Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Visiting Board to London Metropolitan University
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 12 September 2012

Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Design

Part 1: BA (Hons) Architecture
Part 2: Professional Diploma in Architecture
Part 3: Examination in Professional Practice in Architecture

Date of Visiting Board: 26/27 January 2012

Confirmed report
1. Information About the Courses

1.1 Courses offered for revalidation:
Part 1: BA (Hons) Architecture
3 years full time, 4 years part-time (6 years maximum part-time)
Part 2: Professional Diploma in Architecture
2 years full time, 3 years part-time
Part 3: Examination in Professional Practice in Architecture, 24 months

1.2 Address of the Institution where the courses are delivered
London Metropolitan University
Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Design
Spring House
40-44 Holloway Road
London, N7 8JL
T: +44 (0) 20 7133 4431
W: www.londonmet.ac.uk

2. Membership of the Visiting Board

2.1 The members of the RIBA Visiting Board for the visit on 26/27 January 2012 were:

Ruth Morrow (Chair & Academic)
Andy Beard (Vice Chair & Practitioner)
Roosje Barr (Practitioner)
Norman Wienand (Academic)
Tony Watson (Academic)
Philip Hyde (Academic)
Greg Penoyre (Regional Representative)
Joseph Edgard (Graduate/Student Member)

Jenna Quinn (RIBA) was in attendance as Secretary to the Board.

3. Procedures & Criteria for the Visit

3.1 The Visiting Board was carried out under the 'RIBA Procedures for the Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture,' published September 2011, effective from September 2011 and the Criteria for Validation (2003). For more information see www.architecture.com.

4. Recommendations of the Visiting Board Confirmed by the Royal Institute of British Architects Education Committee 12 September 2012

4.1 The RIBA Education Committee of 12 September 2012 confirmed Continued Validation of:
Part 1: BA (Hons) Architecture
3 years full time, 4 years part-time (6 years maximum part-time)
Part 2: Professional Diploma in Architecture
2 years full time, 3 years part-time
Part 3: Examination in Professional Practice in Architecture, 24 months

4.2 The next Visiting Board will take place in 2017.

5. Criteria for Validation

5.1 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).

6. **Standards**

6.1 On the basis of the sample of academic portfolios examined, the work from the previous year of the courses listed in 4.1 was inspected during the visit and was found to meet the required standards.

7. **Conditions of Validation**

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

8. **Standard Requirements of Recognition**

8.1 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.

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

9.1 Among the School’s strengths the Board noted:

- The strong commitment to live projects and design-led research which is supported by the Architectural Research Unit (ARU) and ASD Projects Office.
- The diversity of the School’s student intake and the School’s ability to pedagogically support that intake.
- The vibrant manner in which teaching of management, practice and law occurs right across the school
- The innovative provision of an additional Extended Degree with a foundation style Year 0, which enables students without appropriate entry qualifications to access the Part 1 course with full funding.

9.2 **Recommendations**

The Visiting Board has made the following recommendations. The RIBA expects the Institution to report on action taken or planned as a result of the recommendations in the annual monitoring returns submitted by the School and in the mid-term review. Failure by an Institution to act on recommendations may result in a course being conditioned by a future Visiting Board.

9.2.1 There were no specific recommendations attached to the continued validation of the Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 programmes.
9.3 Advice
The Visiting Board offers the following advice to the institution on desirable, but not essential improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and/or raise standards:

9.3.1 The Board welcomes the proposed move to new premises and the benefits it can bring. Efforts should be made to ensure that the current lively ethos and character of the School is maintained in the organisation of the new accommodation. Care should also be taken, to ensure that the moves are planned and resourced sufficiently, in order that disruption to the student experience is minimised.

9.3.2 The Board advises the School to critically reflect on the format of portfolios, in particular the volume of drawings and the means by which each student presents a comprehensive but succinct body of work.

9.3.3 The School should ensure that all external examiners are given the opportunity at the most appropriate time to view the overall degree award for each student.

9.3.4 The Board welcomes the new resource allocation model that will be introduced following the introduction of the new fee arrangements. However, the Board noted that there will be a transitional period of several years where architecture students remain in the current funding model, and advise the University to ensure that the architecture courses do not become financially disadvantaged as a consequence.

9.3.5 The Board was concerned about the apparent problems between the Faculty and University administration systems, and advises that this should be resolved to minimise the frustrations, and wasted time caused to both staff and students.

9.3.6 The Board commends the School on the broad diversity of its student intake, and commends the provision of part-time options. To support the latter, the School is advised to consider access to its accommodation beyond standard hours, such as opening workshops on Saturdays.

10. Summary of Previous Visiting Board Reports

10.1 The last RIBA Visiting Board to London Metropolitan University took place on 25-26 October 2007. The Board recommended that Continued Validation be granted to:

BA Honours Architecture, Part 1
4 years full time, 4 years part-time (6 years maximum part-time)

Professional Diploma in Architecture, Part 2
2 years full time, 3 years part-time

Examination in Professional Practice in Architecture, Part 3, 2 years part-time

11. Details of the Conditions in Item 8

11.1 There were no conditions attached to the courses listed in 4.1.
School's Academic Position Statement (written by the School)

“We are an established Architecture Faculty with a well-understood commitment to giving our students the practical skills and bravery necessary to flourish as caring citizens and effective professionals.

“Our greatest asset in fulfilling this agenda is our diversity. The diversity of our students, our staff and the forms of practice we support. Underpinning and stabilising this is our shared commitment to the importance of socially engaged forms of practice and to the transformative power of things that are made carefully and well. Inevitably this places us in gentle opposition to others and we are not shy to express our healthy mistrust of formal heroics or values mediated by abstractions, elitism and individual fame.

“This ‘duty of care’ to a wider society, the environment and care for production are at the core of everything we do. It informs our commitment to widening access, our admissions policy, how we structure our courses, the live projects we undertake, the research we support, our workshops, the studios we host and will guide our forthcoming merger with the Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Media and Design.

“This agenda is apparent in the work of the design studios. Wherever possible we engage with the compromised reality of contemporary society and try to improve it. At one extreme are studios working on live projects in tough places such as India, the Ukraine, Mexico, Sierra Leone and Bosnia at the other are studios carefully repairing and dignifying existing contexts like Paestum, Porto, West Belfast, Liverpool, retail parks and many parts of London.

“In all cases there is an emphasis on resolution and on applying and testing proposals in the context that made them. Students work directly with users and clients, engage with political, social and economic structures, prototype elements of their buildings, test materials, model the effects of time, work with external consultants, stage events and in some cases build full-scale buildings.

“This commitment to Practice and the application and testing of our skills in real situations informs all areas of the Faculty. The Faculty hosts the Architecture Research Unit (ARU) lead by Professor Florian Beigel and has it own Projects Office (a RIBA Chartered practice), which provides a supportive professional environment for staff and students to carry out live projects, consultancy and research.

“The Faculty also employs many practices to teach, some recent graduates and others more established. In recent years we have had units run by DSDHA, Design for London, Cottrell Vermeulen, Stephen Taylor, Patrick Lynch, Alun Jones, East, David Kohn, CHORA, The AOC and many more. Many of our students also set up practices and undertake their own projects whilst studying particularly within the context of the Free Unit. The Faculty is also a well-respected venue for public lectures, exhibitions and debates. The “Rip It Up and Start Again” series curated by Kieran Long and Robert Mull, which examined the crisis in contemporary practice and what we can do about it, is typical of the fluid relationship between the Faculty, practice and the communities it serves.

“Our research agenda is also focused on practice. Lead by ARU we are an internationally recognized centre for
practice based and design as research and in recent years our work in areas of rapid change and scarce resources and on the relationship between work and home have extended the pioneering work of ARU. We also host research units in low energy architecture and history and theory. At every level of our courses research informs teaching with many of the design units relating directly to research and consultancy activities. Our new PhD programme lead by Professor Peter Carl also focuses on the idea of practical knowledge through the vehicle of the PhD by project and a number of our studio tutors are part of the programme.

“Looking forward the biggest change will be our forthcoming merger with The Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Media and Design. In January 2011 Professor Robert Mull was appointed conjoint Dean with the Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Media and Design. Extensive consultation took place as to how the two Faculties could work together more closely including academic, administrative and spatial synergies and opportunities. As a result the Governors have agreed to the full merger of the two Faculties in August 2012. Architecture will then move to Aldgate in September 2013. In taking forward the merger particular care is being taken to maintain the autonomy and distinctiveness of architecture in organizational and spatial terms.

“The merger will present our architecture students with many new opportunities. They will have access to a bewildering range of workshops, libraries and other facilities but more importantly they will have the opportunity to broker forms of creative practice that cross traditional boundaries and improve their employability. This process has already begun. More than 600 students from both Faculties are working on a live project for the Aldgate area in partnership with Design for London, the Boroughs and others. Working from the scale of the artifact to urbanism this is already a powerful demonstration of the potential of the merged Faculty.

“Plans are now well advanced for elements of Architecture to move to Aldgate in September 2012. Two floors of Central House are being refurbished to a design by the Architecture Research Unit. This scheme will provide dedicated studio space to Architecture students together with seminar and presentation areas. Work is also underway to turn an area on the ground floor of Central House into a gallery and café opposite the Whitechapel Gallery. In August 2013 Architecture delivery will move entirely to Aldgate. This move will provide each student with the opportunity to have dedicated studio space as well as access to workshops including direct access to the digital manufacturing facilities in Metropolitan Works. In addition students will have improved access to the architecture, art and design library, which will be consolidated in Commercial Road.

“But we do not operate in isolation. Architectural Education and Higher Education in general are entering unknown territory. Higher tuition fees, student debt and the fear of debt will impact on students unevenly. Given our commitment to widening access we have some of the most vulnerable students in our care. We are doing everything we can to protect and support these students and will continue to do so as we believe that diversity is essential to the future of the profession. Our primary move is to have variable tuition fees from 2012-13 starting at £4,600 for level zero, rising to £7,600 for part 1 and £8,600 for part 2. This structure acknowledges our
widening access agenda and reflects the earning capacity of our graduates at each exit point. We will also be exploiting positive changes to the way part time students are funded and anticipate a significant shift back to part time study, which we welcome. Given the forthcoming merger, this year we were able to take more students into our first year thus ensuring that these students at least can complete their education at the lower fee levels.

“Whilst we face extraordinary challenges in education, the profession and indeed society, we feel optimistic about the future. There is change in the air and change is our currency. Architectural culture again feels agitated, provisional and creative. Students are repositioning themselves and looking for new ways to be relevant and accountable. These are challenging but exciting times for the Faculty and for the profession in general we feel ideally placed to exploit them.”

13 Commentary

13.1 Academic Position Statement and Developments since the last visit

The Board considered the academic position statement to be a convincing and accurate presentation of the School. The statement conveyed a strong sense of leadership, a distinct vision and a sense of purpose. The statement clearly reflects the diversity of students and the distinctive culture of the School, which reinforces and builds from the vision conveyed to the previous Visiting Board in 2007. The Board commends the School’s commitment to be driven by a ‘duty of care’ for society and its strong relationship with practice, which prepares students with confidence for the real world.

The Board considered that the School has clearly developed and built upon its strengths since the last visit. There has been the development of a Masters course in Spatial Planning and Urban Design, which was validated by the University in 2010. The School is also exploring possibilities to develop an MA in Manufacturing Architecture and an MA in Landscape Architecture. The Board hopes that the strong thematic content of the MA courses will usefully inform the Part 1 and Part 2 courses. The Foundation Diploma course has changed to an Extended Degree in Architecture and Interior Design. As a result of this change, UK students are able to obtain funding to enrol on to a four year programme. The Extended Degree offers students a direct pathway into the first year of the Part 1 course, after completion of the foundation Level 0. Level 0 prepares students without appropriate qualifications or creative skills for entry to the Part 1 course.

It was reported that a number of changes are taking place within the structure of the University, including the forthcoming merger of the Faculty of Architecture and Spatial Design with the Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, Media and Design. The merger is due to be finalised in September 2012 with the majority of the School relocating to a new building based in Aldgate in September 2013. The co-joined Faculty will consist of three schools and is to be led by Professor Robert Mull. Each School will be led by its own Head of School and will define its own identity, but be open to collaboration across the disciplines. The School’s distinct ‘making identity’ will be further strengthened across all the schools in the Faculty.

The move is scheduled to take place in two stages, with the Diploma students moving to the new building at an
earlier stage in September 2012. Professor Robert Mull will remain Director of Architecture for a year to oversee transitional arrangements. The School reported that the new building’s Aldgate location in the lively and vibrant Shoreditch area of London will be a great place for architecture students to be situated. The building will bring architecture together with art, media and design, and create opportunities for exciting synergies across the four Schools.

The Board considered the merger will bring clear advantages for both students and staff, such as opportunities for collaborative learning and increased access to a large dedicated design library. The Board also noted the challenges the merger will bring as a huge period of change for the Faculty, particularly the transitional arrangements and the challenging timescale of intended alterations to the premises in preparation.

13.2 Documentation and Arrangements for the Visit
All documentation was forwarded in a timely manner and supplementary information was provided during the visit. The Board thanks the staff and students for their hospitality during the visit. Administrative arrangements for the visit were excellent and the Board is particularly grateful to Ms Catherine Connor who acted as Institutional Facilitator.

The Board thanks students for their course appraisals, which were considered to be of great value. The Board appreciates the honesty, openness and engagement of students with the validation process.

13.2.1 Record of Academic Portfolios sampled during the visit
The School provided an appropriate sample of low, middle and high pass portfolios from each year of each programme being considered. The Board reminds the School that the sample of high, middle should be based on the aggregate grade for all modules, as requested in RIBA procedures.

13.3 Responses made to the previous Visiting Board report (and to reports of any revisits) and external examiner comments
The previous Visiting Board gave no recommendations and no items of advice.

13.4 Context of the courses within the wider provision of the School and Faculty
The University is wholly supportive of the School’s move to newer and improved premises at Aldgate. The Head of School has been promoted in the University to Dean level and the Board recognises that this offers the opportunity for architecture to be closer to the strategic decision-making processes in the University. The Vice-Chancellor expressed clear confidence in the senior members of staff who represent architecture within the Faculty as a discipline, and executive support from the University is very strong. The Board considered that the Vice-Chancellor demonstrated a tangible understanding of the nature of creative practice and the challenges and opportunities it affords.

The Board was assured that the existing culture of the School of Architecture will be clearly considered in the move to new premises. The Vice-Chancellor supports the School in using the merger as an opportunity to embed a
strong studio culture throughout the new building. The School is keen to ensure that the studio spaces have energy and the staff team intend to capitalise on its new location in a creative hub of London.

The Vice Chancellor reported that there are plans for the re-organisation of the University’s central structure. Both the staff and the students find the current communication problems between the School and the University to be a great strain in administrative terms. The provision of inductions and training is a challenge for the Faculty, when considering the large number of hourly-paid and part-time appointments. However, the Vice-Chancellor fully supports the high proportion of part-time appointments in the School, and understands the importance of the close relationship between the School and practice that this creates.

Over the past two years, the level of support to students has increased. With the changes to the central University structure, greater clarity will be given to the student support system, which will be responsive to the explicit needs of particular courses. Part-time options are offered for all courses. Full and part-time students of architecture are offered an identical course, but over an extended period of time for part-time students. The School wishes to discourage part-time students from working as a separate unit, and instead seeks to integrate them with the full-time structure. Part-time students are required to provide an additional ten days in which they are ‘active’ in other areas of the course outside of the required hours. It was however reported that the biggest influence on the part-time student experience inevitably depends upon the flexibility of their employer. The Board acknowledges and commends the high level of support provided to part-time students, but was concerned that the closure of the workshops at the weekends disadvantaged them. The Board encourages the School to extend access to workshops during the weekends, as it would be of particular benefit to part-time students as advised in 9.3.6.

The University will be charging a variable tuition fee structure from 2012/13, which is intended to be supportive of its diverse student intake. The fees will start at £4,500 for Level 0 and rise to £7,600 for Part 1 and £8,600 for Part 2. The University is proud of its commitment to widening participation and the Vice-Chancellor reported that the Faculty intends to offer affordable fees in the interest of social justice. A large percentage of students at London Metropolitan are from low income backgrounds and this remains a challenge for the School. There is a hardship fund which is used extensively. The School recognises that field trips can be expensive and offers a range of studios which are locally/London-based. The financial implications of field trips are made explicit to students at the start of the course/s, and a range of options are made available in the planning of the year.

