	Northumbria University
Periodic Review Report Template	

School	**Built and Natural Environment**
Discipline Name	**Built Environment**
Date of Review	**3 & 4 February 2011**
Review Panel (approved by University Learning and Teaching Committee)	Internal Members: Professor Kath McCourt (Chair) Dr Roger Penlington and Dr Tony Mellor Students' Union Member: Adam Wigley External Member: Dr Lynne Jack Facilitator: Sally Iles
Method of Review	This review was conducted using the periodic review procedure defined in Northumbria's Review Handbook (2008 version), available from http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/central/ar/qualitysupport/review/intrev/

Section 1	**Discipline Aims and Context**

In September 2010, the School of the Built Environment merged with part of the former School of Applied Sciences (the Geography and Environmental Management Disciplines) to form the new School of the Built and Natural Environment. Built Environment is a long-established, highly experienced and mature provider of a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It is the largest and by far the most significant provider in the regional context, but it also has an important national and increasingly international role. It offers programmes in most aspects of built environment higher education including design, construction, housing, surveying and engineering services professions, all of which are professionally recognised and accredited, delivered using modern learning, teaching and assessment strategies, in a dynamic and engaging learning environment that meets the needs of students and employers.

The aims of the Built Environment Discipline provision have been summarised into a range of generic characteristics and attributes which the *Northumbria Built Environment Graduate* will demonstrate on graduation.

Our graduating student will have:
1.   knowledge and understanding of essential facts, concepts, principles and theories relevant to their chosen discipline and acquired the skills to gain relevant employment;
2.   the ability to critically analyse and solve problems and new challenges;
3.   a range of transferable skills including written and oral communication, information literacy and study skills, numeracy, IT skills, time management and team-working;
4.   the ability and motivation to undertake self evaluation and engage with lifelong learning;
5.   developed personally in ways which will enrich their lives and facilitate a full contribution to society in the future;
6.   an understanding of, and a commitment to, the sustainable development of the built environment;
7.   a commitment to the effective practice of multi-disciplinary working to achieve positive outcomes for all stakeholders in a project; and
8.   the ability to make a positive contribution in an increasingly international and global context for built environment activities.

The School currently has 194 staff. 137 Academic Staff (including 9 Professors, 4 Teaching Fellows, 6 Readers and 8 Graduate Tutors), 17 Research Assistants and 40 Support Staff.

Student numbers equate to 2092 FTE and include students doing Foundation Degrees, Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes. Programmes are delivered in full-time, part-time, distance learning and sandwich modes. Given the size of the Built Environment Portfolio, a sampling methodology was used (as outlined in the Review Handbook) which took into account the various categories of provision and modes of

delivery.

Classrooms, offices and lab spaces are spread between Wynne Jones (providing a great deal of postgraduate space) and Ellison Building. Most staff offices and the main reception area, Administration Office and Student 'Hub' are on the second floor of A and B blocks in Ellison Building on City Campus West. The 'Hub' is a resource centre run by support staff, which is available for all students. Trinity Building provides additional open access IT facilities. Further Estates developments are planned in Wynne Jones which will increase open access areas for postgraduate students. On the third floor, a project space for up to 60 undergraduate students will be created which will also include two additional IT labs and open access IT. This area will also accommodate a new User Spatial Environment Unit, a joint collaboration with Life Sciences. The School has recently refurbished A218 Ellison Building to accommodate specialist project work with IT facilities and drawing boards for undergraduate students. The School has a Virtual Environment Suite next to the Hub, managed by the Built Environment Visualisation Centre, which has provided the focus for the enhancement of most of the School's programmes by the use of Virtual Reality technology and VR resource.

The Panel recognised the highly vocational nature of the provision, its history and its reputation amongst students and stakeholders and acknowledged that these strengths needed to be capitalised upon in addressing future challenges. Given changes in HE funding, student expectations may be more demanding and programme planning and delivery will need to take this into account alongside an economic downturn which is particularly likely to impact on this suite of programmes. The provision is already providing overseas programmes and will need to continue to address the internationalisation agenda in the content and delivery of its programmes/activities.

The Panel also recognised that the reconfigured School had only been created recently and that new structural arrangements had yet to be confirmed and embedded.

Section 2	Curricula and Standards

The Panel identified the following strengths:

- The reputation of the provision and its programmes as recognised by students and employers (who applaud the graduates' preparedness for the workplace), as well as external examiners and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies.
- The process by which the provision ensures consistent alignment of the programmes with the FHEQ, benchmark statements and PSRB requirements.
- Built Environment's rigorous approach to responding to external examiners.

The Panel made the following recommendations for further development:

- In planning for future workforce requirements and to capitalise on current relationships with stakeholders, and to ensure it is keeping abreast of market trends, the provision should further formalise cross-sector liaisons. This should inform models of delivery and decisions about the balance of FT/PT/Distance Learning programmes and use of the work-based learning framework to accredit CPD.
- The interdisciplinary exemplar which the panel were shown should be extended further within and beyond the School.
- Whilst recognising the provision is already providing overseas programmes, it will need to continue to address the internationalisation agenda in the content and delivery of its programmes/activities.

Section 3	Management Information Trends

The Panel identified the following strengths:

- The introduction of the Women in Construction Group is commendable.

The Panel made the following recommendations for further development:
- Maintaining vigilance in interpreting management information trends to inform discussions with external stakeholders concerning different models of curriculum delivery and their impact on investment and resources.

