

RIBA accreditation of architectural studies at Cracow University of Technology: history and importance for education quality standards

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ABSTRACT: The Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology (FA-CUT) is the only architectural university in the country, and the third in Central and Eastern Europe to give its graduates a Polish and British diploma after five years of Master's studies, and has been doing so since May 2000. Accreditation by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) makes it easier for graduates of the Faculty to begin working with architectural offices all over the world, on every continent - in Western Europe, America and the British Commonwealth, as well. In England, an architect has to pass the three-stage RIBA examination to acquire a licence enabling them to practise the profession independently. The RIBA Accreditation Commission acknowledged that five years of studies at the FA-CUT, as well as a diploma examination and the defence of a diploma project, correspond to the completion of two degrees of the RIBA examinations (RIBA 1 and RIBA 2). The third degree (RIBA 3), as in Poland, can be completed after a few years of professional practice and an examination in the regulations of the local building and contracting law.

INTRODUCTION

The Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology (FA-CUT) since 2000 has been awarding graduates of the Architecture course (formerly Architecture and Urban Planning) two diplomas: one Polish and one English. The Faculty has had a Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA) accreditation since that time. The RIBA was established in London in 1834. This prestigious accreditation makes it easier for graduates to find employment with architectural and other relevant companies in many countries on all continents, as the RIBA enjoys widespread and well-earned recognition and respect. Great Britain, both before becoming a member of the European Union, during its membership and eventually after Brexit, has not, still does not, and may continue not to acknowledge diplomas of foreign universities in architecture if they are not accredited by the RIBA. In all countries of the British Commonwealth, an architect, to be issued a licence enabling them to practise their profession independently, must pass a three-stage RIBA examination.

Thanks to the RIBA accreditation, the five-year architecture studies in the FA-CUT, as well as the final graduation examination and the diploma project defence, count as passing two of these stages: RIBA 1 and RIBA 2. The RIBA 1 examination corresponds to the curriculum of studies and examinations of the first seven semesters of teaching at the Cracow Faculty, along with the engineer's diploma (first-tier engineer's studies). The curriculum for the subsequent three semesters, and the Master's diploma project (second-tier Master's studies) correspond to the RIBA 2 examination. The third stage, as in Poland, can be achieved after a few years of professional practice and passing an examination on local construction law.

In Poland, graduates of studies in architecture, after completing five years of study (either single-tier or two-tier engineer's - seven semesters, and Master's - three semesters) can, after undergoing practical training in an architectural company and in construction, take a licence examination. This licence enables them to perform independent technical functions in construction in the architecture specialisation. The examination is carried out by Examination Commissions of the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland. Earlier, before the introduction in Poland of a two-tier study system, single-tier studies were also accredited as the first two stages: RIBA 1 and RIBA 2. It is surprising that British schools, which have had a two-tier architecture education system, are at present planning to switch to five-year single-tier studies.

HISTORY OF BRITISH ACCREDITATION IN KRAKÓW

The almost 15-year-long (between 1989 and 2003) co-operation with the FA-CUT of the South West School of Architecture at the University of Plymouth began with a didactic exchange based on the completion of a common design assignment as a part of conservation design or urban design classes at the fourth year of studies by groups of students from both universities, with 25 Polish and 25 English students participating. During the didactic exchange,

supervised by the author, with Ewa Węclawowicz-Gyurkovich (an adjunct and later a Professor at the Institute of the History of Architecture and the Conservation of Historical Monuments of CUT), students worked on assignments involving the design of new infill buildings (complementing the structure of urban tissue) in central areas of towns in Cornwall (St Austell, Totnes, Truro, Exeter) or in the strict city centre of Kraków at Poselska, Grodzka, Straszewskiego streets or in the Kraków's district of Kazimierz. A group of students went to Kraków or to Plymouth at the beginning of a semester, initially for three weeks and later two weeks, familiarising themselves with the site of the design assignment and returning after a couple of months spent working on the project guided by instructions and meeting again to present their finished projects at joint exhibitions, workshops and discussions.

Students from Kraków, primarily used to solving design problems in the towns and cities of Lesser Poland, as well as Poland's highland and mountainous areas, were enthusiastic about selecting design assignments located on the sea coast of Cornwall or Devon, the so-called *British Riviera*. Plymouth is a port city in Devon County, near the border with Cornwall. This south-western region of Great Britain features notable charming natural landscapes with a jagged rocky coastline. The mining landscape of Cornwall, as well as that of west Devon, was acknowledged as an element of heritage and placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

While the Polish group stayed in Great Britain, they were shown newly built projects, visiting Bristol, Oxford, St. Ives, Penzance, Bude and Newquay in this south-western region of Britain, in addition to many charming picturesque towns in Cornwall, as well as always devoting a couple of days to visit the latest built projects and museums of London. The British architect Nicholas Grimshaw built a glazed printing and publishing house for the publishers of West Morning News in the High Tech style in Plymouth in 1993. The large massing resembling a ship was placed on a grassy field in the town's peripheral area.

The Polish group visited St. Ives numerous times, a sunny town of painters, sculptors and actors, in a uniquely brightly lit spot of St Ives Bay on the northern coast of the Cornwall peninsula near steep cliffs and jagged rocks. Students from Kraków had the opportunity to visit a branch of the Tate Gallery in St Ives, built in 1993 close to the wide sandy beach. Thanks to the initiative of the University of Plymouth, a group of students met the designers of the gallery, Eldred Evans and David Shaley, in 1996. The entire gallery, with a large oval rotunda, which opens up with a glazed surface towards Porthmeor Beach and the Celtic Sea, is coloured white, similarly to how almost all of the buildings in this resort have been painted, even those built from stone.

British architectural schools are much smaller (in Plymouth there is a total of 250 students on all years of study); while in Kraków, there are about 2,000 students and it is impossible to provide every student with a separate workstation. The Polish group became familiar with the school in Plymouth and their initiative was that, apart from the basic curriculum, a *24-hour sketch design* module was organised by the students themselves, with students of all years of study in attendance and forming competition teams. Over one 24-hour period, the students worked on a given competition assignment, building large models from cardboard, filling the entire building.

Many Polish students liked the team-based approach to work, with some encountering it for the first time. International exchanges and workshops that are now innumerable were not as popular 20 years' ago, with the only unconventional classes taking place in Kraków being those supervised by the Faculty and a team on contemporary architecture. These actions created enthusiasm in students for architectural design, teaching them how to work in groups and making it possible to go beyond conventional boundaries of imagination. Working on fantastic projects, often in unreal, theoretical assignments, tore down stereotypes, forcing the formulation of new ideas and uncommon designs.

In exchange, academics from Plymouth who visited Kraków and familiarised themselves with design projects prepared by FA-CUT students highlighted the high quality and very broad curriculum of the FA-CUT. As a result of six years of didactic and scientific co-operation, the British party submitted a proposal to the Dean of the FA-CUT to pursue accreditation by the RIBA. A year later the FA-CUT hosted the preliminary Accreditation Commission. The assessment of the Accreditation Commission's first visit was positive, noting the school's individuality, the breadth and multi-disciplinary nature of module subjects, a broad historical and architectural conservation curriculum necessary for the Faculty's teaching staff architects in a historical city. In the following year, two didactic employees of the Faculty participated as observers in the RIBA Accreditation Commission's visit to Plymouth.

CHANGES TO THE DIDACTIC PROCESS OF THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE ASSOCIATED WITH ACCREDITATION BY RIBA

Preparations for the arrival of the proper RIBA Accreditation Commission took a few years. The knowledge and experience gained by staff preparing the FA-CUT for the accreditation visit made it possible to implement modernisation measures that enabled improvement in the quality of education and an adaptation of the curriculum to the requirements of British accreditation, while simultaneously preserving tradition and the school's local distinctiveness.

The most important changes included alterations to the system of grading design modules - design project assignments at every semester, as well as final diploma design projects. In place of assessments behind closed doors featuring only a group of instructors, public discussions with presentations and design critiques have been introduced, in the presence

of not only students from individual groups, but also licensed architects from outside the University who work in architectural design practices. Later, after the year 2002, the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland (a professional association) - delegates of the local Lesser Poland Regional Chamber of Architects - started to be appointed as external examiners.

Mid- and end-term assessments of design project assignments - with the involvement of practising architects - have become a standard and a broadly implemented form referring to the defences of diploma design projects, for which this system is obligatory. Much longer, written sections also have been introduced to the projects, primarily Master's design projects (a minimum of 40 standard typescript pages). The theoretical, written part of a diploma design project must feature an essay with a critical analysis of selected designs factually linked to the subject, an analysis of site-specific conditions, design guidelines, a description of the idea behind the conceptual proposal and a technical section, written in accordance with requirements defined in currently enforced construction law on the matter of the detailed scope and form of technical designs. In terms of diploma projects, apart from the required problem scope of design sheets and physical models presenting the conceptual proposal for the building or complex that is designed, an obligation to include a presentation of technical and construction-related solutions has been put into place, including details drawn to a scale of 1:20, in the form of a cross-section through the building's envelope, showing technical drawings - particularly depicting those elements that define the individual character of the architecture that is designed.

Before the first RIBA Commission visit, a faculty guide was written and published in the form of a book, in Polish and English, containing detailed syllabi for every module [1][2]. Changes associated with further modernisation measures were included in the subsequent edition. At present, this information is available on the Faculty's Web site. Each visit of the Commission, which takes place every five years, requires much effort from all of the Faculty's employees. Each time, the British Commission encountered problems with assessing a school as large as the FA-CUT, which employs almost 200 didactic employees and teaches close to 2,000 students, because British schools are much smaller. The much richer curriculum, featuring classes on sculpture, painting, freehand drawing, a broad spectrum of historical modules and linked with architectural and urban conservation, was also surprising.

REQUIREMENTS AND PROCESS OF RIBA ACCREDITATION COMMISSION VISITS TO THE FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE

A visit to Kraków by the RIBA Accreditation Commission lasts between five and seven days. Members of the Commission look through student projects for every module (with three projects shown to them that are best, average and poor yet with Pass) prepared by Faculty employees, and do so for three to four days. According to the Commission, it is the worst projects that affect a school's curriculum quality assessment the most. During this time, the Commission could not meet with employees of the University. Official meetings with the Rector and Dean took place during the first day of a visit, while meetings with didactic employees (eg teaching staff), students and architects from external design practices or the city architect took place at the end.

Representatives of the Commission pay particular attention to the written assessments of external examiners, practising architects from outside of the Faculty, who possess a professional licence granted by the State Chamber of Architects, and who participate in the assessment of design project assignments and in all diploma design project defences. Kraków's Faculty of Architecture is the first one in the country to introduce this custom in co-operation with the State and Lesser Poland Chamber of Architects and the Chamber of Urban Planners. It is essential for the curriculum of a school to prepare architects for practising their profession in the best possible manner. Apart from external examiner assessments, the Commission also receives reports of each diploma session written by a RIBA observer appointed from among practising architects with recommendation from the Chamber of Architects, which verifies whether current regulations and standards are adhered to during diploma design project defences. A representative of the local professional community - an architect operating a design practice - participates directly in the Commission's proceedings, delegated by the Chamber of Architects. None of the aforementioned persons can be professionally associated with another University teaching architects in Poland or with the local school.

Comprehensive information materials in English, defined in RIBA accreditation criteria, are prepared and made available for each Accreditation Commission in advance, at least a month before a visit [3]. They are composed of detailed information concerning the Faculty's academic status, its curriculum and syllabi, in addition to assessments of modules by the staff and students alike. All Faculty employees are obliged to prepare their curriculum vitae documents in English, with a listing of their academic and research projects carried out in the individual divisions and chairs, including publications for the past five years preceding the visit, as well as information about their didactic, professional and creative work. Each of the Faculty's organisation units - Institutes and the chairs or divisions that form them - present the academic and professional work of their employees, such as books and publications, as well as their architectural work.

An essential subject of each visit is the Faculty's international co-operation agreements, lists of visiting professors from other universities, student participation in Socrates and Erasmus programmes, as well as in other exchanges lasting a semester or more or even a couple of weeks, with other European universities and schools from countries with which the Faculty co-operates. The Faculty is extraordinarily active in terms of international co-operation, with more than 100

students participating in semester-long exchanges with foreign universities, accepting a similar number of students from abroad. For almost two decades, through the Faculty, a special teaching programme has been offered to students from the United States of America and other English-speaking countries, during summer semesters. As well, the FA-CUT is at present preparing to open, for Polish students, a full-year study programme in English. When evaluating international co-operation, essential are previously prepared surveys - reports by the Faculty's graduates - with statements concerning their pursuit of employment after graduation, both in Poland and abroad. Through the Faculty, special exhibitions are prepared for each visit: a comprehensive exhibition of the work of a single student, covering all assignments that every student should complete over their full, five-year studies; a diploma design project exhibition and an exhibition of didactic achievements prepared by individual Institutes - chairs and divisions.

Commission members visit all of the Faculty's departments, familiarising themselves with employees' didactic, academic and creative work, as well as the facilities offered to employees and students. They also visit the Faculty and University library, the canteen and places which students use for recreation.

The so-called self-assessment, which is a programme of improving studies and the Faculty's development, prepared each time by the Dean on the basis of earlier RIBA Commission assessments, is an essential document and is prepared on the occasion of each visit. The so-called mapping document, in the form of tables that synthetically present the implementation of RIBA criteria for each module, is an important document and is difficult to prepare. British representatives require that sustainable development, social problems in human habitats, ecology and energy efficiency in construction and the development of soft competencies, as well as communicating with future clients, be taken into consideration in the teaching process, particularly as a part of design modules. Hundreds of documents in five copies (a separate one for each Commission member) must be submitted by the FA-CUT to RIBA headquarters, one month before the planned visit.

In the middle of September 2012, the FA-CUT hosted in Kraków a representative and consultant from RIBA, an architect who was a participant of another visit of the RIBA Accreditation Commission towards the end of November 2012. On the occasion of his first visit, Faculty members expressed their view that Polish students needed a British accreditation. Faculty members are convinced they still do, despite the fact diplomas of the Faculty, with licences issued by the Chamber of Architects of the Republic of Poland, enable the graduates to practise the architectural profession in the European Union. Also, the accreditation of the Accreditation Commission of Universities of Technology, which has European Union-granted powers (EUR-ACE) - once again awarded for five years of the engineer's and Master's studies, ensures the entire course of studies is acknowledged in European Union member states. Great Britain does not recognise Polish diplomas and still requires the passing of successive RIBA 1, RIBA 2 and RIBA 3 examination stages for an architect to be able to open an independent design practice in that country.

In the period between 29 November and 2 December 2017, The FA-CUT once again hosted the Accreditation Commission of the Royal Institute of British Architects from London. The Faculty began preparations for the visit, planned for the end of November and prior to the summer holiday season. The visit had a very positive result. The FA-CUT once again received the maximum possible five-year accreditation.

The FA-CUT prepared for the visit from the spring of 2017. One of the many documents with the required information about the Faculty that had to be delivered to London six weeks before the visit was a self-assessment report prepared by the FA-CUT, which reported changes made by the Faculty in the previous five years. It was not a small list by any means. The changes that were essential to the quality of education undoubtedly included a wide opening of the FA-CUT to co-operation with the business sector. The Dean of the FA-CUT has made this co-operation more dynamic in recent years, having appointed a plenipotentiary in charge of the University's co-operation with local governments and businesses. This initiative of the Dean resulted in the signing of a series of contracts, agreements and letters of intent concerning co-operation between Presidents (or Mayors) of many of Lesser Poland's cities on the matter of mutually searching for potential possibilities of developing selected areas of those cities.

An Innovative Living Laboratory has been established. This is where students, in their diploma design project assignments at the first- and second-tier of studies, as well as a part of module term assignments, search for optimal solutions to topical problems in those cities, along with their academic supervisors at FA-CUT or those submitted by representatives of the economy's private sector.

The FA-CUT international co-operation was once again an interesting subject for the RIBA Accreditation Commission. This included exchanges of the Faculty students (100 per year), as well as foreign students that come to FA-CUT (also about 100 a year), both as a part of the Erasmus Programme and other constantly expanding exchanges with universities from Europe, the United States, Cuba or Asian countries. Students participate in partial studies or in the numerous and varied didactic workshops in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria and other European countries; and lately also in Wuhan, China.

The dynamism of international co-operation of the FA-CUT has been proven by an agreement signed at the Ministry of Science and Higher Education in Warsaw between CUT and representatives of Chinese universities concerning the establishment of a school of architecture at the University of Tianjin in China by the teachers at FA-CUT. The quality

of the Faculty's international co-operation also can be proven by the large number of visiting professors from foreign universities.

