

Decision of the Accreditation Commission of AQAS

On the degree programme

- „Interior Architecture“ (B.A.)

at the Eastern Mediterranean University (North Cyprus)

Based on the report of the expert panel and the proceedings of the Accreditation Commission in its 56th meeting on 18./19. August 2014 the Accreditation Commission decides:

1. The Bachelors's programme "**Interior Architecture**" (**Bachelor of Arts**) offered by the **Eastern Mediterranean University** is accredited according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The accreditation is **conditional**.

2. The study programme essentially complies with the requirements defined by the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version. The required adjustments can be processed within a time period of nine months.
3. The conditions have to be fulfilled. The fulfilment of the conditions has to be documented and reported to AQAS no later than **31. May 2015**
4. The accreditation is given for the period of **five years** and is valid until **30. September 2019**.

Condition:

1. All parts of the curriculum, including internships have to be credited.

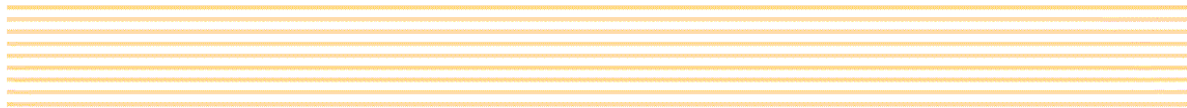
The following **recommendations** are given for further improvement of the programme:

1. The number and intensity of international collaborations and partnerships should be increased in order to promote academic exchange and increase the visibility and recognition of the programme.
2. Unique aspects resulting from the geographic position, history and culture of Cyprus should be incorporated in the profile of the programme making it even more attractive and competitive.
3. The subjects of light, material and furniture should be strengthened in the curriculum.
4. The student workload resulting from different studios should be coordinated and the importance of interior architectural core issues in the studios should be strengthened.

5. Courses/Modules in history of art and design as well as introductory courses to style/design should be included in the curriculum.
6. A stronger obligatory inclusion of students and graduates in the existing quality assurance procedures and their participation in the relevant committees is recommended.
7. The installation of a laboratory to test and experiment with light, material and colour is recommended.

With regard to the reasons for this decision the Accreditation Commission refers to the attached assessment report.

Die Auflagen wurden fristgerecht erfüllt. Die Akkreditierungskommission bestätigt dies mit Beschluss vom 17./18.08.2015.



AQAS

Agentur für Qualitäts-
sicherung durch
Akkreditierung von
Studiengängen

Experts' Report

on the degree programme:

“B.A. Interior Architecture”

offered by the Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU)

Visit to the University: 26./27. June 2014

Panel of Experts:

Barbara Brakenhoff

Architect, Leipzig,
(expert from professional practice)

Prof. Dr. Özge Cordan

Faculty of Architecture, Interior Architecture
Department, Istanbul Technical University,

Prof. Wolfgang Grillitsch

Study-Dean Interior Architecture, Faculty for
Architecture and Design, HFT Stuttgart,

Dominic Helm

Student of Architecture, University of
Applied Sciences, Mainz, (Student representative).

Coordinator:

Ronny Heintze

AQAS e.V.

1. Introduction

This report results from the external review of the Bachelor of Arts in Interior Architecture programme offered by the Eastern Mediterranean University. The review is based on the criteria derived from the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) that were developed by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and presented to the Bologna Follow-Up group in 2005.

The University produced a Self Evaluation Report. The accreditation procedure was officially initialized through a decision by the AQAS Accreditation Commission on 17./18. February 2014. The Accreditation Commission nominated the before mentioned expert panel and the University did not raise any concerns against the composition of the panel.

After a review of the Self Evaluation Report on 26./27. June 2014 a site visit to the University took place. On site, the experts interviewed different stakeholders and consulted additional documentation and student work. The visit concluded with the presentation of the preliminary findings by the group of experts to the University representatives.

