

**Royal Institute of British Architects**

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

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 12 October 2005

**Faculty of Law and Social Sciences  
School of the Built Environment  
Institute of Architecture**

**Part One: BArch (Hons) Architecture**

**Part Two: Graduate Diploma in  
Architecture**

**Part Three: Diploma in Professional  
Practice and Management**

**Date of Visiting Board: 7-8 June 2005**

## 1. Information About the Courses

### 1.1 Courses offered for validation:

**Part One:** BArch (Hons) (three years full time)

**Part Two:** Diploma in Architecture (two years full time)

**Part Three:** Diploma in Professional Practice

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

Institute of Architecture  
School of the Built Environment  
University of Nottingham  
University Park  
Nottingham NG7 2RD

T: 0115 951 4887

F: 0115 951 3159

W: [www.nottingham.ac.uk/sbe/](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sbe/)

### 1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of Nottingham

### 1.4 Name of Head of Institute

Dr Tim Heath

## 2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on Tuesday 07 and Wednesday 08 June 2005 were:

Thom Gorst (Chair)

Patrick Monaghan (Vice Chair)

Richard Patterson

Stephen Greenberg

Ian McInnes

David Gibson (Regional Nominee)

Sharon Wright (Non-Architect Member)

Kevin Davis (Graduate/Student Member)

Kevin Harte (RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

## 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 September 2003, effective from September 2003, 'RIBA Criteria for Validation' published March 2002, effective from September 2003, and 'Description & Regulations for the Recognition of Courses, Programmes and Examinations in Professional Practice and Management, (Part 3) in the UK.

For more information see [www.architecture.com](http://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:

**Part One:** BArch (Hons) (three years full time)

**Part Two:** Diploma in Architecture (two years full time)

**Part Three:** Diploma in Professional Practice and Management (one year part-time)

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 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

There were no special 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 4.1.

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

### 10.1 Background

The Institute of Architecture is a large school located within the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. It boasts impressive resources and a strong student intake.

10.2 The Institute is perceived by the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nottingham as a powerful body with a strong research and teaching base, which the University is keen to continue to support and enhance with additional funding. This strong commitment to research informs teaching at all levels. The Head of the Institute is keen to develop the Institute as one of the top schools in teaching and research in the UK.

10.3 After successfully overcoming some recent difficulties, including substantial increases in student numbers and staff turnover, the aim is to stabilise student numbers. The

Board believes that the Institute is poised to become a leading school of architecture in the UK

10.4 The Board encourages the Institute to build on its strengths which include:

- A well-led, committed and cohesive staff team with a good blend of full time academics, part-time practitioners and visiting special professors
- Student intake of the highest intellectual calibre
- Student satisfaction and heightened morale
- Excellent resources, including new staff appointments and many state of the art facilities to support teaching, learning and sporting activities
- The strong backing that the Institute enjoys from the University

- The flourishing research culture and its positive impact on teaching
- The well-organised and thoroughly assessed Part Three course.

## 10.5 **Recommendations**

10.5.1 There are no recommendations.

## 10.6 **Advice**

10.6.1 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:

10.6.2 The Institute should prioritise and edit course documentation so that staff and students have a clearer picture of the particular learning outcomes attached to each course component.

10.6.3 The Board noted variability in the way that feedback was given to students, particularly in respect of their written work. The Institute should standardise the implementation of feedback mechanisms across all the taught courses.

10.6.4 The Institute conducts many different assessments of its students at various points of the courses. It needs to take care that these incremental assessments are balanced by appropriate holistic assessment of students.

10.6.5 The Institute has responded well to the difficulties it faced in recent years and has emerged a stronger body for that experience. The Board believes that it is now time for the

Institute to define its identity and its strategic targets so that these changes can be managed with equal success.

- 10.6.6 The Institute should integrate part-time teachers more fully into the pedagogy of the School, particularly in Year 3.
- 10.6.7 Staff should now take the opportunity to review and articulate pedagogic techniques.
- 10.6.8 There should be more linkage between Years 1 and 3 in the B.Arch (Part One).

## 11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

- 11.1 The last full RIBA/ARB Visiting Board to the Institute of Architecture, University of Nottingham took place on 21 and 22 March 2002. The Visiting Board recommended **Continued Validation** of:

Part Two: Diploma in Architecture (two years, full-time)

Part Three: Master of Architecture (one year, part-time) (with Diploma pre-requisite).

The 2002 Visiting Board recommended **Conditional Continued Validation** of:

Part One: Bachelor of Architecture with Honours (three years, full-time).

The Visiting Board imposed the following conditions of recognition on the Part One course:

- i. That the Institute should submit, within six months, (i.e. October 2002) a report on how it was managing the changes which were taking place within the Institute. The report should focus particularly on how the Institute was managing the staffing and resource provision given the changes and increases in student intake. In addition, the report should identify how the Institute proposed to address the concerns of the Visiting Board in relation to the Part One course.
- ii. A sub-group of the Visiting Board would revisit the Department in June 2004 to look at the lowest pass portfolios for the Bachelor of Architecture to reassure itself that the appropriate standard was being achieved.

The 2002 visit had been managed by the Validation Advisory Group (VAG) on behalf of both the RIBA and ARB. The report required by October 2002 was submitted to VAG and accepted. VAG recommended that the Institute be required to submit annual reports accompanied by external examiner reports and that these should specifically address the issue of staffing and other resource provision related to student numbers. It was recommended by VAG that the receipt of satisfactory annual reports could be in lieu of the proposed visit.

## 11.2 Summary of the March 2002 Visiting Board Report

" The Institute's strengths included a highly committed and supportive staff and a competent student body. The Board found that the courses within the Institute had a great many strengths. The Board recommended that given the resources and expertise within, the Institute could

develop even greater strengths and standards of excellence.

The Board found that the Bachelor (Honours) in Architecture course met the Criteria for Validation at Part One level in some areas. The Board had concerns with regard to the lowest pass standards and recommends that this must be addressed and would be reviewed by the Board at the revisit in two years time. The Board, however, found evidence in the higher pass portfolios, that the course provided students with a competent and sound experience in architectural design at this level. There was evidence in the high pass portfolios that non-design elements in the design outputs were also of a high standard. However, at the lowest pass level, the Board recommended that the integration of non-design elements, particularly culture and context, construction and structures must be improved. However, the Board noted that the Professional Studies and Management was an integral strength of the course.

The Board found that the Diploma in Architecture (Part Two) course met the Criteria for Validation and the standards of the design work were competent. As well as covering the core Criteria, the Board found that students were offered a rich variety of options in areas of specialist study. The Board was pleased to find that the course had a number of strengths. In particular, the Board commended the areas of Culture and Context of Architecture and Professional Studies and Management. The Board noted the School as a whole was developing a successful research profile, particularly in the areas of sustainability and environmental design. The Board recommended that given the resource available in this area, the Institute could in future explore ways of

integrating and embedding this subject with the courses in architecture more fully.

The Board was satisfied that the standards achieved in the Part Three examination were appropriate. The Board learned that Part Three course involved a number of recall days, that log books were regularly monitored and that students were required to submit assignments, a case study and a written evaluation of their employment before undertaking an office-based examination and a professional interview. The Board was pleased to find that the course and examination were extremely well organised and efficiently managed."

## 12. Commentary

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

The Critical Self-Appraisal provided by the Institute was a clearly written document which dealt with the required issues in an honest fashion. The Board was told that the student body had seen this document in its draft form and had been able to contribute to it.

Changes since the last full Visiting Board in 2002 have included:

- The completion of a new teaching and research building in August 2003
- Construction of a major new studio building in September 2004
- The appointment of a new Head of Architecture in March 2003 and his promotion to Head of the School of the Built Environment in August 2004.
- Several new staff appointments designed to strengthen teaching and research

- The appointment of a number of high profile special visiting professors in 2004, who have each committed 10 days per session to engage with students in the design studios.
- The development of a new Part One programme offered by the Institute. The MEng in Architecture and Environmental Design was validated by RIBA in 2004.

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

The Institute provided all the requisite documentation well in advance of the visit. This was for the most part very well presented and easy to comprehend though the Board would have welcomed a clear definition of the qualities of the Nottingham Architect and of the structure of the taught courses (in a similar way to which these were set out for prospective medical students in Nottingham in the 2006 Undergraduate Prospectus).

All the meetings and activities required by the Board were organised in an impeccable fashion. All the portfolios for review were complete, clearly labelled and well structured. The accompanying mark sheets contained unambiguous explanations of the scales and weightings used. This, coupled with the openness and willingness of the staff to help, enabled the Board to proceed smoothly with its business.

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

Prior to the visit the Board had agreed the number of academic portfolios it wished to review. Due to the increased size of the student cohort in all three years of Part One in 2004/05 (177, 133 and 139 respectively) the number of portfolios was expanded pro rata to meet the

10% requirement. In fact, as a result of the excellent arrangements the Board found itself in the privileged position of being able to view a much larger sample of work than would normally be expected on a Validation Board visit. The Board membership was also larger than normal to ensure as thorough a review of work as possible.

