# Board Paper

for Open session

Subject: Prescribed Examination

Board meeting:

14 October 2026

Agenda item:

8

Action:

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

## Purpose

This paper reports the outcome of the consultation on the revised Prescribed Examination and asks the Board to approve the final framework for implementation. This comprises amendments to Registration Rule 5, revised Eligibility Guidance and the Prescribed Examination Policy.

## Recommendations

The Board is asked to note the consultation report at **Annexe A** and approve:

(i) Registration Rule 5 relating to the Prescribed Examination **at Annexe B**.
(i) The final Eligibility Guidance at **Annexe C**.
(iii) The Prescribed Examination Policy at **Annexe D**.

## Annexes

Annexe A – Consultation Report
Annexe B - Registration Rule 5
Annexe C –Eligibility Guidance
Annexe D – Prescribed Examination Policy

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# 1. Open Session

# 2. Introduction and background

2.1. Section 4 of the Architects Act 1997 provides the statutory basis for entry to the Register. The principal route is through qualifications accredited by ARB, together with the required professional practical experience. The Act also provides for registration where a person can demonstrate an equivalent standard of competence and permits the Board to require a person applying on that basis to pass a prescribed examination in architecture.

2.2. ARB's wider approach to routes to registration is centred on the accreditation and prescription of qualifications delivered by Learning Providers. That will remain the main route to registration. It is supplemented, particularly for internationally qualified architects, by mutual recognition agreements and other arrangements which provide appropriate recognition of qualifications and competence obtained elsewhere.

2.3. The Prescribed Examination has a different and deliberately more limited purpose. It provides a residual route for individuals who may be capable of demonstrating the required academic outcomes, but who cannot access registration through prescribed qualifications or an applicable recognition arrangement. It ensures that potentially competent applicants are not excluded solely because of the route through which they obtained their education or qualification.

2.4. Individual examination of applicants is comparatively resource intensive and is not an efficient route to registration at scale for a professional regulator. ARB does not therefore intend the Prescribed Examination to become an alternative to the qualification-based system or to mutual recognition arrangements. Its purpose is to provide a proportionate route for the relatively small number of applicants who would otherwise have no appropriate means of demonstrating equivalent academic competence. We consequently continue to anticipate that demand for the examination will remain low.

2.5. The current Prescribed Examination is based on the former Part 1 and Part 2 criteria and is no longer aligned with ARB's outcomes-based framework for education and training. In July 2026 the Board approved a six-week consultation on amendments to the Registration Rules, draft Eligibility Guidance and draft Prescribed Examination Guidance for a revised examination assessing the Academic Outcomes.

2.6. The consultation has now concluded. The results support proceeding with the revised examination. They also identified areas where the proposed framework

should be adjusted or clarified before implementation, most significantly in relation to eligibility and the evidence applicants may provide at the Review stage. This paper therefore asks the Board to approve the final framework following consultation.

## 3. Consultation outcome

3.1. The consultation focused on the implementation of the revised Prescribed Examination, including the eligibility requirements, examination format, evidence requirements, online interview, feedback arrangements, proposed amendments to Registration Rule 5, and equality, fairness and accessibility.

3.2. There were 136 individual responses to the consultation.

3.3. Overall, respondents supported the principal elements of the proposed examination. Support was strongest for the proposed qualification discipline, examination structure and feedback arrangements. Views were more mixed on the proposed requirement for every applicant to hold a qualification equivalent to UK Level 7 (RQF), and on the clarity of the draft Eligibility Guidance.

3.4. The headline quantitative results were:

- 60% agreed that applicants should be required to hold a qualification equivalent to UK Level 7 (RQF), 7% neither agreed nor disagreed and 34% disagreed;
- 87% agreed that an applicant's qualification should be in architecture or a relevant discipline;
- 51% considered the draft Eligibility Guidance clear, 15% neither clear nor unclear and 33% unclear;
- 77% supported separating the Review and Interview stages;
- 72% supported the requirement for a self-assessment and 71% supported the requirement for a portfolio of evidence;
- 68% supported an online interview; and
- 95% supported providing written feedback to applicants who are unsuccessful at the Review or Interview stage.

3.5. The consultation therefore provides a clear basis for retaining the overall examination model. However, the response on eligibility was more finely balanced and the qualitative feedback identified a risk that a rigid Level 7 qualification requirement could exclude applicants from different educational systems who may nevertheless have a realistic prospect of demonstrating the Academic Outcomes. We have taken account of that feedback in the revised eligibility framework set out below.

## 4. Changes made following consultation

4.1. The core three-stage examination model remains unchanged. We nevertheless propose a number of changes and clarifications as a result of the consultation and further development work.

4.2. First, we propose to widen eligibility beyond applicants who hold a qualification equivalent to UK Level 7 (RQF) in architecture or a relevant discipline. The additional routes are intended to recognise applicants whose international educational and registration arrangements may not map neatly onto the UK qualification framework, while maintaining an appropriate threshold for access to the examination. The rationale for this change is set out in more detail below.

4.3. Secondly, the Eligibility Guidance will provide greater clarity about what may constitute a relevant discipline. The consultation included repeated requests for greater clarity in this area. The guidance will continue to use a non-exhaustive approach rather than attempting to prescribe a closed list of acceptable disciplines.

4.4. Thirdly, applicants will be able to provide a supporting evidence bundle in addition to their self-assessment and portfolio. Further work following consultation has shown that some applicants may not be able to demonstrate every Academic Outcome adequately through portfolio material alone. The supporting evidence bundle will allow additional relevant evidence to be provided where necessary.

4.5. Fourthly, the applicant guidance will make clearer that applicants should provide the most up-to-date evidence available to them. Older evidence should only be relied upon where more recent material does not demonstrate the relevant competency. This responds to concerns that some applicants may no longer have access to historic project material.

4.6. Finally, operational guidance and procedures will address issues raised about authenticity and the potential use of artificial intelligence, accessibility and reasonable adjustments. These matters do not require a change to the basic assessment model but require clear controls before the examination opens.

## 5. Eligibility framework

5.1. The purpose of the eligibility stage is to establish whether an applicant has a sufficient academic or professional foundation to have a realistic prospect of demonstrating the Academic Outcomes through the Prescribed Examination. It is not itself an assessment of whether the applicant has demonstrated those outcomes. That judgment is made through the Review and Interview stages.

5.2. We continue to consider a qualification equivalent to UK Level 7 (RQF) in architecture or a relevant discipline to be the appropriate principal eligibility route.

This received majority support in the consultation and provides a clear and objective threshold for most applicants.

5.3. However, the consultation highlighted that educational and registration systems in other countries do not always align directly with the UK qualification framework. The Prescribed Examination exists precisely to provide a route for potentially competent applicants who fall outside the normal prescribed qualification and recognition arrangements. Eligibility should therefore not be defined so narrowly that an applicant who may realistically be capable of demonstrating the Academic Outcomes is prevented from doing so solely because of the structure of the system in which they qualified.

5.4. We therefore propose that the revised eligibility framework should allow an applicant to apply where they meet one of the following routes:
(a) they hold a qualification equivalent to UK Level 7 (RQF) in architecture or a relevant discipline;
(b) they are registered (or eligible to be registered) as an architect in another country with which ARB does not have an applicable recognition agreement; or
(c) they hold an accredited UK Part 3 or Practice Outcomes qualification which is recognised by the awarding provider on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications as Level 7.

5.5. For all routes, the applicant will still need to satisfy the requirements set out in the Eligibility Guidance. Eligibility will not imply that the applicant has demonstrated the Academic Outcomes or that they will be successful in the examination.

5.6. The requirement that the relevant qualification or academic background should be in architecture or a relevant discipline will remain. The guidance will provide a non-exhaustive indication of disciplines, knowledge and subject areas that may be relevant, while making clear that applicants are responsible for considering whether their academic background has equipped them to develop and demonstrate the Academic Outcomes.

5.7. Professional experience was also raised by a significant minority of respondents, many of whom supported recognising experience as an alternative basis for eligibility. An unintended reference in the consultation draft of the Eligibility Guidance may have contributed to responses on this issue. Professional experience alone is not proposed as an eligibility route for the revised Prescribed Examination. The feedback will instead inform ARB's separate consideration of potential future routes to registration based on professional experience.

## 6. Final examination framework

6.1. The revised Prescribed Examination will assess whether an eligible applicant has demonstrated the Academic Outcomes to the standard required by ARB. It will not, by itself, confer entitlement to registration. Applicants who pass the Prescribed Examination will still need to pass a Practice Outcomes qualification.

