

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

Cardiff University

McKenzie House
30-36 Newport Road
Cardiff CF24 0DE
Wales UK

Tel please see below
Fax +44(0)29 2087 4130

www.cardiff.ac.uk

Prifysgol Caerdydd

Tŷ McKenzie
30-36 Heol Casnewydd
Caerdydd CF24 0DE
Cymru Y Deyrnas Unedig

Ffôn gweler isod
Ffacs +44(0)29 2087 4130

www.caerdydd.ac.uk

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	John McLaughlin		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	University College Cork, Ireland.		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	Masters in Architecture (design).		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2018-19	Date of Report:	10 th Oct 2019

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 programme has an unusual structure with the first year of the masters being based in practice. This structure seems to work very well and offers an excellent example of integration to the current debate about architectural education. The students entering the second year of the masters were offered a compelling choice of design units with a diverse range of themes to choose from.

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

The academic standard is high and comparable to other schools that I am familiar with. The school achieves the difficult balance of being intellectually ambitious and simultaneously having its feet on the ground.

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

The assessment process was very rigorous and fair. The involvement of an external and internal assessors in each panel seemed to work well. The moderation of marks between panels was carefully done to ensure fairness to students.

4. **Examination of Master's Dissertations (if applicable)** (sample of dissertations received, appropriateness of marking schemes, standard of internal marking, classification of awards)

I examined design studio work. (Written dissertations were examined by a separate panel of external examiners). I found the marking schemes to be thorough and rigorous. Particular care was taken to ensure that the marking scheme was adapted to the different thematic units so that there was an equitable approach to marking the different outputs. There was a good number of marks at the higher levels of classification reflecting the high quality of the work.

5. **Year-on-Year Comments**

[Previous External Examiner Reports are available from the Cardiff University Website [here](#).]

I was pleased when – in response to my suggestion - the University advised last year that it was looking at alternative ways to engage architect-practitioners as unit-leaders on a multi-annual basis with some time allowance for module preparation and meeting attendance. I was however, disappointed that this has not yet changed in practice, so that the disparity between units led by full-time academics and those led by practitioners remains. I urge the University HR Department to find a creative solution to this in collaboration with the school.

I think that my comment about the alignment of timing of dissertation and studio modules was misunderstood last year as I was not suggesting the alignment of research content (though this ought to be permitted) but rather the review of **timing** of the modules to allow the research choices made in the two modules to cross-pollinate and reinforce each other.

I suggested last year that the research stage of the design studio projects be limited to the first term and I am restating this recommendation this year, as it was clear that extended research work running into the second term had impacted on student's ability to complete their design projects (notwithstanding the excellence of the research itself). There was evidence of this in deferred submission numbers and in the student feedback session.

I commented last year that the first year of the M.Arch could carry more of the burden of demonstrating learning outcomes and I am aware that the school is now looking at how this might be done. I support this move and think that it might relieve some of the pressure on students in their final year.

The focus on student wellbeing last year seems to have had a beneficial impact with greater wellbeing reported by students in the feedback session this year. The students expressed strong appreciation of the staff, particularly the course leader.

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)

This was my second year visiting the school and I was again impressed by the way that units are rooted in methodological research processes. In discussion with the tutors this seems to flow from a clear alignment of their own academic research with the unit themes. I note that the quality of the staff research is exceptionally high, and that students are aware of the professional strength and rigour of the school, and that this is a major attraction for them. The range of studio interests is impressive, spanning environmental and sensory design, digital technologies, sustainability, craft, social regeneration, and developing world urbanism. I think that this clarity of purpose could be communicated outwards more strongly as the constellation of interests in the WSA is well fitted to the challenges that we face in the ongoing move away from fossil fuels and as we begin to face the climate emergency.

I am also aware that there are many excellent practicing architects teaching in the school whose work has a high reputation nationally and increasingly outside of the UK. As mentioned above I think that the school and university should do more to support their involvement through allocation of administrative/research time, or through the use of fractional posts. It is really commendable that the WSA has created a culture where teaching, research, and practice are integrated, and the idea of architecture as a practice runs through all parts of the course and is the core strength and attraction for students, so the school should consolidate this as much as possible.

By way of enhancement, I would recommend that a way is found to attribute marks to groupwork undertaken as part of the research phase of projects so that every student has an incentive to participate equally in this.

I would also recommend that the students be asked to produce a short research report and thesis intention at the end of the first term that gets updated and combined with their A3 synoptic portfolio as a full thesis report at the end of semester two. This would be very helpful to the students in preparing for their thesis presentation and for staff in marking outcomes that are less physical or apparent on the wall.

8. Appointment Overview (for retiring External Examiners only) (significant changes in standards, programme/discipline developments, implementation of recommendations, further areas of work)

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?	Y		
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?			N/A
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			N/A
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?			N/A
9.8	Were the scripts marked in such a way as to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			N/A
9.9	Were you satisfied with the standard and consistency of marking applied by the internal examiners?			N/A
9.10	In your judgement, did you have the opportunity to examine a sufficient cross-section of candidates' work contributing to the final assessment?			N/A
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?			N/A
9.22	Was the Composite Examining Board conducted according to its rules?			N/A

Please return this Report, **in a Microsoft Word format**, by email to:
externalexaminers@cardiff.ac.uk

Your fee and expenses claim form and receipts, should be sent electronically to the above email address or in hard copy to:

External Examiners, Registry, Cardiff University, McKenzie House, 30-36 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0DE