

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2013-2014 - BSc in Architectural Studies

Dear Professor Lim,

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. [3 and 8.10] the External Examiner's observation that the “external examining process of “sampling” was not satisfactory”;

The School adopted the RIBA Validation Panel practice in terms of selecting a top, middle and low performing portfolio in each UNIT (RIBA does this through one selection per academic year).

This fair practice has been introduced as a response to adopted policies of Cardiff University for the academic year 2012-13.

70 students displayed their work (our External Examiners had access to all displays) and 21 students were interviewed (30% of the cohort).

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

2. [4] the indication that, for a named aspect of the Programme the “subject matter of the written works was not focused and lacks critical thinking – it would be particularly helpful for the weaker students to have a narrower scope”;

The School reviewed over the academic year 2013-14 our history and theory thread especially in year two. We talked about a much more thematically structured approach in regard to architectural agenda for the coming academic year 2014-15.

Issues in Contemporary Architecture (ICA, 4000 word essay in year three) has been restructured into four categories, Inheritance, Inhabitation, Innovation and Identity, which will help to connect to our expertise as found within the Schools' staff and research better than the module had previously. This will help to focus more on quality, originality and how to form a valid argument (personal tutorials included).

3. [6] the External Examiner's four suggested enhancements to the Programme.

The novel strategic plan of WSA 2014-17, is to focus and refine the School's distinctive identity in teaching and research around a core agenda of Models, Meanings and Making. This agenda was communicated with our whole teaching community.

The holistic approach has been taken on board, not only by studio teachers for the next academic year 2014-15, but supported by important changes to our history and theory thread as stipulated above.

There is a tendency, in most schools of architecture at a comparable level, where Photoshop and Renderings have become rather dominant within our visual culture, therefore wrongly understood as a substitute for traditional methods of representation and architectural thinking. Newly introduced programme structures under the heading of “bim”, do open up this gap even further more. We will address this problem through strengthening our Design Principles and Methods modules (DPM I-III), where we also introduce our students to digital design tools and design studio. Our external design tutors (practicing architects) will take more responsibilities in regard of enhancing classic professional standards (spatial planning) within the cohorts.”

Positive Comments

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

a. [1 and 2] your positive indications regarding the programme structure and academic standards.

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 Wiliamson

for Dr C B Turner
Academic Registrar