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Board Paper

for Open session

Subject: Update on Accreditation

To receive an update on the progress with Accreditation activities, and anticipated developments during the Transition Period

Board meeting:

14 July 2025

Agenda item:

12

Action:

* For noting
* For discussion
* For decision

# Purpose

To Provide the Board with an update on the development and delivery of the new Accreditation model as well as areas for future enhancement to the structure of visits and data use.

# Recommendations

The Board is asked to note and comment on the updates and future development activities as set out in this paper

# Annexes

None

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## Open

* 1. This update sets out progress with the accreditation work since the decision to adopt the new education framework for qualifications leading to Registration, and is in open session for transparency and general interest.

## Background and Key points

* 1. As part of the Initial Education and Training (IET) framework development, the Board approved the new Accreditation model, which replaced the previous Prescription of qualifications that led to registration.
  2. Following extensive stakeholder engagement with the sector, the Board made changes to the Registration Rules, to delegate decision-making to the Accreditation Committee, and to move from an isolated desk-based approach, to one which:
* Assessed providers against a new set of standards for providers
* Including analysis of data returns including assessment against the new standards
* Involved a targeted programme of visits (online and in person) co-ordinated by the Executive, utilising the skills of both lay and professional visitors (either practising architects, or those working within higher education); and,
* Seeking to use an increasing range of qualitative and quantitative data, triangulated to support a proportionate model, informed by risk.
  1. The Board agreed a set of six Standards for Providers, focusing on the requirements for robust policies, governance, resourcing and student support. These new standards would provide, over time, a baseline data set, from which trends and insights could be gleaned, and best practice identified.
  2. The Board also directed that the costs for Accreditation were to be paid for by Providers of qualifications, rather than from individual architects. An accreditation fee model was developed, on a cost recovery basis, and applied to each provider. The fee covered the costs of ARB team members, the Accreditation Committee, and the costs associated with individual visitors’ time, travel and subsistence. The fee recognises the common costs of an annual monitoring programme, as well as a per-qualification multiplier. New qualifications attract a one-off cost, payable in two stages over the development and approval timescale.

**Impact and scope of the changes**

* 1. These changes were the first significant developments in several decades, and required a programme of change management, applying both to ARB staff, and to the wider sector. A significant amount of time to upskill the team has been undertaken, and a review of all documents and assessment processes continues.
  2. Feedback from stakeholders during initial development discussions flagged both the benefits and risks of basing our model on the accreditation systems of other professional regulatory and standards bodies (PRSBs) including RIBAs validation model. A key challenge remains scale with more than four times the number of accredited qualifications in architecture than, say medicine or pharmacy. We also recognise that pace of change has been challenging not only for ARB staff but also the providers who are having to respond to both content changes (through the new competency outcomes) and also the structure of provision.
  3. The implementation of the new model considered and accepted many of the challenges of this implementation, from financial impact and available resources at Provider level, to the reputational impact and understanding of those in the sector, and constituted a significant change programme.
  4. The Board therefore agreed to a Transition Period, to allow simultaneous run out of the three-part model, with the development of existing qualifications to meet the new academic and practice outcomes, and also to collect the baseline data for the Standards for Providers, and establish the mechanisms for collecting qualitative data from those delivering or experiencing the qualifications.
  5. Undergraduate qualifications (Part 1) would cease to be required for registration from December 2027, and only light-touch review through annual monitoring is being carried out to ensure the Board’s proportionate quality assurance continues to be met until this change.
  6. Masters level (Part 2) and Post Graduate diploma (Part 3) qualifications will continue to be recognised until December 2028 under the existing Prescription Criteria. This is to allow Providers to consider and develop new qualifications, to achieve appropriate sign off through their own local approval processes, or meet the needs of other external bodies, and also to have time to prepare for new methods of delivery. These qualifications are also reviewed as part of ARB’s full Annual Monitoring process.

