

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

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	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	Rachel Sara		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University of the West of England		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	M.Arch		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2018/19	Date of Report:	08.08.19

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 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)

The structure of the course is unusual in the UK context and includes a first year in which students are working in practice and undertaking university modules alongside this. This is a strong offer and an interesting and successful approach. The first year M.Arch leader has increased the challenge to students in this year and the results have been strong.

Now that the course has shifted to include an increased number of students coming from elsewhere (previously the course was almost exclusively taken by Cardiff part I graduates) there is a need for a more structured induction and opportunities for networking. I understand that there are already plans to achieve this in the coming year.

The final year – Research through Design year includes the design thesis (80 credits), the practice management and economics (10 credits) work, and the dissertation (30 credits) seems good as it allows a strong focus on the final year studio thesis, with potential to be theoretically underpinned by research undertaken in the dissertation. It is perhaps surprising that the practice management module is not located in the first year (in practice) so that opportunities to connect to real-life practice environments be exploited.

The variety of the studio units continues to be excellent. It was particularly exciting to see the projects in unit XII 'Value' working with an ongoing long-term partnership with Grangetown in Cardiff. It is unusual to manage such a sustained relationship and to draw out collaborations and co-design opportunities whilst also allowing students the freedom to shine in their individual thesis projects.

The political agenda of XI 'Infrastructure Urbanism' was strong and led to some lively experiments and the international aspect of XIII 'Liveable Urbanism' adds a valuable international agenda and connections with a university research project. Unit XIII was able to generate alternative patterns of living and working to respond to environmental challenges at a very local level. This had some crossovers with the XIV 'Environmental Imagination' unit which also responded to climate crisis with site specific phenomenological approaches to architecture in the 'shifting boundary between wet and dry'.

It is also great to see craft and materiality driving a couple of units (XV 'Local Adaptation' and XVI 'Craft: Making Meaning'). This allowed an exploration into making that beautifully informed some of the project proposals and brought a very developed tectonic exploration to the exhibition. I am a strong supporter of live-build experimentation and appreciate the time and effort involved in getting this to work in the Local Adaptation studio.

It was a shame that the 'free' unit or equivalent from last year was not repeated, but perhaps it was only possible with a very particular set of students that year.

There seemed to be fewer models made in some of the studios which seems to be influenced by budget issues. It's a shame to lose this as excellent models has always been a key quality of the Cardiff output, so it is worth exploring options to counter this tendency next year.

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

The students largely achieve high standards and the marking of work is in line with other UK HEI's that I am familiar with. I can confirm that the threshold standards of the RIBA/ARB criteria for Part II levels are being met.

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

Cardiff students are challenged to achieve at the highest levels. The proportion of students achieving firsts and 2:1s is very good. However this year there were a particularly high number of extensions. Whilst I am sure that these were all for very good and justifiable reasons, it can become an issue with perceived fairness if a significant group of students are given more time in which to complete. It is worth exploring the implication of this both for the external examining process and how to incentivise students to complete in the 'standard' time. In some institutions for example a later submission can lead to students missing the 'typical' graduation date which acts as an incentive for most to submit in time.

The proportion of students gaining 2:2 and third class degrees is particularly small.

The studios examination procedure continues to be very well resourced and rigorous, with a clear briefing process for examiners. The process supports a good sense of occasion for graduating students and invites well-respected practitioners as reviewers. I mentioned in last year's report that it might be worth sharing with students the process of assessment and moderation as they still seem to be unclear about the moderation process that goes on.

Finally I really encourage you to clarify the expected minimum level to achieve a pass. In particular are there any 'failable offences' and/or how is complexity demonstrated in smaller projects? Is there a minimum expected scale of thesis project? Or is the final year thesis not the place where the validation criteria needs to be demonstrated – can that/should that happen elsewhere?

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](#).]

The move back to the Bute building has been positive – particularly having more space - and it is exciting to think that the whole building will be refurbished. Some of the studio spaces are top lit but windowless which students reported can be quite soul-destroying for students who work in the studio a lot. The issue of workshops is also going to be key in the return to Bute!

There is an ongoing challenge of maintaining parity between units in terms of the availability of visiting tutors/consultants compared with permanent staff members. In particular it is harder for consultant tutors as unit leads to organise the extra consultants (for specialist consultancy). However this is simply one of the relatively minor challenges associated with running such a vibrant variety of units. In terms of performance there seemed to be a very good parity between the studios, with an ongoing debate (continued from last year) about how to value elements of group work (particularly pertinent in the live-build studio element).

The issue of student well-being that was particularly raised in my last report seems to have been dealt with as students did not report any outstanding problematic issues apart from the perception of fairness with regard to extensions of time for submission dates.

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)

The unit-specific assessment criteria interpretations continue to be excellent practice that really get referred to in the assessments and moderation process and do attempt to give clarity to the way in which parity can be demonstrated between units. They could perhaps be 'weighted' to allow different units to weight different components to a different extent.

The variety and energy of each of the units offered is excellent. The overall standard of student work is very high.

The studio examination process is noteworthy in the sense of occasion afforded the final examination and the opportunities for students to gain feedback and share their work with inspirational practitioners from around the country. This includes an excellent specific focus on the technical component which means that this is looked at in the context of the presentation of the thesis as a whole, and by a specific tutor which means it does not get overlooked.

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. Annual Report Checklist

Please include appropriate comments within Sections 1-7 above for any answer of 'No'.

		Yes (Y)	No (N)	N/A (N/A)
Programme/Course information				
9.1	Did you receive sufficient information about the Programme and its contents, learning outcomes and assessments?	Y		
9.2	Were you asked to comment on any changes to the assessment of the Programme?			n/a
Commenting on draft examination question papers				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?			n/a
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?			
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			
Examination scripts				
9.6	Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts to be able to assess whether the internal marking and classifications were appropriate and consistent?			n/a
9.7	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			
9.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?			
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?			
Coursework and practical assessments				
9.11	Was the choice of subjects for coursework and / or practical assessments appropriate?	Y		
9.12	Were you afforded access to an appropriate sample of coursework and / or practical assessments?	Y		
9.13	Was the method and general standard of assessment appropriate?	Y		
9.14	Is sufficient feedback provided to students on their assessed work?	Y		
Clinical examinations (if applicable)				
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			n/a
Sampling of work				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		
Examining board meeting				
9.17	Were you able to attend the Examining Board meeting?	Y		

9.18	Was the Examining Board conducted properly, in accordance with established procedures and to your satisfaction?	Y		
9.19	Cardiff University recognises the productive contribution of External Examiners to the assessment process and, in particular, to the work of the Examining Board. Have you had adequate opportunities to discuss the Programme and any outstanding concerns with the Examining Board or its officers?	Y		
Joint examining board meeting (if applicable)				
9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			n/a
9.21	If so, were you made aware of the procedures and conventions for the award of Joint Honours degrees?			
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			

Please return this Report, **in a Microsoft Word format**, by email to:
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