

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to the University of Brighton**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 28 November 2007

**School of Architecture & Design
Faculty of Arts and Architecture**

**Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture
Part Two: Postgraduate Diploma in Architecture
Part Three: Postgraduate Diploma in Management,
Practice & Law in Architecture**

Date of Visiting Board: 18 – 19 October 2007

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

University of Brighton BA (Hons) Architecture, Part One,
3 years full-time

Postgraduate Diploma in Architecture, Part Two,
2 years full-time or 4 years part-time

Postgraduate Diploma in Management, Practice and Law
in Architecture, Part Three, 1 year part-time

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered

School of Architecture & Design
Faculty of Arts & Architecture
University of Brighton
Mithras House
Lewes Road
Brighton
East Sussex BN2 4AT

T: 01273 642332
F: 01273 642348
W: www.brighton.ac.uk

1.3 Name of Awarding Body
University of Brighton

1.4 Name of Head of School
Dr Catherine Harper

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on
18 - 19 October 2007 were:

Benedicte Foo	(Chair)
Helena Webster	(Vice Chair)
Musa Garba	
Lilly Kudic	
Professor Richard Parnaby	
Ray James	(Regional Nominee)
Pavandeep Panesar	(Graduate Member)

Dr Chris Ellis (RIBA) acted as Secretary to the Board.

The co-professional appointed to the Board withdrew at short notice. The Board proceeded with the permission of the Head of School and the Chair of RIBA Validation Committee. The Board remained quorate throughout.

Mr Christopher Wellings attended the non-confidential sessions of the Board as the Institutional Facilitator.

3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

3.1 The Visiting Board was carried out under the 'RIBA Procedures for the Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture', published Sept.2003, (as amended at RIBA Validation Committee 19.05.05), the 'RIBA Criteria for Validation', published March 2002, effective from September 2003, and the RIBA 'Description & Regulations for the Recognition of Courses and Examinations in Professional Practice and Management, (Part Three)', published Nov 2003.

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- For more information see www.architecture.com.
- 4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 28 November 2007.**
- 4.1 At its meeting on the 28 November 2007 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed **Continued Validation** of:
- Part One:** University of Brighton BA (Hons) Architecture, three years full-time;
- Part Two:** University of Brighton Postgraduate Diploma in Architecture two years full-time or four years part-time
- Part Three:** University of Brighton Postgraduate Diploma in Management, Practice and Law in Architecture (Part 3).
- 4.2 The next full Visiting Board should 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 course met the Construction Industry Council Common Learning Outcomes for Degree Courses in the Built Environment.
- 5.3 The Visiting Board recommends to ARB that the Part 1 & 2 courses together 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 graduates 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 A range of work from the previous year of the courses listed in 4.1 above was inspected during the visited and was found to meet the required standards.
- 8. Conditions of Validation**
- 8.1 No special conditions of validation were recommended.
- 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 4.1.

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

- 10.1 Architecture provision at the University of Brighton is based in a Faculty of Arts and Architecture with a strong commitment to both research and the development of educational methodology. The courses promote the development of a wide range of transferable and discipline-based skills, critical reflection and the production of socially and environmentally responsible architectural design. There is a strong emphasis on creative production and innovation throughout the courses.
- 10.2 There have been substantial developments in the School since the last Visiting Board in 2002. The former Head of School has been appointed Dean of Faculty and a new Head of School of Architecture and Design took up her post in April 2007. The Faculty is the major partner (along with the RIBA, the V&A and the RCA) in a Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning Through Design. The Faculty ~~is~~ also hosts the national Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre for Art, Design & Media. Two new professors have been appointed to the School to support both teaching and research. The School has seen a significant growth in its Part One numbers from 62 recruits at the time of the previous Board to 109 in 2006/7.

- 10.3 The School's strengths include:
- good staff student relationships;
 - good studio facilities and a lively studio culture;
 - an impressive research portfolio, strengthened by the recent appointment of two new professors;
 - a good balance of full-time and part-time staff;
 - excellent links with the profession, particularly the mentoring scheme run in partnership with RIBA SE;
 - an impressive team of support staff;
 - a strong culture of teaching innovation supported by the Faculty based Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Through Design and the HEA's Subject Centre for Art, Media and Design;
 - strong support from Faculty and University management.
- 10.4 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA will expect 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, or provide the RIBA with a clear rationale for not doing so, may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.
- 10.4.1 The Visiting Board recognised that the School was addressing the issue of poor progression rates on both Part One and Part Two programmes. It was clear that sustained effort was needed to improve completion rates and the Board recommends that the School continues to closely monitor the data and continues to take appropriate actions.

- 10.4.2 The new Part Three course structure should be notified to the RIBA New Courses and Course Changes Group for consideration and approval. The changes currently being made to the Part Two programme should also be submitted to the RIBA.
- 10.5 The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards.
- 10.5.1 The Board advises that a greater variety of studio experience might be incorporated into the second year of the BA programme.
- 10.5.2 With the recent appointment of a new Head of School, it is clearly timely that the School re-examines its vision and future strategy. The Board would advise that a key element of this re-examination might focus on how the Part Two programme might develop a distinctive identity with a view to aiding retention of the best Part One graduates as well as attracting good Part One graduates from other schools.
- 10.5.3 The student**central** web-based learning initiative was seen to be an excellent tool. The Board advises the School to support more of its staff to develop the ability to exploit this potential to the full.
- 10.5.4 The Board advises the School to do more to exploit the potential links with the other schools in the Faculty at the Grand Parade site, but also with related disciplines on the University's main Moulsecoomb campus.

- 10.5.5 The Board regrets the loss of the cross-disciplinary "Technology Week" which, at the time of the 2003 visit had brought together students and staff from different disciplines to work on a range of technology focused projects. The Board advises the School to develop at least one project at some point in the Part One programme which exposes architecture students to the challenge of working with students from different discipline backgrounds.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

- 11.1 The last full Visiting Board to the University of Brighton was held on 13 – 14 November 2003.

The 2003 Visiting Board recommended **Continued Validation** of:

Part One: University of Brighton BA (Hons) Architecture, three years full-time;

Part Three: Examination in Professional Practice (as it was then titled), one year part-time.

The 2003 Visiting Board recommended **Conditional Continued Validation** of:

Part Two: University of Brighton Diploma in Architecture two years full-time or one year full-time plus two years part-time.

- 11.2 In its report the 2003 Visiting Board commented:

“The School is based in a Faculty with a strong tradition of vocational and professional education underpinned by rigorous curriculum design and real strength in research. The School is strongly supported in its work by both the Dean of Faculty and the Vice Chancellor. This is evident in a number of new resourcing initiatives including the recently enhanced IT facilities and the new studio model-making areas.

“The School has undergone substantial changes since the previous Visiting Board, which took place in 1999, when the current head had just been appointed. Some 50% of the current staff of the School have been appointed since that visit. There have been significant changes to both Part One and Part Two programmes, all of which have been approved by the New Courses and Course Changes Group. The Board found that the Part One, which had been the first to be restructured, is a lively, vigorous programme, meeting its aims and objectives in almost all respects. The Board is confident that the Part Two, where the changes are not so far advanced, will, when the same level of energy and effort is brought to bear, be similarly reinvigorated.”

- 11.3 The 2003 Visiting Board recommended conditional validation for the Part Two programme, requiring the submission of a report to RIBA Validation Committee and a Revisit. It did so because:
- no clear mapping onto the RIBA Part Two Validation Criteria had been provided for the Interiors pathway, which is available to students in the second year of their Diploma
 - from the documentation supplied to the Visiting Board it appeared that the Interiors pathway had different learning outcomes to the other

studios/pathways available to students in the second year of their Diploma

- it was not currently possible for the Visiting Board to affirm that all graduates from Part Two would satisfy all Part Two Validation Criteria no matter what combination of studios/pathways they had taken.
- The Visiting Board had significant concerns regarding the two lowest pass final year Part Two portfolios.

- 11.4 In its report the Revisiting Board in 2004 commented: “The first of two conditions imposed by the November 2003 Visiting Board was the submission by the School to the RIBA of the following documentation:
- a full mapping of the Part Two programme onto the RIBA Part Two Validation Criteria including all possible pathways together with
 - a report setting out a clear mechanism for demonstrating that all graduates from the Part Two programme will meet all Validation Criteria no matter what combination of pathways/studios they pursue.

This documentation submitted was supplied by the School and considered by Validation Committee on 15 April 2004. It was deemed an appropriate and satisfactory response to the above conditions. This was formally noted by the Validation Committee on 2 June 2004. This documentation was also copied to members of the revisit.

The second condition required that a visit to the School should take place in summer 2004 by the Chair and one other member of the Board, to review the operation of mechanisms put in place to ensure that all graduates from the Part Two programme have met all Validation Criteria. The Board should see full academic portfolios for both

years of the Part Two course at lowest pass level for all studios.

The Board was supplied, as required, with full academic portfolios for the lowest pass students on both first year studios and all three second year studios. The second year portfolios contained full work from both the first and second years of the Part Two course. The group were also provided (where appropriate) with the highest fail portfolio from each studio.

On the basis of the new course documentation supplied and the academic portfolios examined, the Board was satisfied that minimum pass standards being set by the School were appropriate and that systems were in place to ensure that the Validation Criteria were being met by all Part Two graduates from the School, no matter what combination of studios they had pursued. The Board had no hesitation in recommending that the condition on the Part Two programme be lifted.”

12. Commentary

12.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

The Board was impressed with the collaborative process, involving both staff and students, via which the Self Appraisal had been generated. The Board recognised the document as an honest and helpful statement. They did, however, find it rather descriptive overall, not as self-critical as it might have been and felt that it could have been more clearly structured. The Board would also have found it helpful to have had a clear statement of the School's long-term vision in the documentation submitted.

Developments since the 2003 Visiting Board have included:

- substantially increased student numbers on the Part One course;
- significant new staff appointments including three in the area of technology;
- additional support staff;
- a reconfiguration of studio space including various additions to render the space more flexible in use;
- enhanced IT facilities;
- the appointment of the former Head of School to the post of Dean and the appointment of a new Head of School.

The Board commended the fact that many of the physical changes had been developed and implemented by members of the School staff.

The Board noted that the RIBA New Courses and Course Changes Group had received notification of, and approved, the changes that had been made to the Part One programme. The Board recommended that the new Part Three course structure should be formally notified to the RIBA New Courses and Course Changes Group for consideration, as should the changes currently being made to the Part Two programme.

12.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The arrangements made by the School for the Visiting Board were excellent. The portfolios were clearly structured and labelled and the accompanying mark sheets were clear and easy to follow. The School's exhibition was concise and well organised, but the Board would have found it easier to interpret if a brief description of each of the projects had been provided. The documentation was

provided to members in timely fashion and contained all that was required, but lacked clarity in places, was rather repetitive and could have benefited from significant editing. The overall programme worked exceptionally smoothly. The Board appreciated support and help provided by the Institutional Facilitator, particularly in sourcing additional information.

12.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit (drawn from the 2006/7 cohort).*

BA (Hons) Architecture (Part One)

Year 1: 3 lowest pass, 4 middle and 2 high pass portfolios (from an initial cohort of 109)

Year 2: 3 lowest pass, 4 middle and 3 high pass portfolios (from an initial cohort of 85)

Year 3: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high pass portfolios (from a cohort of 45), plus 4 lowest pass portfolios from repeating students who finally completed their studies in 2006/7.

Graduate Diploma in Architecture (Part Two):

Year 1: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high pass portfolios (from a cohort of 33)

Year 2: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle pass and 2 high pass portfolios (from a cohort of 26). This included the lowest pass from each of the three studios offered in 2006/7.

The year 2 portfolios included all work from years 1 and 2.

Postgraduate Diploma in Management, Practice and Law in Architecture (Part Three)

For Part Three, the Board examined the complete assessed work of all 9 candidates from the most recent (2007) cohort of graduates: 2 referred, 3 lowest, 2 middle and 2 high.

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

The Board was satisfied that the recommendations made and the advice offered by the 2003 Board and the 2004 Revisit had been acted on by the School. Specifically:

- issues regarding the Part Three programme and ~~the roles and~~ the roles of the professional examiners have been addressed by the university validation of the programme as the PG Diploma in Management, Practice & Law in Architecture;
- IT facilities have been substantially enhanced;
- additional support for students' work in technology and environment has been provided by the new staff members in this area.

The External Examiners confirmed that the School responded promptly and appropriately to issues of concern they had raised. This was particularly the case following the 2007 assessment boards when the Part Two examiners had raised a number of serious concerns to which the School had responded quickly. Time will enable the efficacy of the response to be judged.

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

The School of Architecture and Design operates in three undergraduate academic programme areas: Architecture & Interiors, Fashion & Textile Design, Three Dimensional Design and Materials Practice and one postgraduate programme area: Architecture & Design. The School is one of three within the Faculty of Arts and Architecture, the others being: the School of Arts & Communication and the School of Historical and Critical Studies.

Architecture and Interiors is located on the third and fourth floor of Mithras House within the University's Moulsecoomb campus, the remainder of the School is based at the Grand Parade site in the centre of Brighton. The Board advises the School to do more to exploit the potential links with the other schools in the Faculty at the Grand Parade site, but also with related disciplines on the University's main Moulsecoomb campus.

12.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the BA (Hons) Architecture

12.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives:
The objectives of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme were seen to be clear and valid and were generally being achieved. The School provided a detailed and helpful mapping of the BA (Hons) Architecture programme onto the RIBA/ARB Part Two Validation Criteria.

The Board found the way course documentation was written, particularly module descriptors, unhelpful. The style was dense and difficult to understand. In the Board's view it would not have been easy for students to appreciate the learning outcomes they were expected to demonstrate.

12.5.2 Course design and content:
The Part One course is based on the University Academic Framework and requires the acquisition of 120 credits at each of levels 1, 2 and 3. The number of units of study and patterns of study differ across the three levels. Students select one 10 credit extension unit in the second year; all other modules are mandatory. As required by the Validation Criteria, design units account for at least 50%

of the credits in each year of the course. The course operates on the basis of a year structure, although parallel studios had recently been established in the third year. The Board would have appreciated a narrative indicating the specific aims and objectives of each year. In the absence of this, the Board felt that the overall approach to the first two years was perhaps a bit similar. It was too early for the Board to see the potential benefits of the parallel studios in the final year and, with this departure from a pure year system, it will clearly be important to ensure that comparability of standards across the groups is assured and that systems are in place to continue to ensure that all graduates meet all the Validation Criteria.

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 academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design. The Board found that a good solid foundation was being provided by the first two years of the course with taught subjects being thoroughly integrated into design work. They felt, however, that the format of studio projects in year two might be a little repetitive and thus advise that a greater variety of studio experience might be incorporated into the second year of the BA programme. The complexity of projects in the third year could usefully be increased to better challenge the more able students. The Board regretted that logistical difficulties associated with increased student numbers had resulted in the community focussed projects in year three being abandoned. The

Board welcomed the course team's willingness to consider their reinstatement.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment. The Board found technology units with appropriate coverage in each year of the Part One. With the appointment of additional staff in this area, there was now substantial support for students to integrate technology and environmental issues into the various design projects being undertaken throughout the course. The Board saw clear evidence of engagement with issues of sustainability in some of the year three project work and commends this, but felt that there might be more engagement with these agendas earlier in the course.

