

## **Institutionalising National Standards:**

### **A History of the Incorporation of the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) and the *National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA)***

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#### **Abstract**

*Significant changes and transformation in the institutional organisation of the Australian architecture profession occurred in 2014. There were attempts in some states to deregulate the profession, the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) continued to push for a system of national registration, and a major review of the National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA) was completed. It is therefore timely to consider the history of the incorporation of the AACA in 1974 and its role in the development and evolution of the NCSA.*

*The AACA's formation was motivated by the desire for a single body to oversee matters of national professional concern and was initiated by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects and received the co-operation of the state and territory architects registration boards. Its primary objects were to promote, recognise and accredit Australian higher education architecture programs, to define acceptable standards of professional experience, to provide for the examination of those seeking registration as an architect, and to define acceptable criteria for the practice of architecture. The criteria were published in NCSA 01 (1993) under a federal program for the development of national competency standards for the Australian professions generally – a microeconomic reform strategy for a multicultural Australia.*

*Since 1993, the NCSA has evolved and its authority has expanded. In addition to defining the skill sets expected of a competent architect entering the profession, it is now embedded in accreditation procedures for Australia and New Zealand architecture programs, informing higher education curricula and directly shaping the architects of the future.*

*Archival material held by the Institute of Architects and AACA has been examined with financial support from the NSW Architects Registration Board (2012). This history of the AACA's role in the institutional realm of the Australian architecture profession provides a foundation for identifying and understanding the profession's possible futures.*

#### **Abbreviations**

AACA	Architects Accreditation Council of Australia
Institute	Australian Institute of Architects
ARCUK	Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom
ANZAPAP	<i>Australian and New Zealand Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure</i>
CAA	Commonwealth Association of Architects
CBAE	Commonwealth Board of Architectural Education
CHASA	Committee of Heads of Architecture Schools in Australia
COPQ	Committee on Overseas Professional Qualifications
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
NACSR	National Advisory Committee on Skills Recognition
NCARB	American National Council of Architectural Registration Boards
NCSA	<i>National Competency Standards in Architecture</i>
NOOSR	National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition
NCSA (2015)	<i>National Standard of Competency for Architects</i>
NSW ARB	NSW Architects Registration Board
NTB	National Training Board
RAIA	Royal Australian Institute of Architects
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
UIA	Union Internationale des Architectes

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It is timely to consider the history of the incorporation of the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) in 1974 and its role in the development and evolution of the *National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA)* in light of the significant changes that are taking place in the Australian architecture profession. In 2014, there were attempts in some states to deregulate the profession, the AACA pushed for a system of national registration, and a major review of the *NCSA* was completed. This history of the AACA's role in the institutional realm of the Australian architecture profession is intended to provide a foundation for identifying and understanding possible futures for the Australian architecture profession. Archival material held by the Australian Institute of Architects (Institute) and NSW Architects Registration Board (NSW ARB) has been examined with financial support from the NSW ARB.<sup>1</sup>

## **Globalisation of the architectural profession and the establishment of the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA)**

Enormous political, economic, and societal changes occurred both internationally and in Australia in the late 1960s and 1970s. Internationally, it was the dawn of a post-war globalisation nurtured by new technologies, industrial capitalism and the politics of modern nation-states who sought to defend and expand their influence in an increasingly interdependent world.<sup>2</sup> In Europe, for example, the 1957 Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community provided for the free movement of professions within Europe. In Australia, the post World-War II migration of over 170,000 people under the federal government "Displaced Persons" program was followed by further waves of migrants. Australian attitudes began to shift and the Whitlam Government introduced a policy of multiculturalism, arguing for the "benefits of cultural diversity and the importance of social harmony and tolerance."<sup>3</sup> The ties with the United Kingdom were loosened and Australia came into closer contact with Asia. It was against this backdrop of multiculturalism and other internationalising influences that the Australian professions sought to develop mutual recognition procedures and the machinery for accrediting overseas qualifications.

The establishment of mutual recognition procedures in the late 1960s and 1970s was a global phenomenon. In 1966 the Commonwealth Board of Architectural Education (CBAE) was established by the Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA) and immediately attempted to list qualifications of equal standard to those recognised by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) as a guide to member countries in making reciprocal / unilateral arrangements.<sup>4</sup> At the CAA

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<sup>1</sup> Kirsten Orr was the recipient in 2012 (with Dr Jason Prior and Melonie Bayl-Smith) of a NSW ARB Research Grant for a project titled "Harnessing the Architect's Potential for Expanded Agency within Contemporary Collaborative Design and Development Practices."

<sup>2</sup> Paul Kennedy, *Local Lives and Global Transformations: Towards World Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jenny Hocking, *Gough Whitlam: His Time* (Carlton: Miegunyah Press, 2012), 78-79, accessed 17 November 2014, [http://www.whitlam.org/gough\\_whitlam/achievements/foreignaffairsandimmigration](http://www.whitlam.org/gough_whitlam/achievements/foreignaffairsandimmigration).

<sup>4</sup> This work was ambitious and years passed before the data was published, the introduction acknowledging "this survey is now out of date ... since change inevitably continues on after survey data is collected." Peter Johnson and Susan Clarke, *Architectural Education in the Commonwealth: A Survey of Schools* (University

conference held in New Delhi in March the following year, the representatives of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) were interested in implementing mutual recognition processes and recognised their role in advising “governments on national needs for architectural manpower.”<sup>5</sup> They realised that Australia was now the only major country not yet a member of the Union Internationale des Architectes (UIA), and the RAIA National Council resolved to “apply for admission ... forthwith” and to extend its associations with South-East Asian countries.<sup>6</sup> It was expected that Malaysia and Singapore would shortly seek reciprocal arrangements with the RAIA, and the possibility was discussed of Asian graduates of Australian architecture programs who had returned to practice in Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur being able to sit the RAIA Professional Practice Examination to become members of the RAIA.<sup>7</sup> In 1967 the RAIA was approached by the RIBA for reciprocal recognition of architectural practice examinations,<sup>8</sup> and in 1970 meetings were held between the RAIA, the American National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), the Architects Registration Council of the United Kingdom (ARCUK), and national representatives from Canada, Ireland, and South Africa, with a preliminary agreement reached between the RAIA and the NCARB.<sup>9</sup> In 1971 the RAIA adopted the CAA list of approved qualifications but this covered academic qualifications only and not the practical experience component or other requirements.<sup>10</sup> Despite all of this, there was reluctance within the RAIA to whole-heartedly embrace mutual recognition and no firm agreements that included reciprocity of registration could be reached. Finally in 1972 the National Council passed the buck to the yet-to-be-established AACA.<sup>11</sup>

Thoughts also turned to consolidating the RAIA’s national presence as a federal organisation and establishing a system of national certification of architects that would allow those registered in one state or territory to also practice elsewhere in Australia. Until the end of 1972, architects were required to sit two examinations: the first was set by the architect registration board in their state or territory and led to registration; the second was set by the RAIA and was required for full membership. The NSW Chapter Council set a precedent in 1971 by conducting the RAIA examination jointly with the Board of Architects of NSW.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, an ongoing national review of the content and format of the RAIA Architectural Practice Examination resulted in the first national RAIA Architectural Practice Examination for membership of the Institute being held in February 1972,<sup>13</sup> followed in 1973 by the first National Architectural Practice Examination for registration and RAIA membership. It was hoped that this examination would be replaced from 1975 by a new examination conducted by the AACA.<sup>14</sup>

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of Sydney: University of Sydney for the Commonwealth Board of Architectural Education of the Commonwealth Association of Architects, 1979), 1.

<sup>5</sup> All references to “Agenda” and “Minutes” refer to the bound volumes of the RAIA National Council Proceedings for 1967-1973. These are held in the AIA National Archives, Canberra, in Box C5508141754. “Agenda,” May 1967, 156-159.

<sup>6</sup> “Minutes,” May 1967, 207-208.

<sup>7</sup> “Minutes,” May 1976, 178.

<sup>8</sup> The RAIA Architectural Education Committee resisted the RIBA proposal. “Agenda,” May 1971, 32; “Minutes,” May 1971, 156.

<sup>9</sup> The NCARB and ARCUK already had a working system in place and had completed a limited number of mutual recognition assessments. The RAIA required NCARB applicants to have passed the RAIA Architectural Practice Examination. “Agenda,” May 1971, 33; “Minutes,” May 1971, 156.

<sup>10</sup> “Agenda,” October 1971, 123.

<sup>11</sup> “Minutes,” May 1972, 188.

<sup>12</sup> “Agenda,” May 1972, 14.

<sup>13</sup> “Agenda,” May 1973, 322.

<sup>14</sup> “Agenda,” November 1973, 804.

