Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board
to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM)
(Perak)
Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying

Date of visiting board: 11/12 September 2014
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 11 February 2015
1 **Details of institution hosting course** 
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) (Perak) 
Seri Iskandar 
32610 Bandar Baru Seri Iskandar 
Perak 
Malaysia

2 **Head of Faculty** 
Associate Professor Dr Norlizaiha Harun

3 **Course/s offered for revalidation** 
BSc Architecture, Part 1

4 **Faculty co-ordinator (Architecture)** 
Rosmawati Mohamed

5 **Awarding body** 
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) (Perak)

6 **The visiting board** 
Professor Christian Frost - Chair 
Alison Mackinder – Vice Chair 
Andy Usher 
Angie Pascoe 
Regional representative - Ar Anthony Too

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA Validation Manager, attended as secretary

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; effective from September 2011, second revision May 2014); this document is available at [www.architecture.com](http://www.architecture.com).

8 **Proposals of the visiting board** 
At its meeting on 11 February 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional validation of the:

BSc Architecture, part 1

with effect from the 2014 graduating cohort. The next Visiting Board should 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

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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 (written by the School)

Our history
Our university is one of the oldest public institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. Its history traced back as a training college in 1956, and became an institute in 1967 under the name Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM). The main concern of its establishment was to train Bumiputeras1 academically to become professionals in various fields. Architecture was one of the earliest programmes offered by ITM. The Part 1 was offered in 1969, followed by the Part 2 programme in 1970. The awards were then named Diploma in Architecture and Advanced Diploma in Architecture. The Institute’s contribution towards producing quality graduates in various fields earned itself a university status in 1999, hence the name it carries today - Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). It is widely known in Malaysia as a premier university that is the largest in the country in scale and enrolment. Like other local universities, programmes offered at UiTM are centred on the outcome based education (OBE), in compliance with the requirements of the Malaysian Quality Framework (MQF)2. Architecture is an important entity of the Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying (acronym, FSPU). FSPU is reputed to be the pioneer in establishing comprehensive programmes related to the field of the built environment in the country. At present the faculty comprises 10 Centre of Studies running 28 academic programmes.

Our aim, approach and strength
At its inception, the intention of UiTM architecture was purely practical, which was to train Bumiputeras at semiprofessional and professional level to meet the manpower needs of the nation in the building industry and field of architecture. This intention continues to be the main concern of our programme till today as the number of architects and architectural expertise in the country remains inadequate to help steer the country’s development and growth. We are grooming future professional architects to serve primarily the Malaysian society that is diverse in cultural standing, views and expectations. As a whole the society is primarily demanding, educated, have high expectations and eager to embrace the status of a developed nation that the country aspires to soon become. Our programmes expand our students’ sense of responsibility towards making architecture that cares for the current and future generations.

In line with the history of UiTM as a technical-oriented institute, we regard our strength is in the grooming of technically abled graduates tailored to serve the industry as professional architects, and design practitioners. In order to continue to hold the respectable position of a leader in a building construction team, an architect ought to be technically sound, information rich and sensitive towards the implications of his/her design decisions. We instill in our students sensitivity in spatial arrangements to be in sync with macro and micro level contextual parameters, and respectfulness towards the social needs, and the peculiarities of building users. We want our students to take a step further, and be engaged on the practical dimensions of design inquiries that confront technological issues to realize the inward and outward beauty of an architectural outcome.

1 refer to the majority Malay, and indigenous of East Malaysia.
2 MQF is the basis for quality assurance of higher education in Malaysia.
We interpret intellectual pursuit in architecture to not only include engagement in design narration, philosophy, architectural positioning and aesthetics. The ability to configure, resolve and communicate the technicalities to materialize and balance the art and science of an architectural conception is a demonstration of mental prowess and practical skills of the highest degree.

**Our strategy:** The concerns towards practical dimension of architecture is channelled into our learning environment through the capacity of our experienced studio tutors, invited experts, manufacturers, practitioners, and other allied fields. We respond to scrutiny and learn through our appointed external examiners, academic advisor, and expert juries. Our faculty’s comprehensive offering of diverse built environment programmes conveniently places us within the intensive dialogue on issues pertaining to the building industry as a whole. We gain through regular visits and talks by professors and practitioners from other Centre of Studies.

