

Improvements to professional practical experience

for Open session

Board meeting:

10 December 2025

Agenda item:

10

Action:

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

Subject:

A package of proposals to improve professional practical experience and change ARB's registration requirements.

Purpose

To agree to consult on draft changes to ARB's requirements on professional practical experience.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board agrees to consult on proposals to change ARB's Professional Practical Experience (PPE) requirements including:

- i. draft changes to ARB's Standards for learning providers, to introduce a coordinating role and the use of an ARB-approved Trainee Record of Experience
- ii. draft guidance for practices employing trainees and for trainees on placements
- iii. draft minimum requirements for a new Trainee Record of Experience and topics for supplementary advice
- iv. draft changes to ARB's Registration Rules to implement the new PPE requirements, including a new position on the recency of experience gained.

Annexes

Annexe A – Draft changes to ARB's Standards for learning providers and further information that would be included in the Accreditation Handbook

Annexe B – Draft guidance for practices employing trainees and for trainees on placements

Annexe C – Draft minimum requirements for a Trainee Record of Experience and topics for supplementary advice

Annexe D – Draft changes to ARB's Registration Rules

Annexe E – Coordinating role: Engagement activity and feedback

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1. Open Session

1.1 This item is being taken in the open session. The annexes will not be published as part of the papers. This is to avoid confusion by publishing consultation materials that will be finalised after the Board's discussion and not published until 2026.

2. Background and Key points

Introduction

2.1 ARB ensures only those who are suitably competent are allowed to practise as architects. To help achieve this, we accredit (the architecture qualifications required to join the Register of Architects. Qualifications must deliver our Competency Outcomes to be accredited by ARB, and we also set Standards that learning providers must meet. The Standards are supplemented by an Accreditation Handbook, with more detail about how learning providers can meet the requirements we set.

2.2 Our education framework includes requirements for trainees to have undertaken Professional Practical Experience (PPE) before they are able to qualify and practise as architects. In addition to the qualifications needed to register, there is currently a requirement that individuals must have a minimum of 24 months of professional practical experience, with some stipulations about how and where that experience took place.

2.3 As we undertook our reforms to initial education and training, PPE continued to be an important theme emerging through our research and engagement. In particular, we heard about the negative impact that current PPE requirements and ways of working could be having on both the quality and experience of training and also access to the profession.

- 2.4 To address these challenges, in 2023 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 asked a dedicated consultation question to help us understand whether our proposals could help to do that.
- 2.5 The majority of respondents disagreed with our proposal to remove the minimum duration of PPE. We learned through the consultation that removing the minimum duration alone will not address the problems with PPE and could have the unintended consequence of weakening the standards of the architects' profession. Our conclusion was that we should retain and reconsider any changes to the two year minimum while looking more fundamentally at the challenges facing trainees during this period of their training.
- 2.6 To do this, we established an independent Professional Practical Experience Commission. It was formed of a Chair, a lay member, an employer and an architect academic. The Commission was asked to provide options and recommendations to ARB on how to improve fair and consistent access to quality practical experience, including changes to ARB's approach to regulation or requirements that they thought would improve the experience for trainees.
- 2.7 The Commission undertook a series of visits across the UK, and held online sessions and detailed policy discussions with a range of stakeholders as part of their evidence gathering. They reviewed our Workplace Culture research and also launched a call for evidence to find out more about what worked well and the parts of practical training that needed improvement.
- 2.8 In April 2025, the Commission published its recommendations to transform how future architects gain quality professional practical experience. ARB welcomed the report and acknowledged the Commission's findings that trainees hold the risk in securing a coherent progression to registration. At its meeting in May 2025, the Board discussed the Commission's recommendations in detail and agreed to adopt the majority of them, with an emphasis that ARB should develop the new PPE requirements through two-way engagement with learning providers.¹
- 2.9 ARB subsequently published a comprehensive plan outlining the steps to realise the Commission's vision. Our actions focused on enhancing transparency, emphasising outcomes, and strengthening access to relevant and quality practical experience. Amongst the key activities the Board agreed were:

¹ The Board paper is available on ARB's website: <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Board-paper-PPE-recommendations-implementation-FINAL-approved-1.pdf>

- Creating a coordinating role for learning providers: ARB will work closely with learning providers and those involved in architectural education through a series of focus groups to define the detailed requirements and responsibilities of a new coordinating role. The role will be set out in ARB's Standards for Learning Providers and Accreditation Handbook, and will be subject to a public consultation.
- Introducing a standardised “Record of Competency”: ARB will set minimum requirements for evidencing practical experience which trainees will record. ARB will convene a reference group – comprising representatives from learning providers – to co-develop the format and implementation of this standardised record.

