

Academic & Student Support Services
Academic Registrar
Simon Wright LLB
Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Cofrestrydd Academaidd
Simon Wright LLB



Sent by email to c.j.lim@ucl.ac.uk

26 November 2015

Dear Professor Lim,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2014 – 2015

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the BSc in Architectural Studies.

Your Report has been considered by the School in accordance with our approved procedures. I am, therefore, now in a position to respond on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor to the main points you had raised.

Issue(s) Highlighted:

1. Your indication that the lower passes are uninspired and the students showed little creative aspiration and suggested consideration of lifting the bar of the bottom pass;
2. Your detailed observations on written work submitted for Issues of Contemporary Architecture and on the marks for this element;
3. Your recommendation for a more holistic integration of design, history & theory and technology in the BSc RIBA Part 1 course [to] improve the level of critical thinking and [strengthen] the design development and final design output;
4. Your suggestion that a stronger synthesis of context and programme would strengthen the projects, and questions the appropriateness of design briefs;
5. Your observations of a lack of student confidence in their spatial planning/plans/sections and on the indiscriminate use of photoshop;
6. Your suggestion that greater emphasis should be placed in design development through physical models.

Cardiff University
McKenzie House
30-36 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 ODE
Tel Ffôn I +44(0)29 2087 9189
www.cardiff.ac.uk

Prifysgol Caerdydd
Tŷ McKenzie
30-36 Heol Casnewydd
Caerdydd CF24 ODE
Tel Ffôn I +44(0)29 2087 9189
www.cardiff.ac.uk

The following response has been provided on behalf of the School:

1. As is typical in the examination of student design work, the School spends a lot of time considering the pass or fail of students at the lower end of the scale. We feel that our processes are robust and that we did make the appropriate judgement on this occasion after some extended debate. As you indicated elsewhere in your report, consensus was achieved in all cases.
2. Your comments have been noted. On the recommendation of the External Examiners the marks of all students were adjusted before they were considered by the Examining Board.
3. This year the interface between the design module and technology module has been substantially reviewed, and the balance between different components of the technology curriculum have been readjusted. Structure, construction, building science and environmental performance are represented more equitably in the syllabus. Furthermore the mode of delivery has changed. In the first term students will undertake an in depth analytic investigation of technical aspects and their application to exemplary architecture. This student research phase is supported by a series of lectures and workshops where students are familiarised with the underlying concepts, principles and theories. In the second term student will apply their technical knowledge into their own studio design work. This application phase is supported by small group seminar expert classes where relevant technical issues of specific studio briefs are discussed and explored in more detail.

The School has no current plans to 'integrate' the lecture module components of history and theory with design studio in any formal way, but encourage each individual unit to develop an intellectual agenda suited to the project brief.

4. The School held a visiting tutor away-day in September 2015, to facilitate collaboration between WSA staff and visiting staff on teaching (such as brief formation and pacing of projects). We are encouraging dialogue between different unit leaders, and are introducing a cross-unit 'crit' in the second term. These measures are intended to support the unit leaders in defining appropriate level three challenges for the students.
5. The School agrees with your comments that there is room for improvement in the students' articulatory orthographic projections, both as a tool for design and communication. This will be brought to the attention of the studio tutors and the School has have introduced specific presentation workshops to strengthen this aspect of design and to start to address the indiscriminate use of Photoshop.

6. Some studios place greater emphasis on models than others. The School does not make it a requirement that all should incorporate this in their design method.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. Your particular commendation of the School's "unit system". The School confirms that it plans to continue with the unit system, whilst providing additional support, particularly to the visiting unit tutors, through a combination of consultation and some year wide timetable programming;
3. Your report of improvements to the examining process. The School appreciates this positive feedback, and aims to continue to improve the examination processes this session, by integrating the unit tutors into the process and allowing a more structured and lengthy interview between the external unit tutors and the external examines.

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and we thank you for your continued support of the programme.

In order to meet the expectations of the QAA Quality Code, both the External Examiner Annual Report and this Institutional Response will be published on the University website and will be available to all students and staff.

The University's provision of the formal Institutional Response is not intended to constrain direct communication between schools and their External Examiners. Schools are encouraged to discuss with their External Examiners any matters of detail raised in their Reports and, more widely, any issues impacting on the quality and standards of awards, including possible changes to programmes.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar