RIBA

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Visiting Board to the University of Newcastle

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee 12 September 2012

School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape
Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science

BA Architectural Studies, Part One
Bachelor of Architecture, Part Two
PG Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management, Part Three

Date of Visiting Board: 10/11 November 2011

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1. Information About the Courses

1.1 **Courses offered for revalidation:**
BA Architectural Studies, Part One
Bachelor of Architecture, Part Two
PG Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management,
Part Three

1.2 **Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered**
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape
The Quadrangle
University of Newcastle
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU

1.3 **Name of Awarding Body**
University of Newcastle

1.4 **Name of Head of School**
Dr John Pendlebury, Head of School of Architecture,
Planning and Landscape

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on
10/11 November 2011 were:

Professor David Dernie, Chair
Lindesay Dawe, Vice Chair
Satwinder Samra
Stephen Brookhouse
Norman Wienand, Co-professional member
Eric Carter, Regional Representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – RIBA secretary

The student/graduate member withdrew at short notice
before the visit. It was not possible to find a replacement.
The Board remained quorate.

The Board is grateful to Ms Lucy Speak of the University
of Newcastle who acted as Institutional Facilitator during
the visit.

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

4.1 The RIBA Education Committee of 12 September 2012
confirmed **Continued Validation** of;

BA Architectural Studies, Part One
Bachelor of Architecture, Part Two
PG Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management,
Part Three

4.2 The next Visiting Board should take place in 2016.

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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 Previous Visiting Board Reports

10.1 The last full visit to the University of Newcastle took place on 08/09 November 2007. The Visiting Board recommended Continued Validation of:

Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Architecture, Part One, 3 years full-time

Bachelor of Architecture with Honours, Part Two, 2 years full-time

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Postgraduate Diploma in Architectural Practice & Management, Part Three, part-time

11. Details of the Conditions in Item 8.

11.1 There were no conditions attached to the courses listed in 4.1

12. Recommendations

12.1 The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA expects the Institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendations in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the school and in the mid term review. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations, or provide the RIBA with a clear rationale for not doing so, may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

12.2 The Board recommends that Part 3 External and Professional Examiners should be drawn from a wider pool in order that standards are benchmarked against national criteria.

12.3 The Board recommends that clearer clear assessment criteria are established for the Part Three oral examination.

12.4 The Board recommends that at Part Two the School exercise vigilance in marking at the lower end of the portfolios. The Board notes that this was the subject of a recommendation by the 2007 Visiting Board.

12.5 At Part One the Board recommends that the School develop a robust assessment strategy in studio to ensure

that the marking reflects attainment that is comparable to national standards.

12.6 At Part One the Board recommends that the pedagogic structure of stages 1 to 3 be more explicitly articulated and keyed to a coherent teaching, learning and assessment strategy.

12.7 At Part One the Board considers the standards of presentation of the portfolios and quality of communication of ideas and process to be weak in some instances. The Board recommends that more emphasis is placed on communication strategies and representation techniques and presentation skills.

12.8 The Board recommends that the School makes the integration of technology with design work more explicit within the Part One.

13. Advice

13.1 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;

13.2 The Board advises that the School revise the role of the oral in relation to the Part Three criteria.

13.3 The Board advises more comprehensive feedback be provided to candidates at the intermediate assessment stage in Part Three.

13.4 At Part Two the Board advises that the School strengthen the delivery of management, practice and law and further integration into the thesis project.

13.5 At both Parts One and Part Two the Board advises that the School use the full range of marks.

13.6 The Board advises that the School further consider the development of students' writing skills at both Parts One and Two.

14. Commentary

14.1 Academic position statement (written by the School)
At the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, we are a community of students, scholars and practitioners who are committed to architecture as a diverse and wide-ranging field of investigation and practice. We understand design to be a collective cultural endeavour that involves the acquisition and exercise of complex knowledges and skills. These we believe are best realised through a dynamic approach to education, which sees it not as the transmission of a set of truths but as an ongoing process of inquiry in which staff and students are both participants. Our efforts are always directed toward fostering an academic environment that values this openness, while encouraging the pursuit of design, in all its aspects, at the highest level. At the heart of the Newcastle Architecture curriculum is the belief that the students must think for themselves. This results in a well-grounded tradition of plurality of approaches across the School. The students are supported in the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary to them so that they can participate in professional teams, while making their own judgements and acting on their personal convictions.

