



Academic & Student Support Services
Academic Registrar Simon Wright LLB
Gwasanaethau Academaidd a Chefnogi Myfyrwyr
Cofrestrwydd Academaidd Simon Wright LLB

Cardiff University
McKenzie House
30-36 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 0DE

Tel *Ffôn* | +44(0)29 2087 9189
www.cardiff.ac.uk

Prifysgol Caerdydd
Tŷ McKenzie
30-36 Heol Casnewydd
Caerdydd CF24 0DE

Sent by email to u.sengupta@mmu.ac.uk

28 January 2019

Dear Mr Sengupta,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2017/18

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's report for the BSc in Architectural Studies.

Your report will be considered by the School and will also be used to help inform their [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process and where appropriate, [Periodic Review](#).

Your report has been considered by 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](#).

Issues highlighted in your report:

1. **Programme Structure:** Could the overall direction/ambition/identity of the BSc (Architecture) be made more explicit (no matter the multiple routes through which this is approached)?
2. **Programme Structure:** More tectonic expression of the creative design solutions would be welcome along with a philosophical perspective on architectural design/structure and environmental design.

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3. **Programme Structure:** Student feedback suggests a lack of understanding in how the skills learned in Yr1 could/should be successfully applied in Yr2.
4. **Programme Structure:** The third year offers a range of studio units. The amount of time spent on the development of a brief or initial idea differs widely resulting in a high degree of variation in terms of spatial, material and technological resolution. This may lead to marking and moderation processes based on trust or seniority. The alternative could be to openly publish the areas of primary focus for each studio and map enough outputs against common Yr3 output requirements.
5. **Programme Structure:** Design Methods or the digital course in Yr2/3 (while strong in content and ambition) was not very successful in terms of integration with the work being carried out by the majority of students in studios etc.
6. **Programme Structure:** The drawn outputs were of an acceptable standard, but the communication of tectonic detail using line/orthographic drawing could be improved.
7. **Programme Structure:** The technical detailing presented was generic. Student responses indicated a lack of understanding of the philosophical/theoretical approaches to environmental and structural/tectonic design. Instead, these were often treated as tick boxes. More specifically focused exercises to explore specified aspects of technical design could be considered.
8. **Programme Structure:** Technical solutions were primarily based on strategy, with limited demonstration of measurable testing in the final or close to final designs. This could be improved.
9. **The Assessment Process:** Clear feedback on areas of strength and weakness with formative grade indications could be considered at the various submission stages.
10. **The Assessment Process:** The final stage of the moderation is currently a closed-door process. If this is the preferred method, some form of open (to all studio staff) feedback to studio leaders about the areas of success and weakness (i.e. the reasons for the final marking) could be considered.
11. **The Assessment Process:** While the marking and moderation processes appeared to be fair, the publication of open marking criteria and/or feedback may help with transparency.
12. **The Assessment Process:** The comparison between different studios in the final year of the BSc was a little bit unclear. While a suitable outcome was agreed by all - for the highest marks - a discussion and decision involving more teaching staff may be appropriate.
13. **Preparation for the role of External Examiner:** As a new examiner, it would have been appreciated if an introduction to the staff, programme and a walkthrough of work and processes had been provided.
14. **Areas for Enhancement:** The feedback from the students and observable work from the samples of the digital program point to a lack of integration between the digital methods and the rest of the programme.

Response provided by the School:

