External Examiner's report summary

School of Art, Architecture and Design

Undergraduate

- BALAD Landscape Architecture & Des(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)

Yes

Areas of good practice/commendation

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

The unexpected and profound change to the teaching and learning platform through the unexpected CV-19 lockdown in March 2020 for 3-4 months, meant that the University and students had to rapidly adapt to the new rules of digital leaning. Although this will have required a huge effort on the part of staff and students at the time of transition, both appear to have adapted well, with neither recording significant failures or losses through that time. Fortuitously, the CV-19 lockdown has created a new mode of staff/student interaction, through digital meetings. This has advantages for reaching students wherever they are, conveniently, regularly, however they feel, however mobile they are, avoiding the cost and time for travel and in any weather – there are many advantageous layers. Whilst the transition seems to be have been handled well, the loss of momentum, with the students, is a predictable consequence of the lockdown period, running up to and including the end of the academic year. This is considered more later in this report.

The Learning and Resource Centre (LRC), at Becketts Park, continues to be a distinctive part of the Leeds Landscape courses, giving students a unique opportunity to carry out practical landscape work trialling, experimenting and testing landscape solutions. I am not aware of other landscape courses in the UK offering this facility. Last year, there was some question on the future viability of the LRC. However, the decision that the University Estates Dept take over the LRC is positive in that the facility continues to be a resource – as long as the new arrangement for wider use by the University can still provide a rewarding environment for the BALAD students to create, experiment and learn.

Designing with plants is vital to be a strong landscape architect and the horticultural teaching of the LA406 module combined with the Learning and Resource Centre, the field trips and the practicality of the LA 601/2 Design in the Community project all provide a structure for a deep knowledgebase for the students.

Good access to tutors who are described as approachable and supportive. Feedback is as regular as is practical and the tutors are well regarded amongst the cohort.

The BA landscape studio is a good 'home' space providing close mentoring opportunities with proximity to the students – although the size of the studio space is not regarded as being adequate

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.			

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

Due to the CV-19 lockdown restrictions this year, I did not attend the Progression and Award Board. However, the procedures that I witnessed last year were efficient, thorough, consistent and fair.

(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.

Due to the CV-19 lockdown restrictions this year with remote working procedures, there was not a year-end exhibition to browse and gauge the general quality and trends of the students work. The interaction with the students was restricted to six students (three students to each external examiner) which did not allow for a broader awareness of the year group ability level and general standards. The Course Director also reported that 50% of the year group had not yet submitted final project work for various reasons mostly relating to CV-19 or IT related issues which is extraordinary but understandable in these unprecedented times. With the students that I interviewed individually, their performance and work was consistent with the proposed marking.

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

Generally the students were clear on the project briefs, what was expected of them, the programming of works and the intended hierarchy within the curriculum. The final project presentations were well laid out, with a good diet of information, visually engaging using various mediums, good variety of detail and mediums. I would like to see more early concept work and 3D exploration done free hand pencil and pen, before moving to CAD and other software programmes. The concern here is always that the limitations of moving into computer graphics too early can frustrate the opportunity to learn to design. However, my experience is the Leeds Beckett course students have a stronger pedigree in design than some other courses. Designing with plants is vital to be a strong landscape architect and the horticultural teaching of the LA406 module combined with the Learning and Resource Centre, the field trips and the practicality of the LA 601/2 Design in the Community project all provide a structure for a deep knowledgebase for the students.

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

The standards and marking that I witnessed were efficient, thorough, consistent and fair.

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

Generally the project briefs, the course structure, programming of modules and the intended hierarchy within the curriculum, were all clearly laid out and sets up the students for a successful experience over the three years. Feedback is as regular as is practical and the tutors are well regarded amongst the cohort. Last year the tutoring staff were under resourced but with the appointment of Alia, with her technical knowledge, compliments the staffing knowledge base well. I understand that another member of staff is appointed and starting in the Autumn. Project briefs are interesting and sites challenging – enough to allow less able students to find a theme that interests them and more able students to dig into layers of complexity.

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

There were no adverse comments about the use of My Beckett from the students

(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 well thought through, starting with basic building block core subjects underpinned by ‘long thin’ modules that span the terms. The modules are progressively challenging through the three years to ensure the students knowledge is elevated to the required standards as they approach the year ends and at the final year.
Modules briefs are interesting and relevant to todays issues with suitably challenging sites giving a good amount of learning opportunity, preparing the students for the modern workplace where they will need to

be equipped to balance out competing constraints as they seek design solutions for development briefs.

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

Feedback is regular and the tutors are described as friendly and accessible. Studio space is regarded as an issue with not sufficient home studio space and discussions with the architectural studios is on-going on space sharing. Fortuitously, the CV-19 lockdown has created a new mode of staff/student interaction, through digital meetings. This has advantages for reaching students wherever they are, conveniently, regularly, however they feel, however mobile they are, avoiding the cost and time for travel and in any weather – there are many advantageous layers. However, studio time and the interaction with other students and staff, to share ideas and test theories, should remain safeguarded and a pivotal part of the University learning experience.

(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).