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Board meeting 21/07/11
Agenda item 12

Subject	Changes to the Examination Procedures to transpose the new Part 1 and 2 Criteria and additional low level enhancements			
Status	Open session			
Purpose	For decision			
From	Prescription Committee			
History	Parent Committee	First submitted	Topic	Revision number
	Prescription	16/06/11	Prescribed Exam	0

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1. Purpose

To agree changes to the Prescribed Examination, including revisions to its Examination Procedures, to be issued for consultation.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

- i Approves the changes to the Examination Procedures which now transpose the new criteria together with low level enhancements.
- ii Consults on these changes with its stakeholders.

3. Terms of Reference

ARB's Prescribed Examination route is delivered in line with Section 4 of The Architects Act 1997.

Section 4 states:

"1. A person who has applied to the Registrar in the prescribed manner for registration in pursuance of this section is entitled to be registered if-

(a) he holds such qualifications and has gained such practical experience as may be prescribed; or

(b) he has a standard of competence which, in the opinion of the Board, is equivalent to that demonstrated by satisfying paragraph (a).

2. The Board may require a person who applies for registration on the ground that he satisfies subsection (1) (b) to pass a prescribed examination in architecture..."

Prescription Committee is responsible for overseeing the Board's Prescribed Examination.

4. Open

5. Contribution to the Board's Strategic Aims

The Prescribed Examination forms one of the Board's routes to registration which is statutory and delivered in line with the Architects Act, and it is one of the Board's three strategic aims.

6. Key Points

- i. At its meeting of 16 September 2010, the Board agreed to low level enhancements to the Prescribed Examination, based upon feedback received from Examiners and other stakeholders in the Examination scheme.
- ii. The Examination process judges individual candidates against the criteria which are held in common with schools of architecture and the RIBA. The criteria set out the minimum levels of knowledge, understanding and skills that students of architecture must acquire at key stages in the process of qualifying as an architect. As new criteria are about to be applied to qualifications, equivalent changes must be made to the Prescribed Examination. Certain sections of the current Examination Procedures document are not compatible with the new criteria and this paper sets out the changes which need to be made to ensure compatibility as well as other fine tuning which the Board decided should be done as part of the project.
- iii. The proposed changes to the Examination Procedures are attached at **Annex A**
- iv. The low level enhancements agreed by the Board are attached at **Annex B**. Proposed changes include:
 - Amendments to the eligibility requirements.
 - A universal English Language requirement for all persons who do not have English as their First Language. Additional flexibility has also been built into this section, to address the broader range of those affected.
 - Revision to the requirement for candidates' written submissions mapping evidence to Criteria, to provide a more structured framework.
 - Enhanced feedback to candidates who fail the examination.
 - Changes to reflect the new Criteria and determine how the candidate progresses through the process.
 - Amendments to arrangements for those making re-applications.
 - Some consolidation of the Procedures has also been undertaken: provisions common to Parts 1 & 2 which were embedded in dedicated Part 1 requirements have been relocated to 2.2.3 of the Procedures which is now titled 'General Requirements'.

v. **Eligibility Requirements**

The new criteria describe the learning outcomes that must be demonstrated by students gaining qualifications that are prescribed by ARB at Part 1 and 2 levels. It therefore follows that the same criteria and the broadly accepted UK model for architectural education in terms of course duration and curricular content are applied to the Board's Prescribed Examination. At Part 1 level, candidates must have studied for a minimum period of three years' full-time duration, or part-time equivalent; whilst at Part 2, candidates must have studied two years' full-time duration or part-time equivalent.

The criteria are consistent with the requirements for qualifications for architects arising from the Professional Qualifications Directive of which Article 46 states:

'.... the training, which must be of university level, and of which architecture is the principal component, must maintain a balance between theoretical and practical aspects or architectural training..'

Under the Board's current procedures, candidates from cognate/"architectural" disciplines generally have access to the Prescribed Examination subject to assurances from the awarding institute that the candidate has covered equivalent ground to that of the ARB criteria for Part 1 or/and Part 2 level.

In 2007, the Board approved a template to enable Heads of Schools to evidence this curricular content, whereby the head of school maps the course modules against the Board's criteria and confirms that the course complies fully with the eligibility requirements. Despite the introduction of this template, examiners have become increasingly concerned about the reliability of these statements and believe that many of these courses are not in fact principally concerned with architecture. Whilst it could be considered as assisting the candidate, this assistance has often been misguided, even though well-intentioned.

Records indicate that 50% of those candidates who hold qualifications not strictly in architecture fail the examination. Examiners have also indicated that most of those who pass have used compensation measures such as material from practice or postgraduate course work in order to meet the criteria.

It is therefore proposed that more scrutiny is applied to those with qualifications that are not strictly in architecture and the candidates will be asked to present:

- the mapping statement from the awarding institute
- a statement from the registration or professional body in the country of award (for those outside the UK only) confirming the qualification awarded supports access to the profession in that country
- For UK qualifications, the Board will make its own determination of

coverage and may wish to use the services of a specialist academic in order to reach a decision about the relevant curricular content of a programme of study.

Where an eligibility statement and supporting documents are sufficiently clear-cut, staff will put forward the applications for examination without reference to third parties. However, where eligibility is not clearly evidenced nor ruled out, staff will continue to have those applications reviewed by a specialist academic examiner.

Where eligibility is unclear, candidates' submissions will be considered by a reviewer appointed by the Registrar who will determine whether:

- At Part 1 level, a candidate whose education meets the requirements set out in 2.2.1 of the procedures, has undertaken a course principally concerned with architecture and whether the candidate is eligible to sit the Board's examination at Part 1 level
- At Part 2 level, a candidate whose education meets the requirements set out in 2.2.2 of the procedures, has undertaken a course principally concerned with architecture and whether the candidate is eligible to sit the Board's examination at Part 2 level.

Where a candidate is currently found not to be eligible for Prescribed Examination, the application is returned to them together with the application fee, less a 10% deduction to cover the costs associated with having the application reviewed. Currently the scrutiny fee is therefore £139.00, which is insufficient to cover the costs associated with reviewing the applications.

It is therefore proposed that the current scrutiny fee for returning non-compliant applications is revised from 10% to 25% to meet costs of independent review. This will currently equate to £347.50. This means that unsuccessful applicants whose applications cannot be accepted will pay an additional £208.50 for the review of their applications when compared to current costs. In 2010 around ten applications fell into this category. Currently, costs additional to the £139.00 are being absorbed by the Board.

The Board's guidance will make clear that those applicants who do not hold a qualification in architecture will be subject to this scrutiny and may be subject to this fee if their application is rejected.

The Board is asked to note that the eligibility criteria will continue not to accommodate those whose qualifications that have been awarded following periods of study which are substantially different to the UK model for architectural education. By way of example, undergraduate degrees with liberal arts concentrations will continue not to satisfy the Board's requirements for access to Part 1, even though the candidate may have secured a relevant postgraduate level qualification. These changes are reflected in Section 2.2 of the Prescribed Examination Procedures.

Please note: in the event that the current model for architectural education in the UK is changed, it will follow that equivalent changes will need to be reflected in the examination eligibility criteria.

vi. **Language Requirement**

The Examination Procedures currently covers language requirements at section 2.2.3 which states:

“...Candidates whose first language is not English, and who are not nationals of European Economic Area States, will be required to submit a valid International English Language Testing System (IELTS) certificate of 6.5 or above with their application for examination...”

It is now proposed to change 2.2.3 to include the testing of EEA nationals who have not declared English to be their first language, to ensure equal treatment of all examination candidates. EEA nationals were previously exempt from this requirement. Section 2.2.3 will now state:

“Candidates whose first language is not English will be required to submit a valid International English Language Testing System (IELTS) certificate of 6.5 or above with their application for examination.”

