

Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Visiting Board
to the University of the West of
England**

Confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee 12 October 2005

**School of Planning and Architecture
Faculty of the Built Environment**

**Part One:
BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning**

**Part Two:
Bachelor of Architecture**

Date of Visiting Board: 30 June and 1 July 2005

1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for validation

Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning (four years full-time)

Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture (two years full-time or three years part-time)

1.2 Address of the institution where the course is delivered

School of Planning and Architecture
 Faculty of the Built Environment
 University of the West of England
 Frenchay Campus
 Coldharbour Lane
 Bristol BS16 1QY

Tel: 0117 328 3218

Fax: 0117 328 3308

W: www.built-environment.uwe.ac.uk

1.3 Name of Awarding Body

University of the West of England

1.4 Name of the Head of Architecture

Professor Richard Parnaby

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 30 June and 1 July 2005 were:

| | |
|---------------------|------------|
| David Howarth | Chair |
| Joe Jessop | Vice Chair |
| Judi Farren-Bradley | |

Virginia Newman

John Ashton

Mark Brierley

Graduate Member

Regional Representative

Kevin Harte (Validation Co-ordinator, RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

The non-architect member announced at short notice that he was unable to attend. This was agreed in advance with the Chair of the Validation Committee and the Head of School. The Board remained quorate.

3. Procedures and Criteria for the Visit

The Visiting Board was carried out under the “RIBA Procedures for Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture”, published September 2003, effective from September 2003 and the “RIBA Criteria for Validation”, published March 2002, effective from September 2003.

For more information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board confirmed by the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 12 October 2005.

4.1 The RIBA Education Committee at its meeting on 12 October 2005 confirmed:

Continued Validation of:

Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning (four years full-time)

Initial Validation of:

Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture (two years full-time or three years part-time) starting from the 2004/2005 graduating cohort.

4.2. The next Visiting Board should take place in 2009.

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

5.1 1 The Visiting Board recommends to the Commonwealth Association of Architects that the Part Two qualification be accredited.

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

5.3 The Visiting Board recommends to ARB that the Part One and Part Two courses met all points of the EU Directive.

6. Criteria

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 special conditions of validation 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 Recommendations, Advice and Commentary Contained in the Full Report

10.1 Background

10.1.1 When the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the West of England launched its Part One course in 1996 it not only re-established architectural education in Bristol after a gap of more than a decade but it also provided an undergraduate route to qualification as an architect-planner. Rising student numbers have confirmed the popularity of this course and the School has sought to build on this success by rolling out its Part Two course in 2002. While this course has yet fully to establish its identity, the Board can see no reason why, with some modifications to its structure as recommended in section 10.2.1 below and the excellent teaching and learning resources available to the School, the new Part Two course cannot enjoy similar success to the Part One course.

10.1.2 The particular strengths of the School are:

- A strong and committed staff team with a broad spread of expertise
- Excellent staff-student relationships across the entire School
- The professional expertise and guidance provided by the experienced Architecture and Planning Advisory Panel
- Excellent library resources linked to learning in the School and impressive support provided for their use
- Strong support from the University

- Excellent physical resources to support teaching and learning, especially the impressive new Studio Building and the well-equipped specialist laboratories
- A range of robust and effective student support mechanisms.

10.2 Recommendations

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

10.2.1 The Board believes that the School should review the structure of the Part Two course to allow more flexibility and student choice. In particular there is a need for the School to:

- Review the vertical studio structure to ensure equivalence of student experience
- Review the balance of work across both years of the course so that students can more clearly demonstrate their achievement of the Validation Criteria and the School can develop more ambitious integration philosophies and illustrate a clearer personal development over the two years
- Consider expansion of the Design Studio to deliver more modules. It is important that the right balance is struck between classroom and

studio modules to help to alleviate excessive student workload.

- Carefully monitor the integration of research methods to ensure the correct balance is maintained with course core material
- Continue its efforts to increase the emphasis on cultural context in the course.

10.3 **Advice**

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:

- 10.3.1 The 2000 Visiting Board reported the tendency of examiners to over-mark in the lower years of the course. While acknowledging that the minimum pass standards have been set appropriately throughout the Part One and Part Two courses, the 2005 Visiting Board alerts the School to the need for continuing vigilance in guarding against over-marking.
- 10.3.2 The students considered that more thought could have been given to the timetabling of their assessments in the Part One course to avoid the handing in of all their work at the same time. The Board advises the School to look at this matter to see if hand-in dates for assessments could be staggered in future.
- 10.3.3 The Board was appreciative of the efforts made by the School to develop studio teaching and culture in the Part One course but believes that the right balance needs to be struck between classroom and studio modules in order to alleviate excessive workload. The School is exploring how

it might deliver more modules through the design studio and the Board endorses this approach.

- 10.3.3 The School believes that the introduction of the new Technology and Management module in Year 2 of the Part One course, which is delivered by an architect and an engineer, has helped to improve integration. The Board commends this approach and encourages the School to extend this to other years of the course.
- 10.3.4 The Board shared the External Examiners' view that cultural context was a developing part of the course. It would advise the School to strengthen the cultural context component of the course so that students have a broad understanding of the full range of architectural theories. In doing this the Board would encourage the School to look adventurously at the way it invites students to explore cultural context.
- 10.3.5 Some of the project work in both the Part One and Part Two courses lacked inspiration in terms of presentation and communication. The Board advises the School to encourage its students to make more use of the impressive resources in the Faculty to enhance the sensitivity of the presentation and communication of their project work.
- 10.3.6 Although staffing levels appear to have kept pace with rising student numbers, the Board advises the Faculty and/or the University to monitor closely both the student-staff ratio and the demands on staff time if, as expected, recruitment to both architecture courses increases substantially over the coming years.
- 10.3.7 The Board advises the School to continue to monitor closely progression rates, particularly in the early stages of

the Part One course, and to develop appropriate strategies if non-progression rates remain high.

