

**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board  
to the University of East London  
School of Architecture and the  
Visual Arts**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 19 March 2008

**BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part One  
Professional Diploma in Architecture, Part  
Two**

Date of Visiting Board: 01/02 November 2007

## 1. Information About the Courses

### 1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part One  
Professional Diploma in Architecture, Part Two

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

School of Architecture and the Visual Arts  
University of East London  
Docklands Campus  
4-6 University Way  
London E16 2RD

T: 0208 223 3237  
F: 020 8223 3296  
W: [www.uel.ac.uk](http://www.uel.ac.uk)

### 1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of East London

### 1.4 Name of Head of Architecture

Signy Svalastoga

## 2. Membership of the Visiting Board

### 2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 01/02 November 2007 were:

Professor David Dernie (Chair)  
Frank Woods (Vice Chair)

Professor Ruth Morrow  
Virginia Newman  
Ben Barr (co-professional member)  
John Ashton (Student/graduate member)  
Tim Ronalds (RIBA Regional Representative)

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

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

## 3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

### 3.1 The Visiting Board was carried out under the 'RIBA Procedures for the Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture,' published July 2003 and effective from September 2003, 'Tomorrow's Architect,' published March 2003, effective from September 2003. For more information see [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

## 4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 19 March 2008

### 4.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Education Committee of the Royal Institute of British Architects Continued Validation of

BSc (Hons) Architecture, Part One  
Professional Diploma in Architecture, Part Two

### 4.2 The next Visiting Board will take place in 2011.

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

- 5.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA continue with their accreditation of the Part Two qualification.
- 5.2 The Visiting Board was satisfied that the Part One courses met the Construction Industry Council Common Learning Outcomes for Degree Courses in the Built Environment
- 5.3 The Visiting Board recommends to ARB that the Part 1 & 2 courses met all points of the EU Directive.

**6. Criteria for Validation**

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

**7. Standards**

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

**8. Conditions of Validation**

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

**9. Standard Requirements of Recognition**

- 9.1 RIBA recognition of all courses/qualifications is dependent upon:
  - i. external examiners being appointed for the course;
  - ii. any significant changes to the courses and examinations being submitted to the RIBA;
  - iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being reported to the RIBA so that, where appropriate, recognition may formally be transferred to the new title by the RIBA;
  - iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses/qualifications listed in 4.

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

- 10.1 The Architecture Subject Area has coped well with a long period of significant change and upheaval. The Board commends the staff and students for this achievement and believes the Architecture Subject Area should now be afforded time and space in which to consolidate its present activities and plan its future agenda.
- 10.2 The School's strengths include:
  - Its commitment to making higher education and architecture accessible to a wide constituency
  - Lively and diverse student body

- Committed and enthusiastic staff
- Links with the profession
- Good facilities, although under pressure.
- Its excellence in making and modelling.
- Its location in East London at a time of regeneration, offering unique opportunities.

### 10.3 Recommendations

- 10.3.1 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA expects the Institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendations in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the school and in the mid term review. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.
- 10.3.2 The Board strongly recommends that the school re-examine the content and delivery of Professional Studies, particularly at Part Two, in order better to reflect the complexity of the subject within the curriculum. A revitalised programme should be further integrated into other areas of the curriculum.
- 10.3.3 The Board recommends that the School provides significantly improved printing and IT facilities for Architecture students. Some student discontent with aspects of IT provision was noted and the Board recommends that the School undertake a review of such provision to ensure adequate facilities in the future, particularly with larger cohort sizes.

10.3.4 The Board was very concerned to note the disarray of the Architectural library, and recommends that immediate steps are taken to improve the situation.. The Board recommends that consistently adequate resources are allocated to library maintenance so that learning is not disadvantaged.

10.3.5 The Board recommends that the School review its internal moderation procedures to ensure parity between units. The Board noted comments from external examiners and items raised by students that underlined the need to address internal moderation procedures, and the manner in which these are communicated to students, staff and examiners, as a matter of urgency.

### 10.4 Advice

- 10.4.1 The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards;
- 10.4.2 The Board advises the School to develop a strategic research strategy beyond the 2008 RAE.
- 10.4.3 The Board welcomed the studio culture that was evident. The Board advises the School to be mindful of the increasing pressure larger cohort sizes will put on physical resources.
- 10.4.4 The Board recognised the excellent standards of model and artefact making in the School and applauded the way in which the School's ethos of making (including drawings) facilitated a learning strategy well adapted to the student body. At the same time the Board was

disappointed not to see more evidence of this activity within the academic portfolios presented.

10.4.5 The Board advises the School to provide greater support with English language skills for overseas and other students.

10.4.6 The Board recognised a good system of recruitment of part time or visiting staff that is already in place. However, in light of the large numbers of part time and visiting staff, the Board advises that the School develops an appropriate induction system for new part time or visiting studio staff. The Board further advises that all such staff are made fully conversant with the criteria for validation and how these are demonstrated through the learning outcomes they are responsible for.

10.4.7 Whilst applauding the range of communication skills evident, the Board advises the School to further develop portfolios in the area of digital representation.

10.4.8 The Board advises the University to maintain the highest levels of security in the studio space and in the journey to and from transport facilities.

10.4.9 The Board would encourage the transparency with which funding is devolved into Architecture.

10.4.10 The Board noted the low proportion of full time establishment staff. It recognised the opportunities for connection to practice that a large group of part time staff offered but was also concerned about the additional administrative duties placed on full-time staff both with increased student cohorts and the requirement to produce research.

## 11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

2.1 The last full Visiting Board to the University of East London took place on 24/25 October 2002.

The Visiting Board recommended Continued Validation for:

Part One: The University of East London three year full-time course and four year part-time course and the related examinations leading to the award of the BSc (Honours) in Architecture

Part Two: The University of East London two year full-time course and three year part-time course and related examinations leading to the award of the Diploma in Architecture

## 2. Summary of the Previous Visiting Board Report

“The School’s strengths included a highly committed and supportive staff and a richly diverse and capable student body. The Board found that the courses within the School had a great many strengths. The Board recommended that, given the expertise within and the potential of the move to the Docklands Campus, the School could develop even greater strengths, individuality, and standards of excellence.

“The Board found that the BSc (Hons) in Architecture course met the Criteria for Validation at Part One level in all the necessary areas. The Board was satisfied that the lowest pass standards were appropriate. The Board found evidence in the portfolios at all levels, that the course

provided students with a sound experience in architectural design at this stage. There was evidence in the portfolios at all levels that non-design elements in the design outputs were also of a good standard. The Board commended the use of models as a formative part of the design process. The Board noted Year One of the Part One course was particularly innovative and provided a good grounding in preparation for the remainder of the course. The Board also noted that the coverage of Environmental Design and Architectural and Constructional Technologies was an integral strength of the course. The Board found that the areas of communication studies and professional studies and management were also well covered by the course.

“The Board found that the Diploma in Architecture (Part Two) course met the Criteria for Validation and the standards of the design work were competent. As well as covering the core Criteria, the Board found that students were offered a rich variety of innovative options through the vertical unit structure. The Board was pleased to find that the course had a number of strengths. In particular, the Board commended the areas of Culture and Context of Architecture and Environmental Design and Architectural and Constructional Technologies.

“Whilst the Visiting Board was completely satisfied that the threshold standards were appropriate at both Part One and Part Two, it wished to bring two issues to the School’s attention. Given that the School operated a vertical unit system in the area of design in Years Two and Three and also in Years Four and Five, the Visiting Board noted that the School should make more of an effective effort to ensure that all units were covering all of the Criteria for Validation. In addition, the Visiting Board advised that there could be better management of project work within

the School to ensure that units produced a greater number and range of resolved building designs.”

## 12. Details of the Conditions in Item 8.

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

## 13. Commentary

### 13.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

The Board found the Critical Self-Appraisal disappointing at it was prepared for another purpose and was not appropriate to the task in hand. The requirements for the Critical Self-appraisal are set out in Appendix 2 section 3 of the Validation Procedures. It is intended to be a document of no more than 5 pages in which the School analyses developments since the last Visiting Board, explains plans for the future and provides the rationale for any proposed changes. In addition to what is stated in the procedures, the Validation Committee has also agreed that documents produced for internal university purposes are not appropriate as Critical Self-Appraisals. Documents produced for another purpose tend to be significantly longer and do not focus on the essential issues which are of interest to the RIBA.

Since the last visiting board in 2002 the Architecture Subject Area has gone through a period of major change and development. In 2003 the School of Architecture moved from its own building in Holbrook to the main Docklands campus. The Schools of Architecture and Art

and Design merged to form the School of Architecture and the Visual Arts. There have also been changes in headship.

The Board recognises these enormous changes and respects the hard work that has gone into consolidating activities in the new building. The Board commends the coherence of the teaching team and the way in which the School has managed to retain an individual identity following the merger.

The Department of Architecture Subject Area plays a very important professional and social role which the Board supports wholeheartedly and encourages the School to maintain and develop. The Board believes that the School now needs to consolidate its position further and develop its research activities.

At institutional level, Architecture is seen as playing a key role in regeneration. The move to Docklands was intended to encourage synergies between a range of disciplines brought together on one site.

Traditionally teaching-focussed, the School now aims to develop research and innovation, while retaining its commitment to undergraduate teaching.

The School wishes to raise its profile in the East London landscape, offering its expertise to the major initiatives in the area, such as the Thames Gateway project and the 2012 Olympics. A major step towards this is the establishment of the UEL Architecture and Urbanisms Project Office, which is intended to be a research and development consultancy. The School is also increasing

the number of postgraduate courses and has established a doctorate programme.

Student numbers have grown more than anticipated which has led to some overcrowding. The Board notes the University's commitment to preserve the emphasis on making and materials and believes that resources should remain commensurate with student numbers in order to achieve this.

The School is exploring ways in which this might be accommodated. The management responsibilities on full-time staff have also increased.

### 13.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Visiting Board thanks the staff and students for their kindness and hospitality during the visit. All practical arrangements were very good. The School provided comprehensive documentation. The Board particularly enjoyed aspects of the 2 and 3D work which was entertaining and informative. Portfolios were clearly labelled.

While there was sufficient evidence to allow the Board to draw conclusions about the quality of the work, the Board did not think that the portfolios represented all the students' work. While it understood that retention of models is not always possible due to space constraints and security considerations, the Board encourages the School to ensure that students keep a comprehensive record of such work to fully represent all the elements of a complete academic portfolio.

#### 13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

**The School provided the following sample [check with school precise numbers]**

**Part One:**

First year: 4 lowest, 3 middle, 4 high from a cohort of 54  
 2<sup>nd</sup> year : The lowest pass from each unit (7 units in total)  
 10 middle, 5 high form a cohort of 51.  
 3<sup>rd</sup> Year: The lowest pass from each unit (7 units in total)  
 7 middle, 7 high (from a cohort of 56)

**Part Two**

4<sup>th</sup> year: The lowest pass from each unit (7 units in total),  
 7 middle, 6 high (from a cohort of 56)  
 5<sup>th</sup> year: The lowest pass from each unit (7 units in total) ,  
 6 middle, 6 high (from a cohort of 54)

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

The Board considered that the School had made good efforts in most areas to respond to the recommendations of the previous Visiting Board report. The School's response to external criticism is, on the whole, conscientious and thorough. The External Examiners also confirmed that the School was responsive to constructive criticism and feedback.

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

Since 2003 Architecture has formed part of the School of Architecture and the Visual Arts. This has five subject areas: Architecture, Fine Art, Digital Arts and Visual Communication, Fashion and Textiles and Visual

Theories. In addition to the validated architecture programmes, the Architecture Subject Area also offers an M.Arch, MSc Computing and Design, MSc Material Matters, MA Sustainability and Design, MA Alternative Urbanisms, MA Interpretation and Theories and MA Landscape Architecture. A Doctorate programme was established in 2007.

The staff were disappointed that it has not yet been possible to investigate the kind of synergies between disciplines that were anticipated; however this remains one of the School's and University's aims.

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

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives  
 The course objectives are very clear and explicitly laid down in the programme specification. The documentation is good and students are given useful guidance notes, but the Board was not sure that the aims and objectives were communicated sufficiently to all staff.

13.5.2 Course design and content

The BSc (Hons) Architecture programme follows a vertical unit structure within a modular framework. In the first year students are first grouped into four units for the initial projects, then into groups within two design units, rotating halfway through the year. The Board considered that year one in particular provided a good pedagogic model for such a diverse student body.

At the time of the visits there was a choice of 7 units in the second and third year, each unit being made up of

both second and third year students. Students choose their units following a series of staff presentations after which they may also discuss the units with the unit tutors before making a choice.

The staff body, with its links with practice and diversity of background, is reflected in the breadth of opportunity offered by the vertical units. However, the Board noted that there appeared to be an imbalance in delivery in work in some units, some appearing to result in more research than resolution.

The Board recommends that the School review its internal moderation procedures to ensure parity between units. The Board noted extensive comments from external examiners and items raised by students that underlined the need urgently to address transparent internal moderation procedures, and the manner in which they are communicated to students, staff and examiners.

The Board applauds the culture of making and materials, but believed that evidence should be much more visible in the portfolios. As well as providing a more complete academic portfolio, this would be an excellent advertisement for the School.

Students who do not have sufficient design skills on entry may take the four-year Extended Degree, after the first year of which they may formally enter the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme (or indeed any Art and Design discipline).

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

#### - *Design*

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

A good deal of design work is done through models, which the Board was unfortunately unable to see. Year one is well structured and creatively balanced and the Board applauds the plurality of the vertical units in years two and three. Students acquire a good set of skills through a variety of approaches, and the range of models and drawings is an interesting feature of the course. The Board applauded the mixture of both second and third years in the vertical studios which encourages co-ordination between the years. Assessment of units acknowledges appropriately the different levels of achievement at second and third year. This challenges and motivates staff to write briefs appropriately.

