
Royal Institute of British Architects

**Report of the RIBA visiting board to
the University of Malaya**

Date of visiting board: 23/24 June 2016

Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 21 September 2016

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- 1** **Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**
 Department of Architecture
 Faculty of Built Environment
 University of Malaya
 50603 Kuala Lumpur
 Malaysia
- 2** **Head of Architecture Group**
 Muhammad Azzam Ismail
- 3** **Course/s offered for revalidation**
 Bachelor of Science in Architecture (Part I - 3 years full time)
 Master of Architecture (Part II - 2 years full time)
- 4** **Course leader/s**
 Dr. Muhammad Azzam Ismail; Part 1
 Dr. Nazli Che Din; Part 2
- 5** **Awarding body**
 University of Malaya
- 6** **The visiting board**
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|----------------|-------------------------|
| Neil Lamb | Chair/Academic |
| Angie Pascoe | Academic |
| Negar Mihanyar | Practitioner |
| John Koh | 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 21 September 2016 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally revalidated.
- Bachelor of Science in Architecture, Part One (3 years full time)**
Master of Architecture, Part Two (2 years full time)
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in: 2021

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

(Statement written by the school)

Our reputation and history

2016 marks the 21st year of the establishment of the architecture programme at the University of Malaya (UM). 2016 also marks the 111th year of the foundation of UM. Throughout its history, UM has established itself as the centre of excellence in the teaching and learning of various fields including architecture and as the premier research university in Malaysia with world-wide recognitions. UM is the best university in Malaysia and one of the top universities in Asia.

As of 2016, architecture and built environment at UM has been ranked in the top 100 of the QS World University Ranking by subject while the university is ranked at 146th in the QS World University Ranking. Despite its young age, the architecture programme by the Department of Architecture (DoA) at UM has a solid reputation of delivering architectural education that is directly supported by an excellent research profile in areas such as heritage and sustainable green architecture.

Our vision, mission and objectives

In line with the university's own, the DoA visions itself to be internationally renowned in research, innovation, publication and teaching. In pursuing this, the DoA strives to produce architecture graduates who are efficient, ethical and professional, able to lead the construction industry, face technical challenges and sensitive to the social and cultural context at national and international level.

At UM, all programmes are developed with the objectives of producing graduates with a solid grasp of knowledge in their discipline and cognitive ability to think critically to solve problems as well as to easily adapt to various surroundings and to prepare them for lifelong learning. Therefore, the DoA strives to ensure that graduates of architecture programmes of UM are able to:

- 1. Master sufficient knowledge in the design field, research studies, technology, practice the rules and regulations, theory and culture related to architecture.*
- 2. Utilise the practical skills and computer software in design, research, presentation and management of architectural projects to achieve the client and related parties requirements in the construction industry.*
- 3. Demonstrate social skills and responsibility towards mankind and the environment in the design, exploration, management and execution of architectural projects.*

4. *Practice ethical values, professionalism and integrity in advising the client and related parties in the construction industry.*
5. *Communicate effectively, capable of working in a team and apply leadership skills in managing architectural projects.*
6. *Utilise scientific research skills in decision making and solving design and technical problems for architectural projects.*
7. *Utilise information management skills and capability from lifelong learning in designing architectural projects.*
8. *Use managerial and entrepreneurial skills in the management of architectural projects and present ideas to the client to ensure profitability and full utilization of resources.*

Our curriculum

The curriculum of our architecture programmes were tailored, firstly, to conform to the requirements of LAM as a regulatory body that accredits architectural programmes in Malaysia. Secondly, to conform to the requirements of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) as an international benchmark for quality assurance standard of our graduates who would be able to seek employment internationally. Henceforth, the most important aspect of our curriculum is that it seeks to strike a balance between the design and theoretical requirements of studio projects in addition to the integration of technical requirements.

Part 1

Our Bachelor of Science in Architecture programme emphasises students' ability to develop design comprehensively by forming concepts and exploring design ideas. Students are encouraged to comprehend the language of design and criticize design and construction processes. Our Part 1 also encourages students to develop the ability to apply knowledge in environmental science and building physics to meet the technical requirements of design, the profession and the industry. Furthermore, our students are expected to develop their skills in both verbal and graphic forms of architectural communication besides academic writing abilities to encourage scientific research.

Part 2

On top of the Part 1 education, our Master of Architecture programme promotes interest, knowledge and skills in architectural design sensitive to the cultural context and the environment. Students are to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of design and apply creative technical skills. Our Part 2 also encourages students to expand their ability in analytical thinking and problem solving. Furthermore, the students are expected to apply scientific and scholarly principles that form the base of building technology. Graduates from our Part 2 should be able to practice architecture confidently and responsibly besides being able to go further and develop expertise through PhD research.

Our core areas of specialisation

We believe that it is also important to have core areas of specialisation to become exceptional and crucial to set us apart from other schools of architecture in Malaysia. The DoA looks upon heritage and sustainable green architecture as our core areas of specialisation. These two core areas are becoming increasingly important in Malaysia and are well-established areas of key importance internationally. Students are offered an opportunity to pursue these areas within the architecture programmes both directly and indirectly.

