



Board Meeting 13 July  
2017  
Agenda Item 15

**Subject** Prescription Committee's Annual Report  
**Purpose** For Note  
**From** Prescription Committee

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**1. Summary**

To note the Prescription Committee's Annual Report to the Board.

**2. Open/Confidential Session**

Open Session

**3. Contribution to the Board's Purpose and Objectives**

In delivering the Act, ARB's objectives are:

Protect the users and potential users of architects' services: we ensure that architects are appropriately qualified and have undertaken appropriate qualifications before being admitted to our Register.

Support architects through regulation: we maintain and publicly demonstrate the status of architects as competent, qualified professionals by ensuring that they have completed appropriate qualifications before they are admitted to our Register.

**4. Key Points**

- i. This report concerns the Committee's work between June 2016 and June 2017. The Board is asked to note that no detailed statistics have been included within this report as these are routinely included in the Departmental Annual Report and ARB's Annual Report each year.

The Committee considered and agreed the report at its meeting of 22 June 2017.

- ii. **Administrative Issues**

**Committee's Terms of Reference**

The Prescription Committee's Terms of Reference were last reviewed and updated by the Board in May 2017. The Board agreed that the Terms of Reference should be adjusted to allow the Board to appoint an external individual to act as Chair of the Committee for a period of up to one year where the Board does not have the necessary skills base.

The Board, at its recent development day asked that the Committee's approach to its work and the operation of the Committee be looked at during 2017/2018. A paper will be brought to the Board in September 2017 outlining the proposed governance arrangements for the new Board and its Committees from April 2018 onwards. A paper regarding the review of the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications will also be considered by the Board at its July 2017 meeting. Any changes to the procedures will be likely to impact on the Committee's role.

### **Committee Membership**

At its meeting in May 2016 the Board appointed the following members to the Prescription Committee: Alan Jago (Chair); Peter Coe; Guy Maxwell; Susan Ware; Neill Watts; and Alex Wright. Peter Beacock was appointed to the Committee to undertake the role of the Committee's independent adviser from January 2015 and the Board reconfirmed Mr Beacock's membership of the Committee for a further year.

Peter Coe left the Committee in August 2016 due to his becoming the Board Chair. He was replaced by Carol Bernstein. Alan Jago and Neil Watts completed their terms of office as Board members on 31 March 2017 and were replaced by Alice Hynes and Caroline Corby. Alan Jago was re-appointed as Chair of the Committee in May 2017 following the Board's decision to adjust the Committee's Terms of Reference as noted above.

At its meeting of 12 May 2017, the Board agreed that the Committee's membership would be as follows for 2017/2018:

Carol Bernstein; Caroline Corby; Alice Hynes; Guy Maxwell; Susan Ware, and Alex Wright. As mentioned above, Peter Beacock was also appointed for the 2017/2018 period. The Board additionally agreed that Alan Jago should be appointed as Committee Chair until 30 November 2017, after which Alice Hynes would take over the position as Chair of the Committee.

### **Meetings**

The Committee met ten times between June 2016 and June 2017.

### **Committee Effectiveness Review**

The Committee is due to consider the outcomes of the 2016 Effectiveness Review as part of its meeting of 22 June 2017.

### **Prescription of Qualifications**

As of May 2017 ARB prescribed 161 qualifications which are offered by 58 institutions. Of these 73 are at Part 1 level; 59 are at Part 2 level and 29 are at Part 3 level. In May 2016, the Board prescribed 144 qualifications offered by 53

institutions. This reflects an increase of 12% in the number of qualifications prescribed by the Board between May 2016 and May 2017. The most significant rise has been at Part 1 level which saw a 22% increase in prescribed qualifications between May 2016 and May 2017, with Part 2 qualifications seeing a 7% increase. The number of qualifications prescribed at Part 3 level has remained stable over the last 12 months. This rise in prescribed Part 1 and Part 2 qualifications is reflected in the fact that there has also been a 9% rise in the number of institutions offering prescribed awards in the last reporting year.

The Committee's core work involves overseeing ARB's prescription process to assist the Board in ensuring that the qualifications which it prescribes meet/continue to meet the relevant ARB requirements, e.g., analysis and processing applications to renew prescription and applications from institutions seeking prescription for the first time; analysing and processing annual monitoring submissions; reviewing details of course, title and awarding body name changes etc. Where appropriate and in accordance with the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications, the Committee provides advice and guidance to the Board in relation to all of these areas.

The Committee successfully oversaw the 2016/2017 prescription process (refer to most recent Departmental Key Performance Indicators which are provided to the Committee in the annual [Departmental Reports](#) each year.)

In 2017 the Committee has seen a significant increase in the number of new qualifications, delivered by institutions with no previous record of offering prescribed qualifications. Throughout the whole of 2016 the Board prescribed one new qualification from a new institution. Since 1 January 2017 the Board has prescribed eight new qualifications from five institutions which have no previous history of prescribed qualifications. The [Committee's Workplan](#) for the 2017/2018 prescription cycle identifies that the Board is likely to make a decision in relation to two more new institutions before the end of 2017. Initial enquiries have also been made by a further three new institutions and it is likely that applications will be submitted by at least two of these institutions before the end of 2017.

