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National Standard of Competency for Architects.

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National Standard of Competency for Architects

Introduction

The National Standard of Competency for Architects establishes the standard for architectural education and assessment of professional competency prior to registration as an architect in Australia.

The Standard describes what is reasonably expected of a person who can demonstrate the standard of skill, care and diligence widely accepted in Australia as a competent professional Architectural practitioner.

The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) has maintained Standards for the purpose of assessment processes for registration as an architect in Australia previously known as the National Competency Standards in Architecture, since 1990, in collaboration with the architectural sector and Australian state and territory Architects registration boards.

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The National Standard of Competency for Architects and competency based assessment

Competency-based assessment is an approach to establishing occupationally relevant standards of professional practice. Competency standards are occupational functions (expressed as Performance Criteria) that a candidate should be able to perform effectively in an ordinary work environment. The National Standard of Competency for Architects sets out functions important to the profession of architecture, rather than simply measuring knowledge in isolation from skills, or time spent in formal education.

The Standard is not a form of assessment in itself but a framework to be used by those authorised to assess the professional standards of Architects. The Standard describes the skill and knowledge to be demonstrated it is the various assessment processes conducted by the AACA. Assessing the level of competency should reflect community and professional expectations for an Architect.

The Standard is used in the processes that lead to the registration of Architects including:

— Accreditation of architectural courses (Australia and New Zealand Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure)

— Assessment of overseas qualifications in Architecture (Overseas Qualifications Assessment)

— Assessment of appropriate practical experience for entry to the Architectural Practice Examination (National Program of Recognition)

— Examinations for registration (Architectural Practice Examination)

— Special programs that assess knowledge and skills appropriate for registration (Overseas Registered Architects)

The various purposes of assessment may require the demonstration of all or part of the Elements and Performance Criteria described in the Standard.

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The context of the assessment processes is generally to the level of a 'Complex Project', even though not all architectural projects follow this format, or even result in a built outcome. A Complex Project is typically one of medium scale or larger, that requires the skill and knowledge to deliver the integration and resolution of complicated aspects including (but not limited to): siting, planning, structure, services, materials, composition and configuration.

Format of the National Standard of Competency for Architects

The Standard consists of 4 broad Units of Competency covering Design, Documentation, Project Delivery and Practice Management. 9 key Elements of practice are supported by seventy Performance Criteria. Underpinning all the Units are 5 Knowledge Domains constituting the broad base of understanding that underpins the complex profession of architecture.

The practice of architecture is a complex endeavour with a wide variety of skills and knowledge expected of an Architect. The demonstrable capacity to undertake the full range of tasks reasonably required of an Architect is the benchmark for the National Standard of Competency for Architects. The Standard does not prioritise any Unit, Element or Performance Criteria: each has equal weight and all Performance Criteria must be demonstrated to meet the Standard.

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The Standard has been organised into an Integrated Framework for ease of reference for users in recognition that the path to acquiring competency or completing registration is not necessarily linear or singular. It recognises that there are multiple possible pathways and gateways to registration as an Architect in Australia as well as the fact that the boundaries between education and professional practice are irregular and overlapping.

The Integrated Framework illustrates where there is overlap or reiteration of criteria across the processes on the road to registration because some aspects of architecture require learning in the realms of both university and practice, albeit in different ways and at different levels.

The Integrated Framework both links and differentiates between formal architectural education and graduate learning development of competency. The Integrated Framework shows the applicability of the Standard's components to the various processes of accreditation and assessment managed by the AACA. It illustrates the full list of Elements and Performance Criteria alongside the Knowledge Domains, enabling users to see at a glance the relationships between the components.

It does this by specifying where Performance Criteria need to be demonstrated either in terms of knowledge acquisition **K**, skills **S** or application of the knowledge and skills in architectural practice **A**. Notably, all Performance Criteria are required at the **A** level in the Architectural Practice Examination.

To facilitate use of the Standard, it is published in on-line format. Users are able to view the Standard in its entirety or to select an abridged version to suit a particular purpose. Unlike other countries that often have separate documents for the different stages of architectural education, experience and registration, the Standard has always existed as a single document.

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Major Changes since 2008 Standard

This edition of the National Standard of Competency for Architects differs from previous versions of the Standard in three main ways. First is the structural change in the organisation of the components; second is the reduction in the number of performance criteria against which competency is demonstrated and evaluated; and third is the development of a broad overarching framework that explicitly articulates the major domains in which architectural knowledge, skill and agency is to be learned, practiced and assessed.

Major goals for this edition compared to previous versions were to simplify and clarify the document structure and language, as well as update and streamline the Performance Criteria statements, eliminating repetition and redundancy but also adding new emphasis in areas that were previously not sufficiently recognised or which have in recent years acquired greater prominence in practice.

Main structural changes in this edition include the deletion of the former 'Context' layer; the reduction in number of 'Elements' (42 to 9); and the reduction in number of 'Performance Criteria' (149 to 70). The number of 'Units' has remained constant (4), but with a renaming of Unit 3 (formerly Project Management) as 'Project Delivery' to more clearly express the activities undertaken by Architects in this regard and avoid confusion with the roles of non-architect Project Managers.

