

Royal Institute of British Architects

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

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 19 March 2008

**School of Architecture, Planning &
Landscape**

**Part One: Bachelor of Arts with Honours in
Architectural Studies**

**Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture with
Honours**

**Part Three: Postgraduate Diploma in
Architectural Practice & Management**

Date of Visiting Board: 8-9 November 2007

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

Newcastle University, Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Architecture, Part One, 3 years full-time

Newcastle University, Bachelor of Architecture with Honours, Part Two, 2 years full-time

Newcastle University, Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice & Management, Part Three, part-time.

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered

School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
The Quadrangle
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU

Tel: 0191 222 2734

Fax: 0191 222 6115

Web: www.ncl.ac.uk

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

1.4 Name of Head of School

Tim Shaw

1.5 Name of Director of Architecture

Dr Alessandro Aurigi

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2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on Thu. 8 to Fri. 9 November 2007 were:

Kathy Gal	(Chair)
David Howarth	(Vice Chair)
Prof Stephen Gage	
Michael Wilford	
Hilary Holloway	(Co-professional Member)
Alice Fung	(Student/Graduate Member)
Chris Ellis	(Secretary)

Alice Fung was taken ill and was unable to attend the sessions on the second day of the visit. The Board remained quorate throughout.

Christine Stafford attended all non-private sessions of the Board as Institutional Facilitator.

3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

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

For more information see www.architecture.com.

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

4.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the RIBA Education Committee:

Continued Validation of:

Part One: Newcastle University, Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Architecture, 3 academic years full-time

Part Two: Newcastle University, Bachelor of Architecture with Honours, 2 academic years full-time

Part Three: Newcastle University, Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice & Management, part-time.

4.2 The next Visiting Board will take place in 2011.

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

5.1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the CAA continue with their accreditation of the Part Two qualification.

5.2 The Visiting Board was satisfied that the Part One course met the Construction Industry Council Common Learning Outcomes for Degree Courses in the Built Environment.

5.3 The Visiting Board recommends to ARB that the Part 1 & 2 courses together met all points of the EU Directive.

6. Criteria for Validation

6.1 On the basis of the academic portfolios examined, the Visiting Board was satisfied that all the students graduating from the courses and examinations listed in 4.1 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 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 No conditions of validation were attached to the courses listed in 4.1.

9. Standard Requirements of Recognition

9.3 RIBA recognition of all courses/qualifications is dependent upon:
i. external examiners being appointed for the course;

- ii. any significant changes to the courses and examinations being submitted to the RIBA;
- iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being reported to the RIBA so that, where appropriate, recognition may formally be transferred to the new title by the RIBA;
- iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses/qualifications listed in 4.1.

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

- 10.1 Architecture as a discipline is well established at Newcastle University with the Part One programme having been first validated by the RIBA in 1922. The School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape established in 1999 is now beginning to demonstrate its potential for interdisciplinary provision. Architectural education at Newcastle operates via a traditional 3+1+2+1 model. Stage One Professional Experience is supported by means of a University recognised Certificate in Architectural Practice.
- 10.2 The School has had four Directors of Architecture in five years. This had not had a particularly damaging effect on the actual operation of the School as the degree programme directors have a central role in respect of course delivery. With the appointment of the current Director of Architecture and a commitment from University senior management for a period of stability it is clearly timely that the School re-examines its vision and

future strategy. The Board offers its support for the initiatives being brought forward by the new Director of Architecture, particularly those which seek to refresh teaching programmes and revitalise studio culture. The Board recommends that the staff of the School and University offer their full support for these initiatives.

- 10.3 The School's strengths include:
- High quality student intake, particularly to Part One.
 - A strong committed staff team which includes extensive representation of local practitioners contributing to studio teaching
 - A real commitment amongst all full-time staff to research, coupled with an understanding of the need to link research and teaching.
 - Recently enhanced IT facilities.
 - Excellent support for students in their Stage One Professional Experience through the Certificate in Architectural Practice.
 - A lively and articulate student group who contribute to the life of the School through their student society and through running the School's coffee bar.
 - A thorough engagement with local and regional agendas
 - Strong international links.
- 10.4 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendation. The RIBA expects the Institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendations in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the school and in the mid term review. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

