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Sent by email to t.sengupta@ucl.ac.uk

01 June 2016

Dear Dr Sengupta,

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

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the MArch (dissertations).

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.

Issue(s) Highlighted

1. Your detailed observation that the dissertation aims can be limiting or rigid for the top end students and your suggested introduction of a small-group intermediate 'review' stage...on topic formulation, research questions and possible case studies;
2. Your indication that it would be good to develop a bit more of critical questions, thinking and ability, centred around an awareness of the larger or broader questions the research potentially illuminates, the nature of knowledge or critique that students produce and their implications. The good/ very good/ excellent students seem to be doing this already, but the rest can possibly be helped a bit more with this.

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

1. Your comments resonate with other similar remarks received by external examiners this year and, to some extent, last. The School aims to provide clear guidance in order to help the students to develop their dissertations effectively and to a high standard in what is not a great deal of time devoted to this piece of work. However, the School notes the point that there is a need to communicate more clearly that what we provide by way of aims and framework for the dissertation should be treated as a springboard and not as a constraint on creativity or criticality.

The School already has a 'review' two months into the 'Research Preparation Module' that takes place in the MArch I. However, as the School finalises its departmental review of the MArch which has been taking place this academic year, your comment will be taken into consideration as decisions are made on where this kind of skill-building and teaching may best be situated in the revised framework. The School agrees that the kind of workshop session suggested is valuable and productive.

2. The School give further consideration to integrating more on the nature of critical questions and thinking in the next iteration of the Dissertation Handbook, and to briefing dissertation supervisors in this regard. It is agreed that there is a need for research to result in far more than elegant and/or diligent descriptions, but rather to be enquiring, critical and insightful regarding processes and spaces under study.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process;
2. your indications that "the school's strength seems to lie in robust empirical research" and that this "is welcome in the field of architectural research where one sees increasingly less of empirical rigour and hence needs to be preserved."

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,



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar