

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Initial Visiting
Board to the University of Kent**

Kent School of Architecture

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 27 September 2006

Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture

Part Two: Master of Architecture

Date of Visiting Board: 8 - 9 June 2006

1. Information About the Course

1.1 Courses offered for initial validation

Part One: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Architecture (three years full-time)

Part Two: Master of Architecture (two years full-time)

1.2 Address of the Institution where the course is delivered

Kent School of Architecture
Faculty of Humanities
Marlowe Building
University of Kent
CANTERBURY
CT2 7NR

Tel: 01227 824677

Fax: 01227 824679

W: www.kent.ac.uk/architecture

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of Kent

1.4 Name of Head of Department

Professor Don Gray

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on Thursday 8 and Friday 9 June 2006 were:

Derek Cottrell	(Chair)
Ian McInnes	(Vice Chair)
Professor Ruth Morrow	
Jonathan Ellis-Miller	
Stephen Coomber	(Regional Representative)
Kevin Davis	(Student Member)

Dr. Chris Ellis (Head of Validation, RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

(Jonathan Ellis-Miller was unavoidably absent from some of the Board's activities on the Thursday afternoon, but the Board remained quorate throughout.)

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, effective from September 2003 (as amended at RIBA Validation Committee 19.05.2005) and the "RIBA Criteria for Validation", published March 2002, effective from September 2003.

For more information see www.architecture.com

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board Confirmed by the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee on 27 September 2006

4.1 At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the RIBA Education Committee confirmed:

Initial Validation with Conditions of:

Part One: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Architecture (three years full-time)

Part Two: Master of Architecture (two years full-time)

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

5.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA should accredit the Part One and Part Two programmes subject to the successful discharge of the condition set out in section 8.1

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, subject to the discharge of the condition set out in section 8.1, the Part One and Part Two courses met all points of the EU Directive.

6. Criteria for Validation

6.1 On the basis of the academic portfolios examined, the Visiting Board was satisfied that all graduates from both courses listed in 4.1, satisfied all the appropriate Criteria for Validation (which are held in common by the RIBA for validation and the ARB for prescription), but see also the condition in 8.1

7. Standards

7.1 A range of work from the previous year of the courses listed in 4.1 above was inspected during the visit and was found to meet the required standards.

8. Conditions of Validation

8.1 Due to the low numbers of graduating students considered, the Board recommends that a subgroup of the Board (three members) should return following the assessment boards in summer 2007 to confirm that the standards set remain satisfactory and that all graduates of both programmes continue to meet all RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria.

9. Standard Requirements of Recognition

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

- i. external examiners being appointed for the course;
- ii. any significant changes to the course 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 course listed in 4.1.

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

10.1 Background

10.1.1 The Kent School of Architecture at the University of Kent was established in 2005. The University of Kent had previously identified architecture as a logical addition to its portfolio of courses. A significant proportion of the staff and student body transferred from the Canterbury School of Architecture based at the former Kent Institute of Art & Design. Both the BA(Hons) and the MArch courses are completely new, having been written expressly for the Kent School of Architecture at the University of Kent. The University approved the course's documentation ready for the 2005/2006 academic session.

Through its normal arrangements for entry with advanced standing together with a limited number of special dispensations, the University recruited to all years of the BA (Hons) and the BArch allowing first graduating cohorts for both the Part One and the Part Two programmes to emerge in summer 2006.

- 10.1.2 Strengths of the Department included:
- the healthy student:staff ratio and the commitment to keep this below 18:1;

- the clear sense of commitment displayed by the staff team;
- the enthusiastic and committed group of students;
- the strong support provided for the establishment of the School by the University senior management;
- the excellent studio spaces and the strong studio culture that is beginning to develop;
- the impressive level of pastoral care provided for the students in the School by its staff;
- the excellent model-making workshop and the support provided for its use by an experienced model-making technician;
- the good IT facilities, coupled with the plans for a wireless network throughout the School;
- the library provision which has rapidly been developed under the support of an impressive subject specialist librarian to become a valuable resource for staff and students.
- an impressive campus environment;
- the English Architecture and the Western Tradition module in year one with its emphasis on learning through observation and sketching;
- the excellent range of field courses developed and the growing links with Lille and other European cities;
- the School's commitment to the region;
- the contribution made by new staff recruits to both diversifying the staff base and developing a research ethos;
- the strong links with local architectural practices and particularly the student mentoring programme developed in conjunction with RIBA South East Region,;
- The excellent and sensible support provided for the Schools' development by the University QA Department.

10.2 Recommendation

The Board has made the following recommendations to the Institution. 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 the 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.

10.2.1 The Board applauded the efforts being made by the School to develop comprehensive coverage and submission requirements for the technology and environment criteria in both Part One and Part Two. Whilst the mapping exercise undertaken demonstrates full coverage, the Board was not sure that this was always as convincingly achieved in practice as might have been expected. The Board thus recommends that the School reviews how it demonstrates coverage of the criteria in this area, particularly their demonstration within coherent architectural designs which integrate the knowledge required. In making this recommendation, the Board is aware that aspects of this review are already underway and that the School is already looking to modify its Part One structures teaching for 2006/7.

10.2.2 The Board recommends that the School re-examine its marking procedures, particularly the interaction between markers responsible for design elements and those responsible for specialist areas and the subsequent moderation to ensure that marks for design work are consistent and that the integration of non-design work can indeed be demonstrated.

10.2.3 In the absence of the requirement that students complete a formal dissertation, the Board recommends that the School keep under review the means via which students demonstrate their ability "to critically appraise and form considered judgements about the spatial, aesthetic, technical and social qualities of a design...." The Board was concerned that the design and technology reports produced by weaker students were often primarily descriptive and, without the requirement to produce a dissertation, such students would struggle to demonstrate the appropriate degree of critical appraisal.

10.3 Advice

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

10.3.1 The staff team is advised to urgently explore how best to develop a spirit of critical enquiry within the Department which might relate both to establishing a developing research agenda but also to support and strengthen the challenge of the taught courses.

10.3.2 The School is encouraged to look again at its assessment and mapping of Part One Management Practice & Law criteria. Specifically it is encouraged to develop the student mentoring scheme it has established in partnership with RIBA South East region. The Board believes this has the potential to achieve some the Part One Management Practice and Law criteria more appropriately and effectively than is currently the case, perhaps through the medium of critical case studies.

10.3.3 The School should encourage its students to expose more of their design process and decision making and realise the benefits of exploration through the design journals they keep together with the use of process models and sketches - and to make more use of these materials in their final design presentations.

10.3.4 The School is advised, in its review of the Part One design programmes, to have particular regard to their scale and pace, perhaps making more use of sketch design exercises and workshops to introduce more variety and modify the pace of learning across the three years of the programme. The Board is aware that the School is already moving in this direction, for example through the proposed amalgamation for 2006/7 of the stage two "adapt" and "extend" modules and the injection of focused workshops within the second year design programme.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

11.1 The only previous RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Kent was the Exploratory Board held on 5 April 2006. The Exploratory Visiting Board recommended:

- Candidate Course Status for Validation for Exemption from the RIBA Part One Examination be awarded to the BA (Hons) Architecture;
- Candidate Course Status for Validation for Exemption from the RIBA Part Two Examination be awarded to the M.Arch.

These recommendations were accepted by the RIBA Education Committee.

11.2 In making their recommendations the Exploratory Board commented:

- "The School enjoys strong support from the University senior management. University senior management have evidently embraced architecture in the short, medium and long term.
- The School is also supported at Faculty level by the Dean of Humanities.
- The Board commended the University's strategy of working with their partner FE colleges to provide greater access to Higher Education.
- To develop, internally validate and implement two new courses in such a short time was commendable, particularly tailoring it to take advantage of the University's framework of two 12 week teaching periods followed by a six-week period of examination preparation.
- The staff are enthusiastic and, in addition to their teaching responsibilities, understand well the University of Kent's opportunities for research, consultancy and other activities within the region.
- The School has a dynamic head who is supported at all levels from University management to faculty and school of architecture staff. The Head demonstrates support for his staff and acknowledges the contribution that they have made.
- The mapping undertaken by students makes the students aware of the links between academia and the profession. The embedding of this in the documentation was an example of good practice and could be enhanced.
- There is some scope for misinterpretation in the documentation but this can be amended over time; for example, the Board did not know about the 12-12-6 system, which would have been helpful prior knowledge. This was

later clarified by letter from the Head of Quality Assurance and Validation; the course documentation will be amended to make it more explicit.

- The high staff: student ratio reflects the University's commitment to teaching, research and student learning.
- The sessional staff have been effective in the first twelve week period.
- The developing spirit of the school is exemplary.
- The mentoring scheme with RIBA South East is an exemplar of good practice. "

12. Commentary

12.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the Last Visit

The Critical Self-Appraisal provided by the School was well-written, succinct, honest and informative. It provided an excellent basis for the Board's subsequent deliberations. The Board also received from the School a document providing a summary update of activities in the school since the February Exploratory Board.