2.10 This paper sets out the proposals for ARB's revised PPE requirements, the coordinating role that we will require of learning providers, and the basis for a new Trainee Record of Experience (our recommended change of wording from the PPE Commission's recommendation which we think more accurately reflects its purpose).

Our engagement work

2.11 We have developed these proposals through thorough two-way engagement with learning providers and those involved in architectural education. An account of the engagement work and the insight it gave us is in Annex E. It included:

- Three focus groups on the coordinating role, attended by 18 learning providers who saw early drafts of our proposals and shared direct feedback. The first was with learning providers who we anticipated were already meeting many of the requirements we were considering. The second was with a range of providers to test our ideas across different sizes, qualification formats and locations. The third was with a smaller group who had told us they would find it difficult to meet one or more of the requirements we were considering.
- A survey to hear from a wider number of learning providers than we could accommodate in a focus group format. We received 65 responses, 28 of which were official responses on behalf of learning providers. Respondents reinforced the findings from the PPE Commission in showing that most respondents had observed the problems it highlighted. Most respondents thought they would definitely or might be able meet the new ideas for requirements in future. This was also the case for official responses on behalf of learning providers. Many of their concerns were based on misconceptions or a lack of available detail for them to evaluate the ideas.
- A Reference Group to support the development of the Trainee Record of Experience, comprised of learning providers and employers across the UK, and organisations with relevant expertise (RIBA, APSA, SCOSA, APEAS). This Reference Group has now met four times, with discussions focusing on the application of the TRE and its minimum requirements and stakeholders. These

discussions helped us define the minimum requirements and areas for supplementary advice. We have incorporated their feedback and reached proposals that are ready for consultation.

2.12 Further meetings and discussions included a workshop with the ARB Board, learning providers and employers in Glasgow and a session at our October conference to discuss the coordinating role and what practices and learning providers need from each other. We also held a separate meeting with APEAS to discuss the specific arrangements in Scotland so that we could plan how these would interact with our proposals, and shared updates on our work with APSA and SCOSA.

3. Proposed PPE changes

The coordinating role for learning providers

3.1 The Commission recommended that learning providers should take a coordinating role in facilitating trainees' acquisition of all the Competency Outcomes. The Commission identified that learning providers are best positioned to exercise a planning, facilitating and monitoring role. This was because of learning providers' oversight of the educational process, their relationship with trainees, their ability to address specific gaps in learning as part of the qualifications they provide, and the potential for them to develop links with architectural practices. They therefore have an important role in supporting trainees towards registration.

Our proposals

3.2 The coordinating role would only apply when trainees are enrolled on an accredited qualification where the Practice Outcomes are a requirement of that qualification. We expect this would be:

- either an accredited Practice Outcomes qualification
- or an accredited master's-level qualification that includes a practical element (e.g. delivers some Practice Outcomes and/or includes a work placement).

3.3 We want to set requirements that are proportionate and at a level that improves the support given to trainees. Any new requirement placed on learning providers will need resourcing by them and this means there will be an associated cost for them to meet. To make that cost as manageable as possible, we have targeted the new requirements on specific areas that would help trainees to gain relevant, quality experience that is necessary for their future practise, and will ultimately help to protect the public. Through our engagement, we understand that the majority of learning providers can deliver or are already delivering the coordinating role requirements, and we have amended these on the basis of their feedback to help ensure this is the case.

