Board Paper
Open session

Architects Registration Board

Board meeting:

 6 September 2023

Agenda item:

7c

Action:

- For noting ☐
- For discussion ☐
- For decision ☒

Subject: **Standards for learning providers**

Purpose

This paper sets out for consideration and approval by the Board the proposed set of standards that learning providers must meet in order for ARB to continue to accredit their qualifications in architecture.

Recommendation

That from 1 January 2024 a learning provider must meet the Standards for learning providers at **Annexe A** in order to have qualifications prescribed under section 4(1)(a) Architects Act 1997

Annexes

Annexe A – Standards for learning providers

Author/Key Contact

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1. Open Session

2. Background and Key points

Background

2.1. The Under section 4 of the Architects Act 1997 ("the Act"), ARB has legal responsibility for determining the qualifications, experience and competence someone needs to become an architect and join the Register of Architects.

2.2. Because the Act sets a regulatory framework based on the accreditation of qualifications, it is the statutory responsibility of ARB to set out what those qualifications must achieve to be accredited. In order to discharge that responsibility, we must also have confidence that the learning provider responsible for teaching, assessing, and awarding of that qualification is competent to do so.

2.3. We gain that confidence through our accreditation process, where we assess whether qualifications will deliver the Criteria, or as proposed, the Outcomes. To do that, we must have a robust set of standards by which we can judge whether a learning provider is suitable to deliver the education and training. This is an accepted model for those regulators whose remit includes the accreditation of qualifications.

2.4. In February 2023 we published a proposed set of Standards for learning providers for consultation. They focussed on three key aims:
   - that those students being awarded the qualification will have met the relevant competence outcomes
   - that there are sufficient resources in place to deliver the qualification
   - that there is an organisational culture that will ensure consistent quality and support students.

Consultation and adaptation

2.5. While there was a more limited response to this part of our proposals than to other areas of reform, consultees were nevertheless more supportive than not. There were no substantive objections to our proposals or suggestions for change, although following feedback we have identified some areas in which the drafting of the standards can be improved. We have therefore made amendments to provide greater clarity, reflect accepted good practice within higher education, and remove some duplication. These are minor changes.

2.6. The revised set of standards is at **Annexe A**.

Implementation and guidance

2.7. On the Board's approval we will publish the Standards, which will apply to all learning providers wishing to have any of their qualifications accredited by ARB from 1 January 2024.

2.8. We will also be publishing an Accreditation Handbook, which will provide explanatory guidance to learning providers on how they will be expected to demonstrate compliance with the Standards.

2.9. While it is important to have a clear and consistent set of standards that learning providers know they must meet, we will monitor the effectiveness of both the standards and the handbook, and take steps to update as appropriate.

2.10. As noted in the Board paper on the consultation report, we will also issue guidance clarifying that to access an accredited qualification, students will need to have appropriate undergraduate qualifications or relevant work experience.

3. Risk Implications

3.1. The purpose of these standards is to set out clearly the requirements ARB has of learning providers if we are to accredit their qualifications in architecture.

3.2. To be effective the Standards must be sufficiently robust that ARB can make effective regulatory interventions in support of that purpose, but not to the extent that they create unnecessary bureaucratic burdens that may impact fair access to the profession.

3.3. In balancing that risk the Board can take confidence in the engagement that has taken place, and the positive response of consultees.

4. Equality and Diversity implications

4.1. One of the key aims in introducing the new standards was to develop a framework by which ARB could hold learning providers accountable for delivering architectural education in an inclusive environment.

4.2. The new standards stress the importance of EDI being considered throughout, from having effective governance capable of identifying and tackling inequality, to ensure providers have mechanisms for receiving systematic feedback and providing support to students in a fair and equitable way.

4.3. We asked, in our consultation, whether respondents agreed that our new standards would better hold learning providers to account and thereby create a better learning environment for students. Whilst stakeholder views were split, students were more likely to agree.

5. Recommendation

That from 1 January 2024 a learning provider must meet the Standards for learning providers at **Annexe A** in order to have qualifications prescribed under section 4(1)(a) Architects Act 1997

Architects Initial Education and Training: Standards for Learning Providers

Introduction

The Architects Act 1997 gives an individual the right to register as an architect if they hold the qualifications and have gained the practical experience that we have accredited ('prescribed'). For UK qualifications, we do this in two ways.

First, we have published Outcomes that describe the competences that an individual is required to demonstrate by the end of their initial education and training[1].

Second, we set standards ("Standards") for the learning providers ("Providers") that deliver the Outcomes through qualifications. Providers must meet these if their architectural qualifications are to be accredited by us.

Taken together, these help to ensure that someone who has completed accredited qualifications has the practical experience required to join the Register of Architects.

