



EXTERNAL EXAMINER ANNUAL REPORT FORM

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Valerie Mulvin		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Director, McCulough Mulvin Architects		
Programme and / or Subjects Covered by this Report:	M.Arch 2		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2013-2014	Date of Report:	July 2014

For completion by External Examiner in the spaces provided. Please extend spaces where necessary. **Please note this Form will be published online.**

1. Programme Structure

To set the context for the MArch 2, I note the structure of the Fourth Year (M.Arch 1), which we did not assess, comprises each student working in architectural practices in the main, and attending a series of short Block Design Assignments in the School throughout the year. In 2013-14, I understand there has been the introduction of a Summer School with tutored design time and a design assignment of some weeks. This is a welcome improvement, which should generate some benefits to design development in the 2014-2015 session.

At the present time students experience the world of practice in their fourth year rather than undertaking a full year of design development training (Many other Schools deliver experience in offices by recommending a year out, often after the third year). In my view - as expressed in previous years' reports - it is difficult for the students in a full time course with four years of design training to achieve the depth of exploration that is achievable in a full time five year design course. The enthusiasm of staff and their monitoring of the student's progress throughout the MArch 1 year do mitigate this to an extent, but it should be noted that the quality of the student's final year MArch 2 projects can be affected by the quality of their Fourth Year – particularly of concern with weak students and less good work placements.

2. Academic Standards

The system of Units in the MArch 2 programme continues to encourage diversity and a range of architectural approaches to problems which is very welcome. Many Schools become identified with a narrow range of work, while this School fosters the

individual interests of a very committed staff to develop very different work methods and explorations. Students can therefore generally find a Unit leader to work with whose interests most closely parallel their own – while not every student can join their first choice of Unit, it appears most students get their first or their second choice. The five Units concentrate on aspects of Economy; Tectonics, Form & Place; Infrastructural Urbanism; Space, Movement, Illusion; Weather, Coast; each working on a primer project to develop material studies before a major design project.

In general standards are comparable to those in other Schools with the caveat noted above about time devoted to design development and exploration in depth.

3. The Assessment Process.

The external examiners – two of us only in 2014 - were able to visit the studios in a general walk-through to view the presentation drawings/models and technical submissions of the whole cohort, but this was a very brief exposure to the general range of work.

The structure for the external examination has changed in 2013-2014 as a result of University regulations: as a result the role of the external examiner has been reduced to one of observation; internal marks can no longer be moderated, even in bands, and the level of examination of the final year students of the M.Arch 2 course has changed nature, involving a sampling of student work only. WSA requested the externs for 2014 to act in a roving (silent) role to observe the internal marking/final crit/viva of individual students assessed by the WSA panel of external assessors.

In Summer 2014 I observed the final interviews of 11 students across a range of Units – Economy, Form & Place, Infrastructure, Space/Performance

The Units had some excellent primer projects incorporating good, hands-on research which encouraged students' appreciation of materiality.

As in the previous three years, many students' work was excellent: interesting and provocative – graphically maybe not as forceful this year as in other years, but with character, depth and good strategies.

It was encouraging to see a Unit tackling issues of how to work with existing buildings, and while the scope of the investigation this year was quite complex for students who have not done this kind of work before, it was good to see this area of work – of huge significance to many architects in practice – opened up to ambitious investigation. Hopefully this type of project will run in future years, and possibly a smaller project with a more distilled set of objectives might assist in exploring in more depth how interventions and conservation might be considered. Potentially, if time permitted, a project in the undergraduate course as an introduction to the issues of conservation and intervention would be a benefit.

Complex and difficult briefs, incorporating interesting technical submissions were evident in several of the Units, and perhaps because of the nature of the briefs some weaker projects appeared formalistic in their architectural language, and in others an over-reliance on models to the exclusion of drawings was evident. A lack of site plans which has been commented on in the previous three years was again evident throughout many schemes. It was difficult to explore the level of technical submission

made by students on their projects unless the external assessors happened to question the student on this aspect, so I am unable to comment in a substantive way on this very significant aspect of the course.

The standard of some final design projects I was able to observe this year was rather thin, possibly a result of the 'random roving' role identified for the external examiners this year (see below). While we could observe the student being questioned by the external assessors, we had no opportunity to clarify issues with the student directly. A comparative position is easier to achieve by external examiners interviewing the students of a Unit, with or without the presence of relevant staff. Apparently extraneous issues such as the dissertation done in the MArch 1, technical submissions related to the final project of MArch 2, and the level of student satisfaction at their perceived support by the School and the University of individual students cannot be gauged.

There appeared to be some overmarking of the final project in evidence in comparison with other schools, however in discussion with my fellow external examiner we concluded this is likely to be a result of less time in studio – ie the lack of the Fourth Year as a full time year, which means students do not have the same opportunity to develop their skills to the same extent as is possible in other schools. Nonetheless, we considered the students to be fully engaged in the Course and developing their talents and skills to the full.

For reasons of time constraint, I did not participate in the review of examination scripts.

4. Year-on-Year Comments

Although my appointment as External Examiner ended in 2013, I was asked to extend the period by a year to provide some linkage to the experiences of the previous group of externs. There has been a further reduction in the number of external examiners to 2 in 2014, down from 3 in 2013 and 4 the previous two years (see below).

The new role for external examiners somewhat hampers the level of comment this year, as will be evident from my comments above. However I believe the School continues to develop its Courses to ensure the learning outcomes are appropriate and that students are excited and stimulated by the level of work they are asked to undertake. Enthusiasm and innovation are encouraged and rewarded.

As noted before, there is a general tendency this year again to a lack of site plans and drawings which explore the immediate relationship of the building with its location, and this year also – possibly due to the impossibility of a direct engagement between the external examiner and the individual student - there was less evidence in the projects I saw of detailed technical submissions to support the theses.

5. Preparation / Induction Activity (for new External Examiners only)

N/A

6. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement

The area of interest of each Unit Leader is established with an inspirational introductory document, backed up with appropriate reading material, references and sources. The students are interested and resourceful, the best showing great skill

and ingenuity in making clear and well communicated projects across the range of Units.

7. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only)

I believe it would be helpful to the School to have the external examiners assess the MArch 1 in more detail, and sample work from a range of abilities in the year would be helpful to set a context for the final year, MArch 2.

The reduced role of the external examiners this year appeared to me to be rather unsatisfactory. The 'roving silent observer' role appears to deliver little to the School. If it is impossible to continue with the previous method of external examination: ie, a series of one to one interviews with individual students, where the examiners would see at a minimum the highest to fail, lowest to pass, and those around the distinction mark - I wonder whether the role might not be delivered effectively by the people who are currently *external assessors* – one of whom attends each student interview. If these were redesignated as *external examiners*, the final crit/interview would be an opportunity to assess a real range of students across each Unit while also give closure to each student.

As in previous years, I would like to thank the staff of the School for the courtesy and hospitality extended to us, it was a real pleasure to meet with the staff and students and I wish them every success in the future as the School develops its ambitions.

8. Annual Report Checklist

Please include appropriate comments within Sections 1-7 above for any answer of 'No'.

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
Programme/Course Information				
8.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	Y		
8.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?	Y		
Draft Examination Question Papers				
8.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?		N	
8.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?		N	
8.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?		N	
Marking Examination Scripts				
8.6	Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?			N/A
8.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			N/A
8.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			N/A
8.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?			N/A
8.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?			NA/
Coursework and Practical Assessments				
8.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	Y		
8.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	Y		
8.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	Y		
8.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	Y		
Clinical Examinations (if applicable)				
8.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			N/A
Sampling of Work				
8.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining Board Meeting				

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
8.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?		N	
8.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?			N/A
8.19	Cardiff University recognises the productive contribution of External Examiners to the assessment process and, in particular, to the work of the Examining Board. Have you had adequate opportunities to discuss the Programme and any outstanding concerns with the Examining Board or its officers?	Y		
Joint Examining Board Meeting (if applicable)				
8.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?		N	
8.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			N/A
8.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A

Please return this Report, preferably in a Microsoft Word format, by email to:

ExternalExaminers@cf.ac.uk

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Clive Brown, Registry Officer, Registry & Academic Services, Cardiff University,
McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE