

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to Oxford Brookes University**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 28 November 2007

**Department of Architecture
School of the Built Environment**

**BA (Hons) Architecture, Part One
Diploma in Architecture, Part Two
Part 3 Examination in Practice and
Management**

Date of Visiting Board: 27/28 September 2007

1. Information About the Courses

- 1.1 **Courses offered for revalidation:**
BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1
3 years FT or 5/6 years PT
Diploma in Architecture, Part 2
2 years FT or 3 / 4 years PT
Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management
24 months' practice.

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

Department of Architecture
School of the Built Environment
Oxford Brookes University
Headington
Oxford OX3 0BP
United Kingdom

T: + 44 (0) 1865 483200
F: + 44 (0) 1865 483298
W: www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/be/architecture

- 1.3 **Name of Awarding Body**
Oxford Brookes University

- 1.4 **Name of Head of School**
Professor Mark Swenarton

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

- 2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on

27/28 September 2007 were:

Alan Jones (Chair)
Derek Cottrell (Vice-Chair)
Stuart Barlow
Elantha Evans
Michael Foster
Paddy Conaghan (Non-Architect Member)
Dhruv Sookhoo (Graduate/Student Member)

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

Pamela Edwards (RIBA) attended the Board as an observer.

3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

- 3.1 The Visiting Board was carried out under the 'RIBA Procedures for the Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture,' published July 2003, effective from September 2003, 'Tomorrow's Architect,' published March 2003, effective from September 2003, and 'Description & Regulations for the recognition of courses, programmes and examinations in Professional Practice and Management, (Part 3) in the UK. For more information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 28 November 2007

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

BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1
3 years FT or 5/6 years PT

Diploma in Architecture, Part 2
2 years FT or 3 / 4 years PT

Part 3 Examination in Practice and Management Part 3; 24 months' practice.

4.2 The next Visiting Board will take place in 2011.

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

5.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA continue with their accreditation of the Part Two qualification.

5.2 The Visiting Board was satisfied that the Part One courses met the Construction Industry Council Common Learning Outcomes for Degree Courses in the Built Environment

5.3 The Visiting Board recommends to ARB that the Part 1 & 2 courses met all points of the EU Directive.

6. Criteria for Validation

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

7. Standards

7.1 On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined, the work from previous year of the courses listed in 4.1 was inspected during the visit and was found to meet the required standards.

8. Conditions of Validation

8.1 There were no conditions attached to the courses listed in 4.1.

9. Standard Requirements of Recognition

9.1 RIBA recognition of all courses/qualifications is dependent upon:

- i. external examiners being appointed for the course;
- ii. any significant changes to the courses and examinations being submitted to the RIBA;
- iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being reported to the RIBA so that, where appropriate, recognition may formally be transferred to the new title by the RIBA;

- iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses/qualifications listed in 4.

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

10.1 The Department of Architecture at Oxford Brookes University is a thriving school, attracting high-quality students and offering innovative and diverse programmes which benefit directly from its associated research institutes/centres. The Department is outward-looking, continuously seeking to develop and enhance its teaching and learning and build practice links.

10.2 The Department's strengths include:

- The support at senior management level
- Its enthusiastic and committed staff body.
- Very good physical resources, in which the Department has recently invested heavily
- The programmes' global outlook and understanding of extra-European issues.
- The various research institutes/centres in the School of the Built Environment whose activities directly influence both Part One and Part Two.
- The integrated masters' programmes which lend diversity and opportunity to Part Two students.
- The strong links with practice
- Its proximity to London which enables it to attract a wide range of tutors and lecturers

10.3 Recommendations

10.3.1 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA expects the Institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendations in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the Department and in the mid term review. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

10.3.2 The Board recommends that the complexity of the brief in the fifth year is increased organisationally, spatially and contextually and that assessment is clearly tied to the criteria.

10.3.3 At the threshold level in Part Two the consideration of materiality, construction and environmental design does not translate back into the architectural proposal. The Board recommends that this be improved.

10.4 Advice

10.4.1 The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards;

10.4.2 The Board believes that the students' route through the Part One course could potentially benefit from clearer guidance. The Board advises the Department that unit presentations and other advice could perhaps be more explicit.

10.4.3 At present, integration of technology at Part One appears to be fragmented and the Board advises the Department that more consistent evidence should be provided in

academic portfolios. The Board also advises more attention with regard to ensuring the impact of legislation is carried through into design.

