



Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA Full visiting board
to Universiti Malaya - 2022**

Date of visiting board: 12 -15 December 2022

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 31 March 2023

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Department of Architecture
Faculty of Built Environment
Universiti Malaya
50603 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

2 Courses offered for validation

Part 1: Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part One (3 years full time)

Part 2: Master of Architecture (2 years full time)

3 Head of School: Ar Dr Helena Aman Hashim

Course Leaders

Part 1 course leaders: Ar Dr Helena Aman Hashim

Part 2 course leaders: Dr Hazrina Haja Bava Mohidin

4 Awarding body

Universiti Malaya

5 The visiting board

Lindesay Dawe – Chair
Alida Bata
Cindy Walters
Jaime Solloso – RIBA – validation manager
John Koh – Regional Representative

6 Procedures and Themes and Values for Architectural Education

The visiting board was carried out under the RIBA Procedures for Validation and Themes and Values for UK and international courses in architecture (published September 2021, and effective from September 2022); this document is available at www.architecture.com.

7 Proposals of the visiting board

On the 31 March 2023, the RIBA Educational Committee confirmed that the following course and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated:

Part 1: Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part One (3 years full time)

Part 2: Master of Architecture (2 years full time)

The next visit to the Universiti Malaya will take place in 2027.

8 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 of the annual statistical return issued by the RIBA Education Department.

9 Academic position statement (written by the School)

We are committed to providing the best possible learning experience by applying holistic approach towards academia that enables our students to develop creative thinking and problem-solving knowledge and skills. We complement this with an environment that supports learning. Coming from one for the five Malaysian Research University (MRU) status, the school's strengths offer a solid academic program which emphasises incremental learning, strong industry involvement and an active student body.

Solid academic program

We provide our students with a solid foundation in architecture at the undergraduate Bachelor of Science in Architecture (BSc.Arch) program level. At the Master of Architecture (MArch) level, we aim to match as closely to the industry as possible, moving from teacher-centric education to learner-centric education. This will give our graduates a very high chance of employability and better confidence in practice.

The BSc.Arch is a basic-level program that provides our students, who come mainly from a science-based background, with the fundamental knowledge of architecture. We apply an incremental hands-on approach in the first year, teaching basic design principles, graphics and manual drawings, and construction; in the second year, context, design theory and environment are essential emphases, and in the third year, we move to more complex designs for buildings of up to four stories in height using computer-aided software to draw up their design solutions in their final year of undergraduate studies. The undergraduate program also emphasises exploring passive design solutions suitable for the tropical environment.

The MArch is a professional course with a robust curriculum that enables students to explore their interests through research and advanced architectural designs. Students select one of three interest areas to pursue their final design thesis project. The school has developed three significant design labs that focus on these niche areas namely, Green and Sustainable Architecture Lab (GSAL), Community and Urban Architecture Lab (UCAL), and the Heritage and Conservation Architecture Lab (HCAL). This initiative has allowed students to focus and develop more robust design solutions, evident in their design thesis projects' special studies. The newly revised MArch curriculum that comes into effect this 2022/2023 Academic Session will see the focus of each lab becoming more distinctive, with elective courses centring on each lab's focus introduced to support students' design exploration.

The selection of labs (studios) is like the choice of studios/units in the United Kingdom schools. This is not a common practice in Malaysian architecture schools, and this unique strength in the Malaysian context has led other local schools to begin emulating us. Another unique feature is the vertical classes integrating the

undergraduate and master students' learning of culture and context in architecture. Both courses require them to communicate, interact, manage, and take responsibility to make their group assignments successful.

We gear assessment towards learning outcomes to ensure that the curriculum expectations are met. Additionally, we moderate studio grades through the end-of-semester portfolio reviews for a fair, and transparent grading process based on expected competencies and indicators for each 4-studio level. This also encourages a healthy dialogue between staff on expectations and benchmarks for each studio.

Strong industry support and involvement

Our location in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital city is advantageous, and the department has benefitted from strong industry support and easy access for students to participate in industry-led activities. We engage with practising architects in each studio to provide a balance between academia and practice. Almost all our academics teaching the M.Arch are practising architects.

The university also values the expertise that the industry can contribute and has created several programs where the industry can come in and provide expert knowledge, such as the Elite program and the appointment of practitioners as full-time staff. The school has three practising architects appointed as Associate Professors from the industry, each with a specific area of expertise to complement our teaching.

We have many practising architects participating in our interim and final design review sessions, and they are an additional source for important feedback for students to develop their designs. We get regular lecture inputs from the industry and authorities, including the Fire Department, whom we invite annually to comment and give advice on fire safety regulations compliance to the final year (Year 3) BSc.Arch and the MArch (Year 1 and Year 2) students on their studio projects.

Our partnership with the industry is also strengthened through direct ties with the incumbent President of the Institute of Architects (PAM), who is our teaching staff, and three of our full-time staff (including the incumbent PAM President) are appointed by the Minister of Works to sit on the Malaysian Board of Architects. This provides us with the latest information and knowledge regarding the industry's needs and the future of the architecture profession. Other teaching staff possesses diverse expertise that complement the delivery of design studios and specialised courses. They are also involved in many designs and research consultation works.

Active student body

The department recognises the importance of an enjoyable learning experience to motivate students to excel in their studies. We support student-based activities that provide interaction between the lower and upper years to create camaraderie, foster better relationships among students to encourage peer learning and improve students' relationships with lecturers. We believe this will create a gratifying learning environment at the University of Malaya. Architude, the architecture student body, plays an important role on behalf of the collective student body in organising events and initiatives at the school. Students elect their representatives who plan and lead various student-led activities including the AUMLYPICS (inter cohort, alums, and staff

sports), AUM Orientation Week, participation in the annual regional Architecture Students Workshops, and organise talks by invited speakers.

Forward-thinking approach

We are moving forward with the support from the university on initiatives to explore future-ready niche areas, with a focus on digitalisation and innovative technologies as we see these areas becoming an essential part of practice in the future. We hope to see this materialise in time to come and offer another lab at the design thesis level in this area of study.

10 Commendations

- 10.1** The Board commends the School on the energy and commitment of the teaching and support staff within the Architecture programme.
- 10.2** The Board commends the engaged and articulate staff and student body.
- 10.3** The Board commends the School on the involvement of external practitioners on the programme and acknowledges the valuable contribution of these part-time staff.

11 Conditions

There are no conditions.

12 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 processes. Failure by the university to satisfactorily resolve action points may result in a course being conditioned by a future visiting board.

- 12.1** At Part I and Part II the School should expand the study of global and regional Sustainability to look at wider issues of ecology, economy, and human settlement in the ASEAN region, and embed this in defined Course Learning Outcomes.
- 12.2** The School should further develop their programme of international affiliations to establish regular direct collaboration and study exchange for UM students at Part I and Part II.
- 12.3** To properly support the unique pedagogic requirements of the architecture programme enhanced resources should be directed to support ongoing staff research and provision of digital facilities/workshops.
- 12.4** The Board recommends that the schedule for the annual visit of the External Examiners on the programme is extended from one day to three for a full and comprehensive review of student work at both Part I and Part II.
- 12.5** The School should appoint a full Visiting Professor from the ASEAN region to support the evolution of curriculum and research at UM.

12.6 For the next visit of the RIBA Visiting Board the School must curate and prepare a full synoptic exhibition of student work at Part I and Part II.

13 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.

13.1 The Board encourages the School to reflect on the opportunities presented by 'hybrid' delivery of courses in order to offer increased flexibility in delivery of the programme content to the Architecture student body and widening contributions from international practitioners/academics.

13.2 The Board strongly suggests a wider variety in assessment structures and rhythm is introduced at both Part I and Part II to allow students to develop their work at their own pace, and to allow more individual and rigorous exploration at senior years.

13.3 As part of an adjustment to the variety and rhythm of the assessment process the Board advises that multiple Course Learning Outcomes on the Part I are rationalised to four or five, from current ten.

13.4 The Board encourages the school to define a strong and relevant identity which drives the programme material and pedagogies, and takes on current issues and themes, thus developing students who are international, confident, and bold in their approach to the profession of architecture.

13.5 To encourage Student self-directed learning and research interests at both Part I and Part II, the Board suggests the curriculum is developed with more focus on architectural culture, history, and theory to help inform more varied design outcomes.

13.6 For input at key stages in the Part I and Part II courses the Board suggest the School establish a revolving programme of international visiting practitioners and academics to extend the scope and objectives of identified studio design projects.

13.7 The deepen student understanding of contemporary environmental challenges the Board encourages the programme to engage with wider associated disciplines, for example landscape architects, ecologists, geographers, marine biologists, and anthropologists.

13.8 The School should develop a more progressive teaching culture to encourage the movement from supported learners to independent learners to lifelong learners.

14 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 & 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Parts 1 and 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Architecture and the Master of Architecture.

15 Review of work against criteria RIBA Themes and Values and Graduate Attributes

It should be noted that where the visiting board considered a criterion graduate attribute to have been met, no commentary is offered. Where concerns were noted (or a criterion graduate attribute clearly not met), commentary is supplied. Finally, where academic outcomes suggested a criterion graduate outcome was particularly positively demonstrated, commentary is supplied.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers (from the School)

BA Arch (Part 1): 123

M Arch (Part 2): 93

16.2 Documentation provided

The Department provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation.

17 Notes of meetings

On request, the RIBA will issue a copy of the minutes taken from the following meetings: **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 budget holder and course leaders
- Meeting with senior management team
- Meeting with external examiners
- Meeting with students
- Meeting with staff