Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Liverpool

Liverpool School of Architecture

BA (Hons) Architecture, part 1
MArch, part 2

date of visiting board 20/21 February 2014
1 Details of institution hosting courses
Liverpool School of Architecture
University of Liverpool
Leverhulme Building
Abercromby Square
Liverpool
L69 3BX

2 School of Architecture Head of Department
Dr Andrew Crompton

3 Course leaders:
Dr Iain Jackson, Director of Studies for BA Architecture
Jack Dunne, MArch Part 2

4 Courses offered for revalidation
BA (Hons) Architecture, Part 1
MArch, Part 2

5 Awarding body
University of Liverpool

6 The visiting board
Professor Paul Jones, Chair
Angie Pascoe, Vice Chair
Sumita Sinha
Nick Hayhurst
Blair Macintyre – student/graduate member
Philip Hyde – co professional
Maria Killick – regional representative
Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – RIBA
Daniel Crellin, RIBA North West – observer

Ms Sinha withdrew on the second day due to ill-health. However, the Board remained quorate.

7 Procedures and criteria for the visit
The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria for UK and international courses and examinations in architecture (published July 2011, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

8 Proposals of the visiting board
On 2 June 2014 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following course and qualification be granted Continued Validation

BA (Hons) Architecture, part 1
MArch, part 2
9 **Standard requirements for continued recognition**
Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

i external examiners being appointed for the course
ii any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA
iii any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title
iv submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed

10 **School's academic position statement (written by the School)**

1 **Introduction**

The character of the Liverpool School of Architecture is determined by a concern for investigation and experiment, which we believe to be a necessary response to a rapidly changing society. The School is educating for a lifetime of learning in architecture, and providing the graduates with skills that can be applied throughout their career. Responsiveness, flexibility and critical thinking are themes in our approach to teaching our BA Hons Architecture (Part I) and Master of Architecture (Part II) programmes. Student choice, team working, and evolving project agendas are integral to the core programme allowing the School to respond to the students’ individual strengths as well as the increasingly specialist and complex nature of professional life. The School’s non-professionally accredited taught postgraduate programmes, MA Architecture and MSc Sustainable Environmental Design in Architecture, enable students without professionally accredited undergraduate degrees to engage with the discipline at postgraduate level either as a precursor to MPhil/PhD level research or for its value as a specialised masters in its own right.

2 **School Identity and Strategic Aims**

Based around its core role of providing professionally accredited degree programmes that serve the building design industry in the UK and internationally, the School has developed a series of statements that describes its distinctive place in architectural education and establishes key aspects of its identity. The Liverpool School of Architecture:

- Is one of the UK’s oldest university schools of architecture, the first to have RIBA accredited programmes, and continues to innovate in the design of its curriculum;
- Is part of the original red-brick university and is dedicated to pursuing the integration of original research and high-quality teaching;
- Is based within the World Heritage Site port city of Liverpool and responds to its outward-looking international global focus;
- Is a centre for outreach activities in architecture and the visual arts that collaborates with local, national and international institutions and provides research-based intelligence and consultancy for the professions, industry and society;
- Is specifically concerned with the design of cities and the urban situation in its research and architectural teaching;
- Is a place where art and technology are understood as complementary aspects of the study and creation of architecture;
• It is focused on creating architecture graduates who balance imagination and creativity with real-world knowledge and skills.

The School’s principle aims are to introduce a rigorous approach to the development of architectural design and introduce the fundamental knowledge necessary for its pursuit in a professional way. There is a strong emphasis on providing an intellectual foundation to enrich students’ development of their own agenda. This is integrated into architectural design projects and academic modules that explore the real issues, problems and opportunities of creating new buildings in urban environments. The design studio is therefore at the core of the School’s agenda. Projects are often based in the city of Liverpool — a resource for experience in regional regeneration, though an international focus is also maintained with exchange programmes in Austria, Germany, China and the U.S.A.