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- 10.4.1 The Board recommends that the School continues to develop and strengthen the integration of technology with design work within the Part One qualification.
- 10.4.2 The Board recommends that the School, together with its External Examiners, remain vigilant with regard to minimum pass standards in all three validated qualifications.
- 10.4.3 The Board recommends that as a matter of urgency the School develops effective procedures for the integration of the Part Two course with its suite of masters programmes such that students attracted to the Part Two by the routes through to specialist masters awards actually have a relatively straightforward progression route.
- 10.4.4 The Board recommends that the School review the mapping of the Part Three course onto the RIBA/ARB criteria, perhaps using as a template the clear mapping documents presented for Parts One and Two.
- 10.5 The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards:
- 10.5.1 The Board advises the School to continue to collect and analyse progression data for Part One and Part Two and to implement changes to address the causes identified.
- 10.5.2 The Board supports the students' view that more could be done to develop linkages between the Part One and Part Two programmes and between the different years of programmes. The informal mentoring of Part One students by Part Two students might be formalised. The vertical charettes run for both years of the BArch at the start of the 2007/8 academic year might provide a good model.
- 10.5.3 The Board advised that the establishment of more effective interdisciplinary links in the School might help formulate a more distinctive Part Two programme. More distinctive aims and structures for the Part two programme could assist the School in its ambition to retain more of its best Part One graduates and recruit more able students from other Schools.
- 11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports**
- 11.1 The last full Visiting Board to Newcastle University was held on 6-7 November 2003. The 2003 Board recommended Continued Validation of:
- Part One: the University's Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Architectural Studies (BA (Hons)), Three years full-time.
- Part Two: the University's Degree of Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (BArch (Hons)) Two years full-time.
- Part Three: the University's Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management part-time only.
- 11.2 In its report, the 2003 Visiting Board commented:

“The Part One, Part Two and Part Three courses at Newcastle are long established, but continue to evolve to meet the School's aspiration of equipping graduates to make themselves useful in architectural practice. The new Head of Architecture is providing excellent leadership for the School as it continues to adapt to its changing external environment.

Since the last Visiting Board a new university structure had been established. The Board was pleased to receive reassurances from the Vice Chancellor and the Provost (Head of Faculty) that the University was fully committed to architecture as a discipline within the new structure. This had been demonstrated through substantial university investment in additional IT facilities and new staff appointments.

The School had responded appropriately to the issues raised by the previous Visiting Board and by External Examiners. It also has an impressive culture of seeking and responding to student feedback.”

12. Commentary

12.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

The Board found the School's Self Appraisal document to be open and reasonably self-critical, but overall rather bland and not very informative. In particular combining the sections on threats and opportunities was not seen to be helpful. The document opened by emphasising ‘place-making’ as an objective, but this did not really surface as a strength during the visit.

Students had made an input to the document through representatives who attended focus group meetings. Students also supplied a separate critical appraisal entitled “Student Report – Thoughts, Comments and Suggestions”. The Board welcomed this document which was well written, clearly structured and possibly the best presented document they received.

Since the last Visiting Board there have been no substantial changes to the courses; minor modifications have been reported to the RIBA New Courses and Course Changes Group and approved. In addition to the changes in Director of Architecture referred to in 10.2 above, there have been other staff changes, particularly a recent enhancement of staffing in technology. The main change since 2003 has been the substantial increase in recruitment, particularly to the Part One programme where the intake rose from 116 in 2003 to 148 in 2004.

12.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The documentation for the visit was supplied in timely fashion and was commendably concise. It was, however, difficult to interpret and it would have benefited from some background material to provide a clearer understanding of the actual courses and their linkages. The Board did receive this information during the introduction to the exhibition. The documentation would also have benefited from more careful structuring and indexing to allow it to be more easily accessed. The presentation of student work in the form of ‘academic portfolios’ was not ideal, with some work on the walls, some in portfolios and some in the exhibition. The Board was surprised that, despite clear guidance provided at the

Preliminary Meeting, requests had to be made for a full sample of Part Three candidate work to be made available

The overall programme worked exceptionally smoothly. The Board appreciated the support and help provided by the Institutional Facilitator, particularly in sourcing additional information.

12.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit.*

The Board saw complete academic portfolios drawn from the 2006/7 academic year as follows:

BA (Hons) Architecture Part One

Stage One: 4 lowest, 4 middle and 4 high (from a cohort of 110)

Stage Two: 4 lowest, 4 middle and 5 high (from a cohort of 118)

Stage Three: 4 lowest, 5 middle and 5 high (from a cohort of 131)

B Arch (Hons) Part Two

Stage Five: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high (from a cohort of 38)

Stage Six: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high (from a cohort of 47)

PGDip Architectural Practice & Management Part Three

Complete sets of work from 3 lowest pass, 2 middle pass and 2 high pass from the March 2007 graduating cohort (19 candidates).

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

In its Critical Self Appraisal, the School provided a commentary on its actions in response to the recommendation and advice included in the 2003 Visiting Board report. Specifically:

- The School confirmed that the arrangements for the Part Three professional interviews had been changed in line with the Visiting Board's recommendation and advice. The External Examiner now selects a number of professional interviews to observe: borderline candidates plus a representative sample. The separate interviews with individual professional examiners have now been combined to make a single 50 minute interview with the two professional examiners. In her meeting with the Board, the Part Three External Examiner confirmed that she and the professional examiners saw these changes as being an improvement.
- The School has responded to advice regarding the architecture workshop by ensuring that the health and safety regime has been strictly enforced. The School's bid to create a larger workshop to address capacity problems had met with delays, but a workshop extension was under construction at the time of the Board's visit.
- The School has made progress addressing the advice to develop enhanced linkages with other disciplines both within and outside the School. In the BA, the stage one theory module is now taught jointly to architecture and planning students and landscape design is now an integral part of some of the design projects. BArch students undertake a common module with MA Urban Design students in 'Social mapping'. The

special topics list of options in the BArch has been expanded.

- The School has also made progress in addressing the 2003 Board's encouragement to achieve a better gender balance amongst its staff. Two of the three most recent appointments have been females. All the School's recruitment advertising specifically encourages female applicants.

Board members found this commentary helpful, but were disappointed that it had taken so much time to address concerns about workshop capacity and that issues relating interdisciplinary links had to be raised again as a recommendation and advice.

In their meeting with the Board, the External Examiners confirmed that the School responded promptly and appropriately to issues that they had raised in their reports.

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

Architecture, Planning & Landscape is one of 29 schools in the University organised into three faculties. AP&L is one of the eleven schools which make up the University's Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Although not validated qualifications the Board noted that the School offered two additional qualifications in architecture: the Certificate in Architectural Practice which is available to students during their Stage One Professional Experience and a Master in Architecture available for work undertaken in addition to the successful

completion of the Part Three Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management.

In addition to architecture programmes, the School also offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications in Digital Architecture, Town Planning, Geography and Planning, Urban Design, Spatial Planning and Planning & Environmental Research.

The School's documentation makes the point that BArch students may take up to 60 credits of planning modules which can lead to an RTPI accredited masters award. BArch students present at the meeting with the Board who had attempted to follow this route had faced barriers. The Board recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the School develops effective procedures for the integration of the Part Two course with its suite of Masters programmes such that students attracted to the Part Two by the routes through to specialist masters awards actually have a relatively straightforward progression route. The Board believes this will be facilitated by the School's plan to increase the elements contributing to Part Two compliance in stage 5 of the BArch.

12.5 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the BA (Hons) Architectural Studies: Part One**

- 12.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
- The Board found the stated aims of the course to be very ambitious. When questioned, staff and students seemed to be unaware of some of the more ambitious aspirations. Both staff and students identified the key features of the course as being its breadth, its effective grounding in the discipline, the balance it achieves between arts and sciences, the effective integration of taught materials into

design work and the production of humane and well-crafted buildings. From their observations, Board members felt that the aims as expressed by staff and students were definitely being attained. Nevertheless, given the calibre of students being recruited, some of the more aspirational aims in the documentation might be more fully addressed in the studio work.

12.5.2 Course design and content

The course operates to a year structure with common design projects being tackled by all students with the exception of the four different design options available in semester two of stage three. The Board found the course design to be traditional in form, but with an appropriate mixture of group and individual work. The Board learnt that the course, and particularly its design projects, was 'refreshed' every three years. The Board felt it might be timely for a more radical reappraisal, particularly to respond to the challenges posed by the substantially increased student numbers.

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

- *Design*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) in Architectural Studies programme are meeting all of the Validation Criteria in the area of Design. It was clear that students were engaging with buildings from an early stage of the course and this was commended, although the Board felt that the staff team might look again at the range of typologies investigated. The Board applauded the system of offering students a choice of project brief in the second semester of stage three, but felt that more guidance might be given to students regarding the

particular project they selected. The portfolios investigated by Board members suggested that some of the weaker students were tackling the more demanding project briefs. In this respect, the Board also felt that, rather than the marks simply being used for the degree calculation, the second and third years might be looked at together in meeting the criteria in this area, giving more able students more opportunity to experiment in the final semester. The Board also felt that the staff team might like to look again at the range of tools used to explore design and that students might be given more support for the use of digital modelling.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architectural Studies programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment. The content of the taught modules across the three years of the programme were seen to be appropriate. The Board was pleased to learn that a new architect member of staff had been recruited to support this area. In the work seen by the Board, effective integration of technology and environmental issues into design work was being achieved by more able students, but weaker students would clearly benefit from the additional support to be provided in this area. The Board thus recommends that the School continues to develop and strengthen the integration of technology with design work within the Part One qualification.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architectural Studies programme are meeting all the

Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context. The Board noted the excellent lecture programmes in History and Theory across all three years of the Part One. Assessment was rigorous culminating in some interesting and well written dissertations at stage three. The majority of the design work displayed good quality research work, but, given the thorough grounding in this area, there was less evidence of contextual issues informing design outcomes as the Board might have expected.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architectural Studies programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication. The portfolios seen by the Board generally displayed a decent range of graphical communication skills, although these were less polished than might have been expected given the School's requirement for entrants to have an Art or Design 'A' level. In particular, the use of digital technologies and photography was less developed than might have been expected. The Board advises the School that Part One students need to be encouraged to make more models, particularly development models and photograph them for their portfolios. They should also be supported to make more use of Adobe "Photoshop", or other image manipulation software and desk top publishing software, to improve the standard of presentation of work. The Board commended the School's plan to recruit a new member of staff dedicated to supporting these areas.

