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**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](http://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](http://www.caerdydd.ac.uk)

	For completion by External Examiner:		
Name of External Examiner:	DR. TANIA SENGUPTA		
Home Institution / Employer of External Examiner:	The Bartlett School of Architecture		
Programme and / or Modules Covered by this Report	M. Arch Dissertations		
Academic Year / Period Covered by this Report:	2018-19	Date of Report:	11.04.2019

Please complete all information in the spaces provided and submit within **six weeks** of the Examining Board.

**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 structure is quite good and rigorous. One of the biggest advantages of the dissertation programme at the WSA compared to many other architecture schools in the UK - and I was glad to see this being continued this year as well - is that it effectively spans an entire year, which allows substantial and in-depth research to be carried out. The slight loosening of the expected structure of the dissertation itself (while making sure essential components are not missed out) over the years, has, to my mind, worked quite well. Not all students have made use of this flexibility but some definitely did, and this has produced a wider and more interesting range of work. This year the effect of this was further legible. Many students did not insert a conventional literature review, but rather used different theoretical or empirical references along the way as and when relevant and often in a more creative manner. Of course, somewhat conventional or weaker students actually benefit from the framework of a basic structure, and what the dissertation handbook provides seems to be adequate for that purpose. The programme structure at the moment is still largely focused on a student's individual research journey with their supervisor. It could still do with the incorporation of a few social, group/ peer interaction/ learning oriented nodal points. I understand from my conversations with the module coordinator and supervisory staff however, that they very much plan to bring in this dimension in the coming years.

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

The students this year again produced largely very good and robust research by any comparable standards across UK HE institutions. Following the usual practice in the school that I've observed over the years, there was quite a lot of empirical rigour visible. Some of the key and newer dissertation themes this year (based on the sample set that I received) were e.g. questions of heritage especially in relation to diversity and marginalisation of key sections of contemporary British society (e.g. minority communities); gentrification in British towns/ cities; professional questions and the architect's role including ethical questions around regional identity, resources and sustainability; minute interrogation of built environment policy and so on – i.e. the work reflected overall a focus on practice and on-ground conditions and implications of the built environment. Quite a few dissertations were also explicitly self-reflective (e.g. questioning western architects' interventions in developing countries, or self-critical, embedded and self-experienced study of gentrification). Some pieces of work were on very original topics and utilised very innovative research methods (e.g. reading western media representations of heritage destruction in the Middle East through data analytics). All these are excellent developments and I immensely appreciate this contextual and socially, environmentally and politically engaged and responsible orientation. More originality in topic formulation itself would be something to pursue further in the coming years. The top end work was very good and some of the critical policy research can in fact be of direct use to particular regulatory/ policy agencies.

**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 – including its criteria and process – is quite thorough. The supervisors (also the person doing the first marking) seemed quite well mapped onto the students' topics in relation to their own areas of expertise. It was good to see the follow up on my earlier suggestion of supervisors being entrusted with first marking, since they know the students' work the best and are normally fairly professional. The second marker acts as a check on any grossly inappropriate marking in any case. I felt, however, only in a few cases, that the second marker was somewhat removed from the topic in question and hence their judgement could be somewhat arbitrary. To the best extent possible it would be good to ensure that even the second marker is not from a radically distinct expertise. Of course it is understood that this can be attempted only within the constraints of staff numbers and expertise. The vivas were conducted very well in a convivial, positive atmosphere, with the internal examiners giving the student adequate time and opportunity to respond to or bring up key issues. The quality of the feedback was also particularly thorough this time.