#### *Part One: BArch (Hons)*

First year: 17 portfolios including the 3 lowest pass and the remainder a selection of middle and high from a cohort of 177

Second year: 13 portfolios including the 3 lowest pass and the remainder a selection of middle and high from a cohort of 133

Third year: 18 portfolios from each of 6 units including the lowest pass, a middle pass and high pass from a cohort of 139.

(All from the cohort graduating in 2004/05).

#### *Part Two: Diploma in Architecture*

First year: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high from a cohort of 38

Second year: 3 lowest pass, 2 middle and 2 high from a cohort of 27

(All from the cohort graduating in 2004/05).

#### *Part Three: Diploma in Professional Practice and Management*

For Part Three the Board examined complete assessed work of the three lowest pass, two middle pass and two high pass candidates from the cohort of 45 examined in 2004/05.

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

The Board was satisfied that the recommendations and concerns expressed in the last full Visiting Board report in 2002 had been comprehensively addressed by the Institute, specifically the improvement required in the lowest pass standards in the Part One programme and the need for more robust management of the Institute's staffing and resource provision.

This view was shared by the External Examiners who confirmed that the Institute responded to issues raised in their reports and that they did see changes as a result of their comments.

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

The Institute of Architecture lies within the School of the Built Environment in the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The Pro-Vice Chancellor confirmed that the School does not look to the Faculty for its strategic direction but is able to work out its own links with other departments within the University. The Board was gratified to learn of the high value placed on the School by the University and the steeply rising profile of architecture within the institution.

The School was formed in 1997 through the merger of Architecture with Building Technology and Urban Planning. It was expanded further in 2003 with the creation of the Institute of Sustainable Energy Technologies. The formation of this multidisciplinary School has led to a growth in student numbers, academic and support staff as well as teaching and research space. It

has also facilitated the introduction of a number of new courses such as the MEng in Architecture and Environmental Design (RIBA- validated and ARB-prescribed) and the MSc in Architecture and Renewable Energy. In addition to the mainstream BArch course the School also offers a non-vocational degree course in Architectural Studies and a CIBSE-recognised BEng degree in Architectural Environmental Engineering.

At postgraduate level the School offers a range of seven non-accredited Masters-level degrees alongside the Diploma in Architecture and the Diploma in Professional Practice and Management and a strong PhD programme. The Masters programmes include architectural theory, urban design, architectural technology, renewable energy, conservation and critical theory.

**12.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part One qualification:  
BArch (Hons) (three years full time)**

*12.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The vast majority of the specific programme aims were common to the Part One and Part Two programmes. These were clear, comprehensible and appropriate. The programme has been designed to meet the requirements of the RIBA and the ARB and this was reflected in the detailed mapping of the programme learning outcomes onto the RIBA/ARB Part One Validation Criteria.

The Board observed that all of the programme learning outcomes and validation criteria could be met in certain individual modules, and wondered if the Institute had sacrificed clarity for the sake of completeness in this area. Both staff and students agreed that there were too many

learning outcomes in both the Part 1 and 2 programmes. This was particularly true of the final design module. The students told the Board that they were unable to understand the specific educational objectives of each module until they had started work on it.

12.5.2 *Course design and content*

The course is a three-year modular programme, comprising 120 credits per year. In Year 1 students initially undertake design projects with limited objectives, expanding by stages to the design of a small building. In Year 2 students design within the wider context of human settlements, and environmental and engineering concerns. The urban context in Year 3 with its more complex design projects allows students to develop their problem-solving skills in aesthetics, urban design, planning, building construction and building performance.

Year 1 is based around the design projects but Years 2 and 3 are organised in studio units.

The course delivers content based on four teaching streams: architectural design; architectural humanities; architectural technology (constructional, structural and environmental design); and architectural practice and management.

The view of the Board, which was echoed by the External Examiners, was that Part One was a well-resourced course which was capable of closer integration. Year 1 took a more holistic approach to learning than Years 2 and 3, while Year 2 was not as well connected as Year 1 in terms of project work. The Board would suggest that more linkage between Year 1 and Year 3 would be helpful. It seemed to the Board that the modular structure of the

programme appeared to be driven by the Validation Criteria and was impeding integration. This was not assisted by the perceived polarisation of pragmatic technical issues with conceptual issues in the minds of the students.

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

- *Design*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the BArch programme.