The influx of part-time tutors ensures that units are refreshed, retaining their edge and reflecting a contemporary knowing about design. The making culture pervades all activities and is the School's distinguishing feature, for which workshop facilities and access to them are crucial. This has a direct influence on the scale of models.

#### - *Technology & Environment*

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

The Board noted that students had expressed some concerns about this aspect of the course. The Board also noted that the External Examiners had similarly been concerned in 2006, but considered that by 2007 improvements had been made. The Board's appreciation of this aspect of work was undermined by the lack of physical models, which the External Examiners had been able to see. The Board noted that the culture of materials and materiality is well-established and considered it to be an interesting approach as a way in to architecture. At the same time the Board considered that constructed artefacts could be further complimented with more drawings both of process and detail.

- *Cultural Context*

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

This is a developing area in the School. The Board noted that several staff are research-active in this area and this will directly influence the programmes. Students are aware of contemporary issues and some essays dealt with historic matters. In much of the student work this was well done, the Board noted a good deal of excellent analytical work.

- *Communication*

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

The Board commended the variety of strong drawings and particularly well crafted models, which reflected a range of styles. The Board learned that pressure on space meant that models could not be stored, and noted that the first years were now being encouraged to photograph their work. The Board noted the students' use of blogs as communication, which was hampered by the slowness of the PC network. The Board believed that electronic communications would benefit if more resources were put into dedicated IT facilities.

The Board advises the School to provide greater support with English language skills for overseas and other students.

- *Management Practice & Law*

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

The Board believed that the Professional Studies modules lacked ambition and did not sufficiently challenge the students to demonstrate their knowledge. At present, this aspect of the course is rather passive and needs to give students greater opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and respond in a more reflective manner.

- Preparation for Professional Experience, (Part 1 only)  
As part of the Professional Studies module, students visit architects in practice. They are also given a talk about PEDR. The School of Architecture and the Visual Arts employs an Employability Co-ordinator and each department within the School has its own Employability Leader. Architecture also has a Year Out Placement Co-

ordinator, who monitors and signs of students' professional experience.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

Progression rates in the earlier years of the Part One have been in decline, whereas in later years, and at completion, they are improving. The School believes that this can be ascribed to the increase in student numbers and have increased staff in the earlier stages accordingly. It may also be ascribed to the nature of the intake, who often require greater levels of support. Many students who are referred in the June assessments are successful at the September re-sits. Although the School is confident that progression and completion rates will improve, the Board would encourage particular awareness of the Part One situation in retention analysis of forthcoming years

13.5.5 Assessment:

A variety of assessment methods and feedback mechanisms are employed which appear appropriate. There is a good audit trail. Written feedback is clear and useful. Informal mechanisms, such as blogs, are also used for communicating between staff and students. The Board considered that the round table discussion of work at the end of the year is a useful exercise. However, the Board recommends vigilance at threshold level.

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

Offers are made on the basis of an interview with portfolio. Entrants are required to have 220-260 UCAS points. The School has the discretion to make offers to those it thinks will benefit from the programme. The School is happy to accept portfolios by post for

assessment. There are clear APEL procedures for admissions at later stages of the course.

If candidates are deemed not to have sufficient design skills to enter the first year of the Part One they may be offered a place on the Extended Degree. This is a four year programme, which after one year gives access not only to the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme but all Art and Design disciplines within UEL.

The Board applauds the diversity of the intake and the School's commitment to widening participation. The intake is lively. The School's target intake at Part One was 71 for 2006/2007 and 85 for 2007/8. The actual intake in 2007/2008 was 120. The increase in numbers was due to more students taking up places than anticipated. The SSR will need to be monitored to ensure that resourcing is commensurate with student numbers.

13.6 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Two qualification: Diploma in Architecture**

13.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The course aims and objectives were clearly stated in the programme specification and clearly mapped against the Part Two criteria.

13.6.2 Course design and content

The Diploma is two year programme organised in two year long 60-credit modules. These comprise two co-requisite modules, Architectural Design and Supporting Studies. At each level, students also undertake a third co-requisite zero-credit rated Professional Module, which is intended to ensure that each student has passed each of the supporting studies subjects at minimum pass level.

The Board noted that Diploma students can gain advance standing in the Masters' programmes as the taught theory elements are taught together with Masters students.

