

Terms of Reference: Review of accreditation of architectural education in Australia September 2015

Summary

To address a number of emerging issues, a review of the accreditation of architectural education programs in Australia will be undertaken jointly by the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACAA) and the Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) as owners of the Australia and New Zealand Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure (ANZAPAP).

This paper provides background and terms of reference for the proposed review.

The review will include but not be limited to the Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure document, and will also include the governance and resourcing of accreditation, and the relationship of accreditation systems to other documents such as the new National Standard of Competency for Architects and the Institute's published policy documents. It will be undertaken in close consultation with the Association of Architecture Schools of Australasia (AASA) and the Australian Deans of Built Environment and Design (ADBED).

Architectural education in Australia

In line with international standards, Australia requires a five year course of post-secondary study as one pre-requisite for architectural registration. In Australian universities, this takes the form of a three year bachelor degree followed by an accredited two year Master of Architecture (MArch) degree program. The AACAA, jointly with the Institute, maintains the Australia New Zealand Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure (ANZAPAP) that makes recommendations on accreditation to State and Territory Architects Registration Boards regarding programmes offered in their respective jurisdictions.

There are 18 Australian universities that currently offer accredited MArch degrees:

Bond University	University of Melbourne
Curtin University	University of Newcastle
Deakin University	University of New South Wales
Griffith University	University of Queensland
Monash University	University of South Australia
Qld University of Technology	University of Sydney
RMIT University	University of Tasmania
University of Adelaide	University of Technology Sydney
University of Canberra	University of Western Australia

There are three New Zealand universities that currently offer accredited MArch degrees:

University of Auckland	Victoria University of Wellington
UNITEC Institute of Technology, Wellington	

The initial bachelor degree is not accredited in Australia and New Zealand, as it is in some other countries, however each university specifies a 'benchmark academic pathway' through which the majority of students are expected to come. This is a degree such as a Bachelor of Design (Architecture) which provides a foundation in architectural studies. In some cases, a significant proportion of the pathway qualification may be in common with broader design and/or built environment courses of study. Students with successful performance in the pathway bachelor degree are generally guaranteed admission to the accredited master's program, while students with other initial degrees are admitted on a case-by-case basis.

Australia's architecture schools recorded 1106 graduates from accredited Masters programs in 2013, compared with 869 graduates from 2008.¹ Overall, architecture schools enrolled 8909 equivalent full time students in bachelor and masters level architectural study in 2013 (including approximately 30% overseas students), collectively bringing over \$200 million to the university sector.² According to Department of Education and Training data, there were also around 300 higher degree by research (PhD and MPhil) students studying architecture-related topics in 2013, however these degrees are not considered for accreditation and registration purposes.³

The five year course of study for architects on a professional registration pathway is generally divided into seven areas of study:

- ✦ design and documentation (up to 50 per cent of total study);
- ✦ architectural theory and history;
- ✦ building technology, including materials, systems and structures;
- ✦ communication, visual representation and information technology;
- ✦ professional practice and project management;
- ✦ the built environment, including urban planning and sustainability; and
- ✦ elective studies.

The only detailed study of architectural education in Australia was published in 2008 by Michael Ostwald and Anthony Williams with support from the Australian Teaching and Learning Council.⁴ The report found there were around 300 full time academic staff in Australian architecture schools (76 per cent male). This number had been gradually falling since the 1990s and may have fallen further. According to Ostwald and Williams, academic staff divided their time between 40 per cent teaching, 27 per cent research, 23 per cent administration and 10 per cent other activities.⁵ The student:staff ratio of around 25:1 could be considered high for a professional field of study. Many academic staff felt challenged by the pressure from university management to be more research active, while still maintaining high teaching and administration loads. An additional challenge was the aspiration that architecture academics retain a connection to professional practice, with 56 per cent no longer practising and nearly half of these having last practised over a decade ago.⁶

¹ Australian Institute of Architects, *Architecture Schools of Australasia Handbook*, 2014.

² Based on a 70/30 split of domestic and international students, a funding amount of \$18,400 per domestic (CSP) students, and a typical annual fee of \$28,000 for an international student.

³ Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, *Higher Education Statistics: Students*, 2013.