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

I received an adequate number of dissertations to review. They spanned a large range of topics as well as top, middle and bottom end marks (including fails). All dissertations were part of the sample set of one examiner or another, which means between all of us all dissertations were covered. The slightly newer system this year was that about 6-8 dissertations spread across the marks scale had been selected by the school that each of us had to definitely look at. This meant I could do a very thorough job of reading

these (being slightly fewer in number than earlier years), while I had the option of choosing a few more from my total sample set based on their topic, marks or any other criteria, which I did. I welcome this shift and think it works much better. The system of moderation through a moderation committee for large variation of marks between the first and second marker seems to be working fairly well (i.e as a way of resolving disputes), although it is worth considering how a bit more of lateral parity may be ensured – e.g. how to ensure that a 78 and a 90 from two different markers indeed mean essays of very different calibre. At times I felt that the differences at the top end was not as much as the marks seemed to suggest. This however is easier said than done, I acknowledge, since it is not possible for a single person (say, the module coordinator) to read each and every 10,000 word dissertation. So maybe this is something the staff could discuss over the next couple of years and see if at all there is any way of lessening the lateral unevenness.

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

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

On the whole the most significant further shift this year was in the further modification of the remit of the examiner – a positive move to my mind - namely that we sat in as observers on the viva process itself conducted by two internal examiners (first and second markers). We could thus focus on the mode, appropriateness and fairness of the overall process, the actual nature of the research outputs and the viva examination procedure itself. The calibration and mapping of supervisors' expertise to students' topics seemed to have further improved this year. I have mentioned in point 3 ideally the need, if possible, to try and have the second marker not from a radically distinct expertise, as this can considerably skew the assessment. The other major transformation I noticed was in terms of the topics and issues students seemed to be dealing with and which reflected a noticeable turn to social, environmental, cultural and political questions as well as professional ethics and practice related issues, a very good sign. I did miss however, some of the types of work the school used to produce earlier (e.g. very rigorous, often phenomenological architectural studies of buildings) – there were few of these time. It would be good to also try and keep this strand of work alive and make sure they don't die out completely. That said, I myself have pointed out the need for the 'critical turn' and hence warmly welcome it.

## **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)

I had received all the documentation required for the examination well in time. These included a set of dissertations along with first and second marker's detailed feedback sheets, the marks sheet and all the academic information related to the dissertation module. We were briefed particularly well for the examination this year in a session just before the actual commencement of the viva examinations that also included the dissertation supervisors, who, along with us were advised on the spirit and procedural ethics.

## **7. Noteworthy Practice and Enhancement** (good and innovative practice in learning, teaching and assessment; opportunities for enhancement of learning opportunities)

For me what sets the WSA apart from other schools is its emphasis on a grounded approach and empirical rigour. This is something that needs to be valued, continued

and enhanced. Also, this field oriented rigorous approach combined with a sense of social and environmental responsibility can be a wonderful combination. This has always been present to varying extent over the years that I've acted as an external examiner, but for me was particularly legible in many of the essays I read this year. One of the other strengths of the school in the earlier years was also the ability of students and staff on more architecturally oriented analysis, detailed readings of buildings or built environment per se, especially from a phenomenological or historical perspective. This is an aspect that would be good to preserve to the extent possible, but of course, it is only to be expected that the research orientation of the school would naturally be shaped by the students' emerging interest areas as well as research expertise of newer staff members, which needs to be encouraged as well.

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

I would like to particularly thank the school and university for inviting me as an external examiner, it has been a very interesting interaction, exchange and in many ways a very nice learning experience. I would like to congratulate the tutors on their dedicated supervisions and the students on their deeply earnest engagement. Over the past four years the dissertation programme has evolved quite a lot, to my mind, for the better. Many/ most of the suggestions made by us (examiners), I can see, have actively been taken up and each year there has been incremental progress in addressing them. It is perfectly natural that all suggestions cannot be incorporated or incorporated quickly, but my feeling is that the school and staff have made very earnest and commendable headway. I'm elaborating below slightly more detailed thoughts and suggestions on a few themes:

It is very important, in my view, to try and assign supervisors to students in close relationship between the former's areas of expertise and the latter's topic. This mapping has in fact really improved over the years (especially this year and last) and it'd be good to keep prioritising this to the best extent possible, although there would always be the odd topic that'll fall outside of most tutors' expertise and might have to be assigned to a versatile generalist. In that sense, it is also worth trying to develop a couple of supervisors with broad based and versatile capacity.

A key strength of the school, for me, as I have mentioned earlier, is its research culture of empirical rigour, grounded approach, existing and emerging focus on built environment practice and policy and social, environmental, cultural and political questions. These need to be harnessed and built upon. It would be good to keep alive the strand of more classic architectural histories and readings that is also part of its research tradition. I have over the years also noticed that a good number of students tend to focus on Welsh questions: e.g. Welsh architecture and identity or regional resource base and so on. This embedded engagement with the region the school is part of is excellent and is an area to really focus on.

I would encourage more emphasis on the topic formulation stage for the dissertations. There is scope for students to develop more innovative and creative conceptualisations of topics in the first place. The same is true of methodologies; encouragement of slightly more experimental methodologies would be wonderful. It would also be important to have some way of acknowledging the value of these in the marking criteria – for example, a dissertation could be rewarded for its imaginative formulation, even if its execution is not totally perfect (just as there may be works that

are on fairly conventional topics, but excellently executed). I.e. it would be good to have a framework for rewarding different attributes in different pieces. As such, it would be important to ensure that relatively weaker students do not feel too pressured by the burden of 'being innovative' in choosing topics or fashioning methodologies either and other criteria can value their orientations.

In a related point, it would be nice to incorporate, possibly within the more skills based and informative research methods workshops, also some 'value-based' discussions on why academic research/ study is relevant, why e.g. referencing is not merely a technical exercise but is an ethical way of recognising the pre-existing field/ knowledge communities any research is part of and of acknowledging the collective nature of research knowledge, and so on.

The WSA is among the relatively fewer schools that still hold architectural dissertation vivas for each and every student with internal and external examiners. This is an excellent practice giving students an opportunity of real communication with experienced scholars about their work, and acts as a meaningful culmination of a full year's work. It also acts as a point of actual contact between the external examiner and the students and helps the examiner get a sense of the students' actual engagement and learning. I would strongly encourage the continuation of this.

I have always and especially for the past couple of years emphasised the value of making the dissertation an enjoyable and more social and communal mode of research and learning, just as it is extremely valuable as an individual's own journey along with their supervisor's inputs. It would be extremely beneficial therefore to introduce events/ workshops within the programme at one or two points during the course of the dissertation that foster mutual exchange and learning. These could take the form of some workshops for the entire class with breakout sessions on small sub-themes (e.g. trying to formulate research questions) involving small groups or smaller scaled interactions such as review sessions involving two supervisors and their students only. These are just some suggestions; the actual and specific components would obviously be fashioned by the coordinator and supervisory staff.

In the end, I thank the school and all its staff and students again for enabling me such a wonderful and enriching experience over the past four years. I wish them all the best for the years ahead.

## 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)
<b>Programme/Course information</b>				
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		
<b>Commenting on draft examination question papers</b> <i><u>(NOTE: I have taken this to stand for the dissertation handbook and module description and assessed those)</u></i>				
9.3	Were you asked to approve all examination papers contributing to the final award?	Y		
9.4	Were the nature, spread and level of the questions appropriate?	Y		
9.5	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?	Y		
<b>Examination scripts</b>				<b>N.A</b>
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?			
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?			
<b>Coursework and practical assessments</b> <i><u>(NOTE: I have taken this to stand for the M Arch dissertations themselves)</u></i>				
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		
<b>Clinical examinations (if applicable)</b>				<b>N.A</b>
9.15	Were satisfactory arrangements made for the conduct of clinical assessments?			
<b>Sampling of work</b>				
9.16	Were you afforded sufficient time to consider samples of assessed work?	Y		

<b>Examining board meeting</b>				
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		
<b>Joint examining board meeting (if applicable)</b>				<b>N.A</b>
9.20	Did you attend a Composite Examining Board, i.e. one convened to consider the award of Joint Honours degrees?			
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?			

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