- 10.3.8 The limited extent of formal tuition provided by the School on CAD and other design software was highlighted by students. The Board understands that the School is aware of this and encourages it to look seriously at this issue.
- 10.3.9 External examiners' comments provide important feedback to the School. The Board advises in future that that the School includes details of action taken in response to External Examiners' reports in its initial documentation for Visiting Boards.
- 10.3.10 The Board encourages the School to review their mapping of the courses against the RIBA/ARB criteria, with particular regard to Part Two. This was generally helpful, but the Board did not find it easy to match the modular framework to the portfolios as provided.

11. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

11.1 Previous Visiting Board: Part One

The first full RIBA/ARB Visiting Board to the Part One course at the University of the West of England took place on 22 and 23 June 2000. The Visiting Board recommended **Initial Validation** of:

Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning (four years full-time).

11.2 Previous Visiting Board: Part Two

A Preliminary RIBA/ARB Visiting Board to the new Part Two course at the University of the West of England took place on 10 February 2003. The Visiting Board recommended **Candidate Course status** of:

Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture (two years full-time or three years part-time).

11.3 In its report the 2000 Visiting Board to the Part One course commented:

"The School's strengths include a highly supportive and energetic staff, and excellent facilities. There had, initially, been some concern by the New Courses and Course Changes Group that the course might not have met the core requirements. However, the Board was pleased and reassured to see that the course did cover all the core subjects. The Staff were fully aware of the areas in which the course required further development and the Board was pleased to note the commitment and determination to improve these areas. The Board found that the staff were responsive to external advice and recommends that the School considers maintaining the Advisory Panel whilst the course continues to establish itself. The course has established its own identity within the School and this is developing well. Students also have the opportunity to mix with those on other courses within the Faculty, which provides them with an awareness of other cognate disciplines. The School has good links across the Faculty, which should be encouraged and strengthened, particularly in the area of structures. The Board recommends that should the School consider applying for the validation of a Part Two course, any future Visiting Board should take

the opportunity to examine some of the Part One work to monitor its progress."

11.4 In its report the 2003 Preliminary Board to the new UWE Part Two course commented:

"The Visiting Board supports the ambition of the School to establish a Part Two recognised award. The Board felt that the School had developed a worthy and ambitious programme which builds upon the strengths of the existing Part One recognised course. The Board would advise that the School takes the following matters into consideration during the time leading up to an Initial Visiting Board:

- Given the timing of the Preliminary Visiting Board, the Board was inevitably unable to review any student work. The Board therefore recommends that the School seek to ensure that the presentation and standard of design work is carefully monitored. The Board advises that the School should seek to maintain and extend its external contacts (visiting lecturers, critics, visiting as many end-of-year shows as possible) to ensure that appropriate standards are achieved at Part Two level.
- The Board found that the Programme Specification and the Module Descriptors were not fully aligned with the course content. For instance, the Board was concerned that little mention was made of Cultural Context in the Programme Specification. However, on further discussion with the staff, it became clear that this aspect was, in practice, embedded in the design modules. The Board endorses the integration of subject areas within the same module. However, the Board would encourage the School to ensure that in future the course documentation and module

descriptors clearly and accurately reflect the content and requirements of the course.

- The Board recommends that should the Institution seek to admit non-Part One qualified students to the course, a separate exit award must be introduced.
- The Board noted that the School benefited from the support of an experienced Advisory Group. The Board encourages the School to maintain a dialogue with this Group throughout the development of the Bachelor of Architecture course.
- The Board noted that the course contained a strong environmental element and commends this. However, the School is asked to ensure that the students' parallel development of knowledge in relation to structures and construction is not neglected.
- The Board recommends that the School may wish, as the course develops and attracts students who have completed their Part One studies elsewhere, to consider introducing additional support tutorials in basic presentational skills, CAD etc. to ensure that they have the equivalent skills for the Part Two course as would graduates from the UWE Part One course."

12. Commentary

12.1 Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit

The Board thought that the Critical Self-Appraisal provided by the School was concise, informative and gave a useful overview of events at the School since the last full Visiting Board. It was perceived to be a helpful starting point for the Board's deliberations. The Board also appreciated the provision of a critical appraisal produced by the student body.

The most significant changes since the 2000 Visiting Board have been the introduction of the new Part Two BArch course and the opening of the new studio building.

In 2002 the University validated a modified Part Two course, and recruited the first intake of 14 students. In February 2003 this course was granted candidate status following a visit by a joint RIBA/ARB Visiting Board. In 2004 the Part Two course was given unconditional prescription by the ARB for four years and the first cohort of BArch students graduated.

The new studio building was completed in time for the start of the 2002/03 academic year, and is used as a resource for the entire Faculty of the Built Environment. The School believes that this impressive building has been a significant factor in attracting students to the University of the West of England, and the Board would not dissent from that view.