New federal legislation enabling architects to register throughout Australia was required if there was to be national certification of architects. The NSW Chapter made a submission to the NSW Government proposing a national Act, which received support from the RAIA National Council at its meetings in May and November 1972.<sup>15</sup> The RAIA made a successful submission to have the Commonwealth registration of architects included on the agenda for the first meeting of the 1973 federal government Constitutional Convention. However, in 2014, some forty years later, the national registration of Australian architects is still to be achieved and is one of the AACA's "current projects."<sup>16</sup>

Securing architecture's status as one of the pre-eminent Australian professions was a continuing concern of the RAIA. The architecture profession had been omitted from Sir Leslie Martin's 1965 report, *Tertiary Education in Australia: Report of the Committee on the Future of Tertiary Education in Australia* and the oversight was thought to reflect a disregard for the profession and to place it at a disadvantage.<sup>17</sup> However it appeared to have regained the lost ground when the RAIA National President, Mervyn Parry, was appointed to lead the 1967 federally-funded and organised Australian Professional Consultants Mission to South-east Asia and the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> While little or nothing actually came from the architectural opportunities presented by the mission, it was followed in 1971 by the proposal to form an Australian Council of Professions.<sup>19</sup> The RAIA immediately joined and by May 1972 was enthusiastically pursuing the chance to conduct a two-stage competition for the design of a purpose-built building to house the new Council and other professional organisations in Canberra.<sup>20</sup>

The establishment of the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) was motivated by the desire for a single body to oversee matters of national professional concern arising from the profession's increasing involvement in international architectural affairs; its interest in developing mutual recognition procedures for Australian and overseas qualifications; the RAIA's ambition to become a significant, federally-represented organisation with a strong national presence; and architecture's desire to secure its status as one of the pre-eminent Australian professions.

A "Small Committee" of representatives from the RAIA and the architects registration boards was formed in July 1970 to look into the feasibility of an accreditation council and to gather information on overseas precedents. It reported back to the National Council meeting in October 1971 that the establishment of an "Australian Architects' Accreditation Council" was an immediate necessity. The accreditation council should be composed of representatives from all the state and territory architects registration boards, assisted by a secretary and with a committee appointed to conduct the day-to-day work and act as a committee of review. It would have two primary functions: the assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications, with which the RAIA and architects registration boards had "had the utmost difficulty," and the implementation of procedures to assist national recognition of architectural qualifications, including a new national examination leading to an "Accreditation Council Certificate" for registration.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Minutes," May 1972, 220; "Minutes," November 1972, 623.

<sup>16</sup> Nino Bellantonio, "AACA: An Overview," (presentation to the AIA National Education Committee, Canberra, 9 August 2012), slide 12.

<sup>17</sup> "Minutes," May 1967, 178.

<sup>18</sup> "Minutes," May 1967, 206.

<sup>19</sup> "Minutes," May 1971, 206.

<sup>20</sup> "Minutes," May 1972, 178.

<sup>21</sup> "Agenda," October 1971, 121-129.

Meanwhile, the RAIA and the architects registration boards had attended several meetings with the federal government Committee on Overseas Professional Qualifications (COPQ)<sup>22</sup> on the subject of facilitating the interchange of registration between states and territories, reciprocity of recognition between Australia and overseas countries, and the accreditation of overseas professional qualifications and assessment of their equivalency with Australian architectural qualifications.<sup>23</sup> The RAIA offered to take on an advisory role with the COPQ and sought its financial assistance for the establishment of the proposed accreditation council.<sup>24</sup> In October 1971, the COPQ wrote to the RAIA offering to set up and fund an “expert panel” in architecture and to provide the secretarial and research assistance necessary to assist with finalising the accreditation council’s establishment.<sup>25</sup> The RAIA accepted the offer and the first meeting of the expert panel was held in November 1972.<sup>26</sup>

A pivotal player at this time was the RAIA Director, John Scollay. Seeing where things were headed, he arranged to attend the First World Conference on Reciprocity in Amsterdam from 1-2 October 1971. There he joined representatives from the NCARB, ARCUK and a number of other countries “as a step towards the achievement of formal, overseas, ‘block’ or ‘network’ reciprocity agreements.”<sup>27</sup> In particular, he sought information on how the NCARB and ARCUK assessed overseas practical experience and whether their requirements for practical experience and their postgraduate architectural practice examinations were mutually acceptable to the RAIA.

The AACA was officially established at a meeting of the RAIA and representatives of all the architects registration boards (except the Northern Territory) held in Canberra from 29-30 June 1972. The rules of accreditation and standards for national certification were debated at the meeting and then formally resolved by a flying minute on 28 September 1972, the boards agreeing to become constituent bodies of the AACA. The new RAIA Director, Ronald Gilling, immediately departed Australia to represent the AACA at the Second World Conference on Reciprocity held in Dubrovnik from 5-7 October 1972 and, while there, presented a draft reciprocity agreement to the NCARB.<sup>28</sup> By November the AACA had its Provisional Executive in place and the “Preliminary Draft Constitution and Rules” had been circulated to all constituent bodies for comment and ratification.<sup>29</sup> The Provisional Executive was immediately authorised to negotiate reciprocal arrangements with the NCARB Board of Directors, which extended to the establishment of a Joint Committee and provision for joint accreditation visits of schools of architecture in Australia and the United States.<sup>30</sup> The AACA “Revised Preliminary Draft Constitution and Rules,”<sup>31</sup> with some minor

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<sup>22</sup> The COPQ was established in 1969 within the federal Department of Immigration to resolve issues with the assessment and recognition of overseas professional training for migrants seeking work in Australia.

<sup>23</sup> “Minutes,” May 1971, 168.

<sup>24</sup> “Agenda,” May 1971, 44.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from COPQ Chairman D M Myers addressed to Scollay, 1 October 1971. “Agenda,” October 1971, 130-131. The Expert Panel comprised John Scollay (Chairman), Osmond Jarvis, Ron Lyon, Peter Middleton and Gavin Walkley. “Agenda,” May 1973, 603.

<sup>26</sup> After AACA’s incorporation, the COPQ contracted the AACA to undertake architecture-related assessment on its behalf. Committee of Inquiry into the Recognition of Overseas Qualifications, *The Recognition of Overseas Qualifications in Australia: Report of Committee of Inquiry, December 1982*, Volume 2 (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1983), 3.

<sup>27</sup> “Agenda,” October 1971, 124.

<sup>28</sup> “Agenda,” May 1973, 602.

<sup>29</sup> “Minutes,” November 1972, 603.

<sup>30</sup> “Agenda,” November 1973, 1102.

<sup>31</sup> “The Architects Accreditation Council of Australia: Revised Preliminary Draft Constitution and Rules (Revised May 1973),” 1. Held in the AIA National Archives, Canberra: Manilla folder marked “AA/2.3 Incorporation in the ACT,” in Box 000053 1540700 (in biro 5501210813).

amendments, were adopted on 26 July 1973 for the interim period until incorporation was achieved, and all of the Australian architects registration boards agreed to accept the new AACA Certificate for the registration of architects, which was intended to enable architects to register anywhere in Australia and the United States.<sup>32</sup>

The AACA was incorporated in the Australian Capital Territory on 7 March 1974 and on 17 April 1974 Scollay was appointed the AACA Public Officer and Don Bailey its Honorary Secretary. The AACA comprised two representatives from each of the nominating bodies – the President / Chairman or his deputy, and the Registrar / Secretary / Director. The Executive of the Council was given the power to act on the Council's behalf and comprised President of the AACA, elected for a maximum two-year term, and Vice-President, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. The primary objects of the AACA were to promote, recognise and accredit Australian architecture programs, define acceptable standards of professional experience, provide for examination of those seeking registration as an architect, and define acceptable criteria for the practice of architecture.<sup>33</sup>

Although originally an offshoot of the RAIA, the AACA since 1974 has become an entirely independent entity. In 2015 it is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee that remains responsible for co-ordinating and advocating national standards for architects in Australia and for establishing and maintaining mutual recognition agreements with overseas authorities. It also provides an important forum for discussion and exchange of information between state / territory bodies and, as the peak professional body, plays a significant advisory and facilitatory role, liaising with federal government and other international organisations on issues relating to migration, international agreements and skills shortages in architecture.<sup>34</sup>

### **Defining the identity and agency of a competent architect: the *National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA)***

Criteria for the practice of architecture were finally articulated by the AACA in 1993 in the *National Competency Standards in Architecture – NCSA 01*.<sup>35</sup> The development of national competency standards for the Australian professions was one of the key features of the Hawke Government's approach to microeconomic reform and its agenda for a multicultural Australia in the late 1980s to early 1990s.<sup>36</sup> The 1989 *National Agenda for Multicultural Australia*<sup>37</sup> included a commitment to make better use of imported skills and provided a series of policy initiatives, such as the "Migrant Skills Reform Strategy" and "National Training Reform Agenda."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "Agenda," November 1973, 1102-1103.

<sup>33</sup> "Australian Capital Territory Associations Incorporation Ordinance 1953-1966: Notice of Intention to Apply for the Incorporation of an Association," 2. Held in the AIA National Archives, Canberra: Manilla folder marked "AA/2.3 Incorporation in the ACT," in Box 000053 1540700 (in biro 5501210813).

<sup>34</sup> Bellantonio, "AACA: An Overview," slide 2, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Steering Group of the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia, *National Competency Standards in Architecture – NCSA 01*, September 1993.

<sup>36</sup> The other professions developing competency standards in this period were dentistry, dietetics, engineering, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, physiotherapy, psychology, social work and welfare work, teaching and veterinary science. National Advisory Committee on Skills Recognition (NACSR), *Migrant Skills Reform Strategy Progress Report June 1991* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991), 41-43.

