Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Visiting Board to Abu Dhabi University
College of Engineering

Bachelor of Architecture Part 1

Date of visiting board: 6 & 7 February 2018
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 1 June 2018
1. **Details of institution hosting course**  
Abu Dhabi University  
Abu Dhabi Campus  
P.O Box 59911, Abu Dhabi, UAE

2. **Head of Department & Programme Coordinator**  
Dr Mohamed El Amrousi

3. **Courses offered for validation**  
Bachelor of Architecture

4. **Awarding body**  
Abu Dhabi University  
Abu Dhabi Campus  
P.O Box 59911, Abu Dhabi, UAE

5. **The visiting board**  
Cameron Wilson - Chair  
Dr Jenny Russell – Vice Chair  
Andy Usher  
Akshay Khera – Regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – RIBA validation manager - in attendance.

6. **Procedures and criteria for the visit**  
The visiting board was carried out under the *RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria for UK and international courses and examinations in architecture* (published July 2011, and effective from September 2011); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

7. **Proposals of the visiting board**  
The Visiting Board recommended to the RIBA Education Committee that the following programme receive validation with conditions

   Bachelor of Architecture Part 1

The RIBA Education Committee confirmed this recommendation by circulation on 1 June 2018.

Re-evaluation of the student portfolios by means of a revisit by a sub-group to consider the School’s response to the condition will take place in summer 2019.

8. **Standard requirements for recognition**  
RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:  
i external examiners (or an acceptable alternative) 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
In the UK, standard requirements of validation include the completion by the institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department.

9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

The Architecture Program has approximately 400 students. The Bachelor of Architecture is a 5-year program (the 1st cohort was admitted in Fall 2009). The first cohort of Architecture students graduated in Spring 2014. The Architecture Program through its emphasis on design studios as the backbone of its curriculum, established itself as a unique and thorough program not only for the UAE but the whole region. Our school attracts students from the gulf and beyond. It is distinct due to its academic reputation, uniqueness in Abu Dhabi and to its emphasis on design. The curriculum combines technical proficiency and design thinking. In fact, design experience is the main distinguishing factor for ADU’s architecture program when paralleled with others in the area. It is one of two in the country to produce graduates with a focus on design. The department is the largest in the College of Engineering in terms of faculty members. It is also one of the largest in terms of student numbers. Allocated in Abu Dhabi the program is expanding to offer courses in Al Ain and Dubai. The program has had a high number of new student incoming in Fall 2017 and is becoming more and more popular as the University continues to expand, the architecture department continues to cultivate new horizons and expertise. The multinational academic and professional experience of academic faculty brings a richness of thinking to architecture and a range of teaching and research activities. We have 15 fulltime and 2 part-time faculty members and 3 teaching assistants. Faculty members in the department are committed to quality education, and their multicultural backgrounds, and experiences offers student exposure to a broad range of expertise and knowledge. Our students come from different backgrounds and are very engaged and motivated.

The program aims to provide a degree to best prepare students for professional success. We educate our students to become architects who are skilled, competent and responsive to their environment; to become individuals that can positively participate in designing a sustainable future. To this aim, the program seeks to cultivate a studio-based architecture and design education and encourages a spirit of professional standards and innovation; an environment focusing on critical inquiry of design praxis. The critical analysis and response to the various meanings of context (be it environmental, social, cultural or urban etc.) helps to engage students with the local milieu. The Architecture Program delivers academic content using lectures, Studios, one-on-one, hands on teaching approach especially in Design Studios. This is the common practice for delivery of comparable programs in the world as has been shown to meet market needs. Lectures give room to introduce and analyze the theoretical technical content of the courses, while studios allow students to apply their theoretical knowledge obtained to be applied as design projects. Our curriculum evolves based on
The Architecture Program at ADU adopts a number of values.

1. **A Focus on Sustainability and Environmental Design:** Being located in an extreme climate the Program encourages a special consideration of the environmental context and fosters sustainable design. The program consists of an important number of courses focused on Environmental and Sustainable Design (ARC240, ARC 420, ARC 540). This strand makes an important part of the curriculum. The continuing development and success of the program is further strengthened by the establishment of a Masters in Sustainable Architecture in 2015.

2. **Linking Teaching & Research:** Abu Dhabi University is investing heavily in developing research culture this is highlighted by presence of Research Centers in the University and the number of research grants awarded to the faculty members each year. In this context, the Architecture Program in ADU is committed to maintaining and developing its research profile; this is evident in the current research practices of our teaching staff and the expansion of the program with postgraduate degrees. Our faculty members are involved with a wide variety of projects, including research in sustainable architecture; computer aided design, urban design, housing, history and theory; and research exploring the intersections between art and architecture. There is a growing emphasis on the link between teaching and research. We believe this attitude teaches students to adopt a critical, enquiring attitude and independent thinking.

3. **Computer Technology and Digital Modelling:** Students learn CAD techniques and digital representation skills as well as 3D visualization, 3D printing and laser modeling. The department is investing in modelling laboratory (laser cutters and 3D printers).

