

Royal Institute of British Architects

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

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 12 October 2005

Liverpool School of Architecture

**BA Hons (Architecture) Part 1
Bachelor of Architecture, Part 2**

Date of Visiting Board: 05-06 May 2005

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1

3 years full time.

Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch) Part 2

2 years full time.

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered

University of Liverpool

Liverpool

L69 3BX

T: +44 (0) 151 794 2000

F: +44 (0) 151 708 6502

W: www.liv.ac.uk

1.2 Name of Awarding Body

University of Liverpool

1.3 Name of Head of School

Professor Robert Kronenburg

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 05-06 May 2005 were:

Kathy Gal (Chair)

David Porter

Melanie Richardson (Vice-Chair)

Mark Way

Geoff Alsop (Regional Nominee)

Mike Packham (Non-Architect Member)

Pavandeep Singh Panesar (Graduate/Student Member)

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (Acting Head of Validation, RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

Kevin Harte (Validation Co-ordinator, RIBA) attended the Board as an observer.

3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

3.1 Visiting Board carried out under the 'RIBA Procedures for the Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture,' published July 2003, effective from September 2003, 'Tomorrow's Architect,' published March 2003, 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 12 October 2005

4.1 The RIBA Education Committee at its meeting on 12 October 2005 confirmed **Continued Validation** of:

Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Architecture (Part One)

Bachelor of Architecture (Part Two)

4.2 The next Visiting Board should take place in 2009.

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

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

6. Criteria for Validation

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

7. Standards

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

8. Conditions of Validation

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

9. Standard Requirements of Recognition

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

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

- 10.2 Liverpool School of Architecture is a thriving, energetic community with a vibrant studio atmosphere valued by staff and students alike. Teaching is conducted in an environment of mutual respect and support. The staff's expertise and commitment are appreciated by the students who enjoy the freedom the course allows them.

The School's main strengths include:

- An excellent body of staff, whose wide experience, enthusiasm and talents as communicators inspire students to fulfil their potential;
- The School enjoys the confidence and support of the University which has invested heavily in staff and facilities, building a solid base for the future. Facilities at the School are excellent, in particular the studios and the library;
- Its location in and relationship with the City of Liverpool, with tremendous scope for active participation in current and future projects of local, national and international importance;
- The vibrant and dynamic studio culture, and the students' commitment to cultivating and preserving this;
- Freedom of approach within a supportive environment, which allows students to feel challenged and stretched, but not trammelled;
- The positive impact of research on teaching programme. The University is committed to returning world-class research whilst preserving its teaching mission;
- The involvement of staff with the University, with representation on many committees.

10.3 Recommendations

10.3.1 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA expects the Institution to

report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendation in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the school and in the mid term review. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

10.3.2 The Board recommends that the School upgrade the workshop, its equipment and hours of access to help support the existing studio culture.

10.4 Advice

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

10.4.2 The Board believes that the School's effectiveness in delivering its learning and teaching agenda could be enhanced by more administrative support.

10.4.3 The Board congratulates the School on its achievement in successfully addressing the concerns of previous Visiting Boards in a comprehensive and conscientious manner. The School should now crystallise and articulate its aspirations into a clear statement of what it believes to be its distinctive place in architectural education.

10.4.4 The Board considered that the student workload was heavy. The School might wish to explore ways of reducing this without compromising the scope or robustness of the course.

10.4.5 The Board advises the School to explore what improvements could be made to reprographics facilities to provide greater access for students.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

11.1 The last full RIBA ARB Visiting Board to the University of Liverpool took place on 23/24 November 2000. The Board recommended that **Continued Recognition** be granted to:

Part One: Bachelor of Arts in Architecture and the Bachelor of Arts in Architecture with honours (three years full-time)

Part Three: North West Examination in Professional Practice

The Visiting Board of November 2000 recommended **Conditional Continued Validation** of:

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

11.2 Summary of the **November 2000** Visiting Board Report:

“The School’s strengths included a highly committed and supportive staff and a lively, bright and enthusiastic student body. Since the last visit, a new Professor of Architecture, Professor David Dunster, has been appointed. The School has developed a strong focus on urban regeneration.

“The Board noted that the First Year of the Part One course had been under review and that this year now focused on the development of core architectural skills. The Board noted that the design projects for the First Year displayed in the exhibition lacked the rigorous design approach that is demonstrated in Year Two. The Board commended the second and third years of the Part One course, which provided students with a solid grounding for advancing their skills. However, it is recommended that the School must ensure that the architectural technologies are more evident in the design work. The Board found that history and theory throughout the School was a particular strength.

“The Board had serious concerns regarding the Part Two course. The Board found that the integration of construction and technology in the design work at Part Two was inadequate. The Board noted that the amount of time allocated to Urban Regeneration projects may be detrimental to the consideration of building design within the course and the integration of attendant technology and material requirements. The revisit by the Board shall require more evidence of the integration and consideration of these issues in the Part Two design portfolios.

“The Board found that the Part Three course/ examination, operated under the auspices of the RIBA North West Region, met all the appropriate criteria.”

11.3 Part Two Revisit May 2002

A sub-group revisited the School of Architecture on 28 May 2002 to consider the Part Two course. The Revisiting Board recommended **Continued Validation** of

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

11.4 **Summary of May 2002 Revisiting Board Report:**

“The Board was extremely impressed that the points raised at the November 2000 visit concerning the Part Two course had been taken seriously and had been addressed in full by the Department. The Board commended the Department on the manner in which the concerns of the Board had been approached and the level of achievement which had been reached since the last visit. The Board recommended that the Department should continue to make efforts to maintain the high standard of work which was now beginning to be produced.”

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

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

13. **Commentary**

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

The Critical Self-Appraisal document was honest and straightforward, identifying the School’s strengths and weaknesses as perceived by themselves. The CSA was written by the outgoing Head of School, Simon Pepper, the present Head of School, Robert Kronenburg, and circulated to all staff and students for comment and contributions.

Architecture courses have been streamlined radically since the last two Visiting Boards, for a combination of reasons

including student recruitment, staffing provision and University priorities. The decision was made to provide fewer, but higher quality, courses, which would have a positive impact on student recruitment and retention. This policy has been strikingly successful. A sharp increase in numbers between 2000 and 2002 made extra demands on both physical and staff resources, which prompted the University to make additional funds available to accommodate the larger cohorts. Rationalisation allowed the School to focus staffing appointments and replacements in the field of architecture.

The name of Liverpool School of Architecture has been restored, which is a demonstration of University’s belief in and commitment to architectural education. This will help the School to build a distinctive personality of its own whilst maintaining its position in the Faculty.

Since the last visit the arrangements for Part 3 have been modified. Liverpool School of Architecture’s Part 3 students take the RIBA North West Region Part 3 examination (RIBA Advanced Diploma in Professional Practice in Architecture) as part of a mutual arrangement with Manchester School of Architecture and Liverpool John Moores University. The Part 3 examination is now validated separately.

13.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Board would like to thank the School for their kindness and hospitality during the visit.

The School provided all documentation required for the visit in a timely manner. The documentation was straightforward and easy to navigate. When required, additional documentation and assistance was provided

promptly. All practical arrangements for the visit were excellent and the Board appreciated the support of the Institutional Facilitator. The School is especially to be congratulated given the difficult circumstances in which it was operating at the time of the visit, following the unexpected illness of the Head of School. The Board wishes Professor Pepper a speedy recovery.

13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

The Board viewed the work of the 2003/2004 graduating cohort.

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1:

For the first year, the School was required only to produce 14 portfolios from the cohort of 140, to include a minimum of the 3 lowest passes, two middle passes and 3 high passes. In practice the School provided many more in order to give the Board a more representative sample of the achievement of this year.

For the second year, the Board viewed the three lowest passes, two middle passes and three high passes from a cohort of 91.

For the Third Year, the Board reviewed the 4 lowest passes, 3 middle passes, and 2 high passes from a cohort of 46.

From the B.Arch, the board reviewed the 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes and 2 high passes, from the 4th year cohort of 37; and the 3 lowest passes, 2 middle passes and 2 high passes from the 5th year cohort of 28.

