

Nottingham Trent University
School of the Built Environment
Burton Street
Nottingham
NG1 4BU

EXPLORATORY BOARD REPORT

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee, 12 October 2005

Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) – Proposed Candidate Course for Part 1 exemption

1. Introduction and Summary

The Exploratory Board visit to Nottingham Trent University took place on 16 June 2005.

The members of the Visiting Board were:

Dr Robert Felix (Chair)
Ms Caroline Gould
Mr Robert Hutson

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (Acting Head of Validation, RIBA) attended the Visiting Board as Secretary.

The object of the Board was to consider the Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) course for Candidate Course status for exemption from Part 1 of the RIBA Examinations.

2. Recommendations; Confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee on 12 October 2005

The RIBA Education Committee, at its meeting on 12 October 2005, confirmed the Board's recommendation that the course be granted 'Candidate Course for Validation' status. This is valid for a period of 5 years from the date of the Exploratory Visit. The School may invite an Initial Visiting Board to consider the course for full validation once the first cohort has graduated; therefore at any time from June 2009 according to the School's current timetable.

A monitoring visit will take place in June 2007. This will be a relatively informal event, undertaken by one person.

The main purpose of this visit will be to meet the first cohort of students at the end of their first year at the School. At that point the School should supply up to date versions of all documentation relating to the course.

3. Definition

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

4. **General Comments**

- a. The Board would like to thank the Architecture Development Team for their kindness and hospitality during the visit. In addition the Board would like to thank the laboratory and library staff for taking time out to show the Board around their facilities and answer the Board's questions;
- b. All documentation was forwarded in a timely manner and the practical arrangements for the visit were excellent;
- c. The Board commends the enthusiasm of the Architecture Development Team, which serves as an exemplar of a cohesive approach to developing an architecture programme.
- d. The current complement of staff is good and its expertise in interior architecture and disciplines allied to architecture stands in good stead for the development of a successful architecture programme;
- e. The development of architecture is fully supported by the University;
- f. Current resources are good and the planned developments appear to be excellent; however the projected staff:student ratio of 1:22 is on the high side;
- g. The ethos and culture of the School came across very strongly;
- h. The Board was interested by the School's innovative approach to teaching history and looks forward to seeing how it works in practice. However they would add that the theoretical aspects of history are also important and that the course should not lose sight entirely of the linearity of history;
- i. The Board commends the School's high ambitions for research and its intention that a significant part of this will directly inform teaching;
- j. At present the impact of students on the evolution of the course cannot be determined. The Board will be interested to see how the course, in practice, influences the student experience and vice versa.

5. **Background**

The University has recently undergone a major restructuring exercise, which included a review of all courses and modification of its strategic plan. Departments are now organised in Schools under the umbrella of a larger College. Architecture will stand in the College of Art and Design and Built Environment, the academic units of which are the School of Art and Design and the School of the Built Environment, and will benefit from the joint resources of both.

The College offers a wide range of courses in the fields of Art, Design, Construction Engineering Surveying and Technology. These include well-established courses in Interior Architecture and Architectural Technology. There is also a history of urban planning and town planning. The review identified architecture as a natural addition and complement to the current portfolio of courses. The University's predecessor institutions taught architecture until the 1960s and therefore it is looked upon as a re-introduction

The course designers have consulted widely within the University, with the profession and with allied professions about the nature and focus of modern architectural education. This has directly informed their strategy. The Dean of the College and the Senior Lecturer leading the development of the course attended a meeting of the RIBA New Courses and Course Changes Group on 2 March 2005 to discuss their plans for the course. They engaged the services of Ms Helena Webster of Oxford Brookes University to act as an adviser.

The development of the Architecture course is strongly supported by the University. It was internally validated by Nottingham Trent University on 15 June 2005. Two external members of the panel were architects. The Panel approved the course unconditionally.

During the visit the Board met Professor Gordon Kennedy, Dean of the College of Art and Design and the Built Environment, the Architecture Development Team and staff from related specialities (including technical staff) who will contribute to the delivery of the course.

6. **The course**

a. Outline and focus

The Board was satisfied that the course had the potential to satisfy all aspects of the criteria if it continued to be developed in the manner anticipated.

The Board appreciates that the course, although considerably advanced in planning, is still in a state of evolution and some elements have yet to be determined. This was taken fully into account in the Board's discussions with staff and its consideration of material.

The course is a three-year full time course leading to a Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) (B.Arch). It is founded on a year structure within a modular framework.

The course has been designed around five tenets: Design at the core (which is the central tenet); industry understanding; understanding of diverse communities and cultures; entrepreneurship; and sustainability. These were identified during extensive discussions within the Architecture Development Team and their external consultations, the aim of which was to design a distinctive course which was appropriate to the needs of the profession now and in the future.

The focus on industry understanding, diverse communities and cultures, and entrepreneurship are seen as the distinctive elements of the course. The University and its predecessors have enjoyed strong links with the diverse local community which it is keen to preserve and develop, in addition to the international opportunities provided by the significant proportion of staff and students who come from outside the UK. The School's Architectural Design and Global Difference (ADGD: a research group) will inform cultural diversity aspects of the programme.

Sustainability and building technology are intended to permeate all aspects of the course and not considered as separate elements.

Modules are being designed from scratch expressly for the architecture course. Some components of existing modules (for example, from interior architecture) will be used as appropriate, but there is no intention of incorporating complete modules from other programmes.

