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Guidance notes are available to support the completion of this Report via the Cardiff University Intranet here and from ExternalExaminers@cardiff.ac.uk.

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Ulysses Sengupta		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	Manchester School of Architecture		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	BSc Architecture		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2019/20	Date of Report:	23/12/2020

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board (the dissertation stage Examining Board in the case of postgraduate Master's programmes).

Please return this Report, **in a Microsoft Word format**, by email to: externalexaminers@cardiff.ac.uk.

Please note this form will be published online and should not make any reference to any individual students or members of staff in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2018).

Please extend spaces where necessary.

1. **Programme Structure** (curriculum design, programme structure and level, methods of teaching and learning)

Please include consideration of the following:

- *confirmation that the actions taken as a result of the variation of assessments in relation to industrial action and Covid-19 have been appropriate to protect the academic standards of the programme and have allowed students to achieve their programme level learning outcomes*

The unprecedented circumstances faced due to COVID have been addressed on multiple fronts. Preliminary feedback from the students interviewed in terms of support and flexibility have been positive. Staff should be congratulated on this aspect.

The variation of assessments has been framed by a mix of practicalities and university regulations. Strategically the adjustments made appear to make sense for the past academic year and the programme learning outcomes are likely to have been achieved. However, with COVID difficulties not going away, it would be useful

to develop clear strategies for ongoing and future assessment as marking and awards will be impacted on across multiple years.

The responses below attempt to address long-term changes and challenges while keeping the COVID situation in mind.

Structure:

- I am **impressed by the structural changes over the past couple of years**, this is particularly visible in Yr1 & Yr2. I think that the WSA now has a clear and open framework that runs studio design alongside theories, technologies and design methods. I would commend the changes you have made to arrive here and now you can look at each of these in terms of how you choose to improve these aspects iteratively in terms of quality (moving forward).
- **Yr3 due to the external input and unit system is obviously more complicated**, but I would encourage a similar breadth of exposure through the parallel structure to open students up to design approaches and theories etc.
- **The reference to Lawson's work and to look at what design education is a positive self-critical approach**. It is a good reference for an institution looking ahead and improving constantly. This is what I see happening at WSA. **Another useful reference for me has been Inchoate: An Experiment in Architectural Education by Marc Angélil (ETH).**

BSc per Year: (This comes with the caveat that I would have liked to look at the work more closely in order to provide the most useful feedback, but online viewing has a different time demand)

- **1st Year appears to have become much clearer**. The submission type changing is potentially an advantage in that aspect (clearer and more structured student submissions). The narratives in the design projects etc are clearer, and the tech considerations referring to the parallel streams appears to be clearer. Portfolios shown look better than last year. They are more tectonic and better drawn. Tight sites and constraints appear to have been advantageous to design progress/explorations. The DPM and exposure to different urban studies and design concerns is excellent and should be continued into the following years if possible.
- **2nd Year seems robust with the projects allowing students to progress well through the year**. The histories, theories and technologies all appear to be improvements or better integrated to support each other and studio. DPM in terms of being a critical reflection is very interesting and should be retained as possible. The PhD seminars and attempt to introduce Yr2 'Architecture in context' students to research structure is very interesting, it will be worth keeping an eye on this to see what the impact of this is on other aspects of their course. DPM digital looks much better received than previous years. There is also a bigger conversation on the difficulties of timing digital skills later.
- **Yr3 – We see the students enjoying the 3 electives in DPM, but the structure is obviously more complicated in terms of synergies between the different modules**. This can possibly be looked at in terms of how synergies can be raised across the year. Integration between visiting studio leads/tutors and the school came up from the staff as well as the students as an issue. The students we spoke to appear to appreciate the 30% mark for

the autumn semester. **They were quite vocal about feeling a lack of support in technologies.**

2. **Academic Standards** (comparability with other UK HEIs, achievement of students, any PSRB requirements)

Please include consideration of the following:

- *module marks are an accurate reflection of the standards they achieved, and the award classification reflects their academic attainment on their degree programme.*
- *if scaling has been recommended by the pre-Examining Board, there is appropriate justification for the recommendation based on the scaling guidance and the proposed scaling methodology to be applied to the marks is appropriate*
- *the application of the Safety Net Policy to ensure that students' award classification reflects their academic attainment on the degree programme, and that the degree classification is not affected by any potential dip in their academic performance in assessments undertaken during a period of disruption.*
- *Highlighting where the Safety Net Policy could not be applied/or only in part due to specific PSRB requirements and the outcomes of the discussion and decisions made.*
- *the academic standards of degrees meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications' framework.*
- *the degrees awarded by the University are valid and reliable and are of an equivalent standard to degrees awarded in previous years.*
- *confirmation that the degree outcomes of each programme under consideration are in line with the sector and meet any professional, statutory, regulatory body requirements.*
- *where issues have been identified, the main Examining Board have been clear in their deliberations and actions to safeguard the academic standards.*

COVID-19 adjustments:
Summary of understanding is as below. On this basis, the adjustments are deemed to be practical and appropriate for a year that was disrupted part way through:
- Clear communication of scheduling and what extensions were on offer.
- 3-week extension for BSc and M.Arch. Hence external examining was compressed.
- Quick shift to digital teaching.
- All submissions online.
- Yr1 – Pass/fail system – no extension
- Yr2 – 2-week extension. – synoptic portfolio submission. Especially with regards to TECH
- Yr3 – focus – 3-week extension with tutorials. No access to facilities etc. Examination pack considers lack of physical and computational facilities (for physical models and renderings) (software) etc.
- Safety Net Policy – (different from University?) as Architecture could not implement (MarkB) i.e. work done to date. Hence, no safety net for the

students based on trajectory. Students were updated and school was as transparent as possible. The students rose to the challenge and continued design work.
- Shielding and quarantine etc means any failed module can be repeated without capping over the summer or next year.
- A student at 58 or 59 in design was uplifted to 2:1 if achieving that on other parts of course. About 5 or 6 uplifted this way.

EXAM BOARD &* STANDARDS (BSc):
In previous years, the academic standards were appropriate in comparison to other UK HEI's. This is also believed to be the case in the current year. The COVID situation and need for adjustments make a like-for-like comparison difficult, and this is likely to need special attention from the school in order to maintain flexibility for students in unprecedented circumstances and high standards based on expected achievements.

It is worth keeping a close eye on the award class sizes and proportions as sudden shifts up or down are warning signs. The was a little bit of confusion for me on the trajectory of 1ˢᵗ and 2.1 degrees awarded in comparison to the previous 3 years. It would be useful to have this information highlighted after the exam board.

3. **The Assessment Process** (enabling achievement of aims and learning outcomes; stretch of assessment; comparability of standards between modules of the same level)

Please include consideration of the following:

- *assessment variations used are appropriate, and where possible continue to test the module learning outcomes*
- *students continued to be provided with the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the programme learning outcomes as a result of the variations*
- *assessments continued to be conducted with care and due diligence to ensure that students were not academically disadvantaged as a result of the variations.*

The process was clear as were the variations.

The previous advice to provide students with interim assessment/formative marks has been addressed and students appear to be generally happier. Staff appear a little bit divided on the issue based on their process.

Some of the adjustments made for assessments (such as the ability for students to include videos/discussions on their own work) were positive. However, as the issues have not gone away, there is a question of whether this is something that needs to be an option or standard practice in the current circumstances. As the COVID conditions continue to play a role in assessment, it is worth considering alternatives available for more live interaction between staff and students based on online assessment methods.

4. **Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)** (sample of dissertations received, appropriateness of marking schemes, standard of internal marking, classification of awards)

Where possible please complete this section following the dissertation examining board determining the final award.

N/A

5. **Year-on-Year Comments**
   [Previous External Examiner Reports are available from the Cardiff University Website [here](#).]

Please note that due to the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, Schools may have had limited time to enact changes.

It is very positive to see the way in which the school has responded to external examiner feedback and suggestions. The comments below attempt to continue this critical dialogue.

Comments based on Summarised Student Feedback:
COVID adjustments:
The students appear to have been generally appreciative and understanding. There was some mention of missing the interaction of the live crit, which is worth considering in terms of online interactions looking ahead.

Tech integration:
The Tech provision and support appear to need some adjustment in terms of students not feeling supported enough (see the comments summarised below). While the Tech (like digital skills/methods) suffers from the alignment and synchronous vs asynchronous debate, the support outside of the lectures in several schools appears to be moving more towards a drop-in and/or consultancy model. This is worth considering in terms of student support and staffing/resources. Summary of student feedback on Tech:
- Yr3 - Considered logical, with some appreciation of engagement with tech from the beginning. However, students claim to have lost touch with the technical team due to COVID (other than 'general sessions'). Some support in studio was missing.
- Yr2 – Useful to have joint submission. Appropriate level of support suggested as missing due to lack of lectures after a point. Lack of tutorials other (than the tech tutorials one month before) queried with support from studio tutors identified as variable.

Digital Teaching, Learning and attitudes:
- **Students in Yr3 are still quite vocal about a lack of digital skills**, and opportunities for support when self-learning. This is an aspect that the school should addressing directly.
- **Yr1 & 2 have had new elements such as AutoCAD, Sketchup, InDesign, Rhino, Photogrammetry etc. added which appear well**

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received. The concern from students relates to the dilemma of needing a variety of skills to choose from on the basis of their deign project needs. This is very difficult to address, but some sort of drop in points/support would also be a potential solution.

- **The idea of ambition in this field from a school position continues to be something that could be addressed more clearly**. For example, should the skills be about evaluation or design generation? Should the sustainability agenda explicitly lead to the skills beyond drawing?
- **As submissions become digital there is also a huge range of options within this media that can be explored** for submission from interactivity to animation.

Summary of student feedback on Digital:

- Yr2: We feel that we are picking up software etc. on our own and this is difficult for some. More workshops (even as electives – or to ask questions etc. would be useful). Learning Rhino and Grasshopper this year was great, but these were specific tasks so application to your own design is difficult.
- Yr3: Not taught any computer skills really. Good hand drawing and a lesson in CAD in Yr1. Students basically expected to teach themselves.

Design Theories & Practice:
The new structure for methods/DPM etc appears clear structural improvements. This is reflected in the student feedback below (especially from the existing Yr3 who went through the previous system/structure). There are useful pointers for iterative improvement to the new modules in the feedback as well. Clarity and communication of the ambition and learning outcomes of these modules is essential.
Summary of student feedback on Methods:

- Yr3 – DPM has tried to address methods and theories since Yr1, but it was more of an exploration of specific tools or exercises, where the lack of direct applicability and time were detriments.
- Yr2 – Saw two routes analogue and digital. The digital felt was clear (with some questions/comments about applicability to own projects due to the nature of specific exercises). The analogue was harder to understand in terms of requirement (journal) and criteria. Some student claimed to have really got into the digital side – so the analogue suffered.

Climate Change and Sustainability:
There appears to be a lot of scope to engage with climate and sustainability issues as a school. This is worth centralising as a theme with government legislation and the RIBA becoming quite involved. Identification of position and strategy would be useful as a school. Students appear just as concerned (see comments below).
Summary of student feedback on integration/teaching of/on sustainability:

- Yr3 – The discussions are mostly in technical seminars and lectures. But generally, we are expected to include them/refer to them. E.g. in Yr2 passive design was encouraged.
- Yr3 – There is no big emphasis on sustainable design – we are expected to do it ourselves – not sure whether there is any weighting against this within the marking in the school. Sustainability is seen as not congruent with design. So, it is not centralised.
- Yr3 – Some awareness is being raised but not enough emphasis on climate emergency etc. Connection to wider issues.

Student Interaction and Community:

The discussion is primarily based on student attitudes and feedback and the following points were worth noting (Summary of comments):

- Students have COVID related concerns about studio space – students thinking of deferring for a year because of possibility of no studio space. Discussion also related to full fees etc.
- Many students enjoyed the student organised informal crit a couple of times in the year (yr2). It would be good if the university also helped to organise this (designated day and time etc). This is because tutor groups tend to be detached and seeing across all the units/groups is nice. Across the years would also be very nice to see. Big event.
- Yr3 students suggested a lack of support for tech. Unit leaders pointed to brief. This issue is not just related to COVID.
- Students request more feedback – final submissions have ambiguous feedback (for non-design modules). More specific feedback pointing to solutions would be good.

Staff Interaction and Community:
- A sense disconnection continues for external tutors in (especially in Yr3) – presumably further exacerbated by COVID conditions. This is also being felt/voiced as a disconnection by students in terms of the lack of integration between modules. The communication here is difficult, but it is worth considering how to address this.
- The mapping of the learning outcomes needs improvement and support for staff doing this. The school has to lead on interpreting learning outcomes.

6. **Preparation for the role of External Examiner (for new External Examiners only)** (appropriateness of briefing provided by the programme team and supporting information, visits to School, ability to meet with students, arrangements for accessing work to review)

N/A

7. **Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement** (good and innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment; opportunities for enhancement of learning opportunities)

Due to the need to for continued adaptations during the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, we would be grateful if you could please include consideration of the following:

- *advice and guidance on where adaptations can be made to support a blend of high-quality on-campus and online learning for 2020/21 to support Schools with curriculum developments to address ongoing requirements to socially distance due to Covid-19.*

It is going to be very interesting to keep an eye on the refinements possible to the carefully considered structural changes that have been made over the past year(s). As the school makes choices based on identity and diversity of the education provided the structure appears robust.

It is useful to continue a dialogue about the following aspects based on the changes seen so far:

Design Specialisations:

How will/can the methods and theories integrated into the structure lead to the previously mentioned richer dialogue between design methods and urban studies?

Sustainability, Collaborative Design & Computation:

The strategy and focus to address this area remain a current discussion -

- Environmental Sustainability – Moving beyond regulation to clearly link climate, energy and waste. The relationship of buildings and urban development to global climate change.
- Digital Design
- Co-Design

Digital Culture:

The past year has seen the development of some specialisations at masters level at the WSA, but the dialogue about a digital culture that exists from the BSc is an ongoing discussion.

While the previously identified aspects of digital culture requiring attention remain notable:

- Digital skills development

- Incorporation of digital theories

- Engagement with digital methods for design

The pedagogy and delivery of digital skills and methods is undergoing a shift at multiple schools of architecture.

The Main Challenges for Digital Education & Engagement in Architecture

In recognition that the wide range of interests and research agendas within a large and pluralistic school cannot be adequately enhanced through historic models of digital provision based on one single whole school agenda, new models are being developed.

With the move away from contact-based teaching on multiple aspects of the course, there is an opportunity to change the model of delivery while also better addressing current needs for digital teaching in architecture. The problem faced by most schools of architecture pursuing a wide range of agendas is that digital skills and abilities cannot be timed to align with the wide range of student project design interests, design briefs, technical requirements and time constraints (one has to know of a possibility/tool/approach and practice it to utilise it in a new problem). This creates an engagement dilemma for students. I.e. should a student learn a digital skill/approach on the basis that it will be useful at some point? Or should a student engage with the skill when it is necessary for a particular design approach? The former can mean that the timing and content of a digital design skill is not directly relevant or appropriately timed for use in students' projects, while the latter often means that the students do not have the time or support needed to develop the skills sufficiently for creative application in their own projects.

Potential Structural Changes to create a Digital Culture

With the above in mind, any new digital provision structure must aim at developing a combination of online and face-to-face delivery and support for students. The ambitions could be aligned through some or all of the strategies below:

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1. Open all digital teaching sessions to all levels (undergraduate and graduate programmes).
2. Move the delivery of software/coding/skills workshops and introductions to be primarily online. Accessible through Moodle etc as online delivery content (videos, support files and step-by-step instructions). A few specialist sessions will/may need face-to-face delivery.
3. Divide digital skills into separate streams and levels to allow students to engage with the level most relevant to them and their long-term interests. Students can choose any stream to engage with at any time but can do so with some framing of the relevance of each.
4. Provide introductory sessions/videos/timed talks to each stream and each skill explaining the uses (e.g. the difference between BIM for industry and generative design for design explorations) and theoretical framing (where relevant).
5. Create a support/drop-in service will be available to students based on office hours per week for named members of specialist staff (adept at using and teaching multiple digital software).
6. Create/help create student forums for discussion between students attempting to solve design problems, with interested members of staff included as just another member.

Resources and delivery will need to be aligned to ambition and scope.

8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only) (significant changes in standards, programme/discipline developments, implementation of recommendations, further areas of work)

N/A

9. Issues for Response

To assist with a timely and detailed response top your report, we would be grateful if you could briefly summarise any issues referred to above that you would like to be specifically addressed in our institutional response.

1. Development and support of a climate change and sustainability agenda/position as a school.
2. Selection of a digital focus/strategy for the school.
3. COVID – Long-term delivery strategy – and changes for this year.
4. COVID related assessment strategies that are looking beyond 'emergency'/disrupted year measures to maintain standards.
5. How staff shortages/leavers will be addressed.

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