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

The Board considered that the School's response to the previous Visiting Board reports had been remarkable and highly impressive. The School itself has referred to it as a 'Renaissance'. The School has tackled all issues in a commendable and imaginative way. The streamlining of courses has allowed them to concentrate all resources on architecture. The validated courses, in particular the Part 2, have been restructured to allow for greater coherence and more appropriate coverage of the criteria. New appointments have been judicious and the direct correlation of research and teaching has strengthened the course in significant areas. The School has demonstrated an openness and honesty which is admirable. Staff are receptive to comment and suggestion from all interested parties: students, colleagues, the University, external examiners and other external agencies. The School's responses to external examiners' reports are conscientious and considered and chart the steady progress made over the last five years. The result is a sound and increasingly popular School of Architecture with a firm commitment for the future from its parent institution.

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

The Liverpool School of Architecture is located within the Faculty of Social and Environmental Studies, which includes Law, Geography, Sociology, Politics, Civic Design, and Management departments among others. In addition to the two validated programmes, the School of Architecture also offers a BA Hons Architecture (Theory Route) and the Bachelor of Architecture (Design) which

are not subject to RIBA validation. Students on the RIBA validated courses can choose to transfer to these programmes if they decide that their personal priorities are to obtain a good, broad-based degree in architecture rather than a strictly professional qualification. These are seen as valuable awards in their own right and allow students to take options from other University programmes.

In its former existence as the School of Architecture and Building Engineering the School offered a BEng in Environmental and Services Engineering, a BA in Construction Project Management, taught modules in Art History for the Combined Honours Programme and an MA (Art in the City). Following radical restructuring in 2002, these courses were discontinued which allowed the School to focus its activities and resources on the architecture programmes.

13.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part One qualification

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The course objectives for the BA (Hons) were clearly mapped against the RIBA/ARB core criteria. The Board confirms that all objectives were demonstrably achieved.

13.5.2 Course design and content
The BA (Hons) Architecture course is based on a year-structure within a modular framework. From its former complex pathway structure it has been simplified to comprise a core architectural course with optional modules for students wishing to pursue specific areas in more depth.

The structure of the course was amply demonstrated in the exhibition. The course is designed to provide incremental experience, building from smaller projects to longer and more comprehensive ones; progression from each stage of the course is logical and clear attempts are made to relate one year to the next.

The Board considered that the student workload was very heavy. It was clearly designed to challenge and stretch students, which the Board commended. However, the Board was concerned that there was a danger of overloading the students. In particular, the number of projects in the third year could be reduced, as it was possible that the breadth could compromise the depth.

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

- *Design*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. The Board considered that many of the designs were very good and the students presented interesting ideas, especially in 3D models. They thought the first year projects were good fun. There is an additional CAD option for those wishing to acquire more advanced skills in this area.

The Board remarked that space planning, although of an acceptable standard, did not achieve the same high level as the students' 3 dimensional models.

Again, they commented that School might consider reducing the number of projects. Students work through a

number of iterations of the simple design process before tackling the major project in the second semester.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Technology & Environment were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. This aspect of the course has improved markedly since the last Visiting Boards and continues to do so. The School has recognised the difficulty of integrating these two elements into design and taken steps to address this. In addition a technical co-ordinator has been appointed with responsibility for both Parts 1 and 2. The Board commended the School's philosophy of environmental science and sustainability as an ethos rather than a subject. Students wishing to investigate sustainability in more depth may take an option in this subject.

- *Cultural Context*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. The students benefit from the expertise of research-active staff in the fields of history and theory. An additional option in history is available for students with a special interest in this area.

The School is able to take full advantage of its location in Liverpool and the North West, particularly with regard to the wealth of urban issues the region presents. The city's City of Culture status will provide further unique opportunities. Students also undertake site analyses in other European cities, such as Rotterdam, Paris and

Barcelona. Those who do not wish to travel undertake projects at comparable sites in the UK.

- *Communication*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. Drawing skills are well taught in the first year. All visual and verbal communication techniques were well addressed in the course and students demonstrated proficiency in all of them. The students are highly articulate and written work was fluent. Students demonstrated a high level of sketching, handdrawing and CAD skills.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme. The School is committed to providing a comprehensive grounding in these areas and does so to a far higher degree than demanded by the criteria. The School benefits from the expertise of staff formerly attached to the discontinued Construction Project Management course who are now attached to the architecture courses.