- 10.4.4 At Part One, Design was not well communicated or executed at lowest pass level. The Board supports the External Examiners' views that it is important that the Department recognises the value of conventional 2D graphic presentation techniques. The Board advises the Department to guard against possible over-presentation of work at both Part One and Part Two.
- 10.4.5 At Part One, The Board advises and encourages the Department to consider more urban contexts, engaging with existing buildings.
- 10.4.6 At Part One, the Board advises the Department to monitor students' response to guidelines regarding the editing of portfolio work.
- 10.4.7 The Board advises that the Department encourages students to provide greater communication of understanding of scale and tectonic space.
- 10.4.8 At Part Two, the Board advises the Department that a greater level of clarity on groupwork assessments is desirable.
- 10.4.9 The Board encourages the Department to reintroduce the student subsidy for study tours visiting and studying built architecture. The Board was advised that budget constraints to address previous financial deficits had resulted in student subsidies being withdrawn. With a healthier financial situation now being presented to the

Board, the Department is encouraged to consider re-introducing the subsidy for students.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

The last Visiting Board to Oxford Brookes University took place in 2003.

Following discussions between the Department and the RIBA about the conclusions of the Visiting Board, it was agreed that the Part One and Part Two programmes and Part Three examination would be granted unconditional continued validation and the draft report would be annulled. This was confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee.

12. Details of the Conditions in Item 8.

- 12.1 There were no conditions attached to the courses listed in 4.1.

13. Commentary

- 13.1 **Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit**
The Critical Self-Appraisal was a very extensive, informative and detailed document which provided a useful basis for the Board's work. The Department is clearly open and responsive to comment and criticism, actively seeking the Visiting Board's advice on proposed developments.

The appointment of a new head in 2005 has invigorated the Department, clearly giving fresh leadership and

bringing improved financial management and better performance. This has brought stability following a period of financial cutbacks. This appointment was followed by the restructuring of departmental management, in particular the delegation of responsibility for specific areas to two deputy heads and a Director of Design. A major review of the department's activities, including resources, research, curricular content and delivery of all validated programmes has resulted in closer links with practice, the strengthening of links with research in the Part One programme, the review of all teaching of Practice and Management and considerable investment in IT and studio resources.

Architecture is performing well; recruitment, retention and diversity of students is improving. It is well-regarded and supported by senior university management and is fully integrated into the University's masterplan. There is a strong emphasis on reflection, taking criticism and improving, as the review of all aspects of the Department's activities demonstrates, as does its intention to continue to do so. The Department intends to strengthen its existing connections with practice and industry. Looking to the future, the impact on the programmes of proposed revision of the joint RIBA/ARB validation/prescription criteria is anticipated. The Department will also explore new ideas for developing research methods and investigative ways of design in the undergraduate school, with a view to improving the overall quality of student work.

The Department will make two new full-time academic appointments in 2007/ 2008, which will help to alleviate the current pressures on full-time staff. When engaging new staff, there is a presumption that they will be research

active, but will also make considerable contributions to teaching. The head of department wishes to create and maintain a 'virtuous circle' between research and teaching. The clarification of links between research and teaching is in keeping with the University's policy going into the next Research Assessment Exercise.

One highly significant development in this area since the last Visiting Board is the establishment of the 'Reinvention Centre', a CETL-funded project (Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) run in collaboration by the School of the Built Environment and the University of Warwick. Its aim is "to promote excellence across all subjects and aspects of teaching and learning in Higher Education".

13.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Board thanks the staff and students of the Department for their kind hospitality during the visit. The course documentation was extensive, clear and well-organised. All practical arrangements for the visit were excellent. The portfolios were clearly labelled; in some cases it was necessary to fetch additional work. The staff were willing to provide additional clarification of work and procedures whenever necessary.

13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

The Board considered the following portfolios from the 2006/2007 graduating cohorts:

BA (Hons) Architecture (Part One)

1st year: 3 lowest, 2 middle, 2 high portfolios from a cohort of 121.

2nd year: 3 lowest, 2 middle, 2 high portfolios from a cohort of 93.

3rd year: 2 lowest passes from each individual of the 6 units, 2 middle passes and 2 high passes (from a cohort of 75)

Diploma in Architecture, Part Two

5th year: 1 lowest from each unit (five units in all), 1 middle and 2 high passes, from a cohort of 81;
6th year: 2 lowest from each of the 7 special routes, 2 middle and 2 high passes, from a cohort of 57. All sixth year portfolios included the students' fifth year work.

Examination in Practice and Management, Part 3:

Sample of Examination Portfolios from December 2006 examination:
3 lowest, 2 middle and 2 high passes, from a cohort of 20 candidates presenting for examination.

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

Systems are in place to ensure that comments made by External Examiners are promptly acknowledged and acted upon. The Department shows itself as open to constructive criticism and the Board noted the reciprocity of trust between the staff of the Department and the external examiners. The External Examiners express great belief and commitment to the Department.

13.4 Context of the courses within the wider provision of the Department and Faculty.

The Department of Architecture forms part of the School of the Built Environment alongside the Department of Planning and the Department of Real Estate and

Construction. The School of the Built Environment also houses three research-led institutes/centres: the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development, the Joint Centre for Urban Design and the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP). The activities of these directly influence both Part One and Part Two programmes.

In addition to the RIBA-validated programmes, the Department of Architecture also offers BA (Hons) Interior Architecture, MA in Development and Emergency Practice (through CENDEP), MSc Energy Efficient and Sustainable Building, M.Arch Advanced Architectural Design, MA in International Architectural Regeneration and Development and MA (Urban Design). Oxford Brookes University also holds the franchise for the RIBA Office-Based Examinations at Part One and Part Two, which are validated separately.

13.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part One qualification

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The aims and objectives of the course are clearly articulated in the programme specifications and course handbook and are demonstrably being achieved. The clarity of the documentation was commended by the Board.

13.5.2 Course design and content
The BA (Hons) Architecture programme is well-designed for the context. The first year is a common year shared with Interior Architecture; after the first year, each programme assumes its separate identity.

In the second and third year, architecture students join vertical units of approximately 28-30 students. Each unit includes both second and third years, learning outcomes being tailored appropriately for each level and assessed accordingly. There are clear mechanisms for ensuring parity of standards and learning outcomes between units. From the 2007/2008 academic session, the number of units will increase from 6 to 8. Students make their choice of unit after a 15 minute presentation by unit staff and further discussions if required. They are usually awarded their first or second choice, although priority is given to third years. Each unit is supported by two design staff and three technology tutors (construction, structures and environmental design), either from the full time staff or the part-time visiting tutors. A series of exercises and shorter projects are intended to help students through the design process. Students are required to change units between second and third year.

The BA (Hons) Architecture programme may also be taken in part time mode over five or six years, although take-up of this option is relatively low at present. This is identical to the full-time programme in all aspects apart from length. Part-time and full-time students are taught together.

Students may also study abroad through the ERASMUS programme. There are clear procedures in place to ensure that students' work during this period complies with the RIBA/ARB criteria.

The Department has also embraced virtual teaching, via Brookes Virtual, providing excellent on-line tutorials.

The syllabus is very comprehensive and all subjects are properly covered by people who are experts in their field. The Board noted the critical mass of the Department which enables it to offer choice and diversity. The course is designed to take advantage of the research interests of the staff, giving students choice and providing them with a diverse and rich education.

However, the Board noted that this breadth of choice, whilst clearly being a strength of the course, may also be a potential problem. The Board noted that although the students attend 15 minute presentations of each unit before making a choice, some reported that there was a difference between their perception of what the unit would entail and the reality. However, it was noted that it is possible for students to change unit once they have started. The Board believes that the students' route through the course could potentially benefit from clearer guidance. The Board advises the Department that unit presentations and other advice could perhaps be more explicit.

In the third year, students write a dissertation of 8000 to 10000 words.

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

- *Design*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme were meeting all Part One Criteria in the area of Design.

The Board found that designs were tectonically well-resolved. There is an emphasis on the more creative side of design, using new forms, new ways of developing form and understanding innovative technologies and digital technologies. The Board found that work at the top end of the range of achievement was good.

The Board applauds the way the programme is written and delivered to achieve an integration of technology and design, but believed that in weaker schemes further integration should be encouraged and carefully monitored. At present, integration of technology appears to be fragmented and the Board advises the Department that more consistent evidence should be provided.

The Board believed it would be useful to provide a consistent definition of what is expected at the end of the project, so that students understand when a project is finished.

The Board concurred with the external examiners regarding plans, sections, 2D drawing conventions and scales. At lowest pass level design was not well communicated or executed, perhaps through a lack of understanding of convention or emphasis on achieving project closure.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme were meeting all Part One Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

The programme benefits from dedicated provision, being very strongly supported by research interests of staff. The

review of curricular content conducted after the appointment of the new head identified a need to increase provision for the teaching of construction in the studio. This was achieved through partnership with local practices.

As remarked under 'Design', the Board would like to see more consistent evidence of the integration of technology with design. The Board advises more attention with regard to ensuring the impact of legislation is carried through into design.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme were meeting all Part One Criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The cultural context modules were reviewed and revised in the recent curricular review. This is delivered in a very interesting way and the Board strongly applauded the School's policy of relating this closely to studio work and drawing on the well-established Masters courses. The Board was particularly taken with the issue-led thematic approach to the teaching of history, deliberately moving away from Eurocentrism.

The Board encourages the Department to develop this yet further, in order to reinforce what is already an asset.

However, the Board did consider that the city of Oxford itself provided an underutilised resource for the consideration of historical context. The Board advises and encourages the Department to consider more urban contexts, engaging with existing buildings.

The Board noted that one result of the financial restraint under which the School was operating in recent years was the discontinuation of the study tour subsidy. The Board also noted that the organisation of visits may be hampered also by administrative processes. The Board encourages the School to consider the reinstatement of the subsidy or explore other ways of visiting architecture.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme were meeting all Part One Criteria in the area of Communication.

The Board praised the students' communication skills, which demonstrate creativity and involve extensive use of colour and imagery.

Students display particular strength in the use of IT, especially digital media. The Board also saw some physical models and photographs of physical models in the portfolios. The Department has invested in a laser cutter and 3 D printer with dedicated technicians which widens the scope for models considerably.

