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Sent by email to katie.lloyd-thomas@newcastle.ac.uk

13 January 2020

Dear Professor Lloyd Thomas,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2018/19

I am writing further to the receipt of your report for MArch Dissertations.

Your report has been considered by colleagues in 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](#).

The University is pleased to note your positive comments including:

1. Your positive indications regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process.
2. Students were passionate about their chosen topic.
3. Use of the full spectrum of marks.
4. The marking process was much improved – with two internal markers agreeing a final mark before external examiners visited, and a 10% mark awarded for the viva in itself.
5. More students broke away from the classic dissertation structures with different structures reflecting more iterative and independent research processes.
6. It is great to have the viva as an opportunity to meet students.
7. There were many more socially-engaged dissertations this year – which is great to see.



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Issues highlighted in your report and response provided by the School:

1. **Academic Standards:** *On some occasions the final mark awarded after disagreement between markers too cautious; the team are encouraged to reward good work and to take care to match second markers to each dissertation's disciplinary approach.*

The Welsh School of Architecture would like to thank you for the well-thought and rigorous report. We will continue the use of two markers per manuscript to ensure parity and fairness, even though this necessarily produces cautious marking through compromise. The module leader will attempt to balance this through oversight of the process. We will be using third marking more robustly next year, but this will probably increase rather than reduce the cautious marking.

2. **Master's Dissertations:** *Feedback is thorough, but sometimes follows the marking criteria too diligently without including free comment about the content and distinctiveness of the dissertation.*

The School agrees with this comment. However, this must be balanced by the need to ensure that feedback delivered by diverse tutors and supervisors is standardised as well as similar in scope. We will fine-tune the learning outcomes to accommodate more specificity of feedback to try and achieve this balance.

3. **Preparation for the role:** *More time to read dissertations would be welcome where possible, and it would be appreciated if all dissertations supervisors were available to meet external examiners over lunch.*

Beginning next year, 2019/20, the Dissertation module will no longer have an assessed viva, therefore the role of the external examiners and the process will change as well. The viva will be replaced with a non-assessed conference, which will include presentations by students, open round table discussions with the markers and more. In effect, this will replace a process modelled on a PhD viva with one that can support learning more generally, as well as contribute to research and student culture in the school.

4. **Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement:** *Make more of the particular skills of architecture students to use visual methods in their research and consider other forms of dissertation output that could particularly benefit students for whom writing is not a strong point.*

The School's MArch studios have increasingly taken on a by-practice research approach, engaging with diverse media as a means of responding to particular research questions. As a consequence, the MArch Dissertation allows all forms of research undertaken in architecture with the exception of by-practice research.

5. ***Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement:*** Consider instituting some peer learning events.

There is already a degree of peer-review within the module, i.e. in the form of 1-2 seminars conducted by each supervisor with their cohort, though currently this is at the discretion of supervisors. We will consider formalising this next year. More peer-review and seminars take place in the MArch 1 year in the module Research Preparation that precedes the dissertation and prepares for it. Furthermore, as discussed above, we will be replacing the viva with a format that encourages wider discussion and participation.

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