The Board considered that this part of the course might be reduced without loss of depth, as much of it was more appropriate to Part 2.

The Board commented that students do not apply their knowledge to their work as thoroughly as the excellent teaching would enable them to do.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience, (Part 1 only)*

Students felt well prepared for their year in practice which they attributed to the thorough grounding in Management, Practice and Law they received. As stated elsewhere, some would have appreciated more coverage of structure in the BA course. Students return to the School for one day during their year out, as described in paragraph 13.9.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

Drop-out rates at the end of Year 1 are not out of proportion with those at other schools. At the end of Year 2, drop out rates are consistently low. Completion rates at Year 3 are excellent.

13.5.5 Assessment:

The Board considered that the assessment methods were entirely appropriate. Assessment is made chiefly through a combination of portfolio review, presentations, coursework, essays and, to a lesser extent, written examination. Much of the work is assessed by the teaching teams and moderated by other staff. The first year must be passed but does not contribute to the final mark. The University operates a system of compensation, but this is not permitted in the specified modules of the architecture course which are intended to fulfil professional criteria.

The Board commented that the Management, Practice and Law units may be weighted too heavily.

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

Recruitment to the BA (Hons) is especially strong and has risen markedly in recent years, the most notable increase happening in 2003 when 140 were admitted to the BA

course in response to a request from the University. This intake is exceptional and the School confirms that UK intakes will not exceed 100 in future. As stated elsewhere, the University committed extra resources to Architecture to accommodate the higher numbers.

Most students enter through the traditional A level route with excellent grades. The School is actively encouraging those from non-traditional backgrounds, resulting in higher proportions of entrants being recruited from these areas (16% in 2004). The University offers a year-long International Foundation Year programme for students with qualifications which would otherwise not permit direct entry to the first year of an undergraduate programme.

The majority of applicants are interviewed at open days and all are required to submit a portfolio of art and design-based work. The University supports the Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) and the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS) and offers a 'Go Higher' programme for mature students who do not possess traditional entry qualifications. The School recognises APL/APEL as a valid route of entry.

Students may enter year 2 of the BA course on the basis of an interview or portfolio submission under the University APL arrangement.

13.6 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Two qualification**

Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The School's intention is for the B.Arch to focus on contextual architecture and urban design. The Board

found it difficult to identify the course's overall aspirations, but confirmed that the course descriptors were clear. There was an emphasis on deliverables, with the course documents tending to describe tangible outputs at the expense of the aspirations of the project.

13.6.1 Course design and content

The Board's comments about the BA also apply to the B.Arch; namely, that all areas are comprehensively covered. This thoroughness has resulted in a heavy workload, in particular in the fourth year. This is not to criticise the dedication and ambition of the staff, but to draw attention to the fact that there is a risk of overload. The Board found the structural progression through the two years of the B.Arch to be seamless, logical and coherent.

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

- *Design*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme. The Board debated whether the choice of projects was appropriate, and whether they were perhaps rather pedestrian (for example, the hotel). However they did observe that the students appeared to find the projects appropriately challenging. The Board observed that many projects leapt from the masterplanning stage to buildings, with the relationship between the two not being made apparent. The Board would expect to see more emphasis on the demonstration of the 'ability to systematically test, analyse and appraise design options, and draw conclusions which display

methodological and theoretical rigour' as stated in the Criteria.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme. There is clear evidence that the School is assiduous in ensuring students understand the technology. The Board found some of the technical work to be of an exceptionally high standard. Nevertheless at the lowest level they would encourage more evidence of integration. Some students commented that they would have appreciated greater coverage of structures in the BA course.

- *Cultural Context*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme. The Board would welcome more evidence of integration of cultural context with design. The School has an exceptional opportunity in its location in the 2008 City of Culture and the Board commends its intention to take positive advantage of this.

