THE NATIONAL STANDARD OF COMPETENCY FOR ARCHITECTS

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Bibliography

First Edition published 1993
Updated Version published September 2001
Second Edition published 2008
Third Edition published 2015

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1. Introduction

Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA)

The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) is the national body formed by the state and territory architects registration boards to consider matters of common concern or interest. It is formally constituted as a company limited by guarantee.

The main objectives of the AACA are to facilitate the recognition, accreditation and co-ordination of acceptable academic standards and registration practices in the interests of national and international professional reciprocity in architecture.

AACA has developed the National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA). This is primarily created to determine the benchmark standard of competency required for registration as an Architect in Australia.

AACA is not a registration authority. The decision to register applicants is the sole prerogative of the state and territory architect registration boards.

Registration as an Architect in Australia

In Australia the use of the title Architect is reserved by law for those who are registered by the state and territory architect registration boards.

The purpose of registration is to serve the public interest by ensuring that those who can describe themselves as Architects have met the specified standard of competency and that this standard reflects professional and community expectations.

To achieve registration an Architect must be competent in the design, documentation and management of architectural projects. The Architect must also be competent in design resolution, integration of technology and procurement of complex architectural projects in a range of practice models. An Architect will have exposure to a range of building types of varying size and complexity.

The pathways to registration as an Architect are common in all Australian states and territories, and there are provisions for mutual recognition between the states, territories and New Zealand.

Typically, an Architect will have an accredited qualification in architecture or a recognised equivalent.

The final step in the pathway to registration requires all applicants to complete the AACA Architectural Practice Examination (APE).

What are competency standards?

AACA was engaged by the Commonwealth Government in 1990 to develop the National Competency Standards in Architecture (The 2014 revision is named the National Standard of Competency for Architects).

In general, competency based assessment is an approach to establishing occupationally relevant standards of professional practice. The emphasis is on demonstrated competence in the attributes important to an occupation or profession, rather than measuring knowledge in isolation from skills, or on measuring the time that has been spent in formal professional or academic education.

The National Standard of Competency for Architects *(NSCA)*

This document describes the standard of competency that shall be met for Registration as an Architect. This document presents a benchmark which must be achieved through the demonstration of the described Elements through Performance Criteria that make up this Standard.

The practice of architecture is acknowledged as a complex endeavour with a wide variety of skill and knowledge expected of an Architect. The demonstrable capacity to undertake the full range of tasks reasonably required of an architect is the benchmark standard of competency. The framework of this standard is embodied in the NSCA. The NSCA does not prioritise any Element or Performance Criteria, all have equal weight and all must be demonstrated to meet the standard.

The NSCA is an aid in the assessment processes that determine the level of skill, knowledge and experience required for practice as an Architect. The NSCA is not a form of assessment but is a tool to be employed by those authorised in assessment of professional standards for an Architect.

The NSCA is currently used as a tool in the processes that lead to the registration of Architects including:

- Accreditation of architectural courses
- Assessment of qualifications in architecture
- Assessment of appropriate practical experience
- Examinations for registration
- Special programs that assess knowledge and skills appropriate for registration

The various purposes of assessment may require the demonstration of all or part of the Elements and Performance Criteria described in the NSCA. The document - NSCA Integrated Framework - outlines the portions of the NSCA relevant to AACA processes.

The NSCA may also be used for other purposes involving an assessment of the competency for an Architect outside the responsibility of the AACA.

The Professional Practitioner

The NSCA 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.

Level of Competency

The NSCA provides a framework from which the standard of competency can be assessed. While the NSCA describes the skill and knowledge to be demonstrated it is the various assessment processes that determine the level of skill and knowledge required for this demonstration. The assessment of the level of competency should reflect community and professional expectations for an Architect.

While the various assessment processes will determine the relevant level of competency the NSCA offers a description of a 'Complex Project' as a model against which a demonstration of the Performance Criteria can be applied. The model of 'Complex Project' would entail the integration by an Architect of expertise and knowledge to ensure a successful completion of all architectural phases from client engagement and briefing through to administration of the contract and post-completion evaluation. As a guide a 'Complex Project' would typically be a medium-scaled or larger project that requires the skill and knowledge to deliver the resolution and integration of complicated aspects including but not limited to; siting, planning, structure, services, materials, composition and configuration. It is understood that not all architectural projects follow this format nor even lead to a built outcome but the level of competency required for an architect should be tested against this degree of complexity.

Current Edition

The NSCA is reviewed on a five yearly cycle to ensure that it reflects significant changes in the context of architectural practice in Australia. The current document is a product of this cyclical review.

