

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to the Department of Architecture,
School of Architecture and Design,
Royal College of Art**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 30 November 2005

**Part Two:
MA Architecture**

Date of Visiting Board: 3 and 4 November 2005

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Course offered for validation

Part Two: MA Architecture (Two years full-time)

1.2 Address of the institution where the course is delivered

Department of Architecture
School of Architecture and Design
Royal College of Art
Kensington Gore
London SW7 2EU

Tel: 020 7590 4444

Fax: 020 7590 4500

W: www.rca.ac.uk

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

Royal College of Art

1.4 Name of the Head of Department of Architecture

Professor Nigel Coates

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 3 and 4 November 2005 were:

Robert Kronenburg	Chair
Jo van Heyningen	Vice-Chair
Robert Mull	
Michael Wilford	
Hilary Holloway	Non-architect member
Pavandeep Panesar	Graduate Member
Henning Stummel	Regional Representative

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

3. Procedures and Criteria for the Visit

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

For more information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board Confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee 30 November 2005

4.1 The RIBA Education Committee at its meeting on 30 November 2005 confirmed:

Continued Validation of:

Part Two: MA Architecture (Two years full-time)

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

5. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the Commonwealth Association of Architects, and the 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 recommends to ARB that the Part Two course met all points of the EU Directive, as all entrants to the Part Two pathway of the MA are required to hold a Part One qualification.

6. Criteria

6.1 On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined, the Visiting Board was satisfied that all the students graduating from the course and examination listed in 4.1 above satisfied all the Criteria for Validation

(which are held in common by the RIBA for validation and the ARB for prescription).

7. Standards

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

8. Conditions of Validation

8.1 There were no special conditions of validation attached to the course 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 course and examination being submitted to the RIBA;
- iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being reported to the RIBA so that, where appropriate, recognition may formally be transferred to the new title by the RIBA;
- iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses/qualifications listed in 4.1.

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

10.1 Background

10.1.1 The Royal College of Art is a special place to study architecture, offering as it does an MA course with Part Two exemption and sitting within an advanced art school context in which “making” is paramount. The Department of Architecture, which sits within the School of Architecture and Design, is well regarded within the College and has justifiably challenging ambitions and a keen sense of its place in the world of architecture and design.

The Board applauds the Department’s intention to engage with real world issues in an exploratory manner and commends its ambitions to undertake research work, both in-house and with external key partners.

10.1.2 The particular strengths of the Department are:

- An emphasis on the experimental nature of design
- A clear sense of its identity
- A gifted and committed staff team
- A vibrant studio culture
- The close and mutually supportive relationship between staff and students
- Its ability to attract students of the highest intellectual calibre
- A very healthy staff-student ratio

10.2 Recommendations

The Board made the following recommendations to the Department. The RIBA expects the Department to report on actions 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 the recommendations, or to provide the RIBA with a clear rationale for not doing so, may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

10.2.1 The Board believed that the review of the One2One project and CDP2 had resulted in improvements to technology and environment teaching within the Department. Though all the assessed work met the required standards, the Board nevertheless recommends that the Department devises a formal programme of teaching that engages specifically with the Part Two Validation Criteria in Technology and Environment. One model which might usefully be followed in this respect is the Department’s existing Professional Practice Studies course, although the Board recognises there may be other alternatives and consequently does not wish to suggest that this is the only suitable route.

10.2.2 The Board understands that the format of the One2One and CDP2 are changing as a result of course development and staffing changes. In particular the Board considers that the change in the nature of the design of the technical journal to a single graphic representation might reduce its capacity to comprehensively cover the scope of its ambitions. The Board recommends that the Department ensures that the significant benefits brought to the Part

Two course by these components are retained within any revised format.

- 10.2.3 The Department should ensure that its External Examiners comply fully with the QAA Code of Practice in terms of their precise remit and possible conflict of interest. The Code states that ‘It is important that any other roles undertaken by the external examiners should not conflict with or compromise the core role’ and ‘The involvement of external examiners in other activities [in addition to the core role] should involve prior consideration of the potential risk this might pose to the examiner’s ability to be impartial’. (QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section, External Examining – August 2004, pp6-7). Feedback to individual students regarding their work at an earlier stage than the final examination may be considered tutorials and therefore represent a conflict of interest.

