

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Revisiting
Board to the University of Kent
Confirmed by the RIBA Education
Committee 26 September 2007**

Kent School of Architecture

**Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture
Part Two: Master of Architecture**

Date of Revisiting Visiting Board: 12 June 2007

**This report should be read in conjunction with the Report of
the RIBA Initial Visiting Board to the University of Kent on
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 Revisiting Board for the visit on Tuesday 12 June 2007 were:

Ian McInnes (Chair)

Professor Ruth Morrow

Graeme Jennings

Nicholas Smith (Head of Validation, RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

Ian McInnes and Professor Ruth Morrow provided continuity with the Initial Visiting Board in June 2006.

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 Revisiting Board

4.1 At its meeting on 26 September 2007 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed:

Continued Validation of:

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

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

4.2 The next full Visiting Board should take place in 2010

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

5.1 The Revisiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA should continue with their accreditation of the Part One and Part Two courses.

5.2 The Revisiting 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 Revisiting Board recommends to ARB that 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 Revisiting 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).

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 There were no conditions attached to the continued validation of 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 courses;
- ii. any significant changes to the courses being submitted to the RIBA;
- iii. any change of award titles, 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 listed in 4.1.

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

10.1 Background

10.1.1 The previous Visiting Board to the Kent School of Architecture at the University of Kent was the Initial Board on 8 – 9 June 2006. The Board recommended Initial Validation with Conditions of the Part One and Part Two programmes. Section 8 of the original report explains the imposition of the condition as follows:

“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.”

The focus of the Revisit was thus to address the specific issue set out in this statement.

10.2 Recommendations

10.2.1 The Board made no formal recommendations.

10.3 Advice

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

10.3.1 It was clear to the Board that the School had offered a considered response to the recommendations and advice contained in the report of the 2006 Initial Visiting Board. Where actions have already been put in place, it was clear to the Board that the outcomes were already feeding through into the work seen in the student portfolios. The Board would thus simply advise the School to continue to press forward with its initiatives, particularly those directed at better supporting students to (i) integrate technology and environmental learning into their design work and (ii) demonstrate the required levels of critical appraisal.

10.3.2 Based on the information provided, the Board believes that a coherent and workable research strategy for the School is beginning to emerge. The Board supports the proposal of a combination of research linked to regional agendas together with exploiting the School’s proximity to Europe. With the appointment of the new Professor, the staff team are advised to develop plans to turn their proposals into reality. The ultimate aim should be the development of a spirit of critical enquiry throughout the School which not only drives a research agenda, but also supports, strengthens the challenge of, and reinvigorates, the taught courses particularly the Part Two.

10.3.3 As it seems likely that the School will be successful in its strategy to recruit applicants to the Part One programme with higher UCAS points totals, the staff team are advised to reconsider assessments and project briefs to ensure that they have the potential to stretch more able students.

10.3.4 The School is encouraged to further exploit the opportunities for interdisciplinary work that arise from the presence of interior design and interior architecture

courses within the School, subjects such as Film & Visual Arts and History & Drama within the Faculty, and Urban Studies elsewhere in the University.

10.3.5 The Board noted the additional flexibility introduced into the course by such devices as amalgamating the formally separate 'Adapt' and 'Extend' modules. The staff team are encouraged to investigate similar adaptations which could add additional flexibility and introduce changes of pace to the curriculum.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Report

11.1 The previous RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Kent was the Initial Visiting Board held on 8 – 9 June 2006. The Initial Visiting Board recommended Initial Validation with Conditions for:

- Part One: Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Architecture (3 years full-time)
- Part Two Master of Architecture (2 years full-time)

These recommendations were accepted by the RIBA Education Committee.

11.2 In making their recommendations the 2006 Board placed the condition set out in section 10.1.1 above.

11.3 The 2006 Board concluded that the key strengths of the School 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 School's development by the University QA Department.

12. Commentary

12.1 Developments since the Last Visit

In its first meeting with the Head of School and Associate Dean, the Visiting Board was alerted to developments which had occurred since the previous Visiting Board. These are discussed in detail in the relevant sections of the report below.

12.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The supplementary information supplied in preparation for the Board was appropriate and helpful. The timetable established for the visit worked well. The practical arrangements were excellent.