Written work was generally of a very high standard and the group of students who attended the meeting with the Board were extremely articulate.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architectural Studies programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice & Law. The Professional Studies module at stage one (covering team working, time management etc.) and the Professional Practice and Management module at stage three (with its lectures and supporting case studies) provided an excellent grounding in this area. The essay and examination which formed the assessment for the stage three module showed students to have a good understanding of management and practice issues.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience*

Students confirmed that the stage three Professional Practice and Management module provided an excellent preparation for practice. The reports received from mentors in practice via the Certificate in Architectural Practice confirmed this view. The School's close links to local practices and the substantial involvement of practitioners in Part One teaching is also extremely helpful in this respect.

12.5.4 Progression within the course

The student cohort analysis shows higher non-progression rates than would be expected given the standard of students being recruited to the programme. An average of 20% of the entrants to stage one were, for example, not progressing to year two. It was clear from the advance documentation provided for the Board that the staff team were aware of this issue and had collected detailed evidence, for example, on the destinations of students transferring out of the architecture programmes to degrees

such as town planning. The Board advises the School to continue to collect and analyse progression data for Part One and to implement changes to address the causes identified.

12.5.5 Assessment

The Board found the School to be using a traditional, balanced range of assessment techniques throughout the Part One programme. Students commented that sometimes they had to wait longer than they would have liked for feedback on continuously assessed work, but that when received, feedback was comprehensive and clear. The Board felt that lowest pass standards were just acceptable and thus recommends that the School, together with its External Examiners, remain vigilant with regard to minimum pass standards.

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

The School's policy is to make offers to those candidates predicted AAA at A level whose subjects include Art or a relevant Design discipline at A2 level. Students who are not taking an Art or Design subject at A2 but who are predicted AAA are invited to attend an interview. Interviews typically last 20 minutes; the discussion is based around a portfolio of the applicants art/design/creative work.

The School is actively involved in the University's PARTNERS scheme that seeks to increase the University's recruitment from areas with traditionally low progression to higher education. The Board commends this approach which has resulted in the recruitment of

some four to five students a year with A level grades significantly below the normal three As requirements.

Direct entry to stage two is permitted. Normally this route is reserved for applicants who have completed RIBA validated programmes in the UK or overseas. Applications are processed via the University's formal APEL procedures. University rules do not permit direct entry to stage three.

12.6 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours: Part Two**

12.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The Board felt that the majority of the aims of the BArch programme were appropriate and being met. Two of the aims, however, focussed on multidisciplinary learning and links to specialist masters programmes. The Board felt there was less evidence of these aims being met. The Board felt that the establishment of effective interdisciplinary links might help establish a distinctive Part Two programme. More distinctive aims and structures could assist the School in its ambition to retain more of its best Part One graduates and recruit more able students from other Schools.

12.6.2 Course design and content

The BArch course has a traditional structure of two 120 credit years. The central focus throughout is on design with design modules worth 130 credits spread across the four semesters of the programme including a 55 credit thesis design project in the final semester. There is a 10 credit technology module in the first semester of the first year and a 10 credit Professional Practice module in the first semester of year two. There are two 10 credit theory

modules in each semester of year one and a further 10 credit theory module spread across the two semester of year two. The remainder of the course consists of 60 credits of special topics/ electives, 20 credits in each of the first three semesters.

The Board felt that the linkage between the course as delivered and areas of staff research might be more explicit, specifically it was surprised that students were not actively encouraged to pursue thesis projects with obvious links to active research projects within the School.

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

- *Design*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design. The Board confirmed that it found a decent level of competence in even the lowest pass students. The Board, however, echoed the comments already made in the School's documentation that weaker students found the experience of developing their own brief for the thesis project daunting given that they had only previously worked on fully prescribed design projects. The Board offers its supports for the four key steps being taken by the School to address this issue:

- introducing new vertical charettes run by visiting practitioners at the start of the academic year;
- incorporating more freedom into the other stage one projects;
- spreading the RIBA/ARB Part Two Validation Criteria over the two years of the course;

- Providing more milestones to be met at key points in the thesis project.

Students were particularly positive about the short charette projects introduced for the first time at the start of the 2007/8 academic year.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology & Environment. The 'Researching Building Technology' in semester one of the first year provides the major taught input for this area of the curriculum. With presentations forming a major component of the assessment for this module, there was limited dedicated material for the Board to see in the academic portfolio. There is, however also a formal assessment of the technology component of design projects. The Board found that this integration was seen at a competent level in even the weakest portfolios. The Board, however, found only a token engagement with issues of sustainability and felt that technology and environmental issues might have more substantially informed design approaches. For example, many students were designing for brown field sites with no evidence of any considerations of site remediation. The Board learned of initiatives in the School to better support this area including a system of student mentoring by technical specialists. The Board believes this, together with the recent recruitment of new technical specialists should bring further improvements to this area of the Part Two.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of

