



Executive Summary
Renewal of Licensure
Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation

November 1 – 12, 2020

An External Review Team (hereafter ERT) was assembled by the CAA and conducted a remote re-licensure review of the Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation (hereafter DIDI) between 1st and the 12th of November 2020, in line with arrangements to address the Covid19 pandemic. The re-licensure application (hereafter the *Self-Study*) was considered, along with accompanying documents and the information provided by senior managers, faculty, staff and students in a number of remote meetings and interviews. An exit interview was held on November 12th September.

The Dubai Institute of Design and Innovation (hereafter DIDI) is a private, not-for-profit educational institution, licensed by the Ministry of Education in May 2017. It offers a single Bachelor degree program in Design with the five Concentrations in specialist fields. The program offerings are directed to improving educational opportunities for design professionals primarily in Dubai but also the larger UAE and the MENA region. DIDI intends to offer the program to a diverse population of full-time students planning to become professionals in art and design.

The ERT was very pleased to note the high-level of morale at DIDI among all stakeholders. Those on the Board of Directors, the executive leaders, and the faculty all showed a great deal of enthusiasm for and detailed knowledge of DIDI, all of which augurs well for the future of the institution. The faculty includes individuals with exceptional talents that should help DIDI build its reputation going forward.

DIDI is blessed with an excellent location and good facilities. It is well supported by TECOM group and the Dubai Development Authority (DDA), which provide additional competencies and lowers risk in some areas.

The ERT was impressed by the level of commitment and enthusiasm of the students with which it interacted. They are an excellent advert for DIDI and will be good ambassadors in future as the first of many alumni.

There are a number of areas in which the ERT had concerns.

- Strategy: At present DIDI does not have an adequate institutional strategy. At the general level, the institution has no mission-driven goals and objectives, and - at the strategic level - it has a document that does not constitute an adequate strategy based on DIDI's current challenges with detailed information concerning measure, targets, and time-phased initiatives. Consequently, operational planning is very weak at present. There are, perhaps, structural reasons for this state of affairs that concern the relationship between DIDI and – in particular - TECOM. While there are many positive aspects of this relationship, there are also some dangers. Outsourcing certain competencies to TECOM may in some circumstances make sense, but this needs to be done with more care and selectivity. It is critically important that the source of strategic direction, for example, comes from DIDI – with Board oversight and approval. Outsourcing the development of the Strategic Plan to TECOM (because it has competencies in this area) is one reason why the current approach is not fit for DIDI's purposes.

More generally, there needs to be a clearer demarcation between Board oversight and approval on the one hand, and Executive leadership, management, and ownership on the other. One aspect of this concerning the role of the Academic Advisory Committee – a sub-committee of the Board – is discussed in detail, below.

- Quality Assurance: Quality Assurance is not sufficiently operational at DIDI at present. There are indications that there are established frameworks – but these are not fully practiced. The ERT would have expected to see much more comprehensive evidence of program and institutional effectiveness at this renewal of licensure review.

There may be several reasons why this is the case, but one significant explanation is that the Director of Quality is not full-time in his position and is carrying an additional senior role. Moreover, he has no support staff. Thus, it is hard to describe DIDI as having a quality assurance *unit* at present.

A further issue regarding quality assurance concerns the *Self-Study* itself. This was not prepared to a high standard and to some extent has led to requirements that could – perhaps – have been avoided.

- Research: DIDI provided a Research Strategy document. However, strategy in this area is at an early stage and this needs to be refined to address specific challenges rather than general aspirations and clear measures and targets for achievement.

Also required are policies that set out mechanisms for research support; the relationship between research, teaching, and community engagement; faculty research expectations; and the way these links with faculty promotion and evaluation.

- Staffing: At present DIDI has no COO and no Associate Dean. These roles are covered by the President and Dean, respectively. As mentioned above, the Director of Quality is also the institution's Registrar. This is not a sustainable situation and needs to be addressed urgently.

DIDI has a small faculty and the expertise necessary for fully qualified coverage of specialist areas is – in some cases – very limited, making DIDI very vulnerable to loss of its academics. DIDI is already aware that it is under-staffed in faculty and relies too heavily on adjunct staff. A clear plan is required to address this.

- External Relations: There is good evidence and very good opportunities for DIDI to work closely with its community for mutual benefit. The *Standards* requires – but DIDI lacks – a systematic strategy in this area that would give coherence and focus to these activities and opportunities.

Communication with the community is vital at this stage of DIDI's development – especially as it seeks to significantly increase student numbers. Surprisingly, since DIDI is a design institution, the current website is not of high quality and needs improvement.

Finally, at present, there is a degree of confusion between academic oversight and academic advice. DIDI needs both of these – but they are distinct functions. The former is properly a matter for the Board and is realised through a sub-committee. The latter belongs to the executive and the academic leadership and should be realised through the establishment of an External Advisory Board, the governance of which belongs at the level of academic leadership – and not the Board of Directors.

DIDI is moving in this direction through the recruitment of additional external members of its Academic Advisory Committee – which is, however, a sub-committee of the Board of Directors. This is neither appropriate (as discussed above) nor sustainable: at present the terms of reference of the Academic Advisory Committee are very extensive, and there is no prospect of their being discharged effectively given the current calendar.

The ERT makes its recommendations in a spirit of constructive engagement, with the aim of ensuring that the *Standards* are met, and to aid DIDI in its desired objective to renew its license.