6.2. The examination will consist of:
(i) an Application stage, to determine eligibility;
(ii) a Review stage, involving a review of their self-assessment, portfolio of evidence and, where required, a supporting evidence bundle against the Academic Outcomes; and
(iii) an online Interview stage, allowing examiners to explore and validate the applicant's evidence, understanding, judgment and professional insight.

6.3. Applicants will submit the material required for the Review stage alongside their eligibility application. Applicants will progress to Interview only where the Review confirms that they have demonstrated sufficient outcomes to proceed. This staged structure prevents applicants from undertaking and paying for a later stage where they have not successfully completed the earlier assessment.

6.4. The Review and Interview will be undertaken by two examiners. Written feedback will be provided to applicants who are unsuccessful at either stage, identifying the outcomes requiring further development or evidence before a resit.

6.5. Interviews will continue to be conducted online and recorded. This is the most proportionate way of managing examiner and applicant time and cost and will also support quality assurance and any subsequent procedural review. Appropriate controls will be developed to address authenticity, plagiarism and the use of AI.

## 7. Registration Rules

7.1. The final amendments to Registration Rule 5 are at **Annexe B**. The Rules provide the legal framework for the revised examination while retaining sufficient flexibility for ARB to operate and refine the detailed assessment process without repeated rule changes.

7.2. Ten respondents provided comments or suggestions on the draft Rules. The suggestions included requests for additional detail, changes to specific wording, explicit inclusion of eligibility criteria, publication of examination criteria and greater transparency about examiners.

7.3. We do not propose to include detailed eligibility criteria, the examination format or information about individual examiners in the Rules. Those matters are better set out in policy, guidance and published operational material. Hard-wiring them into

the Rules would reduce ARB's ability to make proportionate operational changes and could require further rule amendments and consultation for changes that do not alter the underlying regulatory framework.

7.4. We do however propose to amend Rule 5.11 so that the Registrar's initial consideration is limited to whether an application falls within the permitted grounds for procedural review. We consider this clearer and fairer than requiring the Registrar at that stage to assess whether the alleged procedural failing had a reasonable prospect of affecting the outcome, which is more appropriately considered as part of the substantive review.

## 8. Prescribed Examination Policy

8.1. The final Prescribed Examination Policy is at **Annexe D**. It sets the policy framework within which the examination will operate, including the assessment stages, evidence requirements, examination outcomes, resits, feedback, authenticity and procedural review.

8.2. The consultation supported retaining the self-assessment, portfolio, separate Review and Interview stages, online interview and written feedback. These elements therefore remain part of the final model.

8.3. The main change to the evidence model is the addition of a supporting evidence bundle where an applicant cannot adequately demonstrate an Academic Outcome through portfolio material alone. This provides greater flexibility without reducing the standard applicants are required to demonstrate.

8.4. Examiner training, calibration, moderation and quality assurance arrangements will be used to support consistent decision-making under the two-examiner model.

8.5. The procedural review mechanism will provide a safeguard against procedural impropriety, manifest unfairness or public law unreasonableness. It will not provide a route to re-open the academic or professional judgment of examiners simply because an applicant disagrees with the outcome.

## 9. Fees

9.1. The revised model is intended to be more proportionate and cost-effective than the current Prescribed Examination. The staged structure also allows costs to be aligned more closely with the stages an applicant actually undertakes. Unlike the previous examination, candidates will only pay for the stage of the examination that they undertake.

9.2. Detailed costing will be completed as part of implementation. A proposed fee structure will therefore be brought to the Board for approval at a future meeting. At this stage, we do not anticipate proposing an overall fee higher than the fee charged for the existing Prescribed Examination.

9.3. The fee proposal will balance appropriate recovery of the costs of providing an individual examination route with the need to avoid creating an unnecessary financial barrier for eligible applicants.

## 10. Implementation

10.1. The final examinations under the current Prescribed Examination model will conclude in November 2026. ARB contacted all relevant existing and potential known candidates to explain that no further examination window will be run under the current model after that point.