The Standards will also be supplemented by an Accreditation Handbook, which will set out in more detail the types of information Providers should provide so that we can accredit their qualification. The process by which accreditation of qualifications will be awarded is set out in the Accreditation Rules.

Purpose of these Standards

We are committed to ensuring that anyone joining the Register of Architects is equipped to design a built environment that reflects the needs of society so that people can be safe and live well, and helps to tackle the fundamental challenges our planet faces.

Our overriding objective is to maintain public confidence in the integrity of the Register of Architects. This will be done by ensuring that only individuals that are competent to act as an architect are admitted to and remain on the Register.

We are also committed to supporting the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion. We want to support the goal that anyone who is capable of meeting the required competencies has a fair opportunity of becoming an architect, and in particular, that our requirements do not create additional barriers.

These Standards therefore offer flexibility to Providers in delivering education and training, while giving clarity and reassurance to ARB, other educators, students and the public as to the quality of accredited architectural qualifications.

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[1] For the purpose of this document, Outcomes also includes those qualifications that are based on the General Criteria and Graduate Attributes at Pts 1 and 2, and the Professional Criteria at Pt 3

Standard 1: Educational content

Qualifications are designed, developed, delivered and reviewed to ensure that those who are awarded the qualification have met the Outcomes at the relevant level

Providers will be able to demonstrate meeting this Standard by:

1.1   Showing how the qualification delivers the relevant Outcomes

1.2   Regularly reviewing the qualification content, to ensure continued delivery of the Outcomes and compliance with this Standard.

Standard 2: Assessments

Assessments are designed, developed, delivered and reviewed to ensure that those who are awarded the qualification have met the Outcomes

Providers will be able to demonstrate meeting this Standard by:

2.1   Showing how assessments fairly test whether the student has met the Outcomes at the relevant level

2.2   Showing how External Examiners provide assurance about the rigour of assessment arrangements and that those who are awarded the qualification have met the Outcomes

2.3   Regularly reviewing the content and procedures of assessments to ensure continued delivery of the Outcomes, and compliance with relevant quality assurance processes, regulations and frameworks

Standard 3: Governance and leadership

Providers will have effective governance and leadership to ensure the quality of education and training, and instil a culture of equality, continuous improvement, transparency and accountability

Providers will be able to demonstrate meeting this Standard by:

3.1   Having a governance system that treats staff and students fairly, and delivers education, assessment and training in a way that fulfils the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion

3.2   Showing how feedback is sought and the views of students, staff and relevant stakeholders contribute to the development of policies, systems or processes that relate to these Standards

3.3   Having appropriate systems for students, staff and third parties to raise concerns about the Provider's compliance with these Standards, for investigating those concerns, and documenting and reporting any action taken

3.4   Recording and analysing the protected characteristics of applicants and students, and taking documented action where that analysis shows that any policy, system or process may be disadvantaging any of those groups

3.5   Having systems in place to accurately recognise applicants' academic and/or professional experience and suitability at the point of admission

Standard 4: Human Resources

There will be qualified and experienced educators, assessors and support staff to deliver the Outcomes and to ensure compliance with these Standards

Providers will be able to demonstrate meeting this Standard by:

4.1   Showing how the quantity, quality and experience of staff will ensure delivery of the Outcomes and compliance with these Standards

4.2   Having in place procedures for selecting, inducting, supporting and appraising staff that will ensure the continued delivery of the Outcomes and compliance with these Standards

4.3   Having in place procedures for selecting, inducting and training External Examiners that will provide assurance as to the delivery of the Outcomes and compliance with these Standards

4.4   Showing how educators will maintain their knowledge and skills related to architecture and pedagogy through continuing professional development

4.5   Regularly reviewing staffing to ensure continued delivery of the Outcomes and compliance with these Standards

Standard 5: Teaching and learning resources

There are sufficient and appropriate teaching and learning resources to deliver and assess the Outcomes and compliance with these Standards

Providers will be able to demonstrate meeting this Standard by:

5.1   Having appropriate studio, teaching, digital and workshop resources available in a timely manner to deliver the Outcomes, commensurate with student numbers

5.2   Ensuring equality of access to teaching and learning resources for all students

5.3   Regularly reviewing their teaching and learning resources and processes to ensure continued delivery of the Outcomes and compliance with these Standards

Standard 6: Student Support

Students are provided with a safe and supportive learning environment which enables them to achieve the Outcomes and prepares them to practise as an architect

Providers will be able to demonstrate meeting this standard by:

6.1   Having policies, procedures and resources that ensure timely access to student support in relation to:

        a) discrimination
        b) bullying & harassment
        c) pastoral care
        d) academic support

6.3   Ensuring that students have access to guidance and support to access work-based learning where it is a requirement of the qualification

6.4   Having systems in place to identify and support students whose performance or progress causes concern

6.5   Providing accurate information to applicants and students on how to become an architect