The 9 Elements represent a set of discrete aspects of architectural practice, all of which are integral to the conception, delivery and management of architectural projects as well as to the wider creative and professional endeavours of Architects. The naming and ordering of the Elements does not presuppose a particular mode of practice, nor a particular sequence in which the aspects (in part or as a whole) occur. Architectural practice is increasingly characterised by diversity in practice structures, project types, procurement methods and contractual arrangements. However, the Elements represent those aspects of practice in which an architect, in order to demonstrate competency and achieve registration, must possess knowledge and skill. As with the previous versions of the Standard, where concerned with the specifics of project delivery, competency must be demonstrated in relation to a 'complex project'.

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Under the previous editions of the Standard, the APE Part 1 logbook procedures specified a set of Elements in which candidates were required to obtain minimum numbers of hours of experience at various levels in order to be eligible to sit Parts 2 and 3 of the APE. As a result of the review, the former seven Elements (which encompassed 22 Performance Criteria) are now 15 (different) Performance Criteria spread across eight Elements.

The Knowledge Domains represent a new organisational layer that is intended to provide a more comprehensive picture of competency in architecture and, at the same time, offer a degree of flexibility in the ways that knowledge and skills are provided by educators, evaluated during course accreditation, and examined by assessors. Knowledge Domains are all generally relevant ('necessary') to the demonstration of competency in relation to each Performance Criterion, but one or more Domains are highlighted as particularly pertinent ('critical') to a Performance Criterion. On the surface, it may appear that the applicability of one Performance Criterion to more than one Knowledge Domain could considerably multiply the number of criteria to be taught and assessed. However, the Standard emphasises that education and assessment should highlight the multiple areas and impacts of professional architectural activity such that a single Performance Criterion will often require learning, demonstration and examination from more than one angle.

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AACA Assessment Processes

Australia New Zealand Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure

The AACA, jointly with the Australian Institute of Architects, maintains the Australia New Zealand Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure (ANZAPAP) that facilitates accreditation by each State and Territory Architects Registration Board of programs of study offered in its jurisdiction. ANZAPAP involves a review of architecture schools offering accredited degrees at least every 5 years by an expert panel, which makes a recommendation to the relevant Board.

A 5 year course of post-secondary study followed by approximately 2 years professional experience (3,300 hours) is the usual pre-requisite to the Architectural Practice Examination (APE) leading to registration in Australia. This typically takes the form of a 3 year bachelor degree followed by an accredited 2 year Master of Architecture (MArch) degree, although other structures that are deemed equivalent are also recognised.

To be eligible for accreditation, schools of architecture must provide evidence that the specified performance criteria from the National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA) are integrated within the curriculum and appropriately assessed in student work. The scope of performance criteria includes most of the performance criteria from the Design Unit of Competency and selected performance criteria from the Documentation, Project Delivery and Practice Management Units of Competency as set out below. These competencies reflect the fundamental abilities expected of a graduate from an accredited program of study.

2. Overseas Qualification Assessment

The AACA's Overseas Qualifications Assessment (OQA) process assesses overseas academic qualifications for migration and registration purposes. Overseas academic qualifications in architecture must be assessed to determine comparability with a currently accredited Australian qualification in architecture before a candidate can undertake the Architectural Practice Examination (APE) leading to registration.

The Overseas Qualifications Assessment (OQA) is conducted in two stages:

— **Stage 1 - Provisional Assessment of academic qualifications in architecture which is a desk-based assessment.**

and

— **Stage 2 - Final Assessment and a Verification of an Overseas Qualification, which involves an interview to examine in detail the content of the course leading to an applicant's qualification(s) and a portfolio of the applicant's student and/or professional work.**

Successful Stage 2 OQA Applicants are eligible to undertake the APE before applying to a State or Territory registration board to become registered as an architect. The OQA does not provide an Australian qualification; its purpose is to grant access to the APE process and/or meet the documentary requirements of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

OQA applicants are assessed against relevant components of the National Standard of Competency for Architects, being the same competencies that apply to an Australian accredited qualification in architecture. This includes most of the performance criteria from the Design Unit of Competency and selected performance criteria from the Documentation, Project Delivery and Practice Management Units of Competency. These competencies reflect the fundamental abilities expected of a graduate from an accredited program of study.

3. National Program of Assessment

The National Program of Assessment (NPRA) is a competency based assessment which provides a pathway to the Architectural Practice Examination (APE) for those who have substantial skills and experience in the architectural profession but do not have an accredited qualification in architecture or overseas equivalent. The NPRA does not provide a qualification; its sole purpose is to grant access to the APE process.

NPRA applicants are assessed against relevant components of the National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA). This includes most of the performance criteria from the Design Unit of Competency and selected performance criteria from the Documentation, Project Delivery and Practice Management Units of Competency. These competencies reflect the fundamental abilities expected of a graduate from an accredited program of study.

The NPRA is an 'assessment by project' which is design focused and assesses applicants' abilities to respond to a complex client brief provided by the AACA. Applicants must communicate a design response to that brief and present an architectural project they have conceived and developed on their own.

