

**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Revisiting  
Board to the University of  
Strathclyde**

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 28 November 2007

**Department of Architecture  
Faculty of Engineering**

**BEng (Hons) Building Design Engineering (with  
Architecture) (Part One)**

Date of Visiting Board: 10 September 2007

**NOTE: This report should be read in conjunction with the  
full Visiting Board Report of 01/02 June 2006.**

## 1. Information About the Courses

### 1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:

BEng (Hons) Building Design Engineering (with Architecture) (4 years full-time)\*

*\* this degree maps the achievement of the Part One criteria onto the first three years of the course*

This programme is being discontinued. The final cohort will graduate in 2008.

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

Department of Architecture  
University of Strathclyde  
131 Rottenrow  
Glasgow  
G4 0NG

Tel: 0141 548 3996

Fax: 0141 552 3997

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

### 1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of Strathclyde

### 1.4 Name of Head of School

Dr Michael Grant

## 2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Revisiting Board for the visit on 10 September 2007 were:

James Soane (Chair)  
Professor Don Gray  
Professor Martin Symes

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

Mr James Soane provided continuity with the Visiting Board of June 2006.

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

## 4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board to the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee.

4.1 At its meeting on the 28 November 2007 The RIBA Education Committee confirmed **continued validation** of:

**Part One:**

BEng (Hons) Building Design Engineering (with Architecture) (4 years full-time)\*

*\* this degree maps the achievement of the Part One criteria onto the first three years of the course.*

4.2 The next full Visiting Board to the University of Strathclyde should take place in 2010.

**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 course made a substantial contribution towards the achievement of the eleven 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 course listed in 4.1 was inspected during the visit and was found to meet the required standards.

**8. Conditions of Validation**

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

**9. Standard Requirements of Recognition**

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

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

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

10.1 The Revisiting Board concluded that there had been tremendous progress since the 2006 Visiting Board and

congratulates the School on phasing out the programme without detriment to the students. The integration of the students with the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme has been a positive and beneficial development in many respects, not only academic. The programme has clearly benefited from the enthusiasm and commitment of the programme leader. The 2007 Board agreed that sufficient progress had been made to enable it to recommend that the conditions placed on the programme by the 2006 Board had been met. However, there are still several areas in which the Board would like to offer advice and recommendations with a view to raising standards and optimising the students' experience during the final year of the course.

### 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. Although the course formally under discussion is closing and will not be subject to further formal validation processes, the Board's recommendations are intended not only to help ensure standards during the final years of the course but also as recommendations regarding good practice for programmes at the School in which Part One compliance is determined at the end of the third year. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

10.3.2 The Board recommends that the School continues to exercise vigilance with regard to marking at the threshold level.

10.3.3 The Board recommends that External Examiners should provide a commentary at the end of the Part One process (i.e. at the end of the third year) for all Part One programmes, to which the School should formulate a response.

### 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 2007 Board draws the School's attention to the comments of the 2006 Visiting Board concerning evidence of process in the academic portfolio.

10.4.3 The Board advises the School to encourage students on all Part One routes to explore different methods of representation.

## 11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

The last RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Strathclyde took place on 01/02 June 2006. At its meeting on 27 September 2006, the RIBA Education Committee confirmed Continued Validation of:

### Part One

BSc Architectural Studies (3 years full-time)

BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies\* (4 years full-time with a year in professional practice between years 3 and 4)

BSc Architectural Studies with European Studies (3 years full-time)

BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies with European Studies (4 years full-time with a year in professional practice between years 3 and 4)\*

*\* these degrees map the achievement of the Part One criteria onto the first three years of the course.*

**Part Two:**

PgDip/MArch in Advanced Architectural Design (9 months/12 months full-time)

*Preceded by the final (honours) year of one of the BSc (Hons) degrees or equivalent.*

And continued validation with conditions of

BEng (Hons) Building Design Engineering (with Architecture) (4 years full-time)\*

*\* these degrees map the achievement of the Part One criteria onto the first three years of the course.*

Among the School's strengths the 2006 Board noted:

- the excellent staff-student relationships;
- the real commitment by all members of the staff team to support students;
- the leadership being provided by the new Head of Department;
- the strong links with local practices and the contribution made by local practitioners to studio teaching in the Department;
- the balance in the curriculum between creative design and practical technology and "buildability";

- the excellent preparation for practice provided by the Department's courses;
- strong support from the Department's administrative, technical and library staff;
- the in-depth engagement with urban and social issues throughout the Department, but particularly in the PgDip/MArch programme.

The full report of the June 2006 full Visiting Board can be downloaded from [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com). It is strongly recommended that the present report is read in conjunction with the June 2006 Report.

The 2006 Board was concerned about the quality of design work at threshold level in the BEng (Hons) Building Design Engineering (with Architecture) Part One programme. The 2006 Board was aware that this course was closed to new recruits, but to ensure that students continued to be appropriately supported and that standards of design work are at least maintained (and ideally enhanced) in the final year in which Part One is attained, the Board recommended that the following conditions be placed on the course:

- A revisit by a sub-group, consisting of three members plus Secretary and providing continuity with the present Board should take place to coincide with the external examinations of the final cohort of students from this programme attaining Part One in summer 2007. The sub-group will ascertain whether the minimum pass standards for design work have been set at an appropriate level and that all Part One validation criteria continue to be met by graduates from the programme.

This programme is now closed to new entrants; the final cohort entered in October 2004. The students on the architecture stream will complete their Part One in summer 2007 and graduate in summer 2008.

## 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 Developments since the last visit

At the time of the last visit, the School had already decided to close the programme to new entrants. Nevertheless, the School has made adjustments to the structure and delivery of the programme to ensure that the final cohorts are integrated with students on the continuing architecture courses and are not disadvantaged. The School took steps to begin to re-integrate the students both physically and academically with the BSc (Hons) Architecture cohorts. This move proved successful and from the forthcoming academic session (2007/2008), the students will be completely integrated with the fourth year of the BSc (Hons) Architecture programme.

The objectives of the B.Eng have now been incorporated into the BSc programme specification, without losing the specialist elements. For the final year the School has tried to ensure that there is parity between briefs for students on each programme. Projects were done in the same studio as the BSc (Hons) Architecture students, presented in parallel and were assessed on the same day. This

engendered interesting and positive discussions between engineers and architects.

The School reported that students appear to be much happier and more confident following integration.

### 13.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The Board would like to thank the School for their hospitality during the visit. The documentation was sent in a timely manner. The Board found some of the documentation confusing as it was difficult to distinguish clearly which aspects of the syllabus referred directly to the programme under review. This was acknowledged by the School. It is anticipated that documentation will be clearer following integration of the programmes.

The 2007 Board could not tell from reading the material that some of the external examiners' reports did not relate to architecture, as three examiners are attached to the course, each responsible for the individual pathways. The Board also remarked that some comments appear to have been cut and pasted from earlier reports. One report was only received by the School in March 2007, several months after the assessment period to which it related.

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

The Board viewed all portfolios from the current third year (six) and all portfolios from the current fourth year (3). The Board gave particular consideration to the third year portfolios as students are assessed for Part One compliance at this point, although the Part One exemption itself is tied to the award of the Honours Degree at the end of year four.

13.3 **Commentary on the Course leading to the Part One qualification**

13.3.1 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 Revisiting Board considered that students on the programme were meeting the Part One criteria in Design on completion of the third year. However, while considering that it did merit a pass, the Revisiting Board considered that the lowest pass portfolio was overmarked.

The Board draws the School's attention to the comments of the 2006 Visiting Board: 'The Board was.....concerned about the quality of design work at the threshold level in this programme. 'There is evidence of overmarking in the dedicated BDE elements.' The 2007 Board considered that there was still evidence of this and recommends that the School continue to exercise vigilance. However, the Board also wishes to note that the better work is not overmarked.

The 2007 Board draws the School's attention to the 2006 Visiting Board's comments regarding evidence of process: "There was also less evidence of process and development of design thinking than had been the case with the work of the BSc students." (from 2006 Visiting Board Report, section 12.6.3 page 14). The 2007 Revisiting Board considered that this was still an issue, but noted that the School is running portfolio classes for all students.

The Board observed that Socrates students evidently benefit from the experience, demonstrated by a marked

increase in the level of creativity and output. However, while some students seem to thrive on the exchange programme, and there was work that exhibited flair, the Revisiting Board considered that the course was poorly represented at borderline level and endorses the School's decision to discontinue it.

Students are assessed as individuals in teamwork projects, with students assigned particular elements depending upon whether they are on the architecture or one of the engineering pathways.

*Communications*

The 2006 Visiting Board made the following comments:

"Graphic presentation skills were seen to be significantly weaker than those demonstrated by students on the BSc course and significantly fewer models were on view. The Board felt that animations/videos might have been a particularly appropriate way of representing some of the technology and environmental solutions being proposed." (2006 VB report; 12.6.3, page 15). The 2007 Revisiting Board did not feel that this had been taken on board by the School, but learned that this kind of activity takes place chiefly in the fourth year as preparation for Part Two work. The Board found no evidence of three dimensional exploration in the Building Design route. The Board advises the School to encourage students throughout all Part One routes to explore different media.

The 2007 Board also considered that the lowest pass portfolios were thin in other areas, such as planning, and that remedial action should have been taken by the School earlier.

13.4 **External examining arrangements**

Three external examiners are attached to the course to ensure that it meets each respective professional body's own criteria. The 2007 Revisiting Board was pleased to meet the external examiner responsible for the architecture students.

The 2006 Visiting Board noted:

“The Board was concerned that, although the Department maps Part One Validation Criteria as being met on completion of year three, the External Examiners for the BSc (Hons) focus primarily on fourth year work, only considering third year work in detail if a student has indicated that they will be leaving with a non-honours award. The Board thus recommends that the Department implement the proposal made by its Head that Part One External Examiners should in future sample a range of year three work to include the lowest pass portfolios with a view to confirming that the work demonstrates that all Part One Validation Criteria are being met by all students successfully completing year three.”

The 2007 Revisiting Board noted that the External Examiner views third year work, but only interviews students at the point of award in year four. The External Examiner is required to certify that work meets the Part One criteria.

The architecture External Examiner had commented in his most recent report that the decision to close the course was appropriate. However, during the present visit he commented that integration with the BSc (Hons) had improved the students work and invigorated the portfolios. He commended the School's commitment to

the students and its attempts to ensure the final cohort was well-treated. This year's portfolios were a substantial improvement on the previous year's due to this integration. Portfolios were comprehensive in all cohorts, the students were enthusiastic and the threshold standard was solid. He considered that the degree of complexity of working with other disciplines in one course should be acknowledged and rewarded accordingly. The marking bands permitted by the University are prescribed and rigorous. He also commended the Socrates students, who are faced with greater challenges of having to attain a certain standard before being permitted to participate in the programme and must adapt to different circumstances in their host country.

The 2007 Board found that minimum standard of design has not been moderated by the external examiner at the point of decision. The Board believes that minimum standards of design need to be modified at the time of decision when assessed for compliance with Part One. As good practice, the Board was surprised that the External Examiners responsible for the three strands did not consult or otherwise communicate with each other. The Board considers that the External Examiners are any school's most important asset, providing an important overview and usually have an ongoing dialogue. The present group appear not to have a forum for this. The role of the external examiners needs to be promoted and encouraged by the school in order to gain the greatest benefit from them. The Board noted that some of the Examiners' comments appeared to have been cut and pasted from an earlier report.

The Board did not feel that that external examiner was entirely clear of the critical and official sign-off of Part

One compliance at the end Three of Part One, although the actual award of Part One exemption is not made before the awarding of the Honours degree at the end of Year Four. The Board recommends that External Examiners write commentary at the end of the Part One process (i.e. at the end of the third year) for all Part One programmes, to which the School should formulate a response.

**13.5 Staffing**

Although the recommendations of the 2006 Visiting Board will be formally discussed at the mid-term monitoring visit and the next full visiting board (due in 2010), the 2007 Revisiting Board was pleased to note that the closure of this course will not have an adverse effect on present staffing levels (recommendation 10.2.2, 2006 Visiting Board Report).

**14. Documentation Provided**

Record of the documentation provided before and during the visit. Course structure diagrams for courses recommended for Validation (as provided by the school prior to the visit).

The School provided

Year Three programme handbook 2006  
External Examiners reports 2004-2006  
RIBA Questionnaire Document 2006  
BSc (Hons) Architectural Studies & Architectural Studies with European Studies Undergraduate Student Handbook 2006/2007.