The Institute sees studio-based design work as the core of the programme and this represents 50% of the assessment weighting.

The Board strongly supported the imaginative experimental work being undertaken in the Year 1 design studio and acknowledged the work involved in developing first year teaching since the last Board.

Some of the project work in Years 2 and 3 was of good quality but lacked inspiration in terms of presentation and communication. The Year 3 schemes appeared very similar in outcomes even though the briefs from the various ateliers were very different. The Board suggests that the Institute should consider introducing a module in graphic design to help to continue to develop student skills in these areas.

The Board also noted that generally students did not take full opportunity to explore inner space to any great depth in their design work. It would advise the Institute to address this issue.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the BArch programme.

There are year-long modules in Environmental Design in Years 1 and 2. In those years the Institute aims particularly to integrate construction and structural design modules into design studio projects. The Board has already (in 12.5.2) remarked on the compartmentalised way in which students view conceptual as opposed to technical issues. The Institute needs to consider carefully how to develop the course and the way it is delivered in order to remove this divide in the perception of students.

The graduating cohort from the Part 1 programme told the External Examiners that they had enjoyed their three years but with hindsight would have welcomed more integrated construction technology teaching at an earlier stage and more frequently throughout the programme.

- *Cultural Context*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the BArch programme.

The Board noted and welcomed the focus in some projects on the city of Nottingham and the surrounding region but felt that more could be done to take advantage of the urban context on the doorstep, as many projects were based elsewhere in the UK.

Students indicated that they were well supported to ensure the results of their contextual studies fully informed their design outcomes. Architectural humanities were well represented in Year 1 with modules focussing on contemporary debates in architecture, principles of design and a history survey course. In the second year students complete two modules in architectural history to broaden their cultural understanding of design in relation to its historic context. In Year 3 the architectural theory module aims to deepen this cultural understanding.

- *Communication*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the BArch programme.

The Board noted high standards of communication in all written work it saw, although there was a lack of any extended writing. These observations notwithstanding, the Board believes its comments on the standard of some of the feedback made above should be noted. The graphic work and 3D models were also impressive, there being a good mix of CAD and traditional model-making. The 3D model-making was effectively used as a means of communication and representation but did not demonstrate relatively extensive use as a design generator.

- *Management Practice & Law*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the BArch programme.

The Practice and Management module in Year 3 introduces students to the management and practice systems that are used by the consultant team to work

together in the production of a building design and subsequently its construction on site. It shows students how to set up and run a small practice and imparts information about the principles of avoiding risk, fee assessments and bidding techniques, the implications on the profitability of a job, and the architects' conditions of appointment. The management teaching appeared to be well developed and structured. The assessments could be linked more closely to student work.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience*

The students considered that they were well prepared for the first stage of professional experience. They were appreciative of the introduction to the legal and contractual framework in which they would be working during their year out in the Year 3 Practice and Management module.

12.5.4 *Progression within the course*

The Institute provided progression data for all of its students on the validated courses. The Board noted the impressive completion rates, particularly over the last three academic years. The Board wished particularly to highlight the excellent progression rates in Part One, which were significantly higher than the national norm.

There is an option for students who are registered on the BArch course who decide that they do not want to become professional architects or those who find they are struggling with any of the non-compensatable modules. Such students are able to transfer to onto the School's BA (Hons) in Architectural Studies, which is a non-accredited degree course, subject to the University's standard progression regulations.

12.5.5 *Assessment*

The Institute uses a variety of appropriate methods to assess its students.

The methodologies were largely formulaic in nature, perhaps understandably given the significant numbers of students in the School, and this tended to discourage imaginative design.

Generally for design project work assessment is on a continuous basis by means of juries, consisting of members of the core teaching team and external critics advising the module convenor who is responsible for all marks. Students normally present and explain their work orally to a panel. A final moderating judgement is made at the end of the year on a portfolio submission by all students. A selection of work from across the range of marks is also offered to the External Examiners for scrutiny in Years 1 and 2. In Year 3 all students present an exhibition and portfolio of their design work which is examined by an internal panel and then through a viva voce with an External Examiner. A final moderated mark is agreed between the External Examiners and an internal panel including the Head of the Institute. The Board considered that lowest pass standards were appropriate.

The student perception was that the Part 1 course centred around assessment rather than education, and that often the assessment criteria were difficult to fully understand. They were also unhappy with the quality of feedback they received on their written work. There is a standard feedback form designed for this purpose, but in the sample of marked written work reviewed by the Board it noted great variability in both the use of this form and the constructive nature of the comments made by some

examiners. The Board believes that more could be done to make assessment criteria more transparent and to ensure that assessment methods (including the provision of constructive and clear feedback to students on their work) are consistently applied. Currently this limits students' ability to improve.

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

The Institute provides a clear statement of its entry requirements for prospective students. The current A-level requirements are AAB (excluding General Studies) for home and EU students. The Institute requires one of the A-levels to be in an Art or Design and Technology subject, or the submission of a portfolio of work. Applicants are not invited for interview.

For overseas students the A-level requirement is BBB (or equivalent) and an English language qualification of a minimum mark of 6.0 in IELTS or equivalent. The Board questioned why there was this differential in entry requirements.

The Board considered that the Institute was coping well with increased numbers but needed to keep monitoring the situation. The A-level requirement for the 2006 entry will be increased to AAA in an effort to keep tighter control over entry numbers as the Institute moves towards its preferred target of 150 entrants in Year 1. One of the A-levels will be Art-oriented or candidates will be asked to submit a portfolio of their work.

The Institute has not allowed direct entry transfer into any year other than Year 1 of the programme for the past five years.

The School appeared to have no formal widening participation strategy. The Board would like to see this developed. Increasing diversity and access to architectural education would benefit students on the course and is positive for the profession.

**12.6 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Two qualification:**

Diploma in Architecture (two years full time)

12.6.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The programme has been designed to meet the requirements of the RIBA and the ARB and this was reflected in the detailed mapping of the programme learning outcomes onto the RIBA/ARB Part Two Validation Criteria.

The Board could not fail to notice that all of the programme learning outcomes and validation criteria could be met in certain individual modules, and wondered if the Institute had sacrificed clarity for the sake of completeness in this area. Both staff and students agreed that there were too many learning outcomes in both the Part One and Part 1 and 2 programmes. In the opinion of the Board this surfeit of learning objectives conspires to mask the distinctiveness of the programme.

12.6.2 *Course design and content*

Year 1 of the programme is organised around module packages and offers students the opportunity for in-depth concentration on an aspect of architectural endeavour, including:

- Design and design theory

- The design technology of structures, materials and construction methods
- Design for environmental efficiency and sustainability
- The urban design of the city
- The problem of housing.

Each module package includes a design project, a related lecture/seminar module that is designed to inform and deepen understanding of the design process. Students supplement these core packages with a range of optional modules depending on their particular interests.

In Year 2 students undertake a self-generated Design Thesis with related modules and focuses on the design and comprehensive declaration of a complex building or group of buildings. All modules are compulsory and include a combination of design modules, a briefing document, a design dissertation and a research-based module.

The view of the External Examiners was that there has been a steady improvement in the programme enabling many difficulties to be resolved recently, including the scale and depth of the projects. There was a general perception that Year 5 was currently better structured than Year 6. In general the programme contained too many options and would benefit from a clearer structure and renewed focus on core material. The Institute is aware of these comments and is continuing to develop the course structure for Part Two. The Board supports and wishes the Institute success with this initiative.

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

- *Design*

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

It was very noticeable how research feeds into and informs design teaching in Part Two. The impact of the visiting special professors has been keenly felt and warmly welcomed by students.

In the view of the External Examiners some of the projects could have posed more of an intellectual challenge to students, and there were some instances of design work not being followed through to achieve a final outcome as fully resolved as possible.

- *Technology & Environment*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the Part Two programme.

The Board was pleased to see improved integration (compared to the findings in the 2002 report) of the full range of technical and environmental issues within Part 2 design studio work

The Board considered whether the assessment criteria gave technology and environment a greater emphasis than was appropriate. The School may wish to review this as it feels appropriate.

- *Cultural Context*

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

- *Communication*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the Part Two programme. Communication standards are high in both written and graphic work. The students are also highly articulate.

*Management Practice & Law*

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

12.6.4 *Progression within the course*

The cohort analysis for the Diploma in Architecture revealed healthy progression rates approaching 90% in most years once students repeating years were taken into account.

12.6.5 *Assessment*

In general the Board found a varied and appropriate range of assessment procedures in place across the Part Two programme.. Lowest pass standards were found to be appropriate.

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

The Institute provides a clear statement of its entry requirements for prospective students. All students who enter the Diploma in Architecture must have been awarded RIBA Part One and have completed a period of appropriate work experience. Students who hold a Nottingham BArch degree at 2.2 level or higher and who have achieved a minimum 2.2 standard in design-based modules are automatically offered a place on the Diploma programme. Students who have obtained Part One elsewhere are normally required to have achieved a

minimum 2.1 degree standard. Candidates who do not meet this criterion are invited to submit a portfolio of design work and promising candidates may be invited for interview to ensure that their performance at Part One is at least equivalent to the Nottingham 2.2 standard.