⁴ Michael J. Ostwald and Anthony Williams, *Understanding Architectural Education in Australia*, Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2008.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

In terms of curriculum, Ostwald and Williams found that that the tight requirements around course accreditation had led to a 'de-facto national curriculum'. This maintained national standards, but created a somewhat homogenised student experience.⁷ An area where there is significant variation among universities is the treatment of electives and general education ('breadth') subjects, with some degrees having very limited options outside the architecture school and others actively encouraging or requiring students to take external courses. External subjects may be from other design-related areas (e.g. interior design or landscape architecture) or in unrelated science, social science or humanities fields.

Only a proportion of those who study architecture go on to be architects. The number of people completing a second stage (two year MArch degree) was around two thirds of the number of completions for the first stage three year bachelor degree in 2013.⁸ In turn, the number of people obtaining registration for the first time on the basis of an Australian qualification was around half the number of people completing an MArch degree. It is noteworthy that women comprising only 21 per cent of registered architects and 14 per cent of practice partners, despite being nearly half the quantum of graduates.⁹ There are also notably low numbers of architects in rural areas of Australia. Partly this results from there being no architectural schools outside of major centres, and fewer than 10 per cent of MArch students coming from regional areas.¹⁰

The ANZAPAP system

ANZAPAP is jointly owned by the AACA and the Institute and is run in partnership with the Architects Registration Boards in each state/territory in Australia. ANZAPAP is a well-established formal accreditation system for university architecture programs established in the early 1990s. The current version dates from December 2013.

ANZAPAP's joint ownership provides buy-in from both the profession and regulators. While independent of universities, it also operates in consultation with the schools of architecture and their representative bodies AASA and ADBED. In 2006, the AACA and the Institute granted the New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB) and the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) a licence to use ANZAPAP in New Zealand.

Secretariat to the ANZAPAP is currently provided through the Institute's National Education Unit. A Steering Committee comprising two members each from the AACA and the Institute provides advice on procedural matters, who in turn report to the Boards of those two organisations. Unlike some counterpart countries, there is no independent body to coordinate the accreditation process.

In addition to facilitating ANZAPAP, the Institute's National Education Unit is responsible for overseeing the Institute's Education and Research Policies, supporting the Institute's National Education Committee, and providing secretariat services to the AASA.

ANZAPAP operates on a National Visiting Panel (NVP) model compatible with international standards such as the Canberra Accord. At least every five years (and more often where needed), each accredited university architecture program must be re-accredited, which includes preparation of a background portfolio, followed by a three day visit by the NVP, leading to a recommendation to the state or

⁷ Ibid., p. 142.

⁸ Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, op. cit. at Note 7.

⁹ *Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership*, see <http://archiparlour.org>. This study has resulted in the publication of the 'Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice' which address a number of challenges to improving retention of women.

¹⁰ Commonwealth Department of Education and Training, op. cit. at Note 7.

territory Board. In between NVP visits there will generally be one or more Interim Review Panel (IRP) visits, which are 'check-ups' of how the program is progressing against any issues raised in the last NVP.

The members of the NVP come from a standing panel of experts from architectural practice and academia. Membership of the standing panel is put forward by Education Unit Manager on the basis of nominations and is considered by the relevant bodies (i.e. the Institute, Architect Registration Boards and the AACA). Documented conflict of interest management arrangements apply. Each 9-member NVP includes:

- Three members representing the relevant Architect Registration Board; two of whom must be architects.
- Three members representing the Institute; one a member of the Institute; one a member of the Institute's NEC and one an academic.
- One member representing the AACA; who may be a practising architect, an academic or other suitable person.
- One out-of-jurisdiction academic from an architecture school/program other than that being visited for the NVP.
- One student member from an architecture school other than that being visited.
- The Education Unit Manager also usually accompanies the NVP in a non-voting role.

Over the three days of an accreditation visit, the NVP meets with school and university leadership, academics and students. It observes physical resourcing, views student exhibitions, considers curriculum content of subjects and examples of student work, and reviews other documents as needed. The minimum resource expectations are not specified in detail in the ANZAPAP, as they are in some countries such as the USA. This means there is a greater expectation that professional judgement will be exercised by the panel members. There have now been a number of accreditation 'cycles', which means there is strong corporate knowledge about the desirable characteristics of schools, which assists the process. The Institute's 'Standards for Programs in Architecture' document is also used as a reference point, but is not an enforceable standard.

