Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Exploratory Board to the Azerbaijan University of Architecture & Construction

Baku, Azerbaijan

Bachelor’s programme
Master of Architecture Buildings and Constructions
Master of Design of Architectural Environment
Master of Restoration and Reconstruction of Architectural Monuments
Master of Urban Planning

Date of visiting board: 19-20 May 2016
Confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee: 7 December 2016
Introduction
The Board wishes to thank the Azerbaijan University of Architecture & Construction, Baku for its invitation to consider the programmes listed below for RIBA candidate course status.

1.1 **Course offered for Part 1 candidate course status**
Bachelor’s programme

1.2 **Master’s pathways offered for Part 2 candidate course status**
Master of Architecture Buildings and Constructions
Master of Design of Architectural Environment
Master of Restoration and Reconstruction of Architectural Monuments
Master of Urban Planning

1.3 **Name of awarding body**
Azerbaijan University of Architecture & Construction
A.Sultanova str., 5. Az-1073
Baku
Azerbaijan

1.4 **Dean of Faculty**
Dr Zahida Mammadova, Architect

2. **Members of the Exploratory Board**
Ms Roz Barr
Ms Jane McAllister
Mr John Ashton
Nazim Farajzade, Regional representative

Ms Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk (RIBA validation manager) was in attendance.

3 **Procedures and criteria for the visit**
The Exploratory Board was carried out under the *RIBA procedures for validation and validation criteria*, effective from September 2011. For more information see [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

4 **Recommendations of the Exploratory Board**

4.1 **Bachelor of Architecture**
At its meeting on 7 December 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed Candidate Course Status for Part 1 for the following programme:

 Bachelor’s programme

**Candidate Course status**
The designation ‘candidate course for recognition’ implies that the programme is considered to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated. It is not equivalent to validation, which is only granted once the standards of work have been assessed and found satisfactory by a full board.

A full visiting board to consider the programme for initial validation and full RIBA recognition of Part 1 only will take place no earlier than 2019.
and no later than 2021. The Procedures for Validation (September 2011; second revision May 2014, p22) state that in the case of an existing provider candidate course status for validation should not usually exceed 2 years from the date given in the exploratory board report. The present Exploratory Board has, at its discretion, agreed that a minimum of 3 years is reasonable. This is subject to the agreement of the RIBA Education Committee.

The full visiting board will take place at a date to be mutually agreed between the University and the RIBA. This will also be subject to the RIBA receiving evidence that the Exploratory Board’s action points have been acted upon.

4.2 Master’s programmes
Although invited to consider the following for Part 2 Candidate Course status, the Exploratory Board agreed that it was not in a position to do so, for the reasons stated:

- Master of Architecture Buildings and Constructions
- Master of Design of Architectural Environment
- Master of Restoration and Reconstruction of Architectural Monuments
- Master of Urban Planning

The Exploratory Board believes that it is necessary for the Faculty to seriously implement the action points at degree level recommended by both Professor Farrelly and the present Board before it seeks validation for these master’s programmes.

There was insufficient evidence available for the Board to consider the master’s programmes at this visit.

This recommendation was confirmed by the RIBA Education Committee at its meeting on 7 December 2016.

5 Commendations
The Visiting Board commends the following:

5.1 The students were extremely eloquent and engaged at our student meeting and we were encouraged by their clear communication and feedback skills.

5.2 The board were encouraged by the support and understanding the Rector had for the course.

5.3 The board considered the Restoration “chair” a strength of the course due to its emphasis on the heritage and understanding of the adaptation of existing buildings and their cultural context.

5.4 The Board commends the Faculty’s international outlook as exemplified in its active participation in staff and student exchanges and international competitions.
6 Action points
The following action points are intended as constructive suggestions to the institution: The board acknowledge that Professor Lorraine Farrelly’s report of December 2015 has not been actioned as of yet and recognises that this is due to timescales. The board strongly advises that this is implemented before the next steps towards validation are considered. Further comments can be found under Section 9: “Consideration of course content against the Part 1 Graduate Attributes and criteria”.