**Focus of activity**

* 1. There are currently 67 Providers, with over 200 accredited qualifications. The Accreditation Committee, and the underpinning annual monitoring and visit process, have necessarily had to focus on the maintenance of these qualifications in the last 18 months. The ARB team have simultaneously supported the Providers with guidance on how to submit new applications for new, or changed, qualifications under the new framework.
  2. There are currently 23 applications for new applications. These come from 17 different Providers, two of which are new to ARB as they do not have a current accredited qualification.
  3. The Visit programme has conducted 11 visits in 2024, and a further 23 are planned in 2025. We are on target to visit all existing Providers at least once within the Transition Period. We are evaluating consistency of decision-making, and how we present evidence to the Committee. The first new application to the Committee included the Visit Panel presenting their experience and weighting of evidence directly.

**Standards for Providers**

* 1. A key element of the accreditation approach is to collect a comparable dataset, across all Providers. This will be used as a benchmark not only for the individual Provider, but to inform variations over the sector as a whole.
  2. There are six standards, and the Board agreed – recognising the impact on Providers of simultaneous changes to delivery, and time to develop their qualifications against the new outcomes – to a phased approach to collecting the data across the Transition Period, and for the data to be reviewed as part of the Annual Monitoring process.
  3. The standards are publicly available on the ARB website as part of the Accreditation Handbook. [Standards for Learning Providers - Architects Registration Board](https://arb.org.uk/information-for-schools-of-architecture/accreditation-handbook/standards-for-learning-providers/)
  4. This year, the focus is on Standard 3 (Governance and Leadership), and Standard 6 (Student Support). These two standards require a greater level of work for both Providers and the Executive, in that this is the first time Providers have been asked to collate and submit the information, and the first time the Executive have had to receive and analyse it. Next year, the focus will be on Standards 4 (Human Resources) and Standard 5 (Teaching and Learning Resources).
  5. Standards 1 and 2 relate to the educational content and Assessments. We will require those to be updated at the point of submitting any new or changed qualifications for consideration by the Accreditation Committee. Those Providers who are not submitting a new or changed qualification until the end of the transition would still be expected to update us in 2027 Annual Monitoring on their progress.
  6. We are currently more than half-way through the current Annual Monitoring cycle, meaning we have data for approximately 40% of the Standards. We will have completed the first full dataset, with data for four of the six Standards, and for all Providers by the end of the next Annual Monitoring cycle (December 2026). We anticipate having a dataset which includes all six standards, for around half of Providers by December 2027, based on the current knowledge of new applications
  7. Once we have a full dataset, we can compare and start using the insights, with annual updates from Providers on all areas.

**Qualitative feedback**

* 1. Feedback from those delivering the qualifications, and from those studying, is vital to the process of triangulation.
  2. We have conducted a baseline survey of student experience, which will be compared against the Standards for Providers (3 and 6) once that data collection (see 2.17 above) has concluded in December 2025. We aim to have a first analysis in Q1 2026. The survey was carried out, using Citizen Space software, with all existing Providers asked to forward to students, to invite them to contribute. We received baseline data from students at 42 out of 57 Providers who currently offer a Part 2 or Part 3 qualification. We will continue to run the survey to increase the dataset. Perhaps to be expected, but the response rate is low which does not allow us to draw firm conclusions about any particular population, be it be institution or across the sector.
  3. The feedback from students was positive in relation to the awareness of, or outcomes from, student support policies and resources. A majority (61%) of students felt they knew about reporting bullying and harassment, a majority (71%) were aware of the Providers EDI and discrimination reporting processes, 81% considered the Provider had adequate provision and access to studio and workshop facilities. Only a small proportion of students said they had cause to use student support processes, with 73% reporting they were very confident or somewhat confident in their Provider’s approach. It should be noted that the response rate was relatively low with 269 responses.
  4. Colleagues in our Communications team also run regular Part 3 student sessions, setting out the role of ARB as a regulator, with more than 300 students having attended sessions to hear about regulation and our role in accreditation qualifications that lead to Registration.
  5. Finally, as part of our accreditation visits, we have been opportunistic in asking students about their experience of the Provider. Although anecdotal, often conducted during any tours of the campus, they have been useful in generating feedback about the qualification, and knowledge and confidence in the support structures from the Provider. The responses may provide further question areas for the Visit panel.
  6. We would like to broaden out the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data from students and the staff group.
  7. We will explore during the latter half of 2025 options for cost effective ways of seeking key feedback, either by expanding the scope of visits or collecting feedback through surveys. We will review the work of other regulators and how they manage their resources. In particular, we are keen to explore how we use student and staff feedback from teachers and supervisors to support key lines of enquiry and validate responses from providers against the standards for providers.
  8. We are exploring whether an additional approach would be to survey those who have graduated, as a method of eliminating some of the potential biases described above. This would, naturally, only apply to qualifications where there had been a graduating cohort.

**Looking forward**

* 1. The focus of the remainder of 2025 is to complete the Standards 3 and 6, to allow baseline triangulation data for student experience.
  2. 2026 will then allow the development of further student engagement, along with the collection of the remainder of the Standards for Providers dataset.
  3. By 2027, we will be in a position to compare all Providers against the Standards, and to generate some initial sector-wide highlights of how Providers are doing against the new outcomes. At the end of 2027, once the Part 1 qualifications are no longer required for registration, a significant proportion of Executive resource and time can be used to focus on further data insights, as well as the operational work of accrediting practice outcomes qualifications.
  4. We will analyse the costs and time requirements based on our new applications and visits to date, to assist the Board in accreditation fee and budget setting for 2026.

## Resource Implications

* 1. Resources used to run the programme of accreditation is already approved as part of the budget planning process, and is based on the Accreditation Fees paid by Providers, and set by the Board.
  2. This paper is predicated on the budget allocations, and does not have any further implications.
  3. The evaluation of the costs of accreditation activities will be used to inform the Board’s budget and fee setting later this year.

## Risk Implications

* 1. Accreditation processes remain in the early stages of implementation, and the appetite for development of new qualifications is unknown. We anticipate significant changes once the consultation work on the PPE Commission recommendations is completed.
  2. There is significant financial pressure within the higher education sector, resulting in Providers having to consider the way they resource and structure qualifications. Whilst ARB is not responsible for supporting the market in qualifications, in terms of maintaining the numbers of Providers, there is a need to closely watch any changes in the overall provision of qualifications leading to registration. This includes assessing any changes in geographical location, or support for diversity within those studying.
  3. Apprenticeships as a route to registration may fluctuate, based on changes in funding models. ARB cannot influence such funding, and may need to look at how it can support Providers with any transition of trainees to other qualifications, if apprenticeship qualifications are withdrawn.
  4. We will need to ensure we manage our activities so that we can support rapid move to Practice Outcomes, in order to replace the Part 3 qualifications by December 2028. Depending on appetite for new qualifications, we may need to devise a prioritisation system that balances this need, with the applications to develop integrated qualifications, and standalone academic qualifications. It may be that we need to invite some providers who have greater capacity or experience, to work with us to develop a range of practice outcomes qualifications across the UK.

## Communication

* 1. The Board is reminded that we maintain regular communications with individual Providers through the Annual Monitoring process, relating to their individual qualifications.
  2. Additionally, we meet with stakeholder groups, such as the Standing Council of Schools of Architecture (SCOSA) on a quarterly basis, to share and receive relevant updates from the higher education sector.
  3. We have been running the Education Transition Reference Group, to allow Providers to give feedback on the guidance, support and process of Accreditation. As we have now established the process, and all existing Providers are using it, we are proposing to formally disband the group, and deal with specific queries and feedback as part of the regular review process at each organisation.
  4. As the focus of the education reforms are now on the implementation of the Professional Practical Experience recommendations from the PPE Commission, we propose that the next phase of engagement and consultation is via the newly established, dedicated education engagement group.

## Equality and Diversity implications

* 1. There are no specific EDI implications arising from this update paper. EDI is a core consideration of the accreditation process for qualifications, and is set out in the Board’s Standards for Providers.

## Recommendations

* 1. The Board is asked to note and comment on the updates and further development activities in relation to Accreditation, as set out in this update paper.