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**Sent by email**

**17 October 2016**

Dear Ms van Heyningen,

**Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2015–2016**

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.

**Issues Highlighted**

1. The need for a greater awareness in the students' work of context and related comments.
2. Detailed observations on drawing skills and on the use made of drawings by students.
3. Integration of technology into architectural design proposals (technical exercise not always evident in the finished project).
4. Suggested consideration of having fewer Units.
5. Involvement of Year Chair or Scheme Convenor at feedback sessions with Unit Tutors.
6. Your detailed comments on the role External Examiners played in the assessment process.

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

1. The School agrees that the response of many students to the specific qualities and challenges of the site they were working on was in many cases overly abstracted, or not sufficiently vivid. This is an aspect of design that the School is keen to improve and particular attention will be paid to these issues next year in conversations with Unit leaders and students.
2. The School is pleased that there is some improvement in drawing skills, but will continue to work in this aspect and will encourage Unit leaders to advance a particular attitude to representation in their unit.
3. This is the first year in which the School has attempted to teach architectural technology as a topic fully integrated into the design studio which is structured into Units. There have been some initial difficulties, but the School hopes to make progress on this issue by including the Unit leaders in the conversations concerning the structuring and specific content of the technical design exercises.
4. The School has decided to maintain the present pattern of seven (possibly six depending on student number) design units, since it provides a degree of diversity which we believe to be appealing to students' varying interests and aspirations. Where there is an opportunity to do so, however, cross-Unit teaching will be encouraged (e.g. where two units are addressing adjacent sites, there may be opportunity for collaboration over site).
5. The feedback session with the external examiners was very well received by the Unit leaders and the School welcomes the proposal that the year chair and/ or BSc scheme convenor should also attend the session next year.
6. The Head of Quality and Standards has met with the School to discuss the role of the External Examiner. The External Examiner Handbook sets out the University's expectations of the role and how they align with national expectations. These are fully aligned to the Quality Assurance Agency guidelines about External Examining in its [UK Quality Code for Higher Education - Chapter B7: External Examining](#) along with the [Higher Education Academy](#).

The University attaches great importance to peer review from External Examiners as a key means of ensuring that:

- the academic standards of University awards and their component parts are set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that the standards of student performance are properly judged against this;

- the final assessment process accurately measures student achievement against intended learning outcomes, is rigorous, fair and fairly operated, and is in line with University Regulations and policies;
- the University is able to compare the standard of its awards with those of other higher education institutions;
- the University's provision is continuously enhanced to reflect developments in the sector, institution and discipline.

The External Examiners role in assessment is to verify the quality of final assessment processes and ensure that academic standards of awards are set and maintained at the appropriate level (rather than to seek to judge individual cases).

Whilst there are subtle differences between institutions and subject disciplines, many UK institutions will subscribe to the principles outlined by the QAA to improve the effectiveness, transparency and credibility of the system, especially with external audiences.

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

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. examples of excellent drawings and commendation of student work associated with an exercise which required students to analyse an existing building by a prominent architect in terms of its technical performance;
3. improvements in viva timetabling and internal marking processes.

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,



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