 was also noted; this addressed the growing numbers of students applying to and accepted by MSA, and provided a career development route for recent graduates of the school.

The appraisal offered a candid admission of some shortcomings in the development of inter disciplinary teaching and activity within the Faculty of Art and Design, and difficulties in providing appropriate access to both studio and workshop spaces.

Members of the Board noted that the 2008 institutional review was considered by the school as a potential threat, but noted that the memorandum of understanding setting

up the jointly owned school explicitly asks for periodic reviews to be made.

Overall, the appraisal was felt to provide a good overview of changes within MSA in response to the previous visit, although the Board was disappointed that the opportunity had not been taken to reflect the full scope of future thinking.

### 15.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The documentation provided for Board members in advance of the visit was comprehensive, although it was noted that unit syllabi for both programmes were somewhat generic. The lack of reading lists in some cases made it difficult to understand the intellectual territory of individual modules. It was understood that reading lists were issued either with project briefs or at lectures; some samples of each would have given a clearer sense of the academic direction of both courses, and in which ways these were distinguished from each other.

The arrangements for the visit were generally very good, with well-structured introductions to each teaching level; these gave a clear sense of the organisation of the courses and approaches to design offered by each of the B Arch colleges. The exhibition was comprehensive, and portfolios effectively organised and marked; these were accompanied by clear marksheets for each level of the course.

#### 15.2.1 Record of academic portfolios sampled during the visit

For the Part One BA (Hons) programme, the Board examined 33 academic portfolios of work completed in the 2006/07 academic year, as follows:

Year 1: 3 lowest pass, 3 middle pass and 3 high pass (>5% of cohort)

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

(>5% of cohort)

Year 3: 3 lowest pass portfolios, 2 other low passes, 5 middle pass, and 5 high pass  
(c. 10% of cohort)

For the Part Two BArch programme, the Board examined 27 academic portfolios containing both year five and year six work, as follows:

Year 5: lowest pass, middle pass, and high pass from each of the five colleges offered at this level. This included the 3 overall lowest pass students

Year 6: lowest pass, middle pass, and high pass from each of the four colleges offered at this level. This included the 3 overall lowest pass students.

The B Arch portfolio sample represented c. 17% of the total cohort.

It should be noted that although Board members spoke with students involved with the B Arch flexible route, the first cohort of this pathway would not graduate until 2009. It was not therefore appropriate to inspect portfolios for this mode during this visit.

### 15.3 **Responses made to the previous Visiting Board report and external examiner comments**

The Board was confident that MSA had acted promptly and effectively in response to comments made by the 2004 Visiting Board, making a range of key appointments at senior level, as well as filling a variety of other full and part time lecturer roles.

There were also clear indications of the school's response to observations about the integration of technology teaching with studio projects; in both courses, there was evidence of dedicated technology coursework related to the award year design project.

### 15.4 **Context of the courses within the wider provision of the school and faculty**

The school's base is within the Faculty of Art and Design of Manchester Metropolitan University. Courses offered in the faculty include landscape architecture, contemporary film and video, fashion, fine art, and textiles. However, because the school is jointly owned, students have the opportunity to benefit from both the University of Manchester's library facilities, and Manchester Metropolitan University's Art and Design collections.

### 15.5 **Detailed commentary on the course leading to the BA (Hons) Architecture: Part One**

15.5.1 Clarity, validity, and achievement of course objectives  
The objectives of the Part One course were seen to be clearly expressed, valid, and specific. The Board considered that the description of approach to course delivery, objectives for each level, and mechanisms for assessment were all well articulated. The academic portfolios viewed by the Board demonstrated that objectives were being achieved by students of all ability levels.

The Board noted however that there was a degree of overemphasis on compliance with the validation criteria in some aspects of the curriculum, with potential implications for the vivacity and diversity of student work, particularly in relation to design projects.

### 15.5.2 Course design and content

Prior to 2005, the BA (Hons) course had operated with a common first year, and a college based second and third year. The course now operates a year system at all levels. The programme documentation describes a steady and

methodical progression though thematic concerns with dwelling in BA1, via greater analytical complexity of urban projects in Manchester and Barcelona during second year, to a third year where students are expected to ‘define a position within contemporary architectural dialogue’.

Complementary to this course is the concept of event month, a series of over 40 workshops, competitions, and charettes. These typically involve small groups of students working together across diverse themes of technology, theory, communication, and sustainability.

The Board recognised that they were seeing work from a programme in transition where new initiatives are expected to have a cumulative impact on outputs in the next few years.

15.5.3 Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design and taught course work)

*Design*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Design.

Projects in first and second years were framed to allow students to develop an understanding of basic architectural principles, although it was not generally apparent how theoretical issues informed design decisions.

In the BA3 design portfolios, there was relatively little evidence documenting the design process to explain how formal decisions were made, or the influence of the cultural and physical context of the site in informing design decisions.

The Board considered the concept of ‘reflective making’ interesting, but would have welcomed more evidence of model making, and experimentation with the material aspect of architectural design. The Board suggested that more opportunities to use the workshop facilities within the faculty should be created within the context of design project briefs.

*Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

The technology submission for the degree year in particular appeared to rely on a template; whilst the Board considered this to be effective in ensuring consistency of results, concerns were expressed that technological parameters had proscribed the results of the design work, limiting the ambition of some projects.

Given the facilities on hand in the faculty, the Board considered that a broader approach where students engage with materials and making might be helpful in developing technical insight.

*Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The three humanities modules offered in the BA (Hons) course provide progressive exposure to architectural history, although there is relatively little evidence of students being informed of the critical and theoretical

discourse in architecture, or that this is being reflected in design projects.

*Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Communications.

Students demonstrated a range of communication skills, although these tended to be focussed on a rather normative and uncritical approach to CAD. There appeared to be a misalignment between presentation and representation, where the impetus to achieve the former was at the expense of considering more stimulating options for the latter.

Some high pass portfolios however provided impressive evidence of animation work. The Board considered that further experimentation with a wider range of communications media, model making, and other 3D work would benefit the spirit of enquiry necessary to the BA (Hons) course.

*Management, Practice, and Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Management, Practice, and Law.

The BA (Hons) course structure has no dedicated lecture series for Management, Practice, and Law. Instead, the course mapping indicates delivery of this curricular area in components connected to a range of units including design, humanities, and technology. A significant amount of the evidence against this criterion rests in the design

report produced for the third year, and those embedded in other BA2/3 design projects.

Additionally, there are around 8 hours of lectures offered to degree year students on aspects of the first practical training year.

*Preparation for Professional Experience*

MSA organises 2 days of lectures during the students' year out; these focus on their particular experience of practice, and introduce the B Arch course to those students wishing to continue their studies in the school.

Although students are not visited in their practices during the year out, PEDR submissions are commented upon and signed off by staff responsible for Management, Practice, and Law curricula. At the end of the first practical training year, students 'pass' or 'defer' on the basis of a minimum of 6 months experience.

15.5.4 Progression within the course

The School reports progression rates during the academic year 2006/07 as being c. 88%, 87% and 93% in years one, two and three respectively, which compare favourably nationally. It was noted however that, due to exceptionally high demand for the course, applicants were no longer interviewed. Candidates are instead required to submit a portfolio of work for consideration, and those who are successful in their application invited to an MSA open day.

15.5.5 Assessment

Assessment criteria and procedures throughout the Part One course are clearly articulated, with each element of assessment individually described.

The Board was reassured that moderation of marks was a collective endeavour on the part of the course team, and that all critical submissions were subject to double marking.

There were however some concerns expressed about overmarking at the upper end of achievement.

The Board was satisfied however that procedures for dealing with low pass students were effective, and the use of level descriptors to confirm marking levels appropriately employed.

- 15.5.6 Admissions (and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course)  
MSA has a large intake of traditionally qualified students. With over 2000 applicants in 2006/07, the school has one of the highest number of applicants of any in the UK. The current BA1 cohort is 187 (rising from 175 in 2004/05), with A level grades of entrants averaging better than 3Bs. The school has stated that it wishes to reduce BA (Hons) intake to 110 over the next four years.

Although rare, direct entry to level two is permitted, but only after a rigorous interview process; in the 2006/07 session, only two students entered on this basis. University rules do not permit direct entry to level three.

15.6 **Detailed commentary on the course leading to the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours: Part Two**

- 15.6.1 Clarity, validity, and achievement of course objectives  
Compared with the BA (Hons), the objectives of the Part Two course were expressed primarily in structural terms, rather than a defined pedagogical position on architecture education. The academic portfolios viewed by the Board demonstrated however that objectives were being achieved by students of all ability levels.