This document will replace the 2008 edition of the NCSA

The 2013-14 review was undertaken by a committee of architect practitioners, academics and administrators. Input has been received from architects registration boards, professional bodies, schools of architecture, practitioners and academics and other relevant stakeholders.

In this revised document there is recognition of the diversity of practice models that have evolved since the creation of the NSCA. To the extent that it is possible to do so, the editors have tried to eliminate any preconception of a single practice model.

Format.

The framework of the NSCA is to be seen as an integrated whole. The order and grouping of Units and Elements of Competency are a convenient means for organising the criteria required to demonstrate the standard. In this regard the framework is not intended to represent a closed sequence of architectural activities, although some activities are dependent on pre-requisite activities. Rather, the arrangement of criteria outlines the framework for Competency and is not a default project description.

Units

Units are a group of activities within the practice of architecture. The four Units are:

1. **Design**

   Design is 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 and Performance Criteria is not necessarily linear but often comprises overlap, repetition and reiteration.

2. **Documentation**

   Documentation is 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.

   Material prepared for documentation 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**

   Project Delivery requires the proficient, timely and cost effective completion of an architectural project through all design and construction and 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 management.

4. **Practice Management**

   Practice Management refers to the holistic understanding and organisation of the business and profession of architecture in relation to delivering a project. It involves the knowledge and execution of the processes involved in the provision of 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.

Elements of Competency
The Standard outlined in this document is described through a series of Elements which are collected under each of the four Units. The Elements are positioned to reflect stages against which architectural activities generally occur. These Elements present aspects of architectural practice that must be demonstrated as part of meeting the Standard of Competency. This compliance is described through demonstration the related series of Performance Criteria.

Performance Criteria
These are statements that specify the performance required to demonstrate the Element of Competency. The Performance Criteria are to be seen as both individual criteria and as an incorporated whole. All are required to be achieved for the demonstration of the Element of Competency. All criteria have equal standing.

Knowledge Domains
Knowledge Domains describe the range of knowledge and underlying skills which are to be considered when assessing whether a Performance Criterion has been achieved.

All the Knowledge Domains are generally relevant to achieving the Standard of Competency and should be seen as the knowledge background required in undertaking architectural practice. The Knowledge Domains are presented in a graphic Matrix set against the Performance Criteria. While all of the Domains, as a collective of underlying knowledge, should be considered when determining whether a Performance Criteria has been met the Matrix gives priority to those Domains with specific application to particular Performance Criteria. Typically numerous Knowledge Domains would be relevant an individual criterion.

The Knowledge Domains are:

Regulatory Domain
Social & Ethical Domain
Sustainable Environment Domain
Disciplinary Culture Domain
Communication Domain

Detailed description of the Knowledge Domains

Regulatory Domain	*The regulations, standards and codes, relevant to all aspects of architectural practice, project design and project delivery are understood, addressed and applied as required.*
Social & Ethical Domain	*Relevant social, ethical and cultural values are understood and incorporated.* *Impacts on project users and broader communities are understood and addressed.*
Sustainable Environment Domain	*Understanding of the responsibility of architects to minimise the impact on natural resources.*
Disciplinary Domain	*Application of the knowledge of relevant histories and theories of; architecture, architectural practice, and building and technologies.*
Communication Domain	*Relevant aspects of architectural practice are clearly communicated through verbal, written and visual means as required.*

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2. Guide to Terms

The following key terms are used in this edition of the NSCA.

Standard of Competency	The ability to perform activities within the profession of architecture to the standard expected upon registration.
Unit	The four Units of Competency are Design, Documentation, Project Delivery and Practice Management. Each Unit comprises Elements that are sufficiently related to each other to be considered as a block of connected activities.
Elements	These are discrete activities that together describe the Standard of Competency for an architect.
Performance Criteria	These are evaluative statements, which specify the performance required to demonstrate, through the Elements, a Standard of Competency.
Knowledge Domains	'Knowledge Domains' describe the range of knowledge and underlying skills which are to be considered when assessing whether a Performance Criterion has been achieved. All of the Knowledge Domains are generally relevant to achieving the Standard of Competency and should be seen as the background required to engage in architectural practice
Professional Practitioner	A 'Professional Practitioner' is one who can demonstrate ~~to~~ the standard of skill, care and diligence widely accepted in Australia as competent professional architectural practice.
Complex Project	A 'Complex Project' would typically be a medium-scaled or larger project that requires the skill and knowledge to deliver the resolution and integration of complicated aspects including but not limited to; siting, planning, structure, services, materials, composition and configuration.