



**Subject** Scope for a Review of ARB's Approach to Prescribing Qualifications  
**Purpose** For Discussion and Decision  
**From** Head of Qualifications and Governance

If you have any enquiries on this paper, please contact Emma Matthews at [emmam@arb.org.uk](mailto:emmam@arb.org.uk) or on 020 7580 5861

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### 1. Summary

To consider, discuss and agree the outline scope and timeframes for a 'root and branch' review of ARB's approach to prescribing qualifications.

### 2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board considers and agrees the objectives for the 'root and branch' review of ARB's approach to prescribing qualifications, as well as the outline project scope and timeframes.

### 3. Open Session

### 4. Contribution to the Board's Purpose and Objectives

In delivering the Act, ARB's objectives are to 'protect the users and potential users of architects' services' and to 'support architects through regulation'.

In line with Section 4(1)a of the Architects Act 1997, the Board is responsible for determining what qualifications and practical experience are required for entry to the Register under the UK routes to registration. In order to ensure that individuals have met the appropriate standards on entry to the Register, the Board has established a prescription process for recognising qualifications and practical experience as well as the criteria which must be met at the appropriate levels. The Procedures are therefore important in terms of assuring the users and potential users of architects' services that a clear and transparent process for reviewing qualifications exists and assists in ensuring that individuals who are on the Register have the appropriate minimum levels of skills and expertise.

### 5. Key Points

- i. At its meeting on 19 July 2019, the Board agreed to cease its business as usual review of the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications. Instead, it was

agreed that a ‘root and branch’ review of ARB’s approach to the prescription of qualifications be undertaken in 2020, and that the Executive should bring forward an outline of the scope and timeframes for the review to the Board for consideration in December 2019.

This paper sets out the outline scope for the review and the indicative timeframes for the Board’s consideration and agreement.

ii. **Review Objectives**

The review of ARB’s approach to prescribing qualifications should:

- Ensure that a robust and transparent prescription process is put in place which enables the Board to discharge its responsibilities in a timely way under the Architects Act 1997 as well as meeting the demands of a changing environment.
- Ensure that the prescription process continues to support the admission of competent individuals to the Register on completion of their studies and practical training experience
- Ensure that a prescription process is put in place which enables the Board to take proportionate action in relation to the prescription of a qualification in a timely way.
- Ensure that an appropriate governance structure is put in place to support the operation of the revised approach to prescribing qualifications.
- Ensure that clear guidance is developed for institutions in relation to ARB’s requirements and expectations and supports the Board’s revised approach to prescribing qualifications.
- Explore the regulatory landscape and how this dovetails with ARB’s prescription process to determine whether there are areas where ARB and other organisations, such as the Office for Students; the Quality Assurance Agency and others, could work more closely together.

iii. **Stages of the Review/Timescales**

Activity	Timescale
<p><b>Initial Research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake a review of what other similar organisations do and the rationale for this</li> <li>• Discussion with the Board about its expectations and requirements in relation to Prescription</li> <li>• Benchmarking to develop</li> </ul>	<p>January - April 2020</p>

policy approaches	
<b>Development of initial ideas</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of core features of and rationale behind a revised process</li> </ul>	April – October 2020
<b>Testing of initial ideals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testing initial ideas about core features with stakeholders for reactions and feedback</li> </ul>	October-December 2020
<b>Development of Revised Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafting of revised Procedures</li> </ul>	December 2020 – March 2021
<b>Development of Policies to underpin the Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafting of policies required to support the revised Procedures</li> <li>• Consideration of emerging policies to be undertaken through ARB's Policy Committee</li> </ul>	December 2020 – March 2021
<b>Board Approval to go to consultation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board's initial consideration of the revised Procedures</li> </ul>	May 2021
<b>Full Consultation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full three month consultation to be undertaken</li> </ul>	May - August 2021

<p><b>Review Consultation Feedback</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collation and consideration of feedback received via the consultation</li> </ul>	September 2021
<p><b>Adjustment of Revised Procedures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafting adjustments to be made to revised Procedures based on consultation responses</li> </ul>	September – October 2021
<p><b>Board Approval of Revised Procedures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board consideration and approval of revised Procedures</li> </ul>	November 2021
<p><b>Transitional period</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essential period to brief institutions and put in place appropriate support mechanisms to operationalise revised Procedures</li> </ul>	November 2021 – September 2022
<p><b>Implementation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised Procedures become effective</li> </ul>	September 2022

- iv. The Board is asked to note that this review will be undertaken within the context of a series of other, potentially overlapping, reviews such as the reviews of the Criteria in relation to life/fire safety and climate change; the review of the UK routes to registration (pending the position becoming clearer in relation to the UK's exit from the EU) and the review of ARB's approach to monitoring the competence of individuals on the Architects Register. We will be commissioning the

preparatory research for the review of the UK routes to registration and the review of ARB's approach to monitoring the competence of individuals on the Register in early 2020.

- v. The Board is asked to review and agree the objectives and outline review plans, providing any feedback as appropriate.

## 6. Resource implications

This will be an Executive led review. The Executive will draw upon independent, technical experts as required in order to inform the review as they deem appropriate, i.e., to undertake the initial research required to inform the review, to assist in the facilitation of discussions with stakeholders about the development of the core features of the revised process etc. The Executive will, if needed, form an internal working group to support and progress the review. The Board has agreed a budget of £85k to undertake this review. We will be including the costs of implementing any new approach to prescribing qualifications in our 2021 and 2022 budgets.

Board and Policy Committee time will be needed to discuss the Board's requirements and expectations of institutions as well as the development of the policies which will be needed in terms of underpinning the revised process.

## 7. Risk Implications

The Board will need to ensure that it can continue to fully discharge its statutory functions both under the relevant sections of the Act. Amongst other things, the procedures set out the processes that the Board uses to ensure qualifications are meeting the appropriate standards and cover the relevant subject areas, as well as ensuring that competent individuals are eligible to join the Register. The Board will need to take care to ensure any revised procedures will continue to fulfil these objectives. Failure to do so may result in the Board being unable to undertake its duties effectively, could lead to a lack of transparency and ultimately could lead to incompetent individuals joining the Register.

There are signs emerging that the existing Procedures for the Prescription do not allow the Executive or the Board to identify potentially serious issues and concerns regarding an institution and/or the qualifications it is delivering at a sufficiently early stage; the Procedures lead the Executive and the Board to be reactive in many circumstances, often after a potentially serious event has taken place within an institution. Undertaking a wider review of the Procedures in 2020/2021 will enable the Executive to explore, and the Board to implement, more robust approaches to the prescription of qualifications so that the organisation can continue to fulfil its statutory responsibilities in this area. In the interim, the Executive are aware of the potential issues which are beginning to arise and are learning to spot the relevant signs at an earlier stage and through annual monitoring submissions; we will continue to be vigilant and seek more in-depth explanations and clarifications from institutions where we have cause to believe there could be more substantive issues developing. Our existing Procedures allow us to visit an institution where we believe this will assist us in gathering relevant information and we will continue to use this option where we feel this is proportionate and appropriate.

We are currently implementing the operational and governance changes which the Board has made to the Procedures and this is likely to continue into mid-late 2020. There will therefore be an overlap between this and the start of the 'root and branch' review. There is potential for confusion amongst stakeholders in terms of this overlap. Careful stakeholder management will be needed to ensure that stakeholders are clear on the differences between the reviews and the objectives that we are looking to achieve through the 'root and branch review'. Regular updates will also need to be provided to stakeholders throughout the review.

As noted above in key point iv. we will be embarking on a series of additional reviews which are interlinked with a review of ARB's approach to the prescription of qualifications. We are working in a fast paced and ever changing environment, which may present the Board with important issues to consider in terms of its strategy and cause it to determine that it needs to change its position or approach to this, or any of the reviews. The Executive will alert the Board to any significant changes as they occur. Should the Board determine that a change of strategy or direction of travel is needed in relation to any of the reviews, the advantages and disadvantages of such a change should be carefully considered before any decision is taken. Careful stakeholder management will be needed to ensure that stakeholders are clear on any reasons for such changes.

The Board will need to be aware that any changes to the procedures for the prescription of qualifications could impact on the Criteria at Part 1, Part 2 and Part 3 levels and/or have an unintended impact on the procedures for the Prescribed Examinations which may lead to a lack of synergy between the processes in the future. It will be necessary to understand the impact that any proposed changes will have on other elements of the Board's existing policies, processes and procedures. The Executive will monitor this as the reviews progress.

The Board will need to ensure that it properly consults all relevant stakeholders in relation to any proposed reviews to the prescription process. Stakeholders should be given the opportunity to contribute to and comment on the initial core features of the revised process so that feedback can be gathered at an early stage in terms of the likely operability of any changes to ARB's approach in this area. The Board will need to ensure that it undertakes a full, three month consultation in line with its consultation policy once a revised draft of the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications has been developed. Failure to do so could result in reputational damage and a lack of buy-in by key stakeholders.

We will develop a dedicated project risk register to identify and monitor the key risks associated with this review.

## 8. Communication

The Board has agreed to undertake a 'root and branch' review of ARB's approach to prescribing qualifications, commencing in 2020. A project plan for the review is being developed and will be communicated to stakeholders in the first part of 2020. The Board will wish to fully engage with and consult a wide range of stakeholders throughout the process. Regular updates will be provided to both the Board and its stakeholders as the project progresses.

**9. Equality and Diversity Implications**

Equality and diversity implications will need to be taken into account as part of the review. The Board will need to ensure that any revised procedures meet the Board's objectives in this area. We will prepare an equality impact assessment before the review starts. Any key issues or concerns which result from it will be highlighted to the Board. A further equality impact assessment will be undertaken once any revised Procedures have been prepared.

**10. Further Actions**

Subject to the Board's approval of the outline scope and timeframes, the Executive will develop a more detailed project plan for the review and begin taking forward plans for the initial research to commence.