

RIBA 

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to the Queen's University Belfast**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 4 June 2008

**School of Planning, Architecture and Civil
Engineering**

**Bachelor of Science (Architecture) with
Honours, Part One**

**Bachelor of Architecture, Part Two
Certificate in Professional Practice &
Practical Experience, Part Three**

Date of Visiting Board: 6/7 December 2007

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

Bachelor of Science (Architecture) with Honours, 3 years full-time, Part One

Bachelor of Architecture, 2 years full-time, Part Two

Certificate in Professional Practice & Practical Experience, part-time, Part Three

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses were delivered at the time of the Visit

School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering

Queen's University Belfast

2, Lennoxvale

Belfast

Northern Ireland

T: 028 9097 4198

F: 028 9068 2475

W: www.qub.ac.uk

1.2 Name of Awarding Body

Queen's University, Belfast

1.2 Name of Head of School

Professor David Cleland

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 6/7 December 2007 were:

Derek Cottrell – (Chair) – Academic

David McLean – (Vice Chair) – Academic

Angie Pascoe – Practitioner

Ian McInnes – Practitioner

Negar Mihanyar – Student Member

Norman Hutchinson, RSUA Representative

The co-professional member was unable to attend at short notice due to other professional commitments. This did not affect the quoracy of the Board but permission to continue was sought and obtained from the Head of School and the Chair of the Validation Committee.

One architect member was obliged to leave the Board on the second day for personal reasons. This in itself did not affect the quoracy of the Board. The Board continued with the permission of the Head of School.

One architect member had temporarily to absent himself on the second day due to other professional commitments. The Board continued with the permission of the Head of School.

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

David Gloster (RIBA Director of Education) attended the Board as an observer.

3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

3.1 The Visiting Board 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

- 4.1 At its meeting on 4 June 2008 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed **Continued Validation** of;
- Bachelor of Science (Architecture) with Honours, 3 years full-time, Part One
 Bachelor of Architecture, 2 years full-time, Part Two
 Certificate in Professional Practice & Practical Experience, part-time, Part Three

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 visit took place at a time of significant ongoing changes in the architecture department, the School (hereafter referred to as SPACE, the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering) and university as a whole, which present both serious challenges and great opportunities to build on the department's existing strengths.

The School and University clearly recognise the challenges SPACE is facing. The Board welcomed SPACE's willingness to discuss this frankly. The Board applauds the appointment of the Honorary Professor of Architecture. The Board commends the clear brief he has been given by University senior management to review all of SPACE's activities and make recommendations to the University, supported by a Project Implementation Team. As communicated to the Board, this brief will address leadership, a brand and vision for Architecture, staffing and other areas. The Board believes that this presents a unique opportunity for Architecture to rebrand, crystallise its aspirations and capitalise on its unique selling points. The brief is highly ambitious both in terms of scope and timescale, as the Board understands that its findings are to be delivered in summer 2008. When the report is ready, the Board would welcome indications of SPACE's anticipated timetable for the implementation of any proposed actions.

10.2 Among the Department's strengths are:

- The commendable achievements of the architecture staff and students given the difficult circumstances in which they are working. There is evidence of good work which confirms that staff and students are upholding standards and meeting the criteria in spite of the present challenges.
- Attracting highly qualified and enthusiastic students and consistently producing employable graduates who are valued by the profession.
- The staff's loyalty to the Architecture department

- Its aspiration to be a world-class school serving the local and regional profession, with which it already enjoys impressive links.
- The Board applauds the cross-disciplinary opportunities provided by the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering and hopes that architecture is able fully to exploit the potential of this.
- The good gender balance among students. The Board applauds SPACE's intention to internationalise.
- The commendable quality of the written work, particularly at Part Two.

10.3 Recommendations

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

10.3.1 The Board recommends that the mid-term visit take place next summer (2008) in order to be able to discuss with the Honorary Professor of Architecture the outcome of his review of the school and discipline management.

10.3.2 The Board recommends that the School address urgently the question of the long-term leadership of the discipline, particularly as it impacts on curricular management and the research strategy, in particular to ensure continuity beyond the temporary stewardship provided by the Honorary Professor of Architecture.

10.3.3 The Board strongly recommends that SPACE review the effectiveness of its next round of recruitment and from that develop a strategy to ensure within the next year a full

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- complement of permanent staff which reflects both academic and equality and diversity objectives.
- 10.3.4 The Board strongly recommends that the recruitment strategy also include succession planning to accommodate anticipated staff turnover in the short to medium term.
- 10.3.5 The Board recommends that SPACE review induction procedures for new staff and part time staff.
- 10.3.6 The Board applauds the School's efforts to ensure that there are staff in SPACE able to benchmark work against acknowledged national and international standards and recommends that SPACE develop this aspect of their activity.
- 10.3.7 The Board strongly recommends that SPACE review the adequacy of administration staffing levels. This was raised as a concern by both academic and administrative staff during the staff meeting.
- 10.3.8 The Board recommends that Architecture develop an effective means of establishing and evidencing a greater depth of critical discourse in design process and production throughout the curriculum.
- 10.3.9 The Board recommends that the School urgently review the workshop provision and consider resourcing further extended opening hours.
- 10.3.10 The Board recommends that SPACE provide appropriate workshop induction training for students to enable them to make better use of facilities.
- 10.4 Advice
The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements,
- 10.4.1 Following discussion at the student meeting, the Board advises SPACE to review its provision of pastoral care for students and the information provided to students on the recourse available for dissatisfied students.
- 10.4.2 The Board noted that the University was reviewing the admission policy with regard to widening participation. The Board advises that SPACE could give consideration for support for incoming students lacking drawing skills but who meet academic criteria for entry. This issue was also raised in the Students' Critical Self-Appraisal.
- 10.4.3 The Board also advises that SPACE produce a programme for connecting 3D production to 2D software (including links with CAD CNC) and provides a written strategy for the imminent and ongoing implementation and development of this.
- 11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports**
- 11.1 The last RIBA Visiting Board to Queen's University Belfast took place on 23/24 October 2003;
- The Visiting Board recommended Continued Validation of:
- Part One: The Queen's University of Belfast, Degree of Bachelor of Science (Architecture) with Honours, 3 years full-time.
Part Two: The Queens University of Belfast, Degree of Bachelor of Architecture, 2 years full-time
Part Three: The Queens University of Belfast Certificate in Professional Practice & Practical Experience, part-time
- 11.2 The 2003 Visiting Board commented:

“Queen's University Belfast has offered programmes in architecture since 1965. The School's courses continue to evolve to meet its aspiration of producing professional, balanced and competent graduates who can create innovative and socially responsive architecture. The new Head of School has the ability to provide excellent leadership as the School continues to adapt to its changing external environment.

“The School had responded appropriately to the issues raised by the previous Visiting Board, by External Examiners and by the University's Subject Review. It also has an impressive culture of seeking and responding to student feedback.

“Amongst the strengths of the School are:

- The excellent staff-student relationships across the whole School
- The 24 hour access to studios and the good studio culture that results
- The well established relationships with local practitioners
- The excellent employment track records of graduates
- Excellent Management, Practice and Law teaching at both Part One and Part Two levels
- The well-structured and rigorous Part Three programme
- The high calibre of students recruited to the School
- The School's strong commitment to teaching reinforced by the establishment of its Learning & Teaching Committee to investigate new approaches.”

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 Board would like to thank the University, School and Architecture department for their openness in discussing the challenges currently faced by architecture.

The Self-appraisal was informative and very honest. However it tended to be more descriptive rather than critical. The students had contributed their own appendix which the Board found particularly helpful.

Since the last Visiting Board a major restructuring had taken place within the University, resulting in a smaller number of larger schools combining cognate disciplines within three new faculties. This took place chiefly in order to increase the level and quality of research. A new Academic Plan (435i) has been established, by means of which the University intends to increase the average entry tariff at undergraduate level to 400 UCAS points, increase the proportion of postgraduate students to 30% and raise non-government income by 5% over the next five years and grow its international standing.

Architecture is now part of the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering (SPACE) within the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Science. Each discipline is now led by a Director of Education. The University acknowledged that Architecture is currently facing significant resourcing problems in terms of space, equipment and staff. However, the Board was assured by University senior management that Architecture remained a fundamental component of SPACE and that the University was committed to the discipline, investing in its future, providing an appropriate level of resourcing and raising its profile at Queen's. The University told the Board that it believes that architecture has a key role to play in achieving the Academic Plan, given the high level of demand for places from well-qualified students.

The University is investing heavily in new teaching facilities through the refurbishment of the nearby Keir Building, with the intention of providing better and more appropriate accommodation for architecture, thus enhancing the student experience. At the time of the visit it was anticipated that it would be ready in Spring 2008.

SPACE has appointed a well-known local architect as Honorary Professor of Architecture on a part-time basis in order to provide leadership. This appointment is in addition to the other posts currently being advertised. At the time of the visit he was new in post and the Board was pleased to have the opportunity to meet him and discuss his remit in detail. The broad scope of this is to consider all aspects of architecture's activities, including branding, recruitment, engagement with the profession, structure and teaching and research.