10.3 **Advice**

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

- 10.3.1 At present, the awarding of exemption from Parts One, Two or Three of the RIBA Examinations must be linked inextricably to a named award. The awarding of an MA Architecture from the Royal College of Art carries exemption from Part Two and could therefore imply that the degree holder also has a valid Part One qualification.

The Board advises the RCA to attach different course codes and titles to the different MA Architecture pathways. This would allow easy identification of those entering without Part One, who are not eligible for Part Two exemption on successful completion of the MA, and those who do, and are thus eligible for Part Two exemption on successful completion of the MA.

- 10.3.2 The Department should ensure that the assessment procedures and the criteria for pass/fail are fully understood by students well in advance of their examinations. The Board commends the clarity of the new RCA MA Final Examination Assessment Form for Studio-based Disciplines and advises the Department to adopt this as soon as possible.
- 10.3.3 While the Board appreciates the merits of the One2One /CDP2 project, it advises that care should be taken to balance the nature and extent of individual students’ projects in relation to their different studio units to ensure that commensurate engagement with the issues of constructive architecture are being addressed. This is especially important if it is to fulfil the Part Two Technology and Environment Validation Criteria.
- 10.3.4 The Board was surprised that interdisciplinary working between the Department of Architecture and other departments in the Royal College was not more evident. The Board recognises that there are strategies in place to facilitate interdisciplinary working but advises that the establishment of a more formal mechanism which is supportive of less assertive students would be helpful in promoting a greater mix and reflecting the espoused ethos more thoroughly.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

11.1 The last full RIBA/ARB Visiting Board to the Royal College of Art took place on 11 and 12 November 1999. The Visiting Board recommended **Continued Validation** of:

Part Two: MA Architecture and Interiors (Two years full-time)

11.2 Summary of the 1999 Visiting Board report

“The strengths of the course include a highly committed and supportive staff, good quality student intake and excellent facilities. The period since the last visiting board has seen some changes in the structuring of the Schools and the course is now a part of the School of Architecture and Design. The Professor of Architectural Design has led the course in Architecture and Interiors since 1995. The College offers an open lecture programme whereby students are provided with the opportunity to attend a wide range of lectures and seminars across a variety of disciplines. A system of vertical studios has been introduced since the last visit took place, which the Board supports. It was noted that, although the standard of architectural and constructional technology demonstrated in the design output is adequate, it is an area which could be strengthened. The content of the library is satisfactory. However, the Board recommends that there is a closer co-operation between the staff and the library to ensure that relevant and contemporary material is available to students. The students were lively, confident and articulate and are a credit to the College.”

12. Commentary

12.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

The Critical Self-Appraisal provided by the Department was a clearly written, concise document. Although it included a SWOT analysis, the Board considered it could have been more self-critical, and could have provided the reader with a stronger sense of the ethos of the Department. A number of course development and procedural areas were not addressed in the document; however the Department responded quickly to provide further information as required. The Board also appreciated the provision of an excellently clear and cogent critical appraisal of the Department produced by members of the student body in advance of the visit.

Changes since the last full Visiting Board in 1999 have included:

- The appointment of a new Academic and Research Co-ordinator in 2003
- Updating of the Professional Practice Studies component of the course to integrate the new RIBA/ARB Management, Practice and Law Validation Criteria
- Recruitment of additional staff to keep pace with student numbers of 50
- Updating of the Comprehensive Design Project (CDP) component in 2004 in response to student suggestions
- Review and updating of assessment procedures and documentation
- The provision of technical support for digital design and prototyping

- The increase in Architectural Design Studios (ADSs) from 3 to 4.
- A change in title of the award from MA Architecture and Interiors to MA Architecture.

12.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The Department provided documentation for the visit in a timely fashion. Additional supporting information was provided promptly on request.

The meetings of the Board were well organised and contributed greatly to the Board’s understanding of the course and its appreciation of the ethos of the Department and of the College. The Board found the exhibition content to be concise and well-chosen, but considered that some of the portfolios it reviewed lacked a clear, progressive development narrative and could have been more clearly structured.

12.2.1 Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the Visit

Part Two: MA Architecture

Year one: 6 portfolios in total, drawn from each of the four Architectural Design Studios (ADSs) including the lowest pass from the cohort entering in 2004.