12.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The Department provided the documentation required for the Visiting Board in timely fashion. Everything required by the RIBA procedures was made available although the main bound document provided might have been better structured. The Board felt that information on the weighting of assessment components might have been more clearly presented. The Board would have welcomed student handbooks sent in advance, although these were accessible on-line in the base room. All requests for additional materials made during the visit were dealt with promptly and efficiently.

The programme for the meetings and activities required by the Board was well organised. Special arrangements to accommodate the availability of the External Examiners worked well. The Board particularly appreciated the effort that had gone into the organisation and presentation of the exhibition and the student portfolios.

The Board particularly appreciated the arrangement made for them and the support provided during the visit by the School Co-ordinator.

12.2.1 Record of Academic portfolios sampled

BA (Hons) Architecture (Part One)

Stage one: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high pass (from an initial cohort of 49)

Stage two: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high pass (from an initial cohort of 19)

Stage three: all 6 pass portfolios plus 4 fail portfolios plus 2 deferred portfolios

Masters in Architecture (Part Two)

Stage four: all 8 portfolios

Stage five: 2 MArch portfolios -the complete cohort (including all work contributing to the criteria from stage four)

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

With the Initial Visiting Board taking place within four months of the Exploratory Board and only days after the first assessment boards, this section is unnecessary.

12.4 Context of the courses within the wider provision of the Faculty and School

In addition to the architecture programmes being put forward for Part One and Part Two validation, the new School of Architecture at the University of Kent has also successfully validated and recruited to BA(Hons) degrees in Interior Architecture and Interior Design. Stage one of these programmes is largely common with the Architecture Part One course. For the BA (Hons) Interior Architecture, thus communality extends to the first term of stage two.

The new School is based within the Faculty of Humanities together with the Schools of English, European Culture and Languages, History & Drama, Film and Visual Arts. In their meeting with the Dean of Faculty, the Board learned that significant links were already being developed between architecture and the history, drama and film subject areas within the Faculty and with the strong urban studies group in the Faculty of Social Sciences. There are also aspirations to develop links with the electronic engineering area which has interests in multimedia approaches.

12.5 Detailed Commentary on the Part One course:
Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Architecture (three years full-time)

12.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The stated overall aims of the University of Kent Part One programme are to:

- Provide a broad education in architecture, primarily for those who will continue in architectural education and who will practice architecture;

- Develop students' intellectual, creative and imaginative powers within architectural design to the fullest possible extent;
- Promote study of the practice and tradition of architecture within its social and cultural context, in order to develop knowledge and understanding;
- Develop an understanding of the professional practice of architecture and in particular to develop and implement team skills;
- Develop construction and environmental technology skills appropriate to architectural practice and to be aware of the influence of technology and the relevance of sustainability;
- Promote the importance of an integrated approach to building design and to explore how an appropriate balance is achieved between competing demands.

The Board found these aims to be clearly stated and valid, albeit rather modest and worthy. The Board felt that the School might consider formulating rather more challenging aims when it is clear that it has been successful in its ambition to recruit higher calibre applicants.

12.5.2 Course design and content

The School provided a very clear mapping of the Part One course content onto the RIBA Validation Criteria. The Board felt, however, that the documentation they had received lacked a clear rationale/explanation for the overall structure of the programme and the structure/format of the individual modules. The Board applauded the fact that opportunity was provided in stage three of the course for students to focus on either writing, making, appraising or undertaking an interdisciplinary project. The Board also welcomed the fact that the staff

group were taking the opportunity to evaluate the operation of the programme after its first year and to make modifications where appropriate.

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

- *Design*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. The Board felt that there was an appropriate balance between design and non-design work in the course, but did not understand and had some concerns about the contextual approach to design underpinning the course. The Board shared the view expressed by one of the External Examiners that the students appeared to find it difficult to develop a coherent architectural language. The School should encourage its students to expose more of their design process and decision making and realise the benefits of exploration through the design journals they keep together with the use of process models and sketches - and to make more use of these materials in their final design presentations.

The Board also had concerns about the progression through design projects in the first two stages of the course; feeling that the projects were rather repetitive and at a similar scale and that there might be benefit in injecting more pace and variety at certain points. The School is advised, in its review of the Part One design programmes, to have particular regard to their scale and pace, perhaps making more use of sketch design exercises and workshops to introduce more variety and modify the pace of learning across the three years of the programme.

The Board is aware that the School is already moving in this direction, for example through the proposed amalgamation for 2006/7 of the stage two "adapt" and "extend" modules and the injection of focused workshops within the second year design programme.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Board was satisfied that all Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Technology & Environment were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. The Board applauded the efforts being made by the School to develop comprehensive coverage and submission requirements for the technology and environment criteria. Whilst the mapping exercise undertaken demonstrates full coverage, the Board was not sure that that this was always as convincingly achieved in practice as might have been expected. In particular the Board felt that, whilst issues of environmental design were well addressed in the "Climate" module, issues of sustainability were less comprehensively covered. The Board thus recommends that the School reviews how it demonstrates coverage of the criteria in this area, particularly their demonstration within coherent architectural designs which integrate the knowledge required. In making this recommendation, the Board is aware that aspects of this review are already underway and that the School is already looking to modify its Part One structures teaching for 2006/7.

- *Cultural Context*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. The Board agreed that the two taught courses in this area provided an excellent introduction to historical

and theoretical thinking. The Board particularly commended the English Architecture and the Western Tradition module in year one with its emphasis on learning through observation and sketching. An impressive range of field courses had also been organised for all three years of the programme. The Board welcomed the fact that good shorter variants were offered for students who had financial problems or work/family commitments that prevented participating in longer events. It was clear to the Board that a good range of precedent studies were being drawn upon in the design work examined which clearly also benefited from students' experience of field trips. Although it was clear that work in this area was one of the strengths of the school, the Board felt that students could benefit from further encouragement to integrate the outcomes of their tuition in this area into design work.

- *Communication Skills*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Communication Skills were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. Student work was generally well-presented with examples of both computer generated and hand-drawn work to be seen, although the Board felt that the weaker first year students might have benefited from more support at an early stage in the course. The Board felt that the teaching of animation at stage two was interesting, but that the approach adopted might focus more on the use of animation as a means of exploring ideas. The excellent model-making facilities had clearly assisted in some good final presentation models, although the Board commented on the lack of "working" models showing design development. Written work was generally of an appropriate standard for Part One, although the Board noted that the production of a dissertation was an option

and some stage three design reports tended to be primarily descriptive and short of critical analysis. In the student meeting, the Board found Part One students to be articulate and confident.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice & Law were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. The stage 3 Management Practice & Law module, taught largely by visiting practitioners, provides an excellent coverage of subject matter in this area, but felt that it was largely being treated as a stand-alone area and could have been better linked to other elements of the course. The Board noted that, in terms of assessment, the School had mapped the achievement of the criteria in this area onto a single unseen examination. The Board felt that an unseen exam might not be the most appropriate means of assessing achievement of the criteria in this area. The Board were also surprised at this mapping as students are required elsewhere to reflect on their own working practices and costing, procurement and risk assessment issues are covered in the technology study completed in stage three. The School is encouraged to look again at its assessment and mapping of this curriculum area. Specifically it is encouraged to develop the student mentoring scheme it has established in partnership with RIBA South East region. The Board believes this has the potential to achieve some of the Part One Management Practice and Law criteria more appropriately and effectively than is currently the case, perhaps through the medium of critical case studies.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience*

The Management Practice & Law module included in stage 3 provides an excellent preparation for work in practice. This formal study is supplemented by the mentoring scheme which the School runs in conjunction with RIBA South East. The Board felt that this was an excellent example of best practice particularly in supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds and helping them prepare for their stage 1 professional experience. The stage three students who met the Board confirmed that they felt well-prepared for practice.

12.5.4 *Progression within the course*

The Board shared the view of one of the External Examiners that a higher than expected number of students were failing to progress cleanly from stage two to stage three and graduate. The Board understood the explanation given that some students were taking advantage of the flexibility afforded by the University's assessment scheme to be referred in a subject. However, as expressed in section 12.5.5 below, the Board believes that current procedures may be too rigorous and that there may be scope for some relaxation. The School should keep this under review.

12.5.5 *Assessment*

It was clear to the Board that the course has clear procedures in place to ensure that all graduates meet all elements of the validation criteria. In fact the Board felt that the requirements might be overly strict and unnecessarily punitive contributing to the poor progression rate found at certain levels of the course. The Board felt that that this was particularly so in respect of the requirement to achieve a pass mark on each question

of exam papers. In the case of Management, Practice & Law, for example, the Board felt that, provided the student had achieved a pass overall on the paper, there was broad evidence that they had satisfactorily met the criteria, particularly as many areas were also covered in design project outcomes.