The preparation of several tens of complete portfolios (40 portfolios for first-tier and second-tier studies) with student projects for all modules that the Commission reviewed had also required a lot of work from didactic employees. The visit of the RIBA Accreditation Commission was prepared by a team appointed by the Dean of the FA-CUT that included members of the Faculty management and numerous other academic staff. Practically all of the Faculty's employees were involved in the preparation of this visit.

The curriculum of the FA-CUT, its execution and effects of education were presented in the form of the so-called *single student project presentation*. This exhibition was presented over two storeys in the wide corridors of the building at Podchorążych Street in Kraków. An exhibition organised at Galeria *Gil* at Warszawska Street in Kraków, presenting diploma and term design projects of students and associated with the FA-CUT co-operation with local governments and businesses, with assignments from Nowy Sącz, Tarnów, and other cities of the region, was a complementary event. Each of the six Institutes of the FA-CUT associated with the architecture study course (apart from Institute A-8, which represents the landscape architecture course that was not covered by RIBA accreditation), independently prepared their own exhibitions of student projects.

The RIBA Commission paid particular attention to the exhibitions of student projects organised in the building at Kanonicza Street in Kraków. About a dozen Master's diploma projects were prepared at the Institute of the History of Architecture and the Conservation of Historical Monuments. The programme of the visit of RIBA's Accreditation Commission was similar to those organised in previous years. Meetings took place with the Rector of CUT, the Faculty Board and Institute Directors, students, the Faculty's didactic employees, external examiners and employers/owners of design practices employing Faculty graduates.

The British side consistently has rated highly the level of teaching at the FA-CUT. The Commission also granted the Faculty the maximum possible accreditation period of five years, which means that the next visit is planned for the year 2022.

The latest Accreditation Commission of the Royal Institute of British Architects has, apart from a detailed report, also expressed its particular acknowledgement of the Faculty in the following matters:

- The Faculty's involvement in international exchanges as a part of Erasmus programmes and the organisation of workshops and participation of employees in international conferences, which the Commission saw as a considerable strength of the Faculty.
- Strong ties with the local government and business sectors were highlighted, including the involvement of, and co-operation with, the Chamber of Architects and practising architects.
- The RIBA Commission pointed out that teaching architectural conservation results in the development of high-quality innovative design solutions.
- The Commission confirmed that all graduate attributes of Part 1: The engineer's studies curriculum and Part 2: Master's studies curriculum, have been attained by the Faculty.

In the Commission's final assessment, it was noted that Kraków's Faculty of Architecture regularly receives the accreditation of the Accreditation Commission of Universities of Technology (KAUT), which is equivalent to the EUR-ACE®Label (European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAE)). The Faculty also has an accreditation by the Polish Accreditation Commission, with a distinguished rating.

CONCLUSIONS

The Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology has been accredited by the prestigious Royal Institute of British Architects for 19 years. The first accreditation was granted in 2000 for five years (2000-2005); it also covered diplomas given in 1999, which were the subject of assessment of the RIBA Accreditation Commission. The high ratings concerning education-level quality awarded by each of the visiting Commissions always have been associated with suggestions of additional programmatic or organisational changes that the Faculty could introduce. These could be used towards constant improvement of the teaching process and maintaining a high level of teaching, providing Faculty graduates with the possibility of effectively competing in the national, European and international employment market. The described changes applied by the Faculty to its teaching process and expanding international didactic co-operation, including co-operation with the business sector, have made it possible to equip Faculty graduates with the knowledge and skills required in the employment market.

The FA-CUT at present is making efforts to increase integration in the teaching process that also have been recommended by the RIBA Commission. In its curricula for second-tier studies in English (Master's studies), due to less numerous student groups, an integrated modular teaching system has been implemented, resulting in very good results that were highly regarded by the RIBA Commission and the students who participated in the programme. An analogous modular teaching system was prepared for first-tier studies in English (engineer's studies), which has

been introduced into the teaching programme this year. In the case of the Polish-language course for larger groups of students, integration has been introduced between selected groups of modules concerning design and construction technology. Full integration, for which the Faculty is preparing, will be possible after an essential expansion of the Faculty facilities, after finalisation of the planned extension of the main building.

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