Summary of Conversion of US License to UK Qualification

Last Updated 27.03.18

The notes below are provided for general guidance only. The ARB’s Procedures for the Prescription of Qualification and the ARB’s Examination Procedures are provided alongside other helpful information on the ARB website, and explain in detail the requirements for overseas candidates seeking to sit the ARB’s Prescribed Examination. These requirements are subject to change, and therefore, the information provided on the ARB’s website will always supersede any commentary or guidance provided here.

The guide below is based on the experiences of candidates who have recently sat the examination.

Why sit the examination?

If you have studied architecture in the United States but are looking to move to the UK for an extended period of time, it might be worth considering registration as an architect in the UK.

Under Section 20 of the Architects Act 1997, the title ‘architect’ is protected in the United Kingdom. It can only be used in business or practice by someone who has had the education, training and experience needed to become an architect, and who is registered with the ARB. Firms or partnerships can use ‘architect’ in their business name, as long as a registered architect is in direct control.[1]

Only people who are registered with ARB can legally call themselves an architect, and the Architects Act gives ARB the power to prosecute those who use the title without being registered. It is important to note that unlike the US, in the UK only the title is regulated, not the function, so it is possible to do the work of an architect, just not describe yourself as one to clients or on any promotional material.

In order to register as an architect, a candidate must progress through a three-tier system, passing Part 1 (undergraduate), Part 2 (graduate) and Part 3 (professional diploma), all at an accredited school of architecture.

No US schools are accredited or otherwise recognised by the ARB. As a result, candidates must pass the ‘Prescribed Examination,’ where a candidate’s qualifications are examined on a case-by-case basis. To pass, a candidate must submit their academic qualifications and a portfolio that shows how work completed as part of these qualifications meets the ‘General Criteria’ prescribed by the ARB for Part 1 and Part 2 level.

‘Professional Criteria’ set out the additional knowledge and skills that an individual is expected to have at Part 3 level.

The ARB is the UK’s competent authority for architects under the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive [2005/36/EC]. The directive facilitates the recognition of qualifications across the European Union. The Criteria mentioned above are consistent with the requirements for qualifications for architects arising from the directive. [2]

The Prescribed Examinations

There are two main hurdles in passing the examination. The first is proving that you are eligible to sit the examination based on academic qualifications. The second is preparing a portfolio that shows how the
relevant criteria have been met in a candidate’s education. The sections below deal with each of these two hurdles in turn

**Guidance on Eligibility**

The ARB typically requires evidence of qualifications equivalent to a three-year full-time Part 1, two year full-time Part 2 and one-year part-time Part 3 course. For candidates coming from the US, a three-year M.Arch degree will not suffice for fulfilment of Parts 1 and 2.

In almost all cases, candidates will have to sit Part 3 independently in the UK, even if you have completed ARE examinations in the US.

Candidates with a four-year undergraduate degree in architecture and a subsequent three-year M.Arch will likely find themselves in a strong position to meet the requirements for Parts 1 and 2.

Candidates with a major in architecture at undergraduate level, and a subsequent M.Arch degree have historically not been found to meet eligibility requirements, however, there appears to be increasing flexibility on this, and in some cases, a major in architecture at undergraduate level, complimented by a strong portfolio, has been considered for the Prescribed Examinations.

Candidates with a major in a related subject such as urban planning and an M.Arch degree will have to discuss their education with the ARB individually to ascertain whether they are eligible to sit the examination.

Candidates without an undergraduate degree in architecture will likely have to do a Part 1 course in the UK. Based on each school’s eligibility requirements and the submission of a portfolio of work, it is possible to enrol full-time in the final year of a three-year course, speeding up the process but incurring the costs of a year’s tuition.

**Guidance on the Portfolio**

Somewhat confusingly, material from undergraduate degrees, graduate degrees, professional experience and Part 3 can all be submitted in the Part 1 and Part 2 examinations. Technically speaking, the same portfolio could be submitted first for Part 1, and then again for Part 2. However, the eligibility requirements relating to the length of study of each of the parts (as outlined above) must still have been met.