6.1 Mentor Visit for the Azerbaijan University of Architecture Outline Report December 2015. Please refer to:

“1.2 Course content”
In the documentation prepared for the Exploratory Board there is no reference to the course content.

The board requires that the university articulates what the core strengths and specialisms of the course are identified; for example, the Faculty’s ethos and the course delivery and facilities. This should also be reflected in the Faculty’s academic position statement.

The Faculty needs to describe how the course is delivered under the following headings.
- Design
- Technology
- Architectural Context.

In order to meet with the criteria of validation the Faculty must adhere to delivering 50% of all assessed work at Part 1 and Part 2 is undertaken as design studio projects.

“Schools will…
- Provide courses where at least 50% of all assessed work at part 1 and part 2 is undertaken as design studio projects.”

(RIBA Procedures for Validation, September 2011, second revision May 2014, page 5).

6.2 The Year 4 ‘diploma’ project at present would not demonstrate that the Part 1 graduate attributes had been met. The Board strongly recommends that projects undertaken at this point be of sufficient complexity and scale that would be expected by the RIBA at Part 1. Such complexity will require integration of the other two areas of the course, namely Technology and Architectural Context. It is imperative that sufficient time allowed in the curriculum to enable students to develop and clearly present a robust project.

6.3 The Board strongly recommends that portfolios are developed that demonstrate the process of student and project development from inception to the realization of their design project.

6.4 The course would benefit from a designated co-ordinator for each year group and a facilitator who has oversight of the entire programme at
Advice
The visiting board offers the following advice to the institution on desirable, but not essential, improvements, which it is felt would assist course development and raise standards:

7.1 The Board advises that the University consider installing wifi as this would facilitate a studio culture.

7.2 In order to enhance the students’ presentation and development skills, the Board welcomes the arrival of the new workshop facilities that will be accessible to all students. The Board look forward to seeing the outcomes of this new facility.

7.3 In order to assist the Faculty in its bid to gain Part 1, the Board advises that engagement of an external mentor will be of benefit.

7.4 Following its meeting with the National Union of Architects, the Board suggests that more connections with live projects and practice would be beneficial and help improve students’ presentation skills.

8. Academic position statement (written by the Faculty).
The Accreditation Commission was established with the order number 1136 in 18.11.2014 by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan Republic. The Accreditation Commission in November-December 2014 in order to determine the compliance of the Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction activities to appropriate requirements of the state educational standards has carried out inspections in various fields and prepared a report. In connection with this, the Self-evaluation commission was organized by the university administration and a planning of events (activities) was prepared. The Accreditation Commission, in order to check the last year students’ knowledge level, carried out an examination for 23 specialties of bachelor’s degree, and 25 specialties of master’s degree. Students studied for a bachelor’s degree, from Azerbaijani section- 947, from Russian section- 174, from English section- 44 persons, and studied for master’s degree- from Azerbaijani section- 129, from Russian section- 21, and from English section- 4 students were participated in these exams. In general, an indicator of success in bachelor degree was 82,8% and an indicator of education quality was 53,7%. In master's degree an indicator of success and the quality was 100%. It was highly assessed by the Accreditation Commission.

The Accreditation Commission has comprehensively analyzed the activities of the university in accordance with the requirements of the organizational legal provisions of legislation, the state of the university management, the compliance of the teaching plans with the basic educational programs, the compliance of the subjects that are included into teaching plans and the content of programs relevant to the state educational standards, the amount of hours allocated to the taught subjects relevant to the teaching plans, the compliance of the subjects with the modern sources of information, the compliance of the
recommended methodological aids with the subject programs in the library fund and theirs’ copies to the existing norms, the students’ term papers, the documents related to the carrying out internships, students’ final graduation works, and the results of the final state examinations, master’s thesis, also an involvement of masters and a number of bachelor’s students to each research supervisor who is leading theirs final work relevant to the existing norms, the changes made in the structure of specialist’s preparation, and the compliance to the requirements with the organizations profile, labor market.

The organization of the educational process, relevant to the teaching plans, using new training technologies and methods that increase students’ activity, the compliance to the requirements with the basic educational laboratories, the usage of the new information technologies in the process of education, teaching lab facilities compliant with the requirements, the use of new information technologies in education, the quality of the educational preparation programs, the compliance of the final works’ themes with the educational programs, the present condition of the university human capacities and dynamics, the use of research works’ results in educational process, financing sources of the scientific research works, a number of doctoral students and dissertation authors entrusted to the research supervisor according to the norms, carrying out the scientific-methodical and practical conferences at the university, the development of international relations and its implementation, the relation to the education of foreign citizens at university, the material-technical base and social conditions of the university, financial statements of the university and other issues.

As a result, taking into consideration the above mentioned notes, the Accreditation Commission came to a conclusion that the indicators of the Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction were approved by the Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan Republic and by other executive organs. And it is compliant with the requirements of the legal normative documents. According to the criteria for determining the compliance status of the university activities, it was assessed “good”. Experts from our university attend different events that are held both by local and foreign organizations. One of such event was a conference organized by QAA (The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education) in London. It conducts quality assessment reviews, develops reference points and guidance for providers. The aim was to learn how universities, colleges and alternative providers of UK higher education maintain their academic standards and quality. One of the aims of AzUAC is to improve the quality of higher education and to make students become world-class specialists.

Our university works in the direction to inspire students to obtain a deeper knowledge of the subjects they’re studying. Also to provide support and resources in order to help students achieve their academic and personal goals. Mostly, it will be better for students to use 3D projects and our mission is to create special laboratories for them. Recently 2 laboratories have been opened in the university with the joint effort of other companies like “Holcim” - Adhesive materials.
and concrete testing laboratory, “Pasha Holding”- "Construction examination and application of structures" laboratory. These laboratories are supplied with all modern equipment.

Teachers play an important role in the classroom and are responsible for motivating students to learn. This year an “Internal Assessment” was held by Strategic Planning department. “Internal Assessment” was developed for systemizing the remuneration of academic staff, to determine their salaries in accordance with the scope of work they carried out. The main purpose of the program was a fair selection of the best teachers. This project is highly appreciated by the administration of the University.

9 Consideration of course content against the Part 1 Graduate Attributes and criteria

9.1 Whilst the visiting board appreciated that the school had considered the contents of the mentor report prepared by Professor Lorraine Farrelly, the school is again referred to this report, section 3.0, ‘Documents and correspondence’, in particular the sections reproduced below:

“In summary a set of revised documents should be sent to the RIBA including : An introduction to the School, its context and history and rationale for introduction of course and proposed special features of course.” The date for submission of these documents is to be agreed with the RIBA, in anticipation of a future visit.

1. A revised academic position statement which describes the vision for the School and its future development. This should be 2 sides of A4 maximum.

2. A revised mapping document which maps the course at Part 1 only against the General Criteria and the Graduate attributes for each course at Part 1 only.

This must clearly illustrate that at least 50% of all assessed work is undertaken as design studio projects.

3. A clear structure plan / diagram of the courses so all the various elements can be clearly understood and how they relate to the whole course of study. These diagrams should cross reference to the mapping document to explain how the academic modules relate to the course.

4. A set of descriptions of each of the courses to explain what is studied and how this is assessed (possibly using the template as described above).

5. Typical examples of design project briefs issued to students

6. Any comments from external examiners

7. Selected examples of student work illustrating outcomes of academic modules.
This could be a limited set of information scanned as examples of student design work at year 1, 2, 3, and 4.

9.2 To expand upon point 6.1 (above) the school is further referred to Professor Farrelly’s report, section 1.2, ‘Course Content’.

“For validation requirements, it is important that that at least 50% of the course must be ‘design’, taught in studio. The course content also needs to be described in a more accessible way. It needs a clear diagram and supporting information about each academic module so that someone externally can understand the course structure and its relationship to the mapping against RIBA criteria.