The Board regrets the loss of the cross-disciplinary "Technology Week" which, at the time of the 2003 visit had brought together students and staff from different disciplines to work on a range of technology focused projects. The Board advises the School to develop at least one project at some point in the Part One programme which exposes architecture students to the challenge of working with students from different discipline backgrounds.

Cultural Context

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context. The curriculum for this area had recently been redesigned.

The Board found the documentation excellent and the revised teaching programme, which includes delivery by studio staff, impressive. The Board noted that the revisions to all of the cultural context units in the BA had been carried out by one member of staff who is currently also the module leader for the units. Although this strategy has produced a coordinated curriculum, the Board was concerned that this arrangement was over-dependent on one person and suggested the development of a cultural context team. There was not, as yet, much evidence of the work in this area directly informing design outcomes, but the revised curriculum clearly has the potential to achieve this. The Board also noted the appointment of a new professor in this area and hoped that his appointment would provide additional support for the excellent work already underway in the School.

Communication

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication skills. Good presentation of ideas was seen in portfolios at all levels with some particularly impressive work in the high end portfolios. The portfolios revealed students to have a good command of traditional architectural representation, and the approach of restricting students to hand drawing for the first year and a half of the course was commended. High levels of skill in the generation of computer imagery was shown in final year portfolios, although the sophisticated use of computer packages sometimes got in the way of the communication of ideas with work not well structured and difficult to "read". Given the work they saw going on in the studios, the Board did not see as much evidence as they might have

expected of model making in the portfolios. They were, however pleased to see some excellent examples of development models. The dissertations examined generally revealed good levels of literacy. In their meeting with Board members students showed themselves to be articulate and persuasive in speech.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice and Law. Modules on “Architectural Practices” are found in the first two years of the course with a “Professional Practice” module in the third year. There is clearly a serious attempt to assist students over the three years to acquire an understanding of practice issues and to develop their skills as reflective practitioners. The Board, however, found the weakest portfolios to be very thin in this area and to contain poorly structured work.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience*

The School has for the last five years run a mentoring scheme, in partnership with RIBA South East, which has provided the opportunity for year three students to meet a practitioner once a month. The Board commends this, believing that it has particular benefit for students who come from non-traditional backgrounds and might have no personal or family contacts with members of the profession. The Board suggested that credit might be attached to this activity to demonstrate its importance, perhaps by making it a component of the “Introduction to Professional Practice” course. Students reported that they were generally well prepared for their Stage One Professional Experience.

12.5.4 Progression within the course:

The data presented by the School shows the overall progression rate for the Part One programme over the last five years to be worsening. The School is aware of this and acknowledges that progression rates need constant monitoring, curriculum review and timetable. Whilst the more substantial problems in this respect were with the Part Two course, it was clear that sustained effort was also needed to improve completion rates on the Part One and the Board recommends that the School continues to closely monitor progression data and continues to take appropriate actions.

12.5.5 Teaching & Learning

The Board’s visit took place at a time of flux due to the substantial increase of student numbers on the Part One programme. The Board commends the substantial rethinking that has been underway in the School to establish teaching and learning methodologies appropriate to the significantly larger cohorts now being taught. In this respect, the studentcentral web-based learning initiative was seen to be an excellent tool. The Board advises the School to support more of its staff to develop the ability to exploit this potential to the full.

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

The Board found the School to be using a well-balanced selection of assessment procedures throughout the Part One course. Assessment procedures were clear and transparent. This was confirmed in comments made by the External Examiners for the Part One. Students also confirmed that they understood what was expected of them and that they received good detailed feedback sheets.

Students also confirmed that if they needed additional explanations regarding assessment such additional feedback was readily available from staff.

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

In addition to minimum entry conditions as required by the University, the School asks for a minimum score of 320 UCAS tariff points. This had been increased from 260 at the time of the 2003 Board. Entries with advanced standing are only considered to the second year and only following the rigorous application of the University's AP(E)L procedures which includes an interview with a portfolio of work.

12.6 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the Postgraduate Diploma in Architecture: Part Two

12.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives:

The Board found the aims of the Postgraduate Diploma in Architecture to be clearly expressed. At the time of the visit, the School was about to embark on a major review of the Part Two. The Board hoped this might address concerns as to whether the aims were being as fully met as they might have been. The School also provided a detailed and helpful mapping of the Postgraduate Diploma programme onto the RIBA/ARB Part Two Validation Criteria.

12.6.2 Course design and content:

The course is structured around a number of vertical studios. At the time of the visit there were three (“Architectural Ecology”, “Landings” and “Misc Architecture”) The first year has a significant taught input with the second year largely consisting of a year long thesis

design project with linked technology and professional studies plus a design research study.

The Board noted that the course team was considering a major restructuring of the Part Two such that students met all the RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria in the first year of the programme, allowing a greater degree of experimentation and inventiveness in the work undertaken in the second year. The Board supported this aspiration as it clearly had potential to make the Part Two programme more distinctive and attractive to both returning Brighton graduates and Part One graduates from other schools. In the light of existing non-progression rates, the Board counsels the School to proceed with some caution and to consider carefully the new design project briefs alongside the ability of the students being recruited to the programme. The course changes currently under discussion should be notified to the RIBA New Courses and Course Changes Group as soon as internal approval is received.

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

- *Design*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Post-graduate Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design. The Board did not see the variety of design work they might have expected given the three vertical studios that were operating in the year they examined. The Board welcomed the assurance that the current studio masters were pursuing more diverse agendas. The Board supported the view expressed in one

of the External Examiner's reports that such complexity as existed in the diploma projects focussed on situations not buildings. The Board felt that this had resulted in solutions which focussed on landscapes with little engagement with the complex interaction of spaces. The Board felt that the course team might look again at the briefs being offered and, in at least one unit, offer students the opportunity to explore an urban site and a complex building form.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Post-graduate Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology & Environment. Formal taught content in this area is incorporated into the first year of the Diploma. The academic structure and the strong staff support ensure that technological and environmental issues are thoroughly integrated with the design work. The Board detected an obvious interest amongst both staff and students in investigating interesting/novel technological and environmental solutions. Whilst there was much evidence of ambition and interest, it was unfortunate that the nature of the built forms being considered tended to limit the nature of the technological/environmental solutions which could be applied. As at Part One, there was clear evidence in student portfolios of attempts to engage with issues of sustainability. The Board learnt that the School was a participant in an EU Leonardo Scheme examining educational models for embedding sustainability in design curricula.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Post-graduate Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context. As with the Technology and Environment, formal teaching is restricted to the first year of the Postgraduate Diploma in the form of the "Critical Readings in Architecture" unit. Students are then expected to demonstrate their understanding through their final thesis design project and the linked Design Research Study. The Board heard an account of the recent significant changes to the teaching of this subject area. It commended these changes, and noted the improvements in ambition and achievement in the last cohort of student essays. The Board questioned whether the changes had been notified to the RIBA New Courses & Course Changes Committee.

The Board received details of the Open Lecture series organised by one of the School's new Professors. The overall title of the series was "Material Processes". It brought together an impressive programme involving cutting edge academics and practitioners which was open to all students and local practitioners.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Graduate Diploma in Architecture programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication. As at Part One, students were seen to be articulate and to demonstrate appropriate levels of literacy with some particularly good dissertations on view. As with Part One, the Board saw clear evidence of mastery of

computer based media, but less evidence of the clear messages being communicated.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Postgraduate Diploma programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice and Law. A course of specialist seminars, mostly given by external specialists, providing a good coverage of areas of the criteria, is offered during the final year of the Part Two course. As the assessment for this course, students are required to write up their notes of the session and add a commentary on the relevance of the issues raised in respect of their design project. Despite this, the Board did not see in the design projects themselves as much evidence as they might have expected of legal and regulatory issues being addressed in the final designs.

12.6.4 Progression within the course:

The External Examiners rightly highlighted the fact that only 9 of the 25 students on the 2006/7 second year of the PG Dip passed at the first attempt. The Board shares the view of the External Examiners that such a low pass rate in the fifth year of study suggests that something had gone seriously wrong. The opportunity for referred work to be reassessed in September increased the pass rate, but the School recognises that this is a real problem and has generated an action plan to address the causes. At the time of the Board's visit it was too early to form any judgement as to whether the action plan was working. The Visiting Board acknowledged that the School was addressing this issue of poor progression rates on both Part One and Part Two programmes. It was clear that sustained effort was needed to improve completion rates

and the Board recommends that the School continues to closely monitor the data and continues to take appropriate actions.

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

The Board was satisfied that appropriate assessment mechanisms were in place throughout the Part Two programme and that relative weightings were also appropriate. The Board was disappointed to find a narrow marking band apparently being employed in many of the assessment areas. Possibly as a result, no Postgraduate Diplomas had been awarded with distinction in the last four years. The Board suggests that the School might, with the support of its External Examiners, re-examine the marking range employed.

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

The School welcomes applications to its Part Two from graduates with honours degrees from Part One validated programmes. The Board commended the course team's open admissions policy and their willingness to admit Part One graduates with 2.2 and 3rd class degrees, recognising that correlation between Part One and Part Two performance is not high. Nevertheless, the School clearly wishes to increase both the number and quality of its Part Two students and hopes that recent recruitment of high profile staff members will help achieve this ambition. The Board supports a view expressed by one of the Part Two External Examiners that a key issue is the need for the School to develop a distinctive identity. With the recent appointment of a new Head of School, it is clearly timely that the School re-examines its vision and future strategy. The Board would thus advise that a key element of this re-

examination might focus on how the Part Two programme might develop a distinctive identity with a view to aiding retention of the best Part One graduates as well as attracting good Part One graduates from other schools.

12.7 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the Postgraduate Diploma in Management, Practice & Law in Architecture (Part 3): Part Three

12.7.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives:
The overall aims of the PG Dip in Management, Practice and Law in Architecture (Part 3) were seen to be appropriate. The assessment criteria might, however, have been more clearly expressed in an effort to assist candidates better understand what was expected of them.

12.7.2 Course design and content:
In 2006, the course was restructured to allow it to be validated within the University's standard academic framework. It now consists of 3 modules making a total of 120 credits for the Pg Dip award:
Principles of Professional Management, Practice & Law 60 credits;
Recording & Planning Professional Experience & Development 20 credits and a
Case Study 40 credits.
All the units are mandatory and must be passed to achieve the qualification.

In talking to both the course tutor and the external examiner it was clear that the course was still in the process of "bedding down" following the changes that had been necessary to allow the course to be validated by the University.

The Visiting Board recommends that the new Part Three course structure should be notified to the RIBA New Courses and Course Changes Group for consideration and approval.

12.7.3 Quality and coverage of the syllabus
On the basis of the work sampled the Board confirmed that all the Part Three Validation Criteria were being met by all the graduates from the programme. The Board was confident that standards were being set appropriately. The two comparative areas of weakness were the Case Studies and the CVs. The weaker examples of Case Studies consisted primarily of a historical discourse with a brief appended critical commentary. The Board felt that candidates should be advised to more thoroughly embed their critical commentary to ensure that it had reasonable depth. Some of the CVs and Personal Evaluations were rather short – the Board felt that better use could be made of this document as a basis for the professional interview if candidates were encouraged to provide rather more detail.

12.7.4 Progression within the course:
Only 9 candidates from over 70 enrolled had presented themselves for examination in 2007. This was a significant reduction from previous years where a more normal figure had been for about 70% of the registered cohort to submit for assessment. The course team is encouraged to investigate this increasing trend to defer assessment. If this trend continues, given that the information covered in the course has a limited currency, the School might consider imposing a cut-off period less than the current four years.

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

The assessment regime for the Brighton Part Three includes a distinctive form of examination which candidates tackle over a five week period in open book form. The Board was concerned in this form of examination about the potential for plagiarism and for simply downloading answers from the internet. The External Examiner provided reassurance that the Professional Interview is specifically used to establish the candidate's authorship of the examination answers submitted. He also assured the Board that care was taken by the Examiners in an effort to minimise the extent to which questions could be answered by simply downloading information. The Board accepted the External Examiner's reassurance, but given the format of the examination, advises the Part Three Examining team to continue to exercise great care in ensuring that the questions set assess the candidate's understanding and ability to apply knowledge rather than simply repetition of facts.

The Board felt that the requirement that candidates submit their office diaries as an element of the assessment process was an interesting and worthwhile addition to the normal procedures. Having examined some of the candidate's office diaries, the Board suggests that, if this is to continue to be a requirement, guidance on how the diaries should be compiled is required if they are to be helpful to the examiners.

12.8 External examining arrangements

The Board confirmed that the School was supported in its assessment activities by a strong team of External Examiners. The External Examiners were appropriately critical, but very supportive of the School. In their meeting with the Board, the Part One and Part Two External Examiners reported that:

- they were provided with a thorough and careful induction process
- they were completely satisfied with the assessment process and their opportunity to contribute to decision making.
- they welcomed the fact that they were still able to interview all graduating students
- they strongly supported the School's view that there was significant merit in having the same team of External Examiners looking at both Part One and Part Two.

The Board particularly commended the External Examiner's Forum which concluded the process of external examining and which clearly provided an opportunity for more detailed communication of views and suggestions to staff than was possible via traditional external examiner reports.

The External Examiners reports for Part Two in 2006/7 had raised serious concerns about low progression rates. The Examiners confirmed that they had received a prompt response to their concerns setting out an action plan to address the issues raised.

At Part Three, the Board was able to confirm that the recommendations made by the 2003 Board regarding the role of the Professional Examiners had been addressed. Although the new arrangements set in place following the university validation of the programme were still bedding-

in, the Part Three External Examiner was confident about both procedures being followed and the standards being set.

12.9 Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience

The School has a university validated 50 credit unit of study for year out students: AI 355 “Introduction to Architectural Practice”. Students attend the School for three intensive days during their Stage One Professional Experience for a programme of lectures, seminars and tutorial. The return days also include meetings between the student and the School’s PSA to review experience in practice and to enable their PEDR records to be discussed and signed-off.

The Board confirmed that appropriate arrangements for monitoring professional experience are in place and that monitoring was being done conscientiously. This aspect of the student experience is assisted by the School’s good links with practice.

12.10 Students

The Board’s meeting with students was attended by over 130 students drawn from all years of the Part One and Part Two courses, together with students undertaking their Stage One Professional Experience. The Board welcomed this impressively large attendance. It was disappointed to find no Part Three candidates or recent Part Three graduates, but recognises the difficulty in arranging for those in practice to attend. Overall students were very supportive of the School and particularly commended:

- Brighton as an excellent base to study architecture;
- the openness and accessibility of staff;
- the involvement of practicing architects in studio teaching;
- the excellent studio accommodation;

- the really excellent support from workshop and IT staff;
- the excellent library facilities;
- the recently enhanced IT facilities;
- the good clear feedback received, particularly on design work.

Amongst the concerns raised by students were:

- although the IT facilities have been much improved, there was still pressure on printing facilities on the run-up to studio deadlines;
- the limited capacity of the full workshop facilities (although the light model-making facilities in the studio helps compensate for this);
- extended opening hours in the studios would be welcomed.

The Board found clear evidence that the School takes student feedback seriously. Evidence was provided of student feedback questionnaires for all modules together with minutes from student feedback meetings. Students confirmed that they saw actions responding to the issues they raised.

The Board learned that a formal architectural student society had been formed the day before their visit. The society has clear aims both for Brighton based activities and to play a full part in *archaos* nationally. The Board encourages the School to support the students in their aspirations and particularly to support their bid for funding from the CETLD project.

In the meeting with Board members, students suggested that staff were not sympathetic to part-time study and to students whose personal circumstances required them to

undertake some work alongside their studies. The Board was disappointed to find that the part-time route through Part Two was to be abandoned at a time when many other schools in the country were actively exploring “earn and learn” initiatives. The Board understands why the School is opposed to 24 hour studio access and recognises the issues about work-life balance which underpin this. Nevertheless the Board hopes that student requests for extended access to studios might be favourably considered, particularly some access at weekends, which could be of real benefit to students from less well-off backgrounds who have no option but to take part-time employment during their studies.

The School's figures show it operating at a student/staff ratio of:
 23:1 for the BA (Hons) Architecture (Part One)
 13:1 for the PG Diploma in Architecture (Part Two)
 29:1 for the Part Three programme

12.11 **Staff**

The Board judged the staff within the School to have a good variety of experience; recent recruits had helped improve this balance. There was also an appropriate balance between full-time and part-time staff and between staff with a primary academic focus and practitioners. Easy access from London assists the school in its recruitment of practitioners as part-time studio teachers. The Board learned that good communication systems are in place to ensure that part-time staff are thoroughly involved in academic planning and developments within the School. Staff development is supported by a modest staff development fund that supports attendance at conferences and symposia, and the development of staff IT skills. Technical staff support has been enhanced substantially

since the last Visiting Board; students were universally positive about the support offered in both workshop and IT areas.

The Board's meeting with staff was well attended by both full and part-time teaching staff and technical staff. A total of 27 staff members were present. The Board was pleased that the majority of staff present contributed to what was a frank and open meeting with a substantial level of enthusiasm on display. It was also clear that all staff members had been given the opportunity to contribute to the School's Critical Self Appraisal document.

12.12 **Research**

A number of staff from the School were included in the Faculty submission to Unit of Assessment 64 (Art & Design) in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, achieving an impressive grade of 5. The funding from this had provided good support for research work in the architecture area in the subsequent years. It was clear that the University had high, but realistic expectations for the forthcoming RAE where architecture staff would again be included with other Faculty researchers in a submission to the Art & Design Unit of Assessment. The research base of the School had clearly been strengthened by the recent recruitment of two new professors.

There was a clear expectation from university management for staff to be research active and, as a result of recent recruitment and excellent support for existing staff, a high proportion of staff are now research active. Research is managed at Faculty level through a Centre for Research & Development with accommodation based at the Grand parade site.

The Board particularly commended:

- The fact that all research staff are actively involved in teaching.
- The clear evidence that research impacted positively on teaching in the School, particularly at Part Two level, but increasingly also at Part One.
- The strategies being employed to assist staff who had not historically been research active to become involved with research.
- The impressive number of staff with PhD's or working towards research degrees.

12.13 **Equal Opportunities**

The School provided the Board with a copy of the University's Equal Opportunities Policy Statement and with detailed statistics on both its staff and student population by gender, ethnic origin and disability. There was, however, no commentary on these issues. It is clear, however, that the School takes equal opportunities issues seriously. It has a student population with more female students than the national average and a commendable ethnic diversity. A commendably high proportion of the academic staff, including the Dean and Head of School, are female. The School is encouraged to continue its careful monitoring and to take advantage of any recruitment opportunity to improve the ethnic make-up of staff.

12.14 **Resourcing and facilities**

- General

The architecture and interiors subject area is based in accommodation specifically reconfigured for its use on the third and fourth floors of Mithras House, a building on the Lewes Road opposite the University's main

Moulsecoomb campus and some two miles from the Grand Parade site housing the rest of the School of Architecture & Design. The Board learned from its meeting with the University's Deputy VC that the University's plans included adding an extra wing to the Grand Parade building (possibly in 2011) to allow Architecture & Interiors to be co-located with the rest of the School. The Visiting Board offered its strong support for this aspiration.

- Studios

Two large studios are shared by architecture and interiors students. Each includes a light model-making area created in part to compensate for the shortage of workshop space. The studio spaces had been reconfigured since the previous Board to accommodate increased Part One numbers. The Board found the studios and adjacent spaces were being well used and added to the creation of an impressive "studio culture". The large open-plan studios also encouraged interaction between different years of the course and between architecture and interiors students. Additional funding had recently been secured for further enhancements to the spaces including the provision of screens to help improve acoustic properties and ceiling mounted power points to improve flexibility.

- IT

The Board confirmed that IT facilities available to students had been substantially enhanced since the 2003 Visiting Board. The main dedicated computer facility for architecture and interiors students contained 24 top-end specification G4 powermacs plus 6 scanners and plotters. Elsewhere on the third floor of Mithras House there were other powermacs and PCs, all with an extensive range of up-to-date software, plus printers and plotters. Students

had access to other extensive IT facilities elsewhere on the University's Moulsecoomb site, particularly in the library where certain of the facilities were open for 24 hours a day. Students reported that many of them owned their own computers and that the School's facilities were more than adequate with printing/plotting facilities which came under extreme pressure on the run-up to studio hand-ins. The School's ICT Workshop manager was commended by students for the excellent support service she provided.

- Workshop

The main workshop available to architecture students in Mithras House is well-equipped. Despite being reconfigured since the last Visiting Board it is far too small for the number of students seeking to use it at key times of the academic year. The School has recognised this by developing light model-making facilities in the studios and these spaces were clearly being well used. Subject to prior arrangement, architecture students also have access to the impressively equipped specialist workshops supporting other design students at the Grand Parade site. Students confirmed that the workshop space was seriously inadequate given the recent growth in student numbers, but were universally positive about the high quality support provided by the technicians in the area.

- Library

The University's main library is just over five minutes walk away from the studio accommodation on the main Moulsecoomb site. The library was seen to be well stocked with architectural texts and journals and was also strong in related areas such as construction. A team of specialist subject librarians provides excellent support for students including guidance on accessing the increasing amounts of material that are available on-line. Students also have

access to, and full borrowing rights at, the Art & Design Library on the Grand Parade Site. Both libraries have computer suites for general computing. Both libraries have extended opening hours with some facilities being available 24 hours a day. Specialist CAD software is also accessible via computers located in the Art & Design computer suite which is open on Saturdays.

13. Attachments

- 13.1 Prior to the Visit, members of the Visiting Board received:
- Critical Self Appraisal
 - Completed Questionnaire
 - Supplementary Information
 - Mapping of Part One, Part Two and Part Three courses onto RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria
 - Units of Study Proformas for all three courses
 - External Examiner Nomination Forms
 - External Examiner Procedures and Reports
 - Responses to External Examiner's Reports
 - Staff CVs
 - Assessment Methods Statements for all three courses
 - Details of Research Students, Staff Research Projects, Summary of RAE 2001 outcome etc.
 - Summary of Institutional QA Documentation
 - Summary of 2004 QAA Institutional Audit and the associated discipline audit trails in architecture.
 - Financial Resources
 - Summary of School's Engagement with the Profession
- 13.2 In the Baseroom , the Board was provided with the following additional documentation:
- BA (Hons) Architecture Student Handbook 2006/7
 - PG Dip Architecture Student Handbook 2006/7
 - University of Brighton Student handbook 2006/7

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- University of Brighton Student handbook 2007/8
 - University of Brighton Undergraduate Prospectus 2008
 - Full set of assessment sheets for part One, part Two and Part Three 2006/7
 - “EYE” End of Year Exhibition Brochure 2007
 - Leaflets for MA in Architectural Studies
 - Student Services Leaflet
 - Documentation on student**central**
 - School of Architecture & Design: Programme for Open lecture Series 07/08
- Plus the following University documentation
- Academic Health handbook
 - External Examiners Handbook
 - General Examination & Assessment Regulations for Taught Courses
 - General Examination & Assessment Procedures handbook
 - Quality Statement
- 13.3 In the Portfolio Room, Board members were supplied with the following additional documents:
- BA (Hons) Architecture (Part One)
- Bound volume containing course diagram, year programme, complete mark sheets, study guide and assessment sheets for each unit of levels 1, 2 and 3.
- PG Dip Architecture (Part Two)
- Bound volume containing course diagram, year programme, complete mark sheets, study guide and assessment sheets for each year of the programme.
- PG Dip Management, Practice & Law in Architecture (Part 3)
- Units of Study: Course Descriptors
- Course Information & Guidance Notes
 - Exam paper 2007 (including a version annotated to identify learning outcomes sought)
 - Results marksheet 2007
 - External Examiner's Report 2007 and Response
 - Assessment Process diagram
 - Previous Exam papers/External Examiner's Reports and Responses 03/04, 04/05, 05/06.
 - Complete set of lecture notes and workshops 2006/7
- 13.4 During the Visit, on request, the Board also received copies of:
- 2006/7 External Examiner's Report from Professor David Dunster for the PG Dip in Architecture
 - Extracted Notes from School Annual Academic health Review 2006/7
 - Annual Academic Health Review for School 2006/7
 - List of staff roles and responsibilities
 - Complete set of 2006/7 External Examiner Reports
- 13.5 In addition a networked computer was provided to allow Board members to access, via the "student**central**" intranet, teaching materials supporting BA (Hons) Architecture, PG Dip Architecture and PG Dip Management, Practice, & Law in Architecture