

## Report on the Accreditation of Study Programme

### “Architectural Engineering” (B.Sc. Eng.)

at Cihan University Erbil/Iraq

Reference Number 1714-xx-1



## 04<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the ZEvA Commission on 20 November 2018

### Item 4.01

Study Programme	Degree	Programme Duration	Type of Programme	Maximum annual intake
Architectural Engineering	B.Sc. Eng.	5 years	Full-time	50

Accreditation contract signed on: 24 April 2018

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**Hanover, 31 August 2018 (amended 12 December 2018)**

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

### **1. Decision of the ZEvA Commission (ZEKo)**

*The ZEvA Commission follows the experts' report and recommendations and takes note of the university's response.*

*The Commission decides to accredit the degree programme "Architectural Engineering" (B.Sc.Eng.) as offered by Cihan University, Erbil, provided the following pre-conditions are met:*

- *The Department of Architectural Engineering has to provide compulsory curricular and infrastructural provisions for working with materials that are standard in international architectural higher education, such as woodworking, plaster and metal.*
- *A strategy by the Department of Architectural Engineering (involving department leadership, staff, students, possibly outside experts) in coordination with the Cihan University leadership shall be developed. This strategy shall pay attention to the recommendations from this report, especially*
  - *developing ties with and embedding the department and the programme in the (regional and national) civil society, including its cultural, historical and architectural dimensions;*
  - *strategic goals and procedures for staff recruitment and staff development, including aspects of academic exchange, research and practical experience;*
  - *curricular development in regard to reflective, context-related thinking (building context, sustainability etc.) as well as integration of practical experience (internships, workshops, materials);*
  - *fostering mobility and international exchange of students and staff;*
  - *facilitating apt institutions and processes for quality development of the programme, including a revision of the programmes title.*

*This decision is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the Framework of Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and the recommendations of the ECTS Users' Guide as referred to in the ZEvA Manual for the External Assessment of Study Programmes.*

## **2. Final Vote of the Expert Panel**

### **2.1 General Aspects**

#### **2.1.1 General Recommendations:**

- The experts strongly recommend to Cihan University to clarify its strategy in regard to expansion plans. The strategic goals and the purpose of its further expansion should be identified precisely and aligned with the self-stated quality claims.
- The experts strongly recommend to locate the main responsibility for staff recruitment on the departmental level where the head and faculty members should have more influence and decision-making authority. In addition, overall communication between the department's teaching faculty and the university leadership should be intensified.
- Concerning the high relevance of Architecture and Urban Planning for civil society and its built environment, the experts strongly recommend the university's and department's leadership to build on the existing ties and to intensify the conversation with the whole community. The central position of the University should be used to establish meaningful conversations about the future of the region.
- Cihan University should develop and lay down an explicit policy on equal opportunities and non-discrimination.
- The institutional processes of quality assurance should be focused on developing the profile and structure of its programmes. Academic development of the programmes should be primarily determined by the departments and their teaching faculty. Quality development should also take a proactive stance vis-à-vis the Ministry.

### **2.2 Programme "Architectural Engineering" (B.Sc. Eng.)**

#### **2.2.1 Recommendations:**

- The experts strongly recommend adjusting the programme's title to 'Architecture' as its current curriculum has relatively few technical components and does not prepare graduates for specialized working areas like implementation (or detailed) planning.
- The expert group strongly recommends to use the existing national and international co-operations and MoUs more actively and strategically, including international exchanges or activities like collaborative research, publications, or active attendance of international conferences. Academic exchanges in any format should be rigorously supported on staff and student level alike. Thematic redundancies in areas of academic research should be allowed for. The experts recommend intensifying staff development to enhance an intellectual discourse and development which is also related to practical experience.

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- The experts recommend to put a stronger curricular emphasis on critical, historically, and theoretically reflexive reasoning in architecture. The curriculum and its project-related parts should include a much stronger incorporation of the local and regional contexts, its building traditions and ecological as well as infrastructural requirements, including especially (i) building history and building theory, (ii) basics principles and elements of architectural perception and design.
- The 'common theme' of the programme should be reconsidered. It is currently structured along designing and modelling buildings on an (rapidly) increasing scale. The basic rationale of students' progression should rather be founded in the development of one's own 'architectural language' and individual architectural perspective.
- Practical training during the five years of study should be strengthened. In this regard, the intended outcomes and objectives of the internship should be defined, supervised and the students' experiences evaluated. A stronger involvement of Cihan Construction and Real Estate in this aspect of the curriculum is viewed to be an asset, and is therefore recommended.
- The expert group recommends the development of the teaching methods matching a more student-centred learning approach, including a differentiated, critical feedback on students' work.
- An architectural department should be an open, creative working 'space' for exchanging ideas, projects, and research. This would be supported by changing the policy of an early closing of the facilities; students (and staff) should be able use the department's facilities, including individual work spaces and the necessary materials, to foster the intellectual and practical exchanges between the cohorts of architectural students, but also with internal and external teachers, experts, practitioners, and researchers.
- The experts recommend unifying the crediting structure of the programme. The workload and crediting should also take the two periods of practical training as well as necessary individual study time into account and assign credits/units accordingly. The ECTS key features should be taken into account.
- The experts encourage a timely and rigorous expansion of the library to include publications about topics like Fine Arts, History, Philosophy, etc.

**2.2.2 Conditions:**

- The Department of Architectural Engineering has to provide compulsory curricular and infrastructural provisions for working with materials that are standard in international architectural higher education, such as woodworking, plaster and metal.
- The experts deem it necessary to develop and present a strategy by the Department of Architectural Engineering (involving department leadership, staff, students, possibly outside experts) in coordination with the Cihan University leadership. This strategy shall pay attention to the recommendations from this report, especially

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- developing ties with and embedding the department and the programme in the (regional and national) civil society, including its cultural, historical and architectural dimensions;
- strategic goals and procedures for staff recruitment and staff development, including aspects of academic exchange, research and practical experience;
- curricular development in regard to reflective, context-related thinking (building context, sustainability etc.) as well as integration of practical experience (internships, workshops, materials);
- fostering mobility and international exchange of students and staff;
- facilitating apt institutions and processes for quality development of the programme, including a revision of the programmes title;

2.2.3 Recommendation to the ZEvA Commission:

The expert group recommends the accreditation of the programme “Architectural Engineering” for the duration of five years with the conditions listed above.

