

Alternative Pathways Task Force

RECOMMENDATION REPORT – December 2014

Voluntary review to assess registration requirements & practices and recommend changes to ensure fair access for non-traditional applicants

Prepared by:
Daniel Zanth, Consultant
Standards and Competency Assessment

Prepared for:
ARIDO Board of Management



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Acknowledgements

The task force consisted of the following ARIDO members in good standing:

- Greg Quinn, ARIDO President
- Alison Logue, ARIDO Director
- Ralph Dopping
- Michele Gunn
- Sheri Crawford
- David Gibbons
- Victoria Horobin
- Daniel Long
- Johane Lefrançois-Deignan

In addition, the task force thanks the following ARIDO Membership Committee members for their cooperation during the review of registration practices and for providing feedback during the development of the recommendations:

- Maria Lugosi
- Elaine Bergen
- Alex Taran
- Anne McCance

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Preface

With the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act* (FARPA) coming into effect early in 2007, oversight of the regulated professions in Ontario was put into law to ensure that registration practices were transparent, objective, impartial, and fair. It also formally outlined the responsibilities for the Office of the Fairness Commissioner which opened in the same year with the mandate of ensuring that oversight. The Act was later renamed in 2013 and amended to cover compulsory trades as the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act, 2006* (FARPACTA).

Since ARIDO operates with a focus on becoming the regulator for the interior design profession in Ontario, early in 2014 the ARIDO Board of Management formed the Alternative Pathways Task Force and mandated it to review current registration requirements and practices against the Office of the Fairness Commissioner's fair access principles for regulators of Ontario professions. The Board's intent was to undertake a voluntary review of its current processes to determine readiness to meet expectations for Ontario regulators:

- no entry barriers
- fair registration practices

In doing so, the ARIDO Board was accepting a new level of accountability expected from regulators of Ontario professions:

- to critically examine the necessity and relevance of registration requirements
- to become transparent about all possible routes for meeting licensing requirements
- provide information to applicants about acceptable alternatives

The Board was also recognizing a need to find ways to ensure that applicants who have not completed a CIDA-accredited degree, but who possess entry-level competencies equivalent to that of graduates of CIDA-accredited programs, have a fair way to prove they measure up to the current minimum education requirements for ARIDO Intern Membership.

This recommendation report is the result of task force discussions and decisions that occurred between June and December 2014 and is intended to provide guidance to the ARIDO Board of Management with the goal of ensuring fair access to the path that leads to registered membership.

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Executive Summary

This document is a final report and list of recommendations following a six-month voluntary review to assess ARIDO registration requirements & practices.

The ARIDO Board of Management contracted an independent standards and competency assessment consultant to co-facilitate the review and prepare this report.

This report is delivered to the ARIDO Board of Management to fulfill the task force's mandate. Its contents and recommendations attempt to set a clear direction to ensure fair access for non-traditional applicants into ARIDO registered membership.



This report represents the results of task force discussions over a six-month period in which ARIDO membership registration requirements and practices were reviewed to assess fair access for non-traditional applicants.

For our purposes, **traditional** is used to mean applicants who have completed a CIDA-accredited degree while **non-traditional** is used to mean applicants applying for intern membership having acquired the competencies to meet ARIDO's education requirement from education not accredited by CIDA, and may include relevant work experience.

Task force discussions were informed by the research published by the Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC). The task force looked extensively at best practices put in place, and recognized by the OFC, by other regulators of Ontario professions.

Ensuring fair access meant that we looked at how to streamline our practices, remove obstacles, and identify acceptable alternatives for meeting the entry-level competencies required by ARIDO in order to enter the path to registered membership.

In summary, ARIDO can improve fair access for non-traditional applicants and the Alternative Pathways Task Force formally submits **four recommendations**, summarized below and detailed in the body of the report:

- **Adopt the fair access principles of the OFC**
- **Conduct feasibility studies**
- **Implement competency-based qualifications assessment**
- **Support decision-makers**

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Introduction

ARIDO is the self-regulatory body for interior designers in Ontario and it currently has more than 1,800 registered and intern members. At the time of this report, membership is voluntary and requires individuals go through an application process. ARIDO has a full-time Registrar and many of the same committees and processes as other regulatory bodies. In 1999, legislation granted ARIDO members the right to the exclusive use of the title “Interior Designer” in Ontario.

Currently, ARIDO grants registered membership to those who meet the 3 E's of required Education, Experience and Examination (see *Appendix B: ARIDO – Education, Experience, Examination Requirements*). And registered members who use the title “Interior Designer,” must meet requirements similar to other self-regulated professions:

- six years of combined education and supervised internship requirements
- passing a standardized North American examination (NCIDQ)
- carrying professional and general liability insurance
- adhering to a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice
- participating in a mandatory continuing education program

Responsibility for the accreditation of education programs lies with The Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA) and is conducted against its *Professional Standards 2014* which are reviewed and updated regularly. CIDA considers graduates of accredited programs to have competent entry-level skills for interior design practice.

Responsibility for examination (development and administration) lies with The Council for Interior Design Qualification (CIDQ) and is based on its *2008 Analysis of the Interior Design Profession*. CIDQ considers successful completion of its NCIDQ exams to confirm individuals who have met the minimum standards for unsupervised professional practice.

In order to qualify to take NCIDQ exams, applicants must satisfy one of the CIDQ routes and meet its education and experience requirements. These requirements operate independently to those of other regulatory or registration bodies; although, it can appear as being parallel to those of ARIDO and other organizations that use the NCIDQ exams as part of their qualification process. It should also be noted that the CIDQ currently allows a number of different pathways in instances where non-accredited education programs were completed, and in such cases they increase the number of hours of supervised work experience required.

ARIDO applicants for intern membership who have completed a CIDