

Academic & Student Support Services  
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Sent by email to [joannavanh@gmail.com](mailto:joannavanh@gmail.com)

25 November 2015

Dear Ms van Heyningen,

**Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2014 – 2015**

I am writing further to the receipt of your External Examiner's Report for the BSc in Architectural Studies.

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 perception, shared with students, that too long was taken doing master-planning and brief-writing, leaving them too little time to develop their building project in depth and your related preference to see more living, breathing buildings, and to know that students had thought about what it was like to experience those buildings;
2. Your report of some well-paced units and recommended sharing of best practice in pacing of units between tutors;
3. Your perception that group work at the beginning of the third year would be of pedagogic use to students, and could contribute to better pacing;
4. Your indication of a lack of sufficient evidence in studio work of training/teaching in structural/environmental issues;
5. Your perception that presentation standards were very mixed, but that in general too much emphasis was placed on creating attractive images using photo-shop to produce texture, rather than the proper examination of a proposition in plan and section;

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6. Your encouragement for the use of story boards and your comment that simple diagrams could be used to explain a concept, and spaces should be labelled so that the drawing is intelligible without a verbal commentary.
7. Your wish to engage more with the unit teachers in the examination process.

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

1. This session an outline timetable has been introduced in order to set limits to the master-planning and brief formation phases of the various projects at year 3 level. This includes structured deadlines for the master-planning and brief formation phases, and facilitates the process of guiding students towards formulating an appropriately defined and constrained design challenge for the final phase of their project work. Since different units place different emphases on different scales of design, there will be some variety between units, but the dangers inherent in allowing unduly extended research and master-planning phases have been discussed with the unit leaders, and this strategy developed in collaboration with them.

The School is aware of the particular problems faced by the weaker students in allowing too much freedom of scope and believe that these measures will address this issue. This year the School is supporting students' work in master planning with introductory lectures on urban theory.

The studio teaching plan has been carefully coordinated with Architectural Technology 3, in order to facilitate the development of materiality and integration of constructional and technical learning from the lectures into the design.

2. The School is encouraging dialogue between different unit leaders, and are introducing a cross unit 'crit' in the second term. We held a visiting tutor away-day in September 2015 to facilitate collaboration between School staff and visiting tutors on teaching and timetabling issues.
3. Some units are undertaking group research and master planning work this year.
4. This year the interface between the design module and technology module has been substantially reviewed, and the balance between different components of the technology curriculum have been readjusted. Structure, construction, building science and environmental performance are represented more equitably in the syllabus. Furthermore the mode of delivery has changed. In the first term students will undertake an in depth analytic investigation of technical aspects and their application to exemplary architecture. This student research phase is supported by a series of lectures and workshops where students are familiarised with the underlying concepts, principles and theories. In the second term students will apply their technical

knowledge into their own studio design work. This application phase is supported by small group seminar expert classes where relevant technical issues of specific studio briefs are discussed and explored in more detail.

5. Issues of presentation of design work remain a key component of the School's teaching and the School agrees that the indiscriminate use of Photoshop is counterproductive in communicating design proposals. The School will continue to address this matter and intends to run presentation workshops to address these issues with Year 3 in the Spring term.

This is an issue that must also be addressed in year 1 and 2 and the School will continue to work with these students on issues of graphic intelligibility, both in communicating with others; and developing and reflecting on the student's own work.

6. Your suggestion of using storyboards to develop and present design ideas is welcomed and the Schools notes that this is used by some tutors.
7. The School is pleased to hear that its examination processes are improving and intends to build on this success by making some further changes to next year's protocol. It is intended that unit leaders will be included in the examination process in a much fuller way. The details have yet to be finalised, but it is felt that the tutors will benefit from a closer engagement with the final examination, and a closer contact with the External Examiners. The School is keen that they should receive External Examiners' comments on their contributions to the programme first hand and will organise a formal feedback session between External Examiners and unit leaders at a more appropriate point in the examination timetable.

**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 perception that the External Examiners were able to make an enhanced contribution to the assessment process this year.

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