1. The School runs programme reviews and previews annually and, in recent years, we have focused on the direction, vision of the programme especially to align this closely to School's research, scholarship and pedagogic interests. The upcoming undergraduate programme review will also be addressing this more holistically. We are also reviewing the need for a BSc prospectus for all students and staff (internal and external) that provides the full Years 1-3 (possibly 5) context about briefs, units, themes, subjects and tutors. This would be a combining an editing of the material currently disseminated within each individual year.
2. Acknowledged. The Year leadership has changed in 2018-19. These comments have been taken on board by the new Year Chair and Deputy to structure the studio to focus on more architectural projects during the term as well as to improve the representation skills and techniques to equip them for more complex programmes in following years.
3. We have restructured Technology 2 this year, with weekly content, and associated practical tasks, linked to the development of studio projects. We are bringing externals with focused expertise in to deliver Technology content (structural engineers, M&E consultants, sustainability experts). Technology coursework will include discrete tasks such as lighting studies designed to increase the richness and sophistication of Design work. Our hope is that the revised weekly delivery of Technology will provide students with the confidence to see aspects of Technology as valid and important design drivers. Understanding and integration of aspects of Technology are embedded in Design learning outcomes.
4. Marking is based on overall assessment criteria for the programme. Moreover, it is done collaboratively by a panel that includes the Unit Leader, one internal and one external reviewer. This was done to achieve a balance between studio units' ambitions and the overall learning outcomes of the studio module. In 2018-19 we have introduced a unit-specific learning outcome (similar to what we have in MArch2) to provide greater clarity on the approach, scale and focus of each unit in regard to assessment.
5. This is acknowledged. We reviewed the Design Principles and (DPM) thread and in 2018-19 have introduced 3 electives into DPM 3 to allow more diverse exploration of design methods than just digital /scripting methods that not all students wanted to focus on. The School is in the process of recruiting new staff, some of which will have a specific focus on parametric methods and digital media.
6. Noted. First Year is seeking to lay a better foundation for orthographic drawing techniques. Tectonic details have consistently improved in Years 2 & 3 in recent years. More can be done across modules, not just design studio, and will be considered as part of a wider undergraduate curriculum review being undertaken in 2018-19.
7. This is acknowledged within the School. The wider undergraduate curriculum review this year will address the purpose, direction and requirements of the technology thread of modules as stand-alone and in relation to design studio

to ensure both general and specialist understanding is developed. In both Years 2 and 3 we have reviewed the nature of the technology projects for 2018-19 to create a better alignment. The School is currently in the process of appointing new staff that will address some of the environmental 'gaps'.

8. As item 7 above.
9. The School has consciously made the decision not to provide summative feedback and instead focus on clear formative feedback unless at the end of a distinct component or module. In design studio in Years 1-3 the modules are year-long and students are made aware that they can continue working on the complete portfolio until the end of the year when summative assessment will be provided. This is same in all undergraduate years. We are aware of the differences in opinion in this from students who often like summative marks to guide them. Experience has told us that when marks are provided, weaker students tend to focus on how to improve the mark by x% rather than the feedback. Guidance is provided to all design critics and tutors about the provision of formative feedback and the importance of making any weaknesses and strengths clear. We continue to review this decision at annual programme reviews and this will form part of our wider UG curriculum review.
10. Noted. However, following University guidelines our policy to moderation is not about re-marking specific projects but to review consistency of assessment between panels and units. The introduction of a unit-specific learning outcome will further help and guide moderation and clarity. The moderation looks at fails, benchmark marks and makes judgements in cases of marks that are not agreed by the panel. We always reserve the right to call an examination panel back where more information on the decisions are required.
11. Assessment criteria are available for all modules across all years at the start of the degree programme and each academic year. In Year 3, the assessment criteria and learning outcomes are made clear to students and examiners in advance of the exams.
12. See response to items 10 and 11. The examination panel is made up of three people (unit leader, one internal and one external) who specifically assess the work. This involves all internal studio staff in the process across all units. The moderation panel is comprised of a representative from each panel, Year Chair and Director of Undergraduate to review consistency across panels. Opening the assessment/ moderation up to a wider range of staff risks superficial judgements informing assessment.
13. Noted.
14. Noted. We acknowledge aspects of the integration of digital mediums, skills, theories and methods as part of our wider curriculum. This is already being included as part of a School review of research and scholarship groups and an ongoing comprehensive review of our undergraduate curriculum.

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 third year offers a range of studio units. The briefs were diverse enough to result in a variety of responses at different scales and using different approaches to design.
3. The school has a visibly strong and successful focus on historic integration.
4. The exploration of design using physical models was apparent and the development models in some units were obviously quite successful.
5. The assessment process is generally clear.
6. The initial attempt to develop a digital agenda within the program is noteworthy. This is especially the case given that the current demonstration of engagement with digital design mostly limited to visualisation.

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's [Public Information website](#) and will be available to all students and staff.

We are most grateful for your comments and for your support in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar