

School of Art, Architecture and Design

Undergraduate

- ARCHA Architecture(UG)

Please indicate, below, whether you agree with the statements about the threshold standards of Leeds Beckett University's awards, student achievement and the conduct of the University's assessment processes, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements. Please also list any shortcomings and areas for commendation. You should expand on any issues you mention here in the main report. If any boxes are ticked "No" the Dean of School or nominee will be alerted and will oversee the response from the Course Director.

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Standards Set

	Yes	No
"In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards meet with the requirements of the relevant National Qualifications Statement's."	X	

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

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Student achievement

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, students' who have been awarded qualifications have had the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar." *Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this statement, please note here:	X		

Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision

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If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

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Conduct of process

Yes No

External Examiner's report summary

"In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are reliable, rigorous and fairly conducted."

X

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.

Actions from last year's report

(This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time)

Yes

Areas of good practice/commendation

Any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to learning, teaching and assessment:

Looking back across my 4 years of visiting the school, the BArch course has been consistently strengthened and enhanced. This was achieved through great teamwork, dedication and commitment by all staff in continuously developing the content and the delivery of the programme.

The BArch programme offers a broad and structured introduction to the field of architecture. 1st year delivers the essential tools for further study. The 2nd and 3rd year are characterised by giving the students agency and providing a safe learning environment that encourages students to think big and explore architecture in the context of the past, present and future. The gradual shift from guided learning during 1st year to a more self-led approach in the vertical studios cultivated independent learning and enabled the students to take agency of their own learning and obtain core skill sets whilst gaining independence and confidence in planning and resolving design project tasks. The vertical studio structure offers a great platform to support of peer learning.

The success of the school's strategy was evidenced in the quality student responses in communication skills, intellect, and personal attributes.

Response to Covid 19

Despite the interruption to teaching due to the lockdown and the subsequent shift to online support it was noted that the quality of work submitted for the June 2020 deadline was high. The team has worked extremely hard to mitigate the circumstances.

Virtual Examination Visit

As always, the event was very well organised and coordinated. Material was sent out well in advance; clearly organised. Enough time was given for presentations of 3rd year students, to speak to 1st and 2nd year students as well as to view their work.

Main report

In this section you are asked to describe more fully how the University has or has not maintained threshold academic standards and the quality of the student experience in relation to the course(s) for which you are the external examiner, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements.

Please complete all sections of the form fully and where not applicable please state N/A. Where applicable

External Examiner's report summary

please also complete the sections for any collaborative provision sampled.

If you are an external examiner for any of the University's Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes (HND/HNC level) provision, please also complete the section on page 9 sections l, m and n entitled "for External Examiners Associated with Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes."

Professional Body Requirements

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, the professional body requirements for this course have been met. *Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.	X		
If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.			

(a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended).

All operations and meetings involving External Examiners were conducted to the expected standard.

(b) The action, if any was required, taken in response to your report of last year. (This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time.)

(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.

The students' performances across the three years of the BArch course are at a comparable level to that of students in other RIBA validated schools of architecture.

(d) The strengths and weaknesses of the students in general with respect to knowledge, conceptual grasp or application of skills.

Strengths:

Overall, the general standard of work was high. Students had a very good understanding of the learning objectives, and approached their work in an intuitive, mature, and thoughtful way. The presented material displayed depth, rigour and skill.

The writing skills in all 3 years of Architectural Context are very good and an excellent range of topics was explored.

The possibility for 3rd year students to link the design project theme with all other subjects is an asset and worked well for those students who took up the offer.

The standard of presentation in AD modules was high. The work further demonstrated that the strategic delivery of an increasing range of skills, from manual drawing and model-making to technical drawing and the use of CAD and other digital skills has a positive impact on the quality of outputs. Despite the sophisticated use of digital tools it is reassuring to see that physical model-making is a strong part of the design development process.

First year continues to deliver a stable foundation to new students of architecture. The interviewed students had accumulated a broad range of knowledge and skill sets in semester 1 and were able to apply these in semester 2 in a sophisticated manner.

The work of the interviewed 2nd year students was very strong and clearly reflected the excellent skill sets learned and developed in 1st year. The diversity of representation techniques and the skilled use of infographics are noteworthy and, in my opinion, reflects the continuous improvements made to the delivery of Design Communication skills in 1st year.

The 3rd year students I have met are very enthusiastic about their subject and projects. The project briefs are aligned with staff's research interests and expertise which no doubt contributes to students study experience. The interviewed students presented in a confident manner, are very articulate, and were able to respond without hesitation when questioned about their research, concept development and architectural proposals.

Weaknesses:

The 3rd year AD module is a research-based, year-long design projects where students depart on a semester-long journey of information-gathering, in-depth research and the development of a conceptual basis which is then followed by an architectural response. During the interviews all students expressed without exception their preference for the research element above the design part. This lies in conflict with the latter being the most prominent skill of an architect. When asked about the reason the students disclosed their struggle with effectively prioritising, purging, or discarding findings, ideas and resulting concepts accumulated during semester 1. In order to progress students responded with an 'all in' approach or by 'blending' ideas and concepts. When asked to say in two sentences what the project is about all interviewed students struggled to describe the essence of their project.

However, I was made aware of the school's plan in 2nd year to soften the transition from guided learning to a more self-led approach. I strongly support this decision and believe it could also provide an opportunity to mitigate the issue described above and provide guidance and support for the students in synthesising of a large body of information.

The conceptual approach and 'big' ideas are strongly encouraged by most studio briefs. Considering that the BArch course is 'paving' the way into practice I would like to raise the fact that most briefs could engage more with architectural basics such as comfort, composition, and functionality.

(e) The standards of the structure, organisation, design and marking of all examination papers and/or other forms of assessment.

The standards are clear with a commendable joint effort from staff to deliver a cohesive approach to grading.

All External Examiners jointly agreed that the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are reliable, rigorous and fairly conducted. I would still like to mention that we felt that some of the most outstanding pieces of work could be rewarded with higher scores.

(f) The curriculum, teaching or resourcing of the programme of study as indicated by the performance of the students in the assessment

The BArch programme offers a broad and structured introduction to the field of architecture. The gradual shift from guided learning during 1st year to a more self-led approach in the vertical studios cultivated independent learning and enabled the students to take agency of their own progress.

The success of this strategy is evidenced in the quality student responses in both communication skills, intellect, and personal attributes.

Teaching staff's dedication and skills in planning and delivering programmes of study is evident in the quality of the student's work. The continuing invitation and engagement of external guests across the school through open seminars and lecture series is a great initiative and is visibly enriching the students learning and experience.

(g) Comments on the use of My Beckett (Virtual Learning Environment) within the course (if applicable).

N/A

(h) Module content, consistency of modules and module assessment across the course and the achievement of learning outcomes. (You may be asked by your School to provide detailed comments on the modules that you examine.)

The expanded provision of communication skills in 1st year is applauded and will certainly further enhance experimentation, analysis and presentation in the upper years.

The attempt to better align Technology and Studio has been successful and provides now a great platform for further development. The alterations that were made allowed the students to have greater agency on the direction of investigating technological solutions. This in turn has led to more enthusiasm in engaging with technology, and has enabled a number of students to enrich their design proposals.

(i) Areas of student/staff engagement in teaching and learning, scholarship, research or professional practice.

Overall it was noted that students and staff have a healthy relationship. Students expressed they appreciate the availability and efforts made by staff to support their learning.

Teaching staff are invited to offer project briefs according to their personal research interests which is excellent practice from which both students and staff benefit.

Noteworthy is that most staff are teaching across subjects areas. Whereas this is partially related to resourcing it strengthens the perception of integration among all taught subjects. The continuous efforts to align other subject areas with the AD briefs is commendable and contributes to the holistic teaching of architectural design.

The studio culture is vital in supporting the learning and student retention. Particularly in first year the

development of a studio culture could be further explored, perhaps through teaching activities.

(j) The University welcomes external examiners' comments on its academic regulatory framework. Such comments may not have a direct bearing on standards set and achieved or the conduct of processes and so it may not be appropriate to include them elsewhere in this report or its summary. Please record any concerns or comments you may have here.

The following two points are copied over from last year's report as both problems are still current and require investigation.

It was noted that many 1st year students withdraw from the course throughout the year causing a drastic drop of student numbers from 1st and 2nd year. It is suggested to investigate into the reasons for the high drop-out rate.

It continues to be the case that a large proportion of students do not submit work for the original submission deadline but instead request extension. This occurrence has an impact on the number of examinable work and impacts on the workload and activity planning of all staff involved with the grading. It is strongly recommended that this issue is further investigated.

(k) Collaborative Provision: please include here any comments you wish to make on elements of collaborative provision for which you have responsibility (in addition to those you may have indicated previously in this report).

N/A