The Board found that the emphasis on presentation and the energies that go into it sometimes deflects from the content. Students are able to present work in any medium, as they wish. The Board supports the School's endeavours to strengthen students' communication skills, and encourages them to recognise convention. There is a representation module in the first year which includes sections and elevations; however, the Board supports the External Examiners' views that it is important that the

School recognises the value of conventional 2D graphic presentation techniques.

Entry levels of students are diverse in terms of drawing skills. There is clear demand from students for more proactive support. The Department needs to ensure that, not only hard line drawing, but also the ability to sketch, is part of the design process.

There is a strong emphasis on writing skills, particularly in the third year dissertation. In discussion with the Board students also appeared to be articulate.

The Board identified some lack of judgment in the editing of portfolios. The Board considered that the students are given correct guidance but there is a tendency in weaker students to edit too much. The Board advises the Department to monitor this.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme were meeting all Part One Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law.

This is already a particular strength of the programme. From next year, this will be considered and assessed through the design project, thus integrating it further into the programme, as already happens in Part Two. The Board welcomes the new Practice and Management Co-ordinator's intention to review all aspects of management, practice and law.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience, (Part 1 only)*

Students are very well prepared for professional practice by the Preparation for Practice Module in Year 3. During their year out, students register with the School; this enables them to keep their library cards and other University privileges. The Department holds a seminar each December during which staff offer feedback on students' PEDR records. The Board was pleased to note that the Department was considering instituting office visits for year out students.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

The Board was pleased to note the improving progression rates and encourages the Department in its efforts to ensure that this upward trend continues.

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

Assessment at Part One is robust and well documented. All modules must be passed and there is no compensation. An appropriate range of assessment methods is used appropriate to the circumstances. There is clear guidance for the students. The full range of marks is used and the standard of achievement is high.

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

The Board applauds the Department's efforts to widen participation while at the same time raising the entry tariff. For 2007 entrants, the tariff has been raised to ABB at A level (or equivalent level in other qualifications) from BBB. The Department interviews selected applicants with portfolio, which allows them to adjust offers appropriately.

Procedures for the admission of students from other institutions into the second year of the course are appropriate. Although it is technically possible to enter an Oxford Brookes course in the third year, the architecture programme does not normally accept such students.

Although the programme may be taken part time, numbers are quite low. The overall intake target at part one is 100 per year.

The current staff student-ratio is 1:16.

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

13.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The course objectives were clearly articulated in the course documentation and demonstrably being achieved.

13.6.2 Course design and content

Course design and content is very good, particularly the links to Masters programmes and research.

The full-time Diploma course is taught over two years and is divided into two equal stages; the 'design and technology' stage and the 'research into design' stage. In the fifth year 'design and technology' stage students participate in one of five studios (increased to six in 2007/2008). Tutors present each studio at the beginning of the year and students may vote for three ranked preferences.

In the second stage (the sixth year) students enter a 'Special Route' in addition to the compulsory Specialist Design Studio. At the time of the visit, there were six

special routes all closely aligned with the research activities of the Department's specialist masters programmes. Students are introduced to the various routes at the beginning of the fifth year to enable them to start thinking about their eventual choice of Special Route. The aim of the Specialist Design studio is to amalgamate students' fifth year design work with their chosen Special Route. Students also take an option; this can be done at any time during the Diploma.

The Department wishes to offer a programme that helps students to meet their aspirations post Part Two. Students are therefore allowed to make their own choice of unit; however, the Department does try to identify any weak students in a unit as early as possible in order that remedial action may be taken.

The Diploma shares modules with seven Architecture-related Masters programmes. This presents possibilities for Diploma graduates to proceed to a Masters level award on completion of a dissertation. The Department believes that this integration of courses is one of its strengths, providing both a rounded education and the opportunity to specialise.

The Diploma may also be taken part-time over three or four years, or in mixed-mode (1 year full time and two years part-time). As at Part One, the part-time and full-time routes are identical and students are taught together. As at Part One, numbers of part-time students are presently low.

Accepting the structure of the programme, the Board considered that the studio briefs for the fifth year need to be clearer, particularly as regards complexity. The Board

recommends that the complexity of the briefs in the fifth year is increased organisationally, spatially and contextually and that assessment is clearly tied to the criteria. The Board also noted that it was not always explicit what was group and what was individual work.

As at Part One, mechanisms are in place for ensuring parity of standards and learning outcomes between units.

Students may also take part of their Diploma at an overseas School of Architecture. Arrangements exist with Virginia Tech Graduate School, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. Students may also study at European universities through the ERASMUS/SOCRATES programme.

The sixth year are asked to re-present, reconsider and re-design their fifth year work in one portfolio with their sixth year work. As at Part One, weaker students made some errors of judgement when editing the portfolio.

There was evidence of good teamwork and clarity between teamwork and the Department's collegiate ethos.

