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Sent by email to [phyllidamills@millspower.com](mailto:phyllidamills@millspower.com)

28 January 2019

Dear Ms Mills,

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

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

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:** The Lanzarote project was based on a strong sense of place and precedent studies of a local architect's work, however the students' final output did not appear to reflect the potential richness of the project.
2. **Programme Structure:** The second year course needs to more successfully integrate the more exploratory skills developed in first year with its technical teaching. This combination will provide a stronger platform for students across the board to enter third year.
3. **Programme Structure:** At third year, more students could be demonstrating a high level of skill and effectiveness in communicating their ideas and design projects through their presentation of models and drawings on the wall.

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4. **Programme Structure:** Many projects have generic presentations where the design process has clearly not been enriched by and is disengaged from the technological input.
5. **Academic Standards:** Standards across the school can be improved, particularly for middle and lower achieving students. The course is growing in numbers and consideration needs to be given to how this increase in cohort can be harnessed to raise all students' experience and attainment.
6. **Year on Year Comments:** The school should review its leadership structure to include a wider group of staff in decision making, or at the very least to garner input from a wider group. There is currently a sense that for instance studio tutors who deliver the largest module in third year, architectural design, are isolated from each other and from the school.
7. **Year on Year Comments:** The lack of women staff in leadership roles (present at the exam board for instance) and the very small number of women staff present during the examination process.
8. **General comments:** Studio tutors feel isolated and do not have a sense of the whole course, not even those modules such as the design principles and methods and technological modules which have a very direct bearing and potential benefit to the design module.
9. **General comments:** The pacing of the different modules, with unbalanced workloads and clashing deadlines at times between the design principles and methods, technical design and architectural design modules.

#### **Response provided by the School:**

1. This is acknowledged. Year 1 is now led by a new Year Chair. There will be a renewed focus on representation and developing skills that will continue to be developed year by year as we appraise our structures of large cohort teaching.

We have reviewed the Design Principles and Methods (DPM) thread of modules and made some adjustments particularly to DPM in Year 3. There is a new Module Leader for DPM1 for 2018/19 with a continued awareness of developing technical and orthographic drawing skills.

The School has begun a comprehensive Undergraduate curriculum review (including BSc and MArch) to review the structure, themes, content and delivery methods for all threads including design. We acknowledge the possible constraints of a single spring semester project in Year 1, although we are considering this in the context of the wider programme. There are a variety of 'foundation' projects in the autumn semester with the intention of introducing ways of seeing, thinking and doing. The Vertical Studio that follows the large spring semester project provides opportunities at a different scale, way of thinking and brief that is designed to prepare Year 1 students for the increasingly rigorous independent thinking of Years 2 and 3.

2. It is acknowledged that there are many ways to structure the Year 2 design projects. In 2018-19 we are administering two design shorts in addition to the two core projects. A design short conducted over the summer vacation provides a link between Years 1 and 2, which requires students to work independently on their understanding of a domestic space or spaces. A design short, conducted between autumn and spring semesters, requires students to work in teams on a 'live' design competition. The School design brief (spring semester) has been replaced with a variety of studio-led 'public building' briefs, including (this year) library, community centre, nursery, culinary school... key aims are to introduce greater variety and complexity to the Year 2 offer, and to reduce the repetition between project 1 (housing) and project 2 (public building).

There is a clear focus on understanding of context in the initial weeks of the autumn semester. We are aware that students tend to edit this work out of their portfolios and so we will increase the means by which students include and provide evidence of these studies and contextual design.

We have emphasised the importance of working contextually this year, through lectures and studio direction, with the aim that this will be more evident.

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.

3. This is acknowledged and in some cases is part of the nature of weaker and stronger students as to how they graphically present and how they verbally present. We encourage the development of these skills throughout Years 1-3. In relation to representation, the School is working to address this by improving standards and expectations of representation from First Year onwards to reduce pressure on unit leaders. It is also acknowledged that the nature of the unit system also allows unit leaders to determine unit 'styles' of representation that can be given greater or lesser attention depending on the interests of that unit and Unit Leader. It is clear in some units that the means of study and representation are uniform across all students in that unit from start to end.
4. We acknowledge some disparities between technology and design integration in Years 2 and 3. The wider UG curriculum review will address the purpose, direction and requirements of each module as stand-alone and in relation to design studio. It is acknowledged that in Year 3, there is a preference from some Unit Leaders to determine the complete package of design and technology learning as focussed on unit themes. However there is a risk of

missing some wider technological strategies with this. In both Years 2 and 3 we have reviewed the nature of the technology projects for 2018-19 to create a better alignment.

This is acknowledged and will be considered as part of our wider UG review. While some adjustments can be made year to year, this cannot be immediately changed without consideration of the complete curriculum and the cycle of students through Years 1-3. It is also recognised that not all units will want to go in this direction and at Part 1, we must ensure a graduate has a balanced educational learning, developing and exploring general and specialist principles to allow for a range of approaches in Year 3. To allow for increased specialism in Year 3 technology/ design would increase pressure on Years 1 and 2 to cover the wider topics. In the past we have explored this and noticed increased stress amongst students who are expected to cover more by the end of Year 2.

5. The difference in expectations and assessment between design units is acknowledged. 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, This will be made clear to students and examiners in advance of the end of year exams. The Year 3 design module is a year-long module without components. The requirements at the end of the year are to present the portfolio of work on the walls, models and through synoptic portfolios, reports, documents, diaries and process work. By default this should include work from both semesters. We acknowledge that some units split the project work between the semesters into 2 'outputs', in these cases this work must be evident, but does not carry component weighting and must currently be assessed as the whole within the learning outcomes and unit specific learning outcome. We will continue to review this as part of the wider UG review.
6. During 2017-18 there was a change of structure within directors with a Director of Learning and Teaching supported by Directors of Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research. These directors oversee the appropriate programmes and have regular meetings with programme staff. At undergraduate, the director meets regularly with Year chairs; Year chairs meet regularly with module leaders in the Year; and module leaders meet and coordinate module contributors/ tutors/ unit leaders. At the start of 2018-19 we held a substantial teaching introduction away day for all internal academics and external tutors/ unit leaders across Years 1-5. This covered all information and context for all Years and modules, as well as standards, expectations and requirements from tutorial and crit conduct to personal tutoring. In Year 3 design, we are attempting to provide greater opportunity for cross unit interaction between both unit leaders and students. This will be further considered as part of the wider undergraduate curriculum review as part of managing large cohorts and staff resourcing.

7. There were fewer female staff involved in UG teaching and examination last year because three female staff applied for and were granted research leave, freeing them from all teaching duties. The School recognises the importance of maintaining a strong research profile for staff to enable their progression and development, and actively encourages applications to the University's Research Leave Scheme, supporting those who are successful as far as possible. The success of our female academics in securing this valued time out has been particularly gratifying.
8. The School Executive consists of six directors, the Deputy Head of School and Head of School. Three of the current directors are female. Any member of staff can submit an Expression of Interest for a director role and success is determined by merit – two current directors are Grade 7, the rest are Grade 8.

The School has achieved significant success in academic promotions over the past two years, with three female and two male staff achieving promotion to Reader level. Two further Readers have been recruited externally in the past year: one female (joining February 2019) and one male (in post). Of the four most recent lecturing posts, three have been filled by women. There is a healthy gender balance across the School with good prospects for greater female representation at professorial level in the next two years. However, as noted above, regardless of job title, female staff are currently filling senior management roles.

9. As mentioned under item 6, we provided a comprehensive teaching introduction away day in September 2018 for all internal and external staff, tutors and unit leaders. This was well attended, but some unfortunately could not attend. We have prepared design tutor, critic and lecturer packs that cover the basics that need to be known and provide context of our course for all. 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 (and possibly Year 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.

In terms of appointments – The benefits of more security in appointment is understood, the School is looking at alternative ways of appointing external tutors/ consultants with Cardiff University HR.

10. Over the last few years we have been coordinating submissions and workloads between modules and identifying submission and assessment points. A new clarity of structure between directors, Year chairs and module leaders has resulted in the Year chairs having more of an overview of student workload and are able to alert module leaders to clashes and conflicts and also students about managing time and pressure more effectivity during interaction with them in studio and Year meetings. We are also aware that

some perceived clashes of submissions are down to students' time management. The University examination weeks are set and deadlines for modules will therefore occur in these periods. We stagger submissions, such as design before Christmas, essays, reports, examinations after. Compared to some schools we have few modules and few submission points. There is benefit in having parallel deadlines as students learn to manage time and balance priorities.

In 2018-19 the School has established an Assessment and Feedback working group through which students and staff are working together to discover where the perceived pinch points are and how best we can provide feedback etc. This will be completed by the end of the year.

**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 first year introduces sensory, experiential and practical projects and provides a rich introduction to architectural design. The pacing of the year has shorter projects in the first semester, and a single long project in the second semester. The short projects and the rolling construction project in the first semester were very successful and enjoyed by students.
3. The vertical studio, gives first and second year students an opportunity to work creatively alongside each other and is highly valued by the students, particularly when involving construction.
4. The units offered in third year vary widely in their themes and briefs from small scale interventions to larger city scale sites. Each unit has a different ethos or socially driven motivation.
5. The award of excellent first class degrees demonstrated this year that it is possible to be very successful with a project that is small scale, large scale, socially led, or pragmatically lead. This is a sign of success for the school and should be warmly praised.
6. The variety and quality of the third year briefs and support given to the students by some very stretched studio teaching staff created the opportunity for some excellent portfolios.

We hope that you will find this response satisfactory and 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