The Board believes that there is institutional support for architecture but identified significant issues with curriculum management, leadership and staffing which it would like to see addressed as soon as possible. The Board believed that staff involved in the architecture programme are ensuring that all areas of the curriculum are covered effectively; however the Board considered the current resourcing situation was untenable for the longer term and that this must be addressed by the higher levels of management.

Although all criteria were met at all stages, the Board believed that the curricula need better management and co-ordination. There is an absence of overall course leadership and a lack of coherence in the approach to teaching learning and assessment in the Architecture discipline. The quality of students' work lacked consistency and there did not appear to be a concerted agreed effort across the whole department in terms of assessment strategy, teaching and learning

strategy and the induction of new staff. The Board believes that Architecture at Queen's has a great opportunity at this time to rebrand itself and hopes it takes full advantage of the current review, the move to new premises and the opportunities for recruitment to achieve this.

13.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Board would like to thank SPACE for its hospitality during the visit. The Board is particularly grateful to the Institutional Facilitator for her invaluable contribution to the proceedings. The documentation was good and received in a timely manner. Full academic portfolios were provided. All practical arrangements for the visit worked well.

13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

The School provided the following from the 2006/2007 graduating cohorts:

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part One; Year One: 3 lowest pass portfolios, 2 middle, and 2 high portfolios from a cohort of 72.

Year Two: 3 lowest pass portfolios, 2 middle, and 2 high portfolios from a cohort of 62.

Year Three: 3 lowest pass portfolios, 2 middle, and 2 high portfolios from a cohort of 59 graduates.

B.Arch, Part Two; Year Five: 3 lowest pass portfolios, 2 middle, and 2 high portfolios from a cohort of 19.

Year Six 3 lowest pass portfolios, 2 middle, and 2 high portfolios from a cohort of 23.

Certificate in Professional Practice and Practical

Management, Part Three: 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes, 2 high passes from a cohort of 26.

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

The 2003 Visiting Board, while confident that threshold standards were appropriate, considered that there was need for vigilance with regard to over-marking at the upper end of the marking range. In discussion with the Board in 2007, the staff remarked that they had not identified this as an issue, but nevertheless in 2004 a graduated marking scheme with defined thresholds had been adopted for both Parts One and Two.

The 2003 Board also cautioned against compartmentalisation in Part One, which was perhaps a result of the University's modular framework. Since 2006 marks from the first semester remain unconfirmed until the examination board in June and are only confirmed in the context of the broad overall performance of the student across the whole year. Architecture believes that this procedure 'provides the opportunity, particularly for studio work, to take the developmental nature of the complete academic year into account'. Imminent changes to the module system will also allow for modules to represent a full semester's design work.

Although steps were taken to make the workshop accessible to students following the 2003 Board, the 2007 Board found that access was still limited due to resourcing and health and safety considerations. It is anticipated that the new facilities will mark an improvement.

The 2003 Board recommended that the School 'exploit the opportunities offered by the appointment of a new head to refocus vision with new staff support.' The new Professor of Architecture at the time of the 2003 visit is no longer with the University. University senior management recognises the need for leadership and vision, hence its appointment of the Honorary Professor of Architecture and the current review.

There are clear formal mechanisms for responding to External Examiners' reports and the Examiners themselves confirmed that their advice was heeded.

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

Architecture's new position in the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering (SPACE) provides a wealth of opportunities for cross-collaboration, the benefits of which have yet to be fully exploited. In addition to programmes in Planning and Civil Engineering the School also offers an M.Eng in Structural Engineering with Architecture, and an MSc in Construction and Project Management. The three research centres within the School also offer a variety of taught and research postgraduate degrees, the number of which it plans to increase.

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

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The Board considered that the Part One course did meet the Part One criteria and that the course objectives were well designed for the context. However there is a need for more coherent curriculum management, hence the Board's earlier recommendations.

13.5.2 Course design and content
The course is year-based within a modular framework and is well designed to produce competent graduates for the profession. The Board considered that the variety and number of design exercises was large, leading to a heavy workload. The Board advises SPACE to maintain an overview of the course in terms of project workload, allowing time for student reflection on learning and ensuring that workload intensity is maintained at a manageable and

adequate level. The Board believes that the first year would benefit from a review of best practice across the sector in the light of contemporary students' needs.

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 confirms that all graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme met all Part One criteria in the area of Design. The staff have been making active attempts to ensure that theoretical work is integrated into studio work. However, the Board recommends that architecture develop a more effective means of establishing and evidencing a greater depth of critical discourse throughout the curriculum in design process and production.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme met all Part One criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

The Board found that this aspect of the course was well handled. The Board considered that it was particularly well integrated into the second year projects, the pavilion project being very strong. Technology and environment appraisals were well documented in the technical reports.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme met all Part One criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The Board found that cultural context was well integrated into design work. Students produce a considerable number of precedent studies and there were some good examples of historic buildings. The urban context is covered well. The Board considered that the students' measured drawings were particularly good.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme met all Part One criteria in the area of Communication.