2. Profile / Outcomes of the Programme

The learning outcomes of the programme are grouped in a matrix according to areas of interior architectural education that correspond with the requirements of IMMOBIG. Following the philosophy of EMU-DIA (Eastern Mediterranean University Interior Architecture Department) Interior Architecture is a multilateral specialized profession that addresses the interior space design of the built environment. Aim of the Interior Architecture programme is to train young candidates, fully equipped with knowledge, to contribute to the creation of a better environment for human beings. In a quickly changing and developing design world, responsibilities of interior architects cover a wide range of duties, including spatial analysis; design decisions; project preparation; material selection and detailing; modelling; presentation; production; and application issues. Interior architecture graduates are also supposed to be able to deal with colour, texture, natural and artificial light, sound, heating, ventilation, air-conditioning, and furniture. It is the aim of the Bachelor programme to equip the graduates with the relevant knowledge, skills and competencies to

Admission Requirements are different for T.R.N.C (Turkish Republic North Cyprus) citizens, T.R. (Turkish Republic) citizens, and citizens of other countries. All candidates who decide to study in the Department of Interior Architecture have to take an extra exam with multiple-choice questions based on visual perception. This exam is administered by EMU-DIA and also available to be held in EMU Liaison Offices in Turkey.

Experts' Evaluation

The programme focusses well on some comprehensible qualification goals that are still broadly defined at this point. Besides the field specific qualification goals the numerous non-field-specific and generic competencies incorporated in the profile of the programme deserve positive recognition. Consequently to the defined aims such as internalization, interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and "catching current trends in the world", the programme offers a student centered education. Based on this idea, the Programme has particular forms of teaching and learning like an interactive approach, face-to-face communication, or career integrated teaching/learning. Based on the background of students coming from numerous places in the

world, the required academic standards and the expectation from the labour market the defined qualification goals fit to the overall character of the programme. Resulting from this, and based on the defined international character of the education the experts find that the collaboration and exchange with other well established institutions and schools could be intensified and developed in order not only to increase the visibility and recognition of the programme, but also to underline the intended international character through increased academic exchange of students and teachers. Positively recognizing some already existing partnerships with Turkish institutions, partnerships beyond this culture could be of additional value for the programme. **(Finding)**

The experts also recognize that the university supports the academic staff to go out to give lectures or seminars, attend conferences, or being jury members etc. in other countries. On the other hand it has to be recognized that only a few students leave to study abroad because there is no obligatory period, except for the course titled 'summer practice I', which is an obligatory technical trip with their tutors. Recognizing the widely international student body of EMU this limited student mobility does not create a problem as for many students their stay at EMU creates a full study programme out of their home country.

Furthermore the experts conclude that there is great potential in developing the focus of the programme by strengthening some of the unique factors resulting from the geographic position of Cyprus, the history of the island as well as the country and its cultural specifics. These aspects should be seriously considered for the future development of the programme as they allow the development of a unique character making the programme even more attractive and shaping the profile of the department at the same time. **(Finding)**

Regarding the admission criteria there are different criteria for T.R.N.C. and T.R. citizens as well as all other candidates. For local candidates the EMU-DIA selects students according to a university based multiple choice exam, complemented by a special skill test evaluating the artistic talent of the candidates. For Turkish candidates, there is a special skill test based on visual perception, which is held in EMU liaison offices in Turkey. Additionally Turkish candidates are assessed based on their national exam score, which is held every year in Turkey. For foreign students there are some additional requirements mainly of formal nature. In overall evaluation, the experts conclude that the selection procedure for the applicants is assessed as appropriate.

3. Curriculum

The curricular structure of the programme is arranged around the 'Interior Design Studio' where there is a chain of design studios in each of the eight semesters. The other courses support and feed the interior design studios.

There are mainly 3 forms of teaching and learning in EMU-DIA that create a specific curricular profile of the study program: Interactive Approach, Face-to-Face Communication and Career Integrated Teaching/Learning. In the Interactive Approach students are supposed to contribute actively to the learning process. Interaction between students and instructor is provided through group discussions and also by experimental learning by doing. In this approach students are actively engaged into the learning process and rote learning is prevented.