The Liverpool School of Architecture’s objective is to offer rich and stimulating undergraduate programmes which will appeal to the steady number of increasingly able students we are attracting from home and abroad, whilst satisfying an ever-widening professional agenda and making it possible for the teaching staff to enhance their activities in an ever more competitive research environment. It faces multiple challenges in its programmes in Liverpool, its relationship with Xian Jiao Tong Liverpool University (XJTLU) University in Suzhou, China, and new proposals for the University of Liverpool London Campus. The School aims to respond positively and creatively to the changing educational, research and professional pressures these developments present.

3 Academic Agenda

The following key points are based on staff views, student feedback, internal University reports, and external reports by examiners and professional bodies:

Recent exceptional areas of activity
• Excellent research profile that directly supports undergraduate and postgraduate learning particularly in areas such as architectural history, sustainability, film and architecture, acoustics;
• Initiatives such as new postgraduate masters programmes, e-learning strategies, workshop investment, that have positive impacts on programme development;
• Rich relationship with partner institutions overseas, student exchange programmes to Europe, the USA and China.

Individuality of the learning environment
• Positioned in a physically reinvented city (with which the School has a close relationship) that is facing many architectural and urban design challenges of direct concern to the profession;
• Large size architecture school (by national standards) with consequent increased mix in staff and student backgrounds. Encouragement of non-traditional entrants, gender balance at almost even figures;
• Excellent building resource providing dedicated space for a strong studio culture, student studios, reviews and crits, postgraduate research rooms, CAAD, physical modelling;
• Pro-active relationship with an active student body and a broad outreach programme delivering lectures, exhibitions, workshops, student accessible symposia and conferences.
• Good relationship with university resulting in timely response to programme needs in terms of academic staffing, facilities, IT and library resources;

Differences between Part I and Part II
• In the BA, group and individual teaching focusing on attaining personal professional confidence in order to take advantage of practice experience, and the opportunity to transfer to the non-professional K10D route and obtain a good degree for those who find the practice of architecture is not for them.

• In the MArch, small studio ‘offices’ and team projects provide a simulation of practice where complex projects can be tackled in a ‘laboratory of the profession’, and the increased focus on student choice in response to individual interests and personal future professional career development.

Relevance to professional practice
• High quality experienced full-time professionally qualified staff with a strong commitment to teaching, and excellent cohort of part-time staff with direct ‘real-world’ practice experience;

• Individual projects led by award-winning practitioners working to agendas they face in the office.

• Studio and lecture course themes that draw on contemporary issues, live projects and architectural competitions.

Creative criteria delivering course content
• Focus on integrated fully accredited Part I and Part II architecture programmes that are shaped by specific staff expertise whilst closely adhering to professional requirements;

• Flexible programme design delivering responsive, changing projects that complement and extend core learning whilst still maintaining criteria fulfilling content;

• Module content informed by a deep-rooted research ethos;

• Course delivery benefits from teaching that takes place alongside a strong Masters/PhD programme.

11 Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The drive, energy and commitment of the architecture team in delivering the courses during ongoing significant institutional changes.

11.2 The pedagogic approach to authentic practice through the use of group work and live projects set in the region, leading to highly employable graduates.

11.3 The quality of the existing and new research provision and its relevance to the MArch and the ambition to extend research-led teaching to the undergraduate programme.

12 Conditions
There are no conditions.

13 Action points

13.1 The Board recommends that there should be evidence and articulation of concept development and design process within the portfolios.

13.2 The School of Architecture should develop more diverse design briefs at part 1 to expose students to a variety of design techniques and encourage innovation and a more varied output.
13.3 The students should be encouraged to develop their communication skills using a full range of traditional and digital techniques and media, particularly at part 1.

14 Advice
The visiting board offers the following advice to the school on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

14.1 The Board advises that the School of Architecture consider broadening its approach to scholarship, teaching methods and learning strategies used in the design studio.

14.2 The Board advises that the School of Architecture reconsider the provision for a dissertation at undergraduate level.

14.3 The Board suggests that the School of Architecture exercise caution with generous marking, particularly in the design projects.