Students displayed a wide variety of communication skills. Written work was particularly strong. The Board considered that sketching skills could be developed further. The Board noted that students tried to keep models relatively simple because of the costs involved and the problems with access to the workshops. Students reported that this allowed them to make models in the studios where there is more space.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme met all Part One criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law.

Coverage of Management, Practice and Law throughout Architecture is good. However, the Board considered that there was less coverage in the Stage 3 than might be expected and believed this is an area which Architecture could usefully develop.

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

The chief vehicle for this is the Professional Skills lecture programme in the third year. This introduces the students to the concept of practice-based learning and what they can

expect in practice. Students must enrol with the University on their 'year out' and practices must confirm that they are receiving bone fide supervised experience. Students attend University recall days during their time in practice. In addition to the formal recall days the PSA is able to visit cohorts of graduates in London and Dublin.

As stated earlier, one person is now responsible for this area of activity. Although the Board had every confidence in the postholder, the administrative burden of delivering lectures, signing off PEDR and visiting students in practices is considerable. Students mentioned communication difficulties between them and Architecture and that there had been some difficulty in having PEDR sheets signed off. They would have appreciated more information about the year in practice and associated events.

13.5.4 Progression within the course
SPACE has identified relatively high attrition rates in Part One. Those who do leave architecture are not lost to higher education but transfer to other disciplines in the University. SPACE believes one reason for this may be the nature of careers advice and a lack of understanding of the true character of architecture courses and has taken steps to address this (see paragraph 13.5.6, Admissions).

13.5.5 Assessment:
The Board considered that documented assessment processes were thorough with coherent processes for student feedback. Assessment procedures are clearly laid out in the student handbooks, providing criteria for how marks are set, ensuring both staff and students understand the system. Although it appears to be a complicated process it was fairly and conscientiously conducted. The quality of formative feedback appeared to vary but students appeared satisfied with the written feedback they received.

The Board observed that marks appeared to be compressed within the middle range. This opinion was corroborated by External Examiners. There was no evidence to suggest that able students were being encouraged to excel.

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

Student numbers for all three programmes have increased steadily, rising from 277 in 2001 to 326 in 2007. The most significant growth is at Part One. Demand for places is high, with 500 applicants for approximately 90 places. At present the entry requirements are three grade B A levels, or equivalent. The entry tariff, which is set by the University and not Architecture, has been raised twice during the past five years. In practice many entrants exceed the requirements. At present applicants are interviewed with portfolio only if they have no formal qualification in Art. Architecture is undertaking a review of admissions processes, including appropriate entry qualifications, the interviewing process and the nature of its participation in careers events. Architecture is also considering offering prospective candidates preparatory studio experience so that they gain a better idea of studio culture before they come. These initiatives may help improve retention at Part One.

The Board advises that SPACE could give consideration for support for incoming students lacking drawing skills but who meet academic criteria for entry. This issue was also raised in the Students' Critical Self-Appraisal.

The Board understood the staff's concerns about raising the entry tariff without consultation and applauded the intention to review recruitment policies. Overseas recruitment has historically been difficult given the recent political situation. The University International Office has been restructured and a concerted effort is being made to attract more overseas

students and an officer is tasked with attracting more students from Great Britain.

The Board considered that the procedures for direct entry at later stages of the programme were appropriate.

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 clear and valid and demonstrably being achieved. Although all criteria were being met, the Board's comments about a lack of leadership and coherent strategies apply equally to Part Two as to Part One.

13.6.2 Course design and content
The programme is a two-year full time course structured on a modular framework. As at Part One, the course is well designed to produce competent graduates.

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 confirms that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture programme met all Part Two criteria in the area of Design. The Board's comments about depth of critical discourse also apply to Part Two.

The Board considered that in the fifth year there was very little examination of contextual response but that this was redressed in the sixth (final) year.

- *Technology & Environment*
On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture

programme met all Part Two criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

Technology and Environment, particularly in the incoming year, was strong and well integrated with the project work.

The Board considered that the requirement on students to find their own brief and site and hold discussions with various parties, such as local authorities, was well considered.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture programme met all Part Two criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The Board considered that the design reports and dissertations were exceptionally well written. This was one of the most thorough and impressive parts of the course.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture programme met all Part Two criteria in the area of Communication.

The Board considered that the ambition of presentations was relatively modest. Whilst lucid, there was little evidence of experimentation and no apparent evidence of the presentation of interior space.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the Bachelor of Architecture programme met all Part Two criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law.

As at Part One, the Board considered that coverage of these criteria was good. The Board was also impressed by the links with the local profession.

13.6.4 Progression within the course

Retention and completion rates at Part Two are good.

13.6.4 Assessment

As at Part One, documented assessment is thorough and fair and clearly laid out in the student handbooks.

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

The Board noted the relatively small numbers who enter the Part Two course, compared with numbers at Part One. The Board learned from its discussion with students that they were enthusiastic about the Part Two course but there were many reasons why Part One graduates chose to study elsewhere. The Board understood that many students wish to take advantage of the opportunity to study elsewhere in the UK or pursue a particular agenda outside that offered by the University. Students were also of the opinion that the admissions criteria for Part Two prevented many Queen's Part One graduates from applying. Applicants must normally have obtained at least an upper second class degree.

Architecture wishes to retain more of its own Part One graduates and undertook a review of the programme in summer 2007. Procedures for direct entry are appropriate.

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

A comprehensive external review of the Part Three programme was conducted in 2006. A report was produced with recommendations that were responded to by Architecture.

The Part Three examination consists of seven elements: the case study, practice based assignment (replacing the essay), PEDR record, professional CV, evaluation of experience and the professional oral examination. All elements must be passed.

The Part Three course is now attracting more candidates from outside Queen's University. There are systems in place to ensure all candidates have a recognised Part One and Part Two. A system has been developed to appraise external candidates and has increased the content of the Queen's Part Three to take account of candidates' varied experience and knowledge on entry.

The Board considered that the Part Three course is very good, providing students with a sound knowledge base. However, the Board considered that it could be more creative. Candidates' development of professional judgement and critical thinking could be improved. The Board also encourages Architecture to take full advantage in its interpretation of the criteria to ensure the course is relevant to current and future practice. The Board also recommends that SPACE consider the resourcing and administrative support of the programme, to spread the burden of programme organisation, teaching and the monitoring of professional practice. This applies not just at Part Three but throughout the discipline.

13.8 **External examining arrangements**

There are presently two external examiners attached to Part One, one attached to the Part Two and one to Part Three. There are clear processes for the appointment of externals, their remit and mechanisms for submission of, and response to reports. External Examiners are required to confirm that the joint RIBA/ARB criteria have been met. Formerly all Part One graduating students were interviewed, but sampling

was used in the most recent session due to cohort sizes. Sampling is also used at B.Arch level.

The External Examiners were supportive of Architecture and the talented, enthusiastic students it attracts. They praised the strength of written work; particularly impressive were the history dissertations at Part Two, although this did not always influence the sixth year design work to the extent that might be expected, except in the better pieces of work.

They were also impressed with the level of technical competence at Part One and Part Two. They believed this could be more clearly demonstrated in design work. Architecture was addressing this and they had confidence that this would ultimately bear fruit.

The Part Three examiners shared the Board's view that as high a level of critical analysis should be encouraged at the lower end as it was at the higher end of achievement at Part Three.

Marking levels and threshold standards were appropriate. However, although students are achieving an appropriate standard at present, the Externals were concerned that the considerable challenges being faced by Architecture in terms of resourcing may begin to have an impact on the student experience. The administrative burden on the professional teaching staff was also considerable.

The Externals believed that Architecture needs dynamic leadership, to establish its priorities, strategic direction and find its own locus, and either build its full-time establishment or create resources for part-time provision.

The Visiting Board noted that for a short period there had only been one External Examiner attached to the Part Two course. This was raised as a concern by the present Part Two

External Examiner during this meeting. The Board was pleased to note that SPACE has appointed a second External Examiner to the Part Two programme. Traditionally the second External Examiner has been from outside the UK which all parties considered was good practice.

13.9 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

This is the responsibility of the Professional Studies Adviser. Students commented that the dialogue between themselves and Architecture could be improved. This might be helped by increasing administrative support.

13.10 **Students;**

The Board was pleased to meet representatives of all years of each programme but regretted the fact that more students did not attend, particularly as it had been publicised as an open meeting. The Board found the students to be highly articulate and very loyal to Architecture, committed to their subject and to each other, as demonstrated through the successful mentoring scheme. The Board commended the students' achievements despite the difficulties Architecture faces. There is formal route for recording students' concerns (the SSCC), which are considered and acted upon.

Among the strengths of the Department the students highlighted the following:

- The approachability and quality of the staff
- The use of external critics and their enthusiasm about the students' work
- The contribution of practitioners, whose views provide an interesting counterpoint
- Group work at Part Two
- The format of the Part Three programme and examination
- The scope for self-direction, independence and control at Part Two

- The mentoring system whereby sixth year students visit first and second year Part One students. Both Part One and Part Two students found this beneficial. The Board considered that this was good practice.

In support of Architecture, the students commented on the following areas which could be improved.

- Although staff are generally accessible and approachable, the reduced staffing levels were of significant concern to some students. This was more apparent in some years than others.
- There is variable practice on feedback but overall students were content. Some commented that they would prefer to receive more written feedback.
- Some students found that the present arrangements of Architecture in different buildings a barrier to observing the crits and work of other years. The new studios may facilitate communication between the years. Although at the time of the visit those students present had not yet seen the space intended for them in the new building, they expressed serious concerns about the security implications of open plan space that was not solely dedicated to architecture, particularly where models and computer equipment were concerned. Students would appreciate secure storage space for models and laptops.
- Students would appreciate greater and better communication with Architecture regarding the year out after Part One and requirements for Part Three.
- Part Two students were enthusiastic about the programme, and believed that more Queen's Part One graduates would stay if there were more places and the entry criteria were less stringent. They also

believed that there was demand for increasing the number of places at Part One.

- Students would like better access to the workshop and its facilities. They reported that the technician was helpful but not always able to give them the priority they thought they required. Health and Safety regulations prevent them from using much of the machinery themselves.
- Students would have appreciated further information about additional costs attached to the course (such as for materials or trips) before arrival.
- Students would like more bonding between the different years. The present Architecture society is chiefly involved in the organisation of lectures. The Society would appreciate more student input and suggestions are always welcome.

The Board advises SPACE to review its provision of pastoral care for students and the recourse available for students.

The present SSR is 22.48 if part-time tutors are taken into account and 26.08 if only permanent full-time staff are taken into account.

13.11 **Staff;**

The staff meeting was attended by academic, technical and administrative support staff. The Board observed that a number of key staff were not present at the meeting. The Board thanks the staff for their candid views on major issues currently facing Architecture. The Board noted the staff's commitment to the students and staff acknowledgement of the support received from and the positive attitude of students. However the Board also noted that morale had been seriously undermined by the recent decline in resources, the decision by the University not to submit to the Research Assessment Exercise and the apparent lack of information given to staff by School and University management. The

Board believes that SPACE needs constructive academic leadership from a subject specialist in the discipline of architecture, research and practice-based activity. In the staff meeting the Board heard that Architecture is under-represented on the School Management Board. This situation should be rectified to ensure that the needs of a modern school of architecture are properly understood.

Both School and University senior management acknowledged that staffing is a critical weakness which has prevented them from developing Architecture and discipline as they would wish. As stated previously, staff recruitment forms a major part of the Honorary Professor's review. At the time of the visit SPACE was in the process of appointing a Professor of Architecture and six lecturers or senior lecturers. Currently vacant posts include not only recent resignations and retirements but also three new posts established in order both to meet the recent increase in student numbers and to take forward Architecture's research activities. Although recruitment is ongoing it has not been able to keep pace with these developments. Fortunately Architecture has been able to take advantage of its strong links with practice to establish a register of part-time tutors, who are engaged to act as design tutors. It is clear that the students greatly appreciate their contribution but would be reassured by more permanent arrangements. The Board believes that the current situation is unsustainable.

The rationale for some aspects of the University's research strategy were contested by some staff, who believed that research could be focussed more effectively by the formation of architecture research clusters. The appointment status of several staff members has been changed to that of a teaching position. In the meeting with staff, the Board learned that staff considered that the logic or policy behind this had not been explained to those affected. The Board understood that the staff recruitment policy was under review to allow parallel

teaching and research career paths to be followed to recognise the importance of studio teaching and the staff time involved. The policy is also intended to recognise that staff contributions are complementary, whether primarily in the professional sphere or in research.

Teaching and administrative staff were concerned about the reduction in administrative support, which they felt was affecting the delivery of courses. Administrative staff also felt that the quality of their work was compromised. Staff understood that following the move to the new building, administrative support would be shared between departments.

Although the school documentation referred to induction training for new staff, from discussions with the present staff there appeared, in practice, to be little in the way of formal induction for part-time staff apart from a briefing from the Stage 1 tutor and a pre-term talk for stage 3 tutors. The Board recommends that that SPACE reviews induction for new staff and part time staff.

The Board strongly recommends that SPACE review the effectiveness of its next round of recruitment and from that develop a strategy to ensure within the next year a full complement of permanent staff which demonstrates the achievement of equality and diversity objectives

The Board strongly recommends that the recruitment strategy also include succession planning to accommodate anticipated staff turnover in the short to medium term.