The School operates within the University's academic year structure of two 12 week teaching terms plus a six week assessment period. There were some clear benefits to this structure and students appreciated the opportunity provided to undertake further work on projects before final assessment after feedback had been provided on formative assessment. The Board was not convinced that the assessment regime was ideal for all aspects of architectural education and was pleased to learn that the School was keeping this under review.

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

The process of internal validation of the new course had only allowed recruitment to the 2005/6 academic year via clearing and AP(E)L. Recruitment to the first year had been against a minimum requirement of 160 UCAS points. The School was hopeful of recruiting the majority of its 2006 first year intake through the main UCAS process and had set a minimum requirement of 280 UCA points. Recruitment to the second and third stages of the programme had been undertaken through via the University's rigorous AP(E)L procedures. This had involved students presenting transcripts to demonstrate that they had passed the equivalent level of another RIBA/ARB validated course and then being interviewed with their portfolios. In normal circumstances students would not be allowed to graduate with a University of

Kent degree having only studied for one year at the institution, but special arrangements were made for the 2005 direct entrants to the final year of the BA. The Board discussed these arrangements with the University's Head of Quality assurance and was satisfied that the arrangements made were thorough and rigorous.

12.6 Detailed Commentary on the Part Two course:
Masters in Architecture (two years full-time)

12.6.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

In addition to ensuring that graduates from the programme achieved Part Two standard the key aims of the programme were specified as:

- to promote creativity and excellence in architecture design; from imaginative concepts to thoughtful project development and the integration of technology strategically and in detail;
- to develop knowledge of the professional context of architecture and ensure that graduates are aware of their professional responsibilities;
- to develop students' understanding of architecture within a broader cultural context;
- to promote and support independent self-learning and good communication skills;
- to accommodate a wide range of views and develop the specialised architectural interests of individual students;
- to develop understanding of how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research and promote originality in applying knowledge;
- to develop initiative, responsibility and sound critical judgement in making decisions about complex architectural issues;

- to enable students to develop strategies for self-improvement and commitment to life skills and learning;
- to support students in achieving their potential in all parts of the programme.

The Board found the overall aims of the Part Two programme as set out in the March Programme Specification to be clearly stated, valid and entirely appropriate. The Board particularly supported the emphasis in the programme aims of supporting students to develop their personal architectural interests and self-learning skills. It was difficult for the Board to make overall judgements, given that they were only examining the work of two graduates, but in general the overall aims of the programme appeared to be being met.

12.6.2 *Course design and content*

The Department provided a clear mapping of the Part Two course content onto the RIBA Validation Criteria. The Board felt that the overall structure and content of the Part Two was logical and straightforward.

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

- *Design*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the MArch programme. The Board felt that the short sharp project that started stage four was an excellent vehicle for students returning to higher education from practice. The Board also applauded the landscape project which followed and the fact that preliminary

studies for the major design project commenced in stage four. Overall the structure of design work across stage four was seen to be most appropriate. The Board felt that the one aspect of the Part two design work that might benefit from some re-evaluation when a significant number of graduates have emerged was the independent study project. The Board sees real merit in a project at this stage which puts the onus on the student to negotiate the brief and fully own the project and felt that such a project could fulfil an important role in:

- Allowing students to meet all validation criteria, filling any gaps identified in their personal mapping;
- Providing an opportunity for specialisation;
- Providing a link to School research interests.

It was, however important that the project did not just become "more of the same".

- *Technology & Environment*

The Board was satisfied that all Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Technology & Environment were being met by all graduates from the MArch programme. The Board applauded the efforts being made by the School to develop comprehensive coverage and submission requirements for the technology and environment criteria at Part Two. Whilst the mapping exercise undertaken demonstrated full coverage, the Board was not sure that this was always as convincingly achieved in practice as might have been expected. The Board thus recommends that the School reviews how it demonstrates coverage of the criteria in this area, particularly their demonstration within coherent architectural designs which integrate the knowledge required. The technology report was produced in the second term after major design work had been completed. The Board was surprised that there was no evidence that the opportunity was being taken to

critically reflect on design decisions at the conclusion of a detailed study of environmental and technology considerations. The Board also felt that final year Part two students might benefit from the challenge of producing a technology report which investigated an aspect of the technology linked to their design to a greater depth.

- *Cultural Context*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the MArch programme. The Board found that the stage four Cultural Context module provided a good grounding for Part Two work in this area. The mix of lectures and student seminars was seen as an appropriate structure. The Board found that a good range of precedents studies were being drawn upon in the design work examined and that this had also benefited from students' experience of field trips.