The 2006 Board had commented that information on the weighting of assessment components might have been more clearly presented. The 2007 Revisiting Board learned that the assessment weighting for each element of assessment was now clearly identified in the project brief given to each student at the start of each module. Other queries regarding the documentation submitted for the 2006 Board had also been addressed.

12.2.1 Record of Academic portfolios sampled

BA (Hons) Architecture (Part One)

Stage three: 3 lowest, 2 middle and 2 high pass portfolios from an initial cohort of 17.

Masters in Architecture (Part Two)

Stage five: 3 lowest, 2 middle and 2 high pass portfolios from an initial cohort of 7 (including all work contributing to the criteria from stage four)

The Board appreciated the efforts made by the School to ensure that complete academic portfolios were available including models and supporting materials. Very clear mark sheets accompanied the portfolios.

12.3 Responses made to the previous Visiting Board report and external examiner comments.

The School provided Board members with copies of the following documents:

- Kent School of Architecture Learning & Teaching Committee – Annual Monitoring 2005-6: Response to RIBA Visiting Board of July 2006.
- Kent School of Architecture Learning & Teaching Committee – Responses to External Examiners 2005-6.

There was clear evidence in these responses that the School had engaged seriously with the issues raised by both the Initial Visiting Board and by the two External Examiners. The responses, which are discussed in detail in the relevant sections of the report below, were judged to be entirely appropriate. Some of the changes were not scheduled to be made until the 2007/8 academic year so the impact of these changes was not yet apparent.

12.4 Detailed Commentary on the Part One course:

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

12.4.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The 2006 Board had suggested 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.

The 2007 Revisiting Board learned that the BA programme had increased its academic entry requirement to 280 UCAS points and would further increase this to 300 UCAS points for entry in 2008. The programme team were committed to a re-evaluation of the programme's aims in autumn 2007 when the nature and capabilities of the new intake have been assessed.

12.4.2 *Course design and content*

The 2006 Board felt 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 2007 Revisiting Board learned that the School was making a number of significant changes to modules, particularly at stage 2 (year 2). These changes would require the Programme Specification to be updated during summer 2007. The opportunity would thus be taken to provide greater clarity in the description of the Part One programme.

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

- *Design*

The Revisiting 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.

Whilst the Initial Visiting Board in 2006 formed the view that there was an appropriate balance between design and non-design work in the course, in its report it expressed concerns about the contextual approach to design underpinning the course. The 2006 Board also supported the view expressed by one of the External Examiners that the students appeared to find it difficult to develop a coherent architectural language. As a result, it suggested that 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.

In its response to the 2006 Report, the School acknowledges that some Part One students struggle to develop a coherent architectural language. Besides the study of architectural languages in the Cultural Context courses, the School now exposes students to a wider range of architectural languages through its Open Lecture series and the staff organised lunchtime design lectures ('Design Thursday'). Field trips have also played a stronger role in the course in the last year with visits to Barcelona, Lille, Berlin, Copenhagen and Vienna in addition to visits to appropriate UK project precedents. The School's response to the 2006 Report also affirms the School's commitment to supporting its students to documenting their design process decision making. The response explains that this starts at stage 1 through the sketch book and design journal and continues through the School. It also emphasises that students are positively encouraged to display extracts from process work in their journals in their final presentations.

The 2006 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 was thus 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 2007 Revisiting Board learned that, as predicted at the time of the 2006 Board, the stage two 'Adapt' and 'Extend' modules have been combined, reducing the duplication of student effort and providing additional opportunities to vary the pace of student work. The Board learned that module convenors are supported to introduce innovative teaching and learning approaches and are being encouraged to do so as this forms a heading in the module monitoring proforma. Additional workshop teaching has also been introduced in 2006/7.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Revisiting 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 2006 Visiting Board reported that the criteria mapping exercise undertaken demonstrated full coverage of the Technology & Environment criteria, but it was not sure that that this was always achieved in practice. In particular the 2006 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 recommended 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 was 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.

The 2007 Board was provided with a detailed explanation of the philosophy, structure and detailed delivery of technology and environmental teaching in the School. The School reported that module co-ordinators are to be specifically tasked to ensure that all module staff including design tutors were fully aware of the technology and environmental curriculum for the module, the submission requirements, assessed components and assessment criteria. In part this is to be achieved by module convenors calling a meeting of all staff teaching on a module prior to its commencement. All of this is with the aim of ensuring that students are made fully aware of the need to integrate technology and environmental issues with cultural context and design in the realisation of their projects.