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

- Design

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the Diploma in Architecture programme were meeting all Part Two Criteria in the area of Design.

The Board noted that many projects are based in semi-rural conditions. Landscape is handled well. However, the

Board considered that students needed much stronger contexts in which to stretch their design skills.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the Diploma in Architecture programme were meeting all Part Two Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

The Board compliments the strong research base which underpin the programme, most notably the Special Routes which allow students to undertake in-depth specialist work. However, at the threshold level the consideration of materiality, construction and environmental design is not currently translating well into the architectural proposal. The Board recommends that this be improved.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the Diploma in Architecture programme were meeting all Part Two Criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

Environmental cultural context is very good, particularly with regard to the criteria which require an understanding of ‘The influences on the contemporary built environment of individual buildings, the design of cities, past and present societies and wider global issues’ and ‘The histories and theories of architecture and urban design, the history of ideas, and the related disciplines of art, cultural studies and landscape studies and its application in critical debate’. The Board considered that the interrelation of people, building and environment could be strengthened.

The Board believes that the Department’s particular strength lies in understanding extra-European issues.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the Diploma in Architecture programme were meeting all Part Two Criteria in the area of Communication.

At the middle and high end, students’ communication skills are exemplary. At the low end, while meeting the threshold standard, communication is barely adequate, especially in conventional 2D representation. The Board advises that the Department encourages students to provide greater communication of understanding of scale and tectonic space.

The Board also considered that there were similar issues of over-presentation in Diploma work as those identified at Part One.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirmed that the graduates of the Diploma in Architecture programme were meeting all Part Two Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law. From the present year this is now fully integrated into design. However, as at Part One, the Board recommends that the emphasis the Department rightly puts on the implementation of legislation should be consistently demonstrated in design work.

13.6.4 Progression within the course

Progression rates are improving and the number of distinctions is rising. The Department believes that

difficulties in student progression at Diploma level may be related to the fact that many are in paid employment and sometimes require more time to complete work. The Board noted that there is an opportunity for students to undertake work over the summer in preparation for the November exam board.

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

A wide range of assessment methods are employed appropriate to the task. Assessment is comprehensive and thorough. The weightings are appropriate and the staff clearly engage with the external examiners. The pass mark in the fifth year is 40% at honours level and the pass mark in sixth year is 50%, at masters level, to allow for integration with Masters programmes.

The Board advises the Department that a greater level of clarity on groupwork assessments is desirable.

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

Applicants are usually required to hold an Upper Second (2.1) Part One architecture qualification and normally must attend interview before being offered a place. Oxford Brookes Part One graduates are automatically offered a place on the Diploma if they have achieved an Upper Second (2.1) or above in the Part One architecture qualification and taken the Placement Year. Admissions to Part Two are growing steadily, including an increasing number of Oxford Brookes Part One graduates choosing to take Part Two at the School.

There are clear procedures in place under the University's Credit Accumulation and Transfer Guidelines for admission at a later stage of the programme.

The Department has recently, in collaboration with two practices, piloted a bursary scheme for Part Two students. Under this scheme, a practice sponsors one or more students through the Year Out and Diploma, following which the student undertakes to work for its sponsor practice for at least two years. The Department intends to extend the scheme from next year.

The present target intake is 75 students per year.

13.7 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Three Qualification**

On the basis of the sample of candidates' work provided, the Board confirmed that all candidates passing the Examination in Practice and Management had met all the Part Three criteria.

There is no formal taught course attached to the Examination. The Department provides intensive seminars in spring (two days) and autumn (three days) and a summer case study 'clinic' which are well structured. These are appreciated by the candidates who commented that they provided a positive experience. Numbers of candidates are small but the pass rate is high.

The new Practice & Management co-ordinator, responsible for Management, Practice and Law in all validated courses is also the Part Three programme leader. Although the Part Three is effective in its present form, it

will be reviewed by the Department in 2007/2008 with a view to attracting more candidates.

The Board believes that this particular form of examination suits the needs of certain candidates and supports the Programme Leader's ambition to visit all candidates in practice.

Although it is not a taught course, the Board believed that such intensive delivery would suggest internal systems for quality and appeals should be appropriate and was pleased to learn that this was conducted according to Oxford Brookes University's Quality Assurance procedures.

13.8 External examining arrangements

The Board met External Examiners for Parts One, Two and Three. External examining arrangements are appropriate, with clear systems for reporting and feedback. The Examiners also welcome the policy of seeing all third and sixth year graduating students and also those who fail. Re-sits for Part 1 and Part 2 are now handled through the chair's action procedure in the summer – a procedure agreed to by the External Examiners. If the examination board agrees that any student is not close to passing they are required to re-take the Module in the following year.

There appears to be an excellent rapport between the Department and the External Examiners; the Department clearly heeds the examiners' advice and takes action where appropriate.