ANZAPAP is however linked explicitly to the National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA), the document that forms the basis for architectural registration in Australia. The NSCA consists of four Units of Competency (Design, Documentation, Project Delivery and Practice Management) within which are 42 Elements of architectural practice. Of this, there are 23 Elements (mostly from the Design Unit of Competency) that should be covered in 10 semesters generally held over 5 years of full time study, as set out in the NSCA Integrated Framework. A program's ability to meet this expectation forms the core of the NVP's assessment, together with an assessment that the university has the physical and human resources to deliver the program on an ongoing basis.

The NVP makes a recommendation to the Architect Registration Board in the state or territory where the university is based as to whether and for how long a program should be accredited (maximum five years), together with a list of mandatory requirements ('Action Items'). The NVP also makes non-binding recommendations ('Professional Advice') to the school to assist with continuous improvement. New programs may request an NVP at any time, but usually shortly before completion of the first graduating cohort – a Preliminary Assessment may also be requested prior to the first NVP or where there have been substantial changes to an existing program.

Current issues in architectural accreditation

The ANZAPAP is a strong accreditation process in line with international standards, and with a history of buy in from key architectural stakeholders in Australia. The fact that the process is common to New Zealand is an additional attribute, given the mutual recognition of architectural education and registration between the countries. Accreditation is based on the independent report of the NVP, and while the final decision on accreditation of programs lies with the Architects Registration Board in each jurisdiction, the established convention is for the Boards to act on the advice of the NVP. ANZAPAP is the subject of ongoing fine tuning, and the 2012 review introduced significant improvements into the process. However, a number of issues have arisen that have brought forward discussion of a further review.

The accredited qualification for architectural registration in Australia is the two year full-time Master of Architecture (MArch). While each school nominates a Benchmark Academic Pathway qualification (three year bachelor degree leading to the two year Masters), the Bachelor degree itself is not accredited as it is in some other countries. This means that universities have some flexibility to admit students with qualifications and experience considered equivalent to the pathway degree in accordance with institution specific protocols, but who do not actually hold an initial degree in architecture. By convention, this has been used sparingly, however the trend is for students to enter the accredited qualification from a wider variety of backgrounds, including potentially from TAFE bachelor degrees now under development.

Universities have been asked to provide additional information for future NVPs on the pathways through which students are admitted to the MArch. However, the extent to which NVPs may need to review work from pathways other than the benchmark is currently unclear, as are the implications for the accreditation workload. Another approach that has support from some institutions would be for Australia to move towards accreditation of both first and second degrees, which would have both significant pros and cons, and major resource implications.

The volume of NVPs is also increasing, largely as a result of shorter accreditation terms being granted to some universities. Annually there have been an average of five NVP accreditation visits and nine IRPs. However in 2016 there will be seven NVP visits and a potentially large number of IRPs, placing considerable strain on the NVPs and secretariat. There is also a concern that there has been little turnover in the members of the standing panel, some of whom are no longer in active roles in the sector.

A related topic is the professional development of panel members, which is currently not provided in a formal way. The ANZAPAP Steering Committee is currently developing a proposal for the production of an online module for panellists – given the wide geographic spread it was thought difficult to bring people together for face-to-face training.

The NVP prepares a draft of its report on the third day of the visit, which is then discussed with the leadership of the school prior to the end of the visit. This practice does not occur in most other accreditation systems, and provides an immediate feedback process, but does place considerable pressure on the NVP members and secretariat. Formal feedback to schools then comes in the form of Action Items and Professional Advice. However, there is some ambiguity about the appropriate form and content for this feedback. There is also ambiguity about the proper process to be followed in the case that non-accreditation of a program is recommended by the NVP (this has not yet occurred).

The relationship between ANZAPAP and the Australian professional standards (NSCA) is a subject of ongoing evolution. The NSCA is not necessarily well understood by academics, and it is not always clear how the NSCA Elements map to the expected areas of architectural study set out in ANZAPAP, Institute policy documents and the TEQSA Threshold Learning Outcomes.

