

Royal Institute of British Architects

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

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee
4 April 2007**

**Portsmouth School of Architecture
Faculty of Cultural and Creative Industries**

**BA (Hons) Architecture Part One
Diploma in Architecture, Part Two
The Final Examination in Professional
Practice, Part Three**

Date of Visiting Board: 23-24 November 2006

1. Information About the Courses

- 1.1 **Courses offered for revalidation:**
BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1
3 years full time.
Diploma in Architecture, Part 2
2 years full time.
The Final Examination in Professional Practice, Part 3
1 year part-time

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

School of Architecture
University of Portsmouth
Portland Building
Portland Street
Portsmouth
PO1 3AH
United Kingdom

T: +44 (0)23 9284 2083
F:
W: www.port.ac.uk

- 1.3 **Name of Awarding Body**
University of Portsmouth

- 1.4 **Name of Head of School**
Mr Tod Wakefield

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

- 2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 23/24 November 2006 were:

Professor Martin Symes (Chair)
Mark Way (Vice-Chair)
Angie Pascoe
Alice Fung (Student member)
Hilary Lade (non-architect member)
Scot Masker (RIBA Regional Representative)

One member of the Board was unable to attend at short notice. The Visit continued with the approval of the Head of School and the Chairman of the Validation Committee. The Board remained quorate throughout.

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

Dr Jaepil Choi, a member of the Korean Architectural Accrediting Board attended the Visit as an observer.

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 July 2003, effective from September 2003, 'Tomorrow's Architect,' published March 2003, 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.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board, confirmed by Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee on 4 April 2007

4.1 At its meeting on 4 April 2007 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed **Continued Validation** of:

BA (Hons) Architecture Part 1
3 years full time.

Diploma in Architecture, Part 2
2 years full time.

The Final Examination in Professional Practice, Part 3
1 year part-time

4.2 The next Visiting Board should take place in 2010/11.

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

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

9. Standard Requirements of Recognition

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

- i. external examiners being appointed for the course;
- ii. any significant changes to the courses and examinations being submitted to the RIBA;
- iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being reported to the RIBA so that,

- where appropriate, recognition may formally be transferred to the new title by the RIBA;
- iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses/qualifications listed in 4.1.

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

10.1 Portsmouth School of Architecture enjoys an excellent and deserved reputation for producing well-trained architects. It provides a solid and cohesive education within a close-knit and supportive community. It has forged and maintained close and productive links with the city, region and the local profession. It is now looking to channel this expertise into innovative research while also developing the creative areas of its design agenda.

10.2 The School's strengths include:

- Good communications between the staff team and students.
- Its excellent physical resources. Its purpose-built home in the Portland Building, with on-site workshops, studios and learning resource centre has helped to create a sense of identity and friendly, welcoming environment and a sense of fellowship.
- Its vocational nature, as evidenced by its long-established reputation for training architects who are highly employable.
- The School's location in the newly-established Faculty of Cultural and Creative Industries and the

potential for synergies with other disciplines and benefits for teaching and research.

- The School and University's close links with the region, for example through the new Solent Centre for Architecture and Design, and in particular with local practice.
- The students' satisfaction with the education and training they are receiving
- The School is now well placed, particularly at Diploma level, to be more adventurous and innovative with its design agenda.
- The Board commended the exuberant first year work in the area of design.

The Board applauds the family culture and special atmosphere of the School. It has a very strong character and identity. The Board noted the camaraderie evident in the studios and the presence of the studios and learning resource centre in a dedicated building. The Board recognises the value of the school's physical surroundings and its positive impact on the atmosphere of the School and hopes they are maintained. The fellowship amongst students produces strong architects.

The Board believes strongly that it is essential that the following recommendations and advice be used to build on the School's considerable strengths.

10.3 Recommendations

10.3.1 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA expects the Institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the 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.

- 10.3.2 The Board notes with concern the increasing student staff ratio and the erosion of space. The Board recommends that resources (human, physical, and financial) be enhanced to ensure that the increase in overall student numbers (arising from the bulge in intake in 2006/7) is properly supported, and that procedures and assistance given to weaker students are not compromised. Resources should remain commensurate with student numbers if they continue to grow from the present target intake of 135 home undergraduate students.

10.4 **Advice**

- 10.4.1 The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards;
- 10.4.2 The Board advises that one major lecture space be released from the central timetabling system and made available for the sole use of architecture students. The additional flexibility this will provide for special school-wide events to be organised at short notice and will help staff develop existing vitality in the context of both increased student numbers and the School's role in the new Faculty.
- 10.4.3. While the Board agrees that the establishment of the new Faculty will create exciting possibilities for synergies and collaborative working, it advises that the School must guard against its unique profile becoming blurred.

- 10.4.4. The Board advises the School to look carefully at the strategic exploration of structures at Part Two.
- 10.4.5. The Board advises the School to take urgent steps to replace its director of research who has recently taken up a senior post elsewhere.
- 10.4.6. The School is advised to produce a clear marking scheme for its Professional Examiners which demonstrates that all those achieving 40% have also met all the Part Three criteria.

11. **Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports**

- 11.1 The last full Visit to the University of Portsmouth took place on 28/29 November 2002. The Visiting Board recommended:

Continued Validation of:

- Part One: The University of Portsmouth three year full-time course and related examinations leading to the award of the Bachelor of Arts in Architecture with Honours.
- Part Three The Portsmouth School of Architecture Final Examination in Professional Practice taken on completion of a minimum of two years' practical training and undertaken in accordance with the Rules of the RIBA Practical Training Scheme.