***II Evaluation Report of the Expert Panel***

***0 Introduction: Purpose, Design and Context of the Accreditation Procedure***

## **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 programme, Architectural Engineering offered by Cihan University, Erbil/Iraq, against international standards. The assessment is based on ZEvA's "Assessment Framework for the Evaluation of Study Programmes" as laid out in the "Manual for Evaluation and Certification of Study Programmes". This assessment framework is in part 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).

For the purpose of assessing the study programme, Cihan University and its Department of Architectural Engineering submitted a self-report. Apart from detailed descriptions of the university as a whole and the study programme, the self-report included a number of additional documents, as e.g. course programme, selected course syllabi, CVs of teaching faculty and sample questionnaires for course evaluation. All documents were submitted in English.

This evaluation report is based on the experts' assessment of the self-report submitted by Cihan University and on their findings during the site-visit on May 15<sup>th</sup> and May 16<sup>th</sup> 2018. It will serve as a basis for ZEvA's Commission for International Affairs to decide on the accreditation of the university's study programme. 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 Cihan University and their staff for professionally organizing the stay at the institution. Special thanks go to the Head and staff of the Department of Architectural Engineering as well as its students. The experts enjoyed the open and constructive atmosphere during their on-site talks in Erbil.

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***1 Governance, Management and Profile of the University***

**1. Governance, Management and Profile of the University**

As the first private university in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Cihan University was founded in 2007 in Erbil. At present, a total of about 5.300 students are enrolled at Cihan University receiving undergraduate degrees in Law, International Relations, Business Administration, Health Administrations, Banking and Financial Sciences, Accounting, Communication & Computer Engineering, Computer Science, Architectural Engineering, Civil Engineering, Biology, Interior Design, Translation and English Language, Media, Sports, Physiotherapy, and Nutrition.

The campus of Cihan University is spread into an area of 12,700 square meters which include eleven major buildings hosting 100 classrooms and offices, academic departments, administration offices, and student service facilities. Two additional campuses of Cihan University are located in Sulaimani, with a total of 2.000 students, where Architectural Engineering is also offered (but not assessed in this procedure), and in Duhok with 900 students. In addition, the University leadership referred to further expansion of Cihan University, specifically establishing two campuses inside Iraq (Kirkuk and Baghdad) and one in Cyprus.

The stated mission of Cihan University is to provide a high quality education and research at an international level to the community. Cihan University commits itself to develop the skills and competencies of the youth so as to pursue their professional goals, improve the performance of their organizations and provide leadership and service to the their communities.

Cihan University has adopted an academic plan of two semesters in an academic year. Each semester consists of sixteen weeks. All programmes are taught in English, except for the Law and the International Relations programme, both studied in Arabic. Beside the intensive course in English language throughout the syllabus, the English Language Centre (ELC) at the campus provides support to the students and faculty members as an independent unit.

As a private institution of higher education, Cihan University is owned and supported by the Cihan Group. Founded in 1949 by Haj Yahya Bajger, Cihan Group started its business with textile industry as a family business in Erbil. In the last years, Cihan Group has widened its scope of business including various services such as automotive and heavy machinery, food, constructions and real estate, banking and investment, media, insurance and education. Currently, Cihan Group also provides educational institutions ranging from kindergarten to higher education in various disciplines.

Due to the fact that private higher education institutions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq dispose of a short history of ten years in the higher education landscape, the autonomy of the universities is limited by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research such as determining the tuition, specifying the number of annual intake and carrying out general quality oversight.

**Organizational Structure and Mission of the University**

The university is governed by the Board of Trustees, the President and the University Council, the latter comprising the President, Vice-President for Scientific Affairs, Vice-President for



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Students and Administrative Affairs and the Faculty Deans. Each College is headed by a Dean. On the lower level, each Department is led by a Head of Department who is responsible for its development, management and quality, including the quality of the study programs.

On the central institutional level, Cihan University describes its vision and mission as follows:

*Vision*

*Cihan University aspires to become one of the top leading universities in Iraq and in the Middle East, and to become globally recognized. The university is keen to qualify prospective leaders in their specializations and to be a regional centre of study and scientific research.*

*Mission*

*Cihan University is committed to create the appropriate academic environment for young and mature students to study in a variety of domains by providing academic programs of high standards.*

The educational goals as well as the vision and mission have been communicated by the university in a variety of documents in Kurdish and English language, i.e. Cihan University Student Handbook and Staff Handbook.

**Organizational Structure and Mission of the College of Engineering and Department of Architectural Engineering**

The College of Engineering, established in 2008, intends to qualify human resources in the fields of communication, civil, and architectural engineering, covering a wide spectrum of staff and associates in relevant specialties and laboratories, workshops, and drawing halls. The College of Engineering consists of the following departments:

- Department of Communication and Computer Engineering
- Department of Civil Engineering
- Department of Architectural Engineering

The Department of Architectural Engineering describes its vision and mission as follows in the self-report:

*Vison*

*To be a regional leader in Architectural Engineering education, serving the needs of Iraq and its region, the Department of Architectural Engineering aims at providing innovative designers with a high level of engineering education and knowledge, so they can bridge the gap between technology and creativity.*

*Mission*

*To support the development of Iraq and its surrounding countries, it provides an educational program in quality, establishes research and offering technical services related to architectural engineering.*

Established in 2009, the Department of Architectural Engineering aims to offer up-to-date architectural education with concrete relations to the contextual and regional environment.

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Currently, 192 students are enrolled at the Department which solely offers the Bachelor's programme assessed in this report. It enrolls 50 students per year. After five years of study, graduates shall be equipped to pursue a career in Architecture and Design either in the workplace or by taking up a Master's study programme.

As explained during the site visit, the motivation behind the demand of the universities' leadership to receive international accreditation for Architectural Engineering as the first study programme of Cihan University is related to the high reputation and the prestige of Architecture, coming after Medicine and Engineering, in the Kurdish community. In addition, Architectural Engineering is currently the study programme of Cihan University carrying the highest tuition fee of about 3,000 Euro per academic year.

*Experts' Appraisal*

Cihan University undergoes a rapid growth by establishing new colleges and departments in Erbil. Furthermore, two campuses in Sulaimani and Duhok have been established as well as plans for the expansion of Cihan University network inside and outside of Iraq. However, the experts strongly recommend to the university to further clarify its strategy in regard to expansion plans being conducted and envisioned. The strategic goals and the purpose for further expansion should be identified precisely and aligned with the self-stated high claims regarding the quality of institutional higher education.

Regarding institutional governance, the experts conclude that the university leadership limits the academic independence on various accounts: for instance, the academic faculty at the Department of Architectural Engineering is not involved in the process of selecting new teaching staff at their department even though they are best suited to recognize the necessary skills and qualifications required for their department. The experts thus strongly recommend to the university to locate the main responsibility for staff recruitment on a departmental level, where the head and the members of the department should have more influence and decision-making authority. The experts see the responsible selection of teaching staff as imperative to the success of future expansive endeavours. In addition, overall communication between the Department's teaching faculty and the university leadership should be intensified to encourage an ongoing exchange of academic initiatives, quality enhancement, and strategic development.

Concerning the high relevance of architecture and urban planning for civil society and its built environment, the experts strongly recommend the university's and department's leadership to enhance the ties and the conversation with civil society. The Architectural programme itself offers valuable opportunities to interact with the broader society and its institutions. Actions could range from participative decision making, to the incorporation of regional (building) traditions in innovative ways, to inform about modern building and planning procedures and sustainable designs. This would entail to create a 'culture of openness' with an exchange on intellectual, cultural and architectural aspects.

Existing starting points can be the highly valued Cultural Center, the Exhibition Hall etc. During the on-site talks, teaching staff at the Architectural Department showed considerable in-

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terest in innovate ways of intellectual and architectural exchange, e.g. by establishing a 'research centre' that connects architecture, society, and engineering and thus goes beyond the existing intra-university research support service.

The experts thus encourage the leadership to seek and invite the civil society for open discussion in different formats, like exhibition, discussion and experiments. The central position of the University should be used to establish meaningful conversations about the future of the region. The cultural connotations of projects presented on-site seem to offer a bigger potential than is currently explored. This opportunity should not be allowed to be missed. The experts deem it necessary that these aspects are developed in a strategy that has to be developed by the Department of Architectural Engineering (staff, students, outside experts) in coordination with the Cihan University leadership.

Student Mobility and Internationalisation

In the self-report and during the on-site talks, the university leadership mentioned their concern with internationalisation at Cihan University, naming 28 current Memorandums of Understanding with local universities and cooperation with several European universities; such as the University of Cardiff, Swansea University and Imperial College London.

The university disposes of an International Relations Office linked with the office of Vice President for Scientific Affairs, and headed by a director. The main tasks of the office are listed as follows:

- The coordination and sustainment of international research and teaching partnerships, networks and co-operation agreements.
- Staff exchange links with academic institutions around the world.
- Development and realization of projects with overseas partners.
- Providing researchers and academic staff from the Cihan University with support, guidance, and information for preparing and completing a stay abroad.
- Assisting foreign scholars, academics, and lecturers who wish to work or teach at Cihan University.

During the talks, students and graduates showed their interest in pursuing postgraduate studies at local universities or in European countries. The teaching faculty referred to some graduates who currently pursue postgraduate studies at e.g. Bauhaus University in Germany. Students of Architectural Engineering, however, complained about the absence of mobility during their five years of study. Currently, mobility only starts after graduation when eventually pursuing a Master's degree – while students are interested in exchange programmes with regional and international colleges during the course of their programme. They would also highly support receiving lectures from permanent or visiting international staff.

*Experts' Appraisal*

The expert group encourages the existing cooperation and Memorandums of Understanding on national and international levels that have a special importance for architecture. Yet, they

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strongly recommend to use the existing potential more actively and strategically, including international exchanges or international activities like collaborative research, international publications, or active attendance of international conferences. Academic exchanges in any format should be rigorously supported on staff and student level alike. Thematic redundancies in areas of academic research should be allowed for. This should also be part of an overall strategy development.

**Equal Opportunities**

Cihan University has laid down policies on faculty development and also mentions equal opportunities as one of its objectives. Admission to programs is not related to gender, religion or nationality.

Regarding the programme of Architectural Engineering, the student body features a considerable amount of females. In addition, about one third of the full- and part-time teaching staff at the Department is female.

***Experts' Appraisal***

The experts have not gained the impression that there have been any unequal opportunities according to gender, religion or nationality neither for student admission nor for staff recruitment. Yet, they recommend Cihan University to develop and lay down an explicit policy on equal opportunities and non-discrimination.

## **2. Assessment of the Study Programme “Architectural Engineering” (B.Sc. Eng.)**

### **2.1 Features, Strategic Dimensions and Intended Learning Outcomes**

The Department has set overall goals for the provision of its programme in Architectural Engineering:

*We are committed to providing a comprehensive education that enables our graduates to make significant contributions to Iraq, its region, and the broader global community through conscientious participation in practice. We believe that good design results from a combination of three major elements: a deep understanding of culture, ethical engagement community, and respect for the creative skills needed to establish a sustainable built environment.*

*We prepare our students for successful careers in the following fields:*

- *Architecture, interior design, town planning.*
- *Graphic design, illustration, animation, computer applications, and simulations.*
- *Heritage and cultural management, exhibition design and publicity, general design consulting.*

In the self-report, a differentiated set of learning outcomes were stated for the programme, structured along four categories:

- Knowledge and understanding; including learning outcomes like
  - understanding the fundamental concept of engineering science;
  - understanding the relationship between art and architecture;
  - understanding the principles and elements of design;
  - learning what the nature and functions of building are;
  - types of construction projects;
  - types of contracts.
- Intellectual skills; including learning outcomes like
  - identifying the composition, design limitations, function and functional relationship among design elements;
  - teaching how to deal with realistic projects and understanding the role of functions as the main issue in the design;
  - analysing, studying and designing big complicate architectural projects like a housing project;
  - understanding the integration between historical parts/monuments and new buildings.
- Practical skills; including learning outcomes like
  - applying the type of measurements, proportion, scale and human scale and the major scales used in an architectural drawing;
  - recognizing main characters and features of principles of free hand drawing and the ability to sketch any object in different sizes and shapes.
- Transferable skills; including learning outcomes like
  - acquiring a good command of English vocabulary and correct pronunciation of

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words in the field of civil engineering;

- using scientific evidence-based methods in the identification and solution of problems;
- information about the use of general IT tools and engineering graphic software’s programme (Auto-Cad, 3Ds-max, Revit, and animation software).