Year two: 12 portfolios in total, drawn from each of the four Architectural Design Studios (ADSs) including the four lowest pass from the cohort entering in 2004 (from 20 graduating). These portfolios contained work from both first and second year of the MA.

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

The Critical Self-appraisal provided a clear account of developments since the last full Visiting Board in 1999, many of which are listed in paragraph 12.1. The Board thought that the Department had made significant progress and had been responsive to the comments of the 1999 Board, and noted that it had sought to raise the profile of technology and environmental teaching.

The External Examiners confirmed that the Department responded to issues raised in their reports and that they did see changes as a result of their comments.

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

The Royal College of Art is the world’s only wholly postgraduate University of Art and Design. There are some 800 students in the College attending courses across the College’s 18 Departments. In 1997 the Department of Architecture and Interiors became one of the five Departments in the School of Art and Design, and is located on the eighth floor of the Darwin Building.

The present Department of Architecture has its roots in the course in Interiors offered by the College when it received its Royal Charter in 1967. Gradually the Department became more architecturally-orientated and gained RIBA Part Two exemption in 1983. In 1995 the current Head of Department was appointed and he spearheaded an overhaul of the MA course by creating a spread of 3 Architectural Design Studios (ADSs) to promote competition and a more vibrant design culture. A fourth ADS was added in 2001 and the Department was

renamed Architecture in spring 2005 to reflect its core ambitions and the work of its students. The Department now has a total of 50 students in both years of the MA course and 2 MPhil/PhD students.

The Board was surprised that interdisciplinary working between the Department of Architecture and other departments in the Royal College was not more evident. The Board recognises that there are strategies in place to facilitate interdisciplinary working but advises that the establishment of a more formal mechanism which is supportive of less assertive student would be helpful in promoting a greater mix and reflecting the espoused ethos more thoroughly.

12.5 **Detailed commentary on the Part Two course:**

MA Architecture (Two years full-time)

12.5.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The objectives of the Part Two course are clearly articulated, ambitious and carry within them a strong sense of the Department's identity and its perceived place within the world of architecture and design. Given the special positions the Department and the Royal College occupy in national practice the Board thought that these objectives were appropriate and were for the most part being met.

The Department also provided a mapping of the MA Architecture course and its learning outcomes against RIBA/ARB Part Two Validation Criteria.

12.5.2 *Course design and content*

The MA Architecture course is delivered over two years. Its components fall into five groupings of teaching and learning activities, as follows:

- Research, Experimentation and Design 1 (including the Comprehensive Design Project CDP 1)
- One2one, Comprehensive Design Project CDP 2
- Cultural Context/Critical History Studies
- Management, Practice and Law (Professional Practice Studies)
- Research, Experimentation and Design 2.

Each year begins with an introductory design project that combines issues of the object and the urban context. From the third week on, the four Architectural Design Studios (ADSs) are fully active. Operating on a unit system each ADS has two or three dedicated tutors, and an identifiable culture and way of working. ADSs set particular themes for the year against which projects are developed, designed and tested. They each begin with an initial period of research, lectures and visits pertinent to the programme, followed by an opportunity for each student to select an area of work that particularly interests them. Following the research period, they produce one major design for the year against which different emphasis is placed for first and second year students. This ADS-based design constitutes Research, Experimentation and Design 1 and 2.

The Department's Comprehensive Design Project (CDP) which includes the One2one and CDP2, spans the second and third terms of Year 1. The One2one provides each student with the opportunity to build a key part of their projects at full scale in the second term. This has a number

of phases, including visits to factories. The results are “built” in various locations chosen by the student across the College and students are encouraged to use genuine materials for this process as far as is reasonably possible. The One2one project investigations are continued hand in hand with the personal ADS Design project to form CPD2 in the summer term. This culminates in a synthesised piece of work presented at final crit and assessed by the One2one/CPD2 tutors and the ADS tutors.

The Department of Critical and Historical Studies (CHS) organises a series of lectures dedicated to the Department throughout the autumn term. All first year architecture students are required to attend. This programme of lectures is followed by related seminars. The second term offers a programme of College-wide lectures. The aim of the lecture series is to stimulate student interest, understanding and debate in the history, philosophy and criticism of the various disciplines taught at the College. Students must also submit a 6,000 to 10,000-word dissertation on a topic agreed with their CHS tutor for hand-in at the end of the first week of Year 2.

