Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA visiting board to Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana

Programme of Architecture, Parts 1 and 2

Date of visiting board: 3 & 4 September 2015
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 9 December 2015
1 Details of institution hosting course/s  
UNIVERSIDAD PONTIFICIA BOLIVARIANA  
FACULTAD DE ARQUITECTURA  
Circular 1 No. 70-01, Bloque 10  
Medellín  
Colombia

2 Head of Architecture Group  
Samuel Ricardo Vélez Gonzalez

3 Course/s offered for revalidation  
Programme of Architecture, Parts 1 and 2

4 Course leader/s  
Marta Arias  
Maria Isabel González  
Samuel Ricardo Vélez

5 Awarding body  
Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana

6 The visiting board  
Roz Barr Chair  
Karim Hadjri Vice Chair  
Andrew Usher Practitioner  
Lorenzo Castro Jaramillo Regional Representative  
Sophie Bailey RIBA 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 9 December 2015 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed unconditional revalidation of:

Programme of Architecture, Parts 1 and 2

This proposal will be submitted to the RIBA Education Committee for ratification, and subsequent notification to RIBA Council.

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

The School of Architecture of Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana was founded in 1942, and became the first Program for the formation of Architects in the country, in a private university. This is a five years full-time (ten semesters) course. As part of Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana the Program has some if its distinctive features:

- The national accreditation of UPB as a high quality private university, of which the course derives not only the prestige of its tradition, but also the administrative and academic support in its teaching, research, and extension processes.
- One of the distinctive course features, and of all the academic courses of UPB, is the emphasis on the humanistic formation that characterizes all the graduates of the University. This emphasis is achieved through the courses of the Basic University Cycle, with contents and methodologies guided towards the development of human capacities associated to the ethical sense of the personal and professional life, and supported by the knowledge of the context and the commitment to its development.
- The opportunities for the mobility of the students with other courses of the University, and with the School of Architecture and Design of which the Program is part of. This type of mobility is set among others: By the offer of interdisciplinary courses of the academic Programs of the School – Architecture, Industrial Design, Graphic Design, and Wardrobe Design –; by the offer of double degree among the Programs of the School; by the offer of elective courses, open to each one of the 39 academic programs of UPB, in its seven Schools – Architecture and Design; Engineering; Law and Political Science; Social Studies; Health Sciences; Economics, Administration, and Business; Education and Teaching; Theology, Philosophy and Humanities.

Features of teaching and learning that characterize and distinguish the courses offered when considered against other schools of architecture Other distinctive features that derive from the education proposal of the course:

- The importance of Research in the formation of the UPB Architect, and his integration with the Projects Workshop in general and with the Title Project in particular. Research formation supported by the Research Groups of the Program with their Emphasis Lines: Architecture and Urbanism Laboratory “LAUR” – Emphasis Lines on Housing, Territory, and City, Cultural Landscape –; Laboratory of Experimental and Technical Studies “LEET” – Emphasis Lines on Sustainability, and New Materials and Innovation; Theory and Project Studies Group “GETP” – Emphasis line on Critics and Project –.
- The curricular flexibility that enables the students to define, after the sixth semester, their formation routes according to their professional interests. This flexibility is concreted among others: in the optative
The course/s offered provide skills relevant to modern professional practice:
The Architecture course of UPB defines the purposes of the professional formation considering the demands of the social, cultural, political, environmental, academic, and professional context. Deducing from them, the diverse and changing challenges of the contemporary professional exercise and, in coherence with them, the formulation of the skills that the student must develop. The course has defined diverse curricular strategies to make the formation of the UPB architect to grant the development of relevant skills for the contemporary professional practice. Among others:

- The proposed curriculum guides the formation of an integral professional, with a critical posture, and conscious of his role in the development and growth of the city. Under the idea of integrity, the Program is organized by fields of knowledge - Urbanism, Technique, Representation, History and theory – with research as a support – that base and support the academic activities related to the projection exercise.
- The Projects workshop as axis, in which the skills associated to the professional profile are integrated and evidenced, with an increasing level of complexity in Part 1 and Part 2. The problems of architecture posed by the workshops, have a direct relation with the context in order
to reinforce in the formation of the students, the bond with the conditions of the site, the bioclimatics, the society, and the urban and architectonical dynamics.

