

Board Paper

for Open session

Subject: **Practical Professional Experience Commission**

To agree that ARB establish an independent Commission to develop recommendations to ARB on how to improve fair and consistent access to quality practical experience, and on new minimum requirements for relevant experience.

Board meeting:

6 September 2023

Agenda item:

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Action:

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

Purpose

The consultation on the Board's education reforms found that its proposals for changes to the practical professional experience required of architects would not solve the problems the Board had identified, and could have unintended consequences. This paper asks the Board to agree that ARB establish an independent Commission to review practical professional experience and make new recommendations for change.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to agree that ARB establish an independent Commission to develop recommendations to ARB on how to improve fair and consistent access to quality practical experience, and the recommended new minimum requirements for relevant experience.

Annexes

None

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1. Open Session

- 1.1. This decision will be made in the open session of the Board meeting.
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2. Background and Key points

Practical professional experience in education and training

- 2.1. Practical professional experience (PPE) is a core requirement in the current regulatory framework for the education and training of architects, as is common internationally for architects and across many regulated professions.
- 2.2. The current requirement is for a minimum 24 months practical experience required before Registration, which is a condition for attaining the current Part 3 qualification. The candidate should:
 - complete a full range of activities typically undertaken by a practicing architect;
 - be directly supervised by a professional in the construction industry, with at least 12 months to be under the supervision of a Registered Architect;
 - have their period of practical experience signed off, usually by a Professional Studies Advisers at institutions administering the qualifications;
 - complete at least 12 months in a relevant European territory, and ARB strongly recommends at least 12 months in the UK;
 - have recent experience prior to Registration; this means that 12 of the 24 months must take place in the two years prior to Part 3 examination (ideally in the UK).
- 2.3. In 2020 the independent research ARB commissioned from SQW found that inconsistent availability of good quality work experience placements was as an issue that could have a detrimental impact on fair access to the Register and diversity within the profession. As a result, in our 2021 discussion paper, we committed to engaging with the profession to understand how we can better integrate practical experience into architectural education in a way that ensures consistent quality.¹
- 2.4. PPE continued to be an important theme emerging through our research and engagement. In particular, we have heard about the negative impact the current PPE requirements have on equality, diversity and inclusion in the profession. We have heard that in some parts of the UK, there are insufficient employment opportunities and the requirement for two years specifically with an architect (and not adjacent professions) is limiting the pipeline of local talent. We've heard that employment can rely on connections within the industry, and can unfairly disadvantage those without connections, or without the experience and support to perform well in recruitment processes.

¹ See paragraphs 4.13 and 7.3 in *Modernising the initial education and training of architects*: <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Modernising-architectural-education-and-training-2021-1.pdf>

2.5. Our 2021 education survey revealed concerns amongst some future architects that they lack the power to influence their employer to help them gain the necessary skills, and this was linked to concerns about mistreatment that disproportionately affect some groups. Through our 2023 consultation we learned of other concerns about inclusivity, for example from parents and carers who find the timeframe for the PPE requirement limiting.

ARB's PPE proposals

- 2.6. To address these challenges, the Board proposed that as part of moving to an outcomes-based approach ARB would no longer require a minimum of two years of employment in architecture. This was intended to improve flexibility so that future architects can gain experience in ways that work for them. It would also help them focus their professional experience on what they need to be able to do in order to qualify as an architect. We know that there are wider problems with the availability of employment. ARB can't solve all structural issues on our own, but we can improve our model to help make our requirements more achievable. We asked a dedicated consultation question to help us understand whether our proposals could help to do that.
- 2.7. The majority of respondents disagreed with our proposal to remove the minimum duration of PPE. We received a broad range of ideas and concerns about the role of practices in our proposals, and the impact our proposals would have on them. In their comments, respondents discussed the challenges of getting this right.
- 2.8. Our conclusion is that we should revise proposals for PPE and expand our work to look more fundamentally at PPE. We have learned through the consultation that removing the minimum duration will not address the problems that arise for those looking to gain the experience and could have the unintended consequence of weakening the standards of the architects' profession. We recommend keeping the principles within the current requirements (and therefore retaining the two-year minimum) for the time being. We do however recommend that in the short term we consider what changes could be made, within the two-year requirements, to allow additional flexibility. Any changes we recommend will be brought back to the Board.
- 2.9. Given the complexity of the stakeholders involved in PPE, it is vital that ARB works closely with a range of different professionals and organisations to develop new proposals. This is a topic that requires genuine cross-sector collaboration. Impartiality will also be important in understanding the different roles, the issues that arise, and how ARB can help to develop solutions.

PPE Commission

- 2.10. We propose to establish a Commission, with an independent Chair appointed and funded by ARB, to meet with architects, employers, students and learning providers. The Commission will be asked to provide options and recommendations to ARB on how to improve fair and consistent access to quality practical experience,

and the recommended new minimum requirements for relevant experience. We will appoint the Commission in the Autumn and ask it to present its report to the Board within twelve months.

2.11. The Commission would be composed of one Chair and three members, including a lay member, an employer and an architect academic, to ensure a range of relevant expertise. Its work would be informed by Terms of Reference. ARB would provide the Secretariat, and would develop and support the Commission's work plan.

2.12. Although we have identified an outline person specification for these roles, we would ask the Board to delegate the appointment to the Chair and signing of contracts to the Chief Executive and Registrar.

2.13. The Commission's work would likely include:

- an open call for evidence to invite stakeholders to share their views, experiences and suggestions;
- visits to learning providers, architectural practices and other stakeholder organisations across different locations in the UK;
- workshops or roundtables to hold detailed discussions with invited stakeholders, possibly in the form of an Expert Panel, and bilateral meetings with key organisations;
- briefings, desktop research and, if an evidence gap is identified, original commissioned research.

2.14. The Commission would deliver an interim report to ARB in either presentation or written format, and a final written report with recommendations that would be discussed with Board and published for the sake of transparency.

3. Resource Implications

3.1. An estimated budget has been prepared to cover the Commissioners' fees, visits and research. The anticipated cost to ARB would be £250,000 over the course of one year.

3.2. This would be a one-off piece of work that we believe is essential to modernise the education and training of architects. As such we propose funding it through our reserves.

3.3. The staffing requirements to provide the Secretariat to the Commission can be covered within the current staff team. As the education consultation and analysis comes to a close, the Commission would be a new phase of the engagement we have already been resourcing throughout the project.

4. Risk Implications

- 4.1. One of the major risks associated with PPE is that our remit includes setting the requirements for it as part of an architect's training and education, but we do not have power over employers or access to funding to support those in training. This means the potential solutions the Commission could develop to improve our PPE requirements could fall outside our scope of influence, or be deemed impractical.
 - 4.2. Building on this, there is a risk that the solutions the Commission proposes cannot all be carried out by ARB within our statutory remit. PPE connects many stakeholder groups in the sector – including employers and learning providers – and there will be issues that ARB is unable to solve.
 - 4.3. We also recognise that funding solutions would need government support and while the Commission would be free to make recommendations, as an Arms Length Body, our role is to highlight issues, not to argue for particular funding solutions for things outside the powers of our legislation.
 - 4.4. We will mitigate risks by preparing clear Terms of Reference for the Commission, to be approved by the Board, and providing clear information about what is in scope, and what is possible within ARB's remit. We will also support the Commission in building connections with other stakeholder groups, who may choose to support new initiatives of their own volition.
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5. Equality and Diversity implications

- 5.1. Throughout our engagement and research for the education reforms, we have consistently heard that the PPE requirements, whilst an essential aspect of an architects' training, can act as a barrier that limits access to the profession. This is summarised with examples in paragraphs 2.4-2.5 above.
 - 5.2. The Commission will be tasked with reviewing the concerns and challenges that have emerged through our research and engagement, and making recommendations to ARB on how to improve fair and consistent access to quality practical experience. The Terms of Reference will make clear this requirement and the importance of inclusion. The work programme for the Commission will also support an inclusive approach by introducing them to a range of stakeholders and viewpoints.
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6. Recommendations

- 6.1. The Board is asked to agree that ARB establish an independent Commission to develop recommendations to ARB on how to improve fair and consistent access to quality practical experience, and on new minimum requirements for relevant experience.
- 6.2. The Board is asked to approve the appointment of the Commission Chair to the Chair of the Board with the contract being signed by the Chief Executive on behalf of ARB.