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

- *Design*

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

Close engagement with urban context is one of the programme's distinguishing characteristics. Students have opportunities to travel with projects set in other countries. Students tackle important contemporary issues. Students appropriately employ more highly developed design processes (e.g. scripting) than at Part One. The Board found that there was a critical consistency about the direction of the work. The Board looks forward to seeing how the masters' programmes eventually inform the design work.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the Diploma in Architecture met all Part Two criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

At the top end there was some thorough and well-resolved work. There is more evidence of a sensibility towards sustainability at Part Two than at Part One.

- *Cultural Context*

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

The theoretical aspects of the Masters' programmes clearly influence student work. Students undertake a variety of overseas field trips and critically examine these historical and cultural contexts with a good understanding of the critical debate that informs an appropriate interpretative structure for design.

- *Communication*

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

Students demonstrated a wide variety of techniques and team working skills. Generally the Board's comments regarding Part One are also relevant to Part Two.

Whilst applauding the range of communication skills evident, the Board advises the School to further develop portfolios in the area of digital representation.

The Board noted the students' concerns about the lack of software. Provision tends to be ad hoc. The Board recommends that the School develop consistency in provision.

The Board was disappointed by the School's failure to provide significantly more evidence of models as this would have supported the course ethos of design through

making. The documentation of these in the portfolios was also sometimes inconsistent.

- *Management Practice & Law*

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

However, the Board found this part of the programme unambitious, although students did demonstrate attainment in the terms of what they had been asked to do. The Board strongly recommends that the school re-examine the content and delivery of Professional Studies, particularly at Part Two, in order better to reflect the complexity of the subject within the curriculum. The Board found that the best students produced good responses to the challenge set, but that the challenge itself should be more ambitious and focussed on key subject areas. The Board also believed that the Management, Practice and Law criteria should be disseminated to all staff to allow for greater integration into other areas of the course.

13.6.4 Progression within the course

As at Part One, progression and completion rates have declined recently. This co-incides with the increase in student numbers and the School also sees a correlation with the nature of the intake and financial pressures on students. The School has introduced a new attendance policy, modified aspects of the teaching programme and increased the number of studios. Although the School is confident that progression and completion rates will improve, the Board would encourage particular awareness

of the Part Two situation in retention analysis of forthcoming years.

13.5.5 Assessment:

The School employs a range of appropriate assessment methods. While the Board confirmed that standards are satisfactory, it recommends continued vigilance at threshold level at both Part One and Part Two.

The Board recommends that the School review its internal moderation procedures to ensure parity between units. The Board noted extensive comments from external examiners and items raised by students that underlined the need urgently to address internal moderation procedures, and the manner in which these are communicated to students, staff and examiners.

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

Applicants for Part Two are required to have attained at least a 2.2 in a RIBA/ARB recognised Part One. Entry is conditional on interview with portfolio. As at Part One, the School is happy to accept portfolios by post for assessment. 23 % of students in 2006/2007 (taking both Part One and Part Two together) were from overseas. The target intake for Part Two was 56 in 2006/2007 and 62 in 2007/2008. Students are exceptionally granted entry into Year 5 of the Diploma if it can be established that their academic portfolio on entry is equivalent to or exceeds the School's requirements for Year 4. This must be approved by four senior academics.

13.8 **External examining arrangements**

The School has appointed a strong team of experienced external examiners who examine both degree and diploma. The following reflects the main points of the discussion:

- The Externals reported that the School is open to criticism and responds positively.
- Externals are asked explicitly to confirm that all students have met the criteria. However, it also transpired that Externals assess chiefly the portfolio and technical studies, essays being considered separately by history and theory specialists. Although this was good practice in itself, it did mean that no one examiner had an overview.
- There is an emphasis on physical conceptual models, and the theme of process and working through making is still very strong. There had been some concerns that this would be lost in the move to the new site, but the Examiners believed that the School had succeeded in retaining its unique character.
- The ambition of scale is impressive, although sometimes the relationship between concept and finished project is insubstantial.
- There had initially been some confusion about the role and remit of the External Examiners. The School's processes have now improved, with better information being provided to externals before the assessments.
- In 2007 there was some evidence of generous marking in the degree. The Externals believed that it would be helpful if an overview mechanism were implemented to help guard against this.
- The Examiners commented on the School's desire to provide challenging projects for the students whilst accommodating and supporting those who needed it.
- The Externals had noted some students' difficulties with English language, but also noted that this was not necessarily only a problem for overseas students and that many native English speakers also required support.
- The Externals confirmed that there was absolute parity between the June and September assessments. The Examiners noted the high number of referrals and that probable reasons for this were: the student demographic, previous academic experience (namely the nature of it and not the quality) and financial considerations. Students were often referred because work was incomplete, not because of lack of quality. They suggested that earlier academic counselling might be of benefit. In one case, Externals believed that a particular unit had been too ambitious.
- The range of achievement between the high and low end of passes was wide.
- The Externals noted that the recent intake at Part One had been particularly large. They believed that any further significant growth might affect the School's ability to communicate with its students. The Externals were concerned about how the School's ethos would be preserved if numbers grew any greater and the SSR suffered. They believed that the School may have to change its methods if this were to happen. These concerns notwithstanding, the Externals commended the strength of the core staff and noted that staff numbers had been increased in the first year.

