

Annual Review of the Operation of the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications 2006/2007



Architects Registration Board

This report sets out the conclusions of the Prescription Committee's review of the 2006/2007 prescription cycle

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Foreword

This report covers the outcomes of ARB's annual review of the operation of its prescription procedures for 2006-2007, the fourth year that ARB's 'new' procedures have been operational.

The review was informed by written feedback from those institutions which had submitted applications to renew their prescription, and those which sought prescription for the first time during the 2006-2007 cycle. We also met with representatives of a number of these institutions in July 2007. Finally, written feedback was sought from members of ARB's Board and its Prescription Committee.

The purpose of the review was to consider what steps ARB could take to improve the rigour and efficiency of the operation of its system whilst at the same time seeking to minimise the costs and administrative impact of the procedures to both ARB and the institutions. This is in line with ARB's stated commitments within its Annex to the Higher Education Regulation Review Group's (HERRG's) Concordat on Data Collection and Quality Assurance.

During the 2006-2007 cycle, ARB considered applications to renew the prescription of 13 qualifications, from 7 institutions, and applications seeking prescription for the first time for one qualification. Of these applications the Board was able to make decisions in relation to 35% of the qualifications within 3 months of submission to ARB; and the Board was able to make a decision in relation to a further 30% within 6 months of submission to ARB. The percentage of decisions made more than six months after applications had been received included a new qualification, which required a three-month statutory consultation period before a decision could be made.

Decision reached on whether to prescribe or not

within:	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
3 Months	2 (11%)	16 (41%)	28 (58%)	5 (35%)
6 Months	13 (68%)	23 (59%)	11 (29%)	4 (30%)
6 Months +	4 (21%)	0 (0%)	5 (13%)	5 (35%)

Despite figures being lower than in previous years' application cycles, feedback suggests that institutions that went through the prescription process in 2006-2007 were satisfied with the application process. In particular, positive feedback was received which commended the ease of making an application. Additionally, the feedback also underlined institutions' satisfaction with progress updates communicated from ARB in respect of their applications.

However, as we have stated before in previous reports, and under our HERRG Commitments, we will not become complacent, and will continue to focus our efforts to improving our service to institutions making applications to ARB.

We are grateful to all those who took the time to give us feedback this summer, and hope that alongside our own internal annual review, we will continue to maintain, and increase, the rigour and efficiency of the prescription process, whilst at the same time lightening the administrative cost and burden for both institutions and ARB.

David Jones

Chair, Prescription Committee

Compensation Guidance

ARB's annual internal review of the operation of the procedures for the prescription of qualifications identified that amendments should be made to the guidance offered in relation to the compensation of, and/ or condonment of student marks.

The following guidance, approved by the Prescription Committee, will replace that previously provided and will be effective from 28th September 2007.

How does ARB view institutional regulations which permit the compensation of and/or condonment of student marks?

ARB recognises that institutions are likely to have regulations in place for the 'compensation' or 'condonment' of failed marks. These regulations are typically used in situations where an examination board has reasonable cause to increase a student's mark in a particular module, from 35%-39% to a pass level of 40%, or where an examination board has reasonable cause to overlook a failed mark in a particular module, allowing a student to progress to the next level of study or to receive an award.

However, ARB has to be confident that all its criteria have been, and will be, met by all those receiving a prescribed qualification for the period of prescription sought by the institution. Clearly, an institution's regulations relating to the compensation and/or condonment of modules may affect whether or not it is possible for students to meet all of ARB's criteria on receipt of their award.

Therefore, institutional regulations will be of interest to ARB in that they will help to illustrate whether the processes of assessment and marking ensure that all those receiving the qualification will have met all of the criteria.

Where compliance with all the criteria can be demonstrated by the passing of all key or core modules, a qualification is not likely to be prescribed if students are

permitted to fail such modules and receive the qualification. This is because all those receiving the qualification will not have met all of the criteria. Therefore, an institution applying to have such a qualification prescribed/re-prescribed, may need to get such a regulation changed or may decide not to allow students the benefit of such a regulation, i.e., the institution may wish to state that all students must pass all modules of that qualification in order to ensure that the ARB criteria have been achieved.

In cases where institutions believe that the standards set at the lowest pass level in a particular module exceed the standards set by the criteria, it will be up to the institution to demonstrate to ARB, through reference to marking schemes and the opinions of independent individuals etc, that it can be confident that those receiving the qualifications have met all of the criteria.

If the qualification is structured in such a way as to allow students to meet the criteria across a range of modules, it may be possible for a student to fail a module yet meet all of the criteria because all of the relevant criteria will have been met in an alternative module. However, if students are permitted to fail modules in this scenario, ARB will need to be confident that mechanisms exist and are rigorously applied to ensure that all students who have failed a module and received the qualification have met ARB's criteria before it decides that the qualification should be prescribed/prescription should be renewed. How this is carried out is up to each institution. For example, it may be necessary for external examiners to interview such students and confirm in writing that all the criteria have been met by each student. Such mechanisms should be clearly outlined in relevant course documents, and appropriate records kept confirming that such students have met all the criteria.

ARB is not concerned if students fail modules where these have no bearing upon students meeting the criteria and are not relevant to ARB being satisfied that its other objectives have been attained or will be attained.



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Should ARB be notified of any changes in an institution's regulations?

Institutions which offer an ARB prescribed qualification will note that prescription is subject to a series of standard conditions. One such condition is that 'annually and by a date set by the Board, the institution will be required to provide the Board with information of the nature set out in Appendix 2 [of the Procedures] to enable the Board to see that all its criteria are being attained by students who have been awarded the qualification prescribed.....'

Any changes to the institution's regulations for the compensation and/or condonment of marks could affect the Board's confidence that all of the criteria are being met by all students gaining the prescribed qualification throughout the period of prescription granted. As such, institutions are advised to notify ARB of any changes to the regulations surrounding compensation and/or condonment through their annual monitoring submissions.

The amended guidance has been inserted into both ARB's Good Practice Handbook (<http://www.arb.org.uk/education/handbooks/good-practice/>), and Frequently Asked Questions (<http://www.arb.org.uk/education/faqs.shtml>)

Higher Education Regulation Review Group (HERRG)

At ARB's annual internal review of the operation of the procedures for the prescription of qualifications, the Committee reviewed the work that had been carried out to date in relation to its commitments under ARB's Annex (2006-2007) of the HERRG Concordat.

The Committee agreed that good progress had been made over the last year and that it was satisfied that it was achieving the objectives set out in its Annex.

It was identified that a Working Group charged with reviewing the Procedures for the Prescription of Qualifications would be established in mid-2008.

The work of this Group will enable ARB to meet its commitments under the 2007-2008 Annex of the Concordat by ensuring that ARB's procedures remain fit for purpose, and promote a risk-based approach to the prescription of qualifications.

An update on ARB's achievements to date and ARB's Annex to the Concordat for 2007/2008 can be found in The Report of the Chair of HERRG - The Implementation of the Higher Education Concordat and the Work of HERRG in 2006/2007 - <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/hereform/improvingregulation/>

Updates to ARB's Good Practice Handbook for Institutions Seeking ARB Prescription

In addition to the new guidance on compensation (mentioned earlier in this report), the existing advice for those submitting applications for the second time under the procedures has been reviewed and updated. The revised guidance can be found at <http://www.arb.org.uk/education/handbooks/good-practice/preparing-the-content/advice-for-institutions.html>.

Summary of Action Points Undertaken Following 2006/2007 Feedback

- Annually, to renew ARB's Annex to the Higher Education Regulation Review Concordat
- For ARB to continue to do what it can to minimise the burden of the application process without compromising its statutory role
- Updates made to Good Practice handbook for Institutions Seeking ARB Prescription:
 - Advice on Compensation
 - Advice on 'top-up' applications for those renewing prescription under the current procedures for the second time