In the Face-to-Face Communication method studio-workshop based courses provide an opportunity to have one-to-one contact with the students. The one-to-one contact is a student

centred approach that also allows instructor to know each student's learning differences and enables to teach them with different approaches and techniques of teaching.

Career Integrated Teaching and Learning: Career Integrated teaching and learning is supposed to be provided as a result of collaborations with various professionals, institutions and organizations. Besides, this is also achieved with academic and professional cooperation with partnering organizations and/or institutions. For instance; one of the examples is a technical trip that is taking place as a part of the Design Research course. Students are obliged to participate in a technical trip to Istanbul. This gives them opportunity to get in touch with different professionals from well known partnering organizations; attend seminars given by professional firms and to observe real examples.

20% of the total number of courses is design studios which use the interactive approach as well as face-to-face communication on an individual base in addition to group discussions. More than 30% of the total number of courses are studio-based. 2 hours of these courses is lecture and 2 hours are studio work.

Experts' Evaluation

The department uses a detailed and extensive documentation on learning outcomes based on the modules and courses offered. This systematic approach is of great benefit for an analysis of the different learning outcomes, potential overlap or missing skills and qualifications. The experts were impressed by the level of detail in which information was available. The curriculum of the programme combines both theory-based and studio-based courses. The programme is mainly constructed around the design studios, which is the core of the discipline. The other theoretical courses help to understand the issues related with the discipline such as material, furniture, color, lighting, communication, history, cost estimation as well as communication and presentation skill skills. In this sense, the programme is mainly based on "interior design studios" and the other technical courses support the studio environment.

The first year is defined as a foundation year including common courses taken by all students of the faculty. It creates a common idea and understanding between all students and supports the spirit of collaboration between architects and interior architects. While this is a clear benefit it also leads the experts to conclude that in the following semesters the differences between architecture and interior architecture need clear definition in a way that students can develop a clear identity as interior architects. In the first year some of the core issues for interior architects are not clearly shaped in the curriculum resulting from the joint character with the architecture programme. Besides the soft issues, following this analysis the core issues like material, light, and furniture should be contoured stronger on the content level. **(Finding)** Students should be able acquire the approach to touch the core issues of interior architecture in a poetic and at the same time functional way.

While on the university level the assessment system is mainly based on written exams, the faculty of architecture additionally uses a 'jury evaluation system', which is held two times in a semester (one in the mid-term and the other one as final exam). This jury system is used for both design and design related courses such as design research. In addition to those juries there are some interim and pre-final juries in order to evaluate the learning process of the student. Submissions, presentations, and homework are also used as forms of assessment. The experts conclude that the assessment methodology and practice is adequate.

The Department of Interior Architecture uses two different credit point systems; one which is based on the local credit system and the other one is the European Credit and Transfer System (ECTS). The former one is not related to the work load of the students and mainly reflects the course hours. While in everyday practice the local system is of dominant importance each module has a defined ECTS equivalent facilitating the transfer and recognition to and from other universities.

The experts recognized that within the department there is already an ongoing discussion regarding the amount of homework for students. From the experts perspective the focus on studios as central teaching method result in the need for a strong coordination of activities in different studios and the resulting student workload. While being an appropriate teaching method it should also be monitored that the core issues of interior architecture do not become subordinate elements in the natural flow of the studios focussing on the more soft issues. **(Finding)**

Following the discussions in Famagusta two central areas for future development should not be neglected. While the curriculum fulfils all the requirements that can be expected from a programme in interior architecture, for the future upgrade and development, aspects like the history of art and design, introductory courses to style/design will offer a great potential to strengthen the core aspects of interior architecture and will allow students to develop a positive identity as interior architects. **(Finding)** Consequently a slightly stricter structure of the curriculum is recommended in order to safeguard a balanced academic qualification for all students. Also, the department should think about the names given to their courses and modules in order to increase transparency for external stakeholders. In some cases it became obvious that there is profound and well balanced substance of interior architecture coved behind posh and modern titles from the field of art and design.

4. Student Support

The Study programme is based on a central assessment system that is part of university wide regulations. In addition to the central system that is ruled by a law, different forms of assessments are also used that are unique to the programme. Depending on the different nature of Interior Architecture program, 8 design courses and studio-based design related courses are assessed through a jury evaluation. There are minimum two juries which are Midterm Juries and Final Juries that are compulsory. In addition to those juries there are some Interim and Pre-Final juries in order to evaluate the process of the student.

Following the information of the department for every student entering to the programme an academic advisor is appointed. The academic advisor is responsible for helping the student to register in the program, take courses, etc. The student can refer to his/her advisor in any matter related to his/her program during his/her study. Additionally students have the possibility to change their courses during the “add and drop” period, which is about 2 weeks after the courses commence. Students also have right to withdraw from a course until the end of the “withdrawal period” which is about 11 weeks from the beginning of the semester. These days are announced in the academic calendar.

Furthermore an orientation program is organized for students in the beginning of the semester to introduce them to the school in general and also to the programme they study.

At the beginning of their study every student is given a user name and password to connect to the student portal. Through this portal students are able to see their programs, exam lists, and also evaluate their courses and instructors.

Experts' Evaluation

As already mentioned in the section on the curriculum the documentation of the learning outcomes according to fields and the European Qualifications Framework for every course is very detailed. Based on this documentation, it is easy to compare several courses to avoid overlap or disregard some aspects of the learning methods. The whole staff of the departments meets once a semester to discuss about the content and the coordination of the curriculum to improve the program. Resulting from this it can be stated that the responsibilities are clearly defined and the structures seem to work well.

In general the university offers several support services like psychological assistance or a health center for any case of injuries or diseases of students or staff. Besides these institutions all students receive health insurance, so in any case of medical problems the students have the opportunity to get help. Furthermore the department offers a help desk for academic problems conducted by young assistants who can put themselves easily in a student's position. Related to the student-centered learning the connection to the whole staff seems very familiar and the problems can be faced immediately. The student handbook and the homepage list the academic staff, so the students have another opportunity to get in contact with them. Regarding the fact that there are numerous foreign students enrolled at the university, the international center helps them to face most questions from residence permit to finding a place in one of the dormitories or dealing with initial difficulties around the study programme itself. These services and offers are assessed as very positive by the panel of experts.

In every semester there is a range of teaching and examination methods. The assessment rules of the university are clearly defined on the homepage. Furthermore every course outline has their own method of assessment, partly including mid-term and pre-final juries to improve the work of the students until the final juries. External jury members are invited to the final juries to include an independent opinion and increase the feasibility of the program. The grading criteria are transparently listed in the published student's handbook. Compensation mechanisms are practiced when required.

The feasibility of the program is supported through the structure of the curriculum. In the first year, that is common for all programmes of the faculty, the students can improve their basic understanding of design together with a large number of students coming from different cultures. It also creates a bigger social platform. In later semesters students have the opportunity to study in a flexible system widely allowing them to adjust the course of studies to their personal needs. This widely practiced flexibility is clearly advantageous while it also needs to be balanced against the potential didactic benefits of a slightly stricter structure.

Different elective courses give the students the opportunity to see things from a new perspective. Looking at the offers and recognizing the potential for students to develop individual profiles through elective courses, some offers addressing furniture and furniture design, architecture- and design-history and -theory, as well as experiments with light and colour could be beneficial enhancements.

There are regulations for the recognition of academic achievements at other higher education institutions. They are generally determined by the university level. The department has established a transfer committee deciding about the different matters of recognition on an individual level.