- *Communication Skills*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Communication Skills were being met by all graduates from the MArch programme. There was evidence of a good range of presentation skills being demonstrated in the form of computer and hand drawing together with excellent model-making. In their meeting with the Board the Part Two students demonstrated eloquence tinged with sentimentality, the latter perhaps the result of the uncertainties of having made the commitment to move to a new school in the middle of their course. In the absence of the requirement that students complete a formal dissertation, the Board recommends that the School keep under review the means via which students demonstrate their ability "to critically appraise and form considered judgements about the

spatial, aesthetic, technical and social qualities of a design...." The Board was concerned that the design and technology reports produced by weaker students were often descriptive and that, without the requirement to produce a dissertation, such students would struggle to demonstrate the appropriate degree of critical appraisal.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice & Law were being met by all graduates from the MArch programme. The stage 4 Management Practice & Law module, taught largely by visiting practitioners, provides an excellent coverage of subject matter in this area, but felt that it was largely being treated as a stand-alone area and could have been better linked to other elements of the course, particularly the major design project. The Board noted that, in terms of assessment, the School had mapped the achievement of the criteria in this area onto a single unseen examination. The Board, echoing the remarks they made at Part One, suggested that an unseen exam might not be the most appropriate means of assessing the achievement of the criteria in this area. The Board were also surprised to see that the 2006 exam paper for this module appeared almost identical to that set for the stage 3 module. The School is encouraged to look again at its assessment of this curriculum area.

12.6.4 *Progression within the course*

Of the nine students who started stage four of the course, eight were expected to progress to the final year. Both students recruited direct to the final year graduated with MArch qualifications. It was difficult for the Board to make a judgement given the small numbers involved, but progression rates seem reasonable.

12.6.5 *Assessment*

The course has clear procedures in place to ensure that all graduates meet all elements of the validation criteria. As at Part One the Board felt that the requirements might in certain respects be overly strict and unnecessarily punitive. The Board felt that that this was particularly so in respect of the requirement to achieve a pass mark on each question of exam papers. In the Management, Practice & Law, and Technology & Environment papers, the Board felt that, provided the student had achieved a pass overall on the paper there was broad evidence that they had satisfactorily met the criteria, particularly as many areas were also covered in design project outcomes.

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

Recruitment to the second year of the BArch had been undertaken through via the University's rigorous AP(E)L procedures. This had required two special dispensations regarding university procedures. Applicants for entry with advanced standing would normally be required to present an academic transcript to demonstrate that they had passed the equivalent level of another RIBA/ARB validated course. The two students entering the final year of the MArch (both from KIAD) did not at the time of interview have transcripts although these were later forthcoming. In normal circumstances students would not be allowed to graduate with a University of Kent degree having only studied for one year at the institution, but special arrangements were made for the 2005 direct entrants to the final year of the MArch. Special arrangements were made for the two direct entrants to the final year of the MArch to study Management Practice and law alongside the stage four students as they had not

covered this in the first year of the Part Two at their previous establishment.

The Board discussed these special arrangements with the University's Head of Quality Assurance in particular detail as the School maps elements of the Part Two Validation Criteria onto year four work. The Board was satisfied that the special admissions and study arrangements made were thorough and rigorous.

In future applicants to the programme will be expected to hold a first degree recognised as RIBA/ARB Part One with at least an upper second class honours classification. Normally there would be no direct entry to year two.

12.7 **External examining arrangements**

The School had appointed two experienced External Examiners, one from practice and one from an academic background. Both were involved in examining Part One and Part Two. All graduating students had been interviewed by one or other of the externals. The Board appreciated the speed with which the two External Examiners had produced their 2006 reports within days of the assessment boards. It was clearly of great assistance to the Board to have these available. The Board was able to meet one of the External Examiners face-to-face and had a telephone conversation with the other who was involved in external examining at another institution at the time. The External Examiners were very supportive of the School. They confirmed that they had full confidence in the assessment procedures within the School and the standards set. The key concerns raised by the External Examiners in their reports and discussions with the Board were:

- The requirement for students to pass all components of modules and all questions on some examinations may be too rigorous.
- There was some evidence of gratuitous use of computer graphics obscuring rather than enhancing student's presentations.
- The extensive background research and data analysis that underpins MArch major design projects is possibly at the expense of fully resolved design outcomes

12.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

The School's first Part One and Part Two graduates had just been confirmed at the time of the Board's visit. It was thus not possible to assess the efficacy of the arrangements for monitoring professional experience, although the procedures set out on paper seemed sound. The School is considering whether it might develop its own Part Three programme; in the meantime it is encouraging its Part Two graduates to make contact with one of the London schools.

12.9 **Students**

The Board had a lively and informed meeting with 18 students drawn from all three years of the BA and both years of the MArch. Students were hugely supportive of the School and its staff, commending in particular:

- The ease of access to very supportive staff
- The student centred nature of the learning experience
- The excellent support from visiting specialists
- The support for understanding practice provided through the student mentoring scheme.
- The excellent feedback received following crits and marking of assignments.

- The extended hours access to studios and the good studio culture that results
- The excellent IT facilities
- The model-making workshop and the excellent support from the technician in charge
- The materials shop operated by the model-making technician
- The interesting field trips organised
- The impressive library facilities.

The Board encouraged the students to identify weaknesses in the School's provision. Not surprisingly given the commitment the students had made to join a new unrecognised school they were unwilling to offer any criticisms.

The student:staff ratio for the first year of operation of the School was 9.8:1. The Pro Vice-Chancellor, in his meeting with the Board, committed that the SSR would not rise above 18:1 when the School was operating with full cohorts.

12.10 **Staff:**

The Board had an open and productive meeting with 16 members of the School's staff including full-time and part-time academic staff, admin and technical staff. The Board found staff to be committed to the challenge of developing the new School in its supportive University environment. It was clear that staff, full-time and part-time, operated as a cohesive team with weekly team meetings to focus on practical administrative issues and staff away-days to focus on forward development. Two such away-days had been held to date; one focusing on developing a vision for the School, the other on developing research. Staff acknowledged that their priority

had been to establish the new courses and maintain the level of support for students which had been characteristic of their former college background. This had been particularly necessary for first year students who originally had to work alongside other years whilst building work on the first year studio space was completed. With the future recruitment of stronger students in the future, staff aspired to increase the intellectual challenge of the Part One and Part Two courses, to design and validate postgraduate courses and to develop research activities, particularly consultancy and practice based research.

The Board noted the impressive contribution made by the support staff in the School, particularly the School Co-ordinator.

The Board recognised the real achievement of the staff team in writing and validating the courses and commissioning the new facilities against an exceptionally tight timescale. The Board felt that the practical pressures may have limited the opportunity for reflection and supports the staff team in their efforts to now develop a distinctive identity and mission, befitting their location in a research-led university.

12.11 **Research:**

The University of Kent is a research-led university and it is a formal requirement for all its departments to be research active. In his meeting with the Board, the Pro Vice-Chancellor confirmed that it was understood that the architecture staff would need time and support to match the University's expectations. He reported that the University was committed to recruiting a new professor who would act as Director of Research in the School. The person appointed would help develop the direction of

architectural research, but this might link to existing strong research in areas such as film and the visual arts and urban studies. The Pro-VC made it clear that the University was not expecting architecture to be entered for the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. Nevertheless, the School is an active participant in AHRA, and two lecturers presented papers at the November 2005 conference.

It was clear when the Board spoke to the head and the staff team that they understood the importance of developing a culture of research within the School. The Board would hope that this could be done in a way that strengthened rather than detracted from the strong commitment to teaching demonstrated by the staff team. The Board believes that the expressed view that future research might be linked to regional agendas and that a commitment to work in support of local communities, has real merit. With the support of the person recruited to the new Director of Research post, the staff team is advised to urgently explore how best to develop a spirit of critical enquiry within the Department as a whole such that this might relate both to establishing a developing research agenda, but also to supporting and strengthening the challenge of the taught courses.

12.12 **Equal Opportunities**

The student population at approximately 60% male and 40% female is in line with the national average (38% female). The Board saw students of various nationalities and ethnic groups and apparently differing socio-economic groups. The less marked diversity on the staff side is mitigated by women being in key roles in course management and research. A significant number of recent recruits to part-time posts are female.

The University has a good clear equal opportunities policy. Details were provided in the Student Handbook of the excellent support provided within the University for disabled students, including excellent facilities in support of students with dyslexia.

12.13 **Resourcing and Facilities:**

- General

The new School is housed in the University's Marlowe Building, in space formerly occupied by the Physics Department. The spaces have been remodelled and re-equipped to provide excellent accommodation for the School. Studios, dedicated crit. and teaching spaces, workshop, academic staff offices and the School Office are all in close proximity. The School has established a clear identity for itself with a well-situated reception space and the associated plasma screen message board.

