
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board
to the Manipal Academy of Higher
Education, Dubai**

Date of visiting board: 25-26 February 2025
Confirmed by RIBA: 25 April 2025

- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** (report part A)
Manipal Academy of Higher Education
Dubai International Academic City
Dubai
UAE
- 2 Chairperson & Professor (School of Design & Architecture)**
Dr Bhakti More
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**
Part 1 BArch Bachelor of Architecture programme
- 4 Awarding body**
Manipal Academy of Higher Education
- 5 The visiting board**

Sally Stewart	Chair / Academic
Alida Bata	Academic / Practitioner
Samantha Hardingham	Academic
Sandra Woodall	Regional Representative / Practitioner
Sophie Bailey	RIBA Head of Validation
- 6 Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education**
The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture (published September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this document is available at www.architecture.com.
- 7 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**
On 25 April 2025 the RIBA confirmed initial validation of the following course:

BArch Bachelor of Architecture (Part 1)

The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2030.
- 8 Standard requirements for continued recognition**
Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:
 - i external examiners being appointed for the course
 - ii any significant changes to the courses and qualifications being submitted to the RIBA
 - iii any change of award title, and the effective date of the change, being notified to the RIBA so that its recognition may formally be transferred to the new title
 - iv submission to the RIBA of the names of students passing the courses and qualifications listed
 - v In the UK, standard requirements of validation include the completion of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department

9 **Academic position statement** (Statement written by the school)

The School of Design and Architecture at Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE), Dubai, offers a dynamic and immersive learning environment that equips students to tackle 21st-century challenges in both global and local contexts. By embracing academic flexibility and holistic development, the school ensures that graduates are well-prepared to thrive in the evolving architectural landscape.

A Comprehensive Curriculum

Recognizing the profound impact of design on shaping the built environment, the curriculum fosters an interdisciplinary approach that integrates human behaviour, environmental dynamics, and technological advancements. The program structure is designed to offer a strong foundation in the initial years, gradually advancing toward application-based learning in the final years. The first three years focus on building core knowledge and skill sets, while the last two years emphasize real-world applications and professional readiness. Courses are structured to interconnect vertically and horizontally, reinforcing cumulative learning across semesters.

Student-Centred Learning and Pedagogy

The school employs a student-centred teaching approach that integrates theoretical knowledge with practical applications. A blend of traditional and contemporary teaching methodologies—such as studio-based learning, hands-on workshops, experiential learning, and digital simulations—nurtures critical thinking and creativity. State-of-the-art facilities, including advanced design studios, smart classrooms, a computation lab, an AR & VR lab, and a comprehensive digital resource centre, enhance the learning experience. Over 12 years, the school has established a strong presence in the UAE by engaging with regional architectural practices through curriculum development, research collaborations, and industry partnerships. With design projects in both local and global context the school gives an opportunity to The Bachelor of Architecture program has been recognized as a "Program of Strength" by the Knowledge & Human Development Authority (KHDA), Government of Dubai, based on metrics such as graduate employment rate, international student representation, completion rate, faculty-student ratio, and accreditation standards. ([KHDA HECR Rating 2022](#)).

Industry Engagement and Student Achievements

The students' work has received recognition in regional and international design competitions, with portfolios gaining appreciation from leading architectural firms. Competitions such as the Saint-Gobain Architecture Student Contest have provided a platform for students to showcase their skills and innovation. ([Saint-Gobain Contest](#)). Collaborations with international design practices have opened avenues for research and technological explorations, such as leveraging 3D printing in architectural design. Students also gain hands-on experience through internships, real-world projects, and

international exchange programs, ensuring they are industry-ready upon graduation.

Commitment to Sustainability and Net-Zero Goals

With a strong focus on sustainability, the school actively advances research in resilient and energy-efficient built environments. As a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Race to Zero initiative, faculty and students are engaged in MAHE Dubai's 2040 carbon-neutral plan. Their participation in green campus audits, retrofitting projects, and climate mitigation research underscores this commitment.

One of the school's significant sustainability projects was its participation in the Solar Decathlon Middle East 2020 – Expo Edition, organized by Dubai Electricity and Water Authority (DEWA). This initiative involved collaboration with over 25 industry partners and more than 80 students across disciplines to design and build a solar-powered net-zero home. [Solar Decathlon Middle East | Solar Decathlon](#) The school's dedication to sustainability has been recognized with awards such as CIBSE's Digital Innovation of the Year and Sustainability Initiative of the Year and underscores its commitment to climate action https://www.instagram.com/manipaldxb/p/DB1irl2v96E/?img_index=1 The school's engagement in COP28 and beyond highlights its commitment to climate action, ensuring students contribute meaningfully to global sustainability efforts.

