

Royal Institute of British Architects

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

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 6 April 2009

**School of Architecture
Faculty of Social Sciences**

**Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape,
Part One: BA (Hons) Architecture,
Part One : M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering
& Architecture,
Part Two: MArch in Architecture,
Part Two: M.Arch in Architecture and Town and
Regional Planning,
Part Three: Certificate in Professional Practice**

Date of Visiting Board: 09/10 October 2008

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, Part One, 3 years full time.

BA (Hons) Architecture, Part One, 3 years full time

M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering & Architecture, Part One, 4 years full time

MArch in Architecture, Part Two, 2 years full time

M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning, Part Two, 2 years full time.

Certificate in Professional Practice, Part Three

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered

The University of Sheffield
Western Bank
Sheffield
S10 2TN
UK

T: 0114 222 2000

W: www.sheffield.ac.uk

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of Sheffield

1.4 Name of Head of School

Professor Roger Plank

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 09/10 October 2008 were:

James Soane (Chair)

Professor George Henderson (Vice-Chair)

Bob Sheil

Judi Farren-Bradley

Lindesay Dawe

Sandy Halliday (co-professional member)

Lamis Mary Bayar – student/graduate member

David Simister – RIBA Yorkshire regional representative.

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (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)'. For more information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board Confirmed by the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 6 April 2009

4.1 At its meeting on 6 April 2009, the RIBA Education Committee confirmed **Continued Validation** of:

BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, Part One, 3 years full time.

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- BA (Hons) Architecture, Part One, 3 years full time
M.Eng (Hons) Architecture & Structural Engineering, Part One, 4 years full time
MArch in Architecture, Part Two, 2 years full time
M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning, Part Two, 2 years full time.
Certificate in Professional Practice, Part Three
- 4.2 The next Visiting Board should take place in 2012.
- 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 academic portfolios examined, the work from the previous year of the courses listed in 4.1 inspected during the visit was found to meet the required standards.
- 8. Conditions of Validation**
- 8.1 There were no conditions attached to the courses listed in 4.1.
- 9. Standard Requirements of Recognition**
- 9.1 RIBA recognition of all courses/qualifications is dependent upon:
- i. external examiners being appointed for the course;
 - ii. any significant changes to the courses and examinations being submitted to the RIBA
 - iii. any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being reported to the RIBA so that, where appropriate, recognition may formally be transferred to the new title by the RIBA
 - iv. submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses/qualifications listed in 4.
- 10. Summary of the Recommendations, Advice & Commentary Contained in the Full Report**
- 10.1 The School of Architecture at the University of Sheffield is well-established, celebrating its centenary this year. It has an excellent track record in research and teaching and

a laudable ethos of commitment to the community and social issues. The Board applauds its achievements to date and hopes that the recommendations and advice in this report will assist the School in maximising its potential, particularly as it enters a phase of change and new leadership.

10.2 The School's strengths include:

- The high calibre of staff and students attracted to the School.
- The ethos of the School and its focus on environmental and social responsibility.
- The high quality of both research and teaching, including educational research.
- The range of dual-qualification programmes.
- A lively student body and society (SUAS).
- The self-critical and self-questioning atmosphere, encouraging engagement from students in debate on architecture and education.
- The Live projects at Part Two, which were instrumental in attracting students to the Part Two and inspiring to Part One students.
- A track record of high quality student written work.
- Support from senior university management.
- The School's involvement with the local community.
- The School's willingness to engage with the changing nature of architectural practice.

10.3 Recommendations

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.

10.3.1 The Board recognises that the Part Three co-ordinator is relatively new in post and welcomes his plans for the enhancement and improvement of the Part Three programme and examination. The Board recommends that the School look to the innovative and progressive way in which Management, Practice and Law is covered in Part Two, and how this might usefully be applied to Part Three.

10.3.2 Although confident that all criteria were covered and met in the Part Three examination, the Board recommends that the School complete the formal mapping of the programme against the criteria.

10.3.3 At present all management, practice and law is supported by a 0.5 appointment. The Board advises the School to review whether there is adequate support for students on the Part Three programme.

10.3.4 The Board recommends that the School implements its proposals for dealing with the integration of technology and keeps them under review, looking to consider the interface of technology with the design project. The Board notes the appointment of new staff in these areas.

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 research that is integrated into the validated programmes is very good. The Board advises that the School look to increase the level to which research informs the programmes yet further.
- 10.4.3 Although there is a lively and critical approach towards design, the Board strongly advises that the School places greater emphasis on the quality and methodologies of architectural representation.
- 10.4.4 While welcoming the changes to the External Examining process already reported, the Board advises the School regularly to review the number of external examiners, ensuring the ratio remains commensurate with the size of cohorts.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

- 11.1 The last RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Sheffield took place on 07/08 October 2004. The Board recommended that Continued Validation be granted to:

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

Part One: Master of Engineering in Structural Engineering & Architecture (four years full-time)

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

Part Two: Master of Architecture in Architecture (formerly Diploma in Architecture) (two years full-time or three years part-time: two years combined practice and university based followed by one year full-time)

Part Two: Master of Architecture in Architecture and Town & Regional Planning (two years full-time)

Part Three: Certificate in Professional Practice (one year part-time)

The summary of the 2004 Visiting Board report and its recommendations and advice can be found in section 15 of this report.

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 Board considered that the Critical Self-Appraisal was very good and an exemplar of best practice. The document enabled the Board to appreciate and engage with the School's educational vision from the outset.

The visit took place at a time of great change for the School in terms of leadership and physical resources. A new Director of Architecture had recently been appointed; the present Head of School's term of office is due to end in 2009 and other members of staff are approaching retirement. Major faculty restructuring has recently been completed and the School is about to move to a temporary home during the refurbishment of the Arts Tower. It is anticipated that it will spend about two years in its temporary home.

The University is committed to replacing senior staff in a considered manner. The utmost confidence is expressed in the present senior team and neither School nor institution sees the need for undue haste in filling critical posts. The Board learned from discussions with senior university management, architecture staff and students that these developments are being greeted positively and constructively.

The University recognises and appreciates the intellectual depth of the School. Its educational culture and ethos are shared across all design and research groups. One of the characteristics of the new Faculty is that many subjects have both a professional theme and an intellectual theme. The new structure should make inter-faculty co-operation better but the University recognises that this will always be challenging. The value of interdisciplinarity is recognised, as is the motivation for the dual degrees. Support for the dual programmes is expressed by institution, architecture staff and the students, despite the challenges both to student and to administration. The changes to financial planning following faculty restructuring should also facilitate teaching and research linkages which have not previously been exploited to the extent that they might be.

13.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The Board thanks the staff and students for their kindness and hospitality during the visit. The documentary submission was exemplary, being comprehensive and readable, both in printed and electronic form. The Board is particularly grateful to the institutional facilitator, Simon Beecroft, for his assistance during the visit. All other arrangements worked very well.

The portfolios were clearly marked and easily navigable. The Board recognises the amount of work involved in gathering and collating so many full academic portfolios and ensuring that they were clearly identified. Staff and students engaged positively and enthusiastically with the Board, making the two days in the School very enjoyable for the visitors.

13.2.1 Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit

Part One BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape.

Year 1: 3 lowest, 1 middle, 1 high from a cohort of 8

Year 2: 3 lowest, 1 middle, 1 high from a cohort of 5

Year 3: All portfolios from a cohort of 6 were provided [

Part One BA (Hons) Architecture

Year 1; 3 lowest pass portfolios, plus 1 medium and 1 high pass. from a cohort of 75

Year 2: 3 lowest pass portfolios plus 1 middle and 1 high from a cohort of 89

Year 3: minimum of 3 lowest, 2 middle, 2 high from a cohort of 59.

Part One MEng (Hons) Architecture & Structural Engineering

Year 1: 3 lowest, 1 middle, 1 high from a cohort of 29

Year 2: 3 lowest, 1 middle, 1 high from a cohort of 16

Year 3: 3 lowest, 1 middle, 1 high from a cohort of 26

Year 4 3 lowest, 1 middle, 1 high from a cohort of 12].

Part Two MArch in Architecture

1st year: 3 lowest from a range of studios.

2nd year: Lowest from each studio (9) plus 2 middle from any studio, 2 high from any studio.

Part Two: M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning

1st year: a cohort of only 1 student whose portfolio was present

2nd year: a cohort of only 1 student whose portfolio was present and who has now successfully passed the course.

Part Three Certificate in Professional Practice

3 lowest, 2 middle, 2 high from 27 successful candidates.

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

The School has made serious and significant progress towards addressing the recommendations of the 2004 Visiting Board. The present Board considered that there were outstanding issues with workload, an over-emphasis on analysis and some aspects of the Part Three programme. These are discussed later in this report.

The present Board notes the comments of the 2004 Visiting Board regarding the student contract at Part Two: “The Board also believes that a more formal application of the "contract" with final year Part Two students regarding areas of the Validation Criteria to be demonstrated through the final design projects would also help in this respect.” [in supporting students in integrating technology with design and help ensure that technological issues better informed design outcomes]. The present Board recognises how the contract has become more significant particularly as students go from one studio to the other. The Board would welcome further development of the

learning contract and that this is supported by more directed feedback.

The Board endorses the School’s efforts to minimise and reduce the size of the reports in the M.Arch which had assumed a length and significance not originally intended. This should allow students to focus on the design development of the main project work.

There are clear systems in place for the consideration of External Examiners’ reports and feedback. The School constantly reviews its programmes and teaching methods and encourages critical discourse with students about their education. The Board noted and the Examiners confirmed that the School welcomes comment and criticism and takes constructive feedback seriously.

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

Following the recent restructuring, the School of Architecture, Department of Landscape, and Department of Town and Regional Planning form part of the Faculty of Social Sciences. This provides great scope for cross-collaboration and it is the intention that the new structure will facilitate this. This is applauded and supported by the present Visiting Board. In particular, the Board believes that the School could take more advantage of the opportunities created by this to inform and influence the technical aspects of the Part One and Part Two programmes. Architecture’s connections extend across faculties as the M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering and Architecture (dually validated by the RIBA, Institute of Structural Engineers and Institute of Civil Engineers) is run jointly by the Department of Civil and Structural Engineering and Architecture. Each dual programme has a

‘parent’ department which takes responsibility for integration and for producing and circulating documentation. The Architecture and Landscape course is hosted by Architecture, and has applied for accreditation by the Landscape Institute when taken in conjunction with the Master of Landscape Architecture programme (run by the Department of Landscape).

