

# **Report of the RIBA visiting board to the Universidad Europea de Madrid**

**Date of visiting board: 3 & 4 October 2019**  
**Confirmed by RIBA Education Committee: 22 January 2020**

**1 Details of institution hosting course/s**

Departamento de Arquitectura, Diseño y Civil  
Escuela de Arquitectura, Ingeniería y Diseño  
Universidad Europea de Madrid  
C/ Tajo, s/n. Villaviciosa de Odón. 28670 Madrid

**2 Dean of School of Architecture, Engineering and Design**

Dr Alberto Sols

**Head of Department of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Design**

Dr Miguel Lasso de la Vega

**3 Courses offered for validation**

- Bachelor's Degree in Fundamentals of Architecture
- Master's Degree in Architecture

**4 Awarding body**

Universidad Europea de Madrid

**5 The visiting board**

Professor David McClean, Chair  
Jane McAllister – Vice Chair  
Layton Reid  
Dr Paula Montoya Regional representative

Stephanie Beasley-Suffolk – validation manager – in attendance.

**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 Proposals of the visiting board**

On 22 January 2020 the RIBA Education Committee confirmed validation of the following:

- Bachelor's Degree in Fundamentals of Architecture, Part 1
- Master's Degree in Architecture, Part 2

The next full visiting board will take place in 2024.

**8 Standard requirements for continued recognition**

Continued RIBA recognition of all courses and qualifications is dependent upon:

- i external examiners or an acceptable alternative 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

**9 Academic position statement**

The Architecture program at the Universidad Europea de Madrid is closely related to the plural and contemporary context of our city. Here we can find the headquarters of many innovative architecture studios, international architecture magazines and editors, cultural foundations, other public and private schools, etc. Madrid is also an important center for construction activity, with many examples of first-rate buildings throughout the 20th & 21st centuries.

The program has many prestigious and diverse architects that are teaching and doing research for the School. 80% of our academic staff are active, renowned, independent professionals based in Madrid who teach on a part-time basis at the University. They focus their particular briefs on the understanding of contemporary problems and opportunities, on training that is constantly updated for our increasingly international student body. This is reflected in our students' high satisfaction with their teachers. All of this at a medium-sized school, with very close collaboration between professors and pupils, sharing classrooms with art students where a double degree art+architecture has been created.

The present academic context is multidisciplinary, and future architects have the obligation to collaborate with numerous experts who enrich the experience with their points of view. Accordingly, integrated design workshops are the core of our Project-Based School. This pedagogy allows students to develop their personal competences and skills, tracing links between knowledge areas: the Design Studio, being at the core, articulates history, construction, structures, urban planning and technology and are blended in a particularized mixture adapted to their own personal balance. In this rich and warm atmosphere where tutors and students working side by side, any idea can find a way to grow. This acts as a catalyst for shared learning.

“Hands-on” methodologies are also a strong part of our ethos. Students are encouraged to work on real case scenarios continuously, developing full scale prototypes or small size real and implies working daily in our laboratories with all kinds of technologies. The Design and Engineering schools, our brethren, share studio space and skills with us to achieve unexpected results. In addition, the school strongly supports collaborative projects abroad. This commitment has led us to build in Africa & South America using our own resources.

One of our favorite and most successful events is the festival called “Handstinking”: all lessons are postponed and an intensive series of lectures linked to cross curricular hands-on workshops are organized and managed by the students from the three schools all together. The festival is subsidized by the School, lasts for a full week and has been celebrated since 2014.

Furthermore, UEM establishes compulsory internships for our students with prominent architecture studios of their choice. Internships comprise a total of 12 ECTS, 300 hours of work on real projects, double the usual standard and

is defined as part time dedication so as to be compatible with their ongoing studies. Many students find their professional path through this initiative.

We can state that our School is deeply committed to a creative, technical, realistic and plural approach to architecture.

We are proud that our graduates in architecture have developed their own vision of the profession and of the global scene. This is what surely explains the high rate of employment, at present 94%. In addition, many alumni and students are awarded relevant prizes and commendations with their projects in prestigious competitions such as Biennial Architecture and Urbanism of Spain, European, Archiprix International, Mies van der Rohe Award, Triennial of Architecture of Oslo, Shelter Student Architectural Design, etc.

At the Universidad Europea de Madrid, we believe that there are so many different ways to become an architect that we try to promote an environment where every student can find their own path. This attitude towards the practice of architecture describes our open and plural ethos, an ethos that we try to enhance every year.

## **10 Commendations**

The Board commends:

- 10.1 The School's focus on internationalisation from the perspective of both diversity of staff and students in the learning experience and professional opportunities for graduates.
- 10.2 Staff and student commitment and engagement in the creation of a robust and entrepreneurial community of learning.
- 10.3 The live and onsite project activities within the city and further demonstration through the internship programme.

## **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 recommends that the School revisit its existing academic position statement to convey more assertively the character and accomplishments of the School and its strategy for further development.
- 12.2 The Board recommends the further development and explicit demonstration in design work of user engagement and social context.
- 12.3 Based on the evidence presented, the Board recommends that management, practice and law be further defined and identified as a constituent component

of the major project outcome at Part 1 and Part 2. This relates to action point 9.4 of the 2018 Exploratory Board.

**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 Based on the value that the students place on the dual degree, the Board advises the School either to reconsider the provision of a dual art and architecture degree or some equivalent action that ensures that collaboration with the arts is not lost.
- 13.2 The Board advises that the school ensures that a full range of development and sketch design materials is made explicit as part of the design process in the major projects at Part 1 and Part 2.
- 13.3 The Board advises the School to develop at each level monitoring and feedback processes to refine communication between subject and design projects.

**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.

**14.1 Bachelor's Degree in Fundamentals of Architecture**

The Board confirmed that all Part 1 graduate attributes were met.

**14.2 Master's Degree in Architecture**

The Board confirmed that all Part 2 graduate attributes were met.

**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.

- 15.1 The Board made no further comments.

**16 Other information**

**16.1 Student numbers**

Bachelor's Degree in Fundamentals of Architecture, Part 1: 153  
Part Master's Degree in Architecture, Part 2: 19.

**16.2 Documentation provided**

While the School provided all documentation as required by the Procedures for Validation, please see Advice 13.2.

## 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 mid-term panel and the next full visiting board.**

### 17.1 Meeting with budget holder and course leaders

The Board met the Dean; the Director of Quality and Compliance; the Vice-Dean of the Postgraduate programme; the Head of Department of Architecture, Design and Civil Engineering and the Vice-Dean of the Degree Programme. The Board was interested in discussing: the academic position; architecture's place in the wider University; the School's ambitions; the pedagogic ethos; the course structure and link between Bachelor and Master's programmes; student demographic, numbers and plans for growth; the links with research; and any other relevant issues. The following represents the main points made.

- The University was founded in the 1990s when the law in Spain was changed to permit private universities.
- The driver is excellence in all fields of endeavour. The University's ambition is for all disciplines to be first in their field and to this end, architecture receives full support.
- In addition to its Spanish accreditation, attaining internationally-recognised quality benchmarks, such as NAAB and RIBA validation, are an important part of the University's drive to be recognised as one of the best universities in Europe in terms of quality.
- The School sees itself as educators of architects and providers of architects to the profession. Academic methodology is paramount in achieving this; it is a project-based school, focussing on applied knowledge, and wants to be recognised for excellence in this field. This is closely related to applied research. The University seeks constantly to share ideas of good practice across all disciplines and from other institutions. The success of this approach can be seen in staff publications and the performance of students in competitions.
- The meeting clarified the course structure, the progressive nature of the workshops and how each area is integrated, culminating in the major project in the last year of the Bachelor degree and again in the Master's. The Master's is a continuation of the Bachelor's but with a more practical focus, emulating practice.
- The Bachelor's cohorts number approximately 30 in each year. The majority of students who begin the Bachelor's progress to the Master's. Numbers in the Master's programmes have increased overall by 19%. There is some movement at this level as some graduates move elsewhere for a different experience and new students join from other schools. International students who do not require a Master's in their home country tend not to remain as the Bachelor programme gives them sufficient equivalency.
- The programme content and structure are well established but can be amended in accordance with University quality processes and those of the regulator. Feedback is continuously sought from all stakeholders including students and the profession. Changes are only implemented after consultation.
- There are institutional objectives and learning outcomes for each discipline. Achievement is continuously monitored, and processes are fully documented. The quality assurance department issues improvement plans where

necessary. Students have influence in establishing the themes of the workshops, if they wish and are free to approach the academic co-ordinator with ideas. Student opinion in all areas (academic, pastoral, social) is taken seriously and there are formal and informal mechanisms for student feedback and tracking responses at departmental and institutional level.

- Students have varying levels of skills and knowledge on admission. Most Spanish students come straight from high school. Many, but not all, English-medium students are international. Mentoring sessions are provided to ensure that all students are brought to an equal level of skills in areas such as drawing and mathematics.
- Relationships between staff and students are good, fostered by a favourable staff:student ratio.
- The majority of international students are from the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America.
- The mandatory internship is formalised by signed agreement. This is very good experience and the feedback from employers is good; students are often offered permanent work once qualified.
- There are many opportunities for research to inform the taught courses and for student to become involved. There are opportunities at Master's level to complement the professional architecture programme. The architecture research groups also welcome students who are interested in specific areas including urbanism, heritage and so forth.
- Projected growth will not compromise quality as the School, prior to 2008, was accustomed to teaching significantly larger numbers of students. Pedagogy and programme structure are sufficiently flexible to adapt to scale.

## 17.2 Meeting with students

The Board met a large group of students representing both Bachelor and Master's programmes and including Spanish and international students. The Board was interested in discussing: the student appraisal; why students had chosen UEM; preparation for practice and students' professional ambitions; student representation; the student-centric learning experience; studio culture; the mentor programme; possible impact of growth in numbers; teaching and pastoral care; understanding of the programme structure; the value of RIBA validation; ideas for changes or improvements; and any other issues the students wished to raise. The following represents the main points made.

- The student appraisal had been compiled by the head student representative in consultation with student colleagues.
- Reasons for choosing UEM included;
  - The project-based approach in which students have more direct involvement.
  - The international environment, particularly attractive to students who are not able to study abroad.
  - Class sizes. Close relationships with tutors have advantages and disadvantages but overall this provides a positive experience as more assistance is available and communication is more effective.
  - The opportunity to take a double degree in art and architecture.
  - Students are encouraged to use computers and to be more current.
  - The integrated nature of the curriculum.
  - The opportunity to study in English if desired.
  - Although expensive by Spanish standards the University offers a scholarship programme which attracts talent from across the country.

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- Students see Spanish architects as very entrepreneurial, often opening their own small studios, practising small scale architecture soon after graduating. They are international in outlook and are flexible due to their language skills. The economic situation encourages them to innovate. Their skills can be applied to a variety of endeavours which promote social improvement, not necessarily connected to architecture. They would like to apply the environmental and humanitarian awareness honed in the School to their professional life.
  - The Master's involvement in international networks and exchange programmes allows students to compare their work with other schools. The Master's offers freedom and is not prescriptive. The School supports students in whatever they want to do.
  - The context of Spanish practice is technical; there is a symbiosis between technology and a rigid idea of architecture which comes together in this University. Students learn to solve problems in any field.
  - Students credited the high quality of the teaching staff with the creation of a positive learning atmosphere. The School also responds quickly to students' concerns and ideas. There are formal and informal channels of communication, representation at regular meetings.
  - Students are free to organise their own events and can interact with other disciplines such as engineers and fine arts.
  - Students were concerned that space has been reduced since the discontinuation of the art degree, although they have other facilities such as the FabLab. Space known as the "Bowling hall," open to all disciplines, is well used by the architecture students. As it is multi-disciplinary space one of the benefits is peer learning. Students can also use the hallways and library, although the latter is silent space.
  - Pastoral care systems are good. However, students tend to seek advice from their peer group. While they appreciate the mentor system, they would prefer to choose their own mentor. The onus is on the student to seek advice. Co-ordinators and teachers are approachable.
  - The Master's structure could initially seem daunting, but ultimately its integrated nature became clear. Some felt that academic freedom was achieved possibly at the expense of technical knowledge, which is strength of Spanish architecture education. However, the internship can compensate for this. University education provides the grounding, critical thinking and problem-solving skills upon which practice can build. Students benefit from the rich variety of professional backgrounds, attitudes and interests of the staff.
  - The programme enables students to develop research skills and specialisms. The opportunity to combine different concepts and art classes helped students on the dual degree to identify their areas of interest.
  - RIBA validation is seen as valuable in a broad sense as it demonstrates achievement of a recognised standard and has a level of international recognition, although the value to the individual was less certain. Students believe that it is important for an architect to maximise one's potential to be mobile.
  - Suggestions for change included:
    - The restoration of the art course; the art and architecture double degree students produced outstanding work.
    - To relocate the campus to Madrid.
    - To improve transport to this campus.

- The number of students is growing but facilities remain the same. They should be commensurate with student growth.
- The percentage of art in the architecture degree should be increased.
- Communications between administration and students should be improved.
- As final comments the students wished to add:
  - The advantage of the location is adjacency to sports facilities which helps students' studies.
  - The students reiterated the quality of the staff body and their appreciation of being taught by staff of such calibre.
  - The adjacency to other faculties and opportunity for trans-disciplinary working is welcomed.
  - The digital fabrication laboratory is a valuable resource.

### 17.3 Meeting with head of institution

The Board met the Rector, the Vice-Rector and the Dean. The Board was interested in discussing: the University's strategic vision for architecture; plans for growth and implications for resourcing and quality of delivery; the double degree; partnerships and internationalisation; the distinctive quality of the UEM architecture graduate; and any other relevant issues. The following represents the main points made.

- The current five-year plan is being reviewed for next year. There is a clear commitment to support architecture which is one of the main pillars of the University and regarded as a high-prestige subject.
- The University is ambitious but realistic. Architecture will grow but not exponentially. High quality and accreditation are paramount. The University seeks excellence but as a private institution it also has to be profitable and is confident that these interests can be reconciled. Interest in architecture is growing once more, having declined after 2008, prior to which numbers were very large. The University is accustomed to teaching large cohorts in other areas and is confident that growth will be managed without compromising quality or economic viability.
- Space is always a constraint. The University is refurbishing the campus on an ongoing basis and reviewing space allocations to maximise use. The campus is large and there are options both here and on the North Madrid campus.
- The public universities are the University's main competitors and one University offers a shorter programme, but UEM seeks to be different in terms of academic excellence.
- The dual degree of art and architecture was discontinued as there were insufficient numbers. However, the dual degree of architecture and design remains very popular.
- The budget is shared across the three constituent departments of the School of Architecture, Engineering and Design, with a greater level of support for architecture as it provides facilities, such as the FabLab, which are used by all degrees.
- The University has existing local and international partnerships in practice and academia, including the Colegio. A dual degree with San Diego in California is offered and the University wishes to set up partnership with European universities to facilitate the mobility of students.
- The University is fully committed to architecture and continuous improvement. External validation is seen as an opportunity to discuss and identify opportunities for improvement.

- The University aims to produce “good professionals” in the sense of what society needs. Alumni will be “good” citizens, concerned with the environment and diversity. This is will be developed across all disciplines in the University across all campuses.

#### 17.4 Meeting with external examiners

Note: There are no external professionals acting as course examiners because Spanish university programmes are validated and accredited by Public Administration.

In Madrid, Madri+d Foundation holds this attribution and they review the academic programs every four years. Similar to the RIBA accreditation process, Madri+d revises the student work and interviews staff, students, etc. This Foundation has an agreement with North American Agency NAAB to validate any architecture programmes that obtain NAAB substantial equivalency, as is the case with UEA. The University therefore does not need to pass any specific accreditation by Madri+d Foundation. It will renew the NAAB validation in 2021.

The School suggested that they ask a to attend the visit to explain the University’s situation and the validation procedures in Spain. They also suggested asking a representative of the Architects Association of Madrid to further elaborate on it.

