External Examiner's report summary

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:

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

"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:

The school is well led and benefits from a small but cohesive teaching team. Many of the students interviewed highlighted the commitment and hard work of their tutors, and felt that they had been well supported despite the exceptional circumstances of the latter part of this academic year.
There is evidence of a high standard of teaching across the BA years, but the first year (as evidenced by the work samples) is particularly strong. The workshops, used as a way of delivering the technology content in the year, could be singled out in the way in which they have yielded vibrant and enthusiastic results.
The relatively small size of the school has enabled the formation of a tight, cohesive, staff team the members of which, being required to teach across the specialisms (e.g. some tutors teach design, humanities and technology) have been able to form close and productive relationships with the students.

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 courseplease indicate here.	X		

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

External Examiner's report summary

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

The meetings attended were conducted in a proper manner.

(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 attainment level of the students evident in the work samples and interviews was of a standard equal to that of other institutions of which I have knowledge.

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

Strengths:

The communication skills, graphic, written and verbal, displayed in the work samples and the interviews were of a very high standard across all three years of the B.A. The students that were interviewed were articulate, self confident and enthusiastic, despite the exceptional circumstances in which they found themselves this year. The Design Communication modules may well have had a positive role in helping to develop such skills.

The design projects viewed were particularly strong in their research phases, containing much in-depth and often engaging investigation around the chosen subject matter.

The integration of the technology 'outputs' into the design projects has worked (with some caveats as below) very well, aided by high quality lectures and tuition by some committed and enthusiastic technology teaching staff.

The standard of the humanities essays (some in the form of video presentations) was high across the years, but the years 1 and 2 work was noteworthy for the level of maturity in the written work sampled. The humanities lectures and essay titles were well chosen to elicit the interest of students in a subject area that is sometimes seen as dry or unrelated to the design studio.

Weaknesses:

The diversity of the project briefs, whilst creating a vibrant body of work overall, has resulted in an equally diverse range of responses in terms of scale, theoretical basis and 'realism' of the design work. Although great efforts have been made to ensure a consistent level of assessment across the ateliers it is possible that the approach can disadvantage some students who made the wrong choice of subject matter and/or

tutor. There is a strong emphasis on the research phase of the projects and it was evident in the work samples that in some cases students had 'run out of steam' by the time they came to synthesise their findings in their design work.

Because of the way in which they are timetabled and structured the technology content of the design projects often seemed to have been applied before a coherent design had been developed. As a result, the technology submission was not always directly relevant to the design as a whole. In some cases the very large scale of the (building) designs presented difficulties in applying the knowledge gained in the lectures. It was noted that although technology workshop sessions were available during the design project the uptake of these was poor - possibly therefore creating a gap between the (high quality) technology teaching inputs and the studio.

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

It was evident that the assessment process was rigorous and thoroughly moderated. The standard of marking was, in my opinion, comparable to that of other institutions. The grading, relative to the student cohort within each module, was consistent, but there were instances where it seemed that the marking could have been higher- when judged against that of other comparable schools.

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

The programme offers an appropriate range of modules and there is a good progression of the more guided learning in Year 1 to the more independent atelier teaching in years 2 and 3. The technology teaching inputs in the form of lectures etc are rigorous and delivered by committed and enthusiastic staff but there may be a shortfall in resources in the application of that teaching in the studio - which is more dependent upon the interest and knowledge of the design tutors.

(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 module content is appropriate and consistent. In the samples examples it was clear that the assessment of the modules was consistent and there was a thorough moderation process to ensure consistency across the ateliers.

practice.

The atelier project briefs have been enriched by being related to the research interests of the teaching staff involved.
It was clear, from interviews, that the students benefit from being taught by a small cohesive staff team with whom they are able to form close working relationships during their time in the school.
Many of the teaching staff are either practitioners or have recent experience of architectural practice and are able to bring their knowledge to bear, particularly in the areas of technology and professional studies.

(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.

Much of semester two was affected by the ongoing pandemic and this year may be unrepresentative, but it was noted that a large number of students did not submit their work but instead elected to apply for extensions of time. This means that the students interviewed may not have been fully representative of the cohort. The high drop out rate from 2nd to third year, unrelated to the pandemic, was also a cause for concern and requires further investigation or explanation.

(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