

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2013-2014 - Master of Architecture

Dear Ms Mulvin,

I am writing further to your External Examiner's report for the above programme(s). Your Report has been considered by the Welsh School of Architecture 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.

Issues Highlighted

Your Report raised issue(s) which have been referred for consideration by the School. The following response has been provided on behalf of the School.

- “1. [1.2, second para] the External Examiner's reiterated comments on the Programme structure and length and related observation 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”;**

We are in the process of undertaking a course review which will involve looking at the quality and structure of the education provided through the M.Arch. In the academic year of 2014-2015, we are addressing the issue by fine-tuning the structure of briefings and submissions, with the aim of providing students with as much time as is feasible to develop their design thesis. We are doing this, for example, by pulling back the deadline for submitting the dissertation in M.Arch 2 and also by introducing it earlier in the M.Arch 1. There is also a more generous budget this year to help us to provide more in M.Arch2 year by way of consultancies, workshops, tutorials and seminars designed to assist in overcoming the challenges of the four year full-time design training.

- 2. [3, seventh para and 4, third para] detailed observations on the “lack of site plans and drawings which explore the immediate relationship of the building with its location”;**

Students are encouraged to produce these kinds of drawings in the context of all of the units, and this continues to be emphasised this year.

- 3. [3, eighth para, 4, second para and 7, second para] detailed comments on the “‘random roving’ role identified for the external examiners this year”;**

This was the second year of employing both external assessors and external examiners with distinct roles.

In previous years, we have relied on external examiners as part of our process of moderation. The school believes that it is important to have an external voice in moderation to ensure that our marking is fair and free from bias. The University no longer permits external examiners to make changes to individual student's marks, and sees the role of the external examiner as one of providing feedback on overall quality and standards. As a result of this, we have appointed a team of external assessors who are part of the final examination panel. Given the modified role of external examiners, we felt that it was no longer necessary for them to meet with all students individually, and so last year we introduced sampling. This was not well received by the external examiners, so this year we asked the externals to attend a selection of the final examinations, so that they could observe and comment on whether our processes were robust. In the coming year, in response to this year's

feedback, we will ensure that the role does not appear to be 'roving' but is rather more carefully timetabled to ensure that examiners get a good oversight of a variety of aspects of the course and are, additionally, able to meet with groups of students.

The University has confirmed that it will be reviewing its changes to assessment policy and we have reported the External Examiners' concerns on this issue in our annual report to the university.

- 4. [7, first para] the External Examiner's perception that "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".**

Samples of M.Arch 1 work were sent to the external examiners prior to the final examination. Valerie Mulvin was unable to attend the final day of the examining process at which the other examiner, David Porter, did obtain an overview of the M.Arch 1 work."

Positive Comments

The School and University are pleased to note your positive comments on the School's provision including:

- a. [1, 2 and 3] your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;**
- b. [2, first para] your observation that the "system of units in the MArch 2 programme continues to encourage diversity and a range of architectural approaches to problems" and related comments.**

I hope that you will find this response satisfactory and thank you for your service as External Examiner.

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 Registry web pages and will be available publically.

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.

Dr S L Williamson

for Dr C B Turner
Academic Registrar