

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE: EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORT 2013-2014 - MSc in Building Energy and Environmental Performance Modelling (computer simulation of building energy and environmental performance)

Dear Professor Rylatt,

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. [1 and 4] the External Examiner's comments that "the proportion of shared modules tends to suggest that the course is insufficiently differentiated", and that the programme is "failing not only (clearly) to attract sufficient student numbers but also to deliver an adequately specialised programme given its title and aims" and related comments

a) *To provide background detail, this programme shares 60 of 120 credits in Stage 1 with three other programmes run in the School. This shared "common core" of taught modules covers i) issues in basic building physics and energy usage in the built environment (30 credits in 3 modules); ii) the social and environmental background to sustainability (10 credits) and iii) research methods (10 credits). We argue that each and all of these topics are vital to any of our MSc programmes; indeed much of the content of the 30 credits for building physics is geared towards the details needed in our programme. To reduce the extent of the shared modules (e.g. by removing one) would reduce the overall quality of the learning experience of the students.*

We consider it vital also to share modules on economic grounds; this shared structure has been developed and used from the 2008 session, and has in previous years been very successful, not the least in allowing programmes to be viable even with relatively a low intake.

The differentiation of the schemes come from the 60 credits of specialist modules. We are surprised that this year insufficient differentiation has become an issue; normally the nature and extent of the project work undertaken is quite different in intent, detail, and execution from this programmes sister programmes. However, as has been commented upon by the External Examiner, both he and the tutors felt that this year's cohort was weak; of average capability but with little or no curiosity, "spark", or drive to excel. As a result, the work presented and viewed was technically competent but dull; it may be lack of "spark" that did not show off the depth that this programme has demonstrated in the past, in comparison to its sister programmes.

As a result of this comment, the nature and content of the specialist modules will be reviewed, for the coming session, with a view to ensuring that they continue to promote and encourage the values and aims of the programme. Changes will be made to the content coverage and briefs as necessary, without altering Learning Objectives (which would require significant formal changes to modules and so delay changes).

b) *In the ten years of existence of this programme, it has admittedly not had large enrolments; the average cohort size has been 5. Due to the structure of our*

PGT programmes, e.g. sharing modules as discussed above, we have been able to demonstrate, in past years, that the programme is profitable for the School to continue to offer. However, due to the recent trend across many programmes of decreasing PGT enrolment numbers, the long term viability of this programme will of course be reviewed.

Discussions are current being held with academic staff in the School as to the possible changes necessary to this programme in order to increase attractiveness to Home, EU and international students, and to increase its “sustainability” within the School. Such changes as discussed will however be long term, as they are significant and “major”; the changes, once agreed, will require one or two years to enact, ratify and validate through the School and University system.

2. [3] the suggestion that “perhaps there could be more emphasis on structured deliverables and requirements for specific professional standards of presentation and articulation”

The primary deliverables of the key project modules stress formal technical presentations and written technical reports, as if to clients (e.g. as a role playing exercise of consultant and the client as designer). This is part of the differentiation of the programme, as opposed to the sister programmes which view presentation as design defences to the client as public. We continue to feel this approach is appropriate to the nature of the programme and the likely professional practice of graduates, however we will review the specification and assessment of project deliverables to ensure they promote and reward professional standards of communication.”

Positive Comments

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

- a. [2 and 3] your positive indications regarding the academic standards and assessment process;**
- b. [3 and 6] your commendation of feedback provided to students.**

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 Williamson

for Dr C B Turner
Academic Registrar