- The Externals had commented on the level of technical teaching in 2006 and were pleased to report an improvement in 2007. This was stronger in some units than others, but all students were able to demonstrate the appropriate level of awareness, whether through the academic portfolio or in discussion with the Externals. However, the Externals shared the Board's concern that the tutor's time had been reduced.
- The Board noted that the School now had an additional engineer but also noted that technical tuition did not take place at the optimum time in the course.
- The Externals commented on the scale and quality of the models, which formed a significant part of the work they saw each year.
- The Externals commended the maturity of the established units, which was a strength of the School. They also noted the School's efforts to ensure that those on the newer units could build an appropriate portfolio.
- Parity of assessment between units had been a focus of discussions in 2007. The Externals occasionally had found it necessary to moderate. The Externals believed that staff time had been taken up with an internal quality audit review which had left them no time to moderate; they also stated that the burden placed on the full-time staff is becoming intense.

### 13.9 Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience

PEDR forms are monitored and signed by the Year Out Co-ordinator.

### 13.10 Students

The Board was pleased by the good attendance at the student meeting, at which all years were represented. The Board thanks the students for their candid participation in an interesting and informative meeting. The students expressed great support for the School and in particular the staff.

Among the School's strengths the students highlighted:

- The atmosphere in the school.
- The staff body, who are approachable, pro-active and supportive. Despite the large numbers of students, they had no difficulty contacting staff and receiving the help they needed. Students felt free to approach any member of staff for advice.
- The culture of making and modelling
- The integrated facilities, with studios and workshops under one roof. The open space allows students and staff to see what others are doing.
- The teaching and the quality of ideas.
- The opportunities offered by the unit system.
- The diversity of the student body
- The School's commitment to widening participation. The Foundation year which provides access to architecture and other art and design disciplines
- Student views are taken seriously.
- Students are content with the assessment process and the feedback they receive. Students who had been referred found that they had received good support and encouragement from the school.
- There is an active architecture society, supported by the School, but students find the university

regulations governing student societies can make it difficult.

**Among things students would change were the following:**

- The School should define its image and be more self-promoting.
- The pressure on space was becoming difficult. Students were concerned that any further growth in cohort numbers would not only increase pressure on the physical resources but also have an effect on their education.
- The open plan nature of the studios has its advantages and disadvantages, some finding it a difficult environment in which to work. Students do not have a designated working space within the school; they felt they could not leave work there for fear it might be lost or models broken
- Many models are destroyed at the end of the year because there is no storage space.
- The pressure on space may be affecting the culture of making and modelling. There is insufficient space in their current premises to do such large scale models as at their former home
- Students' use of workshops is restricted due to staffing shortages. Lack of space is also a problem.
- Students would welcome more links with other departments.
- Although many students have their own laptops, it was generally felt that IT facilities should be improved significantly. Students were particularly concerned about the provision of software and problems with printing. A1 printing was

particularly difficult. Students were also concerned about the expense.

- Security needs to be improved.
- Some units are oversubscribed and the students were supportive of the idea that the internal moderation procedures be reviewed and made more transparent.
- Communications and general organisation could be improved. Students would appreciate more forewarning and forward planning of timetabled events

**13.13 Staff**

At the time of the visit there were nine full time members of staff and 51 part-time academic members of staff and the Board was pleased to meet many of them at a well-attended meeting. The Board found the staff to be an energetic, committed and positive body. The Board commended the School's use of a pool of part-time staff, many based in practice, which is constantly refreshed, allowing the School to maintain mutually beneficial and up to date links with the profession. The School had regretfully to discontinue its shadowing system for part-time staff, but the Board was pleased to note that the University has strengthened staff review, training and mentoring to include fractional, part-time and hourly-paid staff.

The Board recognised a good system of recruitment of part time or visiting staff that is already in place. However, in light of the large numbers of part time and visiting staff, the Board advises that the School develops an appropriate induction system for new part time or visiting studio staff. The Board further advises that all such

staff are made fully conversant with the criteria for validation and which of those criteria are to be demonstrated through the learning outcomes they are responsible for.

All staff embraced the challenge presented by the diversity and plurality of students and were committed to offering students diversity of choice. They were also excited by the opportunities offered by the School's location in East London and the major initiatives underway such as the Thames Gateway project and the 2012 Olympics.