The School is confident that the dual programmes are sustainable in the long term. The M.Eng Engineering recruits very healthily. The BA (Hons) Landscape and Architecture is sustainable in terms of resources, although student numbers could be higher. The School may review its marketing of this programme in order to increase numbers.

The Graduate School is also growing and there is a large number of PhDs. It currently offers one-year specialist masters in urban design and architectural design, which are very popular. Any anticipated growth in the School will be at postgraduate level. Looking to the future, the School would like to build more connections with the City of Sheffield, in which it already plays a positive role through the live projects.

14.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, Part One, BA (Hons) Architecture, Part One, M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering and Architecture, Part One

14.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The Board considered that course objectives for all Part One programmes were clear, valid and demonstrably being achieved.

14.5.2 Course design and content

The Board recognises the ambition of the BA (Hons) Architecture and the importance of refining it through discussion at staff and student level. The Board recognises the intellectual flexibility of the programme and the School’s intention that it provide an education and not training.

Students are enrolled in the individual programmes from the outset. There may be some movement between validated programmes or to other programmes; this is considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Board noted that the M.Eng is one of the most popular routes (of the Engineering options). The success of this has led to the introduction of other dual programmes which are not dually accredited. The School reported that the impact of the engineers was considerable, creating students who are not constrained by professional boundaries. The School of Architecture has recognised the strength of the approach of introducing M.Eng students to architecture in their second year, having covered chiefly maths and physics in their first year. They believe that this is achieved without diluting the quality of the architecture work. M.Eng students accompany first year architecture students on a field trip which helps them engage with each other at an early stage.

The School has made some structural changes in order to facilitate integration. The School wants to develop a strong studio centre and sense of debate and sharing of ideas. Peer-led reviews give students confidence. Studio groups normally comprise students from all validated programmes. Second year students also undertake a week-

long project with engineering, which the School believes works well as an academic and social exercise.

The Board noted the difficulty of conflicting timetables in the dually-accredited programmes. The Board appreciated that the students appeared to be able to cope with the workload but would counsel the School that this needs to be constantly monitored.

The plethora of research groups within Architecture and Civil and Structural Engineering also provides expertise for the architecture programmes.

14.5.3 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 confirms that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, BA (Hons) Architecture, M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering and Architecture, Part One met all Part One criteria in the area of Design.

Students undertake a variety of projects, which tend to be of the same scale and complexity. The Board considered that more time could be afforded for design development. The Board also considered that presentation could be more developed and look more sophisticated. The Board welcomes the fact that the School has a broad idea of what constitutes design. The Board believes that the School should build on this and look for higher degrees of interrogation and complexity of design solutions. Greater emphasis on more thorough presentation of design propositions could facilitate this.

The Board welcomes the fact that the School has established a broad discussion on what constitutes design, namely that it is more than mere presentation of an artefact. The Board praised the intellectual ambition of students' thinking but did not believe that this was fully realised in their work. The Board believes that the School could now augment its position by encouraging more ambitious, sophisticated and innovative formal invention. The Board considered that more time could be afforded for design, allowing the opportunity for students to experiment with new design techniques and theories.

Students on the Architecture and Landscape programme demonstrated the same level of design integration as those taking BA (Hons) Architecture. There was less integration in the work of students on the M.Eng programme.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, BA (Hons) Architecture, M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering and Architecture, Part One met all Part One criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

The Board considered that the lecture series was very strong, delivering a great deal of material and of good quality. The Board considered that some first and second year Part One technology work was as good as that at Part Two in terms of content and application.

Integration at present is limited and the Board encourages students to attempt this in greater depth. In particular, the practical application and understanding of current trends in sustainable design could be improved. The School

recognises the challenge of integration of technology. The Board noted that two new tutors have been appointed to the degree course who will help with the integration of design and technology. The School is trying to balance synthesis with a university module system which tends to treat subjects separately.

The Board recommends that the School implements its proposals for dealing with the integration of technology with design, and in so doing, look to increase the proportion of time devoted to resolving their interrelationship. The Board notes the appointment of new staff in these areas.

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, BA (Hons) Architecture, M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering and Architecture, Part One met all Part One criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

This is supported by an excellent lecture series. Students have the opportunity to engage with symposia and to engage with staff. The School has a clear ethos about the delivery of this area of the curriculum. The Board applauds the involvement of senior professors in first year lectures.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, BA (Hons) Architecture, M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering and Architecture,

Part One met all Part One criteria in the area of Communication.

Although all criteria were met, the Board considered that the quality and range of representation techniques in some cases to be limited. The Board therefore encourages the school to invest more time in supporting advanced communication skills. There was not as much model-making or photography as expected. The Board recognises the limited opportunities to make models, due to workshop restrictions. However, the Board would encourage more use of models as a means of communication, utilising greater diversity and ambition than found at present.

The Board was pleased to see the extent of internal and external exploration and consideration of context.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture & Landscape, BA (Hons) Architecture, M.Eng (Hons) Structural Engineering and Architecture, Part One met all Part One criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law.

The School implemented a new course in 2004 in response to the 2004 Visiting board report. This has established itself well. There is comprehensive coverage of this at Year 3, to the point of anticipating the requirements at Part Two. The Board considered that this was thoroughly and commendably covered.

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

This is primarily delivered through the Management, Practice and Law module in Year 3. Third years are given a presentation on the year out.