- 11.2 That **Conditional Continued Validation** is given to:
- Part Two: University of Portsmouth two year full-time course and related examinations leading to the award of the Diploma in Architecture.
- 11.3 The following condition was applied to the Part Two programme
- That a sub-group of the Visiting Board (3 members) should return to the School at the time of the end-of-year exhibition in summer 2004 to:
- Review the Part 2 Portfolios;
 - Examine an exhibition of Part Two work.
- The subgroup should have the opportunity via the exhibition and portfolios to see evidence of process as well as product and thus reassure itself that appropriate threshold standards are being set at Part Two level
- 11.4 The Summary of Visiting Board Report November 2002 included the following statements.
- “The Department’s strengths included a highly committed staff operating as a collegial team. Students are enthusiastic and appreciative of the support offered by the staff team. The Board found that there were many strengths to celebrate within the courses. These often derived from the Portsmouth teaching matrix – a typical year structure overlaid by vertical tutorial groupings. Students also benefit from some excellent facilities within

the School, although have to cope with cramped studio space which is small by comparison with other schools. The Board noted and supported the schools ambition to increase the diversity of the student body.

“The Board found that the BA (Hons) Architecture course met the Criteria for Validation at Part One level. The Board was satisfied that lowest pass standards were being set at an appropriate level. The Board noted the clear evidence of substantial student progression in years one and two and particularly the energy and experimentation visible in the short, focused, year two design projects. Although there was less evidence of this in the third year, overall the course provided students with a competent and sound experience in architectural design. The Board found evidence that the non-design elements were integrated into the design activity. The Board noted that the area of Communication Skills was a particular strength of Part One with students demonstrating impressive visual presentation ability and excellent model-making skills. The Board noted that the School’s claim to focus on the production of employable graduates was clearly met, with the Professional Studies and management area a clear strength.”

The 2002 Visiting Board identified areas of concern surrounding the level of Design work at Part Two, hence the condition placed on the course.

“The Board did, however, find areas of real strength in the Part Two course. Just as at Part One, the Board was particularly impressed with student achievements in many other areas, particularly that of Communication Skills. The Board was thus confident, given also the continued validation recommendations for Part One and Part Three,

that the School had the capability to address the Board's concerns regarding Part Two.

“The Part Three course was impressive, being very well managed and providing an excellent coverage of the syllabus. The Board noted a rigorous approach to the operation of the examinations and was satisfied that the standards achieved in the Part Three examination were appropriate. The changes being developed to the structure of the Part 3 were seen to be logical and sensible.

11.5 **Summary of Part Two Revisiting Board Report**

The Revisit took place on 22 June 2004. The Revisiting Board recommended:

Continued validation of:

Diploma in Architecture (Part Two, two years FT)

This was approved by the RIBA Education Committee and the condition duly discharged.

The 2004 Revisiting Board concluded that the recommendations of the earlier Board had been followed in a satisfactory manner and that they would recommend that the course be awarded Continued Validation.

“The Board found that the School's strengths included a highly committed and enthusiastic staff, a high level of student support by staff, particularly for less able students, excellent integrated facilities and close links with the City of Portsmouth.”

The Board considered that the School has dealt with the concerns of the November 2002 Visiting Board in an entirely satisfactory manner and congratulates them on

their achievement. The Board appreciates that the course is still in a phase of development and refinement; the benefits of the changes that have already been implemented are clearly seen in the work of the 2004 graduating cohort, and the Board is confident that these will be maintained and enhanced in future cohorts.”

12. Details of the Conditions in Item 8.

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

13. Commentary

13.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

The Critical Self-Appraisal was a fair assessment of the present situations but the Board considered that it had not addressed the wider agenda of major change and opportunities which later emerged in discussions with the Vice-Chancellor, Dean and Head of School. In particular, it did not address opportunities and threats. The Board considered that these might be addressed in future documents.

The most significant changes since the last Visiting Board are the establishment of a new Faculty structure and the restructuring of the validated architecture programmes.

The University-wide faculty reorganisation has been undertaken in order to bring together aspects of teaching and research across the creative and cultural industries. The University's intention is to bring together subject areas in interesting and novel ways with a view to encouraging new synergies, through and beyond the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. The University has long

enjoyed close links with the locality and local professional practice; building on these strengths is a key part of its strategy. The University also wishes to develop further its activities in digital and virtual technologies. Leadership and staffing strategies are due to be discussed as part of the University's new strategic plan which is currently in development.

Architecture now forms part of the newly-established Faculty of Cultural and Creative Industries. The Board noted with interest that the Vice-Chancellor modified plans for the new Faculty structure in order to place Architecture in the faculty which the School believed was most relevant. As architecture is a well-established school it is seen as a solid foundation for the Faculty. The RIBA supports and welcomes this move.

The School reported a real feeling of and drive towards changing and improving. The teaching structure underwent significant change when the School replaced the former matrix system with a studio based system. Although this had distinct benefits it was felt that a more flexible system was needed. This has been welcomed by the staff and has taught them how to deal with large cohorts of students. It is understood by students and the Board also found it a positive change.

At the time of the last full visit the Final Examination in Professional Practice (Part Three) was being restructured as a MA Professional Practice – Architecture degree. The changes were approved in 2003.

Confirmation of standards is now embedded in the School's systems. The Board was content that the concerns of the last Visiting Board have been addressed.

The Board applauded the system of mentoring. This is a welcome innovation and becomes more important with increasing numbers.

The School is developing and broadening its research agenda and this is filtering into the courses.

13.2 **Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit**

The Board thanks the staff and students for their hospitality during the visit.

The documentation for the visit was excellent. All other arrangements were similarly good. Portfolios were clearly labelled and easy to navigate. The exhibition was well assembled and the explanations from staff valuable in helping the Board to understand the structure and content of the course and the assessment regimes. Full marks sheets were provided for all cohorts. The Board is grateful to the staff for their willingness to provide additional information and clarification where necessary.

13.2.1 *Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit*

The Board examined the following samples of the work of the 2005/2006 graduating cohort:

BA (Hons) Architecture (Part One)

First year: 4 lowest passes, 2 middle passes, 2 high passes (from a cohort of 74)

Second Year: 3 lowest passes, 3 middle passes, 3 high passes (from a cohort of 98)

Third Year: 3 lowest passes, 3 middle passes, 3 high passes (from a cohort of 93)

Diploma in Architecture (Part Two)

1st year 3 lowest passes, 3 middle passes, 3 high passes (each from a range of units) from a cohort of 28

2nd Year 5 lowest passes (each unit represented), 4 middle passes, 3 high passes from a range of units, from a cohort of 25.

The Final Examination in Professional Practice, Part 3

3 lowest, 2 middle, 2 high from a cohort of 16.

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

The Board was content that the School has responded appropriately to the recommendations of 2002 Visiting Board. Following the last full Visit in 2002 the School produced an Action Plan to address issues highlighted by the Board. The School took the Board's advice into consideration when revamping the studio teaching, moving from the matrix pattern to a year system in the Part One, and the themed vertical studios at Diploma level which are intended to provide better direction and support for weaker students.

There are clear systems in place for responding to External Examiners' reports. The role of the External Examiners themselves has been clarified following their own expressed concerns. The Board also supports the

appointment of a Part Three External Examiner, which it believes will help to raise standards.

In their meeting with the Board, the External Examiners confirmed that the School responded positively to comments in their reports.

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

Until August 2006 the School formed part of the Faculty of Environment. The School of Architecture has now joined the School of Art Design and Media, the School of Creative Arts Film and Media, and the Department of Creative Technology, the Portsmouth Centre for Enterprise and the Institute of Industrial Research to form a new Faculty of Cultural and Creative Industries.

In addition to the validated courses, the School offers a BA (Honours) Interior Design Programme, and MSc Architecture and Environment, MA Professional Practice (Architecture) and M.Arch (Master of Architecture). The School aims to develop further masters courses, exploiting the potential created by the new Faculty.

13.5 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part One qualification: BA (Hons) Architecture**

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The overall aim of all the School's validated programmes is to 'provide a professional course leading to a career as an architect'. The School aspires to enhance the more creative areas of its programmes whilst retaining the strengths on which its reputation has been built. The BA (Hons) Architecture's detailed aims and objectives were clearly laid out in the Programme Specification. The

undergraduate course is chiefly about establishing a good level of competence and professionalism. The School's emphasis on vocational practice is widely recognised as its strong suit; design is an emphatic part of the curriculum but the School feels it is in danger of being driven into box-ticking by the other criteria.

From the Board's inspection of student work and discussion with the students themselves, these aims and objectives are clearly being met.

13.5.2 Course design and content

The BA (Hons) Architecture course operates on a year-based structure. A particularly positive aspect of this is the joint first year with Interior Design. Students who enrolled on the Architecture programme may transfer to Interior Design at the end of the first year, subject to interview.

The Board found that the course design and content were good and commended the School's holistic view, particularly in relation to the links with Interior Design. The course and its learning outcomes were clearly mapped onto the RIBA Part One validation criteria. A cohesive pattern of education is evident here, as in all three validated programmes.

The Board was interested to note the different perceptions of the course's aims and structure from the point of view of the staff and students. The staff considered that the course was relatively directive; conversely, many students commented that they did not find it particularly prescriptive and that they had sufficient freedom to develop their own ideas. The Board considered that this freedom inspired the students in their work.

The end of the first year in particular was very impressive. In the second year, students cover an enormous range of ideas. However, the Board found that the spectrum narrowed somewhat in the third year and there were relatively few options for them. Nonetheless, the quality of the work was still of a high standard. The Board also commends the joint project between first year BA students and 5th year Diploma students.

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

- *Design*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

There was a well-structured sequence of exercises which are particularly suitable for those training to be architects in the present professional context. The course also allows students sufficient freedom to explore their own ideas.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

The Board commends the School's comprehensive coverage of these criteria at Part One. The course begins to integrate technology and construction from the second semester of the first year. The students' work is confident and there is clear understanding of this area and

of the relationship between technical studies and design decisions. The students maintain technical diaries charting the evolution of their ideas in this respect.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

This is clearly covered in the syllabus, which includes a number of studies of historical precedents and a considerable amount of site exploration, in which students examine real sites.

The Board would welcome more consideration of world architecture. The Board commends the School for the range and focus of field trips but believes greater emphasis on placing this in context is desirable. The Board believes more could be done in terms of incorporating this into students' work.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

The Board found this to be very good. Students receive detailed feedback on interviews and portfolio preparation with a clear audit trail.

Students are confident in using quite advanced communications tools in model making and their visual skills are strong.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part One Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the BA (Hons) Architecture programme.

This is covered chiefly in the third year of the course in the excellent Professional Practice, Presentation and Communication Unit. (see following paragraph).

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

This is a particular strength of the School and is greatly appreciated by the students. The Professional Practice, Presentation and Communication Unit in the third year prepares the students well for their year in practice. In addition to learning about office procedures, students also compile CVs and professional portfolios and are interviewed by practitioners.

During their year in practice, the Professional Studies Adviser, whom students meet in Year 3, provides a link between the students and the School, chiefly by email. Students benefit from a great deal of one to one feedback through their year in practice. The year-out is not a taught course, but students do return to the School for two sessions. These involve group discussion about the work they are undertaking, the nature of the practice in which they are employed. Students benefit from discussing each other's experiences and it is also intended that this

empowers them to get relevant experience. Students may also discuss on an individual basis any problems they have.

Students are also introduced to a specific area of practice which they can go back and discuss at work. The year out is managed and supported by the School itself.

13.5.4 Progression within the course

The Board considered that progression and completion rates are good. However, the School wishes to improve retention rates and the level of achievement at the point of award yet further. The Board found that the process of monitoring student progression and retention is well-managed and reviewed regularly, to allow the School to identify and address any problems with student achievement.

13.5.5 Assessment: methods, content and coverage, relative weightings, standards achieved (commenting separately on examinations, course work, dissertations, design projects as appropriate),

The Board had some difficulty in understanding processes of assessment and feedback and was grateful to the staff for their willingness to clarify this in detail. It appears to be a complex but fair system which is clearly understood by staff and students. Compensation is only permitted in accordance with a Board of Examiners Protocol. This ensures that the Criteria are met by all students. Most assessment is undertaken through coursework, in particular at portfolio review. The University recently implemented Personal Development Planning although, in their critical appraisal, students expressed concerns about the relevance of this approach to a discipline like architecture.

The School aims to instil the habit of reflective review in the students and to this end gives students the opportunity to reconsider and revise work before the final portfolio review. Staff aim to feed back to students in a positive way, both in terms of success and challenge. The Institution is using new technology to make available on-line interim marks so that students can understand where more effort is required of them. The Board applauded this initiative but felt that there was a risk that increasing use of technology may result in slower and less detailed feedback to students.

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

Intake at Part One is steadily increasing with 132 being admitted in for the 2006/2007 academic session. There was an unexpected leap in 2006, which the School assumes will not be repeated. It is cautious about over-recruiting and intends to control the intake. The UCAS tariff has recently been raised and this appears to have resulted in a higher number of applicants. The majority of entrants have A/AS levels, but the School is keen to widen participation. Students are not interviewed as a matter of course but must demonstrate an enthusiasm for architecture. The School aims to achieve an average intake of 135 for home undergraduate students in future.

Some overseas students enter directly into the second and third years, although final year entry is permitted only in special cases. Systems are in place to ensure that their previous knowledge and experience is appropriate. Such admissions are made subject to interview by the Year Co-

ordinator and portfolio review. The Faculty Board ratifies credits awarded by APEL.

13.6 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Two qualification: Diploma in Architecture**

13.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The course aims and objectives are clearly stated in the programme specification and being achieved. However, the Board encourages the staff to revisit the course objectives. The Board believes that there is now space and opportunity for greater overall ambition and higher design ambitions, particularly given the new Faculty structure.

13.6.2 Course design and content
The Board appreciated the discussions with the Course Leader, which helped them to understand the intentions, structure and assessment of the Part Two course. The course is delivered over two years in a vertical unit structure and is clearly mapped onto the RIBA Part Two validation criteria. The Exhibition in particular was very good in its comprehensiveness and layout. The Diploma represents a clear progression from Part One in several senses in that it also offers opportunities for special studies and specialisation. The balance of the course is appropriate, with a high weighting given to design. There are also opportunities for overseas exchanges.

The School is aware of the need to keep professionalism and creativity in balance. It wants to offer students a rounded and creative education and avoid being too prescriptive. In the Diploma in particular the School has tried to load the criteria into the first semester to allow students to be more adventurous in the other semesters.

The staff want to reinvigorate the conversation at diploma level with other masters level vocational and academic courses. This will ultimately have an impact on the BA course as many staff are involved in both programmes. The present BA2 options are tasters of the research at diploma level, so students already have a flavour of the research interests of the staff. Units at diploma level also feed into the non-option units at BA level. The mentoring programme also facilitates good exchanges between first and fifth years which carry through into the second and sixth year.

The Board was particularly impressed by the thesis dissertation in the final year of the diploma, for which students are free to choose their own topics. Students are evidently enthusiastic about their work and the Board encourages the School in its desire to attract the best of its Part One students and those from elsewhere.

However, the Board believed that there was a possible risk of fragmentation as some students appear to have difficulties in seeing the whole picture and integrating their detailed studies with the design concept and final design decisions.

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

- *Design*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme.

The School has tried to structure the Diploma to enable students freedom to experiment as well as ensuring opportunities to demonstrate compliance with the criteria. The Board considered that the design ambition could be raised and believes the School is perhaps being too careful. The Board believes that the staff should have more faith in themselves and in their strengths. There is great potential within the present studios for undertaking more adventurous work, which provide staff and students with opportunities for more exploratory and more innovative studies in a stable framework. At the same time, the framework serves to support the weaker and more average students.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme.

Although Part Two students are clearly technically competent there was not much evidence that they explore structures in a strategic way. The Board advises that the School look carefully at this.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme.

Work in this area is often very good, the students' work on European Cities being particularly commendable. This

unit was especially strong and provided interesting opportunities which were not as evident, or perhaps less easily developed, in other units. For example, the Board believed that they were less evident in the Environment unit and perhaps more difficult to achieve in the Eastbourne unit. The Coastal Cities unit was not explored as fully as it might have been.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme.

The end product was very good with excellent communication skills across a wide range of media being demonstrated especially at the higher end of achievement.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board was satisfied that all the Part Two Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the Diploma in Architecture programme.

Although this is covered thoroughly in a dedicated unit, the Board would like candidates to be much more critically aware of issues and to be more questioning of the role of the architect and the profession.

13.6.4 Progression within the course

Progression at Part Two is good. Students are able to move units if they wish, which is an advantage.

13.6.5 Assessment

Assessment at Part Two is carried out chiefly by assessment of coursework. Management, Practice and Law is assessed by examination. The Board found that assessment is very good and thorough, with the work being seen in an holistic and comprehensive way.

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

There were 37 entrants to Part Two at the beginning of the 2006/2007 academic session, an increase on previous years. The Board was pleased to note the encouraging increase in recruitment to Part Two, both of the best of Portsmouth's own Part One graduates (who presently form the majority) and graduates from elsewhere. Applicants to Part Two are interviewed only when the entry criteria are not met. As at Part One, direct entry into the second year of the Diploma is not normally permitted.

13.7 **Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part Three Qualification: The Final Examination in Professional Practice**

A structural review of the Part Three examination was already underway at the time of the 2002 Visit. The Part Three course was expanded into an MA in Professional Practice (Architecture) which can be taken in conjunction with the Part Three examination or as a separate qualification (not validated). The Part Three professional course is now embedded in the MA and within the University's quality assurance systems. The course is clearly mapped against the RIBA Part Three criteria.

An average of 21 students enrol annually on the Part Three programme. On average, 17% are female. All

applicants are interviewed and must already have identified a case study. A topical research project is tackled early on to ease the students' introduction to the course, during which research methods are revisited in order to prepare them for the case study. Students are required to undertake group work as well as individual projects.

The examinations are divided into four sections. All criteria are put into particular examinations so that students can expect to be examined on all elements. The examination is unseen and scenario based. If the interviewers believe that a student has understood a mistake in the written examinations, the student may rectify this and other omissions during the professional interview. Examiners' Guidelines are issued to each examiner at the Introduction session. These explain how the Examiner may want to test poor understanding shown in students' examination responses.

Each examiner is provided with, and also completes, a sheet of marks and comments for each student (thus two per student) and these are collected by the School at the Exam Board. Examiners are likely to record details of these issues on these forms.

At present all Part Three candidates also take the MA. Candidates for the MA only would undertake all parts of the course except the Professional Interview. Unit 704, the Case Study and Practice Based Learning Unit, is marked by different examiners for the Part Three and MA. For the MA, the entry criteria have only recently been changed, so the uptake of the MA as a stand-alone award is yet to be seen.

The Part Three External Examiner remarked that assessment for Part Three is complex as it is linked closely to the masters programme and that the case study has

different assessment criteria for the different examiners as is noted above. She has suggested to the University that the present pass mark be reconsidered.

Although consideration of the MA as a discrete course and qualification was not within the remit of this Board, the Board was interested to learn that the course may be taken as a returner/refresher CPD scheme without presenting for Part Three. Many architects attend seminars; some candidates are overseas-qualified architects, who do not need to take Part Three for registration purposes, but do so voluntarily.

The Board believes the School needs to be careful about the different weighting of different elements to ensure all the elements are assessed equally. The School's efforts to bring practitioners into the School are commendable. The Part Three course is embedded in the University's QA procedures. The University believes that the successful internal validation of the MA course with Part Three exemption within it has allowed the Part Three itself to sit more comfortably within the University's procedures. The School is advised to produce a clear marking scheme for its Professional Examiners which demonstrates that all those achieving 40% have also met all the Part Three criteria.

The examination is classified with pass merit and distinction classes.

The results of the professional examination are recorded in the minutes of the Examination Board. The minutes record, usually in a general way, where a student has shown a poor understanding in an exam but has acquitted themselves well in the professional interview. These, taken

together with the marksheets issued to examiners, provide an audit trail of assessment.

All Part Three examiners have a distinct category within the University's system and are taken from the RIBA's professional list.

The Board considered that the case study unit was overloaded and that the School should guard against this.

13.8 **External examining arrangements**

The Board met present and recent External Examiners attached to Parts One, Two and Three, and Part Three Professional Examiners. There are presently seven External Examiners attached to the courses. Under the University system, each course has Subject External Examiners who are responsible for various specific subjects and units and Award External Examiners who are responsible for the awards and quality assuring the process. The respective roles of each type of External Examiner are clearly defined, although some Diploma Subject External Examiners also interview students at the Diploma point of award.

There is a formal induction and briefing process for Externals. The School responds formally to External Examiners' reports and submits an Action Plan to the School's Board of Studies. Their advice is clearly heeded by the School.

Although the respective roles of subject and award Examiners are now clearer, the Externals still believed that the two-tier system can partly disenfranchise the subject examiners who are not also award examiners. Subject examiners can moderate the internal marks; however, at

award level it is harder for the External Examiners to identify the lowest pass as the marks are fixed by the Subject Exam Board. External Examiners have a small amount of leeway, for instance in extenuating circumstances, and they always return to consider referred work when it is resubmitted.

Graduating Part One students are no longer interviewed, but participate in group discussions with the Externals. All Diploma students are interviewed with their entire body of work. Diploma graduates are awarded Pass, Merit or Distinction. In the course documentation there was muted discussion about the numbers of students achieving merits and distinctions. While the Externals want neither to ration certain awards nor weaken a distinction, they wondered if there was a way of recognising the achievements of those who were worthy of more than a simple pass.

The External Examiners expressed overwhelming confidence in the School and its standards. In particular, they made the following comments:

- The School has made good progress in providing students with space for innovation and design originality, working to counter what might become a criteria box-ticking exercise. The teaching culture is impressive, as it allows students freedom to think, while taking care of those who needed more guidance.
- Students tackled tasks in an original, thorough and consistent way. However, there was some perception that the tremendous energy in the first year could diminish in later years. There was a similar perception at Diploma 2, in which modules designed to meet the criteria appeared sometimes to have a constraining

effect on the students' responses and could erode the 'marvellous freshness' that Examiners had observed in the first year diploma work.

- The Part Three external examiner was particularly impressed with candidates' responses to the tasks set, which she believed had been tackled in a creative and innovative way.
- The School should be encouraged to continue to capitalise on its location and its links with the regional and local practice, the employability of its graduates and its consistency which also allows room for specialisation. The Examiners are very impressed with what the School produces and it should always strive to see what makes it unique.
- There was a harmonious and successful collaborative atmosphere in the School which it harnessed to deal with the large numbers of students. Stronger students help to improve the performance of the rest of the group. There is no question of weaker students being carried. The External Examiners found that Portsmouth was very good at identifying an individual's contribution to group projects and ensuring it received an appropriate mark. At Part Three, the School has developed sophisticated assessment methodologies for group working.
- The high calibre of overseas students is stimulating.

The Board commended the high calibre, enthusiasm and diligence of the External Examiners.

13.9 Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience

The Board commends the excellent, very well organised arrangements for monitoring professional practice.

Students are evidently well prepared for the year out and for Part Three.

Arrangements for the 'Year Out' are described in paragraph 13.5.3. Final year Diploma students are advised on the type of experience they will need to obtain before presenting for Part Three. They are entirely responsible for finding their own employment and ensuring they gain appropriate experience. PEDR log books are signed off by staff every three months and individual feedback is provided. Individual tutorials before deciding whether to enrol on the MA Professional Practice course help establish whether prospective candidates have sufficient experience.

13.10 Students

The Board was pleased to meet representatives of all years of the course and year out students at a well-attended meeting. In addition to their contribution to the School's Self-Evaluation Document, students produced their own critical document. The Board found this document particularly helpful and interesting. The students' views were articulate and well represented.

Students considered the strengths of the School to be

- Its excellent physical resources which are greatly appreciated. Students clearly value the space the School presently occupies. The dedicated building and layout of the space contributes to the culture of the School, which was described as open, warm and friendly, encouraging integration between different years and groups.
- The Portland Learning Resource Centre is considered the most important of resources, not only due to the

accessibility of information but also the expert support provided by the architecture librarian.

- The relationships between different years of the courses are excellent, helped by a student extra-curricular society.
- Contact between staff and students is very good with regular meetings at which students can raise issues. Diploma students are able to discuss ideas and problems on a one to one basis with tutors, in addition to regular email contact and formal meetings several times a year to review their personal development plans. In addition to scheduled sessions with tutors, an 'emergency tutor' is also available in specified timeslots outside scheduled studio sessions.
- The willingness of staff to help despite the additional pressures placed on them by the increase in numbers.
- Students appreciated the mix of full-time and part-time staff and the different experience and perspectives they bring to their teaching.
- The professional and practical aspects of both the BA and Diploma programmes. The School's links with practice and the preparation for working in practice were valued by students. In addition to the preparation for practice, students felt they were afforded a great deal of freedom.
- Assessment regimes are transparent and easy to understand; Students know what must be achieved in order to gain a good mark and there is ample opportunity to improve. The level of feedback is good and the referral system is clear.
- Part Two students commented that they returned to the School for the Diploma because it was "a solid place".

Students expressed concerns about:

- The University's proposals for the centralisation of library services which may result in the loss of a dedicated centre.
- The gradual erosion of studio space caused by the growth in student numbers and the fact that the building was now shared with other departments. This was regretted chiefly by students in higher years. Some were concerned that more students might start to work from home if the squeeze on space continued, with an adverse effect on the School's atmosphere.

Students' views and interests are well represented at School, Faculty and University level. There is a Staff-Student consultative committee which meets approximately five times per year, in excess of University requirements. There is an active Portsmouth Architecture Student Society which organises social and cultural events.

The present SSR is 1:19 which represents a slight increase on previous years.

13.11 **Staff**

The Board was pleased to meet so many of the School's staff and to participate in an informative and wide-ranging discussion. The meeting was particularly useful in helping the Board to understand the School's design direction, its ambitions for research and how these may be influenced by the faculty restructuring.

The staff values highly the School's position in its own building and the family atmosphere it engenders. Despite the squeeze on resources they believe they have maintained its unique character and the diversity of output. Staff are still keen to preserve close student/tutor relationship and respond to students' concerns positively,

despite the increase in numbers. The mentoring system has also proved valuable as has the mutual support and flexibility of the staff.

The School's position in the new Faculty and the question of direction of change are seen as a great opportunity if properly supported by adequate staff and adequate space. Staff see many positive aspects to the change (for example, financial transparency) and were due to meet in January 2007 to discuss how it would be addressed.

