

University of Glasgow
Academic Standards Committee - Friday 29 May 2009
**Stage Two Revalidation Report – Master of Architectural
Studies (Taught)**

Mrs Jackie McCluskey, Senate Office

The Glasgow School of Art

**Report of the Stage Two Validation Meeting: Master of Architectural Studies
(Taught)**

Monday 27 April 2009, The Mackintosh Room

Panel Members:

Professor Klaus Jung, Head of the School of Fine Art (Convenor)
Mr Nicholas Oddy, Lecturer, Historical and Critical Studies
Ms Gillian Moffat, Lecturer, Digital Design Studio
Mr David Boyce, University Teacher, Department of Civil Engineering
Professor Robert Hill, Professor of Learning Teaching and Assessment, Senior
Adviser of Studies, Department of Chemistry
Mr David McClean, Head of the Scott Sutherland School of Architecture and the Built
Environment (Robert Gordon University)
Mr Peter Richardson, ZM Architects
Mr David Griffin, Student Reviewer

Programme Team

Professor David Porter, Head of the Mackintosh School of Architecture
Ms Sally Stewart, Programme Leader
Mr Mark Baines, Lecturer, Urban Building
Dr Glyn Davis, Academic Coordinator (Postgraduate Studies)
Dr Raid Hanna, Senior Lecturer, Digital Creativity
Dr Masa Noguchi, Lecturer, Energy and Environmental Studies

Students

See attached

Attending

Ms Jacqui Fernie, Assistant Registrar (Quality)

1. Summary

The Validation Panel **agreed** to recommend to the Academic Council of the Glasgow School of Art, through its Postgraduate Committee that the Master of Architectural Studies (Taught) be validated for a period of six years, subject to one condition and three advisory recommendations, outlined below.

2. Conditions

The Programme Team is asked to:

- 2.1 Develop clear guidelines for the assessment, making explicit the expectations on students' in terms of the assessment workload for each specialist pathway.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Consider the programme title so that it accurately reflects the student experience, especially in relation to the taught elements.
- 3.2 Consider how the strong links between the curriculum and the collective research expertise within the Mackintosh School of Architecture, with specific reference to MEARU and the Glasgow Urban Laboratory, could be utilised in the marketing of the programme.
- 3.3 Be aware of the balance of the diversity of the student cohort to ensure a good mix of cultural diversity.

4. Introduction

- 4.1 The Master of Architectural Studies (Taught) is a one-year, full-time postgraduate programme hosted by the Mackintosh School of Architecture (MSA). The MSA also offers within its postgraduate portfolio, a Masters of Architecture (by Conversion) and a Masters of Architecture (by Research). The programme aligns fully with the CAF: PGT
- 4.2 The programme attracts an international profile of graduates in architecture, who have experience of practice and who wish to extend their range of skills.
- 4.3 Six specialist pathways of study would be offered in the following areas: Urban Design; Urban Building; Digital Creativity, Creative Urban Practices; Urban History and Theory and Energy and Environmental Studies.

5. Private Meeting of the Panel

The Validation Panel wished to:

- Clarify the student work load and how parity of assessment is achieved.
- Noted the level of detail in course descriptors.
- Explore the relationships between the 'Detailed Report', Feasibility Report and Individual Research Paper.
- Ascertain students' understanding of their path through the programme.
- Enquire as to how the programme is marketed.
- Explore the programme's relationship within the overall MSA postgraduate strategy and how is this relationship supported.
- Survey the student experience.
- Clarify the staffing and resourcing of electives, in particular the demands on staff teaching popular courses and the arrangements for the withdrawal of elective pathways.
- Ask how cross-school collaborations are encouraged.

- Question how the broad range of student abilities is supported.
- Discuss pastoral care arrangements.

6. Meeting with Head of School and Programme Leader

- 6.1 The Programme Leader began with a short PowerPoint presentation on the programme.
- 6.2 The Panel was interested in exploring the assessment workload and asked, what students' are asked to deliver and how parity of assessment across the specialist pathways is achieved.
- 6.3 The Programme Leader explained that stage one students are asked to submit a detailed report, based on their lectures. It allows tutors to assess the beginnings of students' understanding of their pathway. The Feasibility Study, submitted in stage two, is a further investigation into their project, perhaps using alternative tools and outlines methodology.
- 6.4 Students are also required to make presentations to the cohort. This Peer Review is important as it, along with sampling and cross-marking of written assignments, also offers staff an overview of the work of each pathway. Students have a series of detailed seminars at each assessment point. Assessment information can also be found on the VLE where the Programme Team are gathering sample works.
- 6.5 The Programme Team is developing templates for assessment and investigating alternative modes of submission.
- 6.5 Asked how student feedback is gathered, the Programme Leader reported that, mostly due to the size of the cohort, regular, monthly meetings are held with students to talk about general issues. The Programme Leader meets regularly with Student Representatives.
- 6.6 The Panel was interested in discussing staffing and resources and asked the Programme Team to what extent the issue of pathways being dependent on one member of staff been resolved.
- 6.7 The Programme Leader responded that, where possible, resources and staff were shared across pathways. Collaborative working across the MSA is also encouraged and tutors teach on the Undergraduate programme, supervise research students as well as conduct their own research. The Programme Leader acknowledged that one pathway (Digital Creativity) was still dependent on one member of staff.
- 6.8 Applicants choose their pathways prior to admissions and should it become clear that a particular pathway would not run, the applicant would be advised before they arrived. As applicants submit a portfolio, this can be reassessed for an alternative pathway. If students wished to change pathways, they would have detailed discussions with their tutor to explore the scope of their current pathway.
- 6.9 Pathways are specialised and students are immersed in their topics in a way they did not experience in their undergraduate training. Postgraduate students generally come to the programme with quite detailed ideas of their research. Students could do work with MEARU or the Glasgow Urban

Laboratory. This link could be a driver of both the MSA Research Centres and the programme.

