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**Royal Institute of British Architects**

**Report of the RIBA Initial Visiting Board  
to Heriot Watt University, Dubai Campus**

**Date of visiting board: 26-27 May 2021**

**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 29 July 2021**

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- 1 Details of institution hosting course/s** **(report part A)**  
 Heriot Watt University Dubai  
 Dubai Knowledge Park  
 PO Box 38103  
 Dubai, UAE
- 2 Director of Studies | Head of Architecture**  
 Harpreet Seth
- Year Coordinators**
- |                    |            |
|--------------------|------------|
| Cristiano Luchetti | Year One   |
| Shameel Muhammed   | Year Two   |
| Harpreet Seth      | Year Three |
| Alida Bata         | Year Four  |
- 3 Course/s offered for validation**  
 BA (Hons) Architecture, 4 years
- 4 Awarding body**  
 Heriot-Watt University
- 5 The visiting board**
- |                |                         |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| David Dernie   | chair / academic        |
| Lilly Kudic    | academic                |
| Peter Williams | practitioner            |
| Sophie Bailey  | RIBA validation manager |
- 6 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](http://www.architecture.com).
- 7 Recommendation of the Visiting Board**  
 On the 29 July 2021 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed that the following courses and qualifications are unconditionally validated:
- BA (Hons) Architecture, 4 years**
- The next RIBA visiting board will take place in 2026.
- 8 Academic position statement**  
 (Statement written by the school)  
 The Architecture programme at Heriot-Watt University, one of the UK's and UAE'S leading institutions for multidisciplinary teaching and research, is designed to operate as a nexus between the global, regional, and local contexts. Heriot-Watt University aims to produce the next generation of leaders and thinkers who can tackle the challenges of the 21st Century; committed to attaining excellence in a variety of disciplines that contribute to a sustainable, resource and energy-efficient society. The programme aims to educate these critical thinkers, that is fundamental to addressing critically important contemporary challenges facing humanity. These include climate change, industry 4.0, digital divide, population growth, resource depletion, and environmental issues.

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These require collaborative actions that will shape tomorrow's-built environment and create a sustainable future. The programme within the Heriot-Watt, School of [Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society](#) (EGIS), a school of built environment, offers this distinct multi-disciplinary teaching and learning opportunity aimed at tackling these challenges and offering innovative solutions. Students also benefit from research and academic expertise working across disciplines and professions within [Institute of Sustainable Building Design](#) (ISBD) under the auspices of the Royal Academy of Engineering Centre of Excellence in Sustainable Building Design and [Centre of Excellence in Smart Construction](#) (CESC).

The progressive view of the programme towards architectural education encourages Architecture for Change and Architecture for Impact, focusing on the pressing need for graduates who are equipped to challenge the status quo in current design practice. The programme strives for positive impact, by innovating for the future, embedding sustainable practices, responding to people and place, and interdisciplinary design. We reimagine what we produce, and impact with architecture for shaping a better society, closely aligned to [Heriot-Watt Strategic Plan 2025 Shaping Tomorrow Together](#) , in striving to address real problems and challenges. Dubai, situated on a strategic location on the Arabian Gulf Coast of the United Arab Emirates, has become one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world, emerging from a fishing village. Seacoast, expansive sand dunes, and Hajjar Mountains define the enigmatic backdrop for highly resourceful and hospitable Bedouin tribes who survived harsh weather conditions. Today, Dubai inspires a new generation of creative professionals, from across the world, making Dubai their long-term atelier. It is the new Constantinople of the world at a crossroad between the East and the West. It offers a cross-cultural opportunity as a living urban laboratory for upcoming critical design professionals for the Middle East. The [Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan](#) maps out a comprehensive plan for sustainable urban development in Dubai. It focuses on enhancing people's happiness and quality of life and reinforcing Dubai as a global destination for citizens, residents, and visitors over the next 20 years. Our programme aims to educate these resilient future professional architects in both, local and global context, at the new state of art urban campus in Knowledge Park located in the heart of Dubai.

### **Creative Critical Thinkers**

The programme focuses on preparing the students to be critical thinkers, effective communicators, and lifetime learners. They are encouraged to be risk-takers with strong professional integrity. [Dubai's Creative Economy Strategy](#) will enable it to take its creative pulse, transforming it into a global capital for the creative economy by 2025. This knowledge and innovation-based future economy informs the programme in promoting independent inquiry, artistic and technical rigor that underpins the studio-based pedagogy. Students' progress through the project phases of investigation, research, development, and synthesis to final designs. This emphasizes critical inquiry, inventiveness, contextually and culturally relevant adaptable approach to architectural design. The

topics of academic delivery range across history and theory, archaeology of ideas, professional practice, innovation in construction, energy in buildings, integrated technology and architectural representation including freehand graphics, digital tools, and 3D simulations, with an aim to meet industry standards.