<sup>37</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia ... Sharing Our Future* (Canberra: AGPS Press, 1989).

<sup>38</sup> Annelly Aeuckens, "The National Training Reform Agenda 1987-1996: Points of Difficulty in a Partial Transformation," (2000), accessed 17 November 2014, <http://monash.edu/education/non-cms/centres/ceet/docs/conferencepapers/2000confpaperaeuckens.pdf>.

Assessing the growing numbers of immigrants for employment purposes was an ongoing challenge for successive federal governments. In 1981 the Fraser Government appointed a Committee of Inquiry into the Recognition of Overseas Qualifications in Australia. Architecture was not specifically mentioned in the report even though the profession had made a submission.<sup>39</sup> In July 1989 the Hawke Government replaced the COPQ, with a new National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) within the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET).<sup>40</sup> NOOSR was responsible for co-ordinating a national program for the development of competency standards, especially in regulated professions such as architecture. In December 1990 it published two papers that discussed different ways of conceptualising and identifying competencies and of setting standards and that provided advice on suitable methods of assessment.<sup>41</sup> For architecture it was suggested that candidates might be assessed on their performance of practical tasks in simulated or real situations, possibly being “required to produce a plan, a model or a design.”<sup>42</sup>

The work of NOOSR was complemented by a number of other bodies. The National Advisory Committee on Skills Recognition (NACSR) sought, among other things, to promote international mutual skills recognition agreements, such as the agreement already in place between Australia and New Zealand for architecture, engineering, pharmacy and quantity surveying.<sup>43</sup> The National Training Board (NTB) produced national competency standards for vocational education and training and sought linkages between higher education and the professions.<sup>44</sup> The Trade Practices Commission reviewed regulation and competition in the Australian professions and in 1992 found that the AACA accepted overseas architects from only nine countries, with a heavy bias in favour of recognising architectural qualifications from other Commonwealth and English-speaking countries.<sup>45</sup>

The idea behind national competency standards for the Australian professions was that they would increase competition, increase mobility by removing state and territory barriers, open occupations to skilled migrants, promote Australian participation in international trade in services, and protect the public and the professions by maintaining professional standards.<sup>46</sup> These are the reasons why, in late 1990, NOOSR engaged the AACA as a consultant representing the architectural profession

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<sup>39</sup> Committee of Inquiry into the Recognition of Overseas Qualifications, *The Recognition of Overseas Qualifications in Australia*, Volume 1, 256; Robyn Iredale, “Where are we now in overseas qualification recognition? A decade of review and changes” (Centre for Multicultural Studies, University of Wollongong, Occasional Paper 26, 1992), 7, 28, accessed 10 September, <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cmsocpapers/24>.

<sup>40</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia*, 34, 36.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Gonczi, Paul Hager and Liz Oliver, *National Office of Overseas Skills Recognitions Research Paper No. 1: Establishing competency-Based Standards in the Professions* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1990).

Geoffrey Masters and Doug McCurry, *National Office of Overseas Skills Recognitions Research Paper No.2: Competency-Based Assessment in the Professions* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1990).

<sup>42</sup> Masters and McCurry, *Competency-Based Assessment in the Professions*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> NACSR, *Migrant Skills Reform Strategy Progress Report June 1991*, 17-18

<sup>44</sup> The NTB was established in 1990 but no longer exists. Accessed 1 November 2014, [http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/glossary/glossary\\_full\\_record.html?query=BROWSE&entry=National+Training+Board](http://www.ncver.edu.au/resources/glossary/glossary_full_record.html?query=BROWSE&entry=National+Training+Board).

National Training Board (NTB), *National Competency Standards: Policy and Guidelines Second Edition* (NTB: 1992).

<sup>45</sup> Iredale, “Where are we now in overseas qualification recognition? A decade of review and changes,” 25-26.

<sup>46</sup> NACSR, *Migrant Skills Reform Strategy Progress Report June 1991*, 41.

to develop the first edition of the national competency standards in architecture, published in 1993.<sup>47</sup>