Professional Practice Studies requires second year students to complete a course of seminars, practice and site visits, tutorials, a case study and other related professional practice activities undertaken by all students of the College.

In the second year students are expected to progress their ADS work to a higher level of originality and sophistication leading into the Thesis Project which constitutes their major exhibit in the graduation show.

The Board thought that this was a highly ambitious course with high quality students who were excellently tutored, but wishes to make the following observations about the course content and structure.

The Board noted that the Department employed a combination of assessment methods, both on-going (continuous and informal) at a number of key stages and often in combination, throughout the Part Two course. In the light of student comments about their awareness of assessment criteria, the Board advises the Department to review the position and scope of these key assessment points within the course so that they contribute to student progress at appropriate stages in their development.

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

- Design

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the MA Architecture programme.

The Board commended the exploratory nature of the design work and the way that students were encouraged to investigate new ways of developing the design process in response to real world scenarios. The Board also saw evidence of exemplary investigation of the social, political and professional context that guides building construction and some examples of thorough examination of the material and environmental qualities of space.

The Board thought that the Department could emphasise more robustly the role of research and brief-writing in the

design process in order to produce both increased coherence in architectural design and also in other areas such as environment, construction and building production. In some cases the Board was surprised to discover that some elements of architectural design were not articulated more clearly.

The Board considered that standards of studio teaching were extremely high, with an excellent rapport between students and their part time tutors (all of whom are engaged in practice of some form). The mutual respect between the staff and students helps the positive reception of constructive criticism.

- Technology and Environment

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the MA Architecture programme.

The One2one and the CDP2 have been developed by the Department with the intention of “infusing the design process of a major architectural project with technical development, know-how and understanding”. The Board believes that these elements have contributed to technology and environment teaching, and it is its opinion that all the work it reviewed met the required standards. However, in the light of its own observations and of comments made by the student body, the Board recommends that the Department devises a formal programme of teaching that further engages specifically with the Part Two Validation Criteria in Technology and Environment.

The Board appreciates the merits of the One2one project, and is supportive of the range and quality of work done in this area. However it advises that care should be taken to balance its relationship to individual students’ projects in relation to the wide range of architecture and design issues if it is to be used as the major vehicle for fulfilling Part Two Technology and Environment Validation Criteria.

The Board understands that the format of the One2one and the Technical Journal are changing as a result of course development and staffing changes. In particular the Board considers that the change in the nature of the design of the technical journal to a single graphic representation could have a negative impact. The Board recommends that the Department ensures that the significant benefits brought to the Part Two course by these components are retained within any revised format.

- Cultural Context

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the MA Architecture programme.

The Board noted the high quality range of inputs in this area, particularly in the theoretical and historical context delivered in the CHS lecture series, but was surprised at the relatively sparse use of design precedent from historic and contemporary architecture and other relevant fields.

- Communication

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the MA Architecture programme.

The Board enjoyed the quality of the drawings and graphics that it saw and commended the Department's insistence on the absence of a "house style." It noted however that scant use was made of other College resources in student portfolios and encouraged the College establish more formal mechanisms for promoting greater participation and more interdisciplinary working (paragraph 10.3.4).

The Board was impressed by the high levels of verbal presentation and communication, but while individual students were clearly highly articulate, the Board discovered a lack of organisation and absence of a narrative thread in the description of projects in some of the portfolios it reviewed. The Board considered that the Department could encourage the use of more precise methods to record the students' achievements throughout the two years. The portfolio should be a powerful asset to students and it is therefore very important that this reflects a clear and coherent picture of their work.

- Management Practice and Law

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the MA Architecture programme.

The Board thought that the Department should be commended for the culture of engagement it had fostered with Management, Practice and Law and the social and economic context of the projects. Students confirmed that the Professional Practice Studies module with its menu of seminars, workshops, personal tutorials, and practice and site visits provided them with a good grounding in their

appreciation of the context of professional practice. They are also required to complete a case study, an assessed piece of written work of approximately 2,500-4,000 words. This constitutes a critical appraisal of the selected built project to demonstrate their understanding of how buildings are designed, costed, resourced, financed, contractually defined, constructed and evaluated.

