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Sent by email to [t.sengupta@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:t.sengupta@ucl.ac.uk)

**13 January 2020**

Dear Dr Sengupta,

**Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2018/19**

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for MArch (dissertations).

Your report has been considered by colleagues in the School and is the basis of this Institutional Response on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor. The School will also use its contents to help inform their [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process and where appropriate, [Periodic Review](#).

**The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:**

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process.
2. The year-long dissertation period is one of the biggest advantages of the programme over other architecture schools.
3. The slight loosening of the expected structure of the dissertation itself (while making sure essential components are not missed out) over the years, has, to my mind, worked quite well.
4. The contextual and socially, environmentally and politically engaged and responsible orientation of dissertation topics.
5. The top end work was very good and some of the critical policy research can in fact be of direct use to particular regulatory/ policy agencies.
6. The new system of sharing dissertation samples between external examiners works well.
7. External Examiners sitting as observers in vivas allows focus on the mode, appropriateness and fairness of the overall process, the actual nature of the research outputs and the viva examination procedure itself.
8. The emphasis on a grounded approach and empirical rigour sets the Welsh School of Architecture apart from other Schools.



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9. This field oriented rigorous approach combined with a sense of social and environmental responsibility is a wonderful combination, and was particularly legible in work this year.
10. The evolution of the dissertation programme over a number of years, and the active engagement with suggestions made by external examiners.
11. The engagement of a good number of students on Welsh issues is excellent, and an area to really focus on.
12. Holding vivas each student is excellent practice, and its continuation is strongly encouraged.

### **Issues highlighted in your report and response provided by the School:**

1. ***Programme Structure/Dissertation year:*** *Incorporation of some peer interaction/learning events during the dissertation year; More emphasis on the topic formulation stage of dissertations, including some acknowledgement of innovation in marking criteria; Incorporate some 'value-based' discussions on the importance of research/study, possibly within the more skills and informative based research methods workshops.*

The Welsh School of Architecture would like to thank you for your great support and for the detailed and rigorous report. The Dissertation module is preceded by the module Research Preparation in MArch. 1, which is designed to prepare students for their dissertation. This module has undergone some changes this year that will impact next year's dissertation cohort. It now includes seminars and peer-reviews, introductions to research and research culture, lectures and a workshop regarding methodologies, a presentation on research ethics and more. Students are expected to formulate and develop their topics into research proposals and a literature review. This provides time for developing the interests. We believe the Research Preparation module in its new format will provide the necessary support for the Dissertation module. We have tweaked the marking criteria for next year's module, though we have not introduced 'innovation' – we will review this for the following year.

2. ***The Assessment Process:*** *Where possible, ensure the second marker is not from a radically different expertise.*

We agree with you that a 2<sup>nd</sup> marker who is within the general field of research related to the dissertation is desirable. You are correct in identifying the practical difficulties of guaranteeing this – the dependence on available expertise and other workloads of staff. Due to significant growth of PGT dissertations in the last years, a smaller number of staff now contributes to the module, and this has limited ability to perfectly sync 2<sup>nd</sup> marker to dissertation topic. We hope forthcoming recruitment of new staff will resolve this issue in the close future.

3. **Master's Dissertations:** Consider ways to reduce disparity of marks at the top end.

This year's timetable for marking was challenging, with about three weeks between hand-in and exam board. It meant that the key means of marking oversight and resolution of marking disparities has been a moderation committee, with limited use of third marking. However, we plan next year to more robustly use third markers when necessary. This will be enabled by replacing the viva with a non-assessed conference, a change that will provide examination the much-needed time, including for third marking if needed. Third marking, a moderation committee and module leader oversight should assist in limiting the disparities you have identified at the top end of the scale.

4. **Year on Year Comments:** Ensure traditional dissertation topics do not die out as a result of the 'critical turn' to social, environmental and political issues.

The change in topics identified by the examiner is first and foremost brought about by the students' own interests and concerns. There are of course other factors here, and perhaps the most relevant is the attempt to position the dissertation as a rigorous piece of research rather than a contribution to disciplinary discourse. In any case, we welcome and will encourage a wide array of topics and approaches in the module. One means of encouraging this will be by making a wide range of dissertations examples available to next year's cohort.

We hope that you will find this response satisfactory and 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's [Public Information website](#) and will be available to all students and staff.

As this is your final year as External Examiner, we would like to thank you for your service and we are most grateful for your valuable input into this process.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright  
Academic Registrar