

2013/2014 Programmatic Review of Engineering, Phase 2, School of Building & Civil Engineering
(18 – 19 March 2014)

Review of Programmes of the Department of Architecture

Programmes Submitted for Review

BSc in Architectural Technology

BSc (Honours) in Architectural Technology

BSc in Interior Architecture

BSc (Honours) in Interior Architecture

Department of Architecture Sub-Panel

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Findings and Recommendations

Overall Recommendation on Revalidation

The Panel recommends continuing validation of the *BSc in Architectural Technology*, *BSc in Interior Architecture*, *BSc (Honours) in Architectural Technology* and *BSc (Honours) in Interior Architecture* for a further period of five years, subject to the implementation of all requirements and ensuring the earliest possible implementation of the recommendations set out below.

Commendations

The Panel **commends** the Department on its work in continuously developing the suite of Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture programmes presented. The Panel is supportive of the Department's efforts to gain RIAI accreditation for the Architectural Technology programmes and RIBA accreditation for Interior Architecture, with initial reviews scheduled for April 2014. In the Panel's view, professional accreditation will augment the standing of graduates of either discipline, and will lend further weight to the significant role the CIT Department of Architecture has to play in raising the profile of both the Interior Architect and the Architectural Technologist within the architectural profession and the wider construction industry regionally and nationally.

The Panel further congratulates and **commends** the Department of Architecture on its new prize-winning teaching facilities in the Architecture Factory. The Panel heard that, despite the loss of some spaces originally intended for use by the Department, the new premises had proven very successful in supporting the Studio pedagogy and fostering a collaborative and synergistic approach to teaching and learning among staff and students.

Finally, the Panel wishes to **commend** the programme staff on their evident strong commitment to and enthusiasm for Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture education. The discussions with staff, as well as with learner, graduate and employer representatives, gave the Panel great confidence in the quality and standard of the Department's Interior Architecture and Architectural Technology provision.

Programme Documentation (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

By contrast, it was the Panel's view the programme documentation on its own did not do full justice to the quality of the education delivered 'on the ground'. The programme materials submitted, including many of the module descriptors, frequently read quite abstract and generic, leaving the reader with little sense of the specific topics and themes covered and of the actual delivery, feedback and assessment mechanisms employed. This is particularly significant in the Studio modules, since these constitute the programme core to which all other modules are intended to relate. In these, currently only function and scale identify the nature and progression of the projects explored.

While existing descriptors may have been written to facilitate flexibility of content, thus allowing an immediate response to change in areas of legislation, policy or current best practice without the need for revision, the Panel finds that clarity, relevance and reassurance may be lost in the present format.

Inclusion of more concrete detail in the formal programme and module descriptors would make the descriptors more meaningful to learners, employers, and professional bodies alike. This would increase students' confidence in their ability to meet the intended learning outcomes, and would further enhance the confidence of all stakeholders in the quality of the programmes.

Clearer thematic and typological reference points in the core mandatory module descriptors would furthermore serve to guide students in choosing the electives best suited to their individual learning needs and interests.

Recommendation: The Panel **strongly recommends** that the programme materials, particularly the module descriptors for the core mandatory modules, should be revised to include a greater amount of specific and meaningful indicative detail. This should combine across the years to form a comprehensive matrix of key themes and topics (including contextual) which can be referenced by learners, employers and professional bodies alike. The selection of topics should be informed by current best practice paradigms (such as adaptive reuse for Interior Architecture), but reference a sufficiently broad and representative spectrum of contextual elements (e.g. building typologies) to illustrate how Studio practice is anchored in context in its progressive development throughout the programmes.

In addition, the Panel also **recommends** inclusion of sample briefs as a standard part of the programme documentation. If allowable in the CIT context, these should be included in all Studio module descriptors as appropriate.

Differentiation of Parallel Level 7 / 8 Programmes (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

Since the last Programmatic Review, ab-initio Honours programmes were created in both Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture by addition of an Honours stage to the existing Ordinary Bachelor degrees and conversion of the resulting 'ladder'. Contrary to the recommendations of the conversion panels, the School decided to retain the parallel Level 7 degrees rather than abolish them.

The Panel heard that on foot of the recession and collapse of the building industry from 2008 onwards, demand for construction-related programmes had dropped sharply, as had CAO cut-off points. In recent years, the Department of Architecture observed that many entrants who would have qualified for entry to the Honours programmes instead chose to apply for entry to the Level 7 degrees. The School therefore decided to retain the Ordinary Bachelor programmes to keep enrolment levels stable. In combination with strengthened cross-programme efficiencies, it was felt that this would help secure continued programme viability in the face of falling applications.