The Board applauds SPACE's efforts to ensure that there are staff in Architecture able to benchmark work against international standards and recommends that SPACE develop this.

The Board recommends that SPACE address urgently the question of the long-term leadership of the discipline, particularly as it impacts on curricular management and the research strategy, in particular to ensure continuity beyond the temporary stewardship provided by the Honorary Professor of Architecture.

The Board strongly recommends that SPACE review the adequacy of administration staffing levels.

13.11 **Research;**

The University has recently become part of the Russell Group and wishes to strengthen architectural research; The School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering is home to three research centres; the Institute of Spatial Environment Planning (ISEP), the Environmental Engineering Research Centre and the Centre for Built Environment Research (CEBR). Architectural research is conducted under CEBR and focusses on architectural history, design and management, sustainable development and construction and communication technologies. The formation of research clusters within SPACE is intended to give research critical mass and to increase opportunities for interdisciplinary activities.

SPACE attributed the difficulty in finding a professor to a UK-wide problem particularly in the run-up to the 2008 RAE, during which time there was little movement of staff. The School's location may have been a factor but attitudes may be beginning to change. Architectural research has been affected to a degree by the departure of one of the major researchers. In the ongoing recruitment exercise, SPACE will seek individuals who are either currently research active or have the potential to develop an appropriate research profile. SPACE expects that holders of practitioner posts will also be engaged in scholarly activity, which may or may not

be returnable as research according to the RAE's definition of what constitutes research.

As stated earlier, the University decided that Architecture would not make any returns to RAE 2008. Staff undertook an exercise through which they identified areas and themes for possible future development. The Board expressed some surprise that individuals in the architecture department with strong track records in research were not permitted to submit and noted the effect on morale that this decision had had.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Architecture department's research was not entered into the Research Assessment Exercise, the Board encourages them to build on research for future submissions.

The Board welcomed the fact that research clearly informs teaching. The Board noted that the efforts put into research were not to the detriment of staff's teaching commitments. The intention is that this policy will continue. The Board was assured by the University that any increase in the intensity of research will not be at the expense of the students' experience.

In addition to the existing taught postgraduate programmes SPACE plans to introduce further degree programmes in Integrated Sustainable Design, Durability of the Built Environment, International Geotechnics, Environmental Forensics, Water Resources Management.

13.12 **Equal Opportunities:**

The University operates stringent equal opportunities procedures. The gender balance among the students is good, particularly at Part One. At present the majority of recruits come from the Northern Ireland and reflect the local ethnic mix. The present homogeneity of the student population will be diversified by the University's wider UK and international

initiatives and the Board encourages SPACE with its endeavours. The University already meets diversity targets on socio-economic diversity. SPACE now has the opportunity to internationalise its student body and increase the diversity of cultural background and experience, building on the significant reputation that Queen's University already enjoys. Architecture is actively seeking to diversify the age and gender profile of academic staff, which at present is predominantly male.

13.13 **Resourcing and facilities;**

The Board noted the adverse impact of poor maintenance on the existing accommodation and looks forward to this being resolved in the very short term. The Board noted the institutional assurances from the Acting Vice Chancellor and the Head of School that there is a commitment to accommodate architecture appropriately. At the time of the visit it was anticipated that Architecture would move to the nearby David Keir Building in Spring 2008. The Board was shown both the existing and new facilities. Building works were not yet complete but the Board was able to gain an idea of what SPACE's intentions were and what facilities would be available to the students.

The Board was pleased to note that there was a contingency plan to cover the period of transfer to the new building.

It is anticipated that the refurbished building will be DDA compliant.

- *Studios*

The Board learned from the students that they are encouraged to work in the studios and most do so. At present the studios are split between two Victorian houses and a nearby 1980s building. The Board visited the present studios and those being prepared in the Keir Building. The present provision appears to provide a reasonable

environment but with little IT provision on site. The new studios will have wireless and internet provision. Although the Board appreciated that the new studios were still being prepared, they appeared to be generic spaces which did not have a particularly "architectural" ambience to them. The Board understood that there should be more dedicated space in the new studios. The Board noted the students' concerns about the safety of models and computers in shared studios. Whilst it must be acknowledged that the new studios were unfinished at the time of the visit and security arrangements had not been discussed, the Board encourages SPACE to provide storage space for models and students' belongings.

The Board considered that SPACE had an ideal opportunity to provide excellent facilities for architectural education but, even given that renovation was not yet complete, it was difficult to see what SPACE's intentions were.

- *Library*

Library provision is good and SPACE is ably supported by enthusiastic staff. A specialist librarian is responsible for the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering and Science and Engineering.

University libraries are due to be merged in a new, purpose-built building by 2009. At present the majority of the relevant collection is looked after by the Architecture and Planning Information Service (APIS) housed in the Science Library. Art and Social Science material is held in the main University library. This is open from 08:30-22.00 on Monday to Thursday, until 20.30 on Friday and until 12.30 on Saturdays. The Seamus Heaney library is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week in exam time.

The library buys multiple copies of key texts, constantly reviewing reservations data to see what is most needed, and also provides off-prints of relevant chapters. The book

collection for Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering comprises approximately 28000 items and 70 journal current journals. The Library spends £30000 per year on architectural and related journals. There are separate budgets for planning and engineering. Approximately 5000 journals are available on line. Library policy is to move increasingly from print journals to electronic. There are also 30-40000 e-books. The Library is also beginning to digitise material in line with copyright law. Students are able to access the catalogues and e-books from outside the library, via the library portal.

The acquisitions policy prioritises the purchase of all required material for teaching purposes, supporting research and publications relating to architecture in Ireland.

The Library also houses a dissertation store which includes sixth-year design reports. The Library also operates, in collaboration with the Architecture and Planning Library of University College Dublin, PADDI (the Planning Architecture Design Database Ireland) which is an architectural database for Ireland. Interlibrary loans are also possible. The Library also keeps lecture notes. All students receive library and information skills training.

- *Workshops*

Architecture has an in-house workshop. The Board learned that SPACE intends to buy CNC equipment. Architecture does not yet have a laser cutter. The Board learned from students that their use of the workshop is limited by the opening hours, the availability of the technician and health and safety issues which dictate which machinery can be used. The studios are often used for model making.

The Board recommends that SPACE provide appropriate workshop induction training for students to enable them to make better use of facilities.

The Board recommends that SPACE urgently review the workshop provision and consider resourcing further extended opening hours.

The Board advises that SPACE produce a programme for connecting 3D production to 2D software and including links with CAD CNC and provides a written strategy for its imminent and ongoing implementation and development.

The model-making area in the new building had not yet been set up therefore it was difficult for the Board to assess what provision would be.

- *IT*

Students have access to Architecture's own computers, the University's Open Access Centres and the Faculty's CAD facilities in the Northern Ireland Technology Centre (NITC). The Board learned from the course documentation that the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering provided approximately 50 computers for architecture students' use. This includes a School computer suite with an A3 laser printer and two dedicated architecture suites which also provide access to two A0 and one A1 large format plotters. The University's open access facilities are open 7 days a week in term time. In the NITC students also have access to an A3 laser printer, an A3 black and white laser printer and an A0 large format plotter. Students may also borrow laptops from the Science Library.

The course documentation states that the two CAD modules are electives in the first semester of Stage 2, at which stage students learn AutoCAD and ArchiCAD. Students can take an elective in computer modelling in the second semester. Students have access to Autocad, Revit, Sketchup, 3D Studio Archicad, Vectorworks, Architectural Desktop, Microstation and Photoshop.

However, from discussion with students it appeared that access to IT was difficult. There are presently 300 undergraduate students and were it not for the fact that many have their own computers the facilities would be under even more pressure. Part Two students commented the PCs and printers in their studios were insufficient and unreliable. However, otherwise, the Board considered that printing facilities appear to be reasonable.

It is anticipated that provision will be substantially better when Architecture moves to the Keir Building both in terms of quality and quantity of provision and funding.

14. **Attachments**

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

Critical Self-appraisal
Response to Questionnaire
Supplementary Information

In the Base Room the School provided:

BSc Programme Handbooks 2006-2007 and 2007-2008
BArch Programme Handbooks Year 1 2006-2007 and 2007-2008
BArch Programme Handbooks Year 2 2006-2007 and 2007-2008
Practical Training Year Out Course Handbook (Part 1)
Certificate in Professional Practice and Practical Experience Course Handbook
BSc Architecture Programme Module Descriptions
University Calendar, Book 2, book of Modules, Primary Degrees 2006-2007

B.Arch Stage 5 Course Outline 2006-2007
CVs Academic Staff 2006-2007
CVs Part-Time Tutors 2006-2007
Register of Part-Time Tutors 2007-2008
External Examiner Handbook
Undergraduate Prospectus
Postgraduate Prospectus
General Regulations, University Calendar 2007-2008
Catalogues of Student Work 2001-1007
Alison Mackinder Review of Professional Practice in Architecture
Student Feedback – National Student Survey 2007 comments and scores; National Student Score 2007, summary; Queen’s First Year Experience Survey 2007, comments and scores
National Student Survey – Russell Group comparisons
Examination Papers (November 2006-August 2007)
Drawings of new accommodation