All three parts of the professional programme in Architecture at Newcastle are long established. The Architecture programmes benefit from their part in a major civic University with regional significance, from the attitudes that pervade such an institution—encouraging scholarship and research—and from the facilities that support it, such as the University Library and Students' Union. The reputation of the School and the University, together with the popularity of Newcastle as a destination for students, contribute to strong and buoyant recruitment at undergraduate level. We recruit very capable, enthusiastic and industrious students, who are one of our greatest strengths. An international reputation, and the high quality of life in the North East, have attracted a diverse staff from around the world. The School has focused on recruiting people who can both engage in the studio creatively and concretely and pursue research effectively. The contract staff is complemented by enthusiastic, high quality practitioners drawn from all over the UK and beyond, who act as part-time studio tutors, lecturers, consultants and critics. Whilst the School has an international character and outlook, it is the city and region that continue to define the character of the School and provide a rich source of inspiration for the School's teaching.

In its professionally accredited courses, the School's longstanding ethos seeks to balance creativity and practicality, experiment and scholarship. We encourage students to be aware of the physical, social, cultural and economic contexts of design, and we encourage speculation that has material consequences. Architects, we believe, should not only be able to imagine, but must also be able to work towards the practical delivery of their ideas. As architects, we must, of course, be technically and

professionally competent, but professional training needs to go beyond just achieving competence, encouraging young architects to appreciate how architecture works in its various contexts, and what it does. Our aim is to produce reflective practitioners with a good balance of skills and sharp critical judgement who are well equipped in material imagination and with a sense of social and environmental responsibility. We also acknowledge the importance of developing key transferable skills that provide our graduates with the flexibility to pursue careers in other fields.

The Architecture programmes benefit from the proximity of cognate disciplines in Town Planning, Urban Design and Landscape. This equips the School with a wide intellectual scope that encompasses the diversity of ways in which the built environment can be interpreted, understood, designed and inhabited. These understandings are further enriched from wider teaching and research collaborations within the University including Civil Engineering and Fine Art. The School has a strong and varied research culture that informs our teaching. Architectural research has developed exceptional strengths in the areas of architectural history and theory and in visual and material culture. It also has vibrant research strands in practice, sustainability and various areas of technology, including human/computer interaction where there has been a close relation with Culture Lab, the University's media technology research centre. These varied research areas contribute to a wide understanding of how architecture is shaped by the societies and cultures in which it is produced, and how architecture, in turn, shapes those societies and cultures. By Part 2 students become directly aware of the research activity of the School and a clear link is established between research and

pegagogy. This inflects studio design projects and encourages exploration in depth. Linked Research options provide an opportunity for students to work directly with staff on 'live' research projects and a dissertation option builds from specific research strands. The Part 2 programme also allows students to develop a specialism and gives an opportunity to pursue an accelerated Masters level qualifications in related fields: Digital Architecture, Urban Design and Town Planning. The planned introduction of additional PGT programmes from 2012-13 will further enhance these opportunities.

Our overarching view of architectural pedagogy is that it should be student-centred – placing the student at the core of their own learning, with an increasing space to develop their own priorities as they progress through the programmes. The structure of design teaching has consciously sought to build a sense of a learning community and students pursue a shared, broadly based studio education with a common learning experience that also encourages and supports individual interests and varied outcomes. The School values the strong sense of community and studio culture that exists within the Architecture programmes and has invested significant resources into supporting it. Architecture benefits from well-equipped studio spaces with 24/7 access for students. The Architecture Building is located at the heart of the campus and is intensively used and highly valued by the students. We also enable students to play an active role in the running of the School. They chair the Staff Student Committee and are also members of the Board of Studies, giving them an active role in curriculum development. The students help to manage the plotting facilities and run the School-subsidised coffee bar ('Kofi Bar'). A student mentoring scheme provides a peer support network in the

undergraduate programme. Students also play an active role in organising the end-of-year exhibitions, in the publication of the newly established Design Yearbook and extra-curricula lecture series; 'Conversations with Practice', which brings a range of practitioners and alumni into the School. In addition, the Newcastle University Architectural Society (NUAS) organises a regular programme of social events. The School supports and hosts a number of broad-ranging public events including a series of Research and Design Seminars and has recently established the APL Public Lecture Programme which features prominent academics and practitioners from all over the world (this year including Eric Parry, Richard Sennett and Anna Minton). The School is also co-sponsor and co-host of the NE region RIBA lecture series.