With the new fee regime in place, the Vice-Chancellor intends to increase the transparency of budgets, enabling the School to have better alliances between budgets, aims and objectives. The higher fee charges will be matched by a commitment from the School to provide a higher level of resources in the form of studio space, specialist workshops and good staff student ratios. Under the University’s resource allocation model, resources will follow the students who generate the income. The Vice-Chancellor reported that the University wishes to maximise resources at Faculty level. The Dean will have
overall discretion in the way the budget is used within the School, and training support will be provided to all Deans on how to maximise the outcome.

13.5 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part 1 qualification

13.5.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The Board considered the course to be clear in its aims and objectives. The Board applauds the School's vision to provide an integrated course and a design education. The studio system in years two and three offers an interesting and diverse course, which equips students with a broad skill-set through the use of a variety of different interpretations.

The course addresses the diversity of the School’s intake and enables access to students from a range of backgrounds. The variety of projects which are set in other cultures is a reflection of the diverse student body. During the visit, the Board considered the course aims to be communicated very clearly.

13.5.2 Course design and content

The School reported that the course structure is relatively complicated, and has recently been through an internal review process to simplify the framework of the undergraduate delivery. The new framework reduces the number of modules from a 15 to 30 credit system. The Part 1 has also undergone a robust internal revalidation process of its learning outcomes.

The School reported that the advantage of the studio system is to offer the opportunity to go beyond the set learning outcomes. Whilst the outcomes clearly map to the RIBA criteria, it was reported that some design studios go beyond the criteria and have their own learning outcomes which are set out in the core course. The Board considered that this sets a high benchmark and encourages innovation.

The first year of the Part 1 is well considered and provides students with a broad and thorough introduction to architecture and technology. Students work mainly in large tutorial groups. Years two and three are run as a studio system. The second year is skills-based and focuses on drawing exploration, computer-aided drawing and the technology of structure. In the third year, students write a dissertation but also have the opportunity of choosing a shorter dissertation option.

The Board commends the studio arrangement which offers students a choice of nine studios with a diverse range of projects and approaches. The School publishes a summary outline of every studio in September before the presentation day. In addition, students are offered individual interview time with studio tutors to assist them in making their choices. There is a period between the presentation and vote, for students to reflect on the choices which are available to them. The voting system allows students to select up to ten choices, and every student is given one of their top three choices. The School tries to ensure a parity of student numbers in each studio. Students are not generally allowed to remain in one studio for longer than a year, and exceptional requests to remain in the same studio are carefully reviewed by the staff team. The process of organising the voting system is
complex and the School assured the Board that students were given a thorough explanation of the voting system and process.

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

- **Design**

On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture met all Part 1 criteria in the area of design.

The Board commends the School’s commitment to research and design and it supports the idea that good design is sustained by research. However, it was felt that this sometimes results in less emphasis on the resolution of designs.

The Board would like to have seen more evidence of risk-taking, experimentation and ambition in some of the design projects. The majority of projects began with site analysis. The Board considered that this conventional and somewhat linear approach could be supplemented by more exploratory design approaches. The Board encourages the School to celebrate design outcomes more and considered this issue might relate to the fact that students are not able to pin-up their work.

- **Technology & Environment**

On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture met all Part 1 criteria in the area of technology and environment.

The Board considered that the level of attainment and the degree of integration of technology within the design studio projects was variable. It was noted that the students acquire a high level of knowledge about materials and component, but less about assembly. The Board considered that sustainability and environment were viewed separately, rather than integrated. The Board acknowledges that the course has been re-structured to address this issue, with two new appointments made to the subject area in 2011.

- **Cultural Context**

On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture met all Part 1 criteria in the area of cultural context.

Cultural context is a strong feature of the course. The Board observed that students write in a way that is both poetic and narrative. The Board commends the Extended Dissertation and Single Dissertation modules which are included in the final year, and is supportive of the School’s provision of a single and double option choice for students of differing abilities. The Extended Dissertation option enables full-time students to dedicate an extended period of time to theoretical research. The Single module option is particularly beneficial to part-time students who are able to complete a dissertation in a reduced format.

- **Communication**

On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture met all Part 1 criteria in the area of communication.
During the visit, the Board considered students to be articulate and have strong communication skills. The student course appraisal, which was submitted as part of the pre-visit documentation, was of great value to the Board. The written documents produced by the students, were highly polished and professional. The Board also noted the high quality of models and encourages the students to provide greater evidence of this in their portfolios.

However, it was felt that the presentation of portfolios lacked clarity, and that there was no distinctive approach in the School. The Board considered portfolios were not constructed to tell a story, and did not make a statement of individual skills. There was concern that this might mitigate against graduate employability during professional interviews. Students use an Integrated Design Audit (IDA) diary for recording their design process. The Board noted that the IDA diaries were sometimes over-presented at some considerable cost. It was considered that the students put a questionable amount of time and energy in to reproducing highly polished IDA diaries, which could easily have remained unrefined and more authentic. The IDA was considered generally retrospective, acting as a summary, rather than an active diary to record process and develop ideas. The IDA diary has clear potential to be an excellent learning tool and the Board encourages the School and the students to use it as an ongoing developmental diary, incorporating the principles of a sketchbook.

The Board observed that there was little evidence of exploration of other modes of communication, and any alternative modes of representation were poorly served by the format of the portfolio. The Board encourages the School to challenge and reconsider the current use of the portfolio, and to experiment with other forms of presentation and representation as referenced in 9.3.2.

- Management Practice & Law
On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture met all Part 1 criteria in the area of management practice and law.