The research formation oriented towards:

- The development of the thoughtful and methodical thought, as support of the personal and professional autonomy demanded by assuming the multiple and changing challenges of the professional exercise.
- Giving methodical support to the projection exercise; this is evidenced in portfolios, elaborated as an argumentation of the project from the perspectives of concept, context, the study of references, empirical, and experimental, and projection synthesis.
- The curricular flexibility, mentioned in previous paragraphs, that by enabling the student to define routes of depth from the 6th to the 10th semester, finishing with the Title Project, enables, not only to be conscious of the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and dexterities associated to the qualified professional exercise, but also, to develop skills to face the solution of particular problems in his professional life.
- The Civil Service (8th semester) is a professional and academic practice of social character. This program is oriented towards the integral formation; the student develops competences referred to: attention to users of low income and vulnerable populations, in projects that contribute to the improvement of housing and public space; strengthening the social responsibility and the commitment to local problems; recognition and interpretation of the normative regulation for the performance of the projects; application of technical tools to face the cases; skills and dexterities to articulate the academic knowledge with the practice of the professional exercise.

The differences between the aims and outcomes of the first and second award levels:
The program has a defined formation profile towards which the curriculum is oriented: “Committed to the social and human transformations of his time, the architect of Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana is an integral professional, thoughtful, creative, and ethical; with capacities to project, communicate, manage, and build architectonical and urban space of diverse scales, in groups of interdisciplinary work, critically interpreting the dimensions of each context. With knowledge about history and the techniques of his profession, he articulates, through the architectonical project, the local technologies, the urban conditions, and the quality criteria of the building, according to the norms of the profession, sustainability, and the environment.”

The verification of the competence levels for the basic cycle (Part 1) and the professional cycle (Parte 2), are a commitment in the Projects Workshops. These verify the level of growing complexity of the ranges of formation, up to the Title Project, where the formative ranges of the program are evidenced in an integral manner in the work of the students.

How the validation criteria have been creatively interpreted in terms of course content and delivery
The Architecture Program of UPB considers diverse and important references for the formulation of the competencies:
• The guidelines of the Teaching Model of UPB, that guide principles of contextualization and internationalization, integration, interdisciplinarity, flexibility, interculturality, and research as a transversal axis;
• The demands of the context, of which the challenges of the contemporary professional exercise are deduced;
• The Latin America Competency Tuning, that guide the steps for the formation of the UPB Architect, in response to the local context with global recognition;
• The general quality standards of higher education in Colombia and the specific standards for the formation of Architects, defined by the National Ministry of Education.

In the middle of all these references, the Program values the quality standards defined by RIBA for the formation of Architects, and adopts them creatively in contents, methodologies, and learning experiences, to refine the formative proposal. In the Criteria Mapping it is possible to identify the importance and quality with which each one of the RIBA Criteria is adopted in the Fields of Formation of the Program, and in the Projects Workshop that enables to evidence the integration of such competencies.

11 Commendations
The visiting board made the following commendations:

11.1 The transformation of the school’s leadership since 2011 is exceptional and should be further supported.

11.2 The board members were impressed by the outstanding new members of the teaching staff who are emerging architects in Colombia and are an asset to the faculty.

11.3 The content of the exhibition was extremely encouraging and captured the energy of the teaching staff involved.

11.4 The board members were encouraged by the vertical studio programme and saw this as a real strength of the faculty and the student experience.

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. The university is referred to the RIBA’s criteria and procedures for validation for details of mid-term monitoring visits. 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 members were extremely disappointed that the recommendations of the RIBA visits of 2006 and 2011 regarding the lack of teaching facilities such as studios equipped with tables and chairs, lack of working spaces, poor and inadequate internet and digital equipment were not addressed. The senior management have acknowledged this and a programme is in place for faculty
improvements of which the board look forward to seeing. It is imperative that this happens.

13.2 Following the RIBA visit of 2011 the board members were extremely disappointed to see that the library and workshop facilities had not been improved. This needs to be addressed by the time of the next RIBA visit.

13.3 The board felt that Year 1 is a weakness of the 5 year course and should be enhanced to make the introduction of architecture to new students a better grounding in the fundamentals of the discipline.

13.4 The board members were encouraged to see that the previous advice regarding a lack of context within the design work had been addressed. However a more rigorous and critical evaluation of history and the future of the urban condition and public space are required.

13.5 The board would strongly encourage a more rigorous approach to the Semester 10 design project that engages the realisation of a more inventive and creative final proposal.

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 portfolios were greatly improved from the RIBA visit of 2011 but the board would advise to include process and development work to demonstrate the critical thinking of the student.

14.2 The board would recommend that the faculty appoint design leaders for the Basic Cycle and Professional Cycle to co-ordinate the project briefs and content.

14.3 The board would recommend that a standardised marking and feedback system is implemented across both cycles.

14.4 The board would strongly recommend that storage space for students would be extremely beneficial.

14.5 The board recommends that an office space is made available for part time staff.

15 **Delivery of academic position**

The following key points were noted: No comment was made.

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.
Graduate Attributes for Parts 1 and 2
The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

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.

Graduate Criteria for Parts 1 and 2
The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the Programme of Architecture.

18 Other information

18.1 Student numbers
At the time of the 2015 RIBA visiting board: 1,180

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

*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