

School of Art, Architecture and Design

Postgraduate

- MARCH Architecture(TP)

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.

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.

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:

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

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

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)

N/A

Areas of good practice/commendation

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

There seems to be a high level of trust between students and tutors - there is a supportive quality to the teaching and learning environment that allows students to take responsibility for their work and to push themselves to discover and work through ideas.

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 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).

Because of the Covid 19 situation, we did not attend either the Progression and Award Board or any

Module Board.

(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 overall performance of the students is impressive, particularly given current circumstances. Their work is not necessarily highly polished; instead, it is inquiring and thoughtful, broad in its outlook but generally focused in its methods, and engaging and articulate in its presentation.

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

There is an attractive frankness of approach to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. Each issue, be it technical, professional, conceptual or theoretical, is addressed with a kind of practical, analytical inquisitiveness. For technical and professional aspects of the work, this works well - the professional studies are particularly engaging; technical work seems a little less exploratory. For contextual studies (history and theory), it leads to work that is a joy to read - students are clearly stretched beyond their comfortable habits of thought, but at the same time given the analytical tools to engage with new conceptual ideas. For design work, the approach is a little more hit-and-miss; it is not always clear that students are entirely aware of what they have produced.

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

The design work is assessed through portfolios of coursework, presented online. The design portfolios seem logically structured and reasonably self-explanatory in their use of the design project, together with occasional design exercises or workshops, to test skills and ideas. The progression from DS1 (establishing a clear territory for exploration) and DS2 (more detailed design) is a relatively smooth one. We did not attempt to map specific assessment criteria onto specific moments in the design development; this course is not an exercise in ticking boxes or jumping through hoops, but in allowing each student to reach a level of complexity and completion in work that evolves from the studio project brief. There is no such thing as a 'standard portfolio'. Because of this, I would have been very grateful to have seen some of the feedback that the students received.

The 'cultural context' work is also clear in its progression from written 'stasis' (a starting point or outline proposal) to written 'thesis' (an inquiry developing from that starting point), its relationship to the design work usually a useful one of allowing the mind to be opened to new modes of thought without any specific prescription as to how these might develop through design. It is as if 'cultural context' is understood as

exactly that: a context of possibilities within which other work takes place. I am impressed by the level of diligent inquiry evident in the theses. Again, I would very much like to have seen some of the feedback given to students.

I looked less closely at the professional practice and technical modules. For professional practice, assessed ultimately through a written report, I enjoyed the lack of recourse to rote learning. Each aspect of professional life is looked at in an inquiring way, on its own terms, again as context for design. The technical modules seem a little more prescriptive.

Overall, what is impressive is the quiet confidence that students will meet the desired learning outcomes without each having to reach them in the same way; each student is helped to achieve them on their own terms. There seems to be an atmosphere of supportiveness rather than competition amongst the students, and of trust between students and tutors. This is perhaps reflected in the sense I had that grades, while important, seem less so than the interest and integrity of a students' work. I would have liked a little more clarity about the procedures followed for marking and moderation, and, as mentioned above, I would have liked to see more of the feedback given to students, to understand better how judgements in marking are made - but this is not to disagree with those judgements (though we did suggest that some of the lowest design marks might be raised), simply to see them articulated.

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

The tutors are clearly very dedicated to their students, and engage with them very directly. Students spoke occasionally of the presence of colleagues from other disciplines (specifically, urban design and landscape design), which they found helpful. It would be good to know more about how this inter-disciplinarity is achieved.

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

I do not know when the students were using My Beckett, and when they were not.

(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.)

Please see e) above for general comments.

To some students, the iterative process followed through the vertical studio system, in which M.Arch 1 design units appear much the same as those of M.Arch 2 within any particular studio, is unfamiliar, its intention not entirely clear. It may be useful to articulate more closely - for students, tutors and external examiners - what is intended by this iterative process, and how an M.Arch 2 portfolio might differ from an M.Arch 1 portfolio.

It is always hard to achieve exact consistency across different design studios, but here they do appear to operate at similar levels, albeit with different approaches. Let me comment on them in a little more detail:

Fieldwork. This studio's brief worked well across a range of scales - the site was large, while the construction detail pursued near to the start of the design was at a more human scale. Sometimes, the leap from landscape to human scale and back again was awkwardly made, but the intention of the brief was clear and well-structured.

Cinematic Commons. The workshops for this studio looked excellent, really using techniques of film and theatre to pursue ideas about the theatre of urban life. Because these techniques are quite involved, I imagine students particularly benefit from taking this studio over two years.

City-Zen. The public engagement demanded by this studio's brief is distinctive and exemplary, and clearly permeates the M.Arch course as a whole.

Displace / Non-Place. The students I saw struggled a little with this studio - though they had clearly enjoyed the experience. From the work I saw, the purpose of some of the specific design exercises was not always clear to me. I found myself with the following question about the intentions of the studio: if we need to displace ourselves in order to understand, to gain a 'critical distance' but also consciously to engage, is this intended to imply that design proposals should themselves enact displacement in some way?

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

I did not ask specifically about these areas (though I am aware of the professional practice and scholarship of a number of the the staff members, and can see how it permeates the teaching and learning).

(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.

--

(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).

--