The Board believes that the staff body is thoughtful and evidently cares very much for the School. They demonstrate a collegiate spirit and clearly wish to preserve the special atmosphere of the School whilst further developing it. The staff are clearly engaged with the aims and objectives of the course. Teaching and the School's links with practice remain major driving forces in tandem with staff's wish to pursue specialist interests.

At the time of the visit there were 17.0 FT staff and 5.95 FTE staff attached to the School. Whilst the School intends to reduce its reliance on part-time staff, they remain an important element of the overall staffing strategy. The School adheres to the University staff development policy which had a dedicated budget and is closely monitored.

13.12 **Research**

The University of Portsmouth believes strongly that every department should be involved in research activity, whether of the more traditional variety or knowledge transfer and links with practice. The University is teaching-focused but moving more towards research.

Representative staff from Architecture were one of the areas to be selected by the University to submit research to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. Although it plans to submit research in RAE 2008 under the Art and Design Unit of Assessment, it forms only one part of the School's strategy.

The School's profile in the profession is significant. Traditionally the School had seen itself as producing competent, able professionals and professionalism is still key to Portsmouth's mission. Whilst capitalising on its existing strengths, its vision extends to being an artistic and creative school. This was a major consideration prompting the School's request specifically to be placed in the Faculty of Cultural and Creative Industries.

The School is working a great deal with the Solent Centre for Architecture and Design and RIBA South. The School wishes to share its knowledge with the region. The School believes this keeps them current, vibrant and energetic. Research is also a stream of income generation and therefore important to the School's future.

The University has been successful in attracting Research Capability Funding for which staff can bid in order to support short projects.

The School believes that research and the validated programmes feed back into each other very well. The Diploma studios are an important way of developing this research and the staff's interests. The specialisms explored in the Diploma programme, namely, urban design, landscape design and sustainability, are key to these areas of research and are being developed into masters courses, with modules and units being shared between the Diploma course and the masters programmes. The School

wishes to explore the possibility of translating these specialisms into a non-vocational route that would stand outwith the Part Two framework. New staff will also bring new interests.

However, the Board struggled to find really clear examples of the influence of research on the courses and did not have enough time to explore this. The Board was confident from its discussions with the staff that with such a powerful team in place the prospects are promising, but the replacement of the Director of Research is essential. New leadership in this area will be beneficial to building on the existing very good support team. This could be a great stimulus to achievement.

It is intended that knowledge transfer partnerships will provide the link into practice and ultimately lead to income generation. The Board applauds the strong links with local practice and the iterative feedback, which clearly have a beneficial influence on the courses. As stated earlier, feedback through specialisms has yet to be tested but the intent is clear. The Board supports the staff's ambitions in this direction and believes they should be afforded adequate resources to allow them to develop.

The Board advises the School to take urgent steps to replace its director of research who has recently taken up a senior post elsewhere.

13.13 **Equal Opportunities**

There are good procedures in place for monitoring equal opportunities. The School keeps detailed records of age, gender, ethnic background and nationality and wishes to widen participation to those who will benefit from the

School. The student body is becoming more diverse; the gender split at undergraduate level is approaching 50/50, which compares favourably with the national proportion of 66%/34%.

13.14 Resourcing and facilities

- General

The University has recently changed its budgeting methodology and made it more transparent. Funds are devolved to the faculties. Student recruitment is crucial to the financial health of the institution, although it is looking increasingly to develop other income streams.

The Board believes that the Portland Building is a major asset. It is seen as vital to the School's continuing success in terms of recruitment, course delivery and student welfare. The increasing SSR and erosion of space is a worry to the School, which believes it is already efficient in its use of space. Space must be paid for and therefore its use is carefully monitored.

The leap in student numbers in 2006 placed considerable strain on resources. There are now 12 studios in the first year which are divided into morning and afternoon studios. This appeared to be working well so far, although the staff said it may be reviewed. Taught courses must also be supported, and although greater student number should bring in more resources, it can take time for this funding to appear. Although staff have assumed that the leap in number will not recur, this 'bulge' will have to be accommodated as it moves up the School.

In its meeting with the staff, the Board learnt that there is increasing pressure on lecture space. The university has a policy of timetabling lectures across the university and

therefore there is not much flexibility in timeslots, which have to be requested six months in advance. Therefore the School had difficulties accommodating the unexpected additional numbers who were offered places with the 2006/2007 intake. It is not always possible to timetable lectures and studio days appropriately.

The Board advises that one major lecture space be released from the central timetabling system and made available for the sole use of architecture students. The additional flexibility this will provide for special school-wide events to be organised at short notice and will help staff develop existing vitality in the context of both increased student numbers and the School's role in the new Faculty.

- Library

The School has a dedicated in-house library, the Portland Learning Resource Centre, which is an excellent and much valued resource, as the Board learned from its conversations with students and staff. At the time of the visit the Learning Resource Centre was under review. However the School does believe that university senior management is willing to listen to departments' concerns about all resourcing, whether of space, facilities or staff.

The collection contains approximately 6,000 books, 300 journals and 1700 diploma dissertations. The Board found that, in spite of pressures on financial resources, there is ample investment in stock.. The Library has had to exercise particular care over its expenditure on journal subscriptions but the Board found that provision was still good. The Architecture allocation for 2006/2007 is £12,760 of which £8,900 is committed to serials expenditure.