Where Level 7 and 8 programmes run in parallel, current CIT policy requires that they must be differentiated by a minimum of three 5-credit modules. The differences must be non-trivial and feed into the distinct knowledge, skills and competence profiles of Ordinary and Honours levels graduates respectively. The Head of Department outlined that the proposed programmes located the differentiation in the two 10-credit Studio modules in Semesters 5 and 6, resulting in 20 differentiated credits overall in both Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture. While Level 7 and 8 learners were not separated for delivery of Studio, the Level 8 modules carried additional outcomes relating to an area of learner-identified specialisation which needed to be met in the context of the learners' individual Studio projects.

Following review of the documentation and the discussion with staff, the Panel is however not confident that the programme staff will be able to sustain any meaningful and systematic distinction between Level 7 and 8 learners in practice, either in delivery or in assessment. The Panel considers that no clearly-formed view of the nature of the differentiated learning emerged from either the documentation or discussions, and that co-teaching and the studio pedagogy would further level any distinctions between the Ordinary and Honours degree cohorts.

Not only does this run counter to Institute policy, in the experience of Panel members the professional bodies would also expect to see a clear distinction between programmes at different NFQ levels, in terms of entry, transfer and progression requirements, as well as learning outcomes and content. Given that the parallel Level 7 and 8 programmes are practically indistinct in all other respects, the Institute-wide overall progression threshold of 50% for Level 7 graduates may not be sufficient to meet professional body expectations in this regard.

Requirement: The Panel therefore **requires** that as a minimum the differentiated Studio modules for both disciplines (*Interior Architecture Studio 5.7/5.8 and 6.7/6.8; Technical Design Studio 5.7/5.8 and 6.7/6.8*) should be revised to more clearly and systematically define and specify the nature of the differentiated learning, beyond references to "individual specialisation". The distinctive 'flavour' of

the differentiated learning should be carried through the module descriptor (description; learning outcomes; indicative content incl. outline of briefs; and particularly assessment types/description) and should by preference extend to a descriptive distinction in module titles. The distinctive skills profiles of the Level 7 and 8 graduates and the intended contribution of the respective Studio modules to each should serve as a starting point for the revision.

Entry Requirements (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

Regarding the question of entry levels, the Panel expressed a concern that those more recent entrants with actual CAO points in the 200's might not be up to the demands of the programmes, particularly when low points combined with the noticeable increase in financial and other outside pressures on learners described by the Department.

Programme staff confirmed that they had noticed a considerable 'fall-out' in terms of the ability to deal with Studio in particular. The Panel also noted there had been comparatively low Stage 1 and 2 pass rates in several years during the period under review.

To ensure that all entrants have a reasonable chance of success, the Department might wish to consider putting in place appropriate subject-specific entry thresholds. Since Panel members are aware that viability considerations and Institute policy and practice may constrain the Department's ability to introduce such measures, the Panel offers this as a suggestion for further consideration rather than a recommendation for speedy implementation.

The Panel notes however that minimum entry requirements are likely to come up in the context of professional accreditation, as the links between entry requirements and learners' ability to achieve the programme outcomes tend to be closely investigated by the professional bodies.

Common Module Streams and Efficiencies (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

Among the more substantial programme revisions proposed, the Panel noted the creation of two new shared mandatory module streams, *Technology Materials and Structures* and *Environmental Science & Services*. These are to be delivered across all four programmes, creating substantial resource efficiencies and counteracting fluctuations in demand. *Technology Materials and Structures* is intended to provide learners in both disciplines with a strengthened technology foundation through Semesters 1 – 4, after which the stream continues in Architectural Technology only. Delivery of the shared first four ESS modules commences in Semester 1 for Architectural Technology and in Semester 3 for Interior Architecture.

The Panel noted these proposals, and considered that despite increased levels of module sharing the programmes contained enough discipline-specific core material to retain their own distinct identity, provided the common technical material is integrated effectively with the Studio modules of each discipline. However, the Panel cautions that the delayed introduction of the ESS stream in Interior Architecture may create a slight credit profile anomaly for some students which needs to be managed with care (see below).

The Panel also explored the possibility of linkages with the BSc (Hons) in Architecture and MArch offered by the Cork Centre for Architecture Education (CCAIE), in which the CIT Department of Architecture collaborates with its counterpart in University College Cork (UCC). Since the CCAIE

programmes are joint CIT-UCC degrees governed by a separate set of programme regulations, QA protocols and financial arrangements, however, opportunities for efficiencies were limited. The Panel noted this.

