Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering & Geodesy (UACG): Sofia, Bulgaria

Date of visiting board: 27/28 November 2014
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 17 April 2015
1 Details of institution hosting course/s (report part A)
University of Architecture, Civil Engineering & Geodesy
1 Hr. Smirnenski Blvd
1046 Sofia
Bulgaria

2 Head of Architecture
Prof. Dr. Arch. Asen Metodiev Pisarski

3 Course/s offered for revalidation
Master of Architecture, Part 1 and Part 2

4 Course leader/s
Nikolai Davidkov, Panayot Savov, Mariana Tzvetkova- Part 1
Mariana Tzvetkova, Aleksandrina Nenkova, Violeta Komitova, Georgi Stanishev, Part 2

5 Awarding body
University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia

6 The visiting board
Roger Hawkins – Chair, Practitioner
Matt Gaskin – Vice Chair, Academic
Andrew Wilson – Academic
Tina Frost – Practitioner
Ivo Panteleev- regional representative

[Sophie Bailey – RIBA Education Validation Manager]

7 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.

8 Proposals of the visiting board
On the 17 April 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

Master of Architecture RIBA part 1
Master of Architecture RIBA part 2

The next full Visiting Board to the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering & Geodesy will take place in 2019.

9 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 by the
institution of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education
Department

10 Academic position statement
(Statement written by the school)

The Faculty of Architecture (FA) is situated within the University of
Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG), the former Higher
Institute of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy which is the eldest
institution in Bulgaria offering an education in the fields of civil engineering
and architecture since 1942. Located within the city centre of Sofia the Faculty
of Architecture offers Bachelor, Master and Doctoral programs, concentrating
at one campus all educational facilities, library, student workshops and
exhibition spaces.

The Faculty of Architecture has developed its own approach to architectural
education and research focusing on a complex professional development of
students by a wide range of disciplines from engineering, liberal arts and social
sciences. During 11 semesters or 5.5 years of education students have to study
87 disciplines- 45 lecture courses, 26 design projects, 5 types of practical
trainings and other engineering design projects and drawing exercises. The
distribution of disciplines by scientific field for a graduate master degree in
architecture and its related professional qualification is regulated by a state
ordinance from 2003, defining 9 scientific fields in architectural education:
three and history of art and architecture; humanitarian and social sciences;
natural sciences, mathematics and informatics; architectural typology and
architectural design, interior and industrial design, urban planning and
urbanism, architectural technology, engineering disciplines and arts.

As an exceptional feature can be noted the close relationship between
architects and engineers maintained in the educational process where various
basic disciplines are taught by engineers and this cooperation starts since early
education. The faculty of architecture is the only place in Bulgaria where
urbanism is taught encompassing all the levels of the planning system
functioning nowadays in Bulgaria.

The faculty has 8 departments- History and Theory of Architecture, Urban
Planning, Architectural Technology, Public Buildings, Residential Buildings,
Industrial Buildings, Interior and Design in Architecture, Fine Arts and
Modeling. One of the first seven should be selected by students for
specialization during the last 3 semesters. The horizontal connections among
departments are encouraged in order to ensure a consistent and complex
development at the faculty as a whole.

The architectural faculty offers two professional master degree programs in
English in the fields of Architecture Theory and Criticism and Contemporary
Architectural Technology as a transitional step to implement a full spectrum of
architectural education in English. Thus the faculty of architecture aims to
position itself as an attractive educational opportunity at a regional Balkan context.

The architectural faculty is the only place in the country which brings up specialists of architectural heritage preservation in close connection and collaboration with the National Institute for Immovable Cultural Properties. Various well known architects and theoreticians are visiting professors in the English master programs and the faculty has active partnerships with well-known universities in Europe and Asia with multiple opportunities for academic and professional exchange of students and teachers.

The faculty is trying to achieve a balance between well-established and alternative forms of architectural education. Studio type space Projektirane organized and maintained by teachers and students and Fablab are located at the campus offering students opportunity to learn and work on models by using latest laser and 3D printing technologies. The department of Fine Arts and Modeling maintains a long lasting tradition of integration between arts and architecture.

The aims and outcomes of the first award level corresponds to the period 1st-4th years of study which in our system is divided into an introductory, 1st and 2nd educational levels. The aim is to establish a wide base of knowledge necessary for architects- from the history of art and architecture, concept creation, functional requirements, technology basics, understanding of the relationship between building, site and settlement up to the social role of the architect, the ecological aspects of design and the legislative framework. An important outcome is the ability to use freely various contemporary software products for architectural design which is attained at the end of the first award level.

The second award level corresponds to the period of specialization at one of the seven departments and the aim is to deepen knowledge and understanding in the stage of critical analysis, evaluation and interpretation of the site, formulation of a design brief, team working and professional communication skills, preparation of professional design documentation. At this level a high number of elective disciplines is offered to provide skills relevant to modern professional practice and various well-known practitioners are integrated in the teaching process. The possibilities for professional training periods at architectural studios in Bulgaria and abroad are developing further by Erasmus training programs, collaboration with the Chamber of Architects and other European projects.