The School would like to increase the number of full-time staff as the management burden is increasing. Frequent changes of part-time staff also make cross-fertilisation between units and technical staff difficult.

Staff were disappointed that the move to the new building had not yet resulted in the anticipated synergies with related disciplines, but the intention to explore this remains.

Immediate challenges include accommodating growing cohort numbers in the available space and developing the School's research agenda. This will be difficult if staff do not have time to pursue research.

The School is anxious to preserve appropriate staffing levels to allow it to maintain its atelier system. The School has accommodated growing cohorts by increasing the number of units. The current SSR is 1:17 if the Level 0 foundation year is included. If this is not included, the SSR for the validated programmes is 1:16.2.

### 13.13 Research

In the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise the School achieved a Grade 4 in Art and Design. In the 2008 RAE the School will submit under the Art and Design Unit of Assessment which will recognise design as research. This is one area in which the School believes it is innovative. The School is developing an agenda in design innovation and aims to translate this into a research culture; innovation is a criterion for the recruitment of new design staff. A particularly significant development is the establishment of the UEL Architecture and Urbanisms Project Office, which will engage in research and development consultancy.

All staff may bid for funding and sabbaticals are available for key members of staff. Recent sabbaticals have resulted in a number of research publications. At present the main areas of activity centre around the interests of individuals. These include digital technology, in which field the School has long been innovative, sustainability and the history of architecture. Among new developments are Landscape Architecture and Alternative Urbanisms. Computing design and sustainability have been successful in attracting grants. All research fields offer taught masters programmes and the number of PhD students is increasing, many of whom are extending the work begun at master's level.

There is scope for more links with other departments in the School of Architecture and the Visual Arts, such as graphic design, fine art and fashion design and the School would like to try to develop this in the future. There are existing links with other schools in the UK and overseas, particularly in computing.

The Board considered that the research, although a largely emerging group, is handled well, particularly given the relatively low numbers and the recent move and merger. At present one staff member acts as an informal research director. The Board believes that the next stage is to develop a strategy to enable growth and collaboration. The Board believes that the School's research could be potentially as distinctive as its present teaching ethos. The Board advises the School to develop a strategic research strategy beyond the 2008 RAE.

The Masters programmes have developed from the strengths in staffing and teaching at Parts One and Two, creating synergies at all levels of the School. The School would like to publish more of the research findings arising from the masters programmes.

### 13.13 **Equal Opportunities:**

The University's equal opportunities policies are demonstrably implemented, resulting in a very diverse student and staff body. It is a very accessible school and courses are designed to accommodate students' needs.

In conjunction with the Stephen Lawrence Trust the School offers two annual bursaries to black and minority ethnic students on the Undergraduate programme. The gender balance is excellent. The breakdown among the entrants in 2006-07 was as follows: female 40%, male 60%, Asian, 13%, Black 10%, mixed 9%, other 47%, white 21%.

### 13.14 **Resourcing and facilities;**

Resources are chiefly student-number driven. All income, whether from students or research, is channelled back into the School of architecture and the Visual Arts once University overheads have been deducted.

The Head of School exercises a degree of autonomy over budget allocation and the University is in the process of allocating autonomous budgets for each subject area. This should give heads of subject area greater control.

#### - *Studios*

The Board considered that the School's studio facilities were excellent. The open plan and integrated nature of the building reflected the way in which the School works and creates a dynamic, lively atmosphere. The Board noted that the acoustics in the studios could be a problem. The Board welcomed the evidently thriving studio culture. However, as cohort sizes increase, the School must be mindful of the increasing pressure this will put on physical resources. The Board applauded the extended opening hours of the building.

#### - *Workshop*

The Board considered the workshop, which is in the same building, to be an impressive facility. Architecture shares Metal and Casting Workshops, a Wood Workshop, Specialist Printmaking, Fashion and Textiles, Photography and film workshops with other departments in the School.

The Board understood that the workshop was used a great deal by the students but unfortunately were unable to see many models, for the reasons stated earlier. Students commented that the access and opening times are also restricted due to staffing shortages.

- *Library*

All UEL libraries were centralised in 2006. The architecture collection is housed in the main University Library which is a few minutes' walk from the School.

As previously noted, the Board was impressed by the University Library generally but was disappointed to note the disarray of the Architecture collection. The Board recommends that adequate resources are allocated to library maintenance so that learning is not disadvantaged.

Formerly the School of Architecture had a dedicated specialist librarian. At present, the School of Architecture and Visual Arts has a named librarian who is also responsible for other subject areas.

There is a dedicated architecture book budget, which appears to be adequate although it has not been increased. The Board considered that the book collection appears to be adequate. There is a separate budget for periodicals. Print journals are used extensively by architecture students; however the cost has recently risen by 12%, which means that economies may have to be made. The University encourages greater use of electronic journals, although comparatively few architecture journals are available in this format.