The Board met the Higher Education Quality Assurance Co-ordinator, Fundacion Madrid, representatives of the Madrid Architects Association and a Final Project Masters External Examiner, all involved with the School in the capacity of external assessors and evaluating bodies. The meeting clarified the role of the external representatives, including whether they viewed work, had any involvement in assessment or moderation; feedback to the School about areas for improvement; the distinctive nature of the programme; how it is viewed by industry; the importance of the internship; the role of the Colegio;

- One of those present, Enrique Álvarez-Sala, was an external professional and examiner of the Master’s project. All projects are seen and comments are made. This is an official and minuted part of the grading process.
- It is not mandatory to have external examiners, but universities are required by law to have external evaluation. This can be performed by several agencies depending on the region. Fundación Madri+d is the agency in this region. The results of the studio and the professors are key. Every subject area of the Master’s must be checked. The Spanish system takes a holistic overview; the final project is particularly important as it carries the Licence.
- The agency Fundación Madri+d has an accord with NAAB (the National Architectural Accrediting Board of the USA) and assisted NAAB with the substantial equivalence process at UEM. NAAB makes recommendations which are acted upon.
- The double degree was distinctive because of its influence on the standard of the projects. The high standard of projects across Bachelor and Master’s is a distinctive characteristic of the School in its own right. Good technical skills are also a distinguishing feature. Graduates take a very comprehensive view, even if they have a special interest.
- The School is very highly regarded by industry. Internships are compulsory and provide a valuable experience, changing the vision of the students and

enabling them to improve in their final two years of study before they enter the profession formally.

- The Colegio plays an important role in the development of architects by helping students to become members, through two levels of membership: one for those who have completed their studies and one for those who are in the process of doing so.
- The quality and quantity of work is high and commendable. One external assessor voiced the opinion that students are more active in daily life in Madrid, which is probably as a result of the University's influence.

#### 17.5 Meeting with staff

The Board met a large group of staff involved in teaching both Bachelor and Master's programmes, from a broad spectrum of specialities. The Board was interested in discussing: processes for maintaining overview and programme coherence; ownership of the pedagogy; the course structure; entrepreneurship and preparation for practice; internationalisation; research and influence on teaching; the value of RIBA validation; architecture's position in the University; staff's views on strategic direction; the School's vision; the School's distinctiveness; visions for the future; and any other relevant issues. The following represents the main points made.

- The staff explained the programme co-ordination system which ensures parity and coherence at all levels, undertakes regular review of the programmes and identifies omissions and areas requiring improvements. There are official quality meetings for all degrees following which improvement plans are issued and formally monitored. The close relationship between staff enables constant informal discussion about the course and student performance. Shared crits and inclusion of different professors in juries ensure objectivity and parity. Occasionally external architects are invited to offer feedback on projects.
- The pedagogy is set by the teaching staff and is also frequently reviewed. It is organic although set within a quality framework. The project-based approach was pioneered in architecture and is now used across the University. Some years ago the decision was made to adopt an interdisciplinary approach.
- The importance of studio space is recognised, but it is not part of the Spanish architecture education tradition. However, students have the "Bowling Room" which is an unusual and invaluable resource. This is used by students from across the School of Architecture, Engineering and Design, allowing important cross-pollination which would not be fostered in a segregated space. The influence of this is visible in the students' work. The FabLab and other facilities are shared; however more space is needed. Students do take the initiative to get together in shared space.
- Staff are free to express opinions and the University responds. Regular meetings are held with students and students may also speak directly to the School director. The Bowling Room grew from a student proposal.
- The School is not complacent and always wants to evolve. Size makes communication and effecting change simpler. The mixture of art/architecture, technology and project works is not easy to achieve but it distinguishes it from other schools. Integration is traditional in this University. The lack of hierarchy makes this possible, allowing teaching to be more fluid and flexible across disciplinary boundaries. Students are exposed to a variety of styles. Teachers are scholars and have freedom of ideas as well as teaching.
- Staff continuously seek ways to introduce an interesting point of view from research activity.

- There are interconnections between research, teaching and the international profile. Research is mobile and adaptable. A strong international school of architecture was always an ambition. Degree projects are open to any location. Graduates work across the world in academia and practice. They are particularly expert in technology and computer technology.
- Before the 2008 economic downturn numbers were significantly larger. The pedagogy has remained constant and adapts well to change. Staff are confident that it will accommodate any growth without compromising quality.
- The structure of the Master's programme allows students to set a personal agenda from the beginning and to develop their own vision. The School's plural position instils in students the idea that there are many ways to be an architect and the Master's enables the development of an individual approach.
- RIBA validation is part of the international and global outlook of the School which is encouraged in the students. Student cohorts and the staff body are diverse in background and approach. The English-medium group is growing. Students undertake international internships and Master's students go abroad to study. There is a growing international network of alumni. Staff would like alumni to return and teach.