RIBA

Royal Institute of British Architects

Report of the RIBA Full Visiting Board to the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Smart Village

Date of visiting board: 15-16 May 2024
Confirmed by RIBA: 10 September 2024

1 Details of institution hosting courses

Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport (AASTMT)
Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design Department
College of Engineering and Technology
Smart Village - Giza
P. 0. Box 12577
Smart Village - B2401 6th October City
Egypt

2 Courses offered for validation

MSc Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design (Part 2)

3 Head of Department

Professor Suzette Aziz

RIBA Coordinator

Dr Sara Alsaadani

4 Awarding body

Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport

5 The visiting board

Prof. Sally Stewart	Chair/Academic
Dr. Sara Biscaya	Academic
Negar Mihanyar	Practitioner
Prof. Basil Kamel	Regional Representative
Sophie Bailey	Head of RIBA Validation

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 10 September 2024, the RIBA confirmed initial validation of the following course:

MSc Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design (Part 2)

The next visit to the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Maritime Transport, Smart Village campus, will take place between 2027-2028.

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)

Introduction and vision

At Smart Village, both our undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design are based on the same curriculum offered by that of our sister AASTMT schools across Egypt. However, we remain unique in our interpretation of the curriculum through an ethos of regarding the built environment as a lens to develop students' understandings of local and regional issues, under the umbrella of 'community engagement, conservation and revival.' In parallel, we have also been exploring newer, unchartered territories; covering ambitious grounds afforded by recent global events and allowing opportunities for more speculative modes of inquiry across all years of study. By a merger of both positions, we aim at producing graduates who are cognizant of locally-situated knowledge in a larger, fast-developing global realm, and who will therefore be able to contribute to the country's sustainable development goals as part of Egypt's 2030 vision.

Areas of Activity

Our curriculum is centred around design problem-solving, and therefore features a distinct stream of design-studio modules, during which students are exposed to a variety of project typologies. Our curriculum additionally features parallel streams of building technology, environmental studies, and construction modules. Students are also offered electives in a diverse range of areas, including but not limited to art and artistic appreciation, computer software, rendering and applications, urban practice and infrastructure and behavioural aspects in architectural and urban design. Students often work individually and are occasionally assigned group projects to build confidence in team-work and collaboration.

Features of Distinction

Design studio projects: Our design studios have developed to address both physical issues related to the Egyptian locality and the region, as well as more speculative modes of questioning (e.g. growing impacts of virtual landscapes on building functions and adaptability). Thus, architectural design is envisaged as a vehicle, through which pre-defined ontological knowledge may be critically queried. The use of narratives in architectural design is one method by which such exploratory approaches are enabled and supported. As evidence of our students' distinction in architectural design, multiple students and graduates of the department have won gold and silver awards, and honourable mentions, in the last four editions of Cairo Design Awards (CDA).

Representation techniques: Students experiment with a range of representation media to explore, develop and represent their solutions. This includes freehand sketching and technical drawing using both analogue and digital means. We also pride ourselves on a strong culture of model-making to accompany the development of design ideas. We have lately been taking greater steps toward developing students' digital aptitude and rendering techniques by offering a greater number of elective modules in a diverse range of software packages.

High calibre faculty: We are fortunate to attract high-calibre faculty, several of whom have returned from their postgraduate studies abroad. The majority is situated within a relatively young age-bracket(< 40 years). Some practice architecture professionally and/or participate in both national and international competitions. This means that our staff body remains up-to-date with all that is state-of-the-art, while reflects on students by linking academia with industry. We also recruit part-time staff from governmental and private institutions, offering knowledge from various schools of thought and wider professional trajectories.

Collegiate teaching and learning environment: Through highly-selective recruitment of staff, we have succeeded in nourishing a warm, collegiate and amicable learning environment on campus, to the extent that words like 'family' are often used to describe the atmosphere of the departments and dynamics within. This positive environment, coupled with concentrated staff-student ratios (ranging between 1:7-1:10) reflects strongly on students and fosters an encouraging milieu for knowledge exchange, interaction and collaboration to occur.

Off-campus activities: A strong tradition of field trips exists, as site visits are an integral feature of design-studio teaching. Lately, we have engendered out off-campus activities to include internships and numerous opportunities for international student mobility through summer and winter schools.

Visiting Critics and Departments' Activities
We routinely seek expertise of professionals and academics from outside the department through participation as jury panellists and visiting lecturers, updating students with recent developments in their field of study. Concurrently, we encourage students to display their work at department exhibitions. Onset and conditions of the coronavirus, and on line/ hybrid modes of teaching that ensued in the subsequent semesters have given us opportunities to expand such departmental activities at an international scale. This is through both staff and student on line participation at international levels including juries, competitions and talks.

Aims and outcomes of RIBA I and II award levels
Aims at RIBA Part I, corresponding to the first four years of our B.Sc. course, is to equip students with fundamental knowledge and skill sets to allow design problem-solving at diverse scales and in response to various conditions. By the end of the first four years, students should be able to develop their design proposals into technical, execution documents responding to market demands.

Part II of our course, i.e. the final year of our B.Sc. course coupled with taught modules from the M.Sc. course, aims at guiding students toward chosen routes for technical specialization. Building on fundamental knowledge acquired during the first four years of study, Part II aims at exposing students to more complex projects and architectural knowledge associated with the built environment, such as technical precepts of sustainable and energy-efficient design, while increasing students' sophistically in intellectual inquiry. This is through enhanced critical thinking, holistic analyses and independent research, which constitute a foreground upon which creative problem-solving is undertaken.

Specific Outcomes and Relevance to Professional Practice
Our course is designed to produce graduates who can satisfy the following job market requirements:

- Setting architectural programs
- Development of design proposals at both architectural and urban scales
- Presenting design proposals in visual, verbal and written formats, using digital and non-digital media.
- Preparation of well-researched and well-written analytical reports
- Selection of construction methods and preparation of associated technical drawings. Project management practices.
- Our course also emphasizes acquisition of transferrable skills including critical thinking, creative problem-solving, design development, communication and team-working.

10 Commendations

10.1 The Board commends the level of ambition, exploration, and synthesis evidenced within the graduation projects, and the insight they provide to the students' commitment to the development of their ideas and architectural positions.

10.2 The Board commends the Department's approach to responding to the action points and advice of the 2022 RIBA Exploratory Board, and the coherent and comprehensive manner in which these have fed into the evolution of the Masters Programme.

10.3 The Board commends the attention paid by the programme to define and document both physical context and spatial experience particularly apparent within Graduation projects.

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 The Board applauds the exploration of a multi-purpose studio space model, but urges the Department to extend this to provide appropriate physical studio facilities for the cohort sizes across all years.

12.2 The Department should consider the development of a digital archive of both student design and research work to provide a platform for archiving and sharing output across cohorts and to the wider public and professional audiences.

12.3 The Department should consider how the existing library could be developed and consolidated to provide mature and comprehensive learning and teaching

resources for students and staff, matching the level of ambition evident within the programme.

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 Department to explore the context and expanded community within the Arab Academy and the Arab League, to provide students with a range of experiences of learning, peer exchange and professional exposure, and to leverage the particular and unique circumstances available to AASTMT.

13.2 The Board recognises the Department's commitment to ensure students integrate and synthesise skills and knowledge gained across different modules, and recommends that this agenda is extended to further support the development of holistic project work at all levels within the Masters.

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 Part 2

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 2 graduate attributes were met by graduates of MSc Architectural Engineering and Environmental Design.

15 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.

The Board made no further comments.

16 Other information

16.1 Student numbers

236 students

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.

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