During the year out students must register with the University, and liaise with the Professional Studies Adviser over their PEDR. Students considered that they were well prepared for their year out and were appropriately supported by the School.

- 14.5.4 Progression within the course
Progression in all Part One programmes is excellent.
Retention and progression is good

- 14.5.5 Assessment:
A range of assessment methods is employed appropriate to the work being considered. The School appears to have a considerable amount of autonomy with regard to marking. The Board received different views on feedback from the students. The first year seemed particularly successful and was appreciated by students. In later years there was some evidence that further structured feedback would be appreciated.

Although there is a definite range of abilities, the Board identified some bunching of marks which seemed to arise from the procedures for collecting and collating marks. In the Board's opinion this does not encourage excellence and provides no incentive for aiming for a first class degree.

- 14.5.6 Admissions and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course
At present the majority of applicants are 'A' level students. The standard offer is AAA for the BA (Hons)

Architecture programme, AAB for the M.Eng and AAA typically for Architecture and Landscape. Admissions for the M.Eng are handled by Civil & Structural Engineering and those for the Architecture and Landscape course in close collaboration with the Department of Landscape. The selection process is currently undergoing major review in order to refine selection criteria and to increase diversity of intake. Henceforth there will be a portfolio component. Although AAA will still be the standard offer, lower offers may be made on a discretionary basis for students presenting outstanding portfolios. There is appropriate provision for students with non-UK qualifications and mature students.

Direct entry at later stages of the programme very rarely happens but appropriate APEL procedures are in place for such eventualities.

The undergraduate cohort size is about the optimum size that suits the School and its style of teaching. The School has decided that from 2008 the BA intake target is 75, M.Eng Structural Engineering and Architecture is 20, BA Architecture and Landscape 10. It is also considering reducing numbers at Part One and increasing them at Part Two.

14.6 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the MArch in Architecture, Part Two and M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning, Part Two.

- 14.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The course objectives were clear and valid and demonstrably being achieved.

14.6.2 Course design and content

The course design is good, benefiting from a dynamic course structure. The academic year begins with the live project, in which students (both fifth and sixth year) undertake group work with real clients. This remains one of the principal features of the course and provides the main vehicle for driving the School's vision to broaden architectural knowledge in education. It is immensely popular with students and attracts students to Sheffield for the Part Two.

Following the live project, the programme assumes a vertical unit structure. Eight different units are currently available, offering diversity of studios and choice in the live projects. There is ample opportunity for integration between the years as fifth and sixth year students work together and must change studio between years five and six. Students are motivated and proactive, making innovative use of blogs and publishing material in their own right. As mentioned earlier, the School introduced student contracts and student contract meetings at the time of the last Visiting Board to ensure criteria were covered and met. Students are required to write an MArch dissertation, started in the fifth year and submitted in the sixth year.

The same procedure applies to choosing both live projects studios. All studios are presented and students vote for their first three choices. Efforts are made to accommodate students' first choice, with a view to a balance of gender, fifth and sixth years and ability. The School believes that 60-70% of students get first choice, 30% their second choice and a few their third choice. It is possible to change live project, but in practice few do. This is decided on a case-by-case basis.

14.6.3 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 confirms that all graduates of the MArch in Architecture and M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning met all Part Two criteria in the area of Design.

The Board considered that more time could be afforded for design, allowing the opportunity for students to hone skills and integrate ideas generated in other modules. The Board advises the school to consider the prolonged pause between the design work in the fifth and sixth years, which it believes may prevent creative momentum. The Board advises the School to monitor workload progression, particularly on text-based work in the final year in order to release time for design work. In particular, The Board advises the school to monitor the balance between the explicit demonstration of meeting required criteria through text-based analysis and their implicit satisfaction through design visualisation.

As a 'real world' endeavour, the Board recognises the school's strategy to assign a variety of modules to the live projects ensuring that different approaches are applied to work in the fifth and sixth year. As a group exercise, the Board welcomes the collaborative experience the live projects offer, and encourage the School to ensure individuals are fully tested and assessed across all criteria. The Board encourages the School to review the diversity and polemic of the units on a continuous basis.

In general, the Board felt that too much time is spent on project analysis at the expense of design development; more emphasis on the latter would allow greater exploration in terms of presentation and architectural resolution and the consequent development of particular design skills not fully being tested at present. A greater proportion of time spent on design and representational development should also enable more evident integration of technical and contextual aspects, which the Board felt were insufficiently explored in built form in some cases. The Board would urge staff to investigate ways of rebalancing the time allocated to the various stages of design projects to enable students to reach their full design potential.

- *Technology & Environment*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the MArch in Architecture and M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning met all Part Two criteria in the area of Technology and Environment.

While progress has been made in this area the Board believes that there is still room for improvement. Technology at Part Two is supported by a refresher lecture course for students returning from the Year Out. The focus of this at Part Two to date has been the sixth year technical report. This is currently being restructured. New staff appointments have been made which should enable the School to focus on the connection between technical understanding and design work.

The Board would expect more innovation at Part Two. The Board recognises the School's awareness of this as a

work in progress and welcomes the steps the School is taking to address it. The Board concurs with the view of one of the M.Arch External Examiners that the 'the resolutions would have been more successful if the students had a better understanding of how to deal with structure and environmental design.'

- *Cultural Context*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the MArch in Architecture and M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning met all Part Two criteria in the area of Cultural Context.

The Board noted that the unit system offered students a broad range of choices that pinpointed different cultural contexts. This aspect of the course is supported by additional lectures and the 10,000 word dissertation that all students must submit. The diverse and accomplished writing and dissertations and presentation are strengths of the course.

Crucial contribution to grounding the Schools' ethos of social responsibility and research excellence is made through module-based teaching as well as the organisation of annual theory symposia. "field" (their peer reviewed eJournal) is as an excellent way to expose Part Two students to good architectural writing which both feeds into the dissertation and the design report.

- *Communication*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the MArch in Architecture and M.Arch in Architecture and Town and

Regional Planning met all Part Two criteria in the area of Communication.

The Board considered that students could afford to be more radical and ambitious in their approach to visualisation, exploring representation as a design tool and generator of ideas. In this regard, The Board would expect to see greater exposure to and engagement with contemporary techniques. The Board would like to see greater diversity, experimentation and ambition in this area.

The Board was impressed with the documentation and dissemination of the live projects. The dissertations in particular were of exceptionally high quality. Students are very articulate and engaged thoroughly with the Board in the student meeting, displaying great verbal confidence. The Board considered that the expectation that they reflect rigorously on their own education contributes to this fluency and articulacy.

- *Management Practice & Law*

On the basis of the sample of portfolios provided, the Board confirms that all graduates of the M.Arch in Architecture and M.Arch in Architecture and Town and Regional Planning met all Part Two criteria in the area of Design.

At Part Two coverage of these criteria is innovative and impressive. It is intended to be a foundation for Part Three and the School wishes to make it engaging and relevant to the students' interests. A new element of group work has recently been introduced, meaning that 80% of the course is individual work and the remaining 20% consists of group work. A considerable amount is

anticipated at Part One. This addresses the changing nature of architecture in practice. Coverage is succinct and projected at the right level. It is tied to the ethos of social engagement. The course considers architects as agents of change and focusses on leadership and entrepreneurship. Assessment is closely linked to the live projects.

14.5.4 Progression within the course
Progression and completion rates are good.

14.6.4 Assessment:
In a system in which marks from both years are aggregated to determine the final award, the Board is aware of the advantages of recognising holistic achievement but also the dangers of adopting too cautious an attitude towards risk and ambition, and too narrow a range of marks. The Board noted that it was necessary to achieve an above 70 average in year 5 in order to achieve a high award in year 6. The Board were concerned that the system may prejudice the direction of the students work in year five and would suggest that the School monitors this.

Although students discuss progress at the contract meetings and what needs to be addressed in the sixth year, they commented that they would prefer more feedback. Some believed that what is perceived as a lack of feedback may affect their final marks.

The Board would encourage the School to use the full range of marks, particularly in the fifth year as a means of motivation.

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

The normal requirement is a 2.1 or above from a recognised Part 1 course. Sheffield graduates with a 2.2 are interviewed and may be accepted. Applicants from other schools are interviewed. Prospective students must have obtained Part One either from a prescribed programme or the Prescribed Examination to be eligible. The target intake for M.Arch is a maximum of 60. Relatively few elect to study the joint programme.

13.7 Certificate in Professional Practice, Part Three

The Part Three programme is run in conjunction with the University of Nottingham and De Montfort University. The formal element of the programme is delivered in three 3-day sessions, for one of which each university has individual responsibility. Broadly speaking DMU handles management, Sheffield contractual elements and Nottingham legal matters. All three institutions are involved in writing the examination paper.

The Part Three remains in a period of change. The programme leader is relatively new in post and is developing the delivery and improving systems. In particular he wishes to provide better contact with candidates and feedback on their professional experience. A contract workshop has been introduced as part of the institutions' wish to reflect what is happening in practice. The length of assignments has been tightened up and guidance to examiners has been reviewed. The case study is considered a strength.

There are no plans to conduct office visits as students are spread too widely. Feedback is received from both candidates and practices and a formal questionnaire is about to be introduced. From this year the School will

provide feedback to successful and unsuccessful candidates.

The School might wish to consider clarifying or reviewing the arrangements with the two other schools in order to ensure consistent delivery, coverage and balance in the assessments in response to the external examiner's recommendations about the structuring of the professional interview.

The Board advises the School to review whether there is adequate support for students on the programme. The Board encourages the School to review the Part Three programme with a view to making it as distinctive as the Management, Practice and Law elements of Parts One and Two and to embed it into the activities and ethos of the School.

The Board noted that as yet there was no formal documentation demonstrating how the certificate mapped onto the Part Three criteria. However, the Board was confident that the criteria were met and were further reassured through discussion with the External Examiner.

The Board noted the ongoing response to the recommendations of the 2004 Visiting Board. The 2004 Visiting Board recommended that the School ensure "that the Part Three programme is more thoroughly embedded within the School and engages fully with the University's QA procedures to ensure that the positive benefits of annual monitoring clearly seen in the Part One and Part Two course are also made available to the Certificate in Professional Practice." The Board recommends that the School clarify the way in the mapping of the course onto the criteria to assist staff teaching on the programme,

students on the programme and the professional examiners. The Board would encourage the production of clearer and updated documentation to students and the adoption of systems to ensure that it is kept up to date.

At present there are also no formal links between management, practice and law at Part Two and the Part Three programme. The Board encourages the School to review whether this could be to the mutual advantage of both programmes.

There are on average 20-25 candidates and a 75% pass rate.

13.6 **External examining arrangements**

The School has recruited a strong and experienced team of External Examiners who expressed great support for the aspirations and achievements of the School. Systems for feedback to the externals from the School and institution are good. The Board commends the proposal to have independent Part One and Part Two external examiners, to spread the load more evenly.

The Externals reported that relationship between examiners and School is open and frank. The School is open to comments, engages in critical debate, welcomes challenge and is assiduous in responding. It undertakes constant critical review of its activities.

The Externals believed that the key to maintaining the strength of the School was to continue to appoint strong students and staff. They expressed confidence in the current Director of Architecture, the strength of the present team and that the School would make appropriate appointments at senior level.

The dual programmes were supported by the Examiners. The Architecture external examiners do not do not see the Landscape or Engineering components of students' work as they are not validated by the RIBA. These elements are considered by Externals in the respective specialist fields. The Externals considered that these programmes structurally could be more integrated, as could the students' work but noted that the School recognised this.

The School had taken the externals' comments about the integration of technology seriously and Examiners reported a steady rise in achievement. However, there was still room for improvement as regards integration, particularly given the School's research strengths and its access to experts.

The Externals fully supported the Live Project and considered that it was a great vehicle for the School, having only ever heard positive comments about it. The Externals had advised the School to encourage students to reduce the size of reports in the major project at Year 6 and reported that the situation had improved. If anything, they felt that the programme might still benefit from more edginess.

The Part Three External Examiner was confident that all criteria are met, that thresholds were appropriate and that procedures were improving. At present the Sheffield external has no links with either DMU or Nottingham about the programme. The present Professional Studies adviser is keen to improve links between the institutions.

While welcoming the changes to the External Examining process already reported, the Board advises the School

regularly to review the number of externals to ensure that this remains commensurate with the size of cohorts.

13.7 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

Students reported that they felt well supported during the Year Out. Part One year out students attend two recall days at the University, one just before the Christmas vacation and one at the end of the year. The School does not visit year out students in practice and there are no plans to do so. The School is reviewing the timing of the recall days and would like to encourage practices and office mentors to become involved. This year students gave presentations about their year in practice

14.7 **Students;**

The Board was pleased to meet and engage in conversation with a representative selection of the student body. They were supportive of the school, the staff and the ethos of the programmes. Students were very self-aware and all criticism of the programmes was made in the spirit of mature and considered discussion. Students voiced awareness of the next series of critical appointments for the School, namely the Director of Architecture and Head of School. Students have a keen interest in the present and future well-being of the School and enjoy an open relationship with the staff.

The students are looking forward enthusiastically to the possibilities offered by the temporary move, such as the proximity to the Department of Landscape, and the eventual return of Architecture to the Arts Tower.

Amongst the School's strengths identified by the students were:

- The good impression gained by prospective students on open days. The ethos, atmosphere, integration between the years were attractive.
- The Live Projects the hands-on experience they provided. These play a significant part in attracting people to Part Two. The excitement of the Live Project also infects Part One students.
- The freedom students are afforded which extends to their attitude and approach as well as their project work. There is no directed way of having to produce process or product, particularly at Part Two.
- The diversity of experience and approach of the staff
- The teaching of how to question.
- The approachability of the staff.
- Students on the dually-accredited programme felt that the balance between engineering and architecture was good, although integration could be difficult and challenging.
- The Part Three offered independence and freedom.
- The city of Sheffield is attractive to students.
- Students were optimistic about the temporary move and eventual return but anxious that the specific needs of architecture were recognised. They expressed support for the present staff and, although appreciative of what the outgoing Director of Architecture had done for the School, they were excited about the future. Their opinions on the future of the School were welcomed by staff.

Improvements that the students would welcome included the following:

- At Part One third year level, more formal feedback earlier in the year would be welcomed.

- Students believed that graphical content could be better and exposure to the work of other schools would enhance this. Students do feel that they have enough time to design, and that any time management problems may depend on the individual. It can be difficult to tie the threads of research and design together at the end.
- Students would like the School to be a think-tank for ideas
- More interaction between years, with Sheffield Hallam University and the City of Sheffield would be valued.
- More engagement with the School's research activities would be welcomed.
- Students felt that there was sometimes a tendency to be 'safe' and displayed an appetite for something a little more 'edgy'.

The Board found the students' studio blogs very interesting as they provided supplementary information and new material that was not available in the programme documentation. The Board suggests that the printed course documentation might need updating in order to reflect this. The current Staff:Student ratio is 1:15 which is very healthy.

13.9 **Staff;**

The Board was pleased to meet a large number of the academic staff and would also have appreciated the opportunity to meet support staff. The diversity of the staff body is excellent. They appear to form a cohesive group and their commitment to pursuing the agenda of the School is outstanding. Staff are all highly qualified in their individual fields and bring a tremendous diversity of skills and experience to the School.

Although the SSR is healthy, as staff must spend 50% of their time on research, by some reckonings it can increase to 1:20. The School considers that an increase in numbers

of support staff would help to relieve the pressure on academic staff. At present there are the equivalent of 5 / 6 staff on teaching-only contracts, which can impose a heavier burden on full-time staff. Putting fractional staff on part-time contracts will enable the school to use them for other activities.