The Board again noted a degree of overemphasis on compliance with the validation criteria; this had potential implications for the ambition and contemporary relevance of student responses to project work of all types, particularly design.

15.6.2 Course design and content

The B Arch course uses the vehicle of the college to define a number of different approaches to design teaching; in the current academic year there are five colleges (Bioclimatic Architecture, Continuity in Architecture, Landscape and Urbanism, Materiality and, most recently MSA Projects). The number of options is to increase to 7 for the academic year 2008/09. There is an ongoing debate about whether a student should be in a college for any more than a year, although habitually students stay within the same college for both years of their studies.

The course is structured to emphasise the integration of technology and management, practice, and law with design work.

15.6.3 Quality and coverage of the syllabus (including balance and integration between design and taught course work)

*Design*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Design.

As in all academic systems where student choice may determine some outcomes, the Board found design work across the colleges variable. The high pass in the Materiality college was however a manifestly excellent

project, giving a clear sense of design method and development, memorable architectural form, tactility, and integration with the site at a physical and cultural level.

Despite the number of colleges and apparent diversity of approach, design briefs appeared rather prescriptive in respect of outcomes. The Board expressed the view that, given the academic calibre of entrants to the course, some students capable of truly excellent work were not being faced with sufficient intellectual challenge.

*Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

The Board observed that, despite tight templating of the requirements for this area of the curriculum, there was some disparity in results from college to college. In some cases, there was little material development; the report referring to technological precedents was however considered helpful as it placed constructional decisions in a broader cultural context.

There was a sense that in ways similar to the BA (Hons), technology could be approached in a more creative way; critical to this would be for the school to identify project vehicles reliant for their outcomes on the use of facilities within the Faculty of Art and Design.

*Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The Board found the dissertations produced covered a wide range of topics, and were generally of a good standard. The Board also found precedent studies to be well represented in the majority of Part Two design programme submissions, although it was not always clear in which ways they assisted students' understanding of broader issues. Board members found little evidence of taught courses explicitly dealing with the theoretical discourse in architecture.

*Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined, the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Communication.

Model making was not particularly evident, and did not appear to be a basis for students to develop design decisions from. CAD drawing was of a good, if occasionally constrained, standard. The Board considered that the school should encourage students to take a more speculative approach to representation, exploring the full spectrum of digital and analogue media.

Although the Board understood that in certain cases the dissertation developed themes also visited in design projects, a number of schemes at final year level required further written explication. This could usefully have been in the form of annotation, or sheets integrating text and illustrations establishing the context of design decisions.

*Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture are meeting the validation criteria in the area of Management, Practice, and Law.

A programme of 16 lectures is available to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year students. This is delivered both by MSA staff, and specialists working in the NW region; topics covered include architects' appointment, planning legislation and planning applications, choice of contract, cost control, and project management. These are assessed through an extended written submission.

The Board considered that the involvement of external specialists added variety and authority to this programme. Procedures for evaluating students' progress within practice appeared systematic, and sensitive to any problems likely to arise in respect of the quality of practical training.

15.6.4 Progression within the course

The Part Two programme achieves very good progression rates. The overall completion rates in the period 2004/07 are between 88 and 97%.

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

Relevant assessment mechanisms are in place throughout the Part Two programme; the relative weightings of the components of the course were considered appropriate.

15.6.6 Admissions (and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course)

Whilst the intake to the B Arch programme is less than the BA (Hons), it has nevertheless increased exponentially. Numbers in 2003/04 were 61, increasing to 84 in 2004/05, 98 in 2005/06, and 84 in 2006/07. The current 5th year cohort is 77; MSA has expressed its intention to maintain this level.

The percentage of students entering the B Arch from MSA has increased steadily since the last Visiting Board; in 2004/05 the percentage of MSA entrants was 69%, rising to 77% (2005/06), 87% (2006/07), and 82% in the current cohort. Teaching assistants are also recruited from recent graduates. The Board noted that these factors could contribute to a hermetic school culture.

There are no direct entrants to the second year of the B Arch.

15.7 **External examining arrangements**

The Board confirmed the school had in place an experienced team of Part One and Part Two external examiners, drawn from both education and practice.

The team of examiners were very supportive about changes already made to the BA (Hons) and B Arch courses, and to the future direction of the school. The examiners considered that new staff appointments had had a beneficial effect on the BA (Hons), with particular improvements evident in BA1. They further confirmed that there was an increased creative rigour throughout the BA (Hons), with significantly fresher approaches to education delivery now in place.