- *Communication*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme. Students displayed proficiency in both written and graphic communication skills.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Board was satisfied that all Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture programme. The Board appreciates the seriousness and passion with which the School approaches this aspect of the course. The series of lectures at Part 2 is excellent. The Board believes that the subject is covered in far greater depth than demanded by the criteria and reductions could be made without compromising standards; however they acknowledge that the School is committed to maintaining coverage at its present level.

- 13.6.4 Progression within the course
Progression and completion rates at Part 2 are excellent, with no withdrawals or failures at the point of award for the past 5 years.
- 13.6.5 Assessment:
The Board considered assessment methods, through staged presentations and crits, to be appropriate. At B.Arch level the majority of students choose to work in groups. Given the difficulties of identifying individual contributions to group projects and awarding marks consistently and fairly, the Board commended the use of small individual projects designed to establish each students' abilities. This ensures that examiners can assess individuals' abilities and that weaker students are not 'carried' by the stronger ones in a team.
- 13.6.6 Admissions and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course
Graduates of the Liverpool BA who have obtained a First or Upper Second are normally offered a place on the Liverpool B.Arch. Those who have achieved lower class degrees are invited to attend for interview after a period of

office experience. Graduates from other schools must have a RIBA Part 1 plus a minimum of one year's practice.

13.7 External examining arrangements

The Board met five External Examiners who either serve currently or have served during the last few years and bring many years' experience and expertise from both academia and practice. External examiners' reports and the School's responses to them for the previous five years were provided for the Board.

Four external examiners are normally attached to the courses, reviewing both the Part 1 and the Part 2, and the non-validated architecture courses. They interview all students on their degree year design project work, examples of work from all other years and the lowest passes in each year of each programme. Samples of top, middle and lowest pass B.Arch dissertations are sent to the externals before the visit. Previously the examiners had seen every student; henceforth examiners will see the portfolios of all third year BA students and have a meeting with a group of individuals. They will continue to see all B.Arch students. The External Examiners saw all fifth year B.Arch candidates in group presentations and were confident that each student contributed equally to the teamwork projects and that there was no question of 'passengers'.

The External Examiners confirmed the considerable improvements that have been made since the two previous visits. These improvements can be clearly identified through successive reports over the last five years and the School's written responses to them. They commented that the School had addressed all the issues directly. The School was never complacent and keenly sought the

Examiners' advice, responding to comments point by point and producing a summary of examiners' comments which was circulated to all examiners.

The B.Arch in particular, had been reworked entirely to address the concerns of the Visiting Boards, without losing its strengths. The problems of integrating technology and construction with design output had been successfully resolved. They commented that the rise in student numbers had, in some ways, been a force for good as this had been well thought-through by management with appropriate resources provided. They held a similar view to the Board with regard to Management, Practice and Law at Part 1; it is very good, but taxing and much of it might more appropriately be taught at Part 2, for example, students were invited to reflect on the implications on design of practice, which students would be better equipped to judge after their year out.

Examiners found the students to be bright and articulate, well able to explain and defend decisions they had taken in their work.

13.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

There are two Professional Studies Advisers who are full time members of staff. Students on their 'year out' are invited to attend a 'recall' day at the school, which comprises seminars on contract administration and economics and discussion sessions. The School tries to ensure this co-incides with a fourth year review to enable students to gain insights into the B.Arch programme.

The PSAs sign Professional Education and Development Record (PEDR) forms and liaise closely with the RIBA

North West Regional Office. Discussions are underway regarding the possibility of a collaborative programme leading to a formal Practical Experience Certificate and formal supervision of the year out. Consultations with present year out students are currently underway.

All students returning from their year out are interviewed, and their comments used to implement changes, in particular with regard to technology and CAD.

13.9 **Students**

The student meeting was well attended by representatives from most years of the BA and B.Arch, students on their 'year out' and recent graduates, with only the second year of the BA being severely under-represented. The Board found them to be a lively, engaging and articulate group. The students are enthusiastic about and supportive of the school and its staff. Many students offered eloquent and mature opinions in an open and free-ranging discussion. It is evident that the aims of students, staff and university are in harmony.

Students were unanimous in citing the atmosphere of the School and the flexibility of the course as key factors in their decision to study in Liverpool. Students perceived this when attending open days and this was borne out on arrival. The character of the City of Liverpool was also appealing.

The students believed that their expectations of the course were largely being met, with a broad, interesting and challenging variety of projects. All commented that the workload was heavy. One major focus of the Board's discussions with the students was the freedom afforded them by the course. Paradoxically this was cited as both a

strength and a potential difficulty. They also commented on the steep learning curve from year 1 to year 3. Students reported that they are not told what to do, but invited to explore projects in their own way. On arrival at the School, first years had found that the approach was more experimental and creative than they had expected, for example, they were free to make models using whatever materials they chose. This informality was welcome once the students had become accustomed to it. Some believed that there was too much freedom of choice in the BA. Students in the later years commented that they would have welcomed a little more direction in the early stages of the course; current first and second years reported that this was indeed happening to the extent that staff now told them how they would 'prefer' them to go about tasks, but ultimately students still had the freedom to experiment as they wished.

This view was countered by some B.Arch students who believed that the BA should remain as free as possible as that is the time for a student to find his or her own language and that 'you can make buildings at Part 2'.

Students believed that the freedom of the Part 1 was good preparation for the year in practice. For the most part they felt well prepared, although some commented that it would have been helpful to have learnt more about structures in Part 1.

At Part 2, the students received a very good series of lectures on professional practice which they appreciated when studying for Part 3. They found that the group work at Part 2 also served as good preparation for the realities of the workplace. They commented that the progression from individual working at Part 1, into practice, then

group work at Part 2 before entering practice again allowed them to develop a range of skills. Part 2 students did not feel that working in groups reduced opportunities or allowed weaker students to be 'carried' as the introduction of smaller individual projects enabled the skills and achievement of individuals to be identified.

Students in later years commented that the course had improved greatly over the last few years. There was now more correlation of design briefs and lectures, with supplementary lectures being provided as appropriate. In addition to lectures which directly informed the course, lectures about new ways of thinking and construction were also delivered. Sustainability, environmental science and technology lectures were considered especially valuable.

The students agreed that the staff formed one of the School's greatest assets. They believed that the challenges with which the staff present them stand them in good stead when looking for work. Staff are supportive and encouraging. Access to tutors is good and the system is flexible, allowing students to change tutors or request to stay with a particular tutor if they wish. More part-time staff had been provided at Part 1 to cope with the intake and their contribution was valued by the students. The students had been disappointed that the twice-weekly tutorials had been reduced to once a week, but accepted that poor attendance had been a factor. They acknowledged that the School had responded quickly to their comments and provided the opportunity for additional tutorials by providing extra session for which students could sign up.

The atmosphere in the studios was friendly, welcoming and collaborative. Students valued the fact that all years

work in the same studio space, which presents opportunities for discussion and learning from each other. There is some concern that the studio atmosphere is being diluted as more students are working at home on computers in order to use CAD. However it was acknowledged that the School has attempted to stem this by enabling the students to work on laptops in the studio. The School has installed a wireless network in response to the students' expressed wish to work in the studios. The lower years are actively encouraged to do physical modelling which has resulted in more using the studios again. All hope that these two factors will combine to reverse the trend.

The students had mixed feelings about the resources. They appreciated the improvements in the studios but now wanted improvements elsewhere, most notably with the workshop, which they believed to have serious inadequacies. Opening hours are restricted and students had had, in many cases, to buy their own tools. They regretted that they were unable to use CAD in the Mac lab. Reprographics provision at School level was considered inadequate. The Centralised Computer Service was a good facility but was heavily used by students from all disciplines. This meant that students only printed out to scale for the final hand-in. Architecture students had felt obliged to buy their own A3 printers, some B.Arch students had bought their own computers and at the time of the visit there were no plotters and no A1 or A0 printers in the School itself, although these are available in the Central Computer Service.

The current staff:student ratio is approximately 1:15. This compares favourably with that of similar institutions.

13.10 Staff

The staff meeting was well attended and discussions were frank and wide-ranging. The staff are drawn from a wide range of cultural and professional backgrounds and bring wealth and diversity of interests to the courses. The recent rationalisation of courses and heavy investment have allowed for several appointments in architecture which have strengthened the staff:student ratio and improved the demographic of the staff body. A Chair of Architecture has recently been appointed. The need for additional part-time staff was met quickly by the University.

