Royal Institute of British Architects

CONFIRMED
Report of the RIBA Exploratory Board
to Heriot-Watt University, Dubai Campus

Date of visiting board: 22 & 23 February 2017
Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 31 May 2017
Introduction
The Board wishes to thank Heriot-Watt University, Dubai campus for its invitation to consider the Bachelor of Architecture and Bachelor of Architecture (Hons) for proposed RIBA candidate course status. The Board is also grateful to the staff and students of the institution for their work in preparing for the Board’s visit.

1. Course offered for candidate course status for Part 1
   BA Architecture (3 years); BA (Hons) Architecture, 4 years

Name of awarding body
Heriot-Watt University
Edinburgh
EH14 4AS UK

Heriot-Watt University, Dubai Campus
Dubai International Academic City
Dubai
United Arab Emirates

Professor of Architecture & Director of Studies for Architecture
Professor Mary Jane Rooney

Programme Leader
Alex MacLaren

2. Members of the Exploratory Board
   Cameron Wilson, Chair
   Professor Lorraine Farrelly, Vice Chair
   Professor Kevin Singh
   Farid Esmaeil, regional representative (attended for part of the visit)

   Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk, RIBA Validation Manager

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.

4. Recommendation of the Exploratory Board
   The Board was invited by Heriot-Watt University Dubai Campus to consider the BA Architecture (3 years); BA (Hons) Architecture, 4 years for candidate course status for RIBA Part 1.

   The designation ‘candidate course for validation’ implies that the programme is considered to have the potential to meet RIBA criteria, if implemented as anticipated.

   On 31 May 2017 the RIBA Education Committee agreed, by circulation, that candidate course status for Part 1 be granted to the following:
BA Architecture (3 years); BA (Hons) Architecture, 4 years

The Board has agreed that a full visiting board to consider the programme for initial validation and full RIBA recognition of Part 1 will take place no earlier than June 2020 when the 2016/2017 cohort is due to graduate.

At this point the full visiting board will determine whether Part 1 is achieved at BA Architecture point of award (year 3) or the BA (Hons) Architecture point of award (year 4).

This is to allow the School to develop its offer and sufficient time to act upon the action points below in order to be better positioned to meet the RIBA professional criteria and graduate attributes.

5 **Commendations**

The Visiting Board commends the following:

5.1 The School’s ambition to encourage the students to have a professional approach to low-carbon and sustainable design within the context and challenges of the United Arab Emirates.

6 **Action points**

The following action points are intended as constructive suggestions to the institution:

6.1 The professional criteria mapping document must accurately reflect the revised architecture programme in its entirety. A revised document must be sent to the New Courses Group for review and comment.

6.2 The Board encourages the School to utilise the professional criteria mapping as a tool to reflect course developments as well as course content and should describe progressively across the course how criteria is met. The course team who contribute across all studio and taught courses must be involved in this mapping exercise in order for the criteria to be fully embedded and credible.

6.3 The School is reminded that recommendations for validation are made on the evidence that the student portfolio meets all criteria and Part 1 graduate attributes. For all future visits the School must present complete and coherent academic portfolios for a sample of individual students as described in the Procedures for Validation.

6.4 The Board recognises the value of an external examiner with low carbon expertise. However, the Board strongly recommends that this appointment be supplemented by an external examiner with current and significant experience of RIBA Part 1 validated programmes. The Board recommends that both examiners physically visit on an annual basis and are pro-actively involved in course development.

6.5 The Board welcomes the recent appointment of a new Director of Studies for Architecture in Dubai with experience of delivering RIBA-validated programmes. The Board expects the leadership to further
develop the integrated approach across disciplines with a clear understanding of the relationship to professional architectural education. This is an opportunity for this new school of architecture to confidently develop its position related to the local professional and physical context.

6.6 The Board recognises the facilities available to students in respect of studios, future spaces for studios, computer facilities and on-going investment in the library. The workshop facilities should be upgraded to reflect the activities in which architecture students will be expected to engage in terms of model-making across year groups.

6.7 Whilst the Board has commended the School’s ambition to pursue a low carbon agenda, this should be reinforced and evidenced much more explicitly in the students’ work from design to taught courses.

7 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 encourages the School to maintain a positive relationship with Study World in order to facilitate the future delivery of the programme in order to protect the student experience.

7.2 The Board advises the School to develop and refine its mapping criteria document and distinguish between content which is assessed or content which is addressed within all studio and taught courses.

7.3 The Board was pleased to learn of the School’s engagement with the regional profession and the RIBA Gulf Chapter and encourages further development of this.

8. Academic Position Statement (written by the School)
As one of the UK’s leading institutions for multidisciplinary research and teaching in energy, petroleum and built environment disciplines, we are committed to attaining excellence in the core disciplines that contribute to a sustainable, resource and energy efficient society. And as a provider of skilled graduates for the construction sector, we believe we hold a progressive view, part of which includes placing sustainable design and multi-disciplinary teaching at the heart of all we do. Our teaching programmes are therefore specifically designed to address the very real and pressing need for graduates who are equipped to challenge the status quo in current design practice. This will empower them to address the major challenges of design, resource conservation and fitness for purpose that face the construction industry in the 21st century.

Here, we present our Academic Position Statement in relation to delivery of our new BA (Hons) Architecture, the overall aim of which is to provide students with the necessary academic training, knowledge, skills and personal qualities to allow successful completion of RIBA
Part 1’, and for those who progress to the Honours programme, the start of ‘RIBA Part 2’ of their Architecture training.