The Board noted that recent increases in numbers at Part One had not yet fed through to Part Two. The School will need to monitor resource allocation if Part Two numbers do increase.

**12.7 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Three Qualification:**

Diploma in Professional Practice (one year part-time)

12.7.1 The Professional Practice Course and Examination is a formal award of Nottingham University, subject to all the usual University external examining, quality assurance and appeals procedures. Nottingham graduates have the opportunity to combine their Part Two Diploma qualification with their successfully completed Part Three qualification for the award of MArch. Such applicants are required to have an average mark of 60% or above for the Part Two qualification with an average mark of 50% or above for the 120 credits taken in the last year of the course.

12.7.2 The taught programme that helps prepare candidates for the assessment is run in collaboration with the Universities of Sheffield and Leicester De Montfort. A clear protocol defines the shared responsibilities of each institution. The areas of the syllabus covered at the three centres are divided approximately as follows:

Leicester De Montfort - Management

<p>Sheffield - Nottingham -</p>	<p>Contracts Legal Framework and the Context for Practice.</p>	<p>12.7.7 The Institute provided a detailed mapping of its Part Three course onto the RIBA/ARB Part Three Validation Criteria. On the basis of this and examination of the candidate work provided, the Board confirms that all Part Three Validation Criteria are being met by all graduates from the Part Three programme.</p>										
<p>12.7.3 In addition to teaching, the three universities share the process of setting examination questions.</p>												
<p>12.7.4 The course runs from January to November of that calendar year, and is structured into four teaching sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluating experience and marketing and management.</li> <li>• Getting the building built. (This discusses the building team, contracts and their selection, running a contract, through to types of procurement routes)</li> <li>• The architect and the law.</li> <li>• Final masterclass. (Synoptic exploration of information and teaching previously delivered on the course).</li> </ul>		<p>12.7.8 The Board found the course to be well organised, well resourced by the Institute and well managed. The course objectives were commendably clear and course content was appropriate to the level of investigation required. The assessments were appropriate and positive with an almost 100% pass rate. Standard were high; even the lowest pass work which the Board examined showed a thorough appreciation and understanding of the issues involved.</p>										
<p>12.7.5 Assessment takes the form of:</p> <table border="0" style="margin-left: 40px;"> <tr> <td>Three assignments</td> <td>(15%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Case study</td> <td>(20%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PEDR evaluation sheets</td> <td>(5%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Final practice examination</td> <td>(50%)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Professional Interview</td> <td>(10%)</td> </tr> </table> <p>(All the above elements must be passed.)</p>	Three assignments	(15%)	Case study	(20%)	PEDR evaluation sheets	(5%)	Final practice examination	(50%)	Professional Interview	(10%)		<p>12.8 <b>External examining arrangements</b> The Institute had in place a strong team of External Examiners for the Part One, Part Two and Part Three programmes, drawn from education and practice. In their meetings with the Board the External Examiners confirmed that they were well supported by the Institute in taking on their role, having received a thorough briefing and induction. They were completely satisfied with the opportunities they were given to engage with the Institute’s assessment process. There was clear evidence that the Institute responded promptly and appropriately to the issues raised in their reports and that generally action followed.</p>
Three assignments	(15%)											
Case study	(20%)											
PEDR evaluation sheets	(5%)											
Final practice examination	(50%)											
Professional Interview	(10%)											
<p>12.7.6 The Board was satisfied that the Nottingham Professional Practice Course and Examination in Architecture was being delivered in accordance with the RIBA Descriptions and Regulations for the Recognition of Courses and Examinations in Professional Practice and Management (Part Three). As required by the procedures the University in 2002 appointed a strong academic External Examiner.</p>		<p>12.9 <b>Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience</b> As mentioned in 12.5.3 students were confident that they had been well prepared for professional practice in the Year 3 Practice and Management module.</p>										

The Board was pleased to note that the students currently on their year out who were present at the student meeting confirmed that they had been well supported in finding year out employment. The Institute's strong links with local practices had been particularly beneficial in this regard.

#### 12.10 **Students**

The Board met a large number of students representing all years of the programmes including students on their first stage professional practice and Part Three graduates and candidates. The students confirmed that they had had the opportunity to comment on the Institute's Critical Self Appraisal before it was finalised. The Board would suggest that in future students have a more substantial input into the process or are encouraged to prepare a their own Critical Self Appraisal.

The students were intelligent, articulate and very supportive of the Institute. The Board was impressed by their high morale and their positive comments about their experiences on the Nottingham programmes. In particular they mentioned:

- The pleasant Nottingham campus and its many state of the art facilities
  - The excellent teaching and learning resources within the Institute, including new studio spaces with 24 hour access
- The positive impact of the Institute's strong research base on teaching within the Institute
- The new perspective brought to design teaching by the visiting special professors

- The strong social network developed between students on all three years of the Part One programme
- The committed, accessible and helpful staff cadre
- The well-rounded nature of design and technology teaching
- The tutoring of Part One students by their peers on the Part Two programme.

Specific concerns raised by the students included:

- Too many assessments, particularly in Part One
- The need for improvement in the quality of feedback on their written work
- The need for (more ) auto-CAD teaching
- Improved access to printing facilities.

#### 12.11 **Staff**

In its meeting with them, the Board found both full-time and part-time staff to be a high quality, committed and cohesive team. There was a good spread of ages among the staff. The key strengths of the staff team were seen to be:

- A broad spread of expertise
- A real commitment amongst all full-time staff to research and to investing the results of that research in their teaching
- The additional dimension brought to design work by the involvement of the visiting special professors.

With a full-time student equivalent population of 664 and staffing of 43 full-time equivalent contracted staff the student-staff ratio for 2004/05 was approximately 15.4:1.

The Institute is increasingly using part-time practitioners to deliver teaching on its validated programmes in the light of the recent surges in student numbers, particularly in the Part One programme. The Board endorses this approach and encourages the Institute to continue with this policy, and endeavour to integrate part-time teachers more fully into the pedagogy of the Institute, particularly in Year 3.

The Board was also intrigued to learn of the involvement of the visiting special professors in both the Part One and Part Two programmes, and to hear about the tutoring of Part One students by their peers on the Part Two programme. The Board will be interested to see how these initiatives develop over time.

#### 12.12 **Research**

The University of Nottingham describes itself as a research-led institution. Every member of the academic staff is required to be research-active. The School of the Built Environment was rated 4A in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and with the strong backing of the University is keen to improve its research profile and obtain a 5star rating in the next Research Assessment Exercise. The Institute sees sustainability as to the key element in its research strategy.

In the view of the Board the Institute is fully justified in claiming that research informs and permeates its teaching. This is apparent in the large number of research-active members of staff who contribute to studio teaching and in the increasingly pronounced impact of research on teaching as each of the programmes is rolled out. This is apparent in the level of sophistication of the student work.

The Board would like to see the School exploit the potential of its large research base with a stronger link between research and studio work.

#### 12.13 **Equal Opportunities**

In advance of the Board the Institute provided a breakdown of its student population by gender and ethnicity. It was clear to the Board that both the University and the Institute take the issue of equal opportunities very seriously indeed. The number of female students following the validated programmes in 2004/05 exceeds 40%, a figure in excess of the national average.

The permanent full-time equivalent academic staff of the Institute is made up of 33.9 men and 9.1 women. the proportion of full-time female staff is approximately 26%.

#### **Resourcing and facilities:**

##### *- General*

The Board found the University to be extremely supportive in respect of the general resourcing of the Institute. The Pro Vice-Chancellor told the Board that the University sees the School of the Built Environment (and its constituent institutes) as a successful and powerful body with high calibre staff and students which the University is keen to see flourish. This can be clearly evidenced in the large amount of capital invested in the Institute in recent years, which have led to the acquisition of many of the additional resources described in 12.5.1. The Pro Vice-Chancellor revealed that the Management Board had approved two new lectureships and one Chair in architecture in 2005 and that plans were currently afoot to increase the number of professorial appointments in the School as a whole. The Institute itself generates a substantial income, which while helping to subsidise other

departments within the University also ensures the provision of generous capital for its own resources.

- *Studios*

With the expansion of facilities, the Institute has been able to continue to provide 24-hour studio space for every student despite the large growth in student numbers in recent years. First and second year students have individual spaces with drawing boards within the 'Triangle' block. This block is due to be demolished in September 2005 when all BArch students will share the use of the brand new Studio Building. The Board considered that the new Studio Building was very well equipped and that good use was being made of the additional space available. The opening of this building has given the Institute the opportunity to review its studio policy. From 2005 Year 1 students will continue to operate on a studio space per student with Year 2 and 3 students using more flexible space. This will provide dedicated areas of drawing boards, model-making space, areas for lap-top use (the new Studio Building has a wireless network), tutorial and seminar spaces which will be dedicated to year groups on certain days and for 'open use' on other days and during evenings and weekends. The Board supports this initiative which it believes will facilitate closer integration of the student body, assisted by the ongoing tutoring of Part One students by those following the Diploma course.