Architecture with Honours programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context. The Board felt that the specialist taught modules in this area had interesting and appropriate syllabi and the samples of assessed work seen were good. The Board saw some good examples of precedent studies informing design projects and particularly appreciated seeing lively sketch books included in the academic portfolios. As at Part One, the dissertations were strong, although the Board wondered whether it might be helpful for these to be linked in some way to the thesis design and thus inform its outcomes.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication. Although there was no formal teaching in this area, students had clearly benefited from skills acquired in practice, particularly in respect of computer aided representation. The Board judged the 'Student Report – Thoughts, Comments & Suggestions' one of the best produced documents it saw during the visit, whereas the document accompanying 'MultipliCity' the exhibition of 2007 BArch projects was one of the worst. As at Part One, written work was excellent and Part Two students were extremely articulate.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the portfolios examined the Visiting Board confirms that all graduates from the Bachelor of Architecture with Honours programme are meeting all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management Practice and Law. The compulsory module in Architecture & Construction: Process & Management taken in the first

semester of the final year provided an excellent coverage of the criteria in this area. The examination and essay which formed the assessment for this module produced some good work. The Board did not, however, see as much evidence of engagement with economic and costing issues in thesis design projects as they might have expected.

12.6.4 Progression within the course

The School is aware that its progression statistics for the BArch reveal non-completion rates higher than the national norm. The School has been investigating the reasons for this and is seeking to introduce changes with a view to improving progression rates. The Board advises the School to continue to collect and analyse progression data for Part Two and to implement changes to address the causes identified.

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

The Board found appropriate assessment mechanisms to be in place throughout the Part Two. The relative weightings of the various elements were seen to be appropriate. The Board explored with staff the concerns raised by External Examiners in 2006 about moderation procedures and was satisfied that the concerns had been due to a misunderstanding. The School operates University standard moderation procedures that can lead to a graduate's degree classification being raised, but pass levels are fixed. The Board felt that lowest pass standards were just acceptable and thus recommends that the School, together with its External Examiners, remain vigilant with regard to minimum pass standards.

12.6.6 Admissions and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course
 The School receives approximately 100 applications per year for the BArch from which it aims to recruit an intake of approximately 40. Newcastle graduates with a first class honours degree who have completed the CAP will automatically be offered a place. Newcastle graduates with an upper second class degree and the CAP (or equivalent experience) will normally be interviewed and offered a place at the discretion of the programme director provided they demonstrate that they are continuing to develop their architectural knowledge and skills. Newcastle graduates with lower second class degrees may be offered an interview possibly a place, but there would need to be significant evidence of improvement during the period of work experience. Applications from non-Newcastle graduates are encouraged to enhance the diversity of the cohort and all applications are considered on their merits. Over the last four years, some 7 – 12 non-Newcastle graduates have been recruited to cohorts of between 34 and 47. Direct entry to the second year is not possible.

12.7 Detailed Commentary on the Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice & Management: Part Three

12.7.1 On the basis of the Part Three work examined, the Board confirms that:

- all graduates from the Newcastle University Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice & Management are meeting all the Part Three Validation Criteria;
- minimum pass standards are being set at an appropriate level.

12.7.2 The Part Three qualification is validated by the University as a 120 credit postgraduate diploma made up of four 30 credit modules:

- Work Placement
- Case Study
- The Context & Management of Architecture
- The Management of Architecture & Construction

Candidates have to have passed the Work Placement and the Case Study before they are allowed to proceed to the examinations and interview via which the remaining two modules are assessed. The Board felt that this staged assessment approach was helpful, encouraging candidates to distribute their work over the duration of the qualification.

12.7.3 The Part Three requires a total of 10 days attendance at the University. A two day seminar in May covers ‘Practice Management and Business Administration’ issues. A three day seminar in September addresses ‘The Management of Construction’. A two day seminar in January covers ‘The Management of Architecture’. The two written exams and the Viva Voce examinations are held in March with a week’s gap between the two to allow marking of the written papers prior to the interviews.

12.7.4 Over the last four years the School has recruited intakes of between 14 and 25 to the Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management. No analysis was provided as to the background of these candidates. The Board understood from its conversation with Part Three candidates that the cohorts were primarily Newcastle Part Two graduates, but that a small percentage were graduates from other schools who were working for practices in the vicinity.