- 6.10 Asked if it was felt that MArch students feel part of a community, the Programme Leader reported that, although the programme is discrete, with its own studio space, MArch students are encouraged to interact with the rest of the school by taking part in crits of other years and through the GSA-wide Research Training Programme (RTP).
- 6.11 In response to a query about the marketing of the programme. The Programme Leader reported that staff had attended more international recruitment fairs, including India, Korea and Japan. Staff are always building links in the overseas markets. The MSA produced a journal of work, which proved valuable at fairs. By highlighting the research of the Urban Laboratory and MEARU at recruitment fairs, the school would attract students and strengthen Research-Teaching linkages.

7. Meeting with Programme Tutors

- 7.1 The Validation Panel wished to explore how students relate to the programme structure. Programme Tutors explained that students begin with a general understanding of the course structure; they know they'll have a collection of lectures and have to produce a report. These ideas are fleshed out by tutors throughout the lecture and tutorial series.
- 7.2 Research Paper I (RPI) is not seen as an outcome of itself, but as a work in progress towards a students' own outcome. It is an opportunity for students to develop a piece of work they have brought with them. While related, RPII gives students the opportunity to develop an interest in another area divergent from that work. In all cases, students must also demonstrate their research methodologies and good writing skills.
- 7.3 The MArch programme is essentially a creative one and the expectation on postgraduate students is that they produce creative outputs. The Individual Research Project (IPR) can be submitted as either a thesis or a design project. Each student sets their own parameters depending on the subject they have chosen to research. The aims of the research are set out by the student in the Feasibility Report and the IPR is assessed against them. Students can recast the aims of their research as their research develops.
- 7.4 Two Research Centres operate within the MSA: MEARU (Mackintosh Environmental Architecture Research Unit) and the Glasgow Urban Laboratory. As part of the MSA Research Strategy, students will have opportunities to become involved in live projects through these centres and this relationship could draw students to the programme. By adding the Creative Urban Practices pathway, the programme is opened to graduates who would like to be involved in architecture, but without having trained as architects, for instance, town planners and fine artists.
- 7.5 The Validation Team noted the External Examiner's comments on the broad range of student skills and knowledge and asked how a diverse range of students are supported.
- 7.6 The Programme Tutors reported that students are assigned a pastoral tutor, who, if they felt warranted, would refer the student to counselling and welfare.

Students are supported academically through regular contact and support. Plagiarism is an important issue and software is used to detect it. The GSA hopes to introduce pre-sessional English Language courses with the University of Glasgow. Students also gain additional essay skills through the RTP course.

- 7.8 Asked about their work load and the space the programme has to grow, the Programme Tutors reported that minimum and maximum numbers for each pathway have been set, but as yet it has not been an issue. As the programme grows, available resources would be drawn upon. A lead tutor has been appointed for each pathway. In the majority of pathways, a number of staff can be called upon to substitute for each other as well as a number of Postgraduate Research Students.

8. Meeting with Students

- 8.1 The Validation Panel asked what students' experience of the programme was and why they chose it. One student explained that her employer had recommended the programme. The student remarked that she thought the programme would be more taught and less self-directed, but had found this refreshing. It is very clear to the student where to get help and support. Students reported that they chose the programme because it offered an opportunity to work in architecture without necessarily going into practice. One student reported that getting a licence to practice was not a priority, as much as getting into a particular area of study and such the programme has met that expectation.
- 8.2 Asked whether students could switch pathways, one student reported that this has been a relatively easy process, following a discussion with their tutor.
- 8.3 In response to a query on the positive and negative aspects of the programme, the students reported that the freedom and flexibility of the programme was a big advantage. Students reported that the programme feels more research than taught postgraduate. The support offered by tutors and technicians was also invaluable.
- 8.4 The programme could have better facilities, however, and the studio space is not a creatively enriching environment. Students also highlighted that some may not be getting the international experience they had hoped for as in one year, the cohort was made up largely of students from the Indian Sub Continent.
- 8.5 Students highlighted the need to encourage integration with the rest of the GSA. Students welcomed the addition of cross-GSA electives, but noted that the electives might be seen as a distraction. The programme is self contained. Students do everything together and they know each others research well. They also welcomed the addition of the Creative Urban Practices pathway to open the programme to other disciplines. Students also reported that sometimes the programme feels too unstructured.
- 8.5 The Panel wished to explore assessment and students' understanding of assessment. Students reported that they understood they had to complete two projects and a final outcome: a report of approximately 7000 words and a Feasibility Study, presented in the best way for the project.

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 The Panel appreciated the great amount of work that had been undertaken by the Programme Team to address the conditions set by the previous Validation Panel. The Panel considered that all conditions had now been satisfied.
- 9.2 The Panel commended the enthusiastic, engaged and professional Programme Team and noted that students have benefitted greatly from the programme.
- 9.3 The Panel was impressed by the strong links between the curriculum and the collective research expertise within the Mackintosh School of Architecture and considered this a good model for other areas and which has the potential to increase awareness of architectural research.
- 4.4 The Validation Panel **agreed** to recommend to the Academic Council of the Glasgow School of Art, through its Postgraduate Committee that the Master of Architectural Studies (Taught) be validated for a period of six years, subject to one condition and three advisory recommendations, outlined above.

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Approved by Convenor: 18.05.09