Based on the self-report, students’ learning outcomes for each educational unit (course) are listed in a detailed course description that also entails an overview of the course content, forms of teaching and assessment as well as a detailed weekly lecture plan.

As an example given with the self-report, the course book of “Architectural Design II” for the second academic year describes in details the course objectives, course overview, methods of teaching, assessment scheme as well as the course learning outcomes. The latter had been formulated as follows:

- Learning how to deal with realistic projects;
- understanding the role of functions as main the issue in design;
- understanding the role of circulation in design;
- understanding the role of orientation in design;
- understanding the structural importance in design;
- understanding the relation between spaces and furniture;
- understanding the role of building materials in enhancing designs;
- understanding how to prepare a report presentation in architectural career.

The self-report states that overall learning outcomes as well as specific course books will be reviewed and revised regularly.

*Experts’ Appraisal*

*See below (2.2)*

## **2.2 Concept and Structure of the Study Programme**

The programme in Architectural Engineering is structured in five academic years with two semesters. Each semester is structured in mostly seven to eight courses. Each course is described in a more general way in a programme overview as well as in more detail in course books (see above).

At the beginning of the programme, students take mostly basic courses in general English, mathematics, computer skills and get an introduction into art and architecture, architectural graphics and free hand drawing. It also includes some courses on more engineering-related subjects like building physics and building materials.

The second year contains courses related to planning fundamentals, housing planning, engineering mechanics et al., but also on topics like ancient architecture, history of Greek and Roman architecture or computer applications. Some topics are deepened, like free hand drawing or technical English.

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The third year further includes courses on medieval European architecture, specific computer applications (Revit), surveying or concrete design. The fourth years shows more courses on subjects like landscape and urban design, building services or architecture and environment.

In the fifth year, students also take courses related to their thesis project. This includes a course “Thesis report” with the aim to cover “research methods such as literature review, experiment design and use of laboratory instrumentation. In addition, writing and presentation skills would be systematically built through lectures and term project.” For the thesis project/course, students are obliged to choose projects from a list assembled by the Head of Department and based on proposals of the teaching faculty. Students are, however, also free to propose own projects.

All courses state a number of acquired ‘units’, based on a stated number of ‘theoretical’ and/or ‘practical hours’. Each theoretical hour accounts for one unit; each practical hour was stated as accounting for 0.33 units. (However, the given programme material is not always consistent in this regard.)<sup>1</sup> Each semester thus has between 25 and 35 (weekly) theoretical and practical hours, with the last two semesters between 16 and 20. A conversion to ECTS credits has not taken place yet.

In terms of practical experience, students are required to do a compulsory internship of two months, split up into two periods of four weeks each in in the third and fourth academic year. Most of the students apparently mostly decide for an internship in an architect’s office mainly dealing with office tasks with no or few practical work on building sites. During the four weeks of internship, the students are supervised by the lecturers in charge, who also visit the students about two times. At the end of the internship, students are expected to submit a final report.

The curriculum also entails the exertion and acquisition of selected practical skills, including free hand drawing, model building, designing and detailing of buildings, the creation of proposals for urban developments and landscapes located in Erbil itself or in the Kurdistan region.

The admission criteria to the programme consist of the following:

- High school (or equivalent) graduation with a minimum score of 85 per cent;
- high school certificates authorized and accredited by the Ministry of Education (foreign certificates only);
- age younger than 30 years, if they apply for morning mode study
- passing of entry exams in the English language and computer skills at Cihan University.

It has not become entirely clear, if the programme is offered in a full-time mode (morning/day classes) only or if other modes like evening classes exist or are planned.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 3 of the self report. Here, practical hours rather count for 0.5 units each, but also not consistently calculated.



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*Experts' Appraisal*

The experts evaluate the Bachelor's programme in Architectural Engineering as a consistent and customary programme in architecture. In general, graduates will have acquired knowledge and skills that are in accordance with architectural programmes on the Bachelor's level in other higher education settings, including Europe. The basic principles and skills are reasonably acquired and equip students to either start a Master's programme or enter the workplace.

Yet, the experts recommend adjusting the programme's title to 'Architecture'. In the international context, existing programmes in 'Architectural *Engineering*' entail a strong technical component and are preparing graduates for specialized working areas like implementation planning. The evaluated programme at Cihan University only provides minimal competencies in those technical aspects.

The models, drawings etc. observed during the site visit match the expected level of a Bachelor's programme and degree. However, it was not possible for the experts to evaluate the level of academic, scientific reasoning regarding building history or theory. Also Bachelor's theses are somewhat weak in this regard. Thus, the experts recommend to put a stronger curricular (and extra-curricular, see above) emphasis on critical, historically as well as theoretically reflexive reasoning in the realm of architecture. The experts encourage the rigorous use, and further expansion of cultural or historical knowledge the students should reasonably be expected to have acquired at secondary school level.

The curriculum and especially its project-related parts should also include a much stronger incorporation of the local and regional contexts, its building traditions and ecological as well as infrastructural requirements. This would very much enhance the usability and impact of the architectural education in Kurdistan.

The experts also recommend to include more of the following subjects in the curriculum and the overall strategy development: (i) building history and building theory, (ii) basics principles and elements of architectural perception and design.

At the same time, the strategic aspirations of the programme, i.e. the 'common theme', should be reconsidered. At the moment, it is structured along designing and modelling buildings on an (rapidly) increasing scale, from one-family houses to hospitals and newly designed urban quarters. This provides for a rather simplistic 'enlargement' or 'upscaling'. The theoretical and argumentative depth of the students' projects presented to the experts is of concern, thinking 'outside the box' was conspicuously absent. The basic rationale of students' progression should rather be founded in the development of one's own 'architectural language' and individual architectural perspective. Learning, looking, thinking, acting, finding solutions and presenting, in the respective contexts, should be the challenge for teachers and students of architecture.

The experts welcome that Architectural Engineering students receive practical training, including two internships each for the duration of four weeks. However from the experts' point of view; it is advisable to increase the practical training during their five years of study. In addition, the internships seem to be an official part of the curriculum but it is unclear to which



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extent and in what forms the intended outcomes and objectives of the internship are defined and evaluated. During the on-site talks, the experts gained a clear understanding that the students indeed do two internships but mainly accomplish paperwork in architects' offices instead of working on real building projects and sites. To enhance this latter experience, the experts emphasise a stronger involvement of Cihan Construction and Real Estate to provide hands-on practical experience, which might also include e.g. a model building, where the students can get practical experience.

In addition, and as part of a strategic development, the experts recommend a basically more open, creative working context in the department that provides 'space' for a more intensive exchange of ideas, projects, and research. This includes supporting an ongoing exchange between lecturers (that also work as architects or planners) and students of different years.

The experts also recommend unifying the crediting structure of the programme. In the current documentation, it is not entirely clear why and how 'theoretical hours' and 'practical hours' are counted differently into 'units'. The workload and crediting should also take the two periods of practical training as well as necessary individual study time into account and assign credits/units accordingly (cf. ECTS key features).<sup>2</sup>

### **2.3 Teaching Faculty**

The staff handbook of Cihan University documents rules and regulations for staff hiring, mentioning the responsibilities and activities without referring to particular requirements.

New teaching staff is recruited after a presentation and an examination of the applicant's skills and experience in architecture or the related specialities. The process of recruiting new staff is headed and carried out by the University Council rather than on a departmental level.

The Architectural Engineering Department includes 14 lecturers with different specialisations in architecture, urbanism, and regional planning. In addition to carrying out research, the teaching faculty aims to attend different exhibitions and architectural conferences. The ratio of staff to students is 1 to 20. Additional non-academic staff members are responsible for activities and services that are related to the department, such as preparing exhibitions, workshops, and seminars.

#### *Experts' Appraisal*

The experts appreciate the mixture of male and female teaching faculty and commend the overall engaged teaching staff (and students). Most of the teaching faculty possess a long academic experience. Yet, the experts also reaffirm that teaching faculty in architecture and urban planning should also dwell on ongoing practical experience. Hence, the experts recommend intensifying staff development to enhance an intellectual discourse and development which is also related to practical experience. This shall be part of a strategy for the De-

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<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf)

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partment of Architectural Engineering.

Regarding the staff recruitment process, the experts recommend an intensive inclusion of the Department's Head and its teaching faculty. In the architectural discipline, teachers should be especially open, reflective and critical. Therefore, the communication between faculty and the leadership of university could be more open.

## **2.4 Infrastructure, Resources and Student Support**

Cihan University campus includes eleven major purpose built buildings hosting about 100 classrooms and offices at the departments, administration offices, and student service facilities. Other facilities include café/restaurants, a sports centre, a football field, an open air theatre, car parking spaces and a dormitory building hosting female students.

During the site visit, the experts were taken on a tour to the premises of the Faculty of Engineering and its Architectural Engineering Department, including classrooms, drawing rooms, cutting rooms, model building room and computer labs.

The University's Central Library could not be visited during the site visit. According to the self-report, the library contains 750 different resources; books, magazines and publications, as well as online sources on JSTOR are available. The department library contains 500 plus architectural books.

The department has seven classrooms and six drawing halls with 150 drawing boards in addition to computer laboratory containing 35 computers that allow working with the architectural engineering software like Auto-CAD, 3D MAX or Revit.

The tour also included a visit to the Cultural Centre of the university, where students are able to take part in painting classes free of charge. There is also the opportunity for the students as well as external artists to open exhibitions at Cihan Art Gallery.

The self-report contained detailed information on the internet unit and the engineering consultancy office that offers training courses and conferences to strengthen the relationship between the universities and the governmental organization in the field of engineering and construction.

As an independent unit, the English Language Centre (ELC) at Cihan University offers intensive courses in English language to students and faculty members. Tutorials are provided to groups of students who ask for additional lessons as well as to small groups of teaching faculty of each department. The teachers of the ELC are basically a group of the teaching faculty of English Language and Translation Departments.

### *Experts' Appraisal*

The experts have gained the impression that the students are provided with a learning environment that fulfils their academic and non-academic needs. All premises gave a well-kept and clean impression.

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However, the experts regard a higher education institution also as a place of work, communication and intellectual as well as practical interaction. This seems to be rather lacking at the Architectural Engineering Department, also because students mostly leave the university in early afternoon. The Department building is open until 4 pm, yet (or because of that) students primarily use to study and work at home individually or in small groups. Hence, the experts strongly recommend changing this policy in order to influence and change the habit of home-study into interacting groups at the department; for instance by providing individual work spaces and the necessary materials. In addition, the intellectual and practical exchanges between the cohorts/years of architectural students – but also with internal and external teachers, experts, practitioners, researchers – should be encouraged and facilitated, thus ideally promoting the development of a ‘School of Architecture’ as a place and space for academic and practical exchange about architecture in an international as well as locally/regionally embedded context.

Additionally, the experts gained the impression that there is rather limited space for creativity and innovation. For this purpose, the establishment of places for creativity and innovation is recommended, including space for designing and implementing small creative projects at the University’s campus. In addition, Cihan Construction as a related company of the Cihan Group could support such experimental initiatives, including innovative and sustainable ways of architecture, building and planning – triggering positive effects on the building and planning industry in general, but also for Cihan Group itself.

The experts also encourage a timely and rigorous expansion of the library to include publications about topics like Fine Arts, History, Philosophy, etc.

Furthermore, the experts noticed during the tour at the Department of Architectural Engineering the absence of provisions for working with materials that are standard in international architectural higher education, such as woodworking, plaster and metal. Accordingly, the experts set the condition of including those materials and practical skills into the curriculum of the Architectural Engineering study programme as a compulsory component.

## **2.5 Methods of Teaching and Student Assessment**

As the self-report states, the teaching methods at the Architectural Engineering Department consist of a combination of lectures, seminars, laboratory work, and individual as well as group project work.

General IT tools and engineering graphic software programmes such as Auto-CAD, 3D MAX, and Revit are applied in teaching.

In each course different examinations take place usually during the semester, including a mid-term and a (written) final exam at the end of the academic year. If students fail in the final examination, they can retake the exam. If students fail a second time, they have the chance to retake the courses in the next year. Generally, the minimum passing degree is 50 per cent for each course. The final exam accounts for 60 per cent and quizzes, attendance, and assignments account for 40 percent of the final grade.

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According to the Examination and Disciplinary Regulations, students are also considered as failed, if the absence to classes reaches 10 percent without a legally valid excuse (cf. Examination and Disciplinary Regulations).