Graduate employment from the Architecture programmes remains high although students have more recently found it difficult to secure employment in architectural practice immediately following graduation. In response, the School has helped to establish, and continued to support, the so-called archiGRAD initiative which gives unemployed graduates the opportunity to work on design projects outside the commercial interest of established practices, helping them develop their skills and design portfolio whilst looking for practice-based work. The School has also introduced a Graduate Tutor scheme that provides recently graduated students with teaching experience.

The School actively participates in schemes designed to widen access to higher education. We contribute to the University's PARTNERS Programme Supported Entry Route that works with people who have the potential to succeed at university, but who, for a variety of reasons, may not feel confident about applying, or are not sure that

university is for them. The School also participates in a design-based Foundation course and Graduate Diploma with INTO which help international students develop their cultural awareness, language and writing skills prior to embarking on an UG or PG degree in Architecture. The School actively seeks to engage outside organisations and to make contributions to communities beyond the University. We regularly run student projects with external bodies such as Newcastle and Gateshead City Council, Northern Architecture, the Ouseburn Trust, the Ralph Erskine Society and various community groups that allow students to participate in real world projects for mutual benefit. We have recently established a Design Office staffed by academic staff and PGR students that is seeking to undertake research-informed practice both within and beyond the institution

14.2   **Self-Appraisal and Developments since the last visit**
The Board considered that the academic position statement presented to the Board was generic and lacking a clear narrative. It did not state a clear academic position for comment or discussion, offering primarily a descriptive account of the student experience. Whilst the Board recognised the School's on-going development, further reflection on this statement would contribute to the coherence of research and pedagogic development within the School.

The Board commended the many positive developments since the last Visiting Board. The University has invested heavily in resources, including improving facilities and funding high level appointments. University senior management was supportive of architecture and is positive about the future. Architecture is well-regarded and an important part of the University's broad-based offer. The

Board was assured by university senior management that high-level support will continue. The University's commitment to architecture is further demonstrated by the cap on the CAP course fee and the decision to subsidise Part Two fees.

The Department of Architecture considers that it is well supported by the University at both faculty and higher level. The Department is confident that architecture will remain attractive in the new funding regime.

The Department of Architecture is currently in a period of transition. Staffing had recently stabilised following a period of significant turnover, there having been several changes at senior management level. At the time of the visit the Director of Architecture had been in post for one year. Other recent significant appointments included two professorships.

The Department considered that at the time of the last visit it had been unsure of its direction, and was yet to identify its unique selling point in anticipation of the new funding regime, given its own transitional status and the changing context of higher education in the UK. However it was confident that it had retained its identity throughout the period of difficulty. It sees itself as delivering a balanced all-round education, combining design, technology and theory. There are good staff-student relationships and a sense of community. It attracts very able, enthusiastic students who contribute to the life of the school. The School is embedded in the life of the city and the region and enjoys strong links with practice. The staff and student body have become more international since 2007.

The Department would like to provide an enhanced offer and improve the quality of design. It believes that it has not yet exploited the full potential of the range of disciplines available. It is developing a social position, which is seen as distinctive by potential students. The School aims to produce graduates that are versatile thinkers, with a focus on questions of a social and environmental nature, but also with marketable skills.

The validated programmes have undergone, or are due to undergo, extensive review. Part Two was seen as the priority and was revised and re-launched as an M.Arch in 2011. At present Parts 1, 2 and 3 run independently of one another. The Department is aware that students would like to see more cross-stage and vertical design projects, which have been successfully trialled in Parts One and Two. Design charrettes have successfully been introduced. The Department wishes to set up studio work as student centred, providing flexibility to supporting students in their own trajectories. Design elements in the Part One programme were fundamentally restructured in summer 2011 chiefly in response to the revised ARB/RIBA criteria and external examiners' reports. When reviewing the Part One course the School will look to see how connections can be made with staff research and will explore the possibility of a greater level of interdisciplinary working and research-led teaching. In summer 2011 the School received approval for four new postgraduate taught programmes to be implemented in 2012. These will connect directly with staff research strengths and the M.Arch, and should ultimately inform the BA.

Assessment and tutoring processes have been reviewed with the introduction of provisional marks, personal reflective documents designed to encourage self-criticism

and self-reflection, and stage-entry and mid-term interviews to identify and discuss strengths and weaknesses. Students have recently enjoyed success in RIBA competitions, including a commendation in the 2011 President's Medals dissertation awards.

14.2   Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit
The presentation of portfolios made them difficult to access and review. The presentation of Part Three by staff was helpful.

The Board found it difficult to identify clear academic leadership of Programmes and Year stages.

14.2.1   Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit
The School provided samples of low, middle and high pass portfolios from all years of each programme to be validated, as required under the procedures for validation.

14.3   Responses made to the previous Visiting Board report (and to reports of any revisits) and external examiner comments.
The Board noted that external examiners' advice was central to the revision of both Part One and Part Two programmes. The Board considered that the School provided reasonable responses to the external examiners' reports.

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

The Department of Architecture forms part of the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. The School also encompasses Town Planning, Landscape Architecture, Urban Design, Digital Architecture and Urban Conservation and offers a wide range of undergraduate

and postgraduate programmes. Postgraduate provision is being expanded; new programmes include a PhD in Creative Practice and MA in Architecture and Planning Studies: Design. University approval has recently been received for four new taught postgraduate programmes: MA Architectural Design Research, MA Architectural Theory and Criticism, MA Future Landscape Imaginaries and MSc Sustainable Buildings and Environments.

The Board strongly supports the proposals for the development of a postgraduate school. The new taught programmes will open up links with research. The Board noted the Director of Architecture's intention to exploit the potential for interdisciplinary working in more depth. With regard to connections with other schools, the Board noted in particular the positive contribution of artists to year one of the BA (Hons).

14.5   Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the Part One

14.5.1   Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The Board recommends that the pedagogic structure of stages 1 to 3 be more explicitly articulated and keyed to a coherent teaching, learning and assessment strategies. The Board considered that course objectives are unclear. The course appeared to be somewhat lacking in a robust pedagogic strategy, stage by stage leadership, ownership and overall direction. The Board noted that the programme is undergoing an extensive review.

14.5.2   Course design and content
As it stands the overall structure of the course is lacking in clarity. However, the Board recognises that this is work in progress and looks forward to seeing developments at the mid-term visit.

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

- *Design*
This is adequate. However it is inconsistent in quality and lacks overall coherence as a programme. Process was under-represented in the portfolios sampled.

- *Technology & Environment*
Overall there was inadequate evidence of thorough integration of structure, construction and environmental techniques. The Board recommends that the School makes more explicit the integration of technology with design work within the Part One.

- *Cultural Context*
Although criteria were met, overall the work was uninspiring. There was little evidence of in-depth exploration of cultural context. The Board considered that there is an opportunity to explore regionalism in more depth.

- *Communication*
The Board considers the standards of presentation of the portfolios and quality of communication of ideas and process not strong in some instances. The Board recommends that more emphasis is placed on communication strategies and representation techniques and presentation skills. The Board also advises that the School consider the development of students' writing skills.

- *Management Practice & Law*

Specific modules are delivered in years 1 and 3. The Board considered that evidence of management, practice and law needs to be more explicit.

- *Preparation for Professional Experience, (Part 1 only)*
In addition to the professional studies modules in years 1 and 3, the 'BA and Beyond' event in semester 1 of year 3 involves speakers from a variety of professions and former students are invited to offer advice on finding work. The professional studies adviser also offers advice on an individual basis.

14.5.4 Progression within the course
The Board made no observations regarding progression.

14.5.5 Assessment:
The Board recommends that the School further develop a robust assessment strategy in studio to ensure that the marking reflects attainment that is comparable to national standards. The Board advises that the School use the full range of marks.

14.5.6 Admissions and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course
The standard offer is AAA at A level; students who are not taking art and design may be asked to submit a portfolio. The University actively promotes widening participation through its PARTNERS scheme with local schools (see also paragraph 14.12). The PARTNERS Supported Entry Route allows adjusted offers to be made to potential students.

INTO Newcastle University, the University's on campus language centre, has recently introduced an Architecture Foundation Programme in partnership with the School.

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This is designed to support international students towards the Architectural Studies undergraduate degree. International applicants who do not meet the entry requirements for the BA Architectural Studies course may take the foundation programme, successful completion of this course to the required standard allows the student to enter the BA Architectural Studies course.

Admissions remain healthy. Numbers are not expected to grow significantly in the new funding regime although the Department will not be bound by any quota due to the standard of offer.

14.6 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to the Part Two

14.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives
The programme is being redeveloped and has recently become an M.Arch. The structure of the Part Two has been radically overhauled. The programme is now clearly linked to ambitious research objectives that will enhance the standards of outputs at all levels.

14.6.2 Course design and content
This is covered in 14.6.1, above.

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

- *Design*
The Board considered that Stage 5 (first year Part Two) showed signs of excellent achievement. The Board hopes that this is continued into year 6.

- *Technology & Environment*

There was some good evidence of integration of structural and environmental technologies.

- *Cultural Context*
At present the dissertation is optional at Part Two. Students in the sample focussed upon by the Board had not undertaken this option. The Board could not therefore judge levels of achievement in writing.

There was evidence that the School is interested in social context.

- *Communication*
At the upper end of achievement this is very good. There were some excellent drawings at Stage 5. As at Part One, the Board advises that the School consider the development of students' writing skills.

- *Management Practice & Law*
The Board advises that the School strengthen the delivery of management, practice and law and its further integration into the thesis project.

14.6.4 Progression within the course
The Board made no observations regarding progression.

14.6.5 Assessment:
The Board recommends that at Part Two the School exercise vigilance in marking at the lower end of the portfolios. The Board notes that this was the subject of a recommendation by the 2007 Visiting Board. The Board advises that the School use the full range of marks.

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

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Applicants must possess a first or 2.1 Part 1 degree and normally have completed a year of professional training. Students with a 2.2 may be considered on the basis of a strong portfolio and evidence of personal development. There is no direct entry at a later stage of the course.

14.7 Part Three
The Diploma in Architectural Practice and Management comprises four modules: Work Placement, Case Study, the Context and Management of Practice and the Management of Architecture and Construction which are delivered over twelve months. Candidates attend three seminars covering Practice Management & Business Administration, Management of Construction and Management of Architecture. The seminars are assessment points for specific modules. The case study is marked by the professional examiners before the oral. Candidates who successfully pass the case study are permitted to present for examination. Because of this key progression point in the Part Three examination – and the assessment by external professionals – the Board feels that the university should make more explicit the assessment criteria and guidance process leading up to this point.

The Board noted that none of the present Part Three examiners examine at other institutions. The Board therefore recommends that Part 3 External and Professional Examiners should be drawn from a wider pool in order that standards are benchmarked against national criteria.

The Board recommends that clear assessment criteria are established for the Part Three oral examination.

The Board advises that the School revise the role of the oral in relation the Part Three criteria.

The Board advises more rigorous feedback be provided to candidates at the intermediate assessment stage in Part Three.

14.8 **External examining arrangements**
The Board considered that external examining arrangements appear to be adequate and noted that external examiners are consulted on proposed changes to the validated programmes. The Board met external examiners attached to all programmes and professional examiners attached to Part Three. The following reflects the main points of the discussion:

- Externals are treated as critical friends; notably they were consulted about the developments in the M.Arch programme.
- The change in the Department in the last year had been impressive. The Department had responded to very critical external examiners' reports and needed to ensure that this trajectory was maintained.
- Staff turnover and a lack of continuity had been a problem. The recent investment in professorships and quality of appointment gave the School renewed strength.
- Students had always been of high calibre and enthusiastic, actively supporting the School and recommending it to others. The School produced well-rounded and confident graduates.
- At Part One external examiners sampled work due to the time available, focussing on stage 3, although they had access to all portfolios. Non-design work could be thin.
- At Part One, interviews with individual students are no longer permitted under university regulations. This issue

had been raised with the Department, which intended to make representation to the university. The externals commented that normally any apparent thinness in portfolios would be mitigated by the opportunity to interview students. The suspension of interviews due to university regulations was frustrating.

- Broadly speaking the marks did represent the quality of attainment in the work and were comparable with other institutions. The externals agreed that the threshold at Part One was of an acceptable standard.
- At Part One student work was solid, mature and competent rather than exciting. There was not enough ambition. The first year of the BA programme had improved; however, projects could be more ambitious and briefs could be improved. Using sites in Newcastle was good.
- B.Arch (Part Two) external examiners interviewed every student and could view any portfolio. Marks were discussed thoroughly and it was their opinion that marking was appropriate.
- The M.Arch (revised Part Two) programme was still in transition, but changes had been positive and were well received by students.
- The Department's current academic position was difficult to articulate given recent and ongoing developments. It was in a state of flux, in a positive way. New high level appointments would influence its future direction. It was remarked that students may not have a clear idea of the focus and direction for these very reasons.
- The external examiners commented that the Department viewed itself in terms of its richness in research, whereas students were interested in employability. These two objectives require careful integration.

- Its strong reputation in research needed to have a greater influence on studio projects. This was beginning to happen. Examiners commented that the Department wished to base the thesis project to be based on research depth and rigour. Communicating this to students had been challenging.
- Staff were engaged in high level theoretical, philosophical research. This had taken on a more international emphasis with the appointment of new staff who brought new research interests. These would bridge history and theory and research with design. The involvement in design teaching of staff who are leaders in the philosophy of architecture was commended. It was good that Newcastle felt sufficiently confident to develop research in philosophy and theory.
- There was some discussion among the external examiners about the consideration of professional matters within the programmes. One view was that professional matters should be given greater emphasis and inform all areas of the courses. The Certificate of Architectural Practice (CAP) course was a key component in this. It was an excellent course and could form the spine of professional activity from the beginning of Part One through to Part Three. At Part Two the level of management, practice and law knowledge was average; engagement with management, practice and law could be more creative.
- On the other hand the question of the balance between academic and professional considerations in an academic environment was a perennial one. Students at Part Two had requested more design work, which had been responded to by the School. A new member of staff was engaging with practice issues at an intellectual level and it would be interesting to see how this influenced the course.
- The Department was moving towards an idea of critical practice. Examiners gained a strong sense from the better

students that they were engaging in the character and culture of Newcastle and its hinterland.

- The Board noted that the present Part Three professional examiners do not examine elsewhere.

14.9 **Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience**

The Board commended the CAP course and considered it an exemplar of good practice. Students have been affected by the economic climate but graduate employment remains generally high. Post-part 1 students may register on the Certificate of Architectural Practice (CAP) course. This carries 60 credits but is not compulsory. Separate arrangements are made for the recording of professional practice experience of students who choose not to enrol or are unable to do so. The CAP course was restructured last year in consultation with local practices to accommodate students in non-conventional employment. Students are visited in their practices by the CAP module leader only in the rare case of difficulty.

The School has established and supported an initiative called archiGRAD, which enables unemployed graduates to work on design projects outside the commercial interests of practice. This has been a successful venture which the University hopes to strengthen and extend and is commended by the Board. A graduate tutor scheme has been established to provide recent graduates with teaching experience.

14.10 **Students;**

First years were unable to attend the student meeting as they were attending a crit. Fifth year students also had to leave before the meeting finished to attend a class. The following represents the main points of the discussion.

The strengths of the School were seen as:

- Its reputation. The city itself was also attractive.
- A special and distinctive offer. The courses provided a good balance between design and technical underpinning
- The human approach to design, which was good preparation for practice.
- The freedom and support given to students to develop their chosen style.
- The studio culture. The friendly environment built confidence, a sense of team working and the opportunity to see others' work raised individuals' ambition.
- The programmes provided students with transferable skills.
- The diverse student body, which included mature students and international students. There was good retention of Newcastle students from Part 1 to Part 2; at the same time the influx of Part 1 graduates of other schools creates a good mix.
- The youth and enthusiasm of the staff
- The approachability of staff. Students were also content with the amount of contact time.
- The re-launch of the Part Two as an M.Arch; the structure was better and provided a more coherent education.
- The Department's strong links with practice, which enabled the School to provide students with appropriate advice when seeking experience
- The CAP course covering the Part 1 year out, which maintained students' relationship with the university.
- Students who had spent several years at the School had observed a lot of positive change over the last 12/18 months. This included investment in staff and resources and developments such as the yearbook and exhibitions which had been initiated by the new staff.

- Students appreciated the recent considerable investment in IT, studio and workshop facilities. The 24-hour access was considered excellent.
- The Department's speed of response to concerns; students commented that the new director of architecture seems to be listening to students and implementing change. Year heads are also approachable.
- The reinstated system of year co-ordinators and degree programme directors was working well and had provided stability.
- Student-led crits in fifth year had been very successful and were attended by students from other years.

Among areas that could be improved were the following:

- Students would welcome the opportunity to work more with cognate disciplines such as landscape, surveying and planning.
- While acknowledging the heavy investment in facilities, students commented that these might be further improved by more space in the second year and fifth year studios, and more computers in the second year studios.
- Although one student commented that postgraduate level research was a strength and had been a factor in choosing to come to Newcastle, in general students were unsure of the research activities of the school. Some commented that research could be integrated more with the programmes. Part Two students were more aware of staff research, particularly through the links to the thesis project.
- Students considered that student-led crits were trying to make assessment more open. The provision of more feedback opportunities at the end of projects was one change implemented following students' comments. However they were unsure of the difference between

formative and summative assessment. Students commented that in group work all group members received the same mark. However, the Board later learnt that group work is used sparingly and the School noted that it is not always the case that students receive the same mark.

14.11 **Staff;**
The Board met a large group of full time and part time staff attached to the architecture programme, including staff from cognate disciplines who contribute to teaching in specific areas. Staff were supportive of the School and commented on the calibre of its students and the positive atmosphere. The main points discussed were as follows:

- The School's USP is difficult to identify as it changes subtly over time.
- The School focusses on the individual, providing them with the opportunity to find themselves as architects. There was no desire to place a label on the school but to keep the conversation open.
- Painters, sculptors etc are brought in to work with students in the first year to develop the creative process. Students are encouraged to use sketchbooks and developmental work to discover their own identity as architects.
- It has a northern school attitude of gritty realism. The city provides many different approaches to urbanism; localism; material realism and the political context provide material for the students.
- The projects selected by students in stages 3 and 6 identify the school.
- Architecture is deeply embedded in social fabric and concerns, particularly the urban realm.

- Context in all senses informs design imagination. All projects have material consequences; they must be buildable but involving more than competence.
- It is an international school in terms of students, staff and research activities.
- Research does inform the teaching, but could do so to a greater extent.
- With regard to the delivery of education, the periphery of the learning environment is effective, particularly the use of digital media as students are more willing to engage in this and share ideas. This is creating a culture of learning. Off-curricular activities have recently been successfully introduced, for example the 'Conversations with Practice' initiative to which practitioners and graduates of the school contribute.
- The study of the creative process, reflecting on one's interests and developing the ability to articulate an idea is central to the educational process.
- The first year is democratic and inclusive; first year tutoring allows staff to have an awareness of weaker students.
- The revised structure of the first year has helped to improve students' communication skills.
- Staff have tried to articulate more clearly to students the nature of the study of architecture, including, for example, how the crit system works.
- The School can help students to find their own niche, help them to develop their own voice and provide them with marketable skills. Initiatives to help weaker or less confident students include student-led crits and twice-yearly student interviews with portfolio. This is particularly important at the mid point. Staff enable students to develop their own architectural position through various direct and indirect means.

- There is a high level of engagement with local professions and local clients.
- The School is interested in taking architecture out of the school, for example by holding the end of year exhibitions at an external venue.
- There are support mechanisms run by staff and students for international students to help them with cultural, language and academic issues.

Staff believed that the School's strengths included:
- The creative education provided
- The pedagogic context, which combines practical, theoretical and artistic approaches to design.
- Its presence in the region and understanding of 'northern' identity
- The strength of research-active staff, covering a broad and dynamic range of subjects
- The high calibre of the students; their greatest strength is the diversity of skills they develop.

Among things that could be improved were the following
- Printing facilities could be improved.
- It would be pedagogically beneficial to be able to hold crits in the studios, but space is currently too limited.
- The proposals to expand the graduate offer and develop a graduate culture were welcomed, but adequate facilities should be provided as there was a concern about possible competition for space.
- Students commented that the School does not have an external space, although the Board later learned that limited external space is available..
- Architecture staff considered that students would benefit from greater links with the workshops in the School of Fine Art.

- The School no longer had an in-house library and the current book budget for architecture was insufficient.
- Some commented that they felt that they had less contact time with students than previously. However, although a case could be made for more contact, in the present climate this would put pressure on staff as it was already difficult to balance teaching with administrative and research obligations.

With regard to links between research and teaching, staff reported that they introduce issues that are tested in teaching and the results of this then inform research. Through the linked Research modules in both stages of Part Two, students gain access to a wide range of research expertise which can also inform their M.Arch thesis.

The Board was interested in exploring the integration of design and technology. Staff commented that the design project in the second semester of stage 5 is explicitly connected with a technology module. The thesis project in stage 6 is a holistic project and involves detailed environmental strategies. Practitioners who contribute to the programme also bring in practising engineers. The aim is to realise a project from the conceptual stage without dilution.

Architectural representation is taught and encouraged, especially in the third year. Reliance on computers at too early a stage is discouraged. Students receive lectures on presentation. Analogue representation is covered in year 1, digital at year 2; these are then integrated. The School wishes to encourage use of presentation techniques that are fit for purpose. Students are now required to keep a reflective learning journal, which includes developmental work and is to be included in their academic portfolios.

At Part Two projects have a more comprehensive nature; students must undertake research projects in relationship to the main brief. Students must communicate this and consider how information is conveyed visually.

14.12 **Research**;
The School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape is a research intensive school. Its particular strengths are in architectural history and theory and in visual and material culture. Other fields include practice, sustainability and various areas of technology. The Board noted the strength of the research and several exciting initiatives designed to link research with teaching. These have already begun at Part Two (M.Arch) level and there are plans to extend this into the BA. Masters programmes in Architectural Design Research and Architectural Theory and Criticism have recently been established.

14.13 **Equal Opportunities**
The University and School are committed to equal opportunities. The PARTNERS programme with local schools has been running for 11 years and the number involved will soon increase from 117 schools to 150. Students who successfully complete the summer school receive an adjusted offer. The University reported that monitoring demonstrates that students who enter via this route perform as well as their peers.

14.14 **Resourcing and facilities;**

- *Studios*
The Board noted the recent considerable investment in improving and extending accommodation, which has included the enhancement of studio space. This

investment is appreciated by staff and students alike and the studio culture is reportedly good. However, staff commented that space in stage 2 and 5 remains under considerable pressure. Provision for other years is greater; at stage 6 each student has dedicated workspace. The provision of dedicated studio space for stage 1 works well but students commented that they could feel separate from the rest of the school. The possibility of having the 3 part 1 stages in one building is being discussed. There are 6 dedicated crit/exhibition spaces. The Board commended the 24 hour access which is appreciated by students.

- *IT and Workshops*
The Board noted the vast improvement to the workshops, which are supported by good technicians. An extension has recently been completed; new equipment includes laser cutters, a 3D printer and a plastics vacuum former. Opening hours have been extended and an additional staff member appointed. Students may also use the facilities of the art school. The Board noted that the quality of model making could continue to improve. Printing and plotting services have been updated and extended, as has hardware and software provision.

- *Library*
The Library is currently undergoing complete refurbishment. The subject-specific print collection numbers over 12,000 volumes and 39 print journals. This is supported by a growing collection of e-books and e-journals; some titles are held in both formats. An architecture, planning and landscape room houses core journals. Library staff considered the budget acceptable but under pressure from increases in student numbers.

However, the Board considered that the budget for books (currently £6K) could be usefully increased. The School is advised to review the currency of the collection.

15. **Documentation**
The School provided all documentation in advance of the visit as required under the Procedures for Validation.