Research and Academic Excellence

Faculty and students actively participate in research that informs and enriches the curriculum. Publications such as Sustainable Resilient Built Environments: Proceedings of SRBE 2022 ([SpringerLink](#)) and the Manipal International Symposium on Design (MISD) 2024 demonstrate the school's focus on knowledge advancement.

The Global Tall Building Studio Program is a unique offering that engages architects shaping Dubai's skyline, allowing students to collaborate internationally on research in tall building design and vertical urbanism.

Heritage and Conservation Initiatives

Heritage and conservation are integral to preserving cultural identity. The school has undertaken significant documentation projects in the UAE, including the Sharjah Architectural Documentation Project, which recorded landmark structures from the 1970s. This initiative evolved into the Al Mahatta Museum Documentation Project, preserving UAE's first airport. The research contributed to a Conservation Management Plan submitted to the Sharjah Museums Authority and resulted in academic dissertations and an exhibition in 2017.

The school continues to celebrate UAE's modern architectural heritage, working closely with the Ministry of Culture and Youth to integrate heritage studies into its curriculum. ([Instagram: Modern Architectural Heritage](#)).

Urban Studies and the Dubai 2040 Master Plan

The final-year students engage in urban analysis projects aligned with the **Dubai 2040 Master Plan**, focusing on sustainability and liveability. These projects encourage students to assess Dubai's urban fabric across multiple scales—macro to micro—while proposing strategic urban interventions. Such projects equip students with the skills to analyse, design, and implement urban strategies that are sustainable, inclusive, and contextually relevant.

Looking Ahead: A Vision for the Future

The School of Design and Architecture at MAHE Dubai is committed to continuous innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration in architectural education. By integrating emerging technologies and industry best practices, the school ensures that students graduate with the skills and knowledge required to excel in a rapidly evolving global environment.

With a strong emphasis on active learning strategies and alignment with international standards, the program prepares students to address complex challenges with technical proficiency, creativity, and ethical responsibility. The school's vision includes fostering critical thinking, cultural appreciation, and sustainable design solutions, shaping the next generation of visionary architects.

10 Commendations

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 The Board commends the positive and collegiate spirit of the academic staff and student body, as demonstrated through their engagement with the RIBA visiting board.
- 10.2 The Board commends the School's relationship with industry and the profession within the region.
- 10.3 The Board commends the continued support for the architecture provision by the institutional leadership at MAHE, Dubai.

11 Action points

The visiting board proposes the following action points. The RIBA expects the university to report on how it will address these action points. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 11.1 The School should develop ways in which the complete BArch academic portfolio is collated and presented, in order for all students to clearly demonstrate compliance with the RIBA Themes and Values and Graduate Attributes at Part 1.
- 11.2 The School must produce an accurate mapping document to ensure and demonstrate that at least 50% of all assessed work is undertaken as Design Studio Projects.
- 11.3 The School must revise its mapping against the Graduate Attributes at Part 1 to ensure it is clear where these have been achieved, and where evidence of this can be found within the academic portfolio.

- 11.4 The School must better consider how the climatic, social, and environmental context of the region can be used to frame design propositions within projects that students can engage with directly. This may lead to innovation in future practice in response to these critical challenges.

12. Advice

The visiting board offers the following advice to the School on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

- 12.1 The Board recommends the School consider how field trips and study visits can be used consistently to ensure students have firsthand experience that informs the development of their architectural knowledge and design thinking. This should be considered across all subjects.
- 12.2 The School should consider the implementation of an external examiner process, to provide scrutiny of the quality and standards of the programme and provide benchmarking across the sector.
- 12.3 The School should explore the earlier introduction of extended writing to encourage the development of critical thinking and reflection, and the stronger articulation of design arguments. To support this, reading lists, particularly within History and Theory, should be extended and actively engaged with.
- 12.4 The School should consider making clearer the connection between the work undertaken within the Dissertation ARC5103 (semester nine) and the Thesis ARC5102 (semester ten) and the role of the semester nine work as a feasibility phase to support the final Design Thesis.
- 12.5 Within the framework of the Indian Council of Architecture and the shared MAHE curriculum, the School should explore how speculation, exploration and experimentation can be introduced into studio briefs allowing greater breadth of focus, processes, and outputs.

13 Delivery of graduate attributes

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered graduate attributes to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or an attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a graduate attribute was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Graduate Attributes for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the BArch Bachelor of Architecture programme.

14 Review of work against Themes and Values

It should be noted that where the Visiting Board considered the Themes and Values to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a T&V were clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested

a T&V was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

Themes and Values for Part 1

The Board confirmed that all of the Themes and Values were met by graduates of the BArch Bachelor of Architecture programme.

15 Notes of meetings

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings. These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request.

- Budget holder and course leaders
- Students
- Head of Institution
- External examiners
- Staff