### **Specialist Practitioner Expertise**

The Centre of Excellence award further encourages us to engage proactively with external collaborators, including practitioners and relevant professional bodies, connecting academia to professional practice ensuring that our core syllabus is constantly industry informed. To sustain a strong grounding in practice, all our specialist visiting tutors are engaged in a wide range of private practice as partners, associates, or design managers. Additionally, Architecture [Open-Series](#) (OS) is a series of public lectures that exposes students to a variety of practices and processes in real life projects. This effective industry engagement inspires our graduates to be creative, confident thinkers, well prepared to tackle the global challenges. Specialist practitioner-based architects in their engagement with the programme further impress on students their potential catalytic role in creating a positive impact on the socio-cultural fabric.

### **Contemporary Issues and Advanced Technologies**

The programme thrives on establishing the transformative role of architecture, with human-centric design and a strong socio-cultural response at all levels of design and detail. With rapidly changing urban fabric, students are encouraged to test new models and advanced technologies for future placemaking and reimagining the spatial contract. With a strong focus on public health and safety, the programme addresses issues in contemporary and future urban lifestyles. Informed by contemporary thinking and equipped with advanced technologies, students are exposed to interdisciplinary professional expertise. Student's research, innovate, explore, create, and prepare to lead the future within the unbuilt and built environment. The programme encourages students to engage in energetic debates between the digital, contextual, tectonic, and cultural, thereby establishing their own critical positions. Our students regularly qualify and present at [Undergraduate Research Competition](#) (UGRC), the largest undergraduate research event in the GCC region, these dialogues emerging as key drivers for research in the region.

### **Contextually Driven Architecture**

The programme is committed to contribute to a regionally and culturally sustainable future, as a key resource to an integrated, liveable, and sustainable future society engendering the health and wellbeing of people and cities. Post pandemic de-globalization has brought a renewed focus on our graduates with strong regional sensibility, cross-cultural approach, and a robust awareness of global, regional, and local

contexts. The diversity of our students and faculty offers a rich global community helping them to develop as culturally aware citizens of the world. This encourages holistic thinking enabling our students to develop new perspectives to sustainable principles and practices in response to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in architectural profession and the built environment.

### **Collaborative Multi-Disciplinary Approach**

The diversity of faculty and students also adds a healthy dynamic to the debate of relevant response to climate change and rapidly changing socio-economic landscape. Students explore a variety of opportunities yet remain strongly relevant to the spirit of the region. Climate literacy, innovative technologies, and learning from recently finished collaborative live milestone projects form a strong approach towards regionally and contextually relevant architecture. Our students across all cohorts collaborated and successfully participated in [Solar Decathlon Middle East](#) (SDME 2018) to design and build ORA House (Organic-Resilient-Adaptive), the solar-powered house at the Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Solar Park, along with 15 teams from 28 universities in 11 countries. Strong multi-disciplinary learning is what distinguishes us from other providers of Architectural education. This strong emphasis on interdisciplinary design and collaborating is genuinely what we anticipate as one of the keys to sustainability that will contribute to a regionally and culturally sustainable future. We will consider provision in the future for a Masters' programme that supports RIBA Part 2 qualification and also extending our international provisions to the Malaysia campus in near future.

### **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 Commendations**

The visiting board made the following commendations:

- 10.1 The board commends the way in which the school has engaged with the RIBA during the validation process and the clarity of the evidence provided for the visiting board.
- 10.2 The board commends the quality of the school's leadership.

10.3 The board commends the school's ambition and plans for future growth.

**11 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.

11.1 The programme should more clearly evidence its concern for climate responsive design within the portfolios, especially with respect to designs that are underpinned by passive technologies.

11.2 The portfolios should more clearly evidence a concern with social sustainability and connection with context; the city and region of Dubai.

11.3 At the later stages of the programme, the briefs should allow for more focus and commonality, structured so as to facilitate peer-to-peer learning and critical debate.

**12. Advice**

The visiting board offers the following advice to the department on desirable, but not essential improvements, which, it is felt, would assist course development and raise standards.

12.1 Students should be further encouraged to engage in iterative design processes, which include sketching, model making and other forms of visual documentation and inquiry.

12.2 The programme would benefit from greater focus on the study of creative design methodologies and representational techniques, particularly at the early stages of the programme.

12.3 Students would benefit greatly from study field trips at all levels, in order to experience modern and historic buildings, urban environments and landscape settings.

12.4 The programme identity and character would benefit from a clearer articulation of how staff research is integrated into areas of student learning.

**13 Delivery of academic position**

The board felt that the statement accurately reflected the school's ethos, identity and academic position.

**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 1**

The Board confirmed that all of the Part 1 graduate attributes were met by graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture, 4 years.

**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.

**Graduate Criteria for Part 1**

The Board confirmed that all the Part 1 graduate criteria were met by graduates of the BA (Hons) Architecture, 4 years.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers**

2018-2019 (10)

2019-2020 (19)

2020-2021(16)

The total number of students in Architecture for 2020-2021 is 102

**16.2 Documentation provided**

The faculty provided all advance documentation in accordance with the validation procedures.

**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