There have also been a number of staff changes since the 2000 Visiting Board, mainly to match the recent healthy increases in student numbers on the architecture courses. In 2000 there were four full and part-time staff (2.5 full-time equivalent (FTE)) primarily responsible for delivering studio teaching. By 2004/05 this number had risen to nine (6.7 FTE).

12.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit

The School provided all the documentation required for the visit in timely fashion. This was well presented and generally easy to comprehend but the Board did need help from the School in understanding some aspects of the different course structures. All additional documentation requested was promptly supplied by the School.

The meetings and activities required by the Board were arranged well. However the some of the portfolios produced for review by the Board could have been more clearly labelled and better organised. For example all the information required in the Part One portfolios was incomplete and the Board had to spend valuable time seeking this missing information elsewhere. It would also have been useful to the Board to have had a complete record of all student marks in all subjects.

12.2.1 Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the Visit

Part One: BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning

Year one: Sample provided by the School on the basis of modules including lowest pass work, as agreed with the RIBA at the planning meeting in December 2004.

Year two: Sample provided by the School on the basis of modules including lowest pass work, as agreed with the RIBA at the planning meeting.

Year three: Sample provided by the School on the basis of modules including lowest pass work, as agreed with the RIBA at the planning meeting.

Year four: 3 lowest pass complete academic portfolios, 2 middle pass complete academic portfolios and 2 high pass complete academic portfolios -all from the cohort of 27 students entering the final year in 2004/05.

Part Two: Bachelor of Architecture

- Year one: Sample provided by the School on the basis of modules including lowest pass work
- Year two: 3 lowest pass complete academic portfolios, 2 middle pass complete academic portfolios and 2 high pass complete academic portfolios –all from the cohort of 7 students entering the final year in 2004/05 (including both full-time and part-time students).

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

The Board was satisfied that the issues raised in the last full Visiting Board report in 2000 and in the Preliminary Visiting Board report of 2003 had been addressed by the School. In particular much had been done to develop the interprofessional ethos of the School, with many of the architecture modules being shared with courses in other disciplines (planning, construction management, engineering and real estate). It seemed to the Board that staffing levels had kept pace with rising student numbers (see section 12.1) and procedures were now firmly in place to help students with their “year out” preparation. The School did acknowledge, however, that more work was required to integrate technology more fully into the output of the design projects.

The External Examiners told the Board that the School does not formally respond (by letter) to their individual reports but they were completely satisfied that the School does take full account of their views and takes appropriate action in response to their comments and suggestions. For

example the design content of the Year 1 modules in the Part One course had been considerably strengthened as a result of concerns voiced by the External Examiners. The Board was pleased to learn that in the view of the External Examiners the general quality of design work on the Part One course this year had risen substantially. The External Examiners also confirmed that they received a copy of the Head of School’s annual field report (which includes External Examiners’ reports, module leaders’ reports and student feedback). This is sent to the University Executive listing the actions to be taken in response to the observations and comments made by all contributing parties, including External Examiners.

External examiners’ comments provide important feedback to the School. The Board advises in future that that the School includes details of action taken in response to External Examiners’ reports in its initial documentation for Visiting Boards.

12.4 Context of the course within the wider provision of the School and the Faculty

The School of Architecture and Planning is one of five schools in the University’s Faculty of the Built Environment, alongside Land and Property Management, Housing and Urban Studies, Geography and Environmental Planning and Construction Economics, Management and Engineering. With a 2004/05 entry to the Part One course in excess of 70 students, the School runs the largest undergraduate planning course in the UK.

The closure of the architecture school at the University of Bristol in the early 1980s left a gap in the market which the University of the West of England was keen to fill. The idea of re-establishing architectural education in the

city through a dually accredited architecture and planning course received strong support from the RIBA and the RTPI, as well as architects and planners in the south-west of the UK. In 1996 the University validated both Part One and Part Two courses and the Part One qualification was granted candidate status by a joint RIBA/ARB Visiting Board. In March 2000 the Part One course was given unconditional approval by the RTPI, and unconditional validation in June of that year by the RIBA and the ARB.

The School anticipates a continuing healthy intake to the Part One course while the Part Two course (validated by the University in 2002) continues to expand as more Part One graduates return and the course becomes more widely known. The University intends to offer a range of landscape architecture (and perhaps joint) qualifications from 2007. The Faculty is also exploring the possibility of establishing a joint undergraduate course in architecture and building services engineering. This course would be designed to meet RIBA/ARB Part One Validation Criteria and those of CIBSE and/or the Institute of Energy.

12.5 **Detailed commentary on the Part One course:**

BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning (four years full-time)

12.5.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The programme specification for the Part One course included clear and appropriate statements of the educational aims and learning objectives of the course. The School also provided a detailed mapping of the Part One course onto the RIBA/ARB Part One Validation Criteria.

12.5.2 *Course design and content*

The Part One course is built around a core sequence of design projects that starts in Year 1 with introductory explorations of design in a series of relatively short projects and workshops and culminates in Year 4 with the design of a substantial building in an urban context. In parallel students take modules that address the themes of technology and environment, cultural context and professional studies. In addition there is a sequence of modules that address the core requirements of RTPI curriculum. The teaching of communication skills is embedded in design and subject modules.

In each of the first three years of Part One, there is a compulsory interprofessional module in which students work in groups with those on other professional courses (assessment of group work is however limited to 25% of module marks).

The Special Study module in Year 4 allows students the opportunity to engage in a comprehensive piece of research and design work. It comprises 40% research in the form of a 6-8,000-word essay and a 60% design project through the preparation of a detailed urban analysis (undertaken in groups) and design of a particular town, incorporating a single building designed in detail. The detailed substantiation of the design is examined through a technical report and review that attracts 25% of the 60% total mark.

The students whom the Board met found the matrix of modules in the course difficult to understand. The School is aware of this problem and sought to address it by reducing the number of modules by merging modules into one large module (for example, the design and cultural context module in Year 3 has been combined in this way).

The External Examiners thought that the School had worked inventively within the tight modular structure to create a good range of options for students. The Board believes that the course is developing in the right direction. It applauds the School's vision in looking at the possibility of joint awards (see section 12.4) with other design disciplines (for example, environmental engineering and landscape) which could increase the focus on design and reinvigorate design culture within the School.

The Board was appreciative of the efforts made by the School to develop studio teaching and culture but believes that the right balance needs to be struck between classroom and studio modules in order to alleviate excessive workload. The School is exploring how it might deliver more modules through the design studio and the Board endorses this approach.

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

- *Design*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Design were being met by all graduates from the BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning course.

The Board concurred with the External Examiners that the quality of the design work in Part One had improved significantly in 2004/05. The External examiners commented that this was in spite of the heavy workload that design studio work often imposed on students. In particular students found the Design Studio in Year 3, where they spend one and a half days per week designated studio time with their tutors, to be an intensive but useful experience.

The Board agreed with the External Examiners' observation that generally students did not make full use of the opportunity to explore interior space to any great depth in their design work.

- *Technology and Environment*

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Technology and Environment were being met by all graduates from the BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning course.

The 2000 Visiting Board report had remarked on the need for the School to improve and strengthen the integration and demonstration of architectural technologies within design portfolios particularly in the early part of the course. The School acknowledges that this still remains a problem in Year 1 where students often see technology as separate from design. Indeed some of students told the Board in 2005 that they would have welcomed more integrated construction technology teaching earlier in the course. The External Examiners' view was some students were unable to show that they fully understood the technological aspects of the course but that this appreciation and understanding was slowly developing. The School has taken steps to address these issues. It believes that the introduction of the new Technology, Design and Environment module in Year 2, which is delivered by an architect and an engineer, has helped to improve integration. The Board commends this approach and encourages the School to extend this to other years of the course. The School also pointed out that a structural engineer is employed to deliver some of the course in Year 3.

- Cultural context

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Cultural Context were being met by all graduates from the BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning course.

The Board noted and welcomed the focus on the city of Bristol and the surrounding region.

Students told the Board that a contextual approach to design was a discernible thread throughout Part One, but particularly in Year 3 where design and cultural context had been combined in the same module.

The Board shared the External Examiners' view that cultural context was a developing part of the course. It would advise the School to strengthen the cultural context component of the course so that students have a broad understanding of the full range of architectural theories. In doing this the Board would encourage the School to look adventurously at the way it invites students to explore cultural context.

- Communication

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Communication were being met by all graduates from the BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning course.

The Board considered that communication skills were displayed in an adequate fashion but lacked ambition.

The teaching of communication skills is embedded in design and subject modules. For example, design proposals are amplified in written reports and other

documentation that set projects in their economic, political and cultural context and explain structural, constructional and other technical characteristics and environmental impacts.

Written work allows students to develop and hone their communication skills. The 6-8,000-word research essay in the Special Study module in Year 4 provides a good example of this.

However, students expressed an enthusiasm for increasing the opportunities available for the use CAD and other digital media. The Board advises the School to encourage its students to make more use of the impressive resources in the Faculty (including the multimedia facilities in Q block where students can edit sound and video material under the supervision of dedicated technical staff).

The Board agreed with the External Examiners' view that, given that this was a course emphasising context, the students' work did not display ways of exploring contextual and environmental factors which were sufficiently novel or expressive. Much analysis and communication concerned standard ways of representation and in some cases could be a little formulaic.

We comment in section 12.9 on how articulate the students of the School were in their meeting with Board.

In general models were used to describe design propositions but not to explore the material qualities of design or as part of the design process. The Board encourages the School to invite students to use physical models in this way, especially in the Part Two course.

- Management, Practice and Law

The Board was satisfied that all the Validation Criteria in the area of Management, Practice and Law were being met by all graduates from the BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning course.

It was felt by the Board that Law and Business were projected from a planning perspective with less evidence of building law.

The Economics, Society and Built Environment module in Year 1 provides an early grounding in the principles of management, practice and law. In the Management and Decision-making module in Year 3 the School invites lawyers to attend to discuss the ramifications of contract law.

- Preparation for Professional Experience

The students considered that they were well prepared for the first stage of professional experience. An introductory talk on the “year out” is given by the Professional Studies Advisor (PSA) during the last academic semester before students graduate. This covers getting a job, preparing curriculum vitae and the RIBA/ARB Professional Experience Requirements. Students are given a handout which sets out the RIBA’s PEDR requirements, the cost of registering and also the roles of the Mentor and the PSA and are also handed a questionnaire for them to complete when in employment confirming their practice details and contractual and salary matters.

Each student will undertake the Agency Project in Year 4 just prior to their “year out.” This module includes explorations of the implementation of planning policy and

developmental control, and a four-week practice placement. The PSA is also on hand at this time to help with enquiries about the “year out” and advise about career options.

12.5.4 *Progression within the course*

The cohort analysis provided by the School revealed a significant loss of students through transfer or withdrawal prior to the Year 1 assessment. In 2002/03 this amounted to 20 of the 64 students enrolled; in 2003/04 this figure was 11 out of a cohort of 63. The School is keen to point out that this trend is not confined to the Part One course but is a University-wide phenomenon, and indeed the University has implemented a number of strategies in order to combat the problem.

The students told the Board that they thought the high non-progression rate in Year 1 could be attributable to two factors: a recognition by students that they wished solely to pursue architecture, not planning and the intensity of the year in terms of its heavy workload. In an attempt to address the latter factor the School has from the 2004/05 session integrated the two studio-based modules in Year 1 (design Studio A and Design in Context) to provide a more coherent experience for students. It has also been able to demonstrate that there is a correlation between attendance in the design studios and pass rates in Year 1. Attendance is being closely monitored and other measures to encourage student engagement have been introduced. In the view of the School and of the External examiners this has resulted in improved attendance in 2004/05.

The Board advises the School to continue to monitor closely progression rates, particularly in the early stages of

the Part One course, and to develop appropriate strategies if non-progression rates remain high.

12.5.5 *Assessment*

The School uses a variety of methods to assess its students. These appeared appropriate to the Board in terms of their suitability to the subject in question and the stage of student learning.

The Special Study module in Year 4, described in section 12.5.2, involves students in significant design and research work. Although the Board could appreciate the School's wish to test the ability of its students in this way, it wondered if the Special Study module was attempting to cover too many aspects of the Validation Criteria.

The 2000 Visiting Board reported the tendency of examiners to over-mark in the lower years of the course. While acknowledging that the minimum pass standards have been set appropriately throughout the Part One course, the 2005 Visiting Board alerts the School to the need for continuing vigilance in guarding against over-marking.

The students complained about the poorly co-ordinated timetabling of their assessments. These were clustered together which meant that all their work had to be handed in at the same time. The Board advises the School to look at this matter to see if hand-in dates for assessments could be staggered in future. The Board also felt that students could benefit from being encouraged to commence "drawing-up" their project at an earlier stage in the overall time allocated.

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

Unless the applicant is mature or has particular circumstances requiring special consideration, offers are made solely on UCAS tariff points (in the range between 260 and 320 in line with the applicant's predicted results). In the case of mature applicants or those requiring special consideration account is also taken of their work or other experience and they may be invited for interview or to present a portfolio of their work.

The School ran a Summer School for the first time in 2004/05 to attract applicants from local schools offering only 2 A-levels or equivalent. This group markedly underperform against the national average. The School asked applicants to submit a portfolio for assessment. The School reported that this initiative was not greatly successful attracting limited applications but it intends to persevere with the exercise next year, perhaps after reviewing the criteria.

The School's conversations with the Board suggested that joining the Part One course at the UWE at a point other than at the start of Year 1 is not an attractive option for applicants from architecture courses elsewhere. This is because such applicants will not have covered the planning elements of the UWE course and they could only be accredited for part of each year, having to complete the remaining parts of the year. Therefore in practice the School has had no one join the course other than at the start of Year 1 (apart from Erasmus students who do not enrol on the degree course but take some modules which are accredited by their home university).

12.6 Detailed Commentary on the Part Two course:

Bachelor of Architecture (two years full-time or three years part-time)

12.6.1 *Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives*

The programme specification included clear and valid statements of the educational aims, learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies and assessment criteria for the Part Two course.

The School also provided a detailed mapping of the Part Two course onto the RIBA/ARB Part Two Validation Criteria. This was generally helpful, but the Board did not find it easy to match the modular framework to the portfolios as provided. It was also difficult to deduce from the information provided the nature of the “student experience”.

12.6.2 *Course design and content*

Design modules (which account for 50% of course assessment) form the core of the Part Two course and are organised as vertical studios with students in Years 1 and 2 working on the same themes. In each year thus far, two contrasting themes have been offered but the School hopes to offer further options as recruitment to the course increases. As in Part One, students take parallel modules that address the themes of technology and environment, cultural context and professional studies and must complete two optional modules from a range offered across the Faculty. All students are required to undertake a research methods module which reinforces the links between the Part Two projects and the research centres of the Faculty.

The School contends that the nature of the modular programme allows considerable flexibility to the way in which learning is structured. It has adapted this flexibility to develop a part-time Part Two course which makes it possible for students to study for the Bachelor of Architecture qualification while working in practice. The recommended part-time route takes three years (80 credits per year) with students attending the School two days per week. The first year of the part-time course comprises two modules, Architecture Studio A and Integrated Environmental Design which are designed to be delivered concurrently. In Year 2 students complete two professional practice and option modules, while final year students take Architecture Studio B and two 10-credit research modules.

The School is conscious of the need to strengthen the cultural context component of the Part Two course. To date the teaching of the history and theory of architecture has taken place in within the Design Studio (of which its assessment comprises 20%). While the intention is for this to continue for Year 1, it is planned that in 2005/06 Year 2 will have its own stand-alone 15-credit module in cultural context. This will serve two purposes: to free up space in the Year 2 studio for the detailed substantiation of the design projects and to allow a more coherent relationship to the Research Practice module and potentially to a subsequent Masters dissertation.

The Board recommends that the School should:

- Review the structure of the Part Two course to allow more flexibility and student choice
- Review the vertical studio structure to ensure equivalence of student experience

- Review the balance of work across both years of the course so that students can more clearly demonstrate their achievement of the Validation Criteria and the School can develop more ambitious integration philosophies and illustrate a clearer personal development over the two years
- Consider expansion of the Design Studio to deliver more modules
- Carefully monitor the integration of research methods to ensure the correct balance is maintained with course core material.

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

- *Design*

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

In the two design studios (Architecture Studios A and B) students are encouraged to work individually and collaboratively to develop their analytical and synthetic skills of design. The aim is to bring investigation, analysis, and appraisal of context and user needs, the study of precedent, understanding of building performance and knowledge of construction together with the development of creative skills of conceptualisation of form and structure to create well developed proposals for buildings and other physical artefacts.

The Board advises the School to ensure that the student experience in the studios is equivalent and that the students retain the ability to and are encouraged to change

studio. Project briefs and assessment criteria need to be carefully monitored in order to ensure that all students are given clear opportunities to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their design ability.

- *Technology and Environment*

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

The Integrated Environmental Design module in Year 1 has been developed to help students explore how complex designs can be realised in terms of environmental response, structured design, construction strategy and detail and life cycle costing. The module is based on case studies and design exercises and is intended to broaden and deepen student knowledge of current best practice in multidisciplinary and environmentally responsible building design.

Following the comments of the External Examiners, the Board advises the School to continue to emphasise the importance of the demonstration of the integration of technology in design project submissions.

- *Cultural Context*

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

The Cultural Context component of the Validation Criteria is addressed primarily through the design modules Architecture A and B. These modules include reflective and critical work covering theoretical, historical and wider cultural considerations. The Research Practice module in

Year 2 gives students the opportunity to explore the wide range of research theories related to architecture and the built environment.

The Board believes that more sensitivity has been brought to bear by students in relation to the spatial, aesthetic, technical and social qualities of design within a wider cultural context.

The Board believes that the School should consider introducing into the course a more positive interaction with the cultural context. As mentioned in section 12.6.2 the School plans in 2005/06 for Year 2 to have its own stand-alone 15-credit module in cultural context. The Board encourages the School to continue its efforts for greater emphasis on cultural context in the course.

- *Communication*

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

The Board found some evidence of good use of visual communication methods and appropriate media (including sketching, modelling, and digital and electronic technologies) to represent the testing, analysis and critical appraisal of complex design proposals, but concluded that this aspect of communication was underdeveloped in Part Two students. Again it advises the School to encourage its students to make more use of the impressive resources in the Faculty (including the multimedia facilities in Q block where students can edit sound and video material under the supervision of dedicated technical staff).

The Board saw examples of good model-making skills and was able to observe the iteration of drawing skills. It was pleased to see students encouraged to develop key skills in this manner.

- *Management Practice and Law*

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

The Professional Practice Client and User module in Year 1 focuses on the social and business context of architectural design with an emphasis on understanding the divergent needs of patrons, clients, users, the general public and funding institutions.

The Professional Practice Project and Office module in Year 2 covers the legal responsibilities of the architect, the management of architectural practice and methods of construction procurement and project management.

The interdisciplinary nature of Part Two also strengthened the Management, Law and Practice component of the course.

12.6.4 *Progression within the course*

The cohort analysis for the Part Two course revealed very good progression rates among full-time students. In 2004/05 one of the seven full-time students withdrew or transferred prior to the Year 1 assessment; for part-time students this statistic was two withdrawals out of a total of nine. In 2003/04, three of the four part-time students on the Year 1 Part Two course had withdrawn prior to assessment so the figures for this academic year show a

significant improvement in student progression rates on the course.

The School is aware of the particular pressures under which part-time students often find themselves and the course development team is planning to issue clearer guidance to part-time students on the time they need to devote to their studies, both at university and elsewhere.

12.6.5 *Assessment*

The Board considered that there was a broad and appropriate range of assessment measures in place throughout the Part Two course.

As in the case of the Part One course, the Board was satisfied that the lowest pass standards were set at an appropriate level but would advise the School to guard against over-marking.

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

Entry to the Part Two course is open to students who are:

- Graduates of the UWE BA (Honours) Architecture and Planning course.
- Graduates of a course prescribed by the ARB and recognised for exemption from the RIBA Part One examination.
- Graduates who hold a first degree in architecture from an overseas institution, if the candidate can demonstrate its equivalence to Part One in academic terms.
- Students who have successfully completed the RIBA Part One Examination for Office –Based Candidates.

- Holders of other appropriate or academic or professional qualifications.

To be eligible for entry to the UK Register of Architects students must hold an ARB prescribed Part One qualification in architecture or be granted Part One status by the ARB Assessment Panel prior to graduation on the Part Two course.

In addition, all applicants will usually have completed a year's professional practice which is judged by course leaders to be relevant to the award prior to entry to the award.

Applicants in all categories will normally be asked to attend for interview and produce a portfolio of work for examination. In some circumstances the applicant may be asked to carry out an additional assignment or written test to demonstrate competence in particular areas.

12.7 **External examining arrangements**

The Board confirmed that the School had in place a strong team of External Examiners, drawn from both education and practice.

In their meetings with the Board the External Examiners were very supportive of the School. All the External Examiners were satisfied with the opportunities they were given to engage with the School's assessment process and expressed their complete confidence in the assessment regime and the standards set. They also confirmed that the School responded promptly and effectively to issues raised in their reports and took appropriate action. Prior to taking up their appointment all had received a thorough briefing about what was required of them in their role.

12.8 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

Section 12.5.3 describes the arrangements made by the School to prepare students for their first stage professional practice. At this time students are encouraged to contact the Professional Studies Advisor (PSA) for additional advice about or if they encounter any particular problems on their “year out” in practice. The PSA also collects completed student questionnaires which give an indication of the type of work students are undertaking, including whether they are remaining in architecture or related practice, and can flag up any difficulties met by students in their place of employment.

Students are also encouraged to submit early drafts of their PEDR forms so timely advice can be given by the PSA; formal comments are made on the final form.

The School is also building up its database of local practices which offer good work experience and makes this information available to students.

The overwhelming majority of students consulted by the Board were very satisfied with the arrangements made by the School both to prepare them for and support them in their professional practice.

12.9 **Students**

The Board met 15 members of the student group, representing all years of the courses, together with students on their first stage professional practice. The Board appreciated the fact that the students had produced their own written appraisal reflecting on

their experience at the School and had submitted this to the Board in advance of the meeting.

The students whom the Board met were articulate and supportive of the School. They identified the particular strengths of the School as being:

- The impressive new Studio Building which facilitates good interaction between students of different years and those following other courses than architecture.
- Good exposure to tutors in the studios.
- An approachable and responsive staff team.
- Excellent on-line services on the Faculty website (including Digimap).
- 24-hour access to computer facilities in the Bolland Library.
- Excellent staff-student relationships.
- A range of easily accessible and effective student support mechanisms.
- Excellent teaching on environmental issues and sustainability.

Among the concerns raised by the students were:

- Restricted access to the new Studio Building and the sense among students that the building is a showcase for the Faculty.
- Inadequate access to workshop facilities for students wishing to build models with more adventurous materials
- Lack of storage space in studios for models.
- Good access to computers but problems with outdated hardware.

- Although students undergo an intensive introduction to Vectorworks in the second year design studio module, they expressed a wish for more tuition in CAD and other design software.
- A lack of design detail being taught in both courses.
- The high cost of and difficult access to printing facilities.
- Heavy workload – particularly on the Part One course.
- Poorly co-ordinated assessment timetables on the Part One course.

12.10 Staff

In its meeting with them the Board found the staff of the School to be a strong, cohesive and thoroughly engaged team. There was a good spread of ages among the staff. The Board shared the External Examiners' view that the School was fortunate in having staff of such high calibre and with such a broad spread of expertise. The School invests deeply in the development of its staff; one example of this is its allocation of £600 per year for staff development per full-time- equivalent member of staff.

The School provided several different permutations of its student-staff ratio in 2004/05. In relation to the School of Architecture and Planning these included:

| | |
|--|--------|
| Lecturing staff only (25.3 FTE) and 609 students: | 24:1 |
| Lecturing staff including 2 FTE visiting lecturers: | 22.3:1 |
| 36 academic staff (including researchers): | 17:1 |
| 38 academic staff including 2 FTE visiting lecturers: | 16:1 |

As reported in sections 12.1 and 12.3 staffing levels appear to have kept pace with expanding student numbers, but the Board advises the School to monitor closely both the student-staff ratio and the demands on staff time if, as expected, recruitment to both architecture courses increases substantially over the coming years.

12.11 Research

The School is served by two research centres, the Centre for Environment and Planning (CEP) and the Centre for Transport and Society. The CEP is the more active in terms of architectural research, promoting research on spatial planning, sustainable design, urban management, land use, property, architecture, transport and urban design. The research and consultancy skills include scenario-building, policy and design solutions, enhancements to decision support tools, and strategy and programme evaluation.

The Board learned that research at the School had until recently had a lower profile as efforts were concentrated into establishing the Part One and Two courses. The Pro Vice-Chancellor is keen to build up the research profile of the Faculty and reported with some pride that the Faculty had earned £3 million last academic year on research projects, with £300,000 of this taken as surplus. The School now has a team of 3 people dedicated solely to writing up research bids and has recently made a new appointment at Professor/Reader level.

It appeared to the Board that the School had developed a sound research strategy and that the structure and resources were firmly in place for it to move ahead positively on the research front.

The School was developing its research profile and was being well supported by the University in doing this. The funding provided for staff development was welcomed but the Board would expect to see this feeding through into teaching on future visits.

12.12 Equal Opportunities

In advance of the Board the School provided a breakdown of its student population by gender and ethnicity, together with an unequivocal statement of the University's equal opportunities policy. It was clear that both the University and the School took the issue of equal opportunities very seriously indeed.

There is however a marked gender imbalance in the School, with the proportion of female students well below the national average. The Board also noted the limited number of students in the School from minority ethnic backgrounds. The School hopes that the imminent provision of new student accommodation on campus will help to boost the number of female applicants to the architecture courses.

In the case of permanent academic staff directly involved in studio teaching, 5 out of 23 in this group are female. In spite of its best efforts to improve the gender balance the School told the Board it had been hampered by a shortage of female applicants when recruiting.

The Board would encourage the School to develop an action plan to address these issues and would hope to see the benefits of this at the next Visiting Board.

12.13 Resourcing and Facilities

- General

The Board found the Pro-Vice Chancellor to be very supportive of the School and he confirmed that the University would continue to make funds available to develop the role of architecture in its multidisciplinary approach to professional education and research. As an example of this continuing support, the Pro-Vice Chancellor revealed that £1.4 million had been allocated in 2007/08 for extending the new Studio Building to provide more space for students.

The basic Faculty capital budget is £104,000 plus any additional funds received as a result of specific bids. The Faculty intends to spend more than £150,000 on IT and other equipment in 2005.

The visiting lecturer budget for the Faculty is £136,000, of which £40,000 is allocated to the School. The School also receives 30% of the surplus generated by Short Course Unit –approximately £8,000 in 2005. About 60% of these funds are used to provide visiting studio lecturers on the Part One and Two courses.

Previous Visiting Boards have recorded the strong support given to the School by the experienced Architecture and Planning Advisory Panel and this Board is no exception. The Panel provides formal links with practitioners and has met twice a year since 1996 when its role was to advise on the development of the Part One course. Its remit has since been extended to consider the development of the Part Two course and it will continue to guide the School on a range of future issues, including:

- The role and character of the MA in Urban Design
- Whether the University should launch a Part Three course
- A possible MA in architectural conservation
- The possibility of running a jointly validated course in architecture and environmental engineering.

- *Studios*

The new Studio Building is impressive, offering a high level of IT provision and a large workshop open to architecture students. The School told the Board that the building is open 7 days a week until 10 p.m. Students complained about the lack of space (both work space and particularly storage space for models) with the majority of space available being allocated to Year 1 students. The School is aware of this issue and funding has been earmarked to extend the building in 2007/08 as reported above. They also contended that opening and closing times for the building varied greatly and this was particularly irksome for students working on major projects who needed access to studio space.

The building was seen as a showcase within the Faculty and students complained that this resulted in them being restricted on how they used the building because of the need to keep it in pristine condition. They also felt that the security on the studio doors limited interaction between years.

- *IT*

The Board noted that there were in excess of 100 PCs in the Faculty and a number of PCs in the Studio Building with wireless links for laptops. Students told the Board

that access to computers was not an issue but often the hardware was outdated and very slow. Against this backdrop it is perhaps worth noting the Faculty's intention to upgrade IT provision in 2005 as reported earlier in this section.

The Faculty also makes extensive use of web technologies and maintains several intranet, extranet and web services for teaching, research and administration. The Board noted an impressive range of software but remarked that there was no teaching structure embedded in the IT system, though students could book sessions with an IT technician. The lack of formal tuition on CAD and other design software was highlighted by students and the Board would invite the School to look seriously at this issue.

The Studio Building is equipped with A3 scanners, A3 colour laser printers and A1 inkjet printers. Although these facilities are open to students 24 hours a day, students told the Board they had difficulty in accessing printing facilities at peak times and that the cost of printing was considerable.

- *Laboratories and workshops*

The laboratories in the Faculty Building are of a high standard and are equipped with a range of equipment (artificial sky, heliodon, wind tunnel, infra-red cameras etc) for student use under the supervision of a dedicated technician.

The project room is open to all students in the Faculty containing large meeting tables, and printing, copying and binding facilities. The project room staff operate a loan system for digital cameras, laptops, projectors etc for student use. There are also multimedia facilities in Q

Block where students can edit sound and video material under the supervision of dedicated technical staff.

The existing workshop facilities within the dedicated School building was relatively limited in size and facilities and improvement of this facility should be one of the priorities in the proposed future expansion.

- *Library*

The Board visited the Bolland Library on the UWE Campus and noted that it contained a good supply of architectural books and journals (over 70 journals are currently taken), which is being steadily increased on a yearly basis. The University provides £5,000 per year additional funding for architecture books above its usual budget.

The Library contained excellent facilities to assist student learning, including a dedicated training room on site and networked computers offering an excellent range of software and web material linked to learning in the School of Architecture. Students are given tuition in the various software programmes and in accessing the web links so they can prepare in advance for their project work and field trips. The Board thought that this linkage between the Library and learning within the School was an excellent example of good practice. During term time the Library is open 24 hours per day. The Faculty Librarian is a member of all the relevant Faculty Committees and this helps to facilitate good communication links between the Library and its users. The Librarian was included as part of the briefing/review team for specific studio design projects and relished taking an active part within the School.

13. Attachments

- 13.1 Prior to the visit the Board was provided by the School with the following documentation:
- Critical Self Appraisal
 - Student Views
 - Response to Questionnaire
 - Supplementary Information
 - Programme Specification for the Part One course
 - Programme Specification for the Part Two course
 - Course Structures
 - Mapping of all Course Content and Learning Outcomes onto RIBA/ARB Validation Criteria for all courses to be validated
 - External Examiner reports
 - External Examiners' CVs
 - Admissions policies
 - Staff profile
 - Staff Development Plan
 - Equal opportunities policy and information
 - Student Progression data
 - Cohort Analysis
 - Research profile of School
 - Teaching and Learning strategy
 - Quality Assurance Procedures
- 13.2 The Board was provided with the following additional information in the base room and during the visit:
- Module Descriptors
 - Project briefs
 - Mark sheets for the Part One and Part Two courses

- Report of Academic Review 2004 (including the Self-Evaluation Document)
- University of the West of England Undergraduate Prospectus 2005
- University of the West of England Institutional Audit December 2004
- University of the West of England Student Handbook 2004/05
- Staff Handbook –Faculty of the Built Environment
- Student Handbook 2004/05 –Part One and Part Two courses
- Course information leaflets
- School of Architecture and Planning Field Report 2003/04
- QAA Institutional Audit report 2004: Discipline audit trails
- Architecture and Planning 2003/04 Programme Report

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