The Steering Group for this work included representatives of the AACA, RAI National Education Committee, the NOOSR Panel in Architecture, the Committee of Heads of Architecture Schools in Australia (CHASA) and the Practising Architects Group, Queensland.<sup>48</sup> Professor Neville Quarry convened a Research Team with Lynn Crawford and Helen Fisher to develop the draft standards based on an investigation of comparative data gathered from the United Kingdom, European Economic Community, United States and Australia.<sup>49</sup> The Research Team's "Stage 1 Report" was completed in early 1992 and was followed by a consultation process involving ten discussion workshops involving a representative cross-section of the profession to consider the key areas of architectural practice. Draft Performance Criteria were produced from the information they generated.<sup>50</sup> The criteria may also have been informed by an earlier research project undertaken in 1988 by Crawford and Susan Hutchison for the Board of Architects of NSW, which had rated architectural competencies from most to least important as being those in design, interpretation of a brief, understanding "buildability," documentation, understanding codes and statutes, detailing, material selection, financial management, specifications, contract administration, marketability, and contracts.<sup>51</sup> The draft *Competency Standards and Performance Criteria* were widely circulated for comment in 1993.<sup>52</sup> They attempted to negotiate the difficulties presented by a profession underpinned by "essentially creative" practices, noting that quality in professional performance and achievement "is not an absolute value but ranges across a scale of attributes" and that for this reason the assessment of an architect's competency would "require exercise of judgement."<sup>53</sup>

From the outset it was intended that the new competency standards would be applied to anyone seeking registration as an architect in Australia but that they would not form part of the state and territory Acts controlling the registration of architects.<sup>54</sup> Architects worried that the profession would be forced to adopt them in their day-to-day practice; while the universities were concerned about their autonomy in curriculum development being compromised. It was intended that the

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<sup>47</sup> NOOSR also assisted the development of competency standards in dietetics, engineering, nursing, occupational therapy, optometry, physiotherapy, psychology, social work and welfare work, and veterinary science. Dentistry, medicine and teaching developed their own competency standards without NOOSR's involvement. NACSR, *Migrant Skills Reform Strategy Progress Report June 1991*, 43.

<sup>48</sup> Representatives were as follows: AACA: Geoffrey Lumsdaine (Chair) & John Combe (succeeded Angus Teece deceased); AACA Architectural Practice Committee: Roger Pegrum; RAI National Education Committee: Laurie Hegvold & Susan Scott (succeeded Judith Vulker); NOOSR: Jill Vardy; NOOSR Panel in Architecture: John Davison (succeeded Stephen Pikusa); CHASA: Peter Webber; Practising Architects Group Queensland: John Deshon; Research Team: Neville Quarry. Crawford, Fisher and Quarry, "Untitled Report," 3.

<sup>49</sup> Crawford, Fisher and Quarry, "Untitled Report," 3.

<sup>50</sup> Neville Quarry, Lynn Crawford and Helen Fisher, "Competency Standards for Architecture," *Architecture Bulletin* (August 1992), 19.

<sup>51</sup> Lynn Crawford and Susan Hutchinson, *A Study of Means of Maintaining and Developing Professional Competence Throughout a Career as an Architect* (Board of Architects of NSW Research Grant, 1988 (1990)), 24. Unpublished report held by NSW ARB. Note that the Board refused to pay the promised research funds for this report, claiming that it did not meet its requirements/expectations.

<sup>52</sup> Neville Quarry, "Barometer Practice: Competency Standards – Benign or Pernicious?," *Architecture Australia* (March/April 1993), 70.

<sup>53</sup> Crawford, Fisher and Quarry, "Untitled Report," 8, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Lynn Crawford, Helen Fisher and Neville Quarry, "Untitled Report Prepared by the Research Team," 6. Unpublished report held in softcopy by NSW ARB: filename "RAA Assessment for Registration as an Architect 1994" in "NARCS" folder.



competency standards would not to be applied to architectural education<sup>55</sup> and the Minister for Higher Education, Peter Baldwin, gave an “unequivocal pledge that Universities would not be required to adopt competency standards in training methods.” Quarry thought they were no threat to the status quo but would provide a “new reference to a foundation level description of competence upon which continuing professional education can be built,” and would help to “define the professional attributes of education with which the schools may wish to engage.”<sup>56</sup>

The publication of *NCSA 01* in 1993 coincided with turbulent times for architecture, and the professions generally, which were suffering from a “growing anti-professional bias throughout society.”<sup>57</sup> In the state of Victoria, in New Zealand and in Britain there had been recent attempts to deregister architects and to abolish the statutory registration of the title “architect.” In this alarming context, the RAIA was keen to protect the title “architect” through the authority of the architects registration boards in the registration process.<sup>58</sup> The RAIA National Council meeting in March 1994 resolved that it did not accept “that AACA can, should, or will assume authority for registration via competency standards or otherwise,” and refused to accept the application of *NCSA 01* as the principal requirement for registration as an architect in Australia. It also made an interesting claim to joint ownership with the AACA of *NCSA 01*, apparently without legal basis, thus beginning an extended tension between the Institute and AACA.<sup>59</sup>