- *Cultural Context*

The Revisiting 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 2006 Board had been very positive about this aspect of the course which it identified as one of the strengths of the Part One programme, but still felt that students could

benefit from further encouragement to integrate the outcomes of their tuition in this area into design work.

The 2007 Board learned that for the 2006/7 academic year, cultural context modules have been rescheduled so that the inputs occur at a more strategic point in the year. As an example of this, the model making skills of module AR307 'House & Housing' were seen to be more appropriately located in the autumn term of stage 1, whereas the observational drawing skills developed by module AR304 'Western Architecture' are now included in the spring term of stage 1.

- *Communication Skills*

The Revisiting 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.

Whilst generally positive regarding the demonstration of communication skills by students on the BA (Hons) programme, the 2006 Board commented that:

- weaker first year students might have benefited from more support in this area at an early stage in the course;
- the teaching of animation at stage two might focus more on the use of animation as a means of exploring ideas;
- good final presentation models were on view, but there was a lack of "working" models showing design development;
- stage three design reports tended to be descriptive and short of critical analysis.

The 2007 Revisiting Board learned that:

- two stage 1 Cultural Context modules have been rescheduled to allow specific communication skills to be taught at a point that better supports students' design developments;
- staff made it clear to students that 'working' models were expected at interim stages of projects just as 'working' drawings currently are;
- the School provided a robust defence of its rationale regarding animation teaching;
- the School focuses on the option modules as vehicles for developing students' critical reflection.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Revisiting Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

The 2006 Board commented that 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 2006 Board also 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 2006 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 was thus encouraged to look again at its assessment and mapping of this curriculum area.

Specifically it was encouraged to develop the student mentoring scheme it has established in partnership with RIBA South East region. It was felt that this had the potential to achieve some of the Part One Management Practice and Law criteria more appropriately and effectively than was currently the case, perhaps through the medium of critical case studies.

The 2007 Board heard that the course team have been discussing this issue for some time – and that the views of the 2006 Board echoed the concerns of certain staff members. The Board learned that for the 2007/8 academic year the recommendation to the Learning and Teaching Committee for assessment of this module would be 50% unseen examination and 50% case study (to include submissions based on the final year project and the mentoring programme.) In future years design modules were also being enhanced with the aim of achieving more integration of management practice and law issues into design work.

- Preparation for Professional Practice

The 2006 Board had commended the practice mentoring scheme run by the School in conjunction with RIBA South East and the Canterbury Chapter of the RIBA, identifying this as an excellent example of best practice. The 2007 Board learned that this scheme has been further developed. All stage 2 students were now offered the opportunity of an attachment to a local practice to engage in live project issues, including design team meetings, site inspections, contractor meetings and client briefings. Through this attachment, students will also be able to gain insights into the organisation of practices. Students who have been involved in the mentoring scheme will be asked to prepare a short reflective review of their experiences for inclusion in their portfolio and PDP.

12.4.4 *Progression within the course*

The 2006 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 the 2006 Board believed that the procedures might be too rigorous and that there may be scope for some relaxation. The School was asked to keep this under review.

The 2007 Board learned that the School's Teaching and Learning Committee had decided to reduce the number of separate assessed components in modules, particularly in the Part One course. As an example of this, the merging of the 'Adapt' and 'Extend' modules at stage 2 allowed students to concentrate on design, technical and environmental aspects associated with existing building once only rather than being assessed twice on effectively the same subject area as had happened in 2005/6.

12.4.5 *Assessment*

The 2006 Board commented that the Part One assessment requirements might be overly strict and unnecessarily punitive contributing to the poor progression rate found at certain levels of the course. As an example, the 2006 Board identified the case of Management, Practice & Law where they 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 2007 Board learned that the earlier Board had slightly misunderstood the assessment regime for the Management, Practice & law exam paper. Students were not in fact required to achieve a pass mark in all questions on the paper; they simply had to achieve a pass on each section. However, the School reported that these rules had been amended for 2006/7. Students are now required to answer questions from each section to ensure they cover the criteria in this area. They then simply have to achieve the pass mark in aggregate over all the questions to pass the written examination.

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

12.5.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The 2006 Board found the overall aims of the Part Two programme as set out in the M.Arch. 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. The 2006 Board commented that they found it difficult 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.

With the opportunity to view the work of the 2007 Part Two graduates, the 2007 Revisiting Board confirms that the overall aims of the programme are indeed being met.

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

- *Design*

The Revisiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme.

The 2006 Visiting 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 saw 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 important roles 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".

The 2007 Board were assured that the School agreed with the previous Visiting Board's comments. By way of clarification, the School explained that the topics for the independent study projects were proposed and discussed with the Programme Director who is also the Module Convenor in advance of the start of the project to ensure the suitability of the topic being proposed for the student concerned.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Revisiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and

Environment were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme.

The 2006 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 that this was always achieved in practice. 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.

The 2007 Board learned that in 2006/7 the briefs for the major project were revised to emphasise 'the ability to critically appraise' and apply critical reflection in integrating design and technology. Revisions to the brief for the Technical Report (AR808) produced in conjunction with the major project, include the requirement to reflect critically on the final design project decisions. There is also now a further requirement for a specialist technological study into a specific area of the project. As an example it was explained that, in an art gallery, a student would be expected to undertake

specialist research into day-lighting and artificial lighting covering both precedents and a detailed analysis of the predicted performance of their designs using calculations and, where appropriate, physical models.

- *Cultural Context*

The Revisiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme.

- *Communication Skills*

The Revisiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Communication Skills were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme.

The 2006 Board pronounced itself satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Communication Skills were being met by all graduates from the MArch programme. They raised just one issue as follows: 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.

In its response on this issue, the School points out that the criterion referred to is met through the Cultural Context

module (AR802) and the Urban Landscapes Project (AR801). Both these modules were deliberately scheduled at the start of the BArch to emphasise that the spirit of critical enquiry should pervade the whole of the MArch. The 2007 Revisiting Board learned that this aspect was reinforced in the Cultural Context brief for the academic year 2006/7. The decision was also taken to change the assessment of this module from an essay of 3,000 words and a seminar presentation to an extended essay of 5,000 words to offer more scope for critical appraisal.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Revisiting Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme.

The 2006 Board reported that the stage 4 Management Practice & Law module, taught largely by visiting practitioners, provided 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 2006 Board noted that the School had mapped the achievement of the criteria in this area onto a single unseen examination and questioned whether this was appropriate. The 2006 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 was thus encouraged to look again at its assessment of this curriculum area.

The School's response explained that:

- the assessment methodology for this module was under active discussion with changes to be considered by the Learning & Teaching Committee for 2007/8.
- examination rules had been amended for the 2006/7 academic year.; student were now required to answer questions from each section to ensure they cover the criteria and then simply have to achieve an aggregate pass mark.
- the difference in the 2005/6 examination papers had been in the level of knowledge and understanding that students were expected to display.

The 2007 Board noted that a change in the assessment regime for the module could encourage students to draw in more depth upon their experience of practice and undertake research in this area.

12.5.3 *Assessment*

The 2006 Board had made comments regarding the assessment of Part Two along similar lines to those for Part One. The School reported that the changes to examination rules reported in section 12.4.5 would apply to Part Two as well as Part One.

12.6 **External examining arrangements**

The 2006 Visiting Board confirmed that 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. The 2007 Revisiting Board had the opportunity of a discussion with both External Examiners. They confirmed that the standards being set by the School were definitely comparable with those of other schools of architecture and that the assessment process was fair, open and transparent. Student achievement was generally

comparable with other schools, although the best work was not yet quite up to the standard of the very best to be seen elsewhere. They further commented that:

- The quality of the 2007 BA (Hons) graduates was not quite as high as it had been in 2006.
- With a reasonable number of graduates from the BArch in 2007 it was possible to confirm that there was both a fair spread of marks and parity with other institutions across the mark range.
- Overall, the integration by graduates of technology and environmental issues into their design outcomes has improved; the best students demonstrate a very high degree of integration, on a par with the best seen at other schools.
- An engagement with the School's regional context is beginning to come through in a stronger fashion in student projects.
- The School still has work to do to establish a distinctive identity, but has the potential to do so through engagement with the regional agenda and by exploiting the potential for an interdisciplinary approach with, for example, interior architecture.