The Board was interested in the proposed approach to teaching history. This is not identified separately in the curriculum but integrated as 'Architecture in context'. Rather than taking the traditional linear approach they intend to explore the history and theory behind topical issues, to provide 'usable history'. The Board considers that this could be a very interesting approach and looks forward to seeing how it develops in practice. However, if these are not already allowed for in the detailed course descriptors, the Board would advise some linear markers to enable students to place movements and events chronologically.

b. Award titles

The School has chosen to call its first degree a Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (B.Arch (Hons)). Although not unknown at Part One, this title is most usually applied to a Part Two qualification. The School also proposes to offer a BA (Hons) Architecture, which will be a non-validated route, for students who decide, having embarked on the B.Arch, which they do not wish to gain a professional qualification. The title BA (Hons) Architecture is frequently applied to a RIBA-validated Part One qualification. Under University regulations it is also possible to be awarded a BA in Architecture without Honours. Although degree titles do not come within the RIBA's remit, we strongly recommend that the award title for the validated award is considered very carefully. We believe that there is too much scope for misunderstanding and confusion if the validated and non-validated architecture courses are given the titles as currently planned.

c. Assessment

At the time of the visit all modules were designated as 'core' and therefore no compensation would be permissible in line with the RIBA and ARB's policy. Assessment will be carried out through a combination of coursework, group presentations, written work, tests and small projects and portfolio review. Regular peer and staff review of work in progress will be carried out and formative feedback will be given.

d. Quality Assurance

The College and University run properly instituted and robust quality assurance systems.

e. Future plans

The course designers plan to develop a Part Two when appropriate.

7. Research

Nottingham Trent University has a strong research profile (four departments achieved a 5 grade in the 2001 RAE) and is ambitious for the future. One of the two Vice-Chancellors has specific responsibility for research.

In the 2001 RAE the College achieved one 5 grade and two 3a grades. At present they plan to submit research in both Art and Design and Architecture and the Built Environment in the 2008 RAE.

Research will inform teaching to a significant extent, for example through the ADGD and the Centre for Residential Development. Although the School and the University have high ambitions for research, it is not divorced from teaching and will not become so.

8. **Resources**

a. **Staff**

There are presently five architecturally-qualified staff on the Architecture Development Team.

College and University approval for two further FTE posts has been received. How this funding will be allocated in practice has yet to be determined. Decisions regarding further recruitment were awaiting the outcome of the University Validation Panel and the RIBA visit. Any appointments will be made during the 2005/2006 academic year and the successful applicants will be in post well before the start of the 2006 session.

Staff from other programmes within the School of the Built Environment will also contribute to teaching (civil and structural engineering, mechanical and environmental sciences; surveying, construction, property development and management) and other disciplines across the University such as business and law, psychology and so forth.

Teaching will also be supported by visiting lecturers and professionals. The staff:student ratio is projected at 1:22, starting at 1:16-1:17 and then growing in accordance with the anticipated rise in student numbers. The planned intake for 2006 is approximately 30-40, rising to 40 in 2007. The maximum cohort number, achieved over time, is anticipated to be around 60.

The Board considers that a ratio of 1:22 is on the high side.

b. **Studios, workshops and laboratories**

The closure or relocation of other courses has allowed for reallocation and refurbishment of existing resources.

The Architecture programme will be based in the Waverley Building in the University's City Campus. This was a purpose built (19th century, with 20th century extensions) School of Design which has undergone several refurbishments to ensure it is appropriate for modern usage. The precise allocation and nature of studio space within the Waverley building is still being debated. In addition to studio space, the building also houses (or will house, once refurbishment is complete) CAD labs, workshops (including a model workshop), seminar rooms, a technical library, resource centre and exhibition space. The computing facilities are due to be upgraded and the School is considering wireless provision.

Students will also use the extensive laboratory facilities of the nearby Maudslay Building, which are also undergoing remodelling. These include a materials lab, concrete lab, lighting lab, acoustic lab, fluids lab and rapid prototyping facilities.

c. **Library**

The City Campus is served by the Boots Library which is two minutes' walk from the Waverley Building.

The Library has recently been refurbished to provide more study rooms and 250 PC workstations. Laptops can also be used and it is possible to borrow them. The Library will offer 24 hour access from the start of the 2005/2006 academic session. There is a self-serve/self-return service.

A mapping exercise of books and journals has shown that the Library already owns significant architecture stock, with architectural technology, interior architecture and

construction and law forming the core of the collection. This has enabled them to identify remaining gaps in provision. A budget of £55K has been allocated to the Built Environment, of which a large proportion is earmarked for architecture. The Library has invested heavily in electronic media as the University offers a large number of distance-learning courses. There are extensive online resources, including databases which can be accessed off-campus. A named Liaison Librarian works closely with programme staff to ensure that the collection meets the School's needs.

9. **Students**

At present there are no students enrolled on the course. The Monitoring Visit in June 2007 will be the first opportunity to discuss the course with students and view the work of the first cohort at the end of its first year at the school.

10. **Documentation**

Prior to the Visit the School supplied all documentation produced for the Internal Validation process. This comprised:

1. Context document, comprising:
 - a. New Programme Statement
 - b. Introduction
 - c. Rationale, aims and market for the programme
 - d. Standards – programme outcome and level
 - e. Curriculum design and content
 - f. Teaching, learning and assessment
 - g. Assessment regulations
 - h. Admissions
 - i. Student support arrangements
 - j. Learning resources
 - k. Quality management
2. Programme and module specifications, including mapping against RIBA/ARB criteria.
3. Appendices including professional bodies' criteria, UK architectural education statistics, outcome of consultation exercises, SWOT analysis, staff profiles, QA proformas and details of SSRs and contact hours.

During the visit the School supplied:

4. Draft summary of the findings of the Nottingham Trent University internal Validation Panel of 15 June 2005
5. Programme learning outcomes mapped against programme aims.
6. Research activities of staff involved in the architecture course.
7. Widening participation statistics
8. University management structure diagrams.

The Board also viewed an exhibition of the final year work of Interior Architecture students.