There is good communication between architecture staff and students and library staff and the acquisition policy appears to be flexible.

The Library offers drop-in induction sessions. All UEL systems can be accessed remotely. Responsibility for study and language skills has been devolved to the Schools. However, the Library does provide a SkillZone,

offering academic support, including language services to which students can be referred. The English Language Centre for International Students offers weekly workshops.

- *IT*

The Board draws the School's and University's attention to the comments of the 2002 Visiting Board; "... the Board noted that the overall computing facilities, including those used for computer-aided-design, were in need of refreshment and replacement. The Board noted that the Vice-chancellor had provided his commitment to improving these facilities when the School is relocated to the Docklands Campus." Provision of software is inconsistent. Students also reported that access to printers and plotters, particularly A1 plotters, was difficult at busy times although printing is automatically routed elsewhere in the University if the School's printers are busy.

The Board recommends that the School provides adequate printing and IT facilities for Architecture students. Some student discontent with aspects of IT provision was noted and the Board recommends that the School undertake a review of such provision to ensure adequate facilities in the future, particularly with larger cohort sizes.

The Board noted that the School has acquired some sophisticated CNC equipment, and hoped that students would have the opportunity to use it.

**14. Documentation Provided**

Record of the documentation provided before and during the visit. Course structure diagrams for courses

recommended for Validation (as provided by the school prior to the visit).

Prior to the Visit the School provided:  
 Critical Self-Appraisal  
 Questionnaire  
 Supplementary Information including External Examiners' reports 2004-2007.

During the visit the School provided:  
 AVA Showcase Catalogues 2005, 2006, 2007  
 APE [Advertising, Promotion & Events] folder  
 AVA Events 06-07  
 Events & Exhibitions  
 REP School Overview Reports 04/05,05/06  
 First Week Handbooks  
 Student Information CD 2007  
 AVA Student Guide  
 UEL Undergraduate Prospectus  
 UEL Postgraduate Prospectus  
 Research Degree Sub- Committee Minutes  
 December 03 – June 07  
 Research Funding proposals  
 Research Strategy 2004-8  
 Promising Researcher Scheme and Awards  
 Research Centres  
 Research Groups  
 Research Grouping Categories  
 Research Institutes  
 Research and Scholarly Strategy 2003-8  
 Visiting Research Staff – Policy and Procedures  
 School Board Minutes  
 Graduate Certificate in Architecture: Computing and Design Validation Papers  
 MA in Landscape Architecture Validation Papers

Professional Doctorate in Architecture Validation Papers  
 Masters Programmes in Architecture Validation Papers  
 UEL Attendance Policy  
 UEL Student Charter  
 UEL Innovation and Renewal Strategic Plan  
 Student Satisfaction Surveys  
 Minutes of meetings with Student Reps and SMT  
 Health and Safety Handbook  
 Health and Safety Log  
 Risk Assessment folder  
 AVA Facilities Manual - Workshop Passport  
 Health and Safety Handbook  
 Health and Safety Log  
 Risk Assessment folder  
 AVA Facilities Manual - Workshop Passport  
 Communication between School and Strategic Planning  
 HEFCE Report 1994  
 RIBA/ARB Joint Validation reports 1997 & 2002  
 RIBA Course Changes Committee Approval  
 European Commission Architects Directive  
 ARB/RIBA Joint Criteria  
 QAA Benchmark for Architecture 2001  
 Draft QAA Benchmark for Architecture 2007  
 RIBA/ARB Joint Validation Report 2002  
 QAA Benchmark Architecture:, Architectural Technologies, Landscape Architecture 2000  
 REP Reports 2003 - 2006 Level 0 & BSc Honours, Diploma & Masters  
 Student Progression statistics  
 Staff CV Folder  
 QAA's Framework for Higher Education Qualifications  
 Student Handbooks for all programmes. 06-07  
 Architecture weekly Events folder 2004-07  
 Programme Committee minutes all programmes 2004-07  
 Engagement in Learning and Teaching

Peer Observation  
Student Feedback folder  
Architecture employability:  
Year Out mentoring scheme folder  
Part 1 & 2 2007  
Architecture Job file  
Stephen Lawrence Bursary folder  
Urban Buzz projects  
Thames Gateway Futures Symposium November 2006  
and May 2007  
VIPA - Virtual Immersive Architectural Education  
Staff Publication Folder  
Rodrigo Perez de Arce Report following his inaugural visit  
February 2007  
Research Publications  
Module folders all levels  
BSc (Hons) & Diploma Design briefs  
Studio programme folder