In Australia, in common with many university systems around the world, the Government has in recent years imposed cuts in real funding per student to universities, which has placed pressure on disciplines such as architecture that rely on a high level of student practicum for effective learning. In turn, this presents another challenge for NVPs in evaluating the architectural standard in a university system that has changed dramatically in the last 20 years, in ways largely outside the control of individual architecture schools. Some examples of this change include more use of common first degree units across a range of disciplines, more reliance on casual and adjunct teaching staff, limitation on the development of new subject areas such as low-carbon design, and restricted access to studio time and support.

A related challenge is that, in another response to falling public funding, universities have progressively taken on more fee-paying international students, who average around 30% of the student body in architecture schools, but constitute over 50% in some individual schools. In many ways the internationalisation of Australian higher education has been positive, but it can place further pressure on student support and also on a curriculum, which can no longer expect to focus solely on the Australian design and regulatory context.

Terms of reference and membership

It is proposed that the Review of Accreditation of Architectural Education ('the Review') be conducted by an independent Review Panel from October 2015 to June 2016.

The terms of reference for the Review are to consider and make recommendations on:

- The governance of accreditation in Australia
- The relationship between ANZAPAP and the Architects Registration Boards, as the statutory bodies responsible for the final accreditation decision.
- The quantum of funding of accreditation processes, and how this funding is split between the system's stakeholders.
- The most effective model for secretariat support to accreditation.

- The extent to which the ANZAPAP processes should deal with pedagogical issues, different cultures across schools, how students are inculcated into the culture of the discipline and the changing nature of delivery of education, including on-line program content.
- The ANZAPAP document, including but not limited to –
 - the process of NVPs and IRPs;
 - the makeup of the standing panel that provides members for NVPs and IRPs;
 - training and professional development for standing panel members;
 - the material provided to NVPs before and during the accreditation visit;
 - whether ANZAPAP can properly assess different delivery modes (e.g. online)

- the nature of the 'Action Items' and 'Professional Advice' feedback provided to programs through the NVPs;
 - role of the Steering Committee, terms of reference and representative membership of the Steering Committee
 - the relationship of ANZAPAP to the NSCA, the Australian Architectural Education and Competency Framework (under development) and Institute policy documents including the Standards for Programs in Architecture.
- The strengths and weaknesses of ANZAPAP compared with accreditation arrangements overseas and with other professional qualifications in the Australian context (e.g. pharmacy, education).
 - Whether there should be any changes to the current system of accrediting the MArch qualification, and with schools nominating a benchmark academic pathway.
 - Any other matters that, in the view of the Review Panel, have a material impact on the effectiveness of accreditation arrangements.

The review will have a secretariat resourced by the joint owners of the ANZAPAP.

The review will be overseen by the AIA-AACA Liaison Group who will report back to their respective organisations.

The Review Panel will consist of five members consisting of:

- ✦ One member nominated by the AACA
- ✦ One member nominated by the Institute
- ✦ One member nominated by the state and territory Boards
- ✦ One member nominated by the Heads of Schools of Architecture
- ✦ One member the Deans of the Built Environment
- ✦ One member nominated by the New Zealand Registered Architects Board

The Review Panel will meet at least four times during the conduct of the review, two of which meetings may be by teleconference.

With secretariat support, the Review Panel will develop a Discussion Paper to be provided to stakeholders in the architectural sector for comment. The paper will address issues in the accreditation of architectural education and proposed areas of reform.

Members of the Review Panel must consult with the AASA (Heads of Schools), ADBED, the State and Territory Architect Registration Boards, the AACA Board and the Institute's National Education Committee, the ANZAPAP Steering Committee. Other consultations may be organised at the Review Panel's discretion.

The Review Report will report to the AIA-AACA Liaison Group.

Timeframe for Review

August 2015	Final Terms of Reference and resources for the Review agreed between AACA and Institute
September 2015	Communication strategy with stakeholders Review Panel members confirmed Secretariat arrangements finalised
October 2015	First Meeting of Review Panel
November 2015	Discussion Paper issued
March 2016	Stakeholder consultations
April 2016	Draft Report released for comment
June 2016	Final report to AIA-AACA