“For the specific course content, in my brief view of the students work, I think that the hand drawing approach is important for the School, however the way students are formally taught CAD needs some explanation in the course work. In addition, I think it is very important that students are aware of various environmental modelling tools that they can utilise and apply to the design work. There are a range of pieces of software such as Ecotech which would support students learning and understanding around environmental design. This is an important aspect of every architecture course internationally, that students understand the implications of their design decisions on their environment.

“The student design projects need to explain the process of design including
i) Conceptual development in sketch and physical model form
ii) Site analysis to demonstrate understanding of environmental and contextual conditions
iii) Set of orthographic drawings (plans, sections and elevations) of the design project at a range of appropriate drawings scales (such as 1:100, 1:200, 1:500).
iv) At some point to have some information that explains a more detailed understanding of a building or design project at a more detailed scale to illustrate understanding of construction materials and structure. This can typically be a range of section and detail drawings at scales such as 1:50 and 1:5, 1:10.
v) General Criteria 8 and 9 (GC 8 and GC 9) require some understanding of construction engineering problems associated with building design and certain functions associated with buildings. For this reason, it would not be appropriate to include the Master Degree for ‘Landscape’ for consideration for the Part 2 validation, unless there is a building design as part of the students design project. Equally for the Master Degree ‘Urban Planning’ there would need to be a building design brief at some point in the course for this to be relevant for consideration for Part 2 validation.

“Another point to consider is how and when students engage with a
piece of structured **critical writing**. This may be at the Bachelor or Masters stage, but this is not clear in the course. As well as visual literacy, students need to demonstrate an ability to write and comment on various aspects of architecture, whether technical, social, cultural or historical, to prepare them for possible future study as well as professional practice. This needs to be more evident in the course. It may happen as part of the history theory course, or it may be a piece of reflective writing that students produce at some point in their course. This piece of writing is typically 3000 words but it may be more.”

9.3 **Facilities**
The School is referred to Professor Lorraine Farrelly’s report, section 1.4:

“Model-making workshops would be useful facilities for students so they can experiment with various model-making techniques to make 3D maquettes of their work at various scales and at various points in their design project. I am aware that there is a proposal to develop a model-making workshop for students. Also it would be useful to have more student work evident throughout the School.

“There were some examples of student design work on the walls of the School, but there could be more exhibited and this would stimulate student interest in the work of their peers as well as showcase the work to visitors.”

9.4 **The Graduate Attributes for part 1**
The Board makes the following comments in reference to specific graduate attributes for Part 1.

**GA1** With regard to meeting the eleven General Criteria at parts 1 and 2 above, the part 1 will be awarded to students who have:

**GA1.1** ability to generate design proposals using understanding of a body of knowledge, some at the current boundaries of professional practice and the academic discipline of architecture;

The Exploratory Board’s comment:
In its pedagogy, the course does not allow for a range of architectural approaches to practice. At present it requires students to undertake strategic data mapping instead of a comprehensive social, cultural, and spatial engagement with the city of Baku. Most of the schemes started with top-down (i.e. from the general to the particular) master-planning and few, if any, explored space.

**GA1.2** ability to apply a range of communication methods and media to present design proposals clearly and effectively;

The Exploratory Board’s comment:
The absence of full portfolios provided the Board with little evidence of comprehensive architectural design.
The Board considered that the issue referred to under GA1.1 impacted upon the students’ methods of communication, and thus the range of scales of making, the clients/users with whom they are communicating and, lastly, the drawings, models and techniques used as media for communication. The range of scales may be influenced by the examples in the school’s immediate vicinity. Please also cross refer to Professor Farrelly’s comments regarding facilities (paragraph 9.3, above).

Overall, the Board would wish to see a range of practice methods, both professional and pedagogic, and sufficient time within the curriculum for students to explore them in the context of comprehensive design studio projects.

10 Other information

10.1 Documentation provided
In its action points and advice the Board has made several recommendations for revision of the documentation to provide greater clarity.

10.2 Student numbers
Bachelor degree: 675
Master’s degree: 67

11. Meeting notes
These notes will not form part of the published report but will be made available on request. The full set of notes will be issued to the next full visiting board.

- Meeting with Rector
- Meeting with Dean
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with Staff
- Meeting with the Union of Architects