The feedback from staff and students regarding the Portland Learning Resource Centre is very positive. It is open until 19.00 on weekdays (17.30) on Fridays; student support is outstanding and the librarian is excellent. The librarian is supported by a full-time assistant. Students particularly appreciate the 1-day loan period.

The Board did not visit the Central University Library on this occasion but received detailed information about its collections and student support services in the Visiting Board documentation. This houses some architecture books and journals as well as collections in related subjects such as landscape design, planning, construction, structures and art and design. There is some duplication of provision between the University Library and the Portland Learning Resource Centre.

The University Library is open until midnight seven days a week and provides study places with networked computers and printing and scanning facilities. These are to be considerably enhanced when the extension to the building is completed in January 2007.

The post of Faculty Librarian for Creative and Cultural Industries has recently been created; Departmental Library Liaison Officers also provide links between departments and libraries. There are induction sessions for new students to both the Portland Learning Resource Centre and the University Library.

However, the Board expressed serious concerns about the possible removal of the architecture library to the main University Library. Ready access to library resources is an essential component of architectural education and to lose

such a first-rate facility would be an undesirable development.

- Workshops

Workshop provision at the School is very good which is borne out by the quality of the students' models. It is housed in the Portland Building and was upgraded significantly several years ago.

The workshop is open from 0800 to 1700 and manned by two permanent staff. It operates on an informal basis as the staff believes a 'sign up' system can be too rigid. The present system works well, as staff are aware of large projects in advance which allows them to be prepared. Reviews are staggered to relieve pressure on the facilities. Staff are resourceful in acquiring and recycling suitable materials; however students must sometimes pay for materials, depending on what they wish to use. The budget is regularly reviewed and additional equipment bought as necessary. The School is hoping to acquire new equipment through a new initiative with the Solent Centre. Staff are happy to help students on a one to one basis if required.

Future projects include rapid prototyping milling machinery and developing the interface between the workshop and design, including facilities for 3D plotting and laser cutting. The workshop in the University's Eldon building (which houses other departments of the Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries) provides more extensive facilities for milling, plastic moulding and metal forming, and a plaster and ceramic workshop. The School hopes that more use can be made of these facilities in time.

There is also an on-site art materials shop.

- IT

IT provision is excellent. The Board particularly compliments the service staff, led by a newly-appointed Principal Technician, their enthusiasm and readiness to help students.

There is an extensive, and expanding, network throughout the Portland Building. The School is expanding its use of digital technology, virtual learning spaces and Web CT. There are 20 eMacs and three scanners across the studios. Staff and students also have access to a dedicated research room which houses 5 PCs, 1 Mac and 1 A4 colour printer. The Faculty also provides extensive facilities which are available to architecture students, much of it in the Portland Learning Resource Centre with additional Apple Mac facilities in other faculty buildings. The number of plotters helps to ensure that there are minimal queues even at the busiest times.

The School monitors computer ownership amongst students and advises them on appropriate hardware and software if they wish to purchase their own. The University also provides an IT Service Centre for all students and staff and a laptop lending scheme.

The School provides a wide range of software including ArchiCAD, Vectorworks 11 (at the time of the visit due to be upgraded to Vectorworks 12 Architect), Macromedia Studio, Adobe Creative Suite, Sketchup, Cinema 4D, AutoCAD, 3D Studio Max and Ecotect. Students may also use a new 'virtuality' suite in the University's Centre for new Media Research and the Digital CNC milling machines in the Mechanical Engineering department.

Audio-visual equipment is available from the Portland Learning Resource Centre and the School's workshop provides video, photographic and surveying equipment.

- Studios

The School is fortunate in having a dedicated, purpose-built Portland Building, which it shares with the Departments of Civil Engineering and Environmental Design and Management.

However, space is already being stretched and the Board fears that the likelihood of further squeezing may place unbearable strain upon it. The studio space is good but being compromised by partitioning and use beyond their true capacity. Large studios have been separated from their offices. This also affects the accessibility of staff, whose offices were adjacent to the studios. The School is particularly keen to give the first years as much space as possible in order to encourage them to work in studio. The staff and students are concerned about the erosion of space as the present studio culture is valued.

The Board recommends that the resources (human, physical, and financial) be enhanced to ensure any increase in overall student numbers is properly supported, and that procedures and assistance given to weaker students is not compromised. Resources should remain commensurate with student number if they continue to grow from the present target intake of 135 home undergraduate students. Studio space is an essential tool in the teaching of architecture and vital to the culture and atmosphere of the School.

14. Documentation Provided

Prior to the visit the School provided:

Critical Self-Appraisal and Questionnaire
Supplementary information
BA (Hons) Architecture Part One Unit Descriptors
Diploma in Architecture Part Two Unit Descriptors
MA Professional Practice (Architecture) Unit Descriptors
(contains relevant Part Three information)
External Examiners' Reports

In the Base Room the School provided

Full Staff CVs (part time and full time staff)
Detailed students statistics
Portsmouth Undergraduate Prospectus 2007
Portsmouth Postgraduate Prospectus 2007
School of Architecture Student Handbook Introduction
and Course Handbook – all courses
BA (Hons) Architecture – Course Unit Guidebook
2006/2007
Diploma in Architecture – Course Unit Guidebook
2006/2007
MA Professional Practice (Architecture) Course
Handbook 2006/2007
Faculty of Creative and Cultural Industries Brochure
Networked PC providing access to electronic
documentation
Unit (Module) management files were available in the Staff
Room.