Cultural Context Strand (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

The Panel noted that for historic reasons and due to the embedding of the Department of Architecture in an Engineering School, the CIT Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture programmes were quite technical in nature. CIT Interior Architecture graduates receive a Bachelor of Science rather than a BA award.

While acknowledging this, the Panel found that the cultural context strand had not been given due prominence in either discipline. It was the Panel's view however that a thorough understanding of context forms the foundation for any concept development or design work undertaken, be that of the Interior Architect or the Architectural Technologist. This was underscored e.g. by the fact that the RIBA Part 1 criteria relate to a broad design competency with a significant focus on context, concept development and links with creative traditions and disciplines, while the technical and professional criteria take centre stage in Part 2.

- Interior Architecture

In Interior Architecture, architectural history and theory are covered in two mandatory Stage 1 modules, with two design studies electives included in later semesters. With only 10 mandatory credits (out of a total of 180 respectively 240) specifically dedicated to contextual studies, the Panel considers this important strand to be underrepresented in the programmes in comparison with related offerings elsewhere, be it with an Arts or Science orientation.

The approach taken to contextual studies may in the Panel's view contribute significantly to clarifying the demarcation of Interior Architecture from Architecture on the one hand and Interior Design on the other. However, given CIT parameters an expansion of cultural and contextual content in the Interior Architecture programmes may not be all that easily achieved, as it may entail quite a radical redesign and realignment of the programmes. The possibility of replacing Maths with additional contextual studies modules was mooted and discussed. The Panel was open to this, but felt that this would represent a distinct step towards a fundamental reorientation of the programmes, which might need to be the subject of a much wider, high-level discussion.

For these reasons, the Panel decided not to issue any specific recommendations with regard to reinforcing contextual studies in Interior Architecture, beyond the recommendation to highlight specific contextual elements more in the core Studio modules (see above). The Department is however advised to keep the issue under consideration for future reviews.

- Architectural Technology

By contrast, the Architectural Technology programmes include an 'Architectural Appreciation' strand running continuously throughout Semesters 1 - 6. However, this fact is not obvious from the semester schedules, as the strand is incorporated in the *Graphics, Communication* module stream, which might possibly create the impression that context only serves as 'raw material' on which to practice communication-related outcomes.

The Panel considers that the fundamental value of contextual understanding to the overall learning is not sufficiently developed or foregrounded in the modules as presented. In addition to historical and theoretical knowledge, such an understanding would also encompass e.g. strategies for identifying and accessing suitable reference materials, the ability to identify precedents, and the ability to read actual buildings in their environment.

Requirement (Architectural Technology): The Panel therefore **requires** that the contribution of the cultural context to the overall learning and especially the design abilities of the graduate should be brought into relief and emphasised more strongly in the relevant module descriptors for the Architectural Technology programmes, including giving appropriate reflection to this strand in the module titles.

Study Visits (Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture)

Recommendation: Related to the above points, the Panel **recommends** and strongly encourages the Department and School to explore every possibility for enabling site visits and field trips for Interior Architecture and Architectural Technology students, as the ability to read and appreciate the actual built environment constitutes essential learning for learners in both disciplines. In addition, field trips also contributed to individual growth and improved group integration team-working ability. By preference, all students should be afforded an opportunity to broaden their horizons by going on at least one study trip abroad.

Transition Schedules (Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture)

The departmental submission outlined that for learners entering Stage 4 of the respective Honours programmes in 2013/14 and 2014/15, transition schedules apply respectively will apply in both disciplines. The transition schedules themselves were however not included with the materials.

Requirement: The Panel **requires** that transition schedules should be created in Course Builder for the relevant academic years which fully reflect all temporary conditions for the cohorts affected. These need to be submitted to Academic Council for validation together with the proposed 'enduring' schedules seen by the Panel. In addition, the date of validity of the proposed 'enduring' schedules may need to be adapted accordingly.

Module Resources Listings (Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture)

The Panel noted that the reading lists in a large number of modules are out of date. Reading lists frequently also make no mention of relevant electronic or Internet resources.

Requirement: The Panel **requires** that all reading lists be reviewed and brought up to date, with appropriate consideration given to electronic resources, with emphasis on relevant academic sources. Given the evolving nature of what is at any point considered 'current', the Department is furthermore encouraged to ensure the resources listings are updated with sufficient frequency in future.

Numbered Electives (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

The Panel noted that several cognate electives shared between all four programmes are grouped into thematic streams by sequential numbering. Of these, *Adaptation and Reuse 1 & 2* and *3D Visualization 1 & 2* recur in several semesters. However, the relationship between the modules in a thematic stream varies. While the two *3D Visualization* modules build on each other, the *Adaptation and Reuse* and *Design Studies* modules (offered in Semesters 4 and 5 of Interior Architecture only) are independent.

Recommendation: The Panel **recommends** that both the titles and the content of the ‘streamed’ elective modules should be reviewed to provide clarity on sequencing and pre-requisite learning. As a minimum, numbering should be avoided as a means of differentiating between modules which do not need to be taken in sequence.

Modules *Adaptation and Reuse 1 & 2* (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

The Panel found that these elective modules, despite their updated title, in essence remain comparatively old-fashioned conservation modules which do not adequately reflect current best practice and philosophy, including the increasingly central position of the adaptation and reuse paradigm in architectural thought in general.

Recommendation: The Panel **recommends** that the descriptors for these modules should be refocused and brought up to date with current best practice and thinking. Thought should also be given to how the material covered in the *Adaptation and Reuse* modules can be better related to the core Studio projects (keeping in mind that not all students will select electives from this stream).

Elective Choice – Foreign Languages (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

The Department in its submission emphasised that Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture learners might wish to opt for language modules as part of their elective selection. A number of elements appear to the Panel to militate against development of a language focus however. Apart from timetabling issues, these include the distribution of the elective ‘slots’ across the semesters and the strong relevance of a number of cognate electives to the overall programme outcomes in each discipline.

The Panel would caution the Department against raising unrealistic expectations regarding elective choice in languages in the programme materials. If the Department and the School consider language proficiency a valuable potential asset for an Architectural Technologist or Interior Architect, on the other hand, they would need to make a concerted effort to enable language study in practice, especially where a learner wishes to pursue this over several semesters.

Mathematics Module (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

The Panel did not have any specific comments on *Maths for Technology* (MATH6023), which is included in Semester 2 of the proposed programmes. It heard however that last year’s introduction of the *Essential Mathematics* module MATH6000 in several Science programmes had improved pass rates in a number of Science modules requiring a certain level of mathematical ability. Replacement

of MATH6023 by the more generic MATH6000 module is not currently proposed for the programmes of the Department of Architecture.

Should the Department or School consider replacing the existing applied maths module in future however, the Panel would consider it essential that any proposed module would be carefully reviewed prior to introduction to ensure that all mathematical areas relevant to Architectural Technology and Interior Architecture applications (including measuring, surveying, geometric computation) are adequately covered. It would also need to be ensured throughout delivery that both cohorts will be able to relate to the examples chosen for the application and practice of the mathematical principles.

Work Placement Module (Architectural Technology / Interior Architecture)

Recommendation: If the work placement has to take place over the summer months, the Panel **recommends** that an appropriate structure and assessment mechanism should be agreed and put in place before the end of the foregoing academic semester. In addition, all QA arrangements relating to the work place mentor also need to be set out and agreed in advance, including a mechanism for ensuring the mentor is familiar with all applicable academic regulations of CIT.

In view of the upcoming professional accreditation reviews, the Panel would also like to advise that a work placement within an RIBA accredited programme will be subject to meeting certain criteria if it is to fulfil RIBA requirements (post Part 1, log book, role-related criteria, etc.). In the current climate, this might make it rather challenging to obtain suitable placements. Conversely, an elective placement module which does not count towards the RIBA practical experience requirements might be unattractive to students.

Programme Credit Profile (Interior Architecture)

Depending on elective choice, there is a small risk that individual Interior Architecture students might exceed by 5 credits the maximum of 130 Fundamental level credits allowable within CIT Ordinary and Honours degrees. This arises from the fact that the *Environmental Science & Services* stream commences in Semester 3, not in Semester 1 as in Architectural Technology.

Given that this issue is likely to affect very few students, if any, whereas a correction of the anomaly at programme level would likely affect all four programmes, the Panel does not recommend any changes to the structure of the Interior Architecture programmes for this reason alone.

Requirement: In accordance with CIT policy, the Panel **requires** however that the potential anomaly should be advised to the CIT Academic Council prior to revalidation. In addition, the Department of Architecture needs to be cognisant of this issue when advising students on elective choice.

Coverage of the Regulatory and Legislative Environment of the Architectural Technical Designer (Architectural Technology)

The Panel expects that expertise in the integration of new materials and technical specification with EU and national policies and legislation, including in particular Building Control Acts / Regulations, will increasingly become the domain of the architectural technologist, who is poised to become the technical specialist of the architectural practice.

Recommendation: The Panel **recommends** therefore that coverage of the regulatory and legislative environment throughout the programme should be strengthened and supported (both in terms of theory and practical application) and made more visible from Stage 1 of the Architectural Technology programmes onwards. This should include the ability to use appropriate software for energy calculations.