3.4 We propose that the coordinating role is formed of the following requirements:

- **Responsibilities within the learning provider** would be clear, with at least one individual having objectives and accountabilities for delivering the coordinating role with employers. We heard how some learning providers do this through teams with pooled resources across departments.
- They would be asked to **develop and maintain a list of employers** to support trainees to find available work placements. They would not be required to find jobs for every trainee. The draft Standards include a requirement that those responsible within the learning provider have sufficient resources to coordinate the trainees' relationships with employers. We were told that ARB requiring this would provide helpful clarity about our expectations so that the individual schools could explain within their institutions the resourcing requirements.
- **Trainee progression** would be supported with individualised advice from the learning provider. The learning provider would use the Record to help do this, providing advice about what practical experience they require to meet the Outcomes and how they can acquire it. Both the trainee and the learning provider would reflect on this progress.
- Learning providers would need to have reasonable assurance that those on the list of available employers are, and remain, **suitable practices** at which trainees can acquire relevant experience to meet the Practice Outcomes. Feedback from learning providers reinforced that this could be light touch and would not require in person visits. Where trainees have concerns, the learning provider would offer them advice or other support. The learning provider could refer them to another organisation if it is something they are not able to deal with. This is something they told us they needed to be allowed to do.

3.5 The role will be implemented through ARB's Standards for Learning Providers and Accreditation Handbook. The proposed new Standard for the role sits under Standard 6 – Student Support and states that learning providers will meet this requirement by:

Taking a coordinating role in facilitating trainees' acquisition of the Practice Outcomes, where it is a requirement of the qualification. Coordination will include using an ARB approved Trainee Record of Experience to support trainees in understanding their progression towards achieving the Practice Outcomes, and offering advice where trainees have concerns about their employment.

3.6 The new proposed Standards and Handbook changes are in Annexe A. Whilst ARB must consult on changes to our Standards, the Handbook takes the form of advice to support learning providers, and is not usually subject to consultation. We intend to publish our changes to the Handbook alongside the draft Standards so that learning providers have all the information available to them to help inform their understanding and view of our proposals.

3.7 In response to learning provider feedback, to aid them in meeting these requirements, we have prepared supporting guidance to both employers and trainees. This guidance is in Annex B. It aims to advise on the expectations of both groups during periods of employment. Along with the Record, it also provides clarity about who is responsible for supervision. Learning providers would need to make trainees and employers aware of this guidance, and as such this material can be used by them to support their trainees, and will reduce the burden placed on them whilst also helping to standardise the information trainees and employers receive.

Trainee Record of Experience

3.8 The Commission identified flaws in the extent to which trainees could work with those supporting them to track and critically reflect on their progress. Trainees spoke about how recording systems were helpful in doing this and the Commission thought these systems should be streamlined, with clear and consistent standards that would help them to effectively reflect on their experience, avoiding repetition and inefficiency within their professional development.

3.9 The Commission recommended that ARB should set minimum standards for a new streamlined and standardised Record of Competency (ROC), and that this must be used by learning providers.

Our proposals

3.10 The Record will act as a tracking tool for trainees to log the practical experience they gain during their progress to registration. It will support them by acting as a record of their experience undertaken. It is important to emphasise that it is not intended to be a record of performance while undertaking that experience. The Record will not be assessed by ARB at the point of registration.

3.11 As the Record is a tracking tool for experience gained, we propose that the name of the Record should be changed to better suit its purpose. We suggest it is referred to as a “Trainee Record of Experience,” reflecting that it is a tool to support trainees to undertake high quality, relevant, and appropriate practical experience, rather than an assessment of their competency.

3.12 As with the coordinating role, we can use the Standards and Handbook to set new requirements to implement the Record’s use. The proposed changes to the Standards and Handbook therefore include that learning providers should use an ARB approved Record to individually advise trainees on their progress. These new proposed Standards and Handbook changes are in Annex A.

3.13 We also propose to set minimum requirements for the Record itself. These are the requirements that a Record would need to meet for ARB to approve its use by learning providers.

3.14 The proposed minimum requirements are that the Record will:

- map to the relevant Practice Outcomes
- provide a standardised format to log experience
- provide a standardised format to reflect on the experience completed
- provide a standardised format for recording corroboration from relevant individuals, which is available to the trainee and other relevant individuals
- be formatted in a way that helps demonstrate achievement of experience and clearly illustrate gaps in experience, so that trainees, their learning providers, and employers have a shared understanding of these gaps
- be transferrable and usable between a trainee's time at successive employers and/or learning providers
- be flexible in its format to accommodate the variety of qualification routes and different formats in which experience can be gained.

3.15 Annexe C lists these proposed minimum requirements alongside supporting detail, including the purpose of the Record (which we have summarised in paragraphs 3.10-11 above).

3.16 We have not yet made a decision on the format it should take, for example whether it is delivered by ARB or by another organisation and approved by us. The proposed requirements would be implemented on any format we choose.

3.17 Annexe C also includes our proposals for supplementary advice topics to accompany the Record. We will ask respondents whether they think these areas of guidance would be helpful:

- Advice for trainees, learning providers and employers on how to complete the Record effectively
- Case study examples of practical experience that support the Practice Outcomes for trainees
- Advice for learning providers on supporting the trainee's TRE through 'supervision' and corroboration. Along with the guidance on the coordinating role for learning providers, this would provide clarity about who is, and has been, responsible for the trainee's supervision.

Registration Rules

3.18 The Commission said ARB should remove constraints to flexibility and innovation to lead sustainable change across the profession. This would involve changes to our Rules, policies and communication with learning providers.

Our proposals

3.19 Our proposed changes to ARB's Registration Rules are highlighted in Annexe D.

3.20 Our Rule changes include a proposal to remove the requirement that applicants for registration have at least two years of practical experience. This follows our original intent when we started our education reforms and our desire to focus on whether applicants are competent at the point of registration, rather than the way in which they reached that point.

3.21 This change is made possible by complementary improvements to the quality of experience elsewhere within our plans. The stronger coordinating role for learning providers and a new Trainee Record of Experience will both improve the consistency of good quality experience and reduce the need for the reassurance of a two year minimum.

3.22 In removing this minimum requirement, we have considered how to remain assured that candidates have the current knowledge and experience required to practise safely and effectively from the day they join the Register. Topics like legislation and regulations are important for this assurance.

3.23 There is an existing requirement in the Competency Outcomes that trainees understand and are able to “locate, evaluate and apply relevant legislation, regulations, standards, codes of practice and policies related to the development of the built environment” (RE4). This means that if someone has a recent qualification, we can be assured that they are able to locate, evaluate and apply current legislation, regulations and other recency-sensitive knowledge.

3.24 However, these topics can change over time, with knowledge and experience becoming outdated. If someone does not register within two years of gaining their qualification, we intend to apply a separate process to provide further reassurance.²

3.25 We expect to provide further advice on the meaning of the word ‘relevant’ to clarify to learning providers and other stakeholders that we anticipate it would cover application of recent legislation, regulations, standards, codes of practice and policies.

Wider PPE changes

3.26 Other related changes we are already implementing and which do not require consultation are:

- We have removed any references that the Academic Outcomes must be met before the Practice Outcomes. Some qualifications blend both sets of Outcomes. The structure of these qualifications may mean that some Practice Outcomes are gained before all of the Academic Outcomes have been. The Commission highlighted the positive benefit from greater integration of academic theory and practice experience. In the case of standalone qualifications, we would still

² We are currently consulting on a new approach to this separate process. See our proposals online: <https://arb.org.uk/consultations/consultation-on-new-proposed-route-for-registration/>

expect most to undertake a master's-level Academic Outcomes qualification before a practice one, because logic dictates that a trainee must demonstrate an understanding of the academic outcome before demonstrating the ability to perform it in a practice setting.

- We will retain advice that trainees should gain significant experience within the UK. Our position is still that those whose practical experience lies solely outside the UK may find it difficult to demonstrate the required level of knowledge and skill to practise safely and effectively. We can evaluate this position once more qualifications in the new framework are in place. For example, the new flexibility may lead to an increase in trainees whose practical experience is undertaken internationally.
- As a consequence of removing the two year minimum, the 'double counting rule' will no longer exist. This is an ARB policy that prevents trainees from using time spent in practice which contributes to the achievement of academic credits to also count that same time towards the minimum two years.

4. Resource Implications

- 4.1 Implementing the proposed Rule changes and Standards would be undertaken within our existing resources and incorporated into our accreditation work.
- 4.2 The proposals on the Record within this paper can also be implemented within our existing resources. Further development of the Record may require new resources if the format we choose involves new digitisation on ARB's IT systems. This would require further IT transformation work that would need to be scoped in detail. We are not asking the Board to take a view on the format at this time.

5. Risk Implications

- 5.1 There is a risk that removing the two year minimum is perceived to lower the standard for registration and therefore the competence of architects on the Register. However, trainees would still need to meet the same Competency Outcomes. Other complementary parts of our proposals also help mitigate this risk and we would want the coordinating Standards and Record to be in place before the two year minimum is removed. We will therefore need to decide an appropriate timeline for transitioning to the new Standards and Rules. Learning providers will need time to incorporate them into their qualifications and the way in which they are taught. We propose to publish a timeline following the consultation on proposed changes and the Board making its decisions.

- 5.2 These proposals do not affect our wider transition timeline but, as with the education reforms as a whole, we continue to review this and will tell learning providers about any changes.
- 5.3 Although the draft proposals reflect much of what many schools are already doing, we have heard concerns from learning providers about potential additional burdens on them.
- 5.4 As budgets within schools of architecture are particularly tight, we recognise that any additional regulatory costs could have an impact on the scope of provision or resources for delivery. While our proposals are relatively limited and should not in of themselves impact viability of qualifications, it is important to acknowledge this wider context.
- 5.5 We have developed these proposals in a considered way, involving learning providers and taking onboard their feedback. This work suggests a very high proportion of learning providers will be able to meet the requirements and that the proposals we have arrived at are a proportionate way of mitigating the risks that currently exist, particularly for trainees in securing the quality of practical experience they need. The consultation will also give us further insight that the Board will be able to consider when asked to finalise the changes.
- 5.6 We would like more feedback from trainees. In developing our proposals for consultation, we so far have drawn on the evidence base within the Commission's report as an indirect way of including their perspective. Hearing from trainees will be a priority during the consultation period. We will ask learning providers to share the consultation with their trainees to help us to do this. Reaching them will also be a priority during the next stages of developing the Record, as those next stages will include making sure the Record is usable and beneficial to them in practice.

6. Communication

- 6.1 We would consult for three months. We had said our aim was to launch the consultation in 2025. We considered publishing later this month and extending the consultation period to accommodate extra time over Christmas and the New Year. On reflection, we believe there is a risk that educators and others do not see our launch communications over this period and are not available for a webinar we plan to hold. We would instead launch the consultation in early 2026 to reduce this risk.
- 6.2 We would promote the consultation widely across our channels. We would contact every accredited learning provider and our educators engagement network to inform them of the consultation and ask them to share it with all of their trainees. We have already started to use opportunities to tell them to expect this, subject to Board

approval. We would also hold a webinar to tell learning providers what is in the consultation and answer clarificatory questions they might have.

6.3 Engagement work demonstrated some recurring misunderstanding. This has given us a good indication of the areas where we need to be proactive in avoiding this:

- We will be clear that learning providers are not being asked to secure employment for all their trainees or being asked to intervene into legal issues in which they do not have a role.
- We will be clear that the standard required to join the Register has not been lowered. Our experience showed this is particularly important when talking about removing the two year minimum, where we will be clear that trainees will still need to reach the required Outcomes and that this may take them more than two years after their master's-level qualification.

7. Equality and Diversity implications

7.1 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. The Commission's recommendations improve fair and consistent access to quality practical experience. These proposals, following on from those recommendations, advance those same aims.

7.2 Through our communications and engagement to implement the recommendations we will continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. We will do this through the Architectural Education Engagement Network and our ongoing engagement with government and professional bodies.

7.3 In the longer term, ARB has already committed to evaluating the effectiveness of our education reforms in improving access to the profession. Work with an external consulting company is underway and their proposals for evaluation will incorporate any PPE changes the Board approves.

8. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board agrees to consult on proposals to change ARB's Professional Practical Experience (PPE) requirements including:

- i. draft changes to ARB's Standards for learning providers, to introduce a coordinating role and the use of an ARB-approved Trainee Record of Experience
- ii. draft guidance for practices employing trainees and for trainees on placements

- iii. draft minimum requirements for a new Trainee Record of Experience and topics for supplementary advice
- iv. draft changes to ARB's Registration Rules to implement the new PPE requirements, including a new position on the recency of experience gained.