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Sent by email to phyllidamills@millspower.com

18 March 2021

Dear Ms Mills,

Re: Institutional Response: External Examiner Annual Report 2019/20

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

Your report does not appear to raise any significant issues that require a more detailed response, however the School have been asked to note the following comments:

- Overall the programme structure continues to set lengthy design projects; this needs to be balanced by shorter specific projects with more targeted teaching techniques and learning outcomes in the design module.
- Students need to develop the skills to evaluate and prioritise the impact of one strategy over another, or one material over another. It is still not clear in the course as a whole how this climate impact overview is delivered for the students.
- Feedback from unit leaders indicates there is no discussion or teaching on how to research and how to represent research data in compelling graphic form. There is a reliance on students arriving at how to research and how to represent their work unsupported, without any access to theory.
- It was also noticeable across the units that there was no analysis of environmental impacts, sourcing of materials, materials extraction. None of the units seen displayed any understanding of the wider context of sustainability and impact on resources and climate generally.
- The third year course continues to suffer from poor organisation and integration of technical teaching. Technical teaching has evolved in the first and second years and it is essential to improve the third year so that students are able to use their technical knowledge to inspire and support their spatial design.



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- This year remote access arrangements to view the work on-line were inadequate. There was too much information, poorly organised in individual files, too slow to download and view via software with poor navigation.
- Some of the portfolios were 800 Megs, which is pointless for reviewing on screen and makes the process incredibly and tediously slow; A 5 megabyte limit should be set for student portfolios to be viewed on screen.
- Your detailed recommendations on further work to enhance the programme in the coming years.

I am confident that the Programme Team will endeavour to address the issues identified in your report and your comments will help inform their [Annual Review and Enhancement](#) process.

Degree Outcomes

Whilst you have not raised this as a concern in your report from a subject specific point of view, the Chair of the Academic Standards and Quality Committee has asked the School to review their degree outcomes profile as there has been a significant rise in first class honours degrees during 2019/20 compared with other years.

The School will be required to look at this in detail to try and understand any underlying factors that may have contributed to this both positive and negative. I am sure you will agree that it is important we ensure that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained with reference to external expectations in line with our responsibility to publish a Degree Outcomes Statement as specified by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) Statement of Intent to protect the value of UK degrees.

The University is pleased to note your positive comments, including:

1. Your positive comments regarding the programme structure, academic standards and assessment process.
2. The introduction of the mini prospectus for each year is very useful in making accessible, in a short form, the over-arching framework of each year of the degree.
3. The improvement to the Technology module in first year, with the introduction of a comparison between vernacular and modern buildings in terms of both measured and experiential analysis was well done.
4. Technical exploration, BTT and the precedent study were all linked to a study trip to Barcelona, an excellent example of individually differentiated and assessed pieces of work from different modules working together to build up the student's understanding of ways of looking at, thinking about and designing architecture to greater than the sum of its parts.
5. This focus on relevance between the modules and the student being able to think critically and apply learning from one module to another has been successful.
6. The restructuring of second year continues to improve the quality of the students' experience and of the work produced, particularly the richness of portfolio work.

7. The alignment of the Technical module teaching with the design process in studio has been improved in a number of ways, with lectures as well as small group tutorials, streamlining of input from passive strategies early on to more technological solutions later in the programme, the involvement of the design tutors in teaching on lighting for instance, and the parallel environmental analysis of an existing public building.
8. Generally, students appreciated personal tuition, but missed peer to peer feedback and informal and group tutorials, it was, 'weird not seeing what other students were doing'.
9. The Christmas walk around was appreciated. The students like the different flavours of the units and think there is enough variety.
10. The school has consistently responded positively to my thoughts and observations. It has succeeded in implementing recommendations on a rolling basis, with a few areas of the course still to be reviewed.

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's [Public Information website](#) and will be available to all students and staff.

As this is your final year as External Examiner, we would like to thank you for your service and we are most grateful for your valuable input into this process.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Simon Wright
Academic Registrar