12.7 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

The Board did not discuss this in detail. The School employs a Professional Studies Advisor who attends all relevant briefings at the RIBA, and who maintains regular contact with students. The School is continuing to develop its links with local practices. The student mentoring scheme is an important component of this. The School recognises that encouraging local practices to provide “year out” employment is an important strategy in

retaining good Part One graduates and reducing the loss to London schools.

12.8 **Students**

The 2006 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 had been hugely supportive of the School and its staff and had identified no weaknesses whatsoever. As a result the 2007 Revisiting Board had not required a meeting with students.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor, in his meeting with the 2006 Board, had confirmed that the student:staff ratio would not rise above 18:1 and this commitment was confirmed to the 2007 Revisiting Board. The current SSR was still significantly below this figure and it was reported that the University continued to be very generous in supporting the School as it built up to full size.

12.9 **Staff:**

The 2006 Board, following its meeting with staff of the School, reported that it found staff to be universally committed to the challenge of developing the new School and functioning as a cohesive supportive team. The Board also noted the impressive contribution made by the support staff in the School, particularly the School Co-ordinator.

The 2007 Board learned that there had been a number of staff changes during 2006/7. The Head of the MArch programme had retired due to ill-health and another member of the team was acting in this role whilst recruitment of a replacement was underway. As discussed at the 2006 Board a Professor and Director of Research

was to be appointed. Staffing is being enhanced in the cultural context area and a new Director of the Interiors Course has been identified. The number of staff on fractional posts had also been significantly increased with a particular focus on staff who can contribute to supporting students to integrate technology into their design work. Overall the School had kept an approximate 50/50 balance between full-time and part-time staff.

12.10 Research:

The 2006 Board reported that it was clear that, when they spoke to the head and the staff team, there was an understanding of the importance of developing a culture of research within the School. The 2006 Board hoped 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 staff team was thus 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.

The 2007 Revisiting Board learned that two members of staff were already regular contributors to the Architectural Humanities Research Association (AHRA). The School was also considering establishing a European Architectural Research Institute (EARi). This would build upon the School's location in the University's Faculty of Humanities and exploit the School's existing European links. These initiatives would clearly link to and support the School's cultural studies teaching. The Board heard that the School had submitted a Framework 7 proposal during the current academic year in collaboration with the University of Bologna and was awaiting the outcome.

The 2007 Board also heard that the staff team aim to have regional based studies as a focus for one strand of the research in the School. The work in this area might range from environmental studies to historical development studies to regeneration engagement. As an example, the Board learned that the School has recently responded to a request from Canterbury City to become involved in urban regeneration ideas for the coastal town of Herne Bay. This is being run as linked projects across stage 4 architecture, stage 2 architecture and stage 2 interiors. Stage 3 students have also been involved in a project which involves generating ideas for the development of Faversham Creek at the request of the District Council.

12.11 Equal Opportunities

At the time of the 2006 Visiting Board, the student population was approximately 60% male and 40% female and in line with the national average (38% female). The School reported to the Revisiting Board that it had achieved a 50/50 male/female balance in the 2006/7 intake to stage 1. The School also reported that it had improved the gender balance and ethnic diversity of its staff through recent part-time recruitment. The Board hoped that a better balance the balance amongst the full-time staff might also be achieved through the new appointments to be made.

12.12 Resourcing and Facilities:

The 2006 Initial Visiting Board report had been very positive indeed about the school's physical spaces and the resources such as workshops, IT labs, photographic facilities and library. The University had clearly resourced the School to cope with significant expansion in numbers and the facilities were still excellent.

13. Attachments

- 13.1 Prior to the visit, the School provided the Board with the following documentation to supplement that available to the original 2006 Initial Visiting Board:
- Kent School of Architecture School Handbook 2006-2007.
 - Kent School of Architecture: Response to RIBA Visiting Board of July 2006
 - External Examiner Reports 2005/6
 - School's response to 2005/6 External Examiner Reports.
- 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 3.
 - Full mark sheets for MArch stages 5.
- 13.3 A networked computer was provided in the Board's Baseroom to allow access to additional materials. In the event this facility was not needed; the Board had been provided with everything they required.