Since the publication of *NCSA 01*, the competency standards have twice been reviewed by AACA, producing an updated version in 2001 and a second edition in 2008.<sup>60</sup> In its original form, *NCSA 01* comprises four blocks of connected activities called “Units of Competency” – Design, Documentation, Project Management, and Practice Management – defined as “a collection of Elements of Competency which are sufficiently related to each other to be considered as a single block of connected activities.” The Units are broken down into thirteen “Contexts,” defined as the “imperatives of the professional setting within which the performance is enacted.” The Contexts “locate the units of competence relative to the comprehensive process of producing architecture.” Within these Contexts are thirty nine “Elements of Competency,” defined as “a discrete activity that a competent architect must be able to perform.” These Elements are further defined by 112 “Performance Criteria,” “evaluative statements which specify the required level of performance.”<sup>61</sup> The document adopts the general format and language conventions defined as the “Australian Standards Format” by the NTB<sup>62</sup> and the particular format developed for the professions by NOOSR.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> NTB, *National Competency Standards: Policy and Guidelines Second Edition*, 14.

<sup>56</sup> Quarry, “Competency Standards – Benign or Pernicious?,” 68, 70.

<sup>57</sup> Davina Jackson, “The Future for Architecture: A New Blueprint from Britain,” *Architecture Australia* (May/June 1993), 72-73.

<sup>58</sup> Robert Cheesman, RAIA National President, “President’s Letter,” *Architecture Australia* (May/June 1993), 82.

<sup>59</sup> “Resolution from National Council: On Competency Standards,” *Architecture Australia* (May/June 1994), 91.

<sup>60</sup> The author was the NSW representative on the national panel that reviewed the *NCSA* from 2006-2008. Panel members were Philip Briggs, Cris Harding (AACA Registrar), Kirsten Orr, Leigh Shutter and Peter Williams (Chair). This content of this article is not based on that experience and has been derived by research and analysis independently undertaken in 2012-2013.

<sup>61</sup> Crawford, Fisher and Quarry, “Untitled Report,” 10.

<sup>62</sup> NTB, *National Competency Standards: Policy and Guidelines Second Edition*.

<sup>63</sup> Lindsay Heywood, Andrew Gonczi and Paul Hager, *National Office of Overseas Skills Recognitions Research Paper No.7: A Guide to Development of Competency Standards for Professions* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Services, 1992).

### **An emerging schism between the *National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA)* and the realities of contemporary architectural practice**

Subtle changes have been made to the content of the *NCSA* since 1993. A comparative study by the author of the 1993 *NCSA 01* and the 2008 *NCSA* has identified every change to wording, including additions and deletions and re-structuring of statements, and reveals interesting shifts and emerging themes in the evolving definition of a competent Australian architect.<sup>64</sup>

The 2008 *NCSA* continues the same Units of Competency – Design, Documentation, Project Management, and Practice Management. However, Contexts are reduced to twelve, Elements of Competency increased to forty two and Performance Criteria increased to 149. The most significant change is to the wording, with 75% of Performance Criteria, 67% of Elements of Competency and 58% of Contexts being re-worded to substantially change their original intent, or else being altogether new. These changes are not evenly spread throughout the document, the least change occurring in Unit 2 Documentation, where only 33% of Performance Criteria have changed, compared to an 85% change for Design, 72% for Project Management and 88% for Practice Management. An additional layer of empirical language has been applied, with new words such as “demonstrate,” “exercise,” “judgement,” “interpret,” and “evaluate” establishing the expectation of greater rigour, while quasi-scientific words such as “progressively investigated,” “researched,” “explored,” “tested,” and “refined” establish the expectation of higher diligence. Some changes respond to the increasingly regulated and litigious environment in which architects operate, particularly the expansion of Element 1.1.3 “Comply with the law and regulations governing planning, building design, procurement and the practice of architecture,” and the requirement for architects to work within cost and time constraints and to establish client and architect agreements that address scope of services, responsibilities and entitlements, copyright, mechanisms for dispute resolution, time frame for payment of invoices, etc. Still other changes re-affirm the architect’s role as the designer, the increasing imperative of sustainable design, and the increasing complexity and regulation of the construction industry.

The uneven distribution of the 149 Performance Criteria in the 2008 edition between the Units of Design, Documentation, Project Management and Practice Management are of particular interest because they reflect what differentiates architects from other design and building professionals. Design comprises 44% of the Performance Criteria; Documentation comprises 12%; Project Management comprises 28%; and Practice Management comprises 16%. On the basis of this breakdown, Design is clearly the most highly valued area of architectural competency. In contrast, Documentation, with the smallest number of Performance Criteria, is the least important.

