

**Report on the Accreditation of Study Programs
at Tishk International University, Erbil/Iraq,
I-1741-1**



XX Meeting of the ZEvA Commission on XX

Item X

Study Program	Degree	Program Duration	Type of Program	Maximum annual intake
Architectural Engineering	(B.Sc.)	Five years	Full-time	100
Interior Design	(B.Sc.)	Four years	Full-time	50

Accreditation contract signed on: December 11, 2018

Date of site visit: September 24-26, 2019

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Hanover, 23 January 2020

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I. Final Vote of the Expert Panel and Decision of the Accreditation Commission

1. Decision of the ZEVA Commission

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2. Final Vote of the Expert Panel

2.1 General Aspects

2.1.1 General Recommendations:

- The panel highly recommends to issue Diploma supplements according to the requirements of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- The experts recommend reviewing the quality of existing international co-operations (Memorandums of Understanding), take steps to activate promising agreements and engage in establishing long-term bilateral relations with a continuous exchange of staff and/or students.
- The International Office should further support students' mobility, for example through fostering a learning agreement prior to exchange with higher education institutions abroad.
- Online lectures and/or online courses should be facilitated in order to integrate international staff into the curriculum.
- Measurements to increase the share of female teaching staff should be taken.
- A regular Teacher Training in didactics of Higher Education (especially covering problem-based learning (PBL) and research orientation) should be implemented.
- A stronger emphasis on research-driven teaching should be worked on, preferably along with commissioned research involving senior students and exam candidates.
- Language courses in English for both teaching personnel and students with focus on subject related terminology should be offered.
- A separate budget should be allocated for each department in order to fund research projects or excursions. This might be realized in form of field trips, excursions (regional and worldwide) and research collaborations to visit historic and contemporary architectural realizations, explore potential research collaborations, and reinforce existing academic activities of the university.
- To foster connections with civil society and improve students' professional skills, both study programs should regularly exhibit the students' work to the public.
- In the application procedure an additional assessment of the applicants' creativity and motivation should be included.
- Feedback to students' work should be given in an additional document in written form in order to foster an academic dialog between students and teaching staff.
- Islamic architecture and regional building tradition as well as sustainability and hands-on experience should be more visibly integrated into the curricula.

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- Measures to strengthen ties to the local/regional labor market should be taken. These might entail the inclusion of local companies and architecture/interior design bureaus as external advisors in the curriculum development.
- Measure to support graduates' employability should be taken. These might entail the inclusion of academically supervised internships in the study programs.
- The experts give the following recommendations regarding infrastructure:
 - The workshops should be better equipped, including equipment for model making and 3D-printing equipment.
 - Fully licensed versions of "CAD" and "BIM" (e.g. "Revit") should be obtained and made available to students and teaching staff.
 - The library should be supplemented by internationally important standard values of architecture and interior design. This enhancement should include additional computer workstations as well as analog and digital resources (especially coursebooks, journals).
 - Subscriptions should be made and maintained to relevant and world-class Architectural journals, Magazines and Bulletins (for example "Detail", "Arch-daily" etc.)
- The expert panel expressly acknowledges the quality management that has been built up with commitment. Nevertheless, regular evaluations should be carried out with regard to the efficiency and consistency of the processes.

2.2 Program 1: Architectural Engineering (B.Sc.)

2.2.1 Recommendations:

- Efforts to hire international staff should be taken into account. This might include long-term academic faculty as well as visiting faculty.
- The experts recommend the following curricular developments:
 - Enhancing the relevance of interdisciplinary subjects, which might entail adjacent (e.g. Fine Arts, Sociology, Sciences) as well as less closely related disciplines (e.g. dentistry).
 - Including curricular aspects such as post-war reconstruction, model building, material sciences and social research methods.

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2.2.2 Recommendation to the ZEVA Commission for International Affairs:

The expert group recommends the accreditation of the Bachelors' program "Architectural Engineering" for the duration of six years.

2.3 Program 2: Interior Design (B.Sc.)

2.3.1 Recommendations:

- Taking the limited availability of academically educated staff in the field of Interior Design in the region into account, the experts strongly recommend measures to attract disciplinary experts beyond the pool of own graduates.
- More interdisciplinary input, especially from sociological and art-scientific theory and methods, should become part of the curriculum.
- Additional branches of design such as textile design, furniture design or product design should be made compulsory parts of the curriculum.
- Model making should be more strongly anchored in the curriculum as an important design tool. This includes above all three-dimensional, full-scale model making but also computer-supported visualization possibilities.

2.3.2 Recommendation to the ZEVA Commission for International Affairs:

The expert group recommends the accreditation of the Bachelors' program "Interior Design" for the duration of six years.

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II. Evaluation Report of the Expert Panel

Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure

It is the purpose of the accreditation procedure to assess the quality of the study programs “Architectural Engineering (B.Sc.)” and “Interior Design (B.Sc.)” conducted by Tishk International University, Erbil/Iraq, against international standards. The assessment is based on ZEVA’s “Assessment Framework for the Evaluation of Study Programs” as laid out in the “Manual for Evaluation and Certification of Study Programs”.¹ This assessment framework is based on the “European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)” (ENQA 2015), the “Framework for Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area” (2005) and the “ECTS Users’ Guide” (European Communities, 2015). The assessment of the mentioned study programs was combined with the assessment of the internal quality assurance of Tishk International University; these results are laid down in a different report.

For the purpose of assessing the Bachelor study programs “Architectural Engineering” and “Interior Design”, Tishk International University submitted a self-report. Apart from detailed descriptions of the University as a whole, the internal quality assurance and the study programs, the self-report included a number of additional documents, as e.g. quality assurance policies, staff handbook, course catalogues, selected course syllabi, CVs of teaching faculty and sample questionnaires for as well as results of course evaluations. All documents were submitted in English.

This evaluation report is based on the experts’ assessment of the self-report submitted by Tishk International University and on their findings during the site-visit on September 24th to 26th 2019. It will serve as a base for ZEVA’s Commission to decide on the accreditation of the mentioned study programs. In the case of a positive decision by the Commission, ZEVA will award its quality seal for a limited time period, after which the university can reapply for accreditation.

The experts would like to thank the President and Vice-Presidents of Tishk International University, the Heads of the respective Faculties and Departments and their staff for professionally organizing the stay at the institution. Special thanks go to the Coordinators of Accreditation and Quality Management System as well as to the students. The experts enjoyed the open, self-reflective and constructive atmosphere during their on-site talks in Erbil. With this report, the experts do not only assess the study programs “Architectural Engineering (B.Sc.)” and “Interior Design (B.Sc.)”, but would also like to give recommendations for further developing the quality of both programs.

¹ <https://www.zeva.org/international/information-in-english/accreditation-of-study-programmes>

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1. Governance, Management and Profile of the University

Tishk International University was founded under the name “Ishik University” in 2008 as a private institution in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. It was renamed “Tishk International University” in 2018. Thus both names appear on some of the official documents and parts of the website.

In 2009, five Bachelors’ programs were established and in 2010/11, the university moved to a new campus at the outskirts of Erbil. As of today, Tishk International University offers 21 Bachelor’s programs in eight faculties: Dentistry, Pharmacy, Engineering, Science, Education, Administrative Science and Economics, Law, and Nursing. All programs except Law are entirely taught in English. Tishk International University also houses, among others, a Prep School, a Center for Continuing Education and a TOEFL IBT Test Centre. A second campus is located in Sulaimani, the second-largest city in Iraqi Kurdistan.

From 2017 onwards, Tishk International University has established joint Master’s programs with public regional universities; i.e. Erbil Polytechnic University, Salahaddin University and Hawler Medical University.

The language of communication on the campus is generally English, partly on account of a diverse teaching faculty and staff originating from Iraq, Turkey, Syria and other countries.

As a private institution, Tishk International University (TIU) has been licensed in 2008 as an officially recognized private university by the Kurdish Ministry of Higher Education; in 2017, it has become recognized by the Iraq Ministry of Higher Education. The University is governed by a Board of Trustees; it includes the TIU President, its Director of International Relations, five international members from academia and labor market and three representatives of the shareholding bodies.

Tishk International University does not receive state funding but raises fees from students. The institution and its programs are – as all private higher education institution in the Kurdistan Region – under supervision of the Ministry for Higher Education and Scientific Research and its Inspection and Quality Assurance Unit. While the current status gives Tishk International University, like other privates universities, a certain degree of autonomy, some central issues like tuition fees, number of intake in each program per year, the hiring and assignment of full- and part-time faculty staff or the license to offer new Bachelors’ and Masters’ programs are regulated or at least observed by the Ministry in considerable detail.

Organizational Structure and Mission of the University

The University is strategically governed by the Board of Trustees, the President and the University Council, the latter comprising the President, Vice-Presidents, Faculty Deans and the Head of International Relations. President and Council are responsible for the academic and operative planning and implementation as well as financial management. Each faculty is headed by a Dean and has a Faculty Council as a body to develop academic strategies and planning (which then have to be decided by the President & University Council). On the lower level, each of the 21 Departments – each responsible for one study program – also have a Head and a Council, responsible for evaluation and improvement of program-related as-

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pects. The Departments are financially bound by the decisions of the President and University Council.

In addition, Tishk International University installed several additional committees at the central university level, including amongst others

- Exam Committee
- Committee of Appeals
- Accreditation Coordinating Committee
- ISO Implementation Committee
- Quality Assurance Committee
- Central Quality Development Committee

In the provided self-report (p.27), the vision of Tishk International University is described as follows:

“To be a leading university in the country and region in the areas of education, research and development as well as service to the community by raising educated individuals with universal ethical values”.

The university’s mission states:

“To raise well-prepared, productive and competent individuals with a research-oriented spirit, who possess professional ethics and sensitiveness to the realities of the country and the world, in order to serve to fundamental human values; contribute to the improvement of the quality life of humanity based on regional and universal needs.”

These general strategic aims have been developed in a strategic process from 2014 onwards with the help of a Strategy Commission, including the TIU leadership and the Faculty Deans.

The Faculty of Engineering, which offers the study programs “Architectural Engineering (B.Sc.)” and “Interior Design (B.Sc.)”, has also developed a distinct vision:

“To be a faculty capable of leading in the scientific field, aimed to the application and theory of education, training, research and development by taking a global approach into consideration from a local angle.”

The mission statement of the faculty e.g. includes the following points:

- Take scientific, ethical and universal values into consideration through local context.
- Pay attention to the information produced by humans to be environmentally friendly and try to develop scientific solutions to social problems.
- Train graduates who have professional competence and professional ethics.
- Train free, critical, productive individuals with innovative ideas.
- Bring interdisciplinary studies to the fore.
- Build relations with international organizations and institutions to configure events.
- Develop projects by strengthening relationships with industry and service sectors to contribute to the development of the country.

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The university and its institutional subdivisions have communicated its strategic and educational goals in a variety of documents, e.g. Staff Handbook or Student Handbook, and developed it into more detailed and applicable rules, guidelines and regulations. These include e.g. sanctions for causing “polarization due to differences of language, race, color or religious sect” (cf. Student Handbook), or “using position [...] for partisan political or religious purposes” (Staff Handbook).

In the academic year 2018/19, 2,309 students have been enrolled at Tishk International University. The intake in the program Architectural Engineering has been 90 and for Interior Design 36 in the academic year 2018/19.

Tishk International University has been audited against the ISO 9001:2008 and was certified in May 2015 by British Certification Inc. (BCI). This certification procedure had been organized by TIU’s Quality Management Division which was also responsible for organizing and supporting the present evaluation. A re-certification against ISO 9001:2015 has been granted in May 2018.

The University also has taken considerable measures to align its study programs along the standards of the European Higher Education Area (so called ‘Bologna area’). This includes program-related aspects like the ECTS credit system, documented intended learning outcomes on the program and course level and on a wider level the notions of student-centered learning and external as well as internal measures of quality assurance, embedded in a transparently documented governance structure.

Student Mobility and Internationalization

Tishk International University has formulated the internationalization of students and staff as one of its strategic priorities and named several efforts to support this goal:

- English as the sole language of teaching and studying, but also providing opportunities to learn additional languages like Arabic, Kurdish or Turkish.
- Raising the number of international students (currently 40 according to the self-report).
- Establishing an International Relations Office in 2013 that supports outgoing students. An exchange program has been established and used by around 40 students so far according to the self-report.
- Expanding co-operation agreements (MoUs) with universities abroad (currently about 61).
- Continue to carry out the program for staff exchange and widen the network of co-operating universities.

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- Holding international conferences at Tishk International University in different disciplines, including Architecture and Interior Design in November 2019².
- Re-structuring programs according to Bologna standards also to facilitate international mobility and exchange.

Equal Opportunities

Providing equal opportunities for students and staff has been described as one of Tishk International University's 'Points of Strength' in the self-report. It is stressed that student admission and progress as well as staff hiring and promotion is solely based on performance indicators and that one strictly adheres to a policy of non-discrimination regarding race, color, religion, gender, age, disabilities, national origin, or ancestry.

The student and the staff handbook set differentiated rules and regulations in this regard, including rules on equal payment for staff and policies on sexual harassment (between staff and between staff and students; cf. Staff Handbook) as well as sanctions regarding unethical conduct like sexual discrimination or harassment in any form (cf. Student Handbook).

According to the self-report, 50% of the student body is female. About a quarter of the lecturers and research assistants are female as well. The percentage of female teaching staff at TIU was increased by 58.3% between the academic years 2015-16 and 2017-18.

The Equal Opportunities Policy that was attached to the self-report indicates that the university "does not breach the applicable law and does not discriminate on the basis of gender, religion, national, age, origin, disability." Students with disabilities are allowed to deliver their exams in a way feasible for them. The campus buildings are barrier-free accessible and non-attendance in courses or exams due to illness can be excused.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts' panel is impressed by the quick growth of Tishk International University. The developments during the last ten years are remarkable. The eagerness to develop a university that delivers high quality education reflects itself, amongst others, in the development and implementation of an internal quality management unit. The implementation and orientation towards international standards is worth highlighting. One success is the inclusion of TIU in the top-ranked group among private Kurdistan universities in the Kurdistan National University Ranking (NUR; now in the third year).

After ten years of dynamic development, the expert panel suggests that it might be apt to further consolidate the established organizational structures on university and faculty level by considering leaner management procedures, a less top-down but rather participatory approach with regards to opinion-forming and decision-making processes. Moreover, the further development of the curricula, courses and the support of the overall further qualification

² <https://www.ishik.edu.iq/conf/icad/>

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of the teaching staff should be taken into account. Such a strategy could lay ground for the next steps in the University's development.

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2. Assessment of the Study Program/s

2.1 Common Features and Strategic Dimension of the Programs

Both programs are located in the Faculty of Engineering and thus share some characteristics. They both lead to the academic degree “Bachelor of Science” (B.Sc.). All courses are taught in English language and are credited. Tishk International University generally uses the ECTS credit system, based on the average workload students need to achieve the intended learning outcomes, including self-study time. Each semester has a course load of 30 ECTS credits. Students enrolled in “Architectural Engineering” attain 300 ECTS credits, students enrolled in “Interior Design” attain 240 ECTS credits. Each academic year is structured in a fall and a spring semester (with an additional summer term for retaking of courses and exams). The Student Handbook (2019, ch. 3 Article 13) sets an overall maximum of seven years for a four-year program and of eight years for a five-year program. All courses in both programs can be completed in one semester.

Tishk International University uses a letter-based grading system, ranging from AA (90-100 per cent) to FF (0-39 per cent), for courses and the final exam, reaching at least 70 per cent (CC) is the level for passing a course/exam (Student Handbook, Ch. 4, Art. 19, 20).

Entry Requirements, Student Admission and Selection

The entrance of undergraduate students to Tishk International University is regulated by the results achieved in standardized High School exams. For the Architectural Engineering Program, students with a final high school average above 80% were admitted in the academic year 2018-2019. For the Interior Design Engineering Program, students with a final high school average above 72% were accepted for enrollment.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts applaud both Bachelor programs for their dynamic development. The University's location in a post-war region holds both shortcomings and chances for the overall development and especially the content of these study programs. The experts thus encourage the inclusion or deepening of the topics sustainability, post-war reconstruction, regional building tradition and Islamic architecture in order to enhance the connection to the local community and chances of labor market entrance of the graduates.

It is *recommended* to widen practical aspects in the curricula in order to provide ‘hands on’ experience to the students. Moreover, the expert panel *recommends* the provision of equipment with higher standards for the workshops such as equipment and materials for model making and a 3D-printer as well as a laser cutter.

In order to establish a clearer distinction between both study programs, the expert panel commends to hire teaching staff only from the respective fields. Especially for Interior Design as a new university subject in Kurdistan (and probably Iraq), it is understandable that this poses an obstacle. It is therefore *recommended* to use teaching input from international aca-

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demic staff, which could also participate through E- or Blended Learning if administrative or financial burdens hinder their physical presence on campus.

The expert panel also *recommends* to add an entrance test to the set entry requirements, where the applicants could proof their motivation and creativity. This might include first portfolios.

2.2 Intended Learning Outcomes

2.2.1 Architectural Engineering (B.Sc.)

The Department of Architectural Engineering was established in 2012/13 and then started its Bachelor program. It has formulated the following vision for itself:

“The Architecture program is aimed at students who desire to develop a career in the field of architecture. We value and encourage our students to become active and independent learners, very competitive in the market and effectively solve architectural problems by using specific knowledge during their course studies. We encourage students to use reliable sources of materials to develop discussions and writing reports for their courses. As a result of this learning approach, the architecture program uses teaching and assessment methods such as debates, presentations, design projects, class works, and computer applications, drawing techniques, site visits and internship program, during summer time in the public or private sectors, in the delivery of the curriculum.”

The mission is described as follows:

“The mission of the Architecture Department is to prepare students to build up effective skills to face new challenges as innovators and problem solvers in all architecture-related fields by educating students into the highest level of theoretical and practical education that leads them to understand the fundamental concepts, knowledge and drawing techniques of the architectural practice.”

For the program itself, specific ‘Learning Objectives’ have been formulated (abbreviated):

1. *Preparing a new generation of graduates capable of responding to the needs of local and regional markets and professional communities*
2. *Providing a learning environment for Tishk University students that generates well-adjusted graduates, capable of interacting with their professional milieu.*
3. *Encouraging students to match science and art as a creative skill to improve the country and enable them to progress in the field of architecture.*
4. *Preparing students to address the problems of the 21st century through the application of art and design science.*
5. *Providing students with the intensive theoretical training and studio experiences, especially through using computer application instruments (AutoCAD, 3D Max, Revit, etc.).*
6. *Encouraging students to use their creativity, imagination, critical thinking, a sense of history and development of social and ethical aspects.*

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For the program 'Architectural Engineering', specific 'Learning Outcomes' have been formulated:

- *To develop problem-solving skills in the architectural context.*
- *To demonstrate knowledge of architectural history, theory, and practice in solving architectural design problems.*
- *To be able to utilize freehand drawing, architectural graphics, and model building skills in solving architectural design problems.*
- *To be able to utilize the computer as a tool in a wide range of documentation and presentation applications, using CAD, 3-D visualization and rendering, electronic image composition and editing software.*
- *To be able to apply a knowledge of mathematics, science, engineering and technology in solving architectural design problems.*
- *To be able to develop designs that meet desired needs within realistic economic, social, political, and cultural constraints.*
- *To be able to develop a design that fulfils the environmental, health & safety, and sustainability considerations.*
- *The ability to work collaboratively with various design teams involved in the building industry, and collaborate and negotiate with clients.*
- *To acquire the necessary knowledge for applying laws, codes, regulations, standards and practices in relation to building construction systems.*
- *To develop drawing and artistic skills & sense.*
- *To demonstrate an understanding and commitment to address professional and ethical responsibilities and diversity.*
- *A recognition of the need for engaging in life-long learning and knowledge about contemporary issues.*

The learning outcomes have been matched in a matrix with the European Qualifications Framework and then been broken down unto course level. The course catalogue thus states specific course learning outcomes and describes the specific skills and competencies to be achieved as well as content of the course.

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Graduates mostly pass directly into the regional (Kurdish) labor market, yet, some students go on (or intend to go on) to pursue a Master's degree, at home or abroad.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts assert that the Faculty of Engineering has taken great efforts to set up a Bachelor's program that is based on transparent strategic goals as well as detailed learning outcomes on program and course level.

During the site visit the content of the curriculum and the learning outcomes have been analysed. The experts stressed that students should be supported to develop self-consciousness as professional architects, to foster self-directed study and the ability to position themselves within society. In addition, the students should be able to connect to the cultural roots of the community and thus effectively serve society (see chapter 2.3).

2.2.2 "Interior Design" (B.Sc.)

The Department of Interior Design was established in 2014/15 and then started its Bachelor program. It has formulated the following vision for itself:

"The purpose of the Interior Design Engineering Program at TIU is to prepare students within inter-disciplinary engagement between Art and Engineering. The Program aims to prepare graduates who exceed the expectations of employers. The education environment in the Interior Design Engineering Program provides opportunities for practicing technical aspects in modern drawing labs and extensively utilizing computer applications. The assessment methods focus on the direct communication through debates, project defences and seminars."

The mission of the study program is described as follows:

"The mission of Interior Design Engineering undergraduate Program is to produce competent & compassionate and international level skilled designers. The program presents the students with the opportunity of gaining fundamental design skills in addition to encouraging students to self-develop lifelong skills. The main points that the Program keeps to are:

- 1- Updating the content and the structure of the curriculum regularly to correspond to the modern trends in the Interior Design field.*
- 2- Improving the CAD skills of the students.*
- 3- Providing an integrating link between the academia and the market needs."*

For the Bachelor program Interior Design, specific 'Learning Objectives' have been formulated as well:

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1. To provide graduates for future professional careers in the local market and the region.
2. To sustain premium standards for interior design education.
3. To provide student with necessary skills for interacting with multiple environments.
4. To promote effective communication and team collaboration on faculty and students' level.
5. To encourage innovation in design with emphasis on the human and built environment relationship.
6. To raise awareness towards designers' ethical responsibilities to the society.

These are the specific 'Learning outcomes':

- To identify social, cultural, economic, ecological and technological in design solutions.
- To develop Project Management Skills and quantity estimation.
- To acquire the necessary knowledge for applying laws, codes, regulations, standards and practices in relation to building construction systems.
- To demonstrate understanding of the historical and theoretical fundamentals of interior design.
- To apply the principles of lighting, acoustics, thermal comfort, and indoor air quality in relation to environmental impact and human wellbeing.
- To employ collaboration and develop leadership skills in the process of internal design.
- To demonstrate the ability to use of codes, standards, and guidelines that impact the human experience of interior spaces.
- To demonstrate competence at communicating design intent through graphic communication tools, in oral presentations, or in written form.
- To develop creativity, analytical skills and artistic sense.
- To acquire knowledge about how materials are fabricated, installed and maintained and how to plan furniture, fixture and equipment layouts.
- Employ interior design knowledge using computer aided design tools and drawing techniques on two and three dimensional as required.

As in Architectural Engineering, the learning outcomes have been matched in a matrix with the European Qualifications Framework and then been broken down unto course level. The course catalogue thus states for each course the specific course learning outcomes and describes the specific skills and competencies to be achieved as well as the content of the course.

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Since the Interior Design study program is quite young, there are only few cohorts that have graduated already. Some graduates are working now as lecturers in the Bachelors' program.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts recognize that the implementation of a nationally unique study program from scratch has only been made possible by a committed university leadership and highly motivated faculty members. The experts assert that the Faculty of Engineering has taken great efforts to set up a Bachelor's program in Interior Design that is based on transparent strategic goals as well as detailed learning outcomes on program and course level.

The overall profile of the Interior Design Bachelors program could, however, be more clear-cut. The distinction to the Architecture program should be developed more clearly. This could, for example, be enhanced by recruiting teaching staff with a distinct professional background in the respective field (see chapter 2.4).

2.3 Concept and Structure of the Study Programs

2.3.1 Architectural Engineering (B.Sc.)

The study program can be completed in five years/ten semesters. It has an intake capacity of 100 students per year. The program in Architectural Engineering is structured in five academic years with two semesters each, which have between three and ten courses. Each semester is credited with 30 ECTS credits (with one credit equivalent to a student workload of 25 hours).

During the first year, students take mostly basic courses in 'Basic Design' and 'Architectural Graphic' and 'Architectural Design', which also stretches into the following semesters. In addition, smaller units like 'Art and Architecture', 'Computer Application in Architecture' or 'Free-Hand Drawing' are located in this section. Moreover, the courses 'Academic Debate and Critical Thinking' and 'Advanced/Technical English' are taught. In the second year, basic disciplinary subjects like 'Building Construction Technology', 'History of Architecture' and 'Perspective Drawings' are taken. The third year contains further specialized topics like 'Execution Drawing', 'Sustainable Architecture', 'Steel Structure' or 'Principles of Planning'. The fourth year touches amongst others upon 'Landscape Design', 'Urban Design Theories', 'Light and Acoustic in Architecture' and 'Islamic Architecture'. In the first semester of the fifth year, research methods are part of the curriculum in order to prepare for the Thesis Graduation Project, which is conducted in the second semester of the last study year.

The curriculum also encompasses a range of 'Technical Electives'. They are located in the fourth year, in which two courses have to be selected and in the fifth year, where one course has to be selected. They generally deal with more specialized topics in the field of Architecture like 'Digital Architecture', 'Calligraphy in Architecture', 'Furniture Design', 'Architectural Photography' or 'Conservation & Re-habitation'. Overall, three courses can be selected from

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a list of ten. They are each credited with 4 ECTS credits. Non-technical electives are not part of the curriculum of Architecture.

According to the curriculum of Architectural Engineering, internships are not an integral part of the study program. This is also due to the fact that the Bachelor program already consists of 300 ECTS and that the design of the study program is quite strictly regulated by the Kurdish Ministry of Higher Education. However, during the site visit it became known that students have done internships abroad, which was described as a rewarding experience by them.

During the on-site talks with leadership, staff, and students, the actual learning outcomes of the curriculum had been intensively discussed with the experts. Especially the implementation of 'critical thinking' – here understood as the ability to critically relate to social structures and environmental needs – was one topic of discussion. Moreover, the connection of the curriculum to locally available resources and demands as well as the engagement with research-based teaching and learning were talked about.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts conclude that the program generally matches the intended learning outcomes and is aligned with the self-set profile laid out by the Department. The program is well-documented with elaborated course descriptions. Graduates of the program achieve the standards and levels of comparable first cycle, Bachelor programs in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area. The program serves its intention to prepare students for the regional labor market and for further postgraduate Master programs.

Based on the documentation and the on-site talks, the experts like to highly *recommend* the following aspects in order to make the curriculum even more compatible with the above mentioned 'Learning Objectives' of the study program:

- Integrating interdisciplinarity input as part of the curriculum; for example include lectures from the Fine Arts or other non-architectural disciplines such as Sociology or Dentistry.
- Making Islamic architecture and regional building tradition a more visible part of the course content in order to pay tribute to local crafts and heritage and help the development of critical thinking capable of encompassing traditional building customs, contemporary architectural concepts, up-to-date fabrication techniques and global sustainability challenges.
- Include post-war reconstruction into the curriculum to prepare graduates for the specific needs of the local labor market.
- Include research methods in theory and practice throughout the curriculum even before the graduation project. This could enhance students' independent research skills and would enable them to critically relate to society as well as consciously position themselves as architects in their professional career.

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The share of practical elements in the curriculum was also considered relatively low by the experts. It is *recommended*, to include more practical working units into the curriculum. Nonetheless, the experts considered the technical level of the students of Architectural Engineering as good, especially considering the fact, that the program was implemented only six years ago.

Moreover, the experts suggest to implement an internship as integral and compulsory part of curriculum. Necessary adjustments should be made to existing administrative regulations. The internship placement could be facilitated through the Career Planning Office or the International Office.

2.3.2 Interior Design (B.Sc.)

The study program Interior Design has an intake capacity of 50 students per year. It can be completed in four academic years with two semesters each. The eight semesters of the overall study course have six to eight courses. One semester is credited with 30 ECTS credits. One ECTS credit corresponds to 25 hours of workload.

Also in this program, during the first year students take mostly basic courses such as 'Free Hand Drawing', 'Introduction to Interior Design' or 'Form, Space and Order'. In addition, 'Mathematics and Statistics', 'Introduction to IT' and 'Academic Debate and Critical Thinking' are part of the first two semesters. Moreover, 'Advanced/Technical English' and 'Kurdology' are part of the curriculum. In the first year, the students are being given the possibility to choose each semester a course from a list of rather generic 'Non-technical Electives', for example 'Turkish', 'Art', 'Music' or 'Ecology'. These courses are credited with three ECTS credits each.

In the second year, more Design-related courses are taught, like 'Analytical Design Sketching', 'Interior Design Materials', 'History of Interior Design' or 'Computer Graphics'. From now on, the students can only take 'Technical Electives'. In the second and third year, students choose each semester one 'Technical Elective' from a list of twelve courses that are all related to Design such as 'Local Historical Spaces', 'Contemporary Arab Interior Designs', 'Textile Design' or 'Furniture', each credited with four ECTS credits.

The design-related technical topics continue throughout the compulsory courses of the third year. Amongst others, they comprise courses where students can deepen and apply their knowledge and practical skills, such as 'Design Studio' and 'Healthcare Design Studio'. The technical and mechanical understanding of the students is to be enhanced in courses like 'Building Constructions & Systems for the Interior Design', 'Human Respond for the Built Environment' and 'Technical Foundation for Interior Design'.

The fourth and final year prepares for and includes the 'Thesis Graduation Project'. The course 'Portfolio Preparation & Graduation Thesis Study' should enable them to conduct their own empirical research. Furthermore, special attention is given to ecological topics through the courses 'Sustainability and the Interior Environment' and 'Sustainability and Re-Use Design'. Students can choose two Technical Electives in the first and the second semester of the fourth year.

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Just like in the Architectural Engineering program, an internship is not part of the curriculum. However, internships were mentioned during the talks at the site-visit. They were described as enriching experiences by the students.

During the on-site talks with leadership, staff, and students, the actual learning outcomes of the curriculum had been intensively discussed with the experts. This included an exchange on the ability of 'critical thinking', understood by the experts as the ability to critically relate to social structures and environmental needs. Just like in the program Architectural Engineering, the introduction of research methods early on in the curriculum could be a considerable asset. Sociology (both theory and methods) and theory of design could for example be part of the curriculum from early on. This would strengthen a rather functional approach to Interior Design.

The experts applaud the development of the Interior Design program, especially taking into account that the Interior Design department was established only five years ago. The dynamic growth of the program was also emphasized by the students of the first cohort who reported that the study program was adjusted according to their feedback. In general, students were satisfied with the content of the curriculum.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts conclude that the program generally matches the intended learning objectives and learning outcomes and is aligned with the Department's self-set profile. The program and its components are well-documented with elaborated course descriptions and graduates achieve the standards and levels of comparable first cycle, Bachelor programs within the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area. The program serves its intention to prepare students for the regional labor market.

Just like in the Architectural Engineering program, the experts *recommend* to introduce an additional assessment of the students motivation and creativity upon applying for the Interior Design program, e.g. through a portfolio.

The panel would also suggest that the overall structure of the curriculum could benefit if external Interior Designers from academia and industry were involved in the future development of the study program. The competencies gained by students could thus be matched more closely with state-of-the-art-standards or demands of the labor market.

The experts also recommend to make research methodologies or sociology as well as art scientific theories and methods part of the curriculum from early on. This would enable students to relate in their future function as Interior Designers more consciously to their environment. Moreover, this might enhance their abilities to re-shape space in extraordinary settings, such as post-war situations. Additionally, a course in Product Design could be a valuable asset. The same goes for enhancing the topic of sustainability.

Moreover, the experts suggest implementing an internship as integral and compulsory part of curriculum. The internship placement could be facilitated through the Career Planning Office or the International Office.

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2.4 Teaching Faculty

Tishk University has documented encompassing regulations and processes for staff hiring, evaluation, and promotion, e.g. in the 'Human Resources Process' handbook.

The hiring procedure foresees that the Faculty Deans report their recruitment plans to the University Council. The Council decides on the proposal. After vacancies are published, incoming applications are assembled into a shortlist and candidates are invited for interviews. A Recruitment Committee, including the Dean and the respective Head of Department, evaluate the candidates and name suitable applicants. The final decision is taken by the university's Hiring Committee. The Ministry of Education does not interfere in this process.

For the professional development of the academic staff, an elaborated system of promotion ('Continuous Academic Development') has been documented, based on defined issues that take into account, e.g., scientific and research activities, students' evaluation and other evaluative instruments like classroom observation by peers. Respective processes have been defined and documented by the Quality Management unit. The evaluation cycle of teaching staff also includes measures in cases of unsatisfactory performance. These are, as elaborated during the site visit, primarily supportive measures, but can also lead to termination of contracts.

According to the self-report, Tishk University has a total teaching staff of about 443 academics, of which 119 hold a PhD, 126 a Master's degree and 198 Bachelor's degrees.

For the Architectural Engineering and Interior Design program together, the following full-time academic staff has been documented and CVs have been provided:

- 12 full-time academic staff
 - 4 PhD
 - 7 MSc
 - 1 BSc

There is a notable overlap in the teaching staff between the two study programs. This was a point discussed during the on-site talks and has been explained by the Departments mostly with the shortage of available teaching staff, especially in the field of Interior Design. In addition, there is a competition on the regional academic labor market from other universities based in Turkey or bigger cities in Iraq.

Experts' Appraisal

The experts conclude that both Bachelor programs are sustained by a sufficient number of teaching staff. Moreover, the teachers are qualified and hold relevant academic degrees.

The hiring and promotional criteria are well-documented and provide incentives for further academic development of the present staff. Overall, the experts commend the motivation and English language skills of the teaching staff. This positive picture was also reflected by overall positive evaluation results. Students and alumni mentioned during the site visit a high level of personal support and advice, even after graduation.

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The evaluation of teaching staff is comprehensive, also includes innovative instruments like peer-to-peer classroom evaluation, and sets clear measures for unsatisfactory performances. The experts, however, *recommend* to enhance pedagogical and didactic support measures. In general, it is recommended to use more participatory and research-oriented teaching methods and make teacher training on higher education available not only in case of unsatisfactory evaluation results but as a constant offer to academic staff.

It is also *recommended* to enhance the approach of problem-based learning, which could for example be based on the already existing field trips within Iraq. Generally, regional and international excursions should be conducted on a regular basis. These activities could enhance the continual circulation of up-to-date ideas and perspectives, to monitor and classify contemporary architectural tendencies and to reflect on one's own point of view. Curricular parts on material research could also be strengthened.

It also became clear to the experts that the Interior Design program is in a special situation, since it is the first Interior Design program in Iraq. In order to still enhance the distinct, design-related content of the program, the experts recommend to focus the efforts on including more (international) teaching staff. As structural obstacles such as visa applications can be hindering these efforts, E-learning or Blended learning could be a feasible way.

In addition, the experts *recommend* to increase the share of staff in the Architectural Engineering program that has been recruited from outside Tishk University. For Tishk academic staff, at the same time, measures of international staff mobility should be supported.

Furthermore, concerns of Faculty Deans and Heads of Department in view of overcharged workloads should be addressed.

2.5 Infrastructure, Resources and Student Support

Infrastructure and Technical Equipment

The Faculty of Architecture as well as both Departments are located in a modern campus building in Erbil. Classrooms, the library and studio facilities have been visited by the experts. All visited classrooms are equipped with drawing tables. Located on campus, there are workshops in order to work with wood and metal.

Library

The campus houses a central library; however, opening hours and equipment with books and journals were described as slightly underequipped by staff and students alike. According to the university staff, online sources are the biggest information resource, most of which can be downloaded by the students only while being on campus.

Student Support Services

Tishk International University has established a range of services to support students in academic matters. It includes the International Relations Office that supports students in international mobility with information on exchange programs, grants and recognition procedures. A Career Center advises students on career planning and an Alumni Office works on using graduate networks also to advise current students.

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Moreover, the TIU Students' Council is composed of students elected democratically as class representatives, department representatives and faculty representatives. It aims at support students in resolving problems, informing the university administration of ideas emanating from the student body and representing the students in other associations or university bodies. The University also regularly organizes competitions and charity projects, e.g. teaching in refugee camps outside of Erbil.

During the on-site talks, students favorably mentioned the overall accessibility of the teaching and administrative staff.

The institutional rules and regulations of student conduct, examinations etc. are comprehensively made transparent in a Student Handbook that all students receive at the start of their study and that can be downloaded via the website in an updated format each academic year. An online Student Information Systems provides information on curricula, syllabi, grades etc.

Teaching and Learning Environment

Overall, the campus houses several buildings and includes premises for extracurricular activities like a sports field/center, cafeterias, accommodation etc. The main building provides elevators and special ramps for disabled students.

Experts' Appraisal

In general, the experts would like to applaud the university's recent development. It is remarkable how Tishk International University has developed in terms of infrastructure within roughly ten years.

However, regarding the equipment of the Architecture Department, the experts *recommend* the following:

- The opening hours of the library should be extended. The equipment of the library with working places and computer work stations should be enhanced.
- For Interior Design, Architecture and related disciplines, additional state-of-the-art literature should be acquired. The professional architectural journal "Detail" should be subscribed and made available to the students.
- Full program licenses for "CAD" and "BIM" (e.g. "Revit") should be obtained.
- Fully equipped workshops with long opening hours should be made available to the students. A 3-D-printer could be a useful asset.

During the on-site talks with the students, it was mentioned that family decisions and information provided by the International Relations Office are a decisive factor for student mobility. In order to enable students' mobility, the experts *recommend* to have more public events, involving the families of the students, so that they can get acquainted with the teaching body and the International Relations Office. Moreover, they *recommend* to check the existing Memorandums of Understanding with partner universities for consistency and work towards mutual Learning Agreements, which would ensure recognition of study results. To enhance

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the generally weak exposure to international study and to allow for smooth integration of study periods carried out abroad, the experts *recommend* structured exchange schemes providing for defined study units at universities and partner institutions abroad.

Yet, overall support and advice of students appears very positive, obviously sustained by an engaged and committed teaching staff and program leaderships.

2.6 Methods of Teaching and Student Assessment

The teaching and learning methods of both programs are laid down in the course descriptions, often given as a range of different forms like 'lecture, practical session, presentation, case study, exercise'.

Class attendance is checked and shall not be below 80 per cent in theoretical classes and 85 per cent in laboratory courses (cf. Article 17 Student Handbook). Students have to enroll in the courses set for each semester plus courses that have been failed in the previous semester (except Electives) (cf. Article 16 Student Handbook). Course descriptions rarely state prerequisites related to preceding courses, e.g. "Architectural Design I – VI" or "Interior Design Studio I – VI". However, the curricula have a general consecutive structure, thus predefining the overall curriculum for each cohort.

All courses stipulate several examinations, usually a mid-term and a (written) final exam (cf. Article 23 Student handbook). In addition, further varied and marked assignments are set, like quizzes, take-home assignments, design projects, classwork tutorials, presentations, team projects and classroom participation. The percentage weight of each examination is stated in much detail in the course catalogue. For each semester, a Semester Point Average is calculated and a continuous Grade Point Average is computed during the course of study, relating grades to accomplished credits – which can also be improved by taking a course and its exams again. Failed exams can be repeated without any limits; for these make-up assessments, specific dates are set by the administration. The so-called "summer term" is intended for the repetition of exams. However, an overall number of study years is determined for each program.

The regulations provide for an appeals procedure (cf. Article 27 Student Handbook): A student may submit a petition to the Directorate of Student Affairs; the petition will then be assessed by the respective examination committee and Faculty Board.

All examination regulations are laid down transparently in the Student Handbook and the Examination Rules for examiners and supervisors.

During the on-site talks, students and alumni did not mention structural problems with the overall examination system. The relatively low drop-out number of students during both study programs reflects the feasibility of the students' assessment.

Experts' Appraisal

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In general, the experts conclude that the teaching and assessment methods in the study programs Architectural Engineering and Interior Design are adequate to convey the course content and monitor whether the Intended Learning Outcomes have been achieved. The panel was very impressed with the detailed descriptions of grade calculation and examination procedures provided in the documentation by Tishk International University.

However, the students also mentioned that they did not always feel fully prepared for the needs of the labor market. The skill to transfer knowledge to new circumstances and adapt to unforeseen situations might be enhanced, e.g. by introducing new didactical approaches.

The experts would like to give the following *recommendations*:

- For the application process of future students, the re-introduction of an extra assessment of the students' motivation and creativity could be useful. It would especially ensure that the chosen study path and future labor market demands actually match the students' skills and interests.
- The teaching staff should give written feedback to the students' works and designs that goes beyond merely commentary in the actual drawings. It is strongly suggested to give feedback in separate documents in order to extend the academic dialogue between teachers and students. This way of giving feedback should be made compulsory.
- The classrooms and working facilities should enable more participatory methods such as group work, for example through tables that can be moved freely.
- A teacher training for the academic staff should be established, including input in didactics of higher education, pedagogy and educational psychology, in order to implement engaging, student-centred forms of teaching and academic qualification.

2.7 Quality Assurance

With the self-report and during the site visit, Tishk International University has provided detailed information on standards, processes, responsibilities and results of its quality assurance system, regarding the University in general and both programs in particular. It goes under the heading of "Total Quality Management Policy" and is laid out in an encompassing, 57-pages "Quality Assurance Policy at Tishk International University" guideline.

The quality assurance is headed by the Director of the Quality Assurance Unit under the responsibility of Vice President for Educational Affairs. In addition, each Faculty and Department designates a decentral quality assurance representative. Clearly assigned responsibilities and a timetable structured along the academic year make the system transparent. The Quality Management Unit is supported by an additional 'Coordinator of QMS and Accreditation' which also organizes external assessments like ISO certification, Ministry audits and ZEVA accreditation.

The processes for quality assurance and development of the individual programs have been described in detail. They use different tools and evaluative instruments, including

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- Risk/Opportunities Assessment,
- monitoring of achievement of quality objectives,
- pre-graduation survey,
- alumni survey,
- employers' satisfaction service,
- internal auditing cycle,
- students' survey.

The latter instrument is applied every semester for each course in all academic programs. The surveys' results are compiled and forwarded to the Director of Quality Assurance who evaluates and forwards them to the Vice President of Academic Affairs. They are also presented to the Quality Assurance Committee and the University Council. Actions are mostly directed towards the individual lecturer's level and can be enhancement-oriented (debates, workshops), but might also lead to a critical assessment and consequences like termination of contracts.

Each course is evaluated with a questionnaire that includes items on course objectives and their attainment, teaching quality and overall behavior of lecturer, provided resources and materials as well as student support.

Students' representatives are included in University and Faculty processes through the Students' Council, which is composed of elected class, department and faculty representatives. The Students' Council is regularly invited to join decision making bodies of the University such as the Quality Committee, the Board of Trustees, the University and the Faculty Council.

In 2013, Tishk International University has been successfully audited against ISO 9001:2008 requirements. Re-certification (ISO 9001:2015) has been successful in May 2018.

During the site visit, students of the two programs Architecture Engineering and Interior Design were generally positive about formal and informal ways of giving feedback on courses and teaching staff. The students of the first cohort of Interior Design reported that the program developed based on their experiences and feedback. They attested a high motivation of the teaching body to improve qualitatively.

Experts' Appraisal

The expert panel is very impressed with the motivation and work of the quality assurance and quality management units of Tishk International University and congratulates to the achievements of the past ten years.

It would like to give the following *recommendations*:

- Students should be part of all the meetings of the above mentioned decision making bodies of Tishk International University.
- Training programs in higher education didactics should be offered to all academic staff, for example as part of the Professional Development Program.

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- The overall quality assurance and management procedures could be evaluated regarding their effects and efficiency, taking a fitness-for-purpose approach (while staying in line with the requirements of the Ministry).
- In general, more emphasis could be placed on the development of a “quality culture” instead of relying on a formalized system of checks and balances.

2.8 Transparency and Public Information

Tishk International University has presented a comprehensive profile of the Institution, Faculties and Departments. Most documents – all in English language – are accessible via the University’s website, some are only provided to enrolled students and academic staff. General policies are laid down in written form, as are human resource and quality management processes and regulations. The curriculum and course descriptions of both study programs can be found online. A list of titles of the Architectural Engineering graduation theses is published online as well.

The Student Handbook and the Staff Handbook provide detailed information regarding the most important study and assessment regulations (including disciplinary rules/code of conduct). Detailed examination rules and extensive course descriptions document the curricular core of the programs.

Another asset is the regular conduct of international conferences. The next conference “International Conference on Architecture & Interior Design” was to be held in November 2019³.

Experts’ Appraisal

The experts have gained a positive impression of the public information policy at Tishk International University. All enrolled students have sufficient access to the central documents regulating the study process. Policies, regulations and rules are detailed, appear fair and balanced and should be adequate to regulate teaching and learning at Tishk International University. Documentation on the program level, i.e. course catalogues with individual course descriptions are for the most part existing, are aligned to Bologna standards and show a student-centered system of teaching and learning, including a credit system.

In order to align the study programs even closer to the Bologna standards, the expert panel *highly recommends* to issue diploma supplements, corresponding to the requirements of the EHEA, together with the graduation documents.

The panel would still like to *recommend* to widen the attempts to make the work of the students and the Departments more open and accessible to the public. The above mentioned conference is a very good start in this direction. In addition, graduation projects or exception-

³ <https://www.ishik.edu.iq/conf/icad/>

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al course works could be exhibited. This could lead to useful social effects, make the programs more known in the region, enhance closer interactions with the family of the students and establish connections to potential employers. Regular meetings between current students and alumni could also strengthen relations to the labor market.

2.9 Summary of the Findings and Appraisal

Not more than a decade ago, Tishk International University was founded. Its' development as an ambitious higher education institution so far has been remarkable. Equipped with a specific vision and mission, demanding strategic objectives have been set. The university leadership and staff are striving towards being one of the leading private higher education institutions in Kurdistan (and Iraq). The adaption of core "Bologna Standards" (ESG, ECTS, etc.) and of an international approach like English as the language of teaching and research, high quality education offers and research reflects how Tishk International University is meeting its goals.

Moreover, the study programs "Architectural Engineering" and "Interior Design" reflect these developments. Clear learning objectives and outcomes, a student-centred concept of teaching and assessment, a high level of academic education and the employability of graduates are integrated into the respective programs curricula.

The experts assert that the Departments of Architectural Engineering and Interior Design have taken great efforts to set up the relatively recently implemented study programs in order to meet the requirements of incoming students, graduates and the labor market. The current curricular realization is convincing and substantially aligned to the educational goals and learning outcomes.

Both programs though would probably benefit from stronger attempts towards internationalization, regarding teaching staff and student mobility alike. E-learning could be a possibility to overcome bureaucratic obstacles and include more international lecturers. This applies especially for the "Interior Design" program in order to sharpen its professional self-understanding in distinction from the field of Architecture. The existing Memorandums of Understanding could be further strengthened through student exchanges.

Both programs would be enhanced by an expansion of library resources and workshop facilities. In general, the expert panel concludes that the curricula could meet the demands of the community even better, if local traditions and specific labor market demands were a stronger part of the study course.

To conclude, the already highly developed quality assurance systems supports further improvement of the programs – both of them run and sustained by a motivated and qualified teaching staff, active students and an open-minded leadership.

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III. Appendix

1. Statement of the University in Response to the Expert Report