We provide a strong framework for both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, and this new Architecture programme is offered alongside those in Architectural Engineering, Civil and Structural Engineering; Construction Management and Quantity Surveying; and Urban Planning and Property Development, not only making our teaching and research profile undeniably unique, but also allowing us the flexibility to ensure the best multi-disciplinary learning experience for our students. For our graduates, interdisciplinary design, embedding sustainability, and designing for a low carbon future will represent the norm. This approach is firmly embedded within the learning outcomes for our Architecture programme, where we aim to:

- enable graduates access to a well-recognised route to practice as a fully-trained architect
- develop students’ critical analysis and creative skills, particularly those honed through design studio-based teaching
- integrate a culturally-adaptable approach to architectural design that will place our graduates in a strong position to compete in a local market
- embed the communication and interpersonal skills expected of architects in a competitive interdisciplinary workplace
- engender sustainable design concepts that use to best advantage, the technical and engineering teaching already delivered on our Dubai campus
- enable multi-disciplinary team working and an appreciation of different design approaches

Our Architecture programme has therefore been specifically designed in a way that allows us to offer an integrated and high-quality educational provision in which we place a strong emphasis on sustainable low-carbon solutions, the interaction between building design and energy use, and the influence of the built environment on human behaviour. Rather than create specific courses in sustainability or carbon management, our approach is one of creating a theme of low-carbon and sustainable design that pervades the structure of all of our programmes. We believe that we are the only university in Scotland, and one of only a small number in the UK, that can offer this breadth and depth of experience in an Architecture degree of this kind, and the only institution with the ability to deliver this in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

This new Architecture programme sits firmly within the suite of design-related degrees that we offer under the auspices of the Royal Academy of Engineering Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Design. Assessed competitively, the Centre of Excellence awards were made on the basis of excellence in both teaching and research in sustainability within construction-related disciplines. Heriot-Watt University is one of only four Centres of Excellence across the UK, and this endorsement, and the opportunity to work with three UK institutions
of similar standing, means that we have a renewed impetus and focus on graduate attributes, in particular in our design-related degrees.

This Centre of Excellence award has also allowed us to engage more proactively with external collaborators, including practitioners and relevant professional bodies, particularly in relation to ensuring our core syllabus is industry-informed; a characteristic of our programmes that we believe to be exceptional. To support this, we have well-established models of practitioner input to our programme design, core syllabus and course delivery. We purposefully recruit staff with both academic and practitioner expertise and we have highly-effective industrial advisory panels for many of our programmes (in both Edinburgh and Dubai), where these enable input from specialist practitioner-based architects also. These panels not only provide advice on programme development, but also make practical contributions to our degree programmes through the provision of guest lectures and case studies. We see these activities extending to our BA Hons Architecture, as cohorts progress. We aspire to engage the more progressive practitioners within our community and encourage them to share with staff and students, project briefs and specifications that present only the most challenging design criteria.

As can be seen from our mapping of the RIBA General criteria (Section 3.3), our Architecture programme draws upon nine courses from our Architectural Engineering, CPM/QS and UPPD degree programmes and on an additional five courses from our School of Textiles and Design. Our Architectural Engineering programme, in particular, is a long-standing high-quality degree that has held Engineering Council/CIBSE¹ accreditation for over 20 years and is one of only two CIBSE-accredited undergraduate degrees in Scotland. And the School of Textiles and Design is the second-oldest textile institution in the world (dating back to 1883), an internationally-recognised resource for the history of design and fashion from the 18th century to the present. Not only does this structure allow us to draw upon a wide, but highly relevant, range of technical and design-based courses, it also ensures that students engage heavily in multi-disciplinary learning experiences, in part through their involvement in design project groups.

In addition to ensuring the currency of our core curriculum, we aim to ensure that all graduates’ communication and interpersonal skills are matched to the expectation of modern professional practice in order that they can clearly articulate their ideas and motivate others in the industry to pursue low-carbon, sustainable design principles for buildings. We also believe that in order to fulfil our obligation to inspire students and to produce the next generation of leaders able to tackle the construction challenges of the 21st Century, we must enable our graduates to be creative, confident thinkers.

In summary, we believe that the unique characteristics of this programme are based on our provision of an integrated and high-

¹ CIBSE: Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers
quality degree in which we place a strong emphasis on interdisciplinary design, embedding sustainability and low carbon principles, all set within an international context. We believe that we have an exceptional track record and can evidence excellence in both the technical and design-related components required for success. In the short-term, our plans for the development of the Architecture programme are that we should establish this in Dubai, ensuring that we are confident in our delivery of a degree that meets both sectoral demands and the RIBA’s graduate attributes for validation. Longer-term, we will consider extending our international provision to our campus in Malaysia and potentially also to Edinburgh. For the time being, we have no immediate plans to introduce an RIBA Part 2 Architecture programme however, we will continue to observe demand from the UAE region, reflecting on this decision as appropriate.

9 Consideration of course content against the Part 1 Graduate Attributes and criteria
While the Board considered that the programme had the potential to meet the Part 1 graduate attributes if implemented as anticipated, this will largely be dependent upon the School’s response to the Board’s action points and advice.

10 Other information

10.1 Documentation provided
The School provided all documentation as required under the Procedures for Validation. In its action points and advice the Board has made several recommendations for revision of the documentation to provide greater clarity to the full validation board.

10.2 Student numbers
55 enrolled at the time of the visit (years 1 and 2).

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 Provost and the Director of Institute
- Meeting with architecture senior team and course leaders
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with staff