Management practice and law is integrated in all three years. The School has strong links with practice and many studios are dealing with the reality of contemporary practice. In the third year, students are required to complete an Integrated Design Audit (IDA) report which asks them to evaluate their design projects and consider how they are positioned within current legal and regulatory requirements. The Board noted that relatively young practices who are actively thinking through the challenges of practice are involved in the teaching. This is of clear benefit to students. ASD and ARU project offices also enable students to engage with live projects.

- Preparation for Practical Experience, (Part 1 only)
At present, the School has no formal PEDR monitoring service for graduates undertaking practical experience post Part 1. The Professional Studies Advisor (PSA) offers advice and support on completing the PEDR, in addition to providing guidance on the development of portfolios and finding a job in practice. Students receive advice on an informal basis and they reported that the PSA is approachable and available at all times.
During the Board’s meeting with students, year-out students expressed a strong interest in the offer of a formal PEDR monitoring service and were prepared to pay an additional fee to the University for access to this service. With the introduction of the new fee structure, the School intends to review its arrangements regarding practical experience. The Board understands that with the new fee structure, the School is reviewing the current arrangements and is considering the establishment of a formal monitoring system, which will include recall days. The Board considers that this would help the School to increase the retention rate for the Part 2 course.

### 13.5.4 Progression within the course

The Board considered progression rates within the Part 1 course to be satisfactory with an improved retention rate.

### 13.5.5 Assessment

The School uses shared crits which pair different studio groups together, and mixes students of all abilities. There is also an interim assessment of the portfolios.

From the evidence provided and the Board’s meeting with external examiners, the Board considered assessment to be rigorously handled and was confident in the School’s assessment process. The Board acknowledges the difficulty of ensuring parity across such diverse studios, and note that the examiners witness first-hand the process of achieving parity across the units.

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

Minimum entry requirements are 300 points at A2 level and five GCSEs grade C or above. An APL system is in place for students applying from other courses and institutions. Students may transfer to Level 2 from Year 1 of the BA Hons Interior Architecture and Design course if they have passed all the core architecture modules.

The foundation course has been developed as an Extended Degree and students are able to be funded throughout the four years of study. After completion of Level 0, students are able to transfer to Level 1 of the Part 1 course. The Board considered this to be a unique and excellent opportunity to support the School’s diversity and widening participation agenda.

### 13.6 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part 2 qualification

#### 13.6.1 Clarity, validity and achievement of course objectives

The Part 2 objectives are of the same essence and philosophy of the Part 1 course. From the Board’s discussions with staff and students, it was considered that the course is achieving its objectives. However, the Board felt that the objectives were not as clearly articulated and distinctive in the course documentation as they are in Part 1. The Board encourages the School to consider the aims and objectives of the Part 2 course in relation to the Part 1 course, and advises the School to ensure that there is a sense of progression between the two programmes.

#### 13.6.2 Course design and content

The course has a studio system of 14 units which includes a ‘free unit’ option. The free unit option is a popular choice for students who wish to set their own projects. Students develop their own unique learning contract with support from staff, which defines their aims and methods.
throughout the year. The 14 units offer many opportunities for students to visit locations, both overseas and in the UK. The Board was pleased to observe that some units are repeating themes and revisiting sites and regions, which is leading to more critically refined and enriched projects.

- **Design**
On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the Professional Diploma in Architecture met all Part 2 criteria in the area of design.

There are two year-long design modules in each of years four and five. In year four the design modules are two 20 credit modules, and in year five the design modules are two 40 credit modules. The Board welcomes the School’s commitment to research in design projects and considered students to be clearly working at Part 2 level.

- **Technology & Environment**
On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the Professional Diploma in Architecture met all Part 2 criteria in the area of technology and environment.

The group construction charrette was welcomed by the Board in providing an opportunity for students to experience intense learning. However, the Board considered the area of technology to be generally weak and found limited evidence of environmental design. The School’s intention to integrate technology was clearly evident; however, the Board witnessed a variety of standards of execution and output between students and also units.

The Board acknowledges that new staff had not taken full advantage of the technical staff and expertise available in the School; however, it was also noted that many units had drawn upon expertise from beyond the School, particularly through the strong engagement with practice.

- **Cultural Context**
On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of Professional Diploma in Architecture met all Part 2 criteria in the area of cultural context.

The ethos of the School and the unit structure provides students with a good opportunity to experience cultural context in contemporary practice. The Board acknowledged that the teaching of history and theory was supportive of a larger cultural discourse and did not necessarily have to manifest itself directly in the design studio. There is no dissertation option in years four and five, and students complete an Integrated Design Study diary and report (IDS).

- **Communication**
On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the Professional Diploma in Architecture met all Part 2 criteria in the area of communication.

The Board considered that the student essays were well-written and of a high standard. The overall standard of representation was good.
- Management Practice & Law

On the basis of the sample of portfolios reviewed, the Board was satisfied that all graduates of the Professional Diploma in Architecture met all Part 2 criteria in the area of management practice and law.

Students undertake the professional practice module ‘Advocacy’ in year four, which includes an in-house examination and an essay submission. The module leader is the Professional Studies Advisor and also teaches on the Part 3 course. Students reported that they benefited from the continuity of teaching.

The Board considered the delivery of management practice and law to be excellent. The continued presence of active high profile practitioners is viewed as excellent preparation for the profession; and a way to bring knowledge and experience of professional life, and context into the Diploma course. In addition, the support and proximity of the ARU (Architecture Research Unit) and the ASD Projects Office engender a ‘live’ relationship with practice in the School as a whole.

13.6.3 Progression within the course
The Board considered progression rates for the Part 2 course to be satisfactory.

13.6.4 Assessment
Appropriate and rigorous assessment processes are in place with regular presentations, crits and tutorials. All modules are assessed through coursework submissions and there are no set examinations.

13.6.5 Admissions and arrangements for direct entry at a stage other than the start of the course
Students undertake a portfolio review and interview at intake stage. Approximately 85% of Part 2 students are from other institutions.

14.0 Detailed Commentary on the Course leading to Part 3 Qualification
Candidates are able to remain enrolled on the course for a period of 23 months, which allows one re-sit under one enrolment within this period. Last year, students were exceptionally allowed to remain enrolled for up to three years, rather than the current two year maximum. It was reported that the 23 month course period had been introduced to directly respond to the reality of the economy, but also to match competitors.

The Board considered the course to have an excellent syllabus which is clear in its content, direction and ethos. The course is mainly delivered through informal study groups, seminars and a lecture series. Candidates are encouraged to work in study groups and to share their knowledge of practice where possible. Candidates read each other’s case studies which encourages interaction with other people in the cohort.

The Board commends the commitment of the staff members, who also contribute to the Part 1 and Part 2 teaching. The Board was pleased to see the activity of the Part 3 course informing the modules of the second and fourth years.

The Board considered the Part 3 course to be thorough and competent, reflecting the same ethos as the Part 1 and Part 2 courses in the School. The course has a large team...
of professional examiners and the Board has confidence in the external examining process, in which examiners sample the interviews.

14.1 **External examining arrangements**
The Board met with external examiners attached to all programmes. External examiners were very supportive of the School and the courses. From the documentation provided, the Board had concerns regarding the low level of reportage in some of the examiner’s reports and would encourage the School to recognise the examiner’s role as a critical friend. It was also noted that external examiners are unable to view the overall degree classification of students after the examining process. The Board, therefore, advises the School to ensure that all external examiners are given the opportunity at the most appropriate time to view the overall degree award for each student, as stated in 9.3.3.

The following reflects the main points of the discussion:

- Examiners considered the School promotes a rich culture of architecture and focuses on the problem, rather than the solution.
- The Extended Degree is influential and intelligent, and students feel well prepared for the Part 1 programme.
- The School is aware of costs and student hardships.
- The current building has produced a concentrated energy and the new space will have a big impact on the student work.
- The new building will offer studios as a way of interacting and working. Examiners recommended that the School utilises the new space appropriately.
- Technical teaching is very strong, but could be more embedded. The new building and its access to Metropolitan Works (a digital production facility) will make it easier for technical questions to underpin all the units.
- The pass rate at Part 3 is very high because the course is made ‘real’. The School allocates funding directly to professionals outside of the School to teach on the course.
- There is an expectation that students will curate their portfolio over the year.
- Examiners would encourage the students to be more relaxed and to experiment.

The following reflects the examiner’s comments regarding the unit/studio structure:

- The School’s strength is the variety of units which is complex and involves a high level of organisation.
- There are natural affinities between certain units and all units draw from the same pool of technical resources, however, there is little interaction between unit groups.
- Tutors work hard to ensure parity of units.
- The lecture series enabled units to speak to each other on a platform.
- The diversity of units/studios is excellent and the work is unexpected, and exploratory.
- The balance between research and design varies between each unit/studio.
- The unit/studio agendas define the nature of integration.
- Students are given multiple proposals and it was considered that tutors could make the question more explicit.
Examiners were unsure if a student was able to stay in the same unit/studio for two years.

The following reflects the examiner’s comments regarding the external examining process:

- Examining is an intense and rigorous process which is of two days duration.
- The induction is exceptionally well organised and clear. Studio staff members present their unit to external examiners.
- The School communicates with examiners directly and there is an ongoing dialogue with the University.
- The School discusses the moderation of marks very specifically with the examiners and the changes are minimal.
- It is a challenging process for Part 1 examiners to give feedback on nine studios at the end of the day; however, it was generally considered that there is sufficient time to understand every studio.
- Part 1 and Part 2 examiners view work from all modules.
- Examiners would like to have further time to look at individual portfolios.
- The Part 3 examiners role is to sample from what is provided on the day. Interviews take place at the same time and external examiners are able to sample the interviews, but meet with all of the professional examiners on the day.
- Part 3 examiners were confident in the professional examiners and the way they provide care to students during the examination process.
- Part 1 and Part 2 examiners considered it was a disadvantage that they do not meet each other.
- Part 1 examiners are not able to see the overall final mark for a student.

14.2 Arrangements for Monitoring Professional Experience

There is no formal PEDR monitoring service offered by the School. The Professional Studies Advisor is approachable and available on an informal basis. The PSA offers advice and support on completing the PEDR, the development of portfolios and finding a job in practice. The ASD Projects Office also supports students and helps them to find mentors who are able to supervise self-employed projects.

During the Board’s meeting with students, year-out students expressed a strong interest in the offer of a formal PEDR monitoring service and were prepared to pay an additional fee to the University for access to this service. With the introduction of the new fee structure, the School intends to review its arrangements regarding practical experience. The Board understands that the School is currently in discussions about introducing a formal monitoring system for the PEDR and considers that this would help to increase the retention rate for Part 2.

14.3 Students

The meeting was well attended by students from all years of Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 courses. Part-time and year out students were also present. The Board thanks the students for the appraisal document which was considered to be a clear and honest statement. Students were very supportive of the School and positive about the learning experience in the studio environment.

The following reflects the main points of the discussion:
The spirit of the School is based around studio units.

There are ‘free units’ which are not prescribed and enable you to decide what you want to do, however a level of skill is required.

Part 1 students have sufficient time with tutors and there is a good balance between lectures, seminars and forums.

Part-time students attend one day a week at university. Contact time is mainly conducted through one-to-ones, emails and phone calls.

Year out students were concerned that they do not receive appropriate time-tabled contact time with tutors. There are no recall days or exchanging of emails outside of the University. Students would be prepared to pay for a PSA monitoring system in the School.

There are lots of tutors from practice and visiting lecturers have a broad range of backgrounds.

Part 1 students considered that there is a strong emphasis on design and that technical expertise is taught en masse.

Students were very positive about the IDA (Integrated Design Audit), which they felt prepared them well for interviews.

but would like longer than one week to complete the second part of the report.

There is a high level of additional lectures and contact time organised outside of standard university hours. There is a good timetable of studio deadlines which take account of other activities taking place in the School, such as external lectures.

The Part 2 academic leaders are very interested in student feedback. They are approachable and available, and always follow up on issues raised by students.

Student rep meetings are productive.

The following reflects the main points of the discussion with Part 3 candidates:

Part 3 students considered that one evening a week attendance is sufficient and tutors are very responsive to emails outside of University hours.

The Part 3 course needs to adapt to enable students to use overseas projects, which they are working on in practice.

The Part 3 course leader does not teach in a prescribed manner and students feel free to ask questions, however for students who have little experience in practice, the teaching style can be overwhelming and slightly daunting.

The Part 3 lecture series is excellent.

The monitoring of PEDR logbooks is excellent with good feedback from the PSA by email and phone.

When asked about the integration of the course with other disciplines, students said:

Architectural education is very broad and business skills are not included in the curriculum.

The Part 2 course could benefit from the integration of business studies and business skills. Students are not advised at undergraduate level on business models.

There is good collaboration with other parts of the university and some units provide greater integration than others.

The move to Aldgate is being driven by the School’s desire to work with other disciplines. Students felt excited by the prospect of having free access to the Networks service.
Suggested further improvements included the following:

- There are issues with using Eden Grove as a building and students considered that it is problematic for Diploma students to be based at the site. The building has an insufficient number of computers, printers and poor heating. Students felt very pleased to be relocating.
- Some of the communication problems within the University are very basic, but there is no clear person who is delegated to resolve them. The tutors are just as frustrated as students regarding how the university system works.
- Student representatives are only appointed at the beginning of the year. Students considered that there is a time lag before their comments on the course are considered.
- There are problems with the large number of students, particularly in the foundation year and Part 1. Some classes are oversized.
- Students considered that producing a high volume of work with the same hand-in dates is a huge problem, particularly when using printers.
- Part-time students have raised concerns with the School regarding workload and would like to see an alternative pathway offered to reach the same goal.
- Students considered that the unit/studio voting system is not a transparent and open process.

The following covers the main points of the discussion:

- The School’s commitment to live projects is commendable and it is important that there is realism within the programme.
- The Part 1 first year module ‘Introduction to Architecture’ introduces students to practice and gives an understanding of experience in practice to students.
- The School is keen to demonstrate to students the variety of ways in which practice works.
- A diverse range of students enrol on to the Part 2 course and the School views an architectural education as a way of preparing students for the world of work whether they choose to become architects or work in other fields.
- The ASD Project Coordinator commented that it was a conscious decision to engage Diploma tutors who are practitioners. There is a very live engagement with practice at the University.
- Many of the Part 1 studios reflect and develop themes and ideas which practising architects are interested in.
- Unit/studio teachers have a very strong sense of ownership of their unit/studio and their place in the School.
- The School is accommodating to individuality and the structure is flexible.
- The end of year show demonstrates the strong synergies between the variety of studios and units within the School.
- Synergies are brought out through a process of cross-crits.
- The School has restructured the Part 1 technology modules this year and they are now more integrated with the studio at an earlier stage.

Staff

The Board was pleased to meet with a large group of full-time and part-time staff attached to all programmes, including studio/unit tutors and technicians. The Board considered the staff members to be a highly dedicated, motivated, discursive and dynamic team.
• Modifications are being made to the Part 2 course with the introduction of cross-unit group work.

Suggested further improvements included the following:

• Staff would like to have more resources, but what they currently have is sufficient.
• The staff team are very clear about how the courses are organised, although the relationship between the School and the University is frustrating. This is mainly due to the problems with the University’s internal system.

14.5 Research
The Vice-Chancellor is supportive of research activity. The policy of the School is for ‘design as research’ and all students and staff are encouraged to undertake research. It was reported that the publications and books which are produced by staff grow out of the School and the students’ work, and that this, in turn, informs the teaching. The School is also supportive of PhD students and there is a deep connection between ethical terms of architectural practice and the course. There are a number of traditional research units within the School and the Board was pleased to meet with staff members from the in-house practice ARU (Architecture Research Unit) during the visit.

The ARU office is embedded in both the School and practice, with ARU staff delivering teaching in the Diploma units on themes that are similar to those in contemporary practice. The Board commends the impressive precedence books which are produced by the ARU staff with students each year. The Board was pleased to meet with five graduates working as Architectural Assistants at ARU on real projects. It was reported that the ARU staff are salaried by the University as members of staff, which enables the architectural fees that are generated from clients to go directly to architectural assistants.

The Faculty also houses the ASD Projects Office, a live projects office and RIBA Chartered Practice. ASD Projects was established in 2004 to assist students and staff in the Faculty who require mentoring and practical support in their practice/business. The office primarily provides project management support to students and staff who undertake coursework through live projects. With the forthcoming merger, there are plans for the service to be extended to students of the Sir John Cass Art, Media and Design Faculty. The office will be predominantly based at the Sir John Cass School and staff will work closely with the four Schools to establish links with other disciplines, and to encourage collaboration on live projects.

The Board considered that the ASD Projects Office has successfully grown the ambition of live projects within the School, and has strong potential to develop further with the forthcoming merger. It was noted that the number of live projects in the curriculum has grown year on year. It was considered that ASD is bridging the gap between practice and architecture. Projects are generally self-funded, although the Faculty does provide some funding.

14.6 Equal Opportunities
The Faculty has an exemplary widening access policy which caters for a broad spectrum of people. There is an excellent gender balance, diversity and age profile within both the student and the staff bodies. The School values the diversity of its students and staff, which is a strong
feature of the School and influences the wide range of cultural themes, offered through the studio/unit systems of the validated courses.

The Board was assured that appropriate equal opportunities policies are in place. The School operates a series of robust formal systems of support for students. The PAA (Personal Academic Advisor) system offers academic advice and pastoral support to Part 1 students. The School has three members of staff who act as PAAAs and one member is also the Diversity Officer for part-time students. The team is directed by a full-time Faculty Coordinator for Student Experience who manages the overall system. Students are able to book appointments with a Diversity Officer and PAA Coordinator for advice throughout their studies. In addition, there is a regular dialogue between academic leaders and their students on an informal basis.

14.7 Resourcing and facilities
In August 2013, the entire School is relocating to Central House based at Aldgate. During the visit, the Board divided into separate groups for tours of the current and new facilities.

Spring House- studies, workshops and other areas
Part 1 is predominantly delivered at Spring House, based on Holloway Road. The building houses studios, workshops, a lecture theatre and a cinema. The Board considered that the students had outgrown the building. Rooms are small and there is very little space for large group work, although there is space for small crits which manages the over-flow of students. Second and third year students are able to interact and work in the same space, but on different projects, but as a result the studios do feel over-crowded The Board considered studio provision was inadequate for the School’s student intake, in terms of space.

The Board observed that the workshops were ‘static’ and would encourage the School to consider extending the opening hours to Saturday. The workshop has three technicians and is open until 8pm, three evenings a week. Technicians provide a comprehensive 45 minute induction and are readily available to help students at all times during workshop hours. The Board met with a technician who was positive about the School’s move to the new building. With the forthcoming merger, the Board acknowledges that the new building will offer new opportunities and clear advantages in terms of the quality and quantity of space that is offered to students, through the provision of new studios and specialised workshops.

Eden Grove- studios and workshops
In 2008, additional studio space was made available for Part 2 students at Eden Grove, approximately five minutes walk from Spring House. The Board was pleased to observe that the studios were filled with ‘creative clutter’, but under-resourced. The casting area was considered small and inadequate for student needs. The students expressed frustration with the facilities and the majority preferred to work at home. The building’s location can feel isolated; however, it is located opposite the Library which is helpful for additional research. Students expressed that they would like to have extended access to Eden Grove, currently the building closes at 20:45 and this is particularly disadvantageous to part-time students. Weekend access is also limited; on Saturday the building opens 8.00-15.00 and remains closed on Sunday.
Library
The Architecture Library is part of Holloway Learning Centre. The opening hours are Monday to Friday 8am-9pm, Saturday 10-4pm and Sunday 11-5pm. There is a part-time specialist architecture Librarian. The ground floor is an open and attractive social area with excellent group working spaces; however, the Board noted that it lacked adequate cloakroom and locker facilities for students. The architecture section is located on level two, which is a silent study area.

The Library stocks 35 printed journals and 222 online journals. The library does not stock duplicate copies as an economy measure; however, tutors are able to order additional copies as a special request. Students are also able to reserve books online and request that they are sent to the nearest location.

Aldgate campus
In August 2013, the Faculty is relocating to Central House based in Aldgate. The ARU (Architecture Research Unit) is currently redesigning two floors in the new building. The new space will provide dedicated open studio spaces and seminar/crit areas for architecture students. Three members of the Board visited the facilities, some of which were in the process of being redesigned.

Library
The Architecture, Art and Design Library is excellent and has an extensive collection on two floors. The Board considers it to be a significant resource when the architecture collection is relocated in 2013, which will provide students with improved access. There are periodicals, slide collections, study rooms and areas for group and individual working, in addition to materials and product libraries. The loan period is three weeks and some special arrangements offered for part-time students. Funding for new books is delegated to the Librarian and relates to the number of students on each course.

Studios
The Board considered the studio space to be potentially excellent, capable of providing good facilities with lots of light. Board members were shown the designs for the new space, by the ARU, which they felt were very promising. There is space on the ground floor of Central House for a gallery and café.

Workshops
Students will have access to a range of workshops, including a metal and wood workshop which can be used under supervision. Materials are available to students and are kept on site.

Metropolitan Works
With the forthcoming move, students will have direct access to Metropolitan Works, a digital production facility based on Commercial Road. MetWorks is described as a ‘factory in the city’ and will provide students with access to advanced technologies. The Board noted that access to these services might be limited by demand or ability. Services include; 3D printing rapid prototyping, water jet cutting, CNC routing, 3D scanning, laser cutting and a variety of other services are available for students to explore. Metropolitan Works also has a CAD file production service, and technicians are able to produce files in a variety of CAD packages.
15. **Documents**

Prior to the visit, the School provided all documentation as required under the RIBA Procedures for the Validation of UK Courses and Examinations in Architecture.

In the base room, the School provided:
- Staff CVs
- Course handbooks (Parts 1, 2, 3)
- QA documents
- External examiner reports (2010-11)
- External examiner CVs

Additionally, and at the request of the Board, the School provided:
- Overall marking sheets for Part 1 and Part 2