For candidates coming from the US, a period of work experience in the UK is strongly recommended as projects from this work experience can be used to show familiarity with UK procurement, planning and relevant legislation.

The completion of a Part 3 course is very helpful prior to sitting the examination and will help candidates prove that they have met a number of the criteria for Parts 1 & 2. Not all schools allow candidates to sit Part 3 before completing Parts 1 & 2, but there are some that do. At the time of writing, RIBA North-West, London Met and the AA allow candidates to sit Part 3 before Part 2. This is subject to change and candidates should check with schools to confirm.

The portfolio is not to be underestimated. Even an excellent academic/job portfolio from a highly regarded US university will not suffice. The portfolio for the Prescribed Examinations must be carefully constructed
to clearly reflect the Graduate Criteria. A larger amount of process work including preliminary sketches and models will be required compared to a job portfolio. All work must be clearly referenced in a ‘Comparative Matrix’ provided by the ARB, and accompanying notes must direct examiners to relevant parts of the portfolio for each of the Graduate Criteria.

**Case Study Candidates & Routes:**

1. Candidate A: Completed Part 1 in the UK, obtained a 3-year March degree from a US university. Returned to the UK and worked for 2 years at a UK practice, completing Part 3 whilst at the practice and submitting a portfolio including the Part 3 and work from the M.Arch, as evidence to obtain Part 2 equivalence. Passed.

2. Candidate B. Undergraduate degree from a UK university in urban planning. Masters in urban planning in the UK. M.Arch degree from a US university. 3 years subsequent work experience in the UK. Joined the final year of a Part 1 course at a UK university, and passed Part 1 whilst also completing Part 3. Submitted work from the M.Arch, the Part 1, work experience and Part 3 to pass the Part 2 examination. Passed.

3. Candidate C. Undergraduate architecture major from US university, M.Arch from US university. Was allowed to sit the equivalence examination. Did not pass based on portfolio submitted, re-examination pending based on new supplementary work submitted.

**On the Day**

When applying for the exam, candidates are allowed to select a preferred date to sit the interview at the ARB headquarters at Weymouth Street in London. Examinations are normally run every three months in January, April, July and October, and the date will be confirmed roughly three weeks before the exam.

Candidates must then deliver supporting material to the ARB either the day before the exam between 8:30am and 4:30pm, or on the day of the exam between 8:30am and 9:30am. After submitting the portfolio, a panel of three examiners - of whom one is appointed as lead examiner - will examine the application, comparative matrix and supporting material for a maximum of 60 minutes (bear this in mind when preparing and organising material - 60 mins is not a long time!)

During this time, the examiners will determine how many of the Graduate Criteria have been met, and the candidate will only be invited for interview if half or more of the ARB criteria have been met. If fewer than half of the criteria have been met, the examiners may choose to offer some feedback, although this is up to their discretion.

If called for an interview, it will last for up to 45 mins, but may be shorter depending on how many of the Graduate Criteria need to be addressed. During the interview, the examiners will ask candidates to orally support material that they felt did not meet the ARB requirements. The questions may be highly specific depending on which criteria is being addressed, and may cover as few as one or as many as half of the criteria.

At the conclusion of the interview, candidates can collect their portfolio and supporting material, and await the decision, which is usually mailed out a few weeks later, although it is possible to request notification
by email from the receptionist immediately following the interview (this is a good idea as it will likely cut down the waiting time slightly).

The interview should not be taken lightly, as it is a key component in the examination, and answers given in the oral examination will be very important in ensuring the Graduate Criteria have been met. It is a sensible idea to examine your portfolio with a critical eye and try to determine which criteria are least convincingly addressed, as it is likely that these will require further explanation during the interview. Also bear in mind that the examiners’ questions may only be answered by using material already included in the portfolio, so if in doubt, include extra work in the submission to ensure it is there when required during the oral examination.

Finally,

Good Luck!