10.2. There remains a significant amount of operational work to complete before the revised examination can open. This includes:

- preparing and publishing detailed applicant and operational guidance, including guidance on self-assessment, portfolio and supporting evidence;
- developing standard operating procedures and internal quality assurance arrangements;
- developing and testing the necessary CRM systems and workflows;
- training examiners;
- finalising controls and guidance on authenticity, plagiarism and the use of AI;
- putting in place arrangements for reasonable adjustments, moderation, record-keeping and procedural reviews; and
- finalising the fee and payment arrangements, subject to further Board approval.

10.3. Applications for the revised Prescribed Examination are expected to open in early 2027. Subject to completion of the implementation work and sufficient eligible applications, the first examinations are anticipated to take place in March 2027.

10.4. Further operational guidance will be published before applications open. It will explain the practical requirements of the examination in more detail but will sit within the Rules, Eligibility Guidance and Prescribed Examination Policy approved by the Board.

10.5. We will measure the impact of the new examination after 12 months and report findings to the Board.

## 11. Equality and Diversity implications

11.1. The consultation specifically asked about impacts arising from protected characteristics and from different educational or professional backgrounds. Four respondents (3%) identified a potential negative impact on people with protected characteristics, and 21 respondents (15%) identified a potential negative impact associated with different educational or professional backgrounds.

11.2. Specific issues raised included applicants whose first language is not English, applicants with conditions such as dyslexia which may affect written work, the financial impact of the process, access to evidence for the Review stage and the effect of the Level 7 eligibility requirement on people educated in different systems. Conversely, some respondents considered the proposals would widen access for people with protected characteristics or from different educational and professional backgrounds.

11.3. The consultation does not identify evidence requiring a fundamental change to the assessment model. The widened eligibility framework directly addresses the principal concern about applicants from educational systems which do not map readily onto UK Level 7. Other accessibility issues will be addressed through reasonable adjustment arrangements, applicant guidance and operational procedures.

11.4. Overall, the equality impact assessment will report that the proposed changes will have a positive effect on increasing access to the Register, as a result of fairer examination methodology and transparent costing.

## 12. Risks and mitigations

12.1. Demand for the revised examination remains uncertain. The widened eligibility framework may create an initial increase in applications. However, the Prescribed Examination remains a residual route within the wider registration framework, and the development of new qualifications and mutual recognition arrangements is expected to limit the number of people for whom it is the most appropriate route. ARB will monitor demand and review the delivery model if volumes are materially higher than anticipated.

12.2. Widening eligibility creates a risk that more applicants enter the process without an academic background sufficient to demonstrate the Academic Outcomes. This is mitigated by the eligibility evidence requirements, clear applicant guidance and the fact that eligibility does not lower or alter the Academic Outcomes assessed through the examination.

12.3. There is a risk of inconsistent assessment between examiners, particularly under a two-examiner model. This will be mitigated through examiner selection and training, moderation, clear assessment material and ongoing quality assurance.

12.4. There is a risk that applicants may use AI or other means to misrepresent authorship of evidence. This will be mitigated through evidence requirements, authenticity checks, the Interview stage and specific operational guidance for applicants and examiners.

12.5. There is a risk that unsuccessful applicants may seek to use the procedural review process to challenge legitimate academic or professional judgment. The Rules and Policy mitigate this by limiting the grounds of review and making clear that the process is not an appeal against the merits of the examiners' decision.

12.6. Implementation requires coordinated delivery of guidance, systems, procedures and examiner training. Delays in any of these areas could affect the proposed March 2027 examination window. Applications will open only when ARB is satisfied that the necessary arrangements are in place.

## 13. Communications

13.1. Following Board approval, ARB will publish the consultation outcome and the final Rules, Eligibility Guidance and Prescribed Examination Policy. Communications will explain the role of the examination within the wider routes to registration and make clear that it is intended as a residual route for applicants who cannot access registration through prescribed qualifications or applicable recognition arrangements.

13.2. Communications will also explain the widened eligibility framework, the staged nature of the examination and the evidence applicants will be expected to provide. They will make clear that passing the Prescribed Examination demonstrates the required Academic Outcomes but does not, by itself, confer entitlement to registration.

## 14. Recommendation

The Board is asked to note the consultation report at **Annexe A** and approve:

(i) Registration Rule 5 relating to the Prescribed Examination **at Annexe B**.
(ii) The final Eligibility Guidance at **Annexe C**.
(iii) The Prescribed Examination Policy at **Annexe D**.