Students are encouraged to take part in architectural and urban planning competitions in the country and worldwide which are integrated within the educational program. Events such as IAA Architectural Triennale at the university enable students to meet worldwide professionals and academicians on campus and have fruitful contacts for future career opportunities.

RIBA validation criteria are creatively interpreted by splitting sub-elements of each criterion among award levels. For example the first and second points of architectural concept creation (GC1) are integrated as a goal during the first award level, while the third sub-element to integrate aesthetic, technological
and users’ requirements within the concept of design is emphasized during the specialization at each department.

The main principle of interpretation is to split all sub-elements of the criteria related to the accumulation of basic fundamental knowledge of arts, architectural history and theory, engineering and technology, urban planning and architectural profession to be covered by the first award level, while all sub-elements of the criteria related to integrated application of accumulated knowledge, formulation of strategies and intellectual reflective assimilation of a wide range of knowledge aim to be attained during the second award level. In this aspect the final graduation project is an all-encompassing work based on a thorough research and a critical analysis of the topography, physical and social problematic of the site, formulation of a problem and a fully-fledged design brief with an adequate range of technical documentation, regarding concept, functional organization, technology solution and selected building materials and details.

11 Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The Board commends the studio atmosphere and creative learning environment provided in Projektirane. In particular it was noted the opportunity for collaboration between students and group work which reflects modern practice.

11.2 The Board commends the Fab Lab which promotes experimentation into alternative materials and participation in creative building design. Cross fertilization with other European ‘Fab Labs’ is a further opportunity which would ideally be encouraged.

12 Conditions
There are no conditions.

13 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.

13.1 The Board is concerned that there is a lack of understanding of the RIBA Validation Criteria within the staff body and the documents submitted. It is not clear where the course delivers the RIBA Graduate Attributes. Staff members and students need to be aware of the RIBA Criteria and how they inform learning across all years.

13.2 The Board acknowledges that the Faculty has produced some mapping documentation; however, it is unclear and incomplete. The Board recommends that the modules, semesters and pathways are mapped against the RIBA Validation Criteria and confirms where students are expected to demonstrate.
The Graduates at Semester 11 are required to produce a portfolio demonstrating that in addition to their Diploma work all RIBA Graduate Attributes have been met.

The external examiners need to produce an annual report that confirms all RIBA Graduate Attributes and Validation Criteria have been met across the pathways. This annual report needs to reflect the outcomes at each Graduation.

Respond to advice points below and report back with a programme for implementation.

**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.

The provision of social and collective learning space and studio space could be enhanced within the existing building. This was requested by both staff and students.

The Board advises that there should be further consolidation between pathways to encourage collaborative working, minimise duplication of teaching and facilitate greater consistency. The Board suggests that this would promote a more holistic approach in the delivery of the Part Two attributes and criteria.

The Board advises that the Faculty considers best practice in the feedback process and mark sheet transparency; this will encourage students in reflective learning.

The Board supports the students’ request for more model making and experimentation in materials.

The Board advises that multimedia facilities and full wifi access is essential for architectural education and reflects modern methods of working. This should be prioritised throughout all existing buildings.

The Board repeats the previous advice (12.7) to increase the opportunity to engage with other disciplines, particularly given that the Faculty is part of a technical university. This reflects the collaborative nature of the profession.

The Board repeats the advice (12.3) that the Faculty needs to recognise and publicise its own strengths and distinctiveness. This could be used to enhance the Academic Position Statement.

The Board advises that the Faculty sets up a student led forum to enable discussion on architectural education and the student experience.

The Board suggests that an Alumni association could be used to establish links with an international group of architects. There are also funding opportunities which the Faculty could explain.
14.10 The Board noted that generally the design work lacked experimentation and innovation. The Faculty needs to consider placing more emphasis on the design process and recording this within the portfolio. The overall number of separate projects set and time allocated to each could be reconsidered, to extend the time available for deeper exploration. This would also extend the time to produce final Semester II project.

15 **Delivery of academic position** *(report part B)*

The following key points were noted:

15.1 Please see advice on the academic position statement in 14.7 (Advice)

16 **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.

16.1 Please see sections 13.1, 13.3 and 13.4 (Actions) and 14.2 (Advice)

17 **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.

17.1 Please see sections 13.1, 13.2, 13.4 (Advice) and 14.2 (Advice)

18 **Other information**

18.1 **Student numbers**

First year students – 165  
Second year students – 168  
Third year students – 171  
Fourth year students – 181  
Fifth year students – 182  
Diploma period (11th sem.) students – 193  
Total number of students – 1060

(Number of students in the winter semester of the academic year 2014/2015)

18.2 **Documentation provided**

The School provided most of the advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures. However certain documents were missing. Please see section 13.2 (Actions).
*Notes of meetings
On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings:

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