4. **Community Engagement:** The school adopts a participatory role and works to build ties with the community through its organization of a Guest Lecture Series that allows students and professionals from the industry to share their experiences. Among the invited speakers in 2016-2017 are: Ahmed Al Ali from X Architects (Spring 2016), Kenneth Turner from RTKL Dubai (Fall 2016); Masa Noguchi from Melbourne School of Design/ Australia (Spring 2017); Hamad Khoury from LOCI architecture + design (Spring 2017); Kas Oosterhuis from ONL Netherlands (Spring 2017); Tarik Zaharna from TZED architects (Fall 2017). The Architecture Department facilitates faculty and students’ involvement with external organisations in their fields. Through regular field trips to new building projects, invited speakers, invited reviewers to juries. Participation in local and international events from competitions to...
design fairs (list examples, exhibiting work, competitions, Dubai Design Week, INDEX etc.). Moreover, an important engagement with the community is achieved through the internship course (ARC399) The Department regularly coordinates and oversees the required internship requirements. This results in feedback about are students’ skills and the most needed workforce skills for the future. The purpose of the internship is to expose students to the professional world and to give them an opportunity to apply their gained academic knowledge into practice. Furthermore, the Department organized with Careers the invitation of speakers Arch Piyush Bajpai from Xarchitects, Architects Emad & Haifa from Avant-garde Architects & Engineers and Architect Mahmoud Adly from Trojan General Contracting LLC.

5. **Student Participation:** Perhaps our greatest asset is our talented and enthusiastic students, and we value and support their sense of community. The students recently formulated their own association “The Architecture and Design Club” and coordinate field trips, student exhibitions in Abu Dhabi and Alain in addition to attending Guest Speaker’s Lectures from the Industry that help us empower our students to play an active role in the university and beyond.

These principles are reflected in our teaching activities. They are considered essential to the academic experience of our students. The current course structure helps students to build their portfolio towards practices that reflects the kind of architect they aspire to become.

10 **Commendations**
The visiting board made the following commendations:

10.1 The architecture students in their student-led projects, competitions and creation of the Architecture and Design Club (student society). The Board was impressed at the level of institutional support for this initiative.

10.2 The substantial investment and creation of new buildings and future plans for the development of architecture. The Board also noted the future plans to create new campuses at Al Ain and Dubai.

11 **Conditions**
The following conditions apply.

Action points 6.2 and 6.3 of the Exploratory Board of August 2016 specifically concerned the requirements to present a sample of complete academic portfolios and assessment sheets in accordance with the Procedures for Validation. These were not available in full at the Full Visit as required. The full academic portfolio is essential evidence for visiting boards in determining whether all graduate attributes and criteria have been satisfactorily met. A revisiting board will take place in the summer of 2019 to consider whether the condition has been met.
The Board re-iterates these two points as below:

The revisiting board must see a comprehensive academic portfolio of work from an agreed sample of students in accordance with the Procedures for Validation. The academic portfolio is described in section 4.7 of the Procedures document (page 34). All items in bold must be included.

Alongside the folio work will also be included the relevant assessment sheets (as per section 4.4 of the Procedures for Validation, page 26 and 27, first two bullet points).

Folios from years 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 must presented from the 2018-2019 graduating cohort.

Revisits (page 37 of Procedures document)
- where the revisiting sub-group is satisfied the conditions in the report have been met, the RIBA Education Committee will recommend validation without conditions until the next scheduled visiting board (i.e. 5 years after the last full board visit)
- if after considering new work at the revisit, the sub-group is not satisfied the necessary improvements have been made, a full board will visit the school usually no more than 12 months after the revisiting sub-group; this will result either in continued validation or withdrawal of validation
- if no revisit is agreed with the school within 3 months of the RIBA Education Committee ratifying the final version of the visiting board report requiring a revisit, validation will be withdrawn.

12 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. The university is referred to the RIBA’s criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring processes. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

12.1 The Department must develop its academic position statement in order to accurately reflect the qualities of the architecture programme.

12.2 The Board draws the Department’s attention to the graduate attributes for Part 1 and the underpinning Criteria for Validation. It must take cognizance of the criteria sub-headings. These must be reflected in the mapping document.

13 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.

13.1 The Board recommends that the Department continues to ensure that the implementation of environmental design, construction and structure is applied and fully integrated in major design work; for instance, the high-rise project and the graduation project.
13.2 The Board recommends that the projects in years 3 and 4 would benefit from continued review. Projects should consider a range of scale, duration of projects, variety of theme and focus of investigation. The Board suggests that the Department could consider adopting similar strategies utilised in years 1 and 2.

13.3 The Board encourages the Department to evidence the discussion of architectural history and theory within student portfolios.

14 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.

15 Review of work against criteria
It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

The Board had no additional comments.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers
Abu Dhabi campus: 300 full time students; 20 part-time.

16.2 Documentation provided
Please refer to the Condition (section 11) regarding the provision and presentation of documentation in accordance with the RIBA Validation Procedures.

17. Notes of meetings
The RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings on request. They will not form part of the published report. The full set of notes will be issued to the next full visiting board.

17.1 Meeting with the Dean and Head of School
17.2 Meeting with students
17.3 Meeting with the Head of Institution
17.4 Meeting with external examiners
17.5 Meeting with staff