15 Meetings

15.1 Meeting with budget holder
The Board met the Head of the School of the Arts, the current and immediate past Heads of the School of Architecture, the BA and MArch Course Directors, the Roscoe Professor of Architecture and the School Manager. The Board was aware that the School was undergoing a period of transition and was interested in discussing: the School’s academic position, especially with regard to its theoretical position; its strengths as a school; the impact upon delivery and resourcing of recent major changes; architecture’s relationship with the School of the Arts; synergies with the wider faculty and the profession; the degree to which research informs the validated programmes; how graduates are equipped for the modern profession; the diversity of the design agenda; and how design and supporting modules integrate in a pedagogic sense. The following represents the main points of the discussion.

- As Liverpool School of Architecture is a large school, it would be inappropriate to have a single position. There are several areas of research intensity with notable strengths, but no prescribed path in design.
- The School is practice-oriented, producing graduates who can prosper in the profession. There is also a non-validated, alternative route. Those who follow the professional route have an expectation that they will become a professional architect.
- BA is rounded, preparing students for life in practice and also taking a well-rounded artistic approach. The School aims to get as many as possible into good practices. At MArch level group work is encouraged. Students work in teams, emulating practice design strategies in the School. There is a social agenda and an outreach programme. There is a strong ambition to be relevant, particularly in the urban situation. Liverpool as a city is important to the School. Applicants are made aware of its richness and potential and what the School offers. While Liverpool the city is important, students are also encouraged to look beyond this. The School’s agenda is student-led and self-directed to a very large degree.
• The popularity of XJTLU created a demand among Chinese students to transfer to Liverpool because of its reputation. The BA (Hons) Architecture Years 2 and 3 have doubled in size in three years. More space has recently been allocated in an adjacent building. Although there have been difficulties (which were being dealt with through the University Facilities Management) there has been no impact upon teaching, standards remaining high. Through reorganisation of teaching and the employment of a large group of part time tutors, the School has maintained the level of individual student contact.

• Staff and facilities have expanded in line with student numbers. The current staff:student ratio of 1:19 includes the Chinese students. The actual figure is 1:17.5; in studio this becomes 1:12.

• XJTLU is an exciting development that had been planned for many years. The level of success exceeded expectations. Adjustments to teaching and new staff appointments helped the School to deal with the influx. There is necessarily a settling down period and further adjustments have been made. The School is making sure that the basics are done well before exploring further expansion of teaching. Students now have a choice of projects and tutors. It is not yet a true unit system, but is gradually opening up.

• Parts of the transition have been challenging. Managing this while continuing to deliver the courses has been a significant achievement. The School now feels that it is at a position following two years of development to begin to take advantage of these changes.

• The formation of the School of the Arts as part of the University’s total restructuring was intended to ensure administrative and professional services support, to place academic units in the best groupings. The arts school is diverse and it is recognised that architecture has particular needs. The SOTA policy is to ensure disciplines are appropriately supported. Architecture can now draw on a range of professional support staff at local rather than central level, as exemplified by the refurbishment undertaken in response to the large influx of students. The new schools ensure that collaborative possibilities are there and funding is available; however, connections are not imposed. Opportunities will be there in the future but at present the main relationships are in research.

• Every full time member of staff either on a teaching/research or teaching/scholarship contract. Staff are not employed according to the field of research but by the quality of it. This policy ensures diversity. While Liverpool is a research-led university, professional courses are very important. Research therefore does inform the validated courses, particularly through history, the dissertation, urban studies, and projects such as housing, in which the University undertakes research. Staff lectures on specialist areas and on research methodology also directly benefit the students.

• The expansion of masters programmes since the last RIBA visit has been beneficial. Some subjects, such as methodology, are taught to mixed groups of MArch and other MA students.

• The part 2 course structure prepares students for practice through its group dynamics, enabling students effectively to work as a mini-practice. Contact with the PSA is good. 95% of part 2 students have practice jobs. The participation of practising architects in part 1 ensures that students are always exposed to current practice and ideas. Practice is always discussed in design studio. There are also site visits and placements over the summer period in part 1 plus a special module in year 3. The end of the year exhibition provides good exposure to members of the profession. Staff are interested in areas of
practice as research fields. Contacts in the profession can deliver lectures in this area.

- The large final project represents an opening up to different specialisms. The School is presently trying to stay with a year-based system but ideally allowing individual groups to take on some flavour of a unit.
- The integration of design and support modules is an ongoing exercise. Again, this is in transition. Greater integration is being developed through the full and part-time staff, the increasing number of architects teaching, and the contribution of specialists through lectures and specialist tutorials. Induction programme support the new staff.
- The School is approaching its goal of staffing, approach to teaching and approach to studio.

15.2 Meeting with students

All years of the BA and MArch, year out and post-part 2 students were represented, including a representative of the XJTLU incoming cohort. The Board was interested in discussing: the recent changes (increase in students and staff; move to the School of the Arts; changes in physical resources); the experience of XJTLU students who had transferred to Liverpool: aspects of course structure and content including the technical / creative balance, design identity and diversity of design projects; preparation for practice; and awareness of the School’s research activity and how it informs design work. The following represents the main points of the discussion:

Among the reasons students chose to study at Liverpool were the following:

- Its location in Liverpool, which is a small city that has everything a big city has.
- The School was welcoming and had a friendly atmosphere.
- The enthusiasm of the tutors. Students were impressed that they were able to meet tutors on the open day.
- The gallery and studio space
- The structure of the course, the modules and the group work. Students felt this was a more beneficial preparation for practice.
- The mix of the technical and the creative offered by the courses
- Part 1 Liverpool graduates who returned for part 2 chose to do so as the structure of the part 2 dovetailed with that of part 1 and it was logical to return. The group work at part 2 is a valuable experience. Returning students’ knowledge of the staff and their enthusiasm were also a factor.

The Board asked about the students’ perspective on the recent changes involving the School of Architecture, namely the move to the School of the Arts and the influx of students from XJTLU.

- Students felt that the change had come as a surprise. Concerns were expressed that incoming first years at Liverpool did not necessarily know that their cohort size will double in the second year. While the situation was being managed students had come to the School believing that they would be part of a 100-strong year group. The benefits of XJTLU were appreciated, but more information in the course literature was considered essential. The current third year had felt better informed, having been regularly briefed by staff. They confirmed that any related problems (such as studio space) had been dealt with immediately; however, they too felt that it should have been
explained better in the prospectus. The changes in the second year (the adopting of groups) and additional staff had helped.

- Students remained unsure of the benefits of the transition to the School of Arts. They felt that as architecture is the only design course in the University, it appeared that the discipline is little understood. However, again, architecture staff try to resolve issues.
- Students remarked that it is clear that substantial amounts have been invested by the University in the School of Architecture and its facilities. This is ongoing and the benefits have been welcomed.
- Some commented that the new studio arrangements for BA and MArch were creating a physical divide, reducing the opportunity for interaction and exposure to each other’s work, there were also concerns that the year 4 and 5 students were physically separated, making interaction difficult. However, others commented that crits are held in the same building, providing some opportunity to see MArch work when it is finished. Students did appreciate having their own space and felt that the new system was effective.
- XJTLU students felt they were adjusting, but that there was possibly a communications barrier. The formation of students into studios and groups created the opportunity to communicate. It was interesting that the size of the cohort of Chinese students is equal to that of the Liverpool cohort. Chinese students have formed their own communities and there is some sense of a lack of communication between Chinese and home students.
- Students commented that pastoral care arrangements appeared to be clearer in part 1 than in part 2 following the School’s move to the School of Arts. Changes to formal protocols were not immediately apparent. On an individual basis, students do feel that tutors are approachable.
- The mix of tutors is the most instrumental factor in achieving technical and creative balance and fostering a design identity. The eclectic environment allows students to find a niche that suits them. This is helped by the year structure, the first year being creative without restriction, the second year involving spatial planning and the third year combining the two.
- The lower years now participate in more site visits than previously.
- Each studio has its own design identity. This will expand more now that students can choose their own brief.
- While students spoke highly of design teaching and opportunities, more coverage of technology would be welcome. The projects were praised but students felt that more coverage of fundamentals would help them in practice.
- Different views were expressed regarding the level of theoretical input in the masters, some wishing for a greater level while others welcomed the freedom to explore this for themselves, particularly through the thesis.
- Students can choose their own direction for their thesis. Inputs from all areas (technical, theoretical, sustainability) are all demonstrated in the work. The course gives them a good basis to pursue their own direction. Some would welcome more coverage of procurement at both part 1 and 2 whereas others believed that certain knowledge and skills were acquired most appropriately in School or in practice and that what a School could cover was necessarily limited.
- Different views were expressed about the level to which students were prepared for a multidisciplinary environment.
- Views on preparation for practice varied. Although the professional practice modules were good, more could be done to bridge the jump between part 1
and practice, and likewise at part 2. More exposure of their work to London practices would be welcomed. University careers advice could seem generic; it was considered that the needs of architects were not understood by the University. However, architecture tutors were very approachable and offered to look at portfolios.

- Students felt that it would have been useful to talk to fourth or fifth years about applying for year out jobs. However it appeared that the majority of last year’s part 2 graduates found jobs very quickly.
- Different views were expressed about the level to which students should be prepared for practice in a pragmatic way versus the opportunity the University brings to be more experimental and develop skills in an individual way. The practice management module in the fourth year was very helpful as a refresher.
- Students considered that some areas of research do directly inform work. Staff present their research activities to the students. If students express an interest in a specific area staff can direct them accordingly. MArch tutors present their research and ideas, so that students can choose their tutor.
- Students are consulted frequently about feedback and were confident that processes had improved, although sometimes queries remained about group work and understanding the final mark. Some would welcome earlier diagnostic feedback. Other students commented that they were free to discuss with tutors how marking was decided. Formative assessment is good, but only summative assessment received a mark. A breakdown of a mock project would be useful. Others remarked that they had been shown the work of previous years to enable them to gauge the standard.
- Students’ awareness of and engagement with the wider profession is partly fostered through regular tutorials with staff from practice. The onus is on students to engage. The Architecture Society also provides opportunities through its guest lecture series; sometimes these lectures are opened up to everyone.

15.3 Meeting with head of institution
The Board met Patrick Hackett, the current Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University. Given the universal changes in higher education and the recent significant changes within the University itself which had a direct impact upon architecture, the board was interested in the context for change at Liverpool and the University’s intentions, with specific reference to architecture and the student experience, and all related issues. The meeting also discussed the culture of the School, opportunities for interdisciplinary working; the research agenda and how it informs the validated programmes. The following represents the main points of the discussion.

- Liverpool is proud of its school of architecture and is aware of the need to provide an excellent student experience.
- The University strategy centres on the belief that Liverpool can achieve greater heights. Several years ago it embarked on a long-term plan to achieve its potential. This would be by means of a clear academic strategy; clear research strategy and a clear learning and teaching agenda, in recognition of the fact that the student experience needed to play a greater role in the strategic plan. The School of Architecture has been party to all of this. It contributes in an important way to the research strategy.
• There has been significant internal restructuring. The University has moved from a highly centralised structure to a devolved hierarchical structure. Faculties now have executive authority and greater financial autonomy.
• The new Schools bring together similar, like-minded units to encourage interdisciplinarity; to develop efficiencies and ultimately to improve service. Generally speaking this has worked well, although there have been challenges for SOTA and the School of Architecture. This relationship has adjusted and evolved.
• These changes are enhancing the student experience. Student feedback received by the University cited the good new facilities and the quality of the new staff.
• With regard to any direct benefits for architecture, the new Schools should help the University to identify where to prioritise investment under the new structure. The University recognises that different disciplines have different needs. In the new system a strategic decision making is made from understanding the context of each discipline. Planning is better informed and activity-led.
• The international strategy makes Liverpool unique in the UK. Graduates are global in outlook and preparation. Liverpool would like to build a network of 5 or 6 Liverpools around the world. This is not an end in itself but intended to enable students to become global citizens.
• XJTLU (which has been in operation since 2006 and now has 12 academic departments) has been a success. This success has brought its own challenges. It will also contribute to the University’s research agenda as it develops research capacity, building research partnerships as well as student partnerships. The huge demand from XJTLU students to come to Liverpool had presented significant resourcing challenges. New facilities and more staffing were provided. This has been a formative experience. Liverpool is now more of an international university than previously; international students now comprising 25% of the student body. The University is confident that they will ultimately see greater integration between groups of students. There is significant language support for incoming students. There is a Confucius Institute on campus and the University is developing an Oriental Studies Institute in China. Liverpool also encourages its own students to go abroad. The international strategy gives staff as well as students the opportunity to travel.
• The University is aware that it needs to make sure that such a rapid expansion of staff does not exceed the University’s capacity to support them. The University is confident that the University is managing the expansion well. Staff development is available for new staff and current staff (the Certificate in Professional Practice, mentoring schemes, leadership development, and support for early career researchers).
• The culture of the School of Architecture will evolve. The University is confident of its direction and of architecture’s place in the new international culture.
• Fostering greater interdisciplinarity is recognised as a challenge. Much of this is driven through the research strategy. Collaborative working and partnerships are key to securing external funding. The funding imperative is the driver for greater interdisciplinarity.
• It is difficult for students sometimes to see the direct link between research and teaching. However, academics are increasingly at the leading edge of their field and this is fed back through their learning and teaching. Staff engaged in
research only is not encouraged and is not the norm. The University’s success here has been more around STEM areas (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Other areas do not yet collaborate as much as they could do. The new structure should encourage this.

- The balance between research and teaching is a clear part of the strategy. External forces force universities to realise that financial stability comes from the student experience. Universities need the right balance of research power and excellence of student experience. Providing an excellent student experience is a challenge and an opportunity. The strategic plan is holistic and activity-led.

15.4 **Meeting with external examiners**

The Board met a large group of external examiners currently attached to the part 1 and part 2. The Board was interested in discussing: the School’s strengths and unique selling point; the assessment of groups work; how the School exploiting its location in Liverpool to best advantage; the writing of briefs, especially with regard to the recent large influx of students; the diversity of brief at part 1; the School’s engagement with its external examiners; links between research and teaching; and the opportunities presented by the establishment of XJTLU. The following represents the main points of the discussion.

- The School is generally strong. All agreed that the unique selling point of the School is its final year, particularly the joint projects. Students work well in teams and the academic side is good.

- All strongly supported the idea of team working, both for the benefits it brings in terms of learning to work in a team and the more complex projects that can be explored. Liverpool has managed to make it work over a long period. It is a good introduction to the collaborations needed to flourish in practice.

- The MArch is a strength, particularly its structure. The range of projects and mix of architecture and working practices in the fourth year are a powerful grounding for the final year. This is a special feature of the Liverpool programme. The amount of research that can be undertaken by groups is impressive.

- There were no concerns about the marking in group situation or concerns about balance of abilities within a group. Groups are self-selecting and work as a team. Each student brings different skills, all of which contribute to the team; therefore it is fair to give one mark to the group. Each student is interviewed as part of the external examining process. Staff alert external examiners to teams which have not worked particularly well at Part 2. The advantages outweigh any disadvantages. Interviews show the individual contribution and level of achievement. In the fourth year staff can see achievements as individuals and as part of a group. Weighting appeared to reflect the balance of work.

- The context of Liverpool is one of the attractions of the School and using this to effect is one of its strengths. Some individual projects could have made more of the context.

- At undergraduate level previous mismatches in project briefs have been rectified following the introduction of parallel teaching systems.

- External examiners suggested the unit system to encourage more competition between students in the setting of briefs. The results are yet to be seen. There was agreement about a possible lack of diversity in the briefs, particularly
given the wealth of academic expertise in the School. Students do not challenge the briefs. However, a wide range of results was provided, demonstrating that some students do think beyond the briefs, while others struggled. Externals have seen a wide range and a stimulus. The MArch is stronger than the BA, but BA students are good and popular with employers. However, it could be more varied.

- External examiners were satisfied that their reports were responded to. Feedback from the head of school is responsive and comprehensive.
- In the most recent session externals had felt that there was insufficient time for them to meet and discuss their observations. However, there are informal conversations in the studio. It is unusual for external examiners to see the whole School (externals see both BA and MArch; between them all students are seen). While this is welcome, it does put the degree in sharp contrast.
- External examiners encouraged greater links between research and teaching; this perhaps is not as evident in student work as it might be.
- While no opinion was expressed about learning and teaching skills for part-time staff, externals commented that although it is good that full-time staff are responsible for running years, there is a lack of design tutoring. The improvements that the School has made at Part 2 should now enable staff to focus on part 1.
- The external examiners noted the steps taken by the School to cope with the increased numbers; chiefly the introduction of the studio system and the appointment of more staff. The School restructured the second year to accommodate the large incoming group. This appeared to be successful. Externals suggested that the third year might also need to adapt; it was their understanding during the present meeting that this had been done and that the results would be seen this year. It was emphasised that the work that externals saw in 2013 did not include students from the XJTLU as they are not due to graduate until 2014.
- The Chinese initiative is fantastic and unique, but it was something that was imposed upon the School and not originated by them. The real opportunity is for UK students to go to China. Numbers of students doing so will probably increase. If equal numbers could be achieved this would be truly exceptional.
- Suggested further improvements for the programmes were that the School might usefully add a dissertation at 3rd year, which would provide opportunity for linkage between the different areas of the programme, and that there could be more of a social agenda.

15.5 Meeting with staff
The Board met a large group of staff involved in all aspects of the architecture programmes. Always acknowledging that the School is undergoing a period of transition, the Board was interested in exploring: the School’s distinctiveness and academic position; the staff’s response to the recent changes and their views on the University’s response; diversity of briefs; group working; the rich potential of Liverpool and the region; the level to which all staff feel involved in the activities of the School; research; process for assessing group work; and the training and induction of new staff. The following represents the main points of the discussion:

- Liverpool graduates are allowed to lead and develop the confidence and ability to explain their process. They can contribute to the office discussion. Schools are the laboratory of the profession, as there is time for exploration.
Students can be allowed to develop their own agenda; staff can shape projects to suit. This ties in with research, in which the School has strength in diverse areas.

- While Liverpool is very important, the School also looks outside the city. There is no straitjacket of philosophy.
- The programme is student-led. Students explore their own interests and can be directed towards researchers in the appropriate fields if required.
- The School has a great history and is successful in attracting both students and staff. It is a metropolitan school in the provinces, but not provincial. It is part of the Russell Group and research-led. It attracts an international staff body creating a vibrant, diverse community.
- While tradition and identity are respected it is also outward looking, particularly in respect of the recent changes.
- Everything is done well. Quality and professionalism is part of the identity.
- Many felt that the administrative and structural changes had been imposed upon them. The establishment of XJTLU had been in preparation for a long time. Architecture has always supported the initiative. However, its popularity was greater than anticipated and numbers were unexpected. There had been insufficient consultation. The University had provided an interim response, and at the time of the present visit staff considered that matters were running more smoothly. Measures had since been put in place to control numbers and it was anticipated that the balance would be redressed.
- The influx of students was co-incident with rebuilding works. In this case the School was consulted about its needs. There was a sense among staff that universities do not always understand architecture’s need for space. The use of studios was due to be reviewed having been in place for a year.
- Staff felt encouraged that the School could be reflective of the process now and how to continually adapt.
- The meeting briefly discussed the writing of briefs and the scope for greater diversity in projects. These are discussed at the time between staff on a formal and informal basis when they are written, and the success or otherwise of each brief is always reviewed. There is a clear differentiation in approach to design in different studios, reflecting the interests of the different tutors. Staff feel that there is a strong diversity. Students can now choose which groups they join. This is an important part of the strategy. The impact of this is now becoming clear.
- Studios are small which means greater attention to individual students. It is important to teach critical thinking rather than a style.
- The School’s strong ties with the city of Liverpool (both civic and public) is one of the chief attractions of the University for students and staff. Staff believe these are exploited in the courses and also at research level. The city is an asset. Students choose dissertation opportunities related to the city. Students also have the confidence to tackle other cities. At Part 1 Liverpool is used as a learning vehicle. Projects are rooted in the culture of the city.
- Links to city connect to what is distinctive about the School. The approach is very realistic. MArch projects are related to real social problems in Liverpool and other areas, nationally and internationally. The confidence of emerging graduates is linked to this and there is also a link to research.
• The understanding of diversity is growing among students. The incoming XJTLU students provide great enrichment. Home students benefit from their skills and experience.

• Staff felt that they were involved in discussions regarding the philosophy of the School and research direction.

• Now that major events such as the Research Evaluation Framework (REF) and XJTLU have taken place, there is the opportunity to review how all groups in the School are working.

• Having dealt with the REF, XJTLU, now have the opportunity to look at the way all the groups work in the School. The School is now much larger with a greater number of full-time and part-time staff on permanent contracts. This creates a greater set of opportunities.

• Researchers are involved in teaching at undergraduate level, which is considered very important. Young researchers brought back into the School and ultimately becoming lecturers are part of an iterative process.

• Those not engaged in research feel valued and involved; some engaged in practice are beginning to form a Design Institute. Feedback from post part 2 graduates is very good; they feel that pragmatism stood them in good stead.

• The meeting discussed the dynamics of groups and group assessment. Staff are confident that this works well and is successfully student-led. Group and peer learning are greatly valued. The calibre of student on admission is instrumental in the success of group working.

• New teachers are paired with experienced staff as well as undergoing formal University induction and taking the postgraduate teaching qualification. Liverpool is a welcoming institution, with a friendly flexible atmosphere and good relationships between staff. The University offers good staff development and opportunities.

16 Delivery of academic position
The academic position statement reflects the ethos of the School, especially in relation to research informing teaching.

17.1 The Graduate Attributes for Parts 1&2 as appropriate
The board confirmed that all the graduate attributes were met at both Part 1 and Part 2

18 Review of work against criteria
It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

18.1 RIBA part 1 and 2 as appropriate

GC1 Ability to create architectural designs that satisfy both aesthetic and technical requirements

GC1.1 The graduate will have the ability to prepare and present building design projects of diverse scale, complexity, and type in a variety of contexts, using a range of media, and in response to a brief;
There was a general feeling that at Part 1 that this aspect could be strengthened. The number of students that are now being taught in the undergraduate requires much more diversity and ambition in the project briefs, especially in second year of the Part 1. The city of Liverpool - as a context- is rich and varied due to its geography and history. The School should be exploiting the opportunities that this context offers.

**GC3 Knowledge of the fine arts as an influence on the quality of architectural design**

There was some excellent written work at both Part 1 and Part 2 demonstrating knowledge of the wider Arts. However, in terms of application of this knowledge to the design projects the board thought that the Part 1 was weak in this area, with very little evidence in design portfolios. Part 2 was better; it was felt however that both courses need to evidence this type of inquiry and exploration in their development portfolios. The comment relates in part to action point 13.2.

**GC4 Adequate knowledge of urban design, planning and the skills involved in the planning process**

While strong at Part 2, this should be strengthened at Part 1

**GC5 Understanding of the relationship between people and buildings, and between buildings and their environment, and the need to relate buildings and the spaces between them to human needs and scale**

**GC6 Understanding of the profession of architecture and the role of the architect in society, in particular in preparing briefs that take account of social factors**

GC5 and GC6 continue to be strengths of the School, particularly at Part 2.

**19 Other information**

19.1.i Student numbers at Part 1
455 enrolled 2012-13

19.1.ii Student numbers at Part 2
99 in enrolled 2012-13

19.2 Documentation provided
The School provided all documentation before and after the visit as required under the Procedures for Validation.