12.5.4 *Progression within the course*

The Department provided progression statistics for the MA Architecture covering the last five years. In 2000/2001 19 out of 21 students in Year 2 graduated; in 2001/2002 19 out of 22 graduated; in 2002/2003 22 out of 25 graduated; in 2003/2004 21 out of 28 graduated; and in 2004/05 20 out of 26 graduated.

The Board did express some concerns at the frequency with which students can be referred on the course (students can be referred at any point on the two-year course and be asked to repeat a component). The Board thought that this was a particularly extensive use of the referral system and must add to the pressure on students as well as being resource-intensive.

12.5.5 *Assessment*

The course has clear procedures in place to ensure that all graduates meet all elements of the Validation Criteria. This is an absolute requirement. The Department uses a broad spectrum of appropriate assessment methods across all components, in particular, the written project feedback forms which were clear and articulate. However, some students complained that assessment procedures and the criteria for pass/fail were not made sufficiently clear to them in advance of their sitting their examinations. The Department has responded swiftly to this complaint,

pointing out that the Student Handbook contains this information which has also been included in design briefs. It has also recently issued programme specifications to all students as well as staff. The Department told the Board that formal warnings are issued to students after Easter if their work is not up to standard. In the light of student comments about their awareness of assessment criteria, the Board advises the Department to review the position of these key assessment points within the course to ensure that they are appropriate and that their scope and wording is clearly understood.

Over the last two years the College has been developing a generic system for assessment designed to ensure parity in examinations. The Board understands that the RCA MA Final Examination Assessment Scheme for Studio-based Disciplines will be rolled out across the College in all studio-based departments except Architecture in the 2005/2006 session. The Board commended the clarity of the new Assessment Form and advises the Department to adopt this as soon as possible.

The Board was impressed by the quality and depth of feedback that students received in their reviews, and wondered if these might be prepared more frequently to improve communication about progress and ensure students are more prepared for their final assessment.

- 12.5.6 *Admissions and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course*
 Applicants should have achieved a high quality first degree in architecture, interior design or a related discipline and should have at least one year's experience working in a design office. They are required to submit a completed RCA MA form and a portfolio of no more than six

completed projects with supporting design material at the end of January. There is no entry at any other stage of the course except at the beginning of Year 1.

Applicants are alerted to the fact that if they wish to gain exemption from RIBA Part Two they must have satisfactorily completed their RIBA Part One. The Board advises the RCA to attach different course codes and titles to the different MA Architecture pathways to allow easy identification of those entering without Part One, who are not eligible for Part Two exemption on successful completion of the MA, and those who do, and are thus eligible for Part Two exemption on successful completion of the MA.

12.6 **External examining arrangements**

The Board met both of the Department's current External Examiners, who were drawn from education and practice. In their meeting with the Board the External Examiners were very supportive of the Department, praising in particular the experimental nature of the work produced by its students. They confirmed that the Department had been responsive to issues raised in their reports, but suggested that it could seek to make greater use of the impressive resources available within the College as a whole. They also confirmed that they had received a thorough briefing prior to taking up their appointments.

It appeared to the Board that the External Examiners had a good knowledge of that part of the course with which they were engaged; unfortunately this related only to the final assessment. The Board was extremely surprised that the Department was not utilising the considerable experience and expertise of their External Examiners to comment on the rest of the course.

The External Examiners told the Board that they visited the Department in advance of the final assessment to meet students and were invited to take the opportunity to advise some students in general terms on possible avenues that might or might not be followed to their advantage. This meeting used to take place approximately six weeks before the final assessment, but recently it has been put back to ten or eleven weeks. This practice can be viewed as compromising the role of the External Examiners and their ability to make impartial judgement regarding the final work they see. It could also create conflict in students' ambitions due to potential differences between tutors' and examiners' advice.

The Department should ensure that its External Examiners comply fully with the QAA Code of Practice in terms of their precise remit and possible conflict of interest. The Code states that 'It is important that any other roles undertaken by the external examiners should not conflict with or compromise the core role' and 'The involvement of external examiners in other activities [in addition to the core role] should involve prior consideration of the potential risk this might pose to the examiner's ability to be impartial'. (QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section, External Examining – August 2004, pp6-7). Feedback to individual students regarding their work at an earlier stage than the final examination may be considered tutorials and therefore represent a conflict of interest.