Three so called summer internships that are supposed to be done once a year in different fields of the profession are part of the compulsory curriculum. Also from the student perspec-

tive these internships create a valuable experience enabling the learner to identify personal preferences and gain insight in real work life. Students generally have to find these internships on their own; however, in case of severe problems the teaching staff also supports and acts as liaison. While these internships are seen as very positive contributions to the curriculum by the expert panel, it has to be recognized that currently the internships are neither credited nor do they belong to any credited module. **(Finding)**

5. Career orientation

Following the information of the department, in the study programme's planning and implementation, requirements of possible career fields are taken into consideration by involving relevant stakeholders through career days, career seminars, and the "EMU-International Design Week" which was held in 2011 for the first time, and repeated every year in 2012 and 2013.

Furthermore an advisory committee has been set up for getting feedback from stakeholders, professionals, educational experts for quality assurance of the educational management. There are 7 external members assigned for this committee.

Experts' Evaluation

Based on the self evaluation of the department and the interviews held in Famagusta the experts understand that the programme aims to train designers and production controllers in the described areas of interior design. Critically analysing the skills required in the field, it seems to the experts that there is a strong focus on the working fields of a designer and less alignment to that of a production controller. The area of practical work with a material (including exercises to explore a material) is not yet fully taken into account as a significant requirement of the course structure - both in the 'Interior Design Studios' as well as in the teaching. (See comments on curriculum)

Some of the plans presented as part of the final examination, and also in some models produced by the students, a strong focus on architecture was demonstrated and the experts missed details from interior design. The department should not hesitate to make use of their full potential and make the educational focus on interior design more visible.

Regarding employability experiences with the core qualifications of interior architects regarding light, material and furniture should not be underestimated. It is highly recommended that the university has its own workshops, in which students can experiment with colour, light and material. **(Finding)**

Long-term changes in the career field of interior architects are difficult to predict. For interior architects who want to pursue in the profession in the long term, they must have acquired knowledge and skills that make them flexible and adaptable to the changes of the future. These include important virtues and secondary "tools" such as:

- The ability to persevere, even over a long period of time and despite of opposition.
- Not to lose the thread (the main objective of a project) over a long period of time and to follow it with great flexibility.
- The ability to relate oneself to different parties of a construction project, e.g.: the client as well as a construction worker.

- To be “tough skinned” when dealing with contractors and subordinates and withstand the possibility of unpopularity.

Based on the discussions in Famagusta and analysing the structure of the programme the experts are convinced the professors make the students aware of the importance these "meta-skills". This is done particularly using student-centred teaching and learning and in face to face communication. While these skills can not to be taught in isolation and it is also difficult to test these skills under exam conditions, the experts conclude that the concept of the programme is well suited to also address these aspects. Implicitly this also includes aspects like customer service, quoting, project development, quality management etc. These aspects are also covered in the programme, particularly but not only in the internships.

An upcoming topic of growing importance is "planning for people with disabilities". This topic will have a great significance for future EMU-DIA graduates working locally and abroad. EMU-DIA should proactively address this change and equip their students with the required knowledge and qualifications. EMU-DIA could have an initial function in the region.

6. Resources

Following the information provided by the university currently the department of interior architecture has 11 full time and 14 part time instructors in addition to 14 research assistants. The academic profile of EMU-DIA staff is supposed to combine the research-based activities with the practice of the profession, especially considering the contributions of the part-time staff and invited lecturers. The full-time staff is supposed to ensure the continuity of the educational services on offer.

In addition to standardized resources, there are three CAD labs with all the related hardware and software equipment; a research room equipped with computers and printers; a materials lab; an environmental control lab and a clay workshop is available for the use of students during and after the lecture hours.

The first year courses are organized as Faculty Courses (FARC) and shared between the departments of the faculty. Consequently these courses are also used in the other programmes of the faculty to optimize the use of facilities and staff resources while creating a joint basis of learning for the students.

Experts' Evaluation

Considering the number of students in the programme under review the quantity of staff can be seen as satisfactory. Also the various qualifications of full time and part time staff are assessed as good to offer the programme. The different characters and backgrounds of staff members contributing to the programme can be seen as strength of the programme as they not only contribute to diversity, but create the academic backbone of the programme. Contracted lecturers mainly working in professional practice complete the profile of the academic corps. At the time of the review no critical vacancies were unfilled and the rectorate offers opportunities to improve didactic qualifications every now and then.