- The External Examiners expressed every confidence in the Department of Architecture, both as regards standards of achievement, sound threshold standards and

procedures that ensure those standards are applied. These procedures have been tightened over the years.

- There is a thoroughness throughout the Department in dealing with quality assurance matters and a willingness to continue to improve processes. Externals were pleased to note that progression rates were improving.
- One marked change in the Department is the high design and creative pulse, setting up new units in consultation with practice and other tutors. The approach to education is liberal and helps each student to develop himself or herself as a designer. The Externals are confident that the Department takes the need to balance creativity and core elements into consideration, without it becoming a box-ticking exercise, but also believed that a more conceptual strategic level of thinking is desirable.
- The unit system, and the requirement to change units between years, provides richness and diversity for students. The division of units into components of varying lengths allows students to experience different teaching methods and systems. The Externals believed that the students are able to navigate through the system easily. In discussions with the Examiners they prove that they have understood clearly the aim and focus of a particular unit.
- The programme structures and diversity provide thoroughness and the opportunity to create a level of individuality. Units also provide continuity to the Department and give students a language.
- Most units are well-structured, providing an appropriate balance. The third and sixth years are intended to be the culmination of the previous years' learning. It is not possible for students to 'cherry pick' themes in order to avoid areas in which they were less interested; any deficiency is identified and addressed.

- Briefs are very good and allow good students to fly, but there needs to be a safety-net for the weaker students. At Part Two, the Externals believed it would be advisable to introduce ways of identify weaker areas which need to be worked on.
- Although the Externals were able to interrogate apparent deficiencies in students' portfolios and satisfy themselves that all criteria had been covered, they did agree that errors of judgment were sometimes made in editing the portfolios. The inclusion of developmental work and plans would be welcome. On the whole, however, the quality and concision of information had improved.
- Developments in management, practice and law, introducing written papers based on students' own studio project work and which are then related specifically to design work at Part Two, have been very interesting and provide good preparation for practice.
- The Department has taken positive steps to ensure that technology is an integral part of the design process,
- The Part Three has emerged from a difficult period and is now a straightforward, effective and thorough operation, with a high pass rate.
- The Externals did not believe that drawing skills were weak and considered that the graphic skills in the third year were very impressive. They wondered if some apparent problems were caused by the plethora of software that had emerged in recent years.

13.9 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

Professional experience is monitored by PEDR and discussion sessions at the recall seminars. At present there are no office visits, although the Practice Management Co-ordinator wishes to implement this.

13.10 **Students;**

The Board was pleased to meet representatives of all years of all programmes, including 'year out' students and recent graduates, in a wide-ranging, articulate and candid discussion. The students were enthusiastic and greatly supportive of the Department and in particular its staff. The students play an active and proactive role in the Department.

Among the Department's strengths the students cited:

- The thriving studio culture and atmosphere, improved tremendously by the new collaborative studios. There is now a great mix of students in all years of the validated programmes and the Masters students.
- Students praised the high quality of the staff and their commitment to the students. Staff are approachable and accessible, either in person or by email.
- The mix of permanent and non-permanent staff.
- The diversity of the programmes, which are well-balanced between art and science.
- Students appreciated the opportunity to challenge themselves, at Part One and Part Two, by choosing units in areas with which they are unfamiliar, with view to their future career or pursue a long term interest. Students at Part Two are encouraged to choose a studio to contrast what they have studied at Part One. There is an added dimension at Part Two brought by the connections with the Masters courses.
- The opportunity to do a wide-range of options such as psychology and photography.

- Specialisation in the sixth year offers depth. The major design project allows students the opportunity to specialise and create a new identity for the project they had begun in the fifth year.
- All units have core elements and are therefore comprehensive, regardless of the theme. Making the choice could, ironically, be frustrating.
- Broader skills are very well taught at Part One and Part Two. Management, practice and law has been changed and improved.
- The emphasis on practice and the links with practices of many varieties. Students had benefited directly from the office partnering system, for example in technical tutorials.
- Visits and tutorials from practising architects bring an additional dimension to the courses
- Very good preparation for working in practice, at all levels. The format of the Part Three examination appeals to candidates.
- The extensive use of WebCT(now Brookes Virtual), such as the online tutorials.
- Oxford is a great city for students in itself, and its proximity to London is also a benefit.
- The number, quality and range of guest lectures, organised chiefly by staff but also by students, thanks to the reinigorated student society.
- Some students would appreciate more direction in time management, perhaps by imposing more staged deadlines. The Board agreed with the students that that this might help with greater resolution of designs.
- The timetable might be better co-ordinated so that specialist support, such as in technology, is provided at the optimum time.
- The students would welcome the opportunity to go on more study tours, which at present appear to be difficult to organise. The students believe this is hampered by the University procedures.
- Students appreciate the great amount of effort put into IT development and support by the existing staff, but thought that they would benefit from more specialist IT support..
- Open crit days might be better used as a vehicle for seeing the work of all other studios. Access to other students' work has already been improved greatly following the implementation of the collaborative studios, but students would like to have even more opportunity to see others' work.
- Some students would appreciate more formal teaching of drawing skills, in addition to the representation module, as they have not necessarily acquired these before coming to university.

