

## **In focus: Our 'Analysis and Adaptation of Buildings' module. Podcast transcript**

**Andrew Belt:** Hello again. Earlier this week we spoke to James Ritson about the sustainability and climate change issues with regards his MSc Building Surveying programme. And today we're going to look at one of his modules which is 'Analysis and Adaptation of Buildings' to find out a little bit more about the module in particular and how it relates back to the programme overall. So, hello again, James.

**James Ritson:** Hello, welcome. Today talking about my favorite module. So, yeah, it should be great.

**AB:** So previously we spoke with you in your role as the Programme Leader, whilst today it's more as Module Leader and, as you say, your favorite module. So it should be quite easy to discuss and let prospective students know a little bit more about what it involves. So that's the best place to start, I think. What is this module all about?

**JR:** Well, it's really about how you begin to start analysing – I think critical analysis is a very important part of postgraduate work – and actually beginning to analyse the physical and (what we sometimes call) the intangible elements in a building. So it might be its history, it might be the period of the style, the type of construction and so forth, and actually how that can be adapted.

We have this phrase in conservation that 'conservation is about managing change'. And very much the management of change is the *raison d'être* of what building surveying is about, be it the change of ownership in a property with a house buyers report or be it altering a hospital for a crisis or so forth. So, the management of change is very much what buildings surveying is about and that's really the topic of this module. And you can't do that properly without being able to understand the scenario and the building. So, it's about analysing it and learning how to change a building.

**AB:** How does it benefit students?

**JR:** It's one of the only building surveying-specific modules that we do along with 'Maintenance Management' and 'Building Pathology'. It covers the very important topics of professional ethics, law, contracts and construction, but I think what it also does is it begins to bring some of those together: bringing those ethics of understanding and respecting other people's views, being able to understand history and being critical of it, being able to understand another person's requirements, balancing requirements of a brief against regulation and possible restrictions that are imposed upon you as a professional. So, yeah, it really does bring that in. And I think that's very much what a building surveyor does, and I'd probably even stretch that to say it's very much what a built environment professional does as well within different contexts. But this is really much a bread and butter kind of module and applies broadly to what most people, at least to some extent, will be doing in practice.

**AB:** What feedback do you get from students? And the second question on that front, what's the success rate of it?

**JR:** I think they enjoy it. I get very good feedback from it. I think they find it challenging in some ways because it is one of the final modules that they will be doing on the MSc. It's challenging because it will be the first time some of them will be drawing a building in the sense of physically coming up with a proposal for a building based on an adaptation scenario. So obviously there are challenges of learning to use new software or doing technical drawings. The feedback I get from the students is overwhelmingly positive.

I think the students also enjoy that they're getting their teeth into a building. I think people become a building surveyor because they want to deal with buildings and people and that's what you're doing on this module.

It is a challenging module, as all the MSC modules are and should be, but they tend to get very good feedback. We get very high pass rates, certainly for those who engage in the module. We rarely get fails on the module. And the feedback is it's a tough module, but they really enjoy it.

In fact, for those who are converting from other building professions – so those who are already, say, Chartered Quantity Surveyors and want to become building surveyors - it's one of the modules that they are recommended to take so that they can retake their APC to become Chartered Building Surveyors. So, even for established building professionals, it's an accepted part of their learning.

The feedback from the students is they really like it because you very much get to know your peers because we do weekly feedback, weekly webinars... We talk to the students a lot and we get to know them and there's much more interaction than they may have on other more technical or numerical modules.

**AB:** And in terms of the management of the module, how long have you been running it and how has it developed in that time?

**JR:** Well, it was one of the modules that when I came to UCEM almost five years ago, I was asked to take over because it's very much my area of expertise. Sustainability, adaptation and understanding of buildings is very much consistent with the building conservation and sustainability research background that I have.

Certainly my experience in practice has been based around understanding some of the wider issues [in the built environment], be it understanding the history of a building, understanding its historic value and the variations in value it may have to different stakeholders. It may have a certain value to the local community. It's good to understand those opposing views. What might really be valued by somebody may not be valued by someone else.

The question example I give is if you were a football fan, you may really value one stadium and if you're the opposition, you may not like that stadium, but you have to understand that there are values associated with that.

I'm very lucky to have a really strong teaching team on the module. I've got Amanda Lewis who runs a really good series of webinars and resources on the history of architecture. Instead of just going through them all, she draws along three parallel threads of technology, society and architecture while teaching it and I think that's really interesting.

Understanding how society changes and how our built environment changes with all of those changing cultures and environments is important, particularly understanding that international aspect of it as well. UCEM is constantly evolving its modules. We always say to our students: 'this is what your diet will be' but we constantly evolve our diet in light of professional body requirements from the likes of the RICS and the Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors. As well as feedback from our professional bodies, we consult employers and students. We're constantly evolving that, even to the extent that we ask for weekly feedback from the students.

From the feedback, we might add webinars, videos and so forth to assist our students. So, it is a constantly evolving beast.

**AB:** Thank you, James, for taking us through the module and thanks for listening.