The faculty of architecture including the department of interior architecture is equipped with three CAD labs, a material lab, an environmental control lab, a clay workshop, a research room, and a library while students can also use the main library and all other resources of the Eastern Mediterranean University. In the discussions on site the department confirmed that so far, whenever the need arose, technical equipment could be replaced in time. The EMU

library pays special attention the availability of electronic versions of literature and magazines which reflects today's needs in the educational sector. Reflecting on the departments facilities the installation of a lab to test and experiment with light, material and colour would contribute to an advanced level of understanding of these aspects that is essential for interior architecture students. **(Finding)**

The experts conclude that regarding quality and quantity of staff and other relevant resources for teaching the situation at the department of interior architecture can be assessed positively.

7. Quality Assurance

Besides a university-wide quality assurance system, the department uses four additional control mechanisms. These are curriculum review; academic standards review; course evaluation; and the so-called external review.

As part of the curricular review the learning outcomes for each course in the programme are re-viewed every few years in order to minimize overlaps in content between different courses, and to make sure no significant contents are missing in the programme. The necessary curriculum changes are discussed in board meetings. Proposed changes are sent to the faculty board for consideration. Then changes are sent to the university senate through UCC (University Curriculum Committee) that checks the changes considering general university rules for final approval.

In addition course evaluations are implemented on the student's online platform.

Experts' Evaluation

The department uses its own quality assurance system and the presented results of the conducting questionnaires show that the programme receives good student evaluation on criteria such as university services, learning outcomes, internship, and the overall evaluation of the curriculum etc. At the same time, looking at the frequency and the number of the surveys which were carried out as well as the generally small number of participants lead the experts to conclude that these data should only be seen as a positive indicator, but is not valid enough to generalize based on this information.

The experts positively recognize the importance that is given to internal as well as external quality assurance at the department of interior architecture. The experts agree to the understanding of the department, that an important aspect of a quality programme is the comparability with other universities and disciplinary standards. In this case the department linked the programme with the main declarations of the International Federation of Interior Architects to improve the curriculum and provide transparency for other institutions. This is seen as a very positive achievement. The annual curricular review, that should also include a check of the learning outcomes, should also include participation of student representatives. This is, beyond the specific level of curricular reviews, a remark that can be given on the more general level with regard to quality assurance procedures. It became obvious to the panel of experts that the relationship between students and staff seems to be a good one and allows constructive communication. Consequently a stronger obligatory inclusion of students and graduates in the existing quality assurance procedures and their participation in the relevant committees would help to improve the programme even further. **(Finding)**

Besides the university-wide evaluation system, the department offers a procedure of evaluation through the well established student portal. Students have the opportunity to use the system at their convenience. The experts conclude that the methods in use are sufficient to address the challenges and requirements of the department.

8. Recommendations of the panel of experts

The panel of experts recommends an **accreditation with recommendations** for the Bachelor Programme “**Interior Architecture**” (B.A.) offered by **the Eastern Mediterranean University**.

Findings:

1. The number and intensity of international collaborations and partnerships should be increased in order to promote academic exchange and increase the visibility and recognition of the programme.
2. Unique aspects resulting from the geographic position, history and culture of Cyprus and the country should be incorporated in the profile of the programme making it even more attractive and competitive.
3. The subjects of light, material and furniture should be strengthened in the curriculum.
4. The student workload resulting from different studios should be coordinated and the importance of interior architectural core issues in the studios should be strengthened.
5. Courses/Modules in history of art and design as well as introductory courses to style/design should be included in the curriculum.
6. All parts of the curriculum, including internships have to be credited.
7. A stronger obligatory inclusion of students and graduates in the existing quality assurance procedures and their participation in the relevant committees is recommended.
8. The installation of a laboratory to test and experiment with light, material and colour is recommended.