An increase in the number of new institutions seeking prescription will not only have an impact on the work of the Committee and staff through the application process, but also through subsequent annual monitoring submissions which will need to be made year on year.

Applications for prescription of new qualifications have also been sought from institutions with existing prescribed qualifications. Throughout all 2016, three institutions already offering prescribed qualifications obtained prescription of three new qualifications. To date in 2017, three institutions with existing prescribed qualifications have obtained prescription of a further four new qualifications. However, the Committee is currently giving consideration to one additional institution which has submitted an application in relation to two new

qualifications, and it is possible that the Committee will receive applications from a further four institutions before the end of the year.

Of the new applications from institutions with qualifications already prescribed by the Board, three related to new titles being given to existing qualifications with additional periods of study, e.g., BA (Hons) Architecture with a Year Abroad. While these are relatively straightforward for the Board and Committee to deal with, should more institutions follow this trend it will take up an increasing amount of the Committee and Board's time.

The Prescription Committee typically needs to seek a second round of explanations for applications for prescription where prescription is being sought for the first time. Committee members will also occasionally hold meetings with representatives from institutions which are seeking applications for prescription for the first time in order to obtain further information in relation to the application. It is more unusual, however, for Committee members to meet with representatives from institutions who are seeking applications for renewal of prescription. No such meetings were held at all during 2016 calendar year, however, two meetings have been held with institutions seeking renewal of prescription to date during 2017.

There has been little change in the areas upon which the Committee has typically sought additional explanations. Exceptions to this have generally come where an application has been made for a more unusual mode of delivery, where there are periods of education in practice or where there is an element of specialisation within a qualification. The Committee has dealt with all of these elements within the 2016/2017 reporting period.

A large number of clarifications have been sought in relation to annual monitoring submissions. Eleven submissions required follow-up throughout 2015, whereas this increased to 31 during the whole of 2016. To date, explanations have been sought in relation to 29 submissions during 2017. The Committee/Board has adopted a new approach to late annual monitoring submissions and the impact of late submissions on applications for renewal of prescription. Where institutions are consistently late in making their annual monitoring submissions, the Committee has advised the Board that the period of prescription should be granted for one year less than that requested by an institution as part of an application for renewal of prescription.

The past year has continued to see institutions wishing to discuss applying for prescription of more innovatively structured qualifications, e.g., qualifications including varying periods of 'education in practice'; qualifications involving mixed modes of study; and dual-award qualifications.

The Committee has continued to provide advice to the Board regarding the flexibility of the overall prescription cycle by reviewing the prescription history of a qualification to determine whether an extension of prescription can be offered in

cases where appropriate criteria have been met.

### **Annual Review of the operation of the prescription process**

The Committee reviewed the annual feedback gathered from institutions which had been through the prescription process during the 2015/2016 prescription cycle. The feedback is used by both the Committee and the staff team to develop and improve the operation of the prescription process. No significant issues arose from the feedback gathered following the 2015/2016 prescription cycle. The action points arising from the review of the feedback have been taken forward. Feedback is sought from all institutions once the Board has made a final decision in relation to an application for prescription and the Committee reviews this each autumn.

The Committee also noted and approved the content of the Qualifications Department's Annual Report which sets out details about the Department's performance and how well it is meeting its key performance indicators.

The Committee considered the outcomes of the 2016 Committee Effectiveness Review in June 2016. The Committee agreed on the areas where it would like further development and this will be achieved through pre/post Committee briefings. The Committee also agreed it would be helpful to give consideration to the survey questions which formed the review in time for the next survey. It was agreed that the opportunity to provide feedback and comments regarding the Committee's role would be helpful.

### **Prescribed Examination**

The Committee is also responsible for overseeing the Prescribed Examination process. The Committee continues to review the Independent Examiners' reports and the statistics relating to candidates' results following each Examination session. The Committee also considers how improvements and adjustments to candidate guidance and to the operation of the process can be made.

In January 2017 the Committee considered the [Prescribed Examination Annual Report](#). The Annual Report identified that there had been a fall in the number of candidates undertaking the Prescribed Examination from 147 throughout 2015, to 121 throughout 2016. The Report also identified a number of key themes which had been highlighted through the External Examiners report. These themes included:

- The volume of material presented by candidates;
- Timekeeping of Examiners;
- The need for Examiners to be mindful of the diversity training they had received and unconscious bias; and
- That candidates should be signposted towards training run by external providers.

The Committee also noted the action taken by staff in response to these themes. These included:

- Amendments to the guidance for candidates to offer more clarity on what material to submit, and the need to be concise in the evidence presented;
- The importance of timekeeping has been stressed to Examiners and Independent Examiners at their meetings prior to starting the examination day;
- ARB's Frequently Asked Questions for candidates now refer to information available on preparatory seminars and courses for the Prescribed Examination, which the Registration Team keeps up to date and is available on request; and
- The drafting of further guidance on submission material for candidates.

During 2016/2017 the Committee also:

- Oversaw a recruitment exercise for a number of new Examiners and Independent Examiners; and
- Noted that training had been undertaken for Examiners and Independent Examiners covering how Equality, Diversity and Inclusion is relevant to examination process, ensuring fairness, consistency and in the giving of feedback to candidates. It noted that the training had also covered the Examiners' responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty of April 2011 and provided feedback to staff on adjustments to the process they had identified during training.

### **Competency Standards Group**

In January 2017 the Committee considered the [Competency Standards Group \(CSG\) Annual Report](#). The Annual Report provided background to the work of the CSG and identified that the CSG had considered applications from 60 individuals throughout 2016. This compared with 69 individuals who had made an application throughout 2015. It was also noted that in 2016 68% of applications had been processed within the KPI processing time. This compared to 72% in 2015. It was agreed that a review should be undertaken of the CSG's procedures and processes to ensure these continued to be compliant with the 1997 Architects Act and with the Board's General Rules. It is expected that this review will have been completed by Autumn 2017.

### **ARB's Competent Authority Role**

During 2016, the Committee has made progress in its understanding of the revisions which have been made to Article 46 of the Professional Qualifications Directive, particularly in relation to the '4+2' requirements. This understanding will allow it to continue to assist the Board in ensuring that all qualifications prescribed at Part 1 and Part 2 levels continue to comply with the Directive.

In November 2016, the Committee also received an annual trend report from ARB's European Advisers who review European qualifications once these have been

notified to the European Commission for listing under Annex V of the Directive. The Committee continues to use this information to inform the operation of the prescription process and to ensure that ARB's processes continues to dovetail with that of the European Commission to facilitate the notification of UK qualifications.

### **Other areas**

The Committee has continued to keep up to date with stakeholders' developments throughout the year. The Committee has received regular updates from the Staff Team in relation to their engagement with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA); Standing Conference of Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA); the Association for Professional Studies in Architecture (APSA) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The Committee has also continued to receive updates from the Team regarding the work ARB undertakes with other key stakeholders.

The Committee has also continued to look at the risks and issues which will affect the work which falls under its remit on a regular basis. The Committee has also looked at issues which may affect its future work through a horizon scanning exercise.

### **Looking Forward**

The Committee is aware that it will need to continuously update and extend its knowledge of relevant matters affecting the higher education sector so that it can continue to provide high quality advice and guidance to the Board. This will become increasingly important as the Committee deals with applications for prescription/course changes of increasingly complexity. The programme of pre/post-Committee sessions should facilitate this. The Committee will need to obtain updated guidance regarding the revised Professional Qualifications Directive particularly in relation to the content and structure of qualifications. This will help to the Committee to advise and assist the Board in ensuring that prescribed qualifications continue to comply with the appropriate requirements. The Committee is also anticipating the receipt of applications for prescription of qualifications which have been franchised by UK-based institutions to those in European member states.

The Committee will need to keep abreast of developments in relation to 'Brexit' negotiations, and how these may impact on the continued relevance of the Professional Qualifications Directive. Additionally, where the Board approves any changes to the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications and/or ARB's Criteria, the Committee will need to be aware of how these changes will impact on the prescription process and the Committee's ability to advise the Board appropriately.

Pre/Post-Committee sessions are being organised for later in 2017. Wonkhe is an organisation which provides expertise and commentary in relation to policymaking and current affairs across the HE sector. Wonkhe will deliver a session for the

Committee as part of its September 2017 meeting, and will provide the Committee with information on the possible implications of a range of issues facing the HE sector such as Brexit and the implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework. Arrangements are also being made with the Quality Assurance Agency to provide the Committee with a session setting out the changes to the way in which HE institutions are monitored and reviewed.

The development of apprenticeship schemes leading to registration as an architect are likely to contribute significantly to the Committee's workload during 2017/2018. It is not clear at this stage whether the education provision/degree awards involved will be dealt with as changes to existing courses, or as new qualifications. It is also difficult to ascertain the final numbers of institutions that will go on to develop provision at this stage. A number of UK universities have expressed an interest with 12 universities currently working directly with the Architecture Trailblazer Group. Guidance will be developed for institutions wishing to be involved in developing an apprenticeship provision.

Depending upon the outcome of the Board's discussions, the Committee may be delegated some responsibility in relation to the reviews of the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications and the Criteria.

- iii. The Board is asked to note the report.

## **5. Resource Implications**

The Committee's costs are accounted for within the ARB's Annual Budget.

## **6. Risk Implications**

The risk implications associated with the Committee's work are covered in ARB's Risk Register. Regular updates/risk implications are also included in Committee and Board papers.

## **7. Communication**

The Prescription Committee prepares an annual report for the Board to assist the Board in carrying out its oversight responsibilities. The annual report also provides the Board with the opportunity to explore the Prescription Committee's work and identify any areas of concern.

No changes to ARB's website or publication will arise from the Committee's considerations of this paper.

## **8. Equality and Diversity Implications**

Whilst the production of this Annual Report has no specific Equality and Diversity implications, the specific work of the Committee involves ensuring that institutions seeking to apply for and/or renew prescription comply with the Board's objectives (as set out in the

Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications) in this area.

**10. Further Actions**

None.