The Board was impressed by the spirit of team work and the efforts to co-ordinate activities which are complex given the high number of part time staff. The Board commended the year staff's informal but highly effective method of communicating by holding a weekly meeting in a nearby café.

Architecture staff are actively involved at Faculty level and an impressive number are members of University committees, including the Partnership Committee, the Assessment Working Group, the Heritage Group, the Academic Practice Sub-Committee, and Senate. Staff are also pursuing active links with the City of Liverpool; the present Head of School is a member of the University European City of Culture 2008 project team and the School has been involved in the Liverpool Biennial International Festival of Contemporary Art.

13.12 Research; Impact of research activities on the courses under examination.

The University is committed to engaging in research activities of international standard without compromising

its teaching mission. This belief is echoed by the School of Architecture and ensures that any impact on teaching is positive.

Architecture achieved a rating of 4 in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise. This achievement resulted in a greater level of funding from the University as part of its policy to concentrate funding in areas of potential growth and excellence. The Liverpool staff shares the hope that the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise will allow a more appropriate evaluation of architecture-based research.

All full time architecture staff are research-active. Research is concentrated on two main areas: firstly, architectural history and theory, ranging from history of art and architecture through to contemporary design and technical innovation; secondly, technology and process, chiefly environmental engineering and the use and study of innovative techniques in design, construction and project management.

The School has been successful in attracting funding from research councils, (including EPSRC: the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council; and AHRB: the Arts and Humanities Research Board), the EU, government and industry.

Staff are actively encouraged to incorporate their research into their teaching and enjoy doing so. It is fortuitous that much of the staff's research is pertinent to current architectural debate and therefore ideal for inclusion in both programmes. There are currently 40 postgraduate students who are encouraged to be come involved in the validated programmes through studio teaching and demonstration.

13.13 **Equal Opportunities:**

In advance of the Board, the School provided a detailed breakdown of its student population by gender, ethnicity, and academic backgrounds. The School is committed to a policy of equal opportunities and encourages those applying through non-traditional routes. At University level scholarships and bursary schemes have been instigated with the aim of promoting fair access, including targeted schemes for certain groups. The gender balance of students has improved markedly and women formed 47% of entrants to Part One in 2004.

The School has identified an imbalance of age and gender among the staff and will seek to remedy this through any future recruitment activity.

13.14 **Resourcing and facilities;**

The University has recently embarked on a £200 million capital investment programme, from which the School of Architecture has benefited greatly. In early 2004 £0.5 million was invested in the School to improve the current facilities. This has resulted in generally excellent facilities, despite some perceived shortcomings by students and the acknowledged deficiencies with workshop provision.

Studios

The studios are excellent. The capital investment in 2004 enabled the School to make better use of existing space for lectures, studios, tutorial and exhibition areas, improving lighting, converting redundant laboratories into a new postgraduate research centre and adjusting facilities to comply with universal access regulations. Students did express reservations about the new arrangements which meant that B.Arch students now

worked in dedicated studios; they felt this reduced the opportunity for cross-fertilisation of ideas, particularly with students on the BA course.

Workshops

- 10.3.3 The School has a dedicated model-assembly workshop and a part-time technician. Opening hours are limited and students have felt obliged to purchase their own tools. This is at odds with the high standards of all other facilities and the Board recommends that the School upgrade the workshop, its equipment and hours of access to help support the existing studio culture.

The School is aware of the limitations of the workshop and is considering ways to address this.

IT

IT provision is generous, with three main computer laboratories within the School's building, two of which are University PC teaching labs open to all. CAD teaching is carried out in one of these laboratories.

In addition there is a dedicated architecture computer lab, providing 8 new high end PCs specified for 3D modelling, rendering, animation and virtual reality.

Many students now have their own laptops and can use them to access email and the Internet in the main studio space and most of the smaller studios; the School of Architecture was one of the first in the University install the RoamNet wireless network system.

An A3 scanner and colour printer is available in the School. A0 plotting and other printing facilities are provided by the Central Computing Services. However, as

stated elsewhere, the students are concerned about access to these printing facilities, particularly at peak times. The School has tried to rectify this by introducing an in-house printing service which was subsequently discontinued on cost grounds, as students preferred to use the university printer because it was cheaper.

There is a photographic studio, two photographic dark rooms and students and staff can borrow cameras, including digital stills cameras, a digital video camera and sound systems. There are also DVD and VHS recording facilities which can be used for real-time editing. A technical support facility is available in the school, and on-line tutorials for much of the software the students use is available to supplement formal IT teaching sessions.

Library

Library facilities are excellent. The main architecture collection is held in the Sydney Jones Library, a short walking distance from the School of Architecture, which caters for Social and Environmental Studies. The Engineering Collections are housed in the Harold Cohen library (approximately 5-10 minutes' walk from the School). The Sydney Jones Library has now reached capacity in its present building and there are plans to expand into the adjacent Senate House building, although date by which this might happen had not been agreed at the time of the visit.

The Liverpool University Library has a sophisticated on-line presence. The catalogue is accessible on an off campus. Borrowers can reserve and renew items from home and there is also a self-issue facility in the library. Loan periods extend from 3 hours for heavily used materials to two weeks.

The University is a member of the Liverpool Learning Partnership, which is a collaborative project between the six higher education institutions in Liverpool and Liverpool City Libraries. Students and staff at Liverpool University may register to access material at any of the participating libraries.

Opening times are generous and extended during examination periods. At the time of the visit the University was piloting 24-hour opening at the Harold Cohen library, although there is duplication of provision in various libraries if the demand is there.

The Architecture Collection at Liverpool has been in existence for over 100 years and now runs to over 15000 volumes. The Library subscribes to over 9,000 electronic journals, of which 94 are architecture and building related, to which students have one-stop access by registering with ATHENS. Current journals are kept on display, and older journals are filed with the book collections under the same classification. Apart from current numbers, all journals can be borrowed on a 3-day loan.

The acquisition policy is generous and flexible. As soon as two reservations for a particular book are made, an urgent order for more copies can be placed. Budgetary allocations are calculated by applying a set formula. Staff can make suggestions on line and most acquisition decisions are made at departmental level. There are no limits on numbers of multiple copies although they attempt to share journals across departments to spread the expense.

There are several PC 'clusters' in the library which are available to all borrowers. These are heavily used but it is

usually possible for all students who wish to use a machine to be able to do so. All machines will be replaced in Summer 2005. The Library provides reprographic facilities, printers, colour printers and scanners. Departments can arrange orientation sessions and research skills sessions for new students.

14. Documentation Provided

Prior to the Visit the School supplied:

The Critical Self-Appraisal, completed questionnaire and supplementary information in two volumes comprising:

Responses to standard questionnaire regarding structure of programmes, statistics, resources, cohort analyses, admissions policies and equal opportunities policies
 Mapping of School's programmes
 External Examiners' CVs
 External Examiners' Reports
 External Examiners' Guidelines
 Module Descriptors
 Committee and Management structure diagrams
 QAA documentation
 Mock RAE Exercise 2004

In the Base Room the School provided:

Programme (Course) Material:

Full Syllabus handouts for all subjects/modules 2003/2004
 BA and B.Arch Student Handbooks 2003-2004
 Examination Question Papers 2003-2004
 Mark Sheet and list of supplied portfolios 2003/2004
 List of recent dissertation Topics

School Teaching Timetable

School Material

CVs of School of Architecture Academic Staff

Students' response to the Critical Self-Appraisal

Student feedback on courses

List of periodicals and books purchased in the last year

University Periodic Annual Review of Architecture,
November 2002

School of Architecture Prospectus/Recruitment

Brochures

Visiting Part-time Lecturer Training Session

Year in Practice – recall day material

Planning statement

University of Liverpool Material

Managing Diversity and Equality of Opportunity

Workshop Manual

Student Finance Information, Scholarships and Bursary

Schemes

Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy

University of Liverpool Prospectus

Student Charter

External Examiners' Code of Practice

Code of Practice on Assessment

The School also provided a networked computer which gave Board members access to web-based University documentation.