A third, extensive review of the *NCSA* was undertaken by AACA in 2013-2014 and has resulted in substantial changes to the structure, format, and general and detailed content, and the renaming of the document to *The National Standard of Competency for Architects (NSCA 2015)*. This was adopted by the AACA Board in 2014 for publication in 2015. It is not the purpose of this paper to review the *NSCA 2015* as at the time of writing it is not publicly available.<sup>65</sup>

There have been changes to the application of the *NCSA* since 1993. The *NCSA*, in combination with the requirements of Australian architectural registration processes, continues to establish the occupationally relevant standards for professional practice in architecture and, as such, significantly contributes to the definition of what Australian architects are qualified to do and the skill sets they

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<sup>64</sup> This was undertaken in 2012 with funding from a NSW ARB Research Grant.

<sup>65</sup> Accessed 19 November 2014, <http://www.aaca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Draft-Preamble-NCSA-for-consultation-130814.pdf>.

are expected to have. It directly informs the examination of candidates presenting for Part 3 of the Architectural Practice Examination to be admitted to the Register of Architects, as well as the Review of Academic Equivalence assessment process for applicants with overseas academic qualifications seeking a determination on the extent to which their qualification delivers equivalent competencies to those required of Australian architecture courses. The *NCSA* is also an important document that informs the curricula of Australian schools of architecture who are charged with shaping the architects of the future. Despite assurances in the 1990s that the *NCSA* would not apply to higher education, since 2012 it has been embedded in the *Australian and New Zealand Architecture Program Accreditation Procedure (ANZAPAP)* that guides the review and accreditation of Australian and New Zealand Master of Architecture qualifications.

A chorus of voices within the profession suggests that there may be a growing schism between the quantifiable measures of a competent architect, as defined by the *NCSA*, and the realities of contemporary architectural practice. In 2013 this schism was acknowledged at the national level in the Institute's submission to the AACA.<sup>66</sup> The Institute wrote that,

Architectural practice, theory and research are continually evolving to meet the challenges posed by societal and climate changes. Changes in technology, infrastructure, materials, and the rise in innovation, means an architect by necessity must be multidisciplinary in both skills and scope. It is imperative that the *NCSA* reflect this evolution in practice.

To ensure the relevancy of the *NCSA* to current practice, it is important that the review of the *NCSA* take into account:

- the increasing diversity in the agency roles assumed by architects;
- changes to the boundaries of the discipline, for example, masterplanning and urban design;
- the growth of international architectural practice;
- the increasing global and trans-cultural context of architecture;
- the increasing imperative of sustainability within the practice of architecture;
- the increasing complexity and array of technology being used in the practice of architecture.

References to a “singular” preferred model of practice should be removed from the *NCSA* in recognition of the diversity of practice and that competency can be acquired and demonstrated in a variety of modes of architectural practice.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

This history of the incorporation of the AACA and the development and evolution of the *NCSA* demonstrates an intertwined relationship between the Australian architecture profession's institutional organisation and external political, economic and social forces. There is evidence in the secondary literature that substantial changes in the professional environment are affecting the ways in which architects think about their role in, and influence on, the built environment that may not be well reflected in the *NCSA*. For example, Paolo Tombesi, Blair Gardiner and Anthony Mussen have recognised the challenges to Australian architects' understanding of their place within the construction industry, the built environment and broader society, notably those posed by the advent of new digital design tools, construction technologies, building procurement practices, innovative

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<sup>66</sup> AACA, “Review of the *National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA)*: Request for Feedback by 19 July 2013,” May 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Letter from Paul Berkemeier, National President, to Andrew Hutson, Chair, Review of *NCSA*, 19 August 2013, 4.

materials and alternative ways of thinking.<sup>68</sup> Rory Hyde's blog and recent book speculate about what this might mean for the profession.<sup>69</sup> There is strong evidence that the identity of the Australian architect is evolving responsively to the pressures exerted by external change and innovation and that the profession is adjusting its aspirations, expectations and actions. The *NCSA* may define what architects are qualified to do and the skill sets they are expected to have, but the secondary literature supports the Institute's position that the *NCSA* does not adequately address evolutions in Australian architectural practice. As such, further research is required to explore the relationship between the values, worldviews, practices, behaviours and organisations of contemporary Australian architectural practice and the quantifiable measures of performance that should govern the training and actions of architects into the future.

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<sup>68</sup> Paolo Tombesi, Blair Gardiner and Anthony Mussen, *Take 5 Looking Ahead: Defining the Terms of a Sustainable Architectural Profession* (Red Hill: Royal Australian Institute of Architects, 2007).

<sup>69</sup> Rory Hyde, "Potential Futures for Design Practice," accessed 10 August 2013, <http://roryhyde.com/blog/?p=614>.

Rory Hyde, *Future Practice: Conversations from the Edge of Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2012).