- Studios

Four former physics laboratories have been refurbished as two adjoining studios on the first floor of the Marlowe Building. These spaces are used in an integrated fashion to house second, third, fourth and fifth level students with the deliberate aim of encouraging students to interact. These are well-equipped, top-lit spaces of generous volume. First year students have a dedicated studio space on the ground floor. The first year studio provides space for some 75 to 80 desks enough for all students to be working at the same time. Flexible teaching and crit. spaces are available adjacent to the studios. The university allows extended access to the studio spaces (effectively 24 hours). Students reported that the extended access coupled with the attractive nature of the carefully

refurbished spaces is resulting in the development of an excellent studio culture.

- IT

In addition to computers located in the studios, the School has established a dedicated IT laboratory situated between the two first floor studios. This is available for general use when not booked for formal teaching. There are a total of 30 high-specification PCs with a wide range of software including AutoCAD, 3D Max, Photoshop, Illustrator, Sketch-up plus video-editing and animation software. The School provides fast colour printing up to A0 and has just ordered an additional large format printer to keep pace with demand. It was reported that 70% of the School's students possess their own laptops. There are plans for the whole University of Kent campus to be equipped for wireless operation and the Marlowe Building is scheduled to be equipped before the start of the 2006/7 academic year

- Workshops

The School has developed a dedicated model-making workshop which is supported by a technician and assistant with substantial experience of architectural model-making. The workshop is well-equipped with a good range of bench and hand tools for working with wood, metals and plastics; mostly sheet materials but also some casting. A spray booth allows well-finished models to be produced. The aim is to expand the facilities to include, for example, vacuum forming and laser cutting when funds allow. Students reported that they were well-trained in the use of the facilities and well-supported to produce both experimental models as an element of their design process and professional standard final models. The model-making technician also runs a small shop where students

can buy a decent range of materials and art supplies - a very useful resource with the city's shops more than a mile away. The Board were particularly impressed by the support being provided by the technician in charge.

- Photographic Facilities

The School has its own traditional 'wet' darkroom facilities close to the first floor studios. Through the "Point & Click" module at the end of stage one, the School seeks to equip students with an understanding of both traditional and digital photography, although the impact of this elsewhere in the student's work was not particularly obvious.

- Specialist Facilities

In addition to the dedicated facilities within the School, with prior arrangement, architecture students can and do make use of specialist facilities elsewhere on campus including the drama workshop and electronics laboratory.

- Library

The Templeton Library, the University's main collection is only a few minutes walk from the Marlowe Building. Prior to the formation of the School, the Library had a decent holding of architectural texts in support of its existing Schools of Social Policy, Sociology & Social Research and Drama, Film & Visual Arts. Since September 2005, the Library has purchased 821 new architecture texts and purchasing to further enhance the book stock continues. Subscriptions to 45 architecture and interior design journals have been taken out; with both printed and on-line access where this is available. The Library has a huge slide collection which continues to be updated; it already holds over 8,000 architecture related slides. Architecture staff and students are supported by a dedicated and

enthusiastic Subject Librarian who has maintained close liaison with the academic staff in the rapid build-up of the collection. Students also have access to the library at Canterbury Christ Church University.

Board members confirmed that the Library provision had grown rapidly and already provides an excellent resource in support of the Architecture School. Future plans should ensure that the provision keeps pace with the expected growth of the School. The Board was particularly impressed with the commitment and enthusiasm of the Subject Librarian in developing the provision and supporting students to make full use of it.

13. Attachments

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

- Critical Self Appraisal including SWOT analysis
- Report of External Panel Review from Nov. 2005
- Update on Activities since the Exploratory Board
- Staff List
- Student Statistics
- BA (Hons) Programme Overview
- BA (Hons) Curriculum Mapping to Validation Criteria
- BA (Hons) Programme Specification
- BA (Hons) Module Specifications
- MArch Programme Overview
- MArch Curriculum Mapping to Validation Criteria
- MArch Programme Specification
- MArch Module Specifications

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

- Full mark sheets for BA stages 1, 2 and 3.

- Full mark sheets for Match stages 4 and 5.
- Examples of staff publications
- Details of 2005/6 Field Trips
- Details of Kent Architectural Student Association Guest Lecturers

13.3 Board members also had access to a networked PC allowing access to a range of additional University and School documentation including:

- Detailed staff CVs
- University QA Documents on External Examining, Assessment & Marking etc.
- University General Regulations
- School Handbook
- Internal Validation Report
- Full details of school resources
- Minutes of School Meetings