Section 4	Student Experience

The Panel identified the following strengths:

- The proactive use of administrative staff to assist in supporting the student journey ("the one stop shop approach") particularly in relation to attendance monitoring.
- The approach used to displaying the programme plan/learning journey in Architecture and Quantity Surveying which was very well received by the students.
- The more formalised guidance tutorial system adopted by the Quantity Surveying Programme Team.
- Student confirmation that the provision is alert and responsive to issues brought up at Programme Committee meetings, including those relating to the provision of assessment feedback.

The Panel made the following recommendations for further development:

- The provision gives further consideration to the monitoring and recording of student support/contact.
- In relation to the Student Hub/Support and Advice centre:
    - appropriate permanent accommodation is designated to ensure that admin/staff student discussions can be conducted in private; and
    - improvement to signage.
- The provision gives further attention to extending opening hours and communicating opening times clearly to students.
- In view of the increased demand for flexible approaches to programme delivery (DL/PT) that the provision needs to ensure equity in the student experience with particular reference to:
    - consideration of the maintenance of the student's work/life balance in the planning and organisation of programmes and assessment;
    - communication with employers about programme arrangements and the development of arrangements which might facilitate some time for independent learning within and outside term times;
    - alignment of teaching room allocation with tasks allocated (e.g. tables of sufficient size to accommodate A3 documents); and
    - management of e assessments for students with weak broadband provision.
- Keeping a watching brief on assessment load and tasks and particularly multi-component summative assessment.

Section 5	Enhancement Strategies

The Panel identified the following strengths:

- The Panel was impressed with the many and varied examples of enhancement they were shown throughout the two days and recognised that a number of these had arisen from APT and RIT awards.

The Panel made the following recommendations for further development:

- The provision should articulate a more formal framework to inform and support the identification, delivery and impact measurement of enhancement activities (supported by the wider University framework).
- Engagement with wider networks to support and disseminate enhancement which may also assist with further funding (particularly given the demise of the Centre in Education in the Built Environment).
- The University considers how it might incentivise enhancement activity in the light of the loss of APT and RIT awards.

Section 6	Discipline Response to Report

Curricula and Standards

In planning for future workforce requirements and to capitalise on current relationships with stakeholders, and to ensure it is keeping abreast of market trends, the provision should further formalise cross-sector liaisons. This should inform models of delivery and decisions about the balance of FT/PT/Distance Learning programmes and use of the work-based learning framework to accredit CPD.
A Built Environment Employer Liaison Group is being be established which will provide strategic support for programme and Continuing Professional Development. Consultation will inform the most appropriate format for liaison e.g. task-focused, discipline focused, industry-wide.

The interdisciplinary exemplar which the panel were shown should be extended further within and beyond the School.
Programme teams have explored opportunities and a number of programmes now include interdisciplinary activity.

Whilst recognising the provision is already providing overseas programmes, it will need to continue to address the internationalisation agenda in the content and delivery of its programmes/activities.
All programmes continue to internationalise their content where feasible, whilst recognising the constraints imposed by the requirements of the accrediting UK Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies.

Management Information Trends

Maintaining vigilance in interpreting management information trends to inform discussions with external stakeholders concerning different models of curriculum delivery and their impact on investment and resources.
This will inform discussions with the Employer Liaison Group (see first action above).

Student Experience

The provision gives further consideration to the monitoring and recording of student support/contact.
The Student Support team carefully record all support provided which is reported annually to the School Learning and Teaching Committee.

In relation to the Student Hub/Support and Advice centre:
  o *appropriate permanent accommodation is designated to ensure that admin/staff student discussions can be conducted in private; and*
  o *improvement to signage.*
These form part of the estate improvements which are being progressed following the School restructure and new space becoming available in Ellison Building.

The provision gives further attention to extending opening hours and communicating opening times clearly to students.
Opening times are currently publicised on My Northumbria, Blackboard and via posters. Opening hours are restricted only by the opening hours of the relevant buildings, but we are in regular dialogue with Estates to extend these at appropriate times (e.g. end of semester 2).

In view of the increased demand for flexible approaches to programme delivery (DL/PT) that the provision needs to ensure equity in the student experience with particular reference to:

- o *consideration of the maintenance of the student's work/life balance in the planning and organisation of programmes and assessment;*
  This continues to be reviewed annually in all programmes.
- o *communication with employers about programme arrangements and the development of arrangements which might facilitate some time for independent learning within and outside term times;*
  Employers are being consulted about communication improvements via the Employer Liaison Group (see first action above).
- o *alignment of teaching room allocation with tasks allocated (e.g. tables of sufficient size to accommodate A3 documents);*
  The timetabling team strive to ensure that appropriate rooms are allocated but there are constraints. The School is currently increasing its project space via refurbishment in Wynne Jones Building.
- o *management of e assessments for students with weak broadband provision*
  Alternative submission arrangements are made for any student with problems of internet access.

Keeping a watching brief on assessment load and tasks and particularly multi-component summative assessment.
Assessment loads are reviewed and revised annually as necessary for all modules.

Enhancement Strategies

The provision should articulate a more formal framework to inform and support the identification, delivery and impact measurement of enhancement activities (supported by the wider University framework).
This is being reviewed in the context of the new School structure. All staff are encouraged to share their enhancement activities at the School's annual Staff Conference as well as staff workshops. New Directors of Learning & Teaching permit more systematic identification and recording of activity across the School.

Engagement with wider networks to support and disseminate enhancement which may also assist with further funding (particularly given the demise of the Centre in Education in the Built Environment).
There is already significant engagement with Professional Statutory Regulatory Body activities which provide fora for support and dissemination.

The University considers how it might incentivise enhancement activity in the light of the loss of APT and RIT awards.
The School restructure and introduction of Directors of Learning & Teaching and Programme Development provide improved opportunities to encourage and support enhancement activity within each Department.