



MENA

Student Design Competition 2026

Integrated Lifestyle Communities — Engineering Net Zero Districts by 2050



A Regional Kick-off, Live from the UAE

On 20th May, CIBSE MENA proudly launched the Student Design Competition 2026, opening the floor to universities, academics, and industry leaders shaping the region's built environment.

The event set the tone for this year's ambitious theme — challenging students to think beyond individual buildings toward whole, integrated districts.



Sales Director, CVS,

CIBSE MENA, Education Liaison Lead

4

Guest Speakers

20 May

Launch Date

MENA

Region-wide
Reach

"This competition continues to grow in relevance and impact as we confront the complex challenges shaping the future of our built environment."

— Imran Shaikh, Director of MEP & Specialisms,
Ramboll · CIBSE MENA Chair



LOOKING BACK

2025 Winners & Highlights

Competition Winner

Manipal University, Dubai

Runner-Up

Higher College of Technology, Dubai

Highly Commended

University of Birmingham, Dubai



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UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

With thanks to our 2025 competition sponsors for their continued support.

2025 HIGHLIGHTS

Moments from the 2025 Competition

Beyond Sustainability

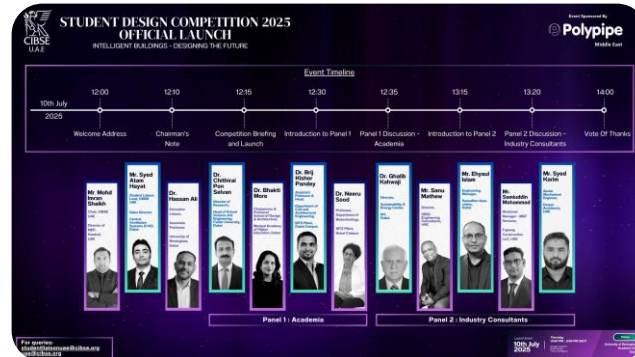
Manipal University, Dubai — a session on regenerative design as the future of green building.

Pre-Awards Celebration

Manipal University, Dubai — students and faculty gathered ahead of the 2025 awards.

Regional Launch Event

University of Birmingham, Dubai — the regional launch that opened the 2025 competition.



Voices Behind the Launch

Imran Shaikh



Director of MEP & Specialisms,
Ramboll
CIBSE MENA Chair

Syed Atam Hayat



Sales Director, CVS,
CIBSE MENA, Education Liaison
Lead

Dr. Bhakti More



Chairperson and Professor,
School of Design and Architecture,
Manipal Academy of Higher
Education Dubai

Dr. Hassan Ali



Dr. Hassan Ali,
Associate Professor,
University of Birmingham,
Dubai

Four voices from academia and industry set the direction for the 2026 competition, spanning university leadership, research, and consulting engineering.

A Message from Imran Shaikh

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 2026 CIBSE Student Design Competition. This year's theme challenges you to think at a broader, more ambitious scale — moving beyond individual buildings to consider entire districts as interconnected, living systems that balance energy, water, mobility, digital infrastructure, and wellbeing on the path to net zero.

Engineering net zero districts is no longer a long-term aspiration — it is an immediate necessity. This competition is your opportunity to demonstrate how engineering leadership can help deliver inclusive, low-carbon communities for future generations.

— Imran Shaikh, Ramboll • CIBSE MENA Chair



WHY IT MATTERS NOW

District-level thinking unlocks efficiencies no single building can achieve alone — a powerful catalyst for meeting UAE and global net zero goals by 2050.

“Together, through engineering excellence and creative thinking, we can help shape resilient, inclusive, and low-carbon cities for the future.”

— Imran Shaikh

Integrated Lifestyle Communities

Engineering Net Zero Districts by 2050

Students are challenged to design future-ready districts that go beyond the building scale — balancing energy, water, mobility, digital infrastructure, health, and social wellbeing while progressing decisively toward net zero carbon outcomes.

District Energy Systems

Smart Infrastructure

Low-carbon Mobility

Water & Circular Resources

Climate Resilience

Health & Wellbeing

Alignment with the UAE Net Zero 2050 ambition underpins every criterion.

Why It Matters Now: the UAE's Net Zero Push

Sustainability is embedded in the UAE's national agenda through We the UAE 2031, the UAE Green Agenda 2030, and the UAE Net Zero 2050 Strategy — positioning it as a driver of growth, resilience, and quality of life.

19.8 GW

Installed clean-energy capacity target by 2030

42–45%

Energy efficiency improvement vs. 2019 levels

AED 150–200bn

Mobilised investment by 2030

200,000

Green jobs across six key sectors

Masdar City is a living model for net-zero urban design, while the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park is set to reach 5,000 MW by 2030, saving over 6.5 million tonnes of carbon emissions annually.

Global attraction: delivering net zero in the desert climate
The UAE has a fast-paced, dynamic working environment, with some of the most ambitious building projects on earth. Also worth noting is the region's commitment to net zero. CIBSE MENA is proud to be part of the CIBSE MENA Region's commitment to net zero. CIBSE MENA is proud to be part of the CIBSE MENA Region's commitment to net zero. CIBSE MENA is proud to be part of the CIBSE MENA Region's commitment to net zero.



Intervening, challenging and rewarding is how Farah Hach CIBSE describes her four years as chair of the CIBSE MENA Region. The UAE government's commitment to net zero, as chair of the CIBSE MENA Region, is a high demand, and the CIBSE MENA Region is proud to be part of the CIBSE MENA Region's commitment to net zero. CIBSE MENA is proud to be part of the CIBSE MENA Region's commitment to net zero. CIBSE MENA is proud to be part of the CIBSE MENA Region's commitment to net zero.

Reimagining Smart, Sustainable Buildings

The CIBSE MENA Student Design Competition 2026 invites aspiring engineers across the UAE, KSA, and the wider MENA region to design or retrofit a building that integrates intelligent systems — smart HVAC, IoT-driven controls, adaptive lighting, predictive maintenance, and real-time energy optimisation.

Proposals should build on the legacy of COP28 and reflect innovation, inclusivity, resilience, and sustainability — responding to environmental goals and the needs of occupants and communities alike.

Individuals or teams of up to 3 from the same university may submit — bringing forward your own vision or a collaborative, cross-discipline effort.

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

- Better energy performance & lower carbon footprint
- Digital tools & data for continuous improvement
- Region-wide relevance: UAE, KSA & MENA
- Innovation, inclusivity, resilience & sustainability

How Submissions Are Evaluated

30%	Technology & Innovation	Smart infrastructure, digital tools, and cutting-edge solutions aligned with human-centric, sustainable practice.
15%	Energy Efficiency	Passive design, renewable integration, and smart energy management across the district.
15%	Climate Resilience	Address climate challenges, strengthen governance capacity, and demonstrate resilience across strategies.
10%	Inclusion	Equitable access to housing, work, wellness, clean energy, and public space for all social groups.
10%	Embodied Carbon	Identify and minimise embodied carbon, showing how it complements operational net zero goals by 2050.
10%	Frontline Communities	Climate risk resilience and protection for vulnerable and frontline populations.
10%	Finance	Realistic, measurable pathways to Net Zero balancing ambition with practicality.

Who Can Take Part

- Currently enrolled students, or graduates within the last 24 months, at a recognised university.
- Individuals or teams of up to 3 students from the same university may enter.
- Teams may span disciplines — engineering, architecture, environmental science, and sustainable design.
- All submissions, measurements, and units must follow English language and the metric system.
- Entries must be original work with proper references — no third-party copyright infringement.
- Submissions must be clearly presented, legible, and received by the stated deadline.
- Copyrighted material used must have permission from rights holders, specified in the entry.
- Judged by regional and industry experts against the published assessment criteria.

Key Dates to Remember

20 MAY 2026

Launch Date

1 SEP 2026

Entry Closing Date

15 OCT 2026

Announcement of Finalists

29 OCT 2026

Award Winners & Prize
Distribution

Competition opens to all MENA
universities.

Final deadline for all submissions.

Shortlisted teams notified.

Winners announced and prizes
awarded.

No entry fee. Open to all universities with architecture and engineering curricula across the MENA region.

Email Submission

Send entries to

studentliasionmena@cibse.org | mena@cibse.org

What's at Stake

First Prize

AED 7,500

Runner-Up

AED 5,000

2nd Runner-Up

AED 2,000

EVERY WINNER ALSO RECEIVES

- Article publication on the official CIBSE blog
- Opportunity to present a synopsis to the CIBSE MENA technical committee
- Feature across CIBSE / CIBSE MENA social media channels

FOR ALL ENTRIES

Every participant receives a CIBSE certificate. Full-time students can also access free CIBSE student membership — or a significantly reduced rate for part-time study.

GET IN TOUCH



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Have a Question? Let's Connect

Email

studentliasionmena@cibse.org
mena@cibse.org

LinkedIn

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Syed Atam Hayat — CIBSE MENA Education Liaison Lead — studentliasionmena@cibse.org

Free CIBSE student membership available for all full-time students — join at cibse.org/membership-registration/join-cibse/student



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THANK YOU

Student Design Competition 2026

Entries close 1 September 2026

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