The Board was pleased to note the existing direct links between research and the undergraduate school, exemplified by the fact that professors lecture in the lower part of the school. Some are also authors of coursebooks used by the school, creating a direct link between teaching and publications. The Board noted that some staff were cognizant of the fact that some high-end research did not reach the validated programmes of the School. The School hopes that professional researchers will be able to integrate with the courses but there remain gaps which will have to be filled by practitioners. The Board welcomes the contribution of part-time staff from local practice in studio teaching.

The School has an established international agenda, through ERASMUS exchanges, special relationships with schools of architecture, the number of overseas students on taught masters and PhDs, the international body of staff and their involvement in overseas activities. However it believes that it could do more to establish itself on the international stage.

13.10 **Research;**

The Board recognises the School's excellence in research in a wide range of disciplines, as evidenced by, among other things, its performance in the Research Assessment Exercise over the last decade. The proximity of SaBRE (a joint venture between the University of Sheffield and the

Building Research Establishment) brings together expertise on the built environment from both the School of Architecture and the Department of Civil and Structural Engineering. Landscape also has an active research culture.

The School believes that research-led teaching is natural as they are teaching in an environment of enquiry and instilling this philosophy in the students. As professors lecture throughout the school from the first year there is a direct link between research and teaching. The relationship between teaching and learning is part of research project. Learning environment research received a Knowledge Transfer grant from the university. Students are articulate and self-critical and staff recognise the importance of presenting them with intellectual challenge. The School believes that the influence of research on students is not necessarily to be manifested in university work but often its impact is demonstrated later in their professional careers.

The Graduate School is large, presently comprising 100 graduates and 54 PhD students. PhD students sometimes act as teaching assistants. The Board and School recognise that there is huge potential crossover between the postgraduate school and Part Two though shared modules. The M.Arch dissertations links with some PhD theses.

The School has existing strengths in Building Science and wishes to improve the connection with design. Staff reported that filtering building science into the M.Arch has presented a challenge. An architect from practice will be involved at specific times in order to co-ordinate this and to ensure that it is introduced at the optimum time. The

School is also considering the best way to integrate technologies and the humanities. It is intended that mixed interview panels will be involved when appointments are made. The School is also discussing how building science might inform a new course on urban sustainability, which students might choose as a specialism. From next year staff will lecture about their research projects and external experts will make up the basic gaps

The School is confident that the senior level posts will be filled appropriately in order to maintain and develop the research activity at the school.

The School is home to the Bureau of Design and Research, which is a research consultancy which also undertakes design. It is a self-sustaining facility and the presence of a working practice within the School is of benefit. The Bureau also employs students and a percentage of its income is paid to the University. The School also houses the Building Energy Analysis Unit and the Research Information Centre, which keeps copies of PhD and taught masters theses.

13.11 **Equal Opportunities**

The Board endorses the staff's recognition of the need to look at ways to attract a more diverse student body. The School recognises that this would complement its social agenda. The changes to the admissions procedures are intended to broaden student intake.

13.12 **Resourcing and facilities**

The School enjoys significant control over its own budget. The Faculty restructuring and accompanying financial reorganisation should facilitate research and teaching collaboration.

The School believes that the temporary move, during the refurbishment of the Arts Tower, presents a great opportunity if handled appropriately. One positive aspect is the proximity to the Landscape Department. The temporary space provision is better than expected but there are still concerns that it is insufficient. Students will receive a presentation about the new building and there is an undertaking to minimise disruption. The School hopes it will be able to create the atmosphere of an Art School which will be retained on its return to the Arts Tower. Staff would welcome being consulted about the refurbishment of the Arts Tower.

Library

The Library is excellent and the Board was very impressed by the Faculty librarian. The majority of the architecture collection is housed in the main University Library, Western Bank. The present collection in the Architecture reading room is 9000 volumes with a further 17000 in the stacks. The library also subscribes to a wide range of periodicals and databases. A small collection comprising multimedia copies of core material for lecture courses and other high-demand items is housed in the Information Commons. Students also have access to St George's Library which serves the Faculty of Engineering and School of Management. Students may also use the Sheffield Libraries and Information Services and the library of Sheffield Hallam University, which houses a comprehensive collection on the history of art and design. There is a monthly email to all students concerning recent acquisitions.

The library budget is substantial. The Faculty librarian liaises directly with the Departmental Library Co-

ordinator. The building also provides IT clusters for undergraduates and postgraduates. Opening hours vary between libraries, but are generous.

Laboratories and workshops

The Board noted the dedication and commitment of the technicians to accommodating the students' needs.

The Board noted that the workshop is more of a model workshop. It is well-used. The Board was not made aware of what the future of the current facility would be but the Board hopes it could be expanded and provide more up-to-date equipment which would enable students to produce more ambitious models. The Board welcomes the School's interest in acquiring new modelling technologies. This would potentially affect and influence design techniques, which is crucial for students' continuing employability.

Equipment available to students included an artificial sky, acoustic measuring equipment and a thermal imaging camera. Students also have access to photography facilities, although there was surprisingly little evidence of this in the portfolios.

The Board considered that the School could make more use of the concrete laboratories and other facilities.

Studios

There is a good studio atmosphere and healthy studio culture. The studios were described as 'scruffy but happy'. The School wishes to be consulted about the refurbishment of the Arts Tower to ensure that it is appropriately accommodated upon its return.

- *IT*
Although the majority of students buy their own laptops, there is University provision within the Arts Tower, some of which is dedicated Architecture equipment. Students appeared to be satisfied with IT provision, including printers.

Students are taught Vectorworks and Sketchup and can request tutorials in other design software. The Board noted a lack of high-end CAD work, such as environmental modelling. The Board considered that IT provision needs more vision and that there should be more debate about the type of programme that is needed.

- Compliance with DDA
The Board presumes that the refurbishment will comply with SENDA requirements.

14. Documentation

Prior to the visit the School submitted the complete set of documentation as required under the procedures. Complementary and further information was made available in the base room.

15. Summary and recommendations of 2004 Visiting Board report

- 15.1 The School of Architecture is one of three Departments in the University of Sheffield Faculty of Architectural Studies. The Faculty has a very strong research base with all three departments scoring '5' in the last Research Assessment Exercise. The Faculty is home to the largest

range of dually accredited professional degrees in the built environment field.

- 15.2 The Board found the School to be a lively vibrant community with an active studio culture. The School's concerns for social responsibility and its commitment to the social and cultural context of architecture inform the full range of its teaching and research activities. The School has been extremely active in developing innovative teaching and assessment methods. The School's exceptionally active student society (SUAS) and a series of whole school events contribute to the excellent atmosphere and high morale in the School.

- 15.4 Strengths of the School included:
 - the commitment of a cohesive and energetic staff team including both full-time academics and practitioners;
 - the very well-qualified students recruited by the School to all of its programmes;
 - the Live Projects in each year of the Part Two programme and the opportunity provided by them for engagement with real clients;
 - the non-parochial focus within the School on the city and the region and the field trips which supported this focus;
 - the strong research base within the School which had a real and positive impact on teaching;
 - the School's engagement with educational research and the innovative teaching, learning and assessment methodologies that have emerged from this;
 - the research methods course in the first year of the Part Two course, taken alongside research students;
 - the development of the Bureau of Design Research, complementing the more academic research elsewhere in the School;

- the strong support received by the School from the University;
- the contribution made to student life by SUAS - an extremely active student society.

15.4 **Recommendations (2004)**

The Board has made the following recommendations to the School. 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 the recommendation, or provide the RIBA with a clear rationale for not doing so, may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

- 15.4.1 The School should investigate the workload of students on the dually accredited first degree courses. The aim should be to identify overlaps in content which can be removed or introducing projects which span the two disciplines or other mechanisms by which the overall workload could be brought closer to that of students on the mainstream architecture courses. The specific issue of particular modules attracting 30 credits on the BA Architectural Studies degree, but 20 on the dual qualifications and the linked differential assessment above the threshold should be addressed.
- 15.4.2 The Board did not always find the excellent research and analysis undertaken by students in their Part Two design projects to be fully exploited in their final design work. The Board recommends that the School investigate ways in which students can be better supported in their final

design projects to more thoroughly explore the process of moving from concept through to final building.

- 15.4.3 The Board commended the School in adopting the use of a "contract" with final year Part Two students regarding areas of the Validation Criteria to be demonstrated through the final design projects. The Board recommended that this process be formalised (perhaps in the form of a learning contract) and that the "contract" be formally revisited during the year.
- 15.4.4 The Board recommends that the School revisit its approach to the assessment of Management, Practice & Law in the Part Two. The Board applauds the approach, of linking this to the major design project, but recognises that it is fundamentally more difficult via such a route to demonstrate that criteria are being met. The Board also found that, although minimum pass standards were being set appropriately, there was evidence of some inconsistency of marking in this area.
- 15.4.5 The School should ensure that the Part Three programme is more thoroughly embedded within the School and engages fully with the University's QA procedures to ensure that the positive benefits of annual monitoring clearly seen in the Part One and Part Two course are also made available to the Certificate in Professional Practice.
- 15.5 **Advice (2004)**
The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the Institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course developments and/or raise standards:

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- 15.5.1 The School might reconsider the timing of the specialist technology input provided to both Part One and Part Two students in their final design projects. The Board believes that scheduling some of this support at an earlier stage in the project might better support students in integrating technology with design and help ensure that technological issues better informed design outcomes.
- 15.5.2 The School should investigate the support it offers year-out students with a view to formalising and enhancing this and fully implementing the structures already in place which incorporate provision for work-based learning.
- 15.5.3 The Board found that low-pass portfolios especially at Part Two level contained an excess of high quality presentation of analysis and research materials sometimes to the detriment of a reading of the architectural resolution. The School is advised to provide better guidance to students on the selection of research and analysis materials for their portfolios
- 15.5.4 The Board found that the final design projects of the students on the MEng programme did not display the level of structural sophistication and integration that might be expected of graduates from such a dual degree. Similarly students on the BA Architecture and Landscape did not always bring their understanding of landscape issues to bear on design projects undertaken in the School of Architecture. The School is advised to investigate ways in which such students can be encouraged not to pigeonhole knowledge, but fully integrate their learning from across the whole degree.
- 15.5.5 The Board recognises that some of the students who fail to complete the Part One dual degrees transfer to the

mainstream architecture degree. Nevertheless it advises the School to continue to exercise care in admission to the dual programmes to ensure as far as is possible that students admitted have the ability and the motivation to succeed on the programmes.