The forms of student assessment cover a wider variety, including written examinations, practical project-related examinations, coursework and project reports, pre- final and final presentations.

During the on-site talks, students and alumni basically mentioned their satisfaction with the skills they acquire during the five years. Regarding finding suitable jobs after graduation, various reasons have been discussed by the graduates, also mentioning the importance of personal relationships in order to get employed. Some graduates disagreed and rather named a good CV with skills and practical experiences as well as skills in architectural software as most relevant for the employability.

The students critically mentioned a lack of substantiated feedback from the teaching faculty when submitting a design or a project, and would highly value a written detailed feedback clarifying the reasons of the grading.

*Experts’ Appraisal*

The experts generally regard the teaching and assessment methods as matching the requirements of a competence-oriented Bachelor’s programme. They also commend that the department is providing and teaching up-to-date software programmes during the five years of study.

The examination regulations seem to be transparent to all students, also by providing booklets at each department. Moreover, the experts appreciate the transparency of information flow regarding the goals, learning outcomes and teaching and assessment methods, especially through the use of detailed course books.

However, during the experts also noticed that teaching methods are mainly teacher-centred and the students expressed a demand for more active group work inside the class. Hence, the expert group recommends the development of the teaching methods matching a more student-centred learning environment.

## **2.6 Quality Assurance**

As stated in the self-report, basic processes and tools of quality assurance are available and applied at Cihan University. At the university level, a Quality Assurance Directory consists of about 20 coordinators from each department, being in charge of a range aims and topics, including

- quality in teaching;
- students satisfaction;
- academic research;
- International accreditation;

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- community service;
- teaching staff self-assessment.

The quality of programme delivery itself is managed through several permanent and temporary committees at department level. These committees are described as cooperating with each other and their task being the monitoring of relevant educational and social activities.

These permanent committees on the departmental level include:

- Department council
- Scientific committee
- Quality assurance committee
- Academic guidance committee
- Examination committee
- Social committee

The various quality processes of the department are integrated through the discussion in regular meetings of the members of those committees to plan and monitor the achieved social and academic events and activities such as the weekly seminars and meetings with the Head of Department. In addition, feedback from the quality assurance reports and from communication between teaching staff and students is taken into account.

The Quality Assurance Committee of the Architectural Engineering Department is – as stated in the self-report – responsible for ensuring the quality standards that have been set by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The Committee’s activities include:

- Following up the implementation of quality standards;
- following up the documentation of the information and activities of the teaching staff members on the website;
- arranging electronic students’ feedbacks related to the lecturers’ performance;
- arranging staff feedback in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the department;
- providing technical support to arrange seminars, workshop and training course inside the department.

There appear to be two main categories of evaluations, ~~to enhance the Quality Assurance~~ student’s feedback and staff feedback, both carried out at the end of each semester. The Quality Assurance Committee provides an electronic system to the students to evaluate the courses and lectures of the semester using a questionnaire mainly provided by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. The staff feedback consists of three parts: staff assessment by the Head of Department, assessment of the Head of Department by the staff, and faculty’s peer- to-peer evaluation.

According to the self-report, the curriculum is evaluated and reviewed continuously, before and after each semester, by three departmental committees; namely, the Quality Assurance Committee, the Scientific Committee, and the Curriculum Development Committee.

### *Experts' Appraisal*

The experts appreciate the processes and tools described for quality assurance. As stated in the self-report and during the site-visit, there are obviously various committees existing at the university and departmental level; yet, their exact roles and duties did not become transparent. On a departmental level, regular evaluations are taking place; however a mechanism of analysing the evaluation results and taking measures has not been mentioned.

Hence, the experts recommend concentrating the institutional units and processes of quality assurance mainly on developing the profile and structure of the programme. Furthermore, academic development of the programme should be primarily determined by the department and its teaching faculty, with the support of but with less interference from university leadership. Quality development especially on the departmental and programme level should also include a more proactive stance vis-à-vis the Ministry.

## **2.7 Transparency and Public Information**

The students of Cihan University have access to information and documents concerning their study programmes, including exam regulations. These official documents are available in Kurdish, Arabic and English language. Several handbooks such as the Students' Handbook and the Staff Handbook provide detailed information on the most important study and assessment regulations (including disciplinary rules/code of conduct), the facilities on campus and extra-curricular activities.

The syllabus including the teaching contents as well as the estimated student workload is available on the university's website. However, some other relevant aspects of the programme in Architectural Engineering such as the intended learning outcomes and the methods of teaching and assessment are missing from the website. The often highly detailed and knowledgeable programme description in the self-report should be made transparent to future and current students as well as teaching and university staff.

## **2.8 Summary of the Findings and Appraisal**

The experts applaud the progress that has been made in the short period of time since the founding of Cihan University. They are confident that the university's pursuit of higher levels of quality will be successful. Open communication between the university's leadership and the departments as well as a greater autonomy of the latter in regard to academic matters like staff recruitment, staff selection, programme, and curriculum design would strongly support this quality development.

Regarding the programme in Architectural Engineering, the experts strongly encourage a widening of the scope of topics and subjects in the delivery of the course. This should include a strengthening of the intellectual capacity of the graduates to critically reason their ideas and opinions orally and in written formats. In addition, a much stronger inclusion of the regional social, cultural-historic and architectural context in theoretical and practical education

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is deemed necessary. The programme must also include more theoretical and practical training (workshops) with standard building materials and processes.

To address these issues, the Department of Architectural Engineering shall develop a strategy for a continuous evaluation and enhancement of its programme in cooperation with and support from Cihan University leadership. It should include options for a thorough exchange and interaction between the different stakeholders of the architectural programme, including students, staff and outside national and international experts. A strategic paper should be put down in writing and revised regularly under the supervision of national and international external experts.



**III Appendix**

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

**III. Appendix**

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

Erbil, 27 September 2019

Dear Sir,

Greetings.

We have read the report submitted by you on the subject of self-assessment of Architectural Engineering Department at Cihan University. We thank your efforts in preparing this report and the valuable notes mentioned in addition to the general and specific recommendations on various subjects about the University in general and the Department in particular. Although some observations may have been taken because of misunderstanding during the period of the field visit to the University and Department, as for the rest of the observations, the University and the Department in accordance with the plans put forward by the Ministry of Higher Education in Kurdistan region is working to meet the recommendations. In the report attached to this e-mail we provide our answers on the issues raised in your report.

Best Regards

**General Recommendations:**

- 1 - The University has already expanded its plans for admission by opening new departments relating to medical education, medical technology, etc.
- 2 - The University started to implement new staff recruitment mechanism, relying heavily on the interviews and reports submitted by the concerned departments.
- 3 - The Department of Architecture has taken practical steps to establish strong ties with the Directorate of Antiques as well as a number of institutions working in the fields of local architecture, culture, and heritage.
- 4 - Cihan University already avoids decision and procedures that demonstrates any sort of discrimination.
5. - The University follows strict quality assurance policies and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research closely follows the policies and procedure in this regard.

Additionally, the university is close to getting an ISO certificate having taken important decision concerning quality assurance.



**III Appendix**

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

# Strategic Vision of Cihan University

## Erbil Campus: 2025

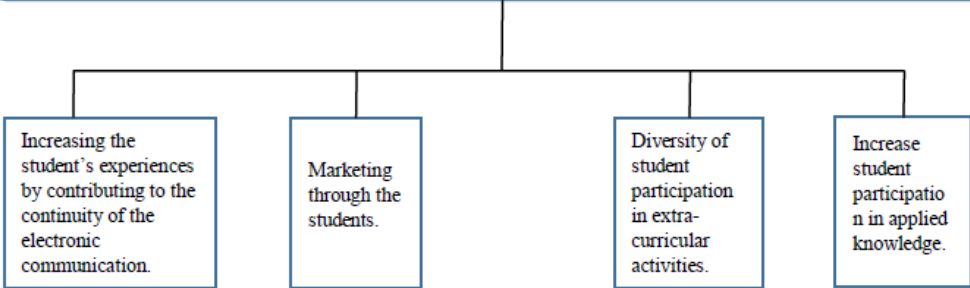
**Vision: An international university with standards of academic excellence and investment in advanced information technology for the knowledge sharing of societies.**

**Mission: A unique educational level for students and contribution to sustainable development through the adoption of international quality programs in higher education, the development of practical research, effective service to society.**

### Axes and objective

**Students**

**Vision towards the students: A student who is capable of applied knowledge and is connected to the university life and to be marketer of his university locally and internationally, through increasing his technical expertise.**

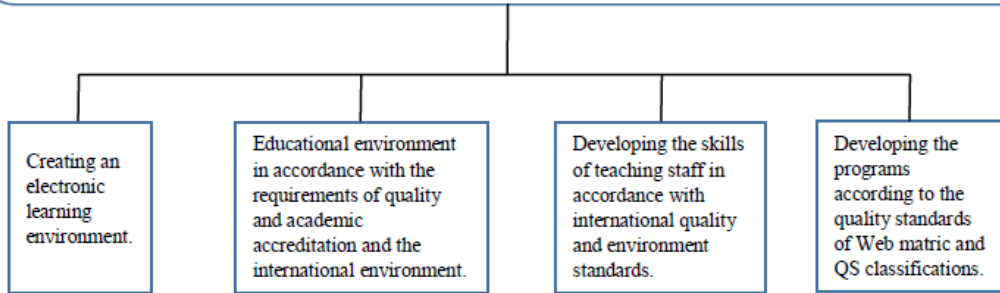


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**1 Statement of the University in Response to the Expert Report**

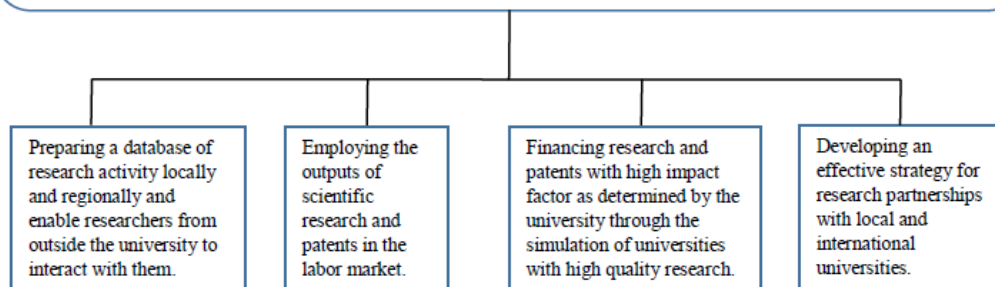
**Axis of the educational process: Bachelor's program**

**Vision:** Educational programs based on excellence and academic accreditation in a balanced manner with the local and international labor market.



**Research**

**Vision:** Preparing research according to the criteria of the international classification and to provide useful researches for society and sustainable development.

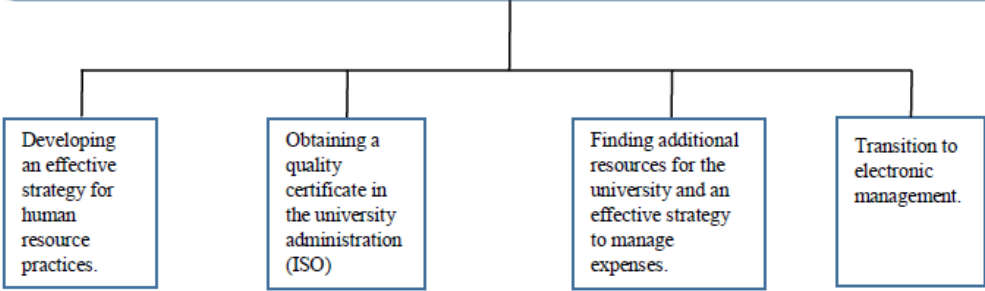


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**1 Statement of the University in Response to the Expert Report**

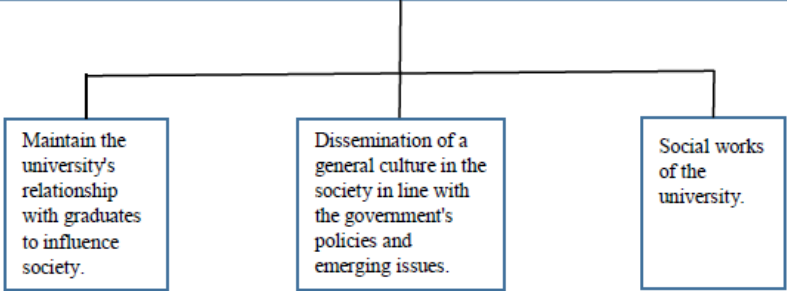
**Administrative and Financial Affairs**

**Vision:** A university based on information technology in its management with global standards and effective human resources to keep pace with global developments.



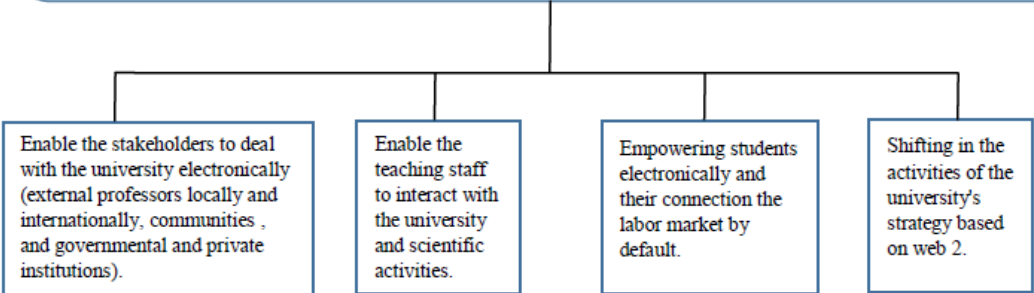
**Community Service**

**Vision:** A community based on social responsibility and graduates influential in the community



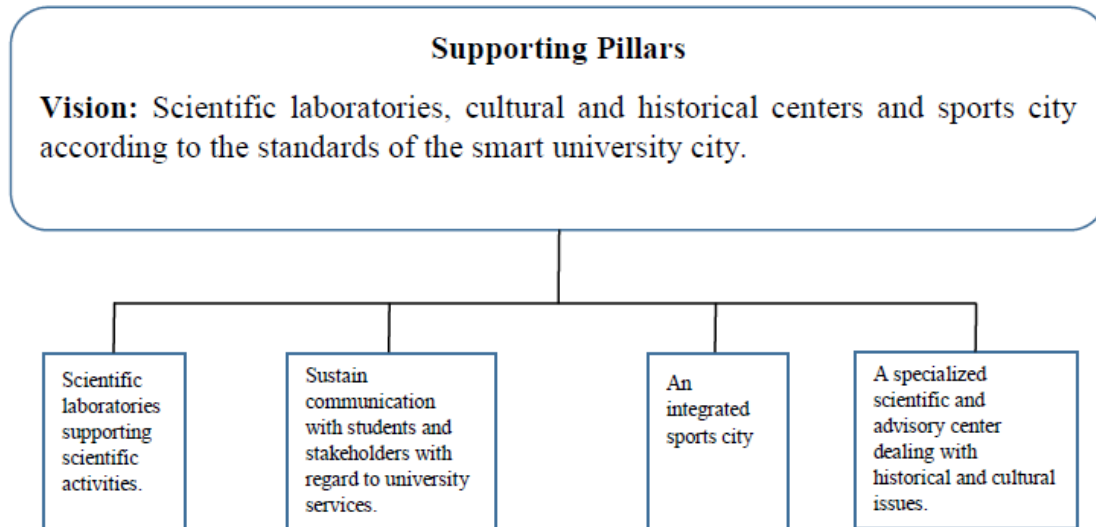
**Information Technology**

**Vision:** Relying on Web 2 for a shift towards digital university, and enabling local and international stakeholders to interact with the activities of the university.



### III Appendix

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



### **Response to Recommendations related to the Programme “Architectural Engineering” (B.Sc. Eng.)**

- During the current period a discussion to unify of the programmes title of architecture in the Kurdistan region towards a more comprehensive and closer to the nature of the department by a committee formed by the Ministry of Higher Education in Kurdistan takes place. The title of “the Faculty of Architecture” was an initial proposal.
- On the level of Cihan University some initiatives took place in the direction of international exchanges. Also the university financially supports lecturers to seek better opportunities to obtain higher degree or better research and academic training and attend and participate in international conferences and academic events.
- The curriculum includes several courses to enhance students’ abilities for critical thinking in Architecture such as art and architecture (1<sup>st</sup> year), history of architecture for several courses that focuses on both local and western architectural styles (ancient architecture [Mesopotamian and Egyptian mainly], Greek and Roman, Islamic architecture and renaissance architecture), Theory of Architecture (two courses included) in addition to an elective course in vernacular architecture in the 5<sup>th</sup> year. On the level of urban planning and design the department also teaches courses that aids and supports the practical courses through theoretical lectures within courses of urban design, rehabilitation and landscape design, and courses such as Fundamentals of Planning and Theory of Planning.
- The University added two courses of Academic Debate for all departments in the first year as this enhances students’ abilities to express their thoughts and opinions, which can also influence their critique skills and expand their horizon generally.
- The students are usually required to have a summer practical office training when they pass their third year. A plan to add another requirement for practical site training

### **III Appendix**

#### **1 Statement of the University in Response to the Expert Report**

was set as part of the requirements to graduate as an architect. This is supported by Cihan Construction and Real Estate.

- The critique of students' work is usually given directly and individually for each project and aims to encourage a better understanding for the "design" process. Yet, "notes-on-sheets" method is also used through the different development stages of these projects. This process is usually preceded by general theoretical guidance and lectures related to the required project and similar examples. Another process usually held is to encourage and ask students to give their colleagues their notes and opinions according to the logical methods they were guided through each course.
- The Department's facilities are usually all open for students during all times including the drawing halls, computer laboratories, and seminar halls that can be used for students' seminars and report discussions. Also, the teaching staff members would usually remain in the Department after working hours during days of projects development to supervise and aid students' work.
- A committee of all the Architectural departments in the Kurdistan Region was established and a workshop to unify the programme curriculums and their course units in these departments took place, considering the practical training as part of each programme.
- The University's central library includes resources for architectural and civil engineering students. In addition, a distinct library for the Engineering College is going to be allocated within building no. 9. It will include books and publications that the Department was keen to provide, in addition to students' significant reports and graduation thesis'. It is equipped with computers to provide electronic sources in pdf or other forms.
- Annually, a committee of the Department is assigned to visit the international book fair held in Erbil city and to search references and publications related to architectural, structural, urban planning and design and other topics that are related to the Department, and to make the acquired books available to the students.