**Our syllabus:** Our curriculum is frequently updated in order to keep pace with new technologies and challenges. Our programme, particularly the Part 1 is mainstream in approach. We designed our curriculum mindful of and with respect to the criteria and requirements set by our local Board of Architects (LAM), and the RIBA to strike a balance between science, technology and culture in design. We are committed to produce graduates that are wholesome, equipped with integrated knowledge, skills and competency in architectural design, technical systems, technological advancement, environmental and social issues; and that they understand the essence of cultural, historical, social, economic and environmental dimensions in connection with the architects’ role and responsibilities in society. We view our B.Sc. (Hons) Architecture Part 1 as preparatory ground for the next stage into the Master of Architecture Part 2 programme. Our anticipation is that the B. Sc. Architecture graduates will eventually en route to Part 2 education to complete the full cycle of the academic training of a professional architect. Our current capacity allows us to recapture about 25% of our own Part 1 graduates to be feeder candidates for our Part 2 Master of Architecture.

**Part 1 and 2:** Our Part 1 programme emphasizes on instilling fundamental knowledge and sensitivity, and to train and stimulate students to equip themselves with multiple architectural technical skills. The Part 1 education will develop strong basic knowledge in design conception and principles, technology and drawing skills (eg. solid draughtsmanship, illustration and visualization, model-making). Our Part 1 graduates should be able, and capable of developing a concept sketch of his/her supervising architect into a complete set of presentation drawings and submission drawings, fit for the authority’s approval.

The emphasis of our Part 2 education is on building higher knowledge, confidence and intellect to enable them to be managers and leaders. We challenge our students to think concurrently of how a design idea is to be attuned to meet building performance challenges. Strong communication aptitude, leadership and managerial skills are the fundamental characteristics that the programme aims to develop. They are to initiate, conceptualise, and develop design scheme into a detailed presentation and construction drawings. These will be aided by 3d physical models and up-to-date technological visualizations such as digital models and animation enhanced by the appropriate textual aspect of design report and theoretical discourse. The Part 2 holders are expected to be able to carry out the task as designing architects with confidence and independence.

**Our course delivery:** We assume a combination of traditional and highly technological approaches in our course delivery. Studio environment offers a formal and informal place to learn architecture, where ideas are experimented, developed and criticized by the lecturers and
peers. Our lecturers are committed to studio tutorials, where the sessions are intense, and challenging to bring out the best of our students.

Practical training is an experiential approach to better understand architecture. Our Part 1 programme offers a full semester practical training - which is the longest duration in the country. Practical training inserted within our academic session is a welcomed breather from the simulated studios learning environment. It allows students to gain valuable field experience, better appreciate theoretical knowledge application, and get introduced to a diverse building industry work place. UiTM promotes the use of e-learning platforms that many of our members have adopted in their teaching and learning (T&L) processes. Other essential methods of T&L include academic visits, collaborative workshops and competitions. Our syllabus has the flexibility to enable lecturers to formulate non-conventional T&L method for their students to earn credit points.

Our graduates: Our graduates are expected to make an impact at the national and international scale and able to contribute to society and the profession. In any route of their vocational choice, our graduates exhibit technical competency and leadership confidence. Our graduates strive to serve the society through expansion of knowledge in their field of choice. Our graduates possess multiple skills and competencies to diversify into allied fields of interest such as education, research, and creative industries. We take pride of our graduates’ track record of high employability and successes in furthering their educations at various universities around the world.

Future CoSA and DoA
While our educational stand are the same, CoSA and DoA will in the immediate future chart their own respectable path to be distinctively and collectively strong to contribute better towards a significantly unique blend of architectural education in the country, to the advantage of our stakeholders. The articulation of niche areas will serve to steer and enrich our programmes further in the future. Our vision is that the two campuses will continue to harvest the opportunity in maintaining a symbiotic relationship with each other. We are in the process of defining the niche for each campus, which will take the cue from the siting, environment and cultural surrounding of the two campuses.

UiTM Shah Alam is strategically located in the Klang Valley, where the economic growth is fast, and the pace of development is intense. Sited in the Klang Valley gives it an added advantage. Klang Valley offers a laboratory of rich mix of urban issues and inspiring architectural solutions that students of architecture can experience, appreciate and learn from. Many prominent architects and practitioners have offices in the Klang Valley that make them more accessible to connect, and be part of the university activities. Being part of the biggest university and faculty, CoSA has ready access to experts from multi-disciplinary fields.

DoA Perak is located in the mid-northern region of Peninsular Malaysia. This region is rich in historical and natural elements which can become significant resources for the department to engage with the local communities and work with them for the development of local and regional architecture that have strong sense of tradition, materiality and sustainable surroundings. The exposure given to students through cultural grounded projects, will develop high degree of consciousness to the cultural, environmental and societal aspects that present architecture of character. The course delivery will take a formal and informal approach to make connections with local community, and historical context. Hence, DoA Perak considers this to be its niche area for future direction of programme development.
11 **Commendations**
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The Board commends the vibrancy of the work of the early semesters, particularly the use of models and the study of traditional regional architecture and looks forward to seeing these themes developing through all semesters.

11.2 The Board commends the competition which included the erection of the bamboo shelter as an innovative example of good teaching practice in sustainable design.

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 History, theory, cultural context (GC2.1 and GC2.2) and awareness of the fine arts (GC3.3) were all evident in written submissions. However, they should be more apparent in the design work presented in the award year (semesters 7 and 8).

13.2 The Board recommends the greater use, exploration and critical analysis of precedents to be evident in both design process and the final presentation.

13.3 In accordance with GA1.3, the Board recommends that students develop a greater understanding of material qualities and how the choice of material influences the process and resolution of design projects.

13.4 In accordance with GC1.1 and GC5.3, the Board would encourage greater qualitative understanding of context in the design process and final representation.

13.5 The Board was pleased to see the use of Turnitin in written submissions. However, the Board recommends the use of a recognised reference system (eg Chicago, Harvard) in all submissions including the referencing of images under copyright in design work.

14. **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.

14.1 The Board recognised that UiTM Perak has little control over the intake of numbers at semester 1. However, the University should endeavour to employ appropriate additional staff in good time to sustain the staff:student ratio levels as mentioned in the external examiners’ reports and maintain the current balance of professional and academic teaching staff.
14.2 The increase in project scale from semester 5 to semesters 7 and 8 seemed excessive and consequently affected the ability of the students to resolve the projects. The Board advises a more gradual progression in scale between semesters.

14.3 During the transition from semester 5 to semester 7 there was an abrupt shift from hand-drawing to computer representation. The Board advises that this transition should be more gradual.

14.4 In accordance with GA1.2 and GC1.1 the Board advises that students should be encouraged to broaden their visual references in graphic representation, style and post-production render techniques.

14.5 The full academic year’s work should be present at the final examination. This is to ensure that all criteria can be evidenced at the point of award (semesters 7 and 8).

15 Delivery of academic position
The following key points were noted:
For the present visit the University provided a joint academic position statement for both the Shah Alam and Perak Campuses. The present Board suggests that, for any future visit, the staff of the Perak campus should be encouraged to produce a separate academic position statement indicating their own special characteristics.

The Board were interested to see the introduction of the MSc in Green Architecture to the faculty and will be interested to follow the impact of this new course on the work in the school as a whole.

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.

While the Board was content that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met, please see action point 13.3 and advice 14.4.

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.

While the Board was content that all criteria were met, please see action points 13.1 and 13.4, and advice 14.4.

18 Other information

18.1 Student numbers
At the time of the visit there were 477 students enrolled on the Bachelor of Science (Architecture) programme.

18.2 Documentation provided
The School provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

19 Notes of meetings
On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings:

- Budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with the Rector
- Meeting with the external examiners
- Meeting with staff