It is proposed that the Board continue to use the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) by way of testing English proficiency for those candidates who declare English as not being their first language and that the current minimum academic level of 6.5 in each individual band still apply. The reasons are as follows:

- It is in keeping with the schools of architecture requirements most of which require the IELTS examination at 6.5 or often higher for postgraduate access which is sought by candidates at Part 1 level.
- It is globally accessible and offered up to four times a month in more than 125 countries.
- It is low in cost (£70)
- It is supported by a good accessible and transparent website.
- By maintaining the level of 6.5 or above in each individual band it ensures that candidates have reached an overall level of 7 or above. Level 7 is considered to be a ‘good user’ by the IELTS performance indicators. Level 6 is considered to be a ‘competent user’, when the Prescription Committee last considered the language requirement it felt a minimum score of 6.0 in each band, particularly in Writing and Speaking was not appropriate for a professional examination.

It is further proposed that requests for exemption from the IELTS language requirement will be considered if candidates can demonstrate a level of English proficiency that is comparable to the IELTS requirement. These candidates will be required to complete the Board’s English Language Exemption Form and provide evidence of the type listed on the form: this

will be specific and will cover such matters as language of instruction and language in which the home life has been conducted and so on. ARB will then decide whether or not the IELTS requirement should be disapplied. As this is a new introduction, resources and/or provisions may need to be reviewed, should it prove burdensome.

vii. **Revising the candidate's written submission mapping evidence to Criteria.**

Currently candidates are required to undertake a mapping exercise in the form of an "analytical commentary" to demonstrate how and where they have met the criteria. A large number of candidates struggle in their approach to this mapping exercise and it was agreed by the Board that we provide a template matrix to assist candidates by making explicit the linkage between the criteria and the evidence necessary. Candidates will have the opportunity to use a narrative and the matrix will provide space for this. It is therefore proposed that the term 'Analytical Commentary' is replaced with 'Comparative Matrix' in the Board's Examination Procedures to reflect this change. The Board's guidance documents will be enhanced to provide detailed information about how to complete the Comparative Matrix. The purpose of this change is to ensure that all candidates understand the importance of evidence of the correct standard being specifically mapped to the relevant criteria if their application is to succeed.

viii. **Enhanced Feedback**

a) Candidates who are not offered an Interview

Currently, candidates who do not qualify for interview have their supporting material (that is, the portfolio and other relevant work) returned to them and are not offered any detailed advice on the nature of failure.

It was agreed by the Board that examiners be permitted to discuss reasons for failure with these candidates and this change is reflected in section 2.6.3 of the procedures.

The lack of the option to discuss reasons for failure with examiners is perceived by candidates to be unfair and lacking in transparency, and feedback has constantly reflected a need to improve this part of the service. Those candidates who have failed to qualify for interview have often failed to understand the process; especially where their first language may not be English, and clear face-to-face advice would improve their understanding about reasons for failure, and clarify what would be necessary for a more successful submission at a future date.

The purpose of the feedback should enable candidates to evaluate their performance in order to improve, and it would be more advantageous and cost-effective if the feedback were to be offered directly following the examination. The advisory nature of the feedback will need to be made clear, and candidates should understand that it is an indication of what is necessary, rather than a guarantee of future success at examination. To ensure this, a standard introductory statement for Examiners to use at

feedback sessions will be drafted by staff. The importance of this consistency of approach will also be reinforced in the 2011 examiner training days.

b) Candidates who fail following interview

Under the current procedures, candidates who fail to meet the criteria after interview are provided with a copy of the Examination Record Sheet which indicates the criteria that have been met and the criteria that have not been met. It does not always provide the candidate with constructive feedback.

It is proposed that all candidates who fail the examination will be provided with enhanced written feedback. Examiners will need clear guidance on the nature of feedback. Staff will draft template feedback for inclusion on the record sheets to cover typical circumstances, which examiners will be required to complete.

The Board's examination appeals process will need to be amended to ensure that candidates cannot appeal on the grounds of any feedback provided. Appendix 2 of the Examination Procedures has been amended accordingly.

ix. **Changes to reflect the New Criteria**

- The procedures have been amended in Section 1 (Introduction) to include the graduate attributes that determine the level difference between Part 1 and 2 applications and this is transposed throughout the procedures.
- Section 2.6.2 of the Procedures has been changed to increase the examination period from 45 minutes to 60 minutes as there are now more outcomes to record when considering the criteria as well as the graduate attributes.
- There are six graduate attributes at Part 1 level and seven at Part 2 level to be met. Section 2.6.2 (b) has been changed accordingly and candidates will be required to meet half or more of the graduate attributes in order to qualify for interview.
- Appendix 1, Re-examination and Referral to Lead Examiner have been amended to reflect the number of graduate attributes required to qualify for each.

x. **Re-sit**

In 2010, three applicants qualified for what is described as a 're-sit' under the current examination procedures.

Re-sit applies where candidates have met a majority of thematic headings and a majority of criteria, candidates in this category are not be required to be re-examined against the criteria in any thematic headings which they have entirely satisfied. Candidates are required to satisfy (subject to eligibility) at re-sit, all criteria within the one or two thematic headings that were not entirely satisfied.

Designated re-sit days have been scheduled twice yearly (May and November), where re-sit applicants are examined by two examiners to reduce the cost of the re-sit exam. Candidates are offered the choice of a re-sit day or alternatively can request a last minute cancellation for any of the other scheduled dates. There has been very little up take on the designated re-sit days: provision was made during the last set of examination enhancements to offer two dedicated re-sit sessions each year, each being costed on the basis of five candidates per-panel, per-day. It has proven that candidates prefer to opt for a last minute cancellation which is offered to them at a lower cost than the fee for a designated day. It is therefore recommended that the re-sit option be removed. Costs incurred by ARB are no less than those for full examination and sometimes more than applications for re-examination. Feedback from examiners indicates that where the candidates are required to make a full re-application these applications are significantly more straightforward for both candidates and examiners as context is seldom evidenced in the re-sit category. The number of candidates affected by this proposal will be very small, based on the number qualifying in 2010.

Amendments to Appendix 1 - Re-examination, Re-sit and Referral to Lead Examiner are proposed as follows:

‘All candidates who fail to meet all of the criteria and who are not eligible for referral to lead examiner, are to be re-examined against all the graduate attributes.’

xi Designated Examination Dates

At present, examinations are normally run on the first Tuesday and Wednesday of every month and ARB have the capacity to run three panels per day, each panel examining up to three candidates per day. Due to a drop in numbers, which we can only assume is because of the current economic climate and the alternative routes now available to those who have EEA rights through the implementation of the Professional Qualifications Directive, panels are not being filled and are subsequently being reduced. It is therefore proposed that examinations are run every three months as a matter of course. (January, April, July, and October.) Additional dates will be scheduled on an ac hoc basis as is current practice, should demand require.

xii Transitional Arrangements

The deadline for those applying under the current criteria will be 31 December 2011 and examinations under the current criteria must be concluded no later than 31 March 2012. Any application which remains incomplete by 31 March 2011 must be reconsidered in full under the new procedures. It is proposed that the introduction of the new criteria and procedures be implemented with effect from 1 April 2012, this will allow time for the publication of the procedures, application and guidance documents. Transitional arrangements will be in place for all those

candidates who qualify for re-sit or referral to lead up to 31 March 2012 and these candidates will be notified of this arrangement.

xiii. **Consultation**

A full consultation exercise will be required on all changes to the Board's Examination Procedures. It is anticipated that the feedback from this consultation will be submitted to the Board at its meeting in September.

6. Resource Implications

Resources have already been allocated to cover the costs of this project. Additional staff support to candidates and other stakeholders will also be required; the currently reduced numbers of candidates will permit existing resources to be re-allocated to deal with this requirement.

7. Communication

Procedures will be more transparent for candidates and examiners. Candidates will gain more constructive feedback from examiners.

8. Risk Implications

Eligibility requirements could be subject to challenge and the Board's reasons for its opinion on equivalence should be made clear to reduce this risk. Access to the examination does require a qualification of broadly the same level and duration of study before eligibility is assured. The examination process is not a scheme which offers universal access regardless of the qualifications held.

The new provision for candidate advice may generate challenges about advice until bedded-in. This will need to be carefully monitored following its introduction.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications

No equality and diversity implications have been identified to date. It is intended that an Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted on the process during the consultation period.