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- 12.7.5 The Board was provided with a mapping document, but did not find this very helpful. It was very discursive and failed to identify in a clear fashion exactly where the various elements of the ARB/RIBA criteria were covered in the course and assessed. Following its study of academic portfolios and discussions with the External Examiner, the Board was satisfied that the criteria were met, but recommends that the School review the mapping of the Part Three course onto the RIBA/ARB criteria, perhaps using as a template the clear mapping documents presented for Parts One and Two. A concise, clearly expressed document might then also be made available to candidates to assist them in assessing their personal progress in meeting the criteria.
- 12.7.6 The Board found the standard of written English demonstrated by the lowest pass candidate to be very poor to the extent that it clearly hindered an ability to engage in critical reflection. The Board accepted assurances that the candidate had been able to demonstrate the necessary attributes via the professional interview. This does, however, suggest that the support systems available to BA and BArch students whose first language is not English, or who suffer from dyslexia, might also be made available to Part Three candidates.
- 12.7.7 In their Critical Self Appraisal, recent Part Three graduates commented that, despite some organisational hiccups, the Part Three course was well structured. They also paid tribute to the former course leader who had provided excellent support despite having relinquished his responsibility for the programme. They offered two suggestions which might improve the experience for future candidates: the provision of sample case studies from previous candidates and a longer revision session between getting feedback on case studies and the exams.
- 12.7.8 The Board felt that lowest pass standards were just acceptable and thus recommends that the School, together with its External Examiners, remain vigilant with regard to minimum pass standards.
- 12.8 **External examining arrangements**
The Board confirmed that the School had in place a strong team of External Examiners drawn from both academia and practice. The Board had a formal meeting with five of the School's External Examiners: two from the BA (Hons) programme, two from the BArch and the sole Part Three External Examiner. A telephone conversation also took place with a further Part One External Examiner who was unable at short notice to attend. This ensured that the requirement for the Board to engage with at least 50% of the School's External Examiners was exceeded.
- In their meeting with the Board, the External Examiners were very supportive of the School and its courses. They confirmed that they were completely satisfied with the opportunities they were given to engage with the School's assessment process which they found to be open and straightforward. This was true of both first assessments and reassessments. They particularly welcomed the fact that all final year students on both the BA and BArch programmes were interviewed by one of the External Examiners. First, second and fifth year work was sampled. They also confirmed that they had been given a thorough induction in which due attention had been given to the RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria. They also confirmed that

the School responded promptly and appropriately to issues that they had raised in their reports.

The Board explored with External Examiners for all three programmes the procedures via which decisions were made on borderline candidates. The Board was satisfied that careful and considered approaches were in place with opportunities for detailed discussions between internal and external examiners, with professional examiners also involved in the case of Part Three. The External Examiners explained their understanding of the University's moderation procedures. It was clear that this might allow degree classifications to change for marginal candidates, but that bottom line pass/fail decisions were unaffected.

The only suggestions for changes that the External Examiners expressed were

- a specialist external examiner might be appointed for dissertations/theses, or more time allocated for this element of their role;
- fifth stage design projects might be revitalised and restructured so that they stretched the more able students;
- the free choice of diploma project in the sixth stage doesn't necessarily benefit the weaker students;
- slightly more time between the examinations and the interviews for the Part Three programme would be helpful.

The External Examiners acknowledged that the School was addressing at least some of these issues.

12.9 Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience

Newcastle Confirmed Report.doc

The School has well established systems in place to support and monitor students whilst undertaking their Stage 1 Professional Experience. The process is formalised through a university validated qualification, the Certificate in Architectural Practice (CAP). This is a 60 credit certificate made up of three modules: Professional Practice Assignments, a Self-Assessment Essay and the Work Placement itself. Employers complete two confidential reports, one of which is used as the basis of the assessment of the last of these modules. The CAP Module Leader also acts as the Part One Professional Studies Advisor and thus reviews and signs student's PEDR sheets. He is also available to help and advise students in respect of problems with their placements, contacting the employing practice if necessary. The Board found this process to be a model of good practice.

12.10 Students

The Board had a lively and informed meeting with 22 students drawn from all years of the three programmes being revalidated except stage 5 of the BArch. The Board was particularly pleased to have the opportunity to talk to a number of Part Three candidates. The Board also appreciated the detailed, helpful and attractively presented "Student Report" they were given which had been compiled by the year reps of the three courses.

The Board found the students to be lively, bright, committed, articulate and capable of constructive criticism. Students played an active part in the life of the School, running the coffee bar and the printing service as well as through the events and activities organised by the architectural student society.

Students identified the strengths of the School as being:

- the good balance in the course between technology and an arts based/creative approach;
- a strong studio culture with those students who choose to work in the studio benefiting from the opportunity to learn from each other;
- approachable and supportive staff who readily provide both course-related and pastoral support;
- the excellent variety of work produced; with no house style and students encouraged to develop their own approaches;
- The freedom in Part Two for students to develop their own brief for the thesis project;
- Newcastle as an excellent place to live and study architecture;
- the regular exposure to practitioners and specialists in the design studios;
- excellent library facilities.

Amongst the concerns raised by students were:

- there was insufficient teaching of both traditional and computer based representation techniques;
- more could be done to encourage interaction between the different years of the courses; the vertical charettes organised for stage five and stage six students at the start of the 2007/8 academic year was seen as a good model;
- the strong research culture of the staff might more obviously inform teaching and particularly the design projects undertaken;
- the informal peer-tutoring that has been undertaken (for example of stage three students by stage six students) might be formalised;
- although work was now underway to install new machines, printing/plotting had for many years

been a serious problem, with major delays at crucial times of the year;

- workshop facilities had long been inadequate. There was concern that, with the recent increases in student numbers, even with the workshop extension now being built, space would still be inadequate at busy times of the year.

12.11 **Staff**

The Visiting Board met a total of 37 members of staff at a well-attended meeting. A large number of part-time staff drawn from practice attended the meeting and their contribution was particularly impressive. The Board explored with staff the recent changes in the architecture management team. Staff conceded that the fact that the post of Director of Architecture had been filled by five different members of staff in four years was not ideal. This might have had an impact on forward vision, but it had not adversely affected the day-to-day running of the validated courses because of the key roles played by the degree programme directors.

The Board also discussed with staff their perceptions of the vision/USP of the Newcastle School of Architecture. Staff suggested that the School

- was a good all-round School with a good balance of design, technology and theory;
- was a lively friendly establishment with good staff-student relationships;
- benefited from strong links with practice;
- was well-embedded in the life of the city;
- recruited particularly able students;
- produced students capable of designing well-ordered socially engaged buildings;

- had a strong research base and strong international links.

The Board also asked staff to explain how often design project briefs were ‘refreshed’. The Board learnt that the course, and particularly its design projects, was ‘refreshed’ every three years. The Board advised it might be timely for a more radical reappraisal, under the leadership of the new Director of Architecture, particularly to respond to the challenges posed by the substantially increased student numbers. There was the potential with the Part Two to develop more distinctive offerings which would aid the retention of the Schools best Part One graduates, together with the recruitment of able graduates from other schools.

There have been a number of recent additions to the staff. One new member of the team is an architect with particular expertise in teaching architectural technology. Two architects who are moving their practice from Madrid to Newcastle have been recruited to a job share to contribute primarily to design teaching. A further post dedicated to CAD and communication teaching has been advertised and the School hopes to recruit to this shortly. Approval is also being sought to recruit to a Chair in Architecture and Sustainability. At the time of the visit, the staff-student ratio was reported as being 1:21

12.12 **Research**

In the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise, the members of the architectural staff in the School submitted a return to Unit of Assessment 33 (Built Environment) achieving a grade of 4. There were at the time three research groups: the Centre for Architectural Research and Development Overseas (CARDO), construction informatics and tectonic cultures. Since then there has been a major

regrouping of research across the School and CARDO is now a constituent part of the School’s Global Research Unit (GURU). Just prior to the last Visiting Board, the majority of staff associated with the Construction Informatics area moved as a team to RIBA Enterprises. This area of work has subsequently been re-established within a grouping entitled Applied Research in Architecture (ARA). The work in tectonic cultures has led to the establishment of a Centre for Tectonic Cultures. The works of this centre and its publications have expanded substantially since the last Visiting Board.

It was clear to the Board that work in the School was underpinned by a strong research culture. Staff provided many examples of their teaching being informed by their research work. Students were, however, not so aware of this and expressed the wish that the strong research culture of the staff might more obviously inform teaching and particularly the design projects undertaken.

12.13 **Equal Opportunities**

The University has in place a clear Equal Opportunities Policy. It was clear that the School takes the equal opportunity monitoring of its student population seriously and the Board was also provided with detailed data on the sex, age and ethnicity of the students on all three validated courses. The percentage of females in the most recent cohorts recruited to the Part One and Part Two courses are close to the national average at 42% and 39% respectively. The number of mature entrants to the Part One programme has been rising steadily as have the number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The University makes a range of support systems available to students through the Student Wellbeing

Service. This is organised in three sections: Financial Support, Disability Support (providing support for a wide range of disabilities including dyslexia and other learning difficulties as well as medical and physical problems) and Life Matters (which includes life skills development and counselling).

The 2003 Board had asked that the equal opportunity monitoring of staff might encompass part-time as well as full-time staff. The data presented for this Board did so and demonstrated that approximately one third of the School's staff were female. The staff group is still predominantly white, but a number of recent recruits have increased the range of national backgrounds represented.

12.14 **Resourcing and facilities:**

- General

The main entrance to the architecture building is from the main University Quadrangle. A rear extension known as the "Building Science" block was added in the 1960s. The interior spaces were remodelled in summer 2002 with funding from a successful HEFCE capital bid. The Board heard from both staff and students that the School was short of space, particularly given its recent increase in student numbers. The Board felt that this was in part a function of the nature of the spaces available, particular the separate crit and seminar rooms. Whilst supporting the School in its bid for additional accommodation, the Board also advised the School to look at whether the existing spaces could be used more flexibly. In particular the Board felt that the studios could be energised by a flexible configuration that could allow them to be used for seminars and crits. If it was possible to locate crit. or exhibition space adjacent to the School entrance this would encourage observation and participation of students

of all years and visitors in crits and exhibitions. It could also provide a visible focus to the School's activities as a key component of the circulation pattern within the building.

- Studios

The Board found the studios dedicated to stage one of the Part One and the final year of Part Two course to be well-populated lively spaces with students working in a variety of media. Students welcomed the twenty four hour access provided via a swipe-card system. The Board learned that changes had been made to the usage of the studios for stages two, three and five to accommodate the increased student numbers. Although lockers had been provided to provide security for possessions to support multi-tasking, the proportion of students using these spaces had declined. The Board learned from the new Director of Architecture of plans to revitalise these studios and enhance the studio culture. This included using a support staff vacancy to appoint a studio manager.

- IT

The School has approximately 150 PCs distributed amongst the studios plus an additional 22 PCs in a space configured for teaching adjacent to the stage three studio. All studio computers allow access to Autodesk Architectural Desktop, Sketchup, ArchiCAD and Microsoft Office. Photoshop Elements is available on 85 of the studio machines. In addition the University IT Service provides some 1200 PCs in 45 clusters across the campus offering access to Microsoft Office and the internet etc., most of these are available 24 hours a day. The majority of the School is wifi enabled.

Students reported that the majority of them had their personal computers, in many cases laptops which they could bring into the studios which had wireless access. Students generally felt that IT facilities were good, but reported two problems: a shortage of tuition to support use of CAD packages as reported in 12.5.3 and problems with printing and plotting. The Board saw work underway to significantly enhance the printing and plotting facilities in the School. The plotting facilities used to be managed by the students, but the new facilities will be under the control of the School and staffed by trained student reps with the support of the School IT officer.

- Workshop

The 2003 Visiting Board reported that there were serious capacity problems in the School's workshop and advised the School to examine critically its procedures for workshop usage. The 2003 Board also heard that there was the possibility of a new enhanced workshop being created in partnership with the School of Fine Art. This Board learned that the proposed joint workshop with Fine Art had not materialised, but funding had been secured and plans approved to extend the existing architecture workshop. At the time of the Visiting Board, building work had commenced and the Head of School was confident that the extended facilities would be ready for the start of the second semester of the 2007/8 academic year. The Board was pleased to see evidence that this work was now underway, although disappointed at the time it had taken. It was also clear, given the increase in student numbers since 2003 that, even with the new extension, there were still likely to be capacity problems at key points in the academic year and this would have to be managed.

- Library

The University's main Robinson Library is approximately five minutes walk from the architecture studios. It holds an impressive and up-to-date collection of architectural texts together with UK and international journals. The library has a policy of buying multiple copies of key texts at a ratio of 1 text per 15 students; it houses these in a short loan collection. There is a dedicated resource room for architecture, planning and landscape students on level three of the library adjacent to the architecture collection. The library also houses a representative collection of student dissertations. In the last year, architecture students have benefited from the fact that the university's fine art collection, formerly a separate library, has been integrated with the main collection. The library opening hours have been extended since the last Visiting Board and the building is now wireless network enabled. There has also been a recent drive to increase the number of electronic books, journals and other materials available off-site to students. This includes the ability to digitise in-house material from UK sources and make this available via "Blackboard". An enthusiastic and supportive specialist librarian runs induction courses for all recently recruited students and specialist research training courses for students about to embark on dissertations. An architecture student has recently been recruited to the library committee to ensure student input to decisions regarding the purchase of new texts.

The Robinson Library has over 230 networked PCs, extensive photocopying, scanning and printing facilities. There are group work spaces and a new internet café. Students were universally positive about the facilities available in the library and the support provided by the library staff. The concern expressed during the 2003

Visiting Board about the transfer, earlier that year, of the contents of the dedicated Architecture Resource Centre to the Robinson Library has clearly evaporated.

- Other Facilities

Students have access to the following additional facilities in the School:

- artificial sky with TV camera
- heliodon
- thermal, acoustic and light measuring equipment
- surveying equipment
- digital cameras

13. Attachments

13.1 Prior to the Visit, members of the Visiting Board received:

- School's Critical Self Appraisal
- Completed Questionnaire
- Supplementary Information
- Staffing Details
- Programme of Studies Documents for:
 - BA (Hons) Architectural Studies 2006/7
 - Bachelor of Architecture 2006/7
 - Diploma in Professional Practice and Management 2006/7
- Mapping documents for Parts One, Two and Three
- General Handbook for Architecture 2006/7
- External Examiners Reports
- Responses to External Examiners Reports
- CVs for External Examiners
- A letter from Professor Tim Shaw, Head of School, to Kathy Gal, Chair of Visiting Board,

dated 24 September setting out changes in Personnel and Management which had taken place in the University and School since the Preliminary Visit in March 2007.

13.2 Copies of the following were made available in the Baseroom:

- Module boxes for all part One, Part Two and Part Three modules, generally containing module outlines, course documents and sample assessments.
- General Handbook for Architecture Programmes of Study
- Programme of Studies: BA Architectural Studies
- Programme of Studies: Bachelor of Architecture
- Programme of Studies: PGDip APM
- APL Internal Subject Review 2005: Self Evaluation Document
- APL Staff Handbook APL Internal Subject Review 2005: Report
- APL Internal Subject Review 2005: Action List
- Faculty Strategic Plan
- APL Preliminary Strategic Plan 2006/7 to 2010/2011
- Review of External Examiner Reports 2006/7
- Detailed Staff CVs

13.3 During the visit, the Board received copies of the following:

- External Examiner reports missing from original dispatch
- Contact times for part-time staff

- “Student Report – Thoughts Comments & Suggestions”
- “MultipliCity” – document accompanying the exhibition of 2007 BArch projects

13.4 A networked computer was provided in the Baseroom providing access via the University’s intranet to various central University documents including a full set of QA procedures.