Successful NPRA Applicants are eligible to undertake the APE before applying to a State or Territory registration board to become registered as an architect.

4. Architectural Practice Examination

The AACA Architectural Practice Examination (APE) is a nationally consistent competency based assessment process. All candidates seeking registration as an architect in Australia are required to successfully complete the APE (unless exempted through an eligible overseas registration).

The APE has been developed and is maintained by the AACA. It has been adopted by all Australian state and territory architects registration boards as the national examination in Architectural Practice. The purpose of the APE is to ensure that persons applying to be admitted to a Register of Architects have an adequate knowledge and understanding of the practice of architecture in Australia and a capacity to exercise professional skill.

APE candidates are assessed against relevant components of the National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA), including applicable Knowledge Domains. This includes some of the performance criteria from the Design Unit of Competency and all performance criteria from the Documentation, Project Delivery and Practice Management Units of Competency.

These competencies reflect the breadth of abilities expected of an architect in independent practice. Some design competencies are not tested as they are covered in the accredited architectural programs.

The APE is a three part process (all three parts of which must be completed sequentially), including completion of a logbook, a written paper and an interview with architect practitioners. Candidates who have satisfactorily met the requirements of all three parts of the APE may apply for registration to the Architects Registration Board in any state or territory.

5. Assessment of Overseas Registered Architects

For experienced architects from selected countries, Australia's participation in the APEC Architect Program offers a 'fast track' to registration for architects with at least seven years post-registration experience in their home jurisdiction. Reciprocal rights are in turn available to experienced Australian-registered architects.

Currently APEC Architect mutual recognition arrangements have been reached with Japan, Singapore and Canada. Suitably experienced architects from these countries need only go through a short Supplementary Assessment Process by interview in order to obtain registration in any Australian jurisdiction.

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Definitions

Units of Competency

The activities involved in the practice of architecture are broadly categorised by the National Standard of Competency for Architects into four units.

1. Design – an activity involving iterative explorations and appraisals of a range of ideas and concepts, leading towards the development of coherent proposals for a project.

The design process extends from the evaluation of project viability to the conceptual and schematic resolution of a project in response to client, user and public requirements. The design process for a project is informed by appropriate social and environmental considerations of the architect. Although separately listed for convenience, the sequence of design phases indicated through the Elements of Competency and Performance Criteria is not necessarily linear but often comprises overlap, repetition and reiteration.

2. Documentation – the process of resolving, detailing and communicating an architectural project through all project stages. The modes of documentation include modelling, drawings, specifications and schedules that can be used in the construction, contract management and handover of the project.

Documentation material must be consistent with design objectives and budgetary constraints, and must conform to relevant codes and industry standards. Where supplied by consultants, documentation compliance must be verified.

3. Project Delivery – the proficient, timely and cost-effective completion of an architectural project through all design and construction phases. Project Delivery must take into account the range of contractual obligations carried by architects, clients, consultants and contractors.

Project Delivery involves the evaluation and implementation of procurement systems as well as appropriate contractual administration systems. The establishment and operation of project teams as well as formalising of project agreements (such as with client, team/s and contractor) is critical to competent project delivery.

4. Practice Management – the holistic understanding and organisation of the business and profession of architecture in relation to delivering projects.

It involves the knowledge and execution of the processes involved in providing architectural services; the knowledge and implementation of appropriate systems to establish and maintain an architectural practice; and the knowledge and enactment of the broad range of ethical and legal obligations required of a Professional Practitioner.

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Knowledge Domains

The core areas of knowledge that underpin architectural practice are referred to in the National Standard of Competency for Architects as Knowledge Domains, and are relevant in demonstrating competency across all Performance Criteria. One or more of each of the Knowledge Domains has specific application to each performance criterion in each relevant AACA process, and so is labelled as a 'critical' (as opposed to 'necessary') in the Standard's Integrated Framework.

Architects provide services that require knowledge, judgement and the execution of skill in response to contexts and questions that are disciplinary, regulatory, social and ethical, and environmental in scope. The Knowledge Domains identified in the Standard provide the broad framework within which the everyday practice as well as the overarching professional context of architecture can be taught, understood and evaluated. It is the intention that the Knowledge Domains will on the one hand offer effective ways to educate students and graduates in the various facets of professional proficiency that will be expected of them to become registered as an architect. On the other hand the Knowledge Domains will facilitate the exploration by AACA assessors of the level of knowledge and experience possessed by a candidate.

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Regulatory Domain	Knowledge of the regulations, standards and codes, relevant to all aspects of architectural practice, project design and delivery.
Social & Ethical Domain	Knowledge of the social, ethical and cultural values relevant to architectural practice and the impacts on project users and broader communities.
Sustainable Environment Domain	Understanding of the responsibility of architects to minimise the impact on natural resources and design for longevity.
Disciplinary Domain	Knowledge of histories and theories relevant to architecture, practice, building and technologies.
Communication Domain	Knowledge of appropriate verbal, written and visual means to communicate relevant aspects of architecture.

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