To further enhance our core areas of specialisation, the university and the DoA encourage our lecturers to engage in research and working on real projects. Several of our lecturers are actively involved as consultants in on-going

conservation projects and have served in advisory capacity to the Department of National Heritage and the Kuala Lumpur City Hall. Lecturers who are keen on sustainability-based research have received research grants from UM and external funding from government agencies and private organisations to carry out various researches.

Distinctive approaches to teaching and learning

International collaboration, cross cultural learning and multi-ethnic composition of student and staff population, as well as excellent linkages with the profession/industry, are features of our academic environment. As part of the UM's efforts to enhance our students' academic experience through international exposure, we have pursued active inbound and outbound programmes and student exchanges since 2005. The inbound and outbound programmes allow collaborative studies which affords participating students opportunities to learn more about different cultural and physical contexts.

The employability and marketability of our graduates for local and overseas practices are our prime concerns in giving learning experience to our students within the diverse and multi-cultural environment. To this end, the DoA benefits from the university's central location in Kuala Lumpur which affords ease of access and the university's reputation as a premier university makes it attractive for industry players and the architectural fraternity to be involved in its programmes. Our location in Kuala Lumpur where most architectural practices in Malaysia are located has enabled us to tap into a readily available pool of experienced professional architects who facilitate as external critics for our design studios as well as contribute to lectures and other academic activities.

In addition, the DoA has appointed two Adjunct Professors and four industry experts as a means to further bring experience and knowledgeable people as part of the teaching community. These constant and regular exposures have enhanced our university-industry link, our students get to visit the firms for exposure to practice and intern for practical training and seek job placements.

Skills relevant to modern professional practice

The DoA also emphasises the learning process by experimentation and exploration in the students' works especially at the Part 1 level. We impart skills in the design process that is rational and pragmatic that takes into account that most students would bring their own prior knowledge into the programme. However, the architectural design studio projects must indicate build-ability; especially at Part 2 level with the majority of the teaching staff are licensed architects with practice experience. Nevertheless, we see this as a mainstream requirement which is the staple attribute of graduates from Malaysian schools of architecture that must be complied with.

To give our students an added advantage and to meet the current needs of modern professional practice, we have invested in training our students in the use of new software technologies such as Revit, Rhino and Integrated Environmental Solutions (IES) to test the effectiveness of their design solutions for studio projects. Our students also get to familiarise themselves with the use of laser cutters and 3D printers in exploring designs and very soon a sophisticated 3D laser scanner.

Future of Architecture at UM

The DoA will continue to further enhance its excellence in teaching and learning architecture and also achieve world-wide visibility of its research and research expertise.

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 11.1 The board commends the investment in new facilities.
- 11.2 The board commends the engaged and articulate staff and student body.
- 11.3 The board commends the clarity of the documentation provided for the RIBA visiting board.
- 11.4 The board commends the department's engagement with local practice at all levels of the courses.
- 11.5 The board commends the way in which the department has responded to the external examiners advice. We believe that this is a valuable asset in aiding course development and encourage the university to maintain and formalise the process.

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 At part 2, the students should be encouraged to explore greater design creativity through the application of the full range of communication and presentation tools.
- 13.2 At part 2, the department must develop a stronger culture of model making and experimentation throughout the design process using a variety of scale and media.
- 13.3 The department should strengthen the delivery of critical thinking in written work and must ensure that all work is appropriately referenced.
- 13.4 At part 2, the department should develop a more innovative approach to investigating the creative possibilities of technology to inform the design approach.
- 13.5 The department must ensure all general criteria are mapped to core courses, and we remind the department that electives cannot be included in this.

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 encourages the department to take creative advantage of the proximity of other departments located in the new building.

- 14.2 The board advises the department to strengthen the theoretical and philosophical content of the courses at part 1 and part 2 to help inform more varied design outcomes.
- 14.3 The board acknowledges the university's ambition to increase student numbers and advises that appropriate facilities should be provided to maintain the standards of the course.
- 14.4 The board advises that the academic position statement is redrafted to clearly articulate the identity and ambition of the department.
- 14.5 The board encourages staff to support the more able students to take more risks and demonstrate excellence in their design work at Part 2.
- 14.6 The department should develop a more progressive teaching culture to encourage the movement from supported learners to independent learners to life-long learners.
- 14.7 The board advises that the department explore how to enhance the vertical collaboration between year groups at all levels of part 1 and 2.
- 14.8 The board supports and encourages the proposal of setting up a student council.
- 14.9 The board strongly recommends careful succession planning to maintain the breadth of design talent in the Architecture staff body.
- 14.10 We note the schools ambition to specialise in heritage, conservation and sustainability and would encourage the department to develop this further and to review these themes holistically, to better advantage.
- 14.11 The board recommends the department continues to develop its culture and identity. This could be strengthened by continued financial support from the University to assist with study trips, site visits and core student publications.

15 Delivery of academic position

The following key points were noted: Please see advice point 14.4

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 2016 RIBA visiting board:

BSc	M Arch
Year 1: 45	Year 1: 38
Year 2: 41	Year 2: 35
Year 3: 39	

18.2 Documentation provided

The board received all of the required University of Malaya documentation prior the RIBA visiting board.

19 Notes of meetings

***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**