12.7 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

As part of the Professional Practice Studies component of the MA Architecture course, all second year students are placed for 1 to 3 days in a London architect's practice to research an individual case study project. Feedback from the practice is communicated to each student. A member of a prominent architectural practice's Human Resources Department holds CV and job applications workshops in the Department with second year architecture students to prepare them for finding jobs after they graduate. Additional support for students seeking employment or information and support for self-employment and starting up a business is available centrally from the College-wide programme of activities. Students are also able to book tutorials with the Department's Professional Studies Advisor.

12.8 **Students**

The Board met 41 representatives of the student group from both years of the course. Members of the student body had supplied members of the Board in advance with a written appraisal of the Department from the student perspective. In both the written appraisal and the comments made in the meeting, the students were broadly positive about their experience on the course, mentioning in particular:

- The small, intimate nature of the Department and the close relationship between staff and students
- The positive orientation towards design and creativity
- The benefits of working in a collegiate environment
- The strong intellectual base enabling research into social ideas in project work
- Excellent workshop facilities
- An active studio culture

- High quality teaching
- Encouragement of the Department to cultivate both an individual style and a professional outlook
- Additional support, both academic and pastoral, provided through the tutorial system.

Specific concerns raised by the students included:

- Disappointment that design projects are not introduced earlier in the academic year thereby allowing more sophisticated formal and technical resolution.
- A lack of educational objectives noted in some of the 2004/05 ADS studio projects (this has now been addressed by the Department)
- A sense that architectural technology, in particular environment, is not being taught ‘formally’.
- A lack of information about the assessment procedures and the criteria for pass/fail for students in advance of last year’s examinations
- A request for more formal technological input to teaching
- Difficulties encountered in accessing interdisciplinary opportunities within the College.

The Board was greatly impressed by the articulate, highly motivated, intelligent and committed student body.

12.9 **Staff**

The Board held a lively meeting with 13 members of staff, all of whom were part-time, apart from one administrator. The Board was impressed by the attendance at this meeting of almost all the Department’s staff and by the thoughtful and constructive contribution they made.

The Board found a real sense of unity among the staff team, all of whom appeared to share the Department’s vision. It seemed to the Board that the Department contained a corps of gifted and dedicated staff, many of whom worked well in excess of their contracted hours. Whilst much of the Validation Criteria were met through good efforts of local practitioners and experts, the Board expressed some concern that such a mechanism might not be sustainable in the event of favours being withdrawn.

The staff team believed that even a modest increase in student numbers would only be possible provided that additional space was found to meet this increase. They explained that they were currently working in very cramped conditions to the extent that there was no space available for a staff room. The Board has commented on this issue in paragraph 12.12.

With a full-time staff equivalent of 3.4 and a student population of 43 the staff-student ratio for 2004/05 was approximately 1:12.6.

12.10 **Research**

The RCA Strategic Plan 2002-2006 prioritises the development of world class design research across all the departments in the College. The Department of Architecture is no exception and was able to point out to the Board an impressive menu of core and satellite research themes. Much of this research work was undertaken by Departmental staff or linked to projects on the Architectural Design Studios (ADSs), while other themes were pursued in conjunction with Helen Hamlyn Research Associates and Innovation Research Associates. The Department is keen to improve its research output and is looking to build on its existing links as well as

exploiting new channels such as the new Architectural Research Centre, which is funded by research funding bodies, local authorities and commercial interests. The Board commends these research activities and the appointment by the Department of a Research Co-ordinator in 2003 to oversee its research strategy. The College's agenda is putting more pressure on staff in the Department to undertake more research. Indeed the Department itself wishes to encourage its staff to be more research-active and wishes to employ more researchers. It was explained to the Board that the mechanisms for facilitating research were already in place. At the staff meeting the Board was informed that the most important factor in improving research was a substantial increase in the space available within the Department to accommodate existing and new staff and research students. This would also have the benefit of creating more direct links between teaching and research activities. The Board agrees that if the College wishes to encourage the Department to increase its research output then effective space resources need to be made available to support this.

12.11 **Equal Opportunities**

In advance of the Board the Department provided a breakdown of its student population by gender and ethnicity. Board members also received a copy of the College's Code of Practice for Equal Opportunities in Employment. It was clear to the Board that both the Department and the College take the issue of equal opportunities very seriously indeed.

The percentage of female students in the Department in 2004/05 was in excess of 45%. The academic staff of the Department is made up of 13 men and four women.