Improvements the students would welcome included the following:

- Some would welcome more detailed unit presentations to give a better idea of how units are run and what they involve; perhaps workshops would help.

13.11 **Staff;**

At the time of the visit there were 36 fulltime equivalent staff in the department. Full time, part time and support staff were all well-represented in the staff meeting. The Department values greatly the contribution made by its part-time and hourly paid tutors, many of whom are also in practice. The organisation of both full and part time staff appears to be well-managed, and part-timers in

particular praised the Department's administrative support in this respect.

The Board found that the staff were extremely conscientious, enthusiastic and well-motivated. These qualities were acknowledged and appreciated by the students. There is collegiate approach and an open, collaborative and co-operative staff ethos. Strength also lies in the fact that staff teach across Part One and Part Two.

Despite the staff:student ratio (1:16 is appropriate) and the Department's sophisticated workload planning model, which allocates roughly a third of each staff member's time to research, teaching and administrative duties, staff have felt overstretched and this has also been perceived by the students. Possible reasons for this, as identified by the Department, included the change to semesterisation and the loss of a unit tutor shortly before the beginning of the last academic session. This necessitated some reorganisation and funds were reallocated to bring in extra staff to help.

The Department has identified a need for growth in the number of full-time staff members to accommodate larger student cohorts. Several significant appointments have already been made in the areas of Practice & Management, Humanitarian and Development Practice and Sustainable Design. All are involved in studio teaching. Two further new appointments are to be made in 2008. One will play a major role in general support for the undergraduate programme and teach a design studio. Before recruiting for the second post the Department will consider where additional expertise is most needed.

The staff believed that some of the students' comments regarding technical support may be historical as replacements have now been brought in. Staff anticipate the pressure points in the programme and try to bring in specialists from related disciplines at appropriate times.

Staff praised the induction system programme offered by the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development and the many other opportunities for staff to improve their teaching skills. All staff employed on a 0.5 or greater contract, with less than five years teaching experience, must obtain the Postgraduate Teaching Certificate in Learning and Teaching. There is a mentoring system for design studio, in which experienced tutors mentor new tutors. It is also possible to apply to take sabbaticals.

13.12 Research

Research activity in the School of the Built Environment, and income generated from research and consultancy, has grown considerably since the last visit in 2003. As stated earlier, the School of the Built Environment also houses three research-led institutes/centres: the Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development, the Joint Centre for Urban Design and the Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP).

At the last RAE in 2001 the School achieved a grading of 4, and aims to achieve at least the equivalent if not better in 2008. Of the staff included in the School's anticipated 2008 submission, between a quarter and a third are from the Department of Architecture. Research in the Department of Architecture is overseen by the department's research co-ordinator.

The Department believes that the impact of research on the courses is a major defining characteristic of the Department. The Board agreed that the direct involvement of specialists in the undergraduate programmes and the integrated Masters courses at Part Two are a particular area of strength. When new appointments are made it is presumed that the postholder will be both research active and involved in teaching. The Department is working towards a model staff profile in which all staff are engaged in both teaching and research.

13.13 **Equal Opportunities:**

Even though the student body describes itself as chiefly white, there were between 20%-30% non-white students on the architecture programmes in 2006/7. The gender balance is satisfactory and there is an increasing number of mature students. The School and University operate clear Equal Opportunities policies. Appropriate efforts are made to ensure that policies are implemented. Admissions policies give the Department the discretion and flexibility to encourage student from non-traditional backgrounds. The School buildings appear to meet legislative requirements under the DDA.

13.14 **Resourcing and facilities;** Comments regarding general accommodation, studios, workshops, library, Information Technology (IT) etc.

The School is currently in a healthy financial state having emerged successfully from a period of difficulty. In 2006-7 the School decided to invest in improving the accommodation for architecture, most significantly with the big new studio. The School is able to use any surplus flexibly, directing funds where it decides they are most needed.

- *Studios*

Studio provision is very good, having been recently refurbished and upgraded, creating the so-called 'collaborative studio'. The Department has worked towards a more intensive and efficient use of less, but higher quality space. Investment in the studios was intended both to improve their quality and to make better, more versatile use of them. The first year studio has been brought back into the main building and Part One and Part Two students share studio space which is accessible 24 hours a day. The innovative studio environment has been instrumental in reinvigorating the studio culture.

- *Library*

The main architecture collection is housed in the Gipsy Lane campus adjacent to the School. This comprises approximately 16000 books and 1400 relevant journals, the latter increasingly available in electronic format. Architecture students also benefit from extensive collections in related areas such as construction, real estate management, art, planning, engineering, business management, law and so forth.