- *IT*

The Institute has made significant investment in computer and printing facilities (£200,000 since the last full Board in 2002). All students have access to the following computing resources:

- The Cripps Computing Centre (24 hour access), the main University facility
- The CAD suites in the triangular block of the School of the Built Environment (24 hour access with 20 PCs). This will be replaced in summer 2005 by a new teaching CAD suite in Paton House.
- The CAD suites in the School's Angela Marchmont Centre for Renewable Energy (38 PCs approximately).
- The CAD suite in Paton House (15 PCs approximately)
- Individual terminals in the Sustainable Resources Building (10 PCs approximately).
- The PC facilities in the Faculty of Engineering.

In addition, most students, even those in Year 1, told the Board that they owned laptop PCs. The Board could see that students were very well served in terms of provision of and access to IT facilities but noted the students' concerns about the availability of printing facilities at peak times. They told the Board that at such times they were not able to use the centralised printing facility in the University because of the large amount of students also wishing to use this resource. Many students had opted to use external printers at considerable financial cost to themselves in order to avoid queuing at the University print facility. The Board believes that the University should address this issue and review its strategy on access to printing facilities. One option would be for the University to consider providing a number of small printing centres across campus for use by students in place of one central resource. The University needs to make more printing resources available to students, either directly by increasing the number of large format and other printers available or by working with an external company to provide printing resources within the

Institute. Whatever solution is adopted the Institute should consider the cost to students of printing, as this is increasingly forming a significant proportion of the course cost. Higher costs are likely to restrict the economic diversity of students on the course.

- *Workshops*

The Board was informed that workshop space had increased by 100% since the last Visiting Board in 2002. The workshops, which include a large woodworking, model shop facility, were spacious and very well equipped and were supervised by experienced technicians.

The photographic studios and darkroom were impressive, containing cameras, and video-editing and recording equipment. These facilities were greatly appreciated by students of the Institute.

- *Library*

During the last Visiting Board in 2002, The Board found a 'lack of contemporary architectural literature' available in the main architectural Library and heard the complaints of students that they were frequently unable to gain access to the books they needed to undertake their studies. The Board is pleased to report that these issues have now been fully addressed by the Institute. The main architectural Library now houses a comprehensive and up-to-date collection of architecture books and journals. The Library book budget has increased significantly over the last three years; for 2004 it stood at £18,000 (additional to the annual spending on journals). The Library is now open 7 days a week until 9.45 p.m.

The University has been substantially increasing its investment in e-journals accessible from networked computers on campus and also off campus via the Library e-gateway. Students have extensively used both resources; those whom the Board met were satisfied with the quality and range of architectural literature available to them and its accessibility. It was clear to the Board that the Institute has now put in place the necessary infrastructure to ensure that the issues uncovered by the 2002 Visiting Board do not readily recur.

### 13. Attachments

13.1 Prior to the visit, the Board was provided by the Institute with the following documentation:

- Critical Self Appraisal
- Response to Questionnaire
- Supplementary Information
- Part One Course Handbook
- Part Two Course Handbook
- Part Three Course Handbook
- Programme Specifications
- Course Structures
- Module Descriptors
- Standards and Marking templates
- Mapping of all Course Content and Learning Outcomes onto RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria for all courses to be validated
- External Examiner reports
- Responses to External Examiner reports
- External Examiner CVs
- Staff CVs
- Staff profile

- Teaching Quality Documents
- Quality Assurance Documents
- Student Profile
- Student Progression data 2001-2005
- Staff Development Plan

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

- Detailed file for every module
- Detailed mark sheets for Part One, Part Two and Part Three and for Year 3 Architecture Studies
- Criteria Maps for Part One, Part Two and Part Three
- Information on Architecture Related Courses
- Summary of Regulations for Assessment for the BArch 2004/05
- Schedules of Important Module-related Dates 2004/05 Parts One, Two and Three
- Personal and Academic Record ( School of the Built Environment)
- School of the Built Environment Student Pastoral and Welfare Support Network
- Coursebook 2004/05 Undergraduate
- Coursebook 2004/05 Graduate
- Undergraduate Prospectus University of Nottingham 2006

13.3 Board members also had access to a networked PC allowing access to a wide range of additional University documentation.