With respect to the B Arch, the examiners assured the Board they were offered ample time to develop a balanced view of parity between colleges, and to discuss marking and pass/fail levels. The system of 'technology buddies' (sic) now offered to B Arch students was also felt to be working well, and a strength of the school. Views were offered that able students could usefully be offered more latitude and challenge in design solutions, with the sense of a thesis to define and defend.

15.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

MSA has good systems in place for supporting and monitoring students during the first stage of their professional experience. Students are required to register with the school.

During the practical training period, contact is maintained with the student by telephone or email; students return to the school for a two day seminar in spring. During this time students share experiences, make presentations, attend lectures by visiting practitioners, and get PEDR forms signed. Attendance at this event is good. At the end of the placement, employers complete a detailed report and students submit an evaluation of their experience.

15.9 **Students**

The student meeting was attended by representatives of all years of both programmes, together with students on first stage professional experience. The Board found the students to be committed and articulate, offering a wide range of opinions of the school and its courses.

Students were generally positive regarding their experiences of the School. There was a strong sense that the school promoted practical values in architecture education due to its practitioner links, and that this was a desirable attribute. Some students felt the high reputation of the courses would assist in their securing employment, and that MSA offered a good balance in architecture education between arts and technology sensibilities.

There were varied opinions offered about feedback given to students after project presentations. Some students believed feedback was explicit and gave a clear

understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their work; others said that it did not provide clear indicators of action to be taken, and lacked real communication.

When asked about taking advantage of the facilities within the Faculty of Art and Design, students' reactions varied. Some did not consider the adjacency of arts based disciplines as having any potential to usefully inform their work; others reported on collaborations they had made with arts students that had been very successful, while others did not seem to recognise this as a possibility.

There was broad consensus that Manchester represented a great resource for study and student social life, and a genuinely viable cultural alternative to other metropolitan areas. The Board was however surprised that MSA students seemed to have few links with Archaos. There was agreement that the school would benefit from improved social spaces, storage facilities, longer opening hours, and the provision of dedicated work stations in the studios.

Some B Arch students expressed concerns that Event Month was aimed primarily at BA students, and commented that a dedicated lecture series (possibly in the evenings) would be welcome.

Finally, students testified to the high degree of commitment of the academic staff, and hoped that the level of this resource would be maintained to avoid excessive demands on staff time and energy.

15.10 **Staff**

The Visiting Board met a broad cross section of the academic staff, including course leaders, full time lecturers, part time appointees, hourly paid lecturers, and teaching

assistants. Staff expressed a wide range of views about the character of the school. They confirmed it would be desirable for better connections to be created to other departments within the faculty as a result of the rebuilding and refurbishment programme, but expressed the view that MSA's identity should not be subsumed within its host body. The staff considered the building programme should go beyond the simple provision of teaching functions, and develop effective social spaces for the entire academic community enabling an effortless and symbiotic interaction.

The Board sought staff views on the balance between compliance with the criteria, and the ambition to build up from compliance to achieve excellence. There was a range of views on this matter, although the discussion centred more on achieving compliance than excellence.

Understandably in a large school of architecture, there appeared to be some differences of opinion among staff about the nature of the academic programmes, with views ranging from the desirability of a strengthened professional orientation ('the B Arch always has realistic consultants involved', 'consultants have to engage an architectural context', 'students are focussed on getting a job, not the academic exploration of architecture', 'new staff should know about recent legislation') to the concept of a broader intellectual endeavour ('it's about raising intellectual debate, not just getting in architects', 'the course is about developing a culture of thinking').

Staff were very supportive of the developments in research at MSA, and considered that recent senior appointments and the involvement of more staff in the current RAE were welcome developments. The appointment of Simon Guy had been pivotal to this, and

the staff looked forward to further 'ambitious, forward looking' developments, and 'explosions of initiative'.

#### 15.11 **Research**

The Board considered the establishment of the Manchester Architectural Research Centre in the School of Environment and Development (and appointment of Professor Simon Guy as Director) a welcome response (and critical addition) to the research ambitions of both MSA and the University of Manchester. The research strategy outlined in documentation handed to the Board during the visit evidenced a coherent and ambitious approach, with ample confirmation of interesting projects already in progress.

Work complementary to MARC was also apparent in publications associated with the A+UD group; this work drew effectively on the expertise and experience of staff already teaching B Arch colleges, and was considered by the Board to accurately reflect the goal of research-led teaching.