The print collection is complemented by a large collection of electronic sources of information including databases and catalogues. Most of these can be accessed off-campus. There is also an extensive slide collection of over 140000 slides, 37000 of which represent architecture, CD-roms and architectural videos. Also housed in the Library is the book and journal collection of the Oxfordshire Society of Architects which may be consulted for research purposes. Short-loan arrangements are in place for items in heavy demand and students also have access to interlibrary-loan facilities and may use other University libraries in Oxford.

The School of the Built Environment benefits from two attentive, experienced Subject Librarians, one responsible for Architecture, Real Estate Management, Construction and Civil Engineering and the other for Planning. Acquisition policies appear to be flexible. As part of their induction students are offered a library tour, and further guidance on research methods is offered later to help students prepare for dissertations and major studies.

The Library is open until 22.00 in semester time and from 10.00 to 16.00 at weekends. There is generous provision of study space.

The School of the Built Environment has its own dedicated Resource Centre, housing architecture-related equipment, indexes journals, brochures and previous students' dissertations.

- Workshop.

Workshop provision is extensive, providing space for a wide-range of hand tools and larger tools, including a 2D laser cutter. The workshop is managed by a technical tutor. Staff and students undergo compulsory induction sessions before being permitted to use the workshop.

The Department plans to establish a metal workshop in the Technology lab, which will also be managed by an experienced technician. It is anticipated that this will be realised in the first half of the 2007/2008 academic session.

- IT

The Board was impressed by the extensive IT provision and commends the efforts made to develop online

tutorials. Within the Department there are two open-access studios in which there are over 50 PCs providing 2D and 3D CAD software. These are available 24 hours a day and open to students and staff.

The Board was pleased to hear of the recent appointment of a second computer technician, which should address student concerns about computer support. The Department undertakes an annual review of software and tries to provide software that is being used by industry and also innovative software and also responds to requests for new software from staff and students. Students are encouraged to combine media.

The Department makes extensive use of I WebCT (now Brookes Virtual), which students can access School or from home. This provides access to lecture notes, assignments, assignment submissions, marks and feedback, bulletins, competition entries, video tutorials, software tutorials and anonymous discussion groups. Lecture notes and 'screen grabs' are uploaded before lectures so that they are immediately available afterwards. The majority of students have their own laptops. There is a dedicated Architecture print room adjacent to the studios which is staffed by a technician and open during normal working hours. Opening hours are extended during peak exam periods. There are two large format colour copiers on which students may print. They may also have worked copied or enlarged on an A0 plan copier. There is also a 3D printer. Students may also borrow, for short periods, a selection of photographic equipment including SLR cameras, digital cameras and lenses. There is also a Departmental dark room.

14. Documentation Provided

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

Prior to the visit the Department provided:

Critical Self-Appraisal
 Supplementary information and questionnaire
 BA (Hons) Architecture Student Handbook 2006/2007
 Diploma in Architecture Student Handbook 2006/2007
 Guide to the Part Three Examination in Practice and Management, 2007
 External Examiners' Reports and Department's Responses 2003-2007 (Parts One and Two)
 External Examiners' Reports, Part Three, 2004-2007
 External Examiners' CVs

During the Visit the School provided:

BA (Hons) module handbooks 2006-2007
 Diploma module handbooks 2006-2007
 BA and Diploma design studio briefs 2006/7
 BA (Hons) Student handbook 2007/2008
 Diploma in Architecture student handbook 2007/8
 Placement year student guide 2007/8
 Staff CVs
 Oxford Brookes University Undergraduate Modular Programme Handbook and Regulations September 2006
 Public lecture series brochures 2007/8
 International Pre-arrival Guide 2007/8
 Postgraduate programme 2007. Enrolment and induction instructions for international students.
 Modular programme enrolment and induction instructions 2007

Modular programme enrolment and induction instructions 2007 for international students
 Undergraduate prospectus 2007
 Undergraduate prospectus 2008
 Postgraduate prospectus 2007
 Postgraduate prospectus 2008
 BA (Hons) Interior Architecture – design and practice 2006/2007
 CENDEP Student Handbook
 - MA in Humanitarian and Development Practice 2006/7
 - PG Dip in Humanitarian and Development Practice 2006/7
 - PG Certificate in Humanitarian and Development Practice 2006/2007
 Student Handbook MSc/PG Dip in Energy Efficient and Sustainable Building 2006/2007
 Master of Architecture (M.Arch) handbook 2006/2007
 Student Handbook MA/PG Diploma/PG Certificate in International Architecture Regeneration and Development 2006/2007
 Joint Centre for Urban Design – Department of Architecture and Planning, School of the Built Environment Linked PG Cert/Dip/MA in Urban Design Student Handbook 2006/7.
 Assessment Policy Revised 2007
 Postgraduate Procedures Handbook 2007/8
 Student module feedback scheme
 School of Built Environment Equal Opportunity and Diversity Guidelines for Curriculum Design and Development.

Individual module handbooks were provided with the portfolios.