Accessibility to the main floor of the Department is impaired as there is no lift thus posing significant problems in terms of SENDA compliance.

12.12 **Resourcing and Facilities**

- *General*

The policy for the future financial resourcing of the Department is to continue on the basis of the current College-wide method of structuring the Department's annual budgets. The Department's budget for visiting lecturers has increased from £20,200 in 2002/03 to £38,600 in 2004/05, and was increased again by £30,000 to cover the new post of Academic and Research co-ordinator and again by £6,000 in 2004 to accommodate changes required by the new RIBA/ARB validation criteria.

Lack of space in the Department was the major issue for staff. They are severely overcrowded and have no staff room or a place to keep their personal belongings. The staff believe that this problem is limiting the Department's development, especially in respect of research and the greater range of teaching staff the Department wishes to engage. The Board understands the limitations of the current site and it notes the Rector of the College informed it that plans are being drawn up to resolve these issues. The Board strongly supports the Department's case for additional space.

- *Studios*

The open plan layout of the studios creates a friendly, supportive but noisy environment. Lack of space is again the issue and the Department has had to be creative to try to resolve space problems for students and their work. There is a general concern regarding the lack of lift access

to the 8th floor where the Department is housed for accessibility issues and transportation of models and materials.

- *IT*

The Department has a computer studio on the 8th floor, which is shared with the Design Products Department and there are additional computing facilities on the 2nd floor. The Board thought that IT provision was sufficient and commended in particular in excellent print facilities. Students agreed and praised the helpful and knowledgeable IT technicians.

- *Laboratories and workshops*

The Department shares the 2nd floor workshops with the School of Architecture and Design. These facilities include model-making facilities, woodwork and metalworking workshops as well as a CNC milling machine and rapid prototype technology such as Z-Corp 3D Printer, FDM, SLA, 5-Axis CNC Milling and 3D Laser-Scanning.

The Board thought these were outstanding resources, staffed by experienced and approachable technicians. Students were appreciative of these high quality resources and the opportunity to work alongside a number of design disciplines within these shared spaces.

- *Library*

All students have access to the RCA Library on the ground floor of the Darwin Building which houses over 70,000 books and approximately 120 periodicals, with a Product Information collection, Slide collection, Colour Reference Library and computer cluster.

The library is open from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Friday and 12 noon to 4 p.m. on Saturday during term time and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Friday during vacations. All students receive an induction at the beginning of Year 1 and are able to attend user education workshops.

The Board thought the library was a useful resource, though the stock of architecture books was below what might be expected for the institution it was serving. However students told the Board that if they could not find a particular book there enquiries were made to other London University libraries or the British Library to see if it could be obtained. If this is unsuccessful library staff will buy another copy of the book in question.

13. Attachments

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

- Critical Self Appraisal
- Student Views
- Response to Questionnaire
- Supplementary Information
- Mapping of all Course Content and Learning Outcomes onto RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria for all courses to be validated
- External Examiner reports
- External Examiners' CVs
- Admissions policies
- Staff profile
- Staff Development Plan
- Equal opportunities policy and information

- Student Progression data
- Cohort Analysis
- Research profile of School
- Teaching and Learning strategy
- Quality Assurance Procedures

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

- ADS Briefs 2004-05
- MA Architecture programme specification 2005/06
- Diary 2005 and 2006
- ADS Assessment Forms 2004/05 Year 1
- ADS Assessment Forms 2004/05 Year 2
- Professional; Practice 2004/05
- One2one and CPD 2
- RCA Postgraduate Art and Design Prospectus 2005/06
- RCA Postgraduate Art and Design Prospectus 2006/07
- RCA Handbook 2005/06
- RCA East of Eros Architecture Annual 2005
- RCA Architecture and Interiors Annuals 1999-2005
- RCA Report on the revalidation of the MA Architecture and Interiors January 2002
- RCA General Regulations – Fees
- RCA Postgraduate Art and Design Departmental Reviews of the Academic Years 1999/2000 to 2003/04
- Departmental budget information 1994-2004
- List of student portfolios for review by the Board
- Staff CVs
- List of School facilities

- QAA Institutional Audit of RCA March 2003
- QAA Subject Review report on Art and Design
- Annual Course Monitoring evaluations 1999-2004

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