#### 15.12 **Equal Opportunities**

The School provided the Board with statistics on the student community by entry qualifications, region of origin, and ethnicity. The statistics suggested a growing diversity in the student body, and increasing evidence of a shift away from a wholly localised intake.

Considered numerically, approximately 25% of the teaching staff are now female, with recent appointments contributing substantially to an improvement in gender balance.

15.13 **Resourcing and facilities**

*General*

The school has access to accommodation provided by both parent universities, although is primarily based in the Chatham Building of Manchester Metropolitan University. A number of staff offices and research facilities (including the architecture reference library) are located in the nearby Kantorowich Building, the homebase for the University of Manchester's humanities programmes. The Accordion lecture theatre in this building is also used by MSA on a shared basis for large and/or public lectures.

*Studios*

The Board visited studio space in the Chatham Building. These studios were well used, although there was evidence of overcrowding and multiple usage (e.g. design presentations, tutorials, and student working simultaneously competing for space). The Board considered that, as a priority, MSA need to be acknowledged as an early presence in the planning of new accommodation in the Faculty of Art and Design. This accommodation should acknowledge the large size of the student body in architecture, the requirement for dedicated presentation and exhibition space, and the pressing need for social facilities where the academic community can interact to achieve synergies typical of a Faculty of Art and Design.

*IT*

The Visiting Board considered the IT facilities to be appropriate for a school of architecture, although there was inevitably evidence that printing facilities could be improved. Students considered that relatively limited opening hours to the printing facility could be thought of both as an impediment – and a means to discipline their work practices.

There was evidence that students approached IT in a relatively conservative way, using drawing programmes to present work rather than represent the process and possibilities of architectural projects. The recent introduction in the faculty of software compatible with model making processes could be usefully explored in the future.

*Workshop*

The Board was given a comprehensive tour of the impressive campus workshop facilities; architecture students have access to the majority of workshops where specialised assistance is not required (or hazardous processes not in evidence). Access is often on a walk in basis, and at other times by appointment.

The Board considered that the school's statement about 'reflective making' needs to be evaluated against more obvious outcomes connected to workshop programmes, and greater evidence of investigation using physical models. The provision of a dedicated plastics workshop, rapid prototyping machinery, and a laser cutter appeared to be much appreciated by the students. A second laser cutter had been requested by the students.

*Library*

Complementing the smaller architecture reference library in the Kantorowich Building, the All Saints Library on the Manchester Metropolitan University site is less than five minutes walk from MSA's Chatham Building base. It contains an impressive stock of contemporary architecture texts and journals. There are approximately 14,000 subject specific texts and around 150 relevant journal titles, from both national and international sources. The library also houses the Manchester Society of Arts historic collection.

There are around 120,000 books and 438 journal titles in total in the faculty.

A significant number of additional resources are also available online, including British Standards, Digimap, and the Ordnance Survey; 200 PCs are available on the 4th floor. The collection is curated by a specialist architecture librarian, who is closely involved with the work of the school through attendance at consultative committees and programme meetings.

The library is open 12 hours a day weekdays, opening at 8.45am. It is also open from 10.00-4.00 at weekends, with extended opening in response to review. Library e-services, such as renewal of loans, are available online.

## 16. Attachments

16.1 Prior to the visit, members of the Visiting Board received:

- critical self appraisal
- mapping of BA and BArch programmes against RIBA/ARB Part One and Part Two criteria respectively
- external examiners' reports for BA and BArch, together with MSA responses
- programme guides for BA and BArch for 2007/08; the latter contained the MMU/UoM memorandum of understanding on joint ownership of MSA
- (for information only), programme guide for M Arch, together with external examiners' reports
- questionnaire containing information on admissions, student statistics, policy on equal opportunities, and staffing and staff CVs

16.2 On arrival, the Board also received copies of:

- a comprehensive document providing information on meeting locations, and maps of the campus complete with annotated building plans
- a comprehensive document detailing the breadth and depth of the current research programmes

16.3 In the Base Room the following additional documentation was made available:

- Manchester University prospectus
- Manchester Metropolitan University prospectus
- documentation submitted to ARB for course prescription
- MSA catalogue for 2006/07 academic year
- details of MSA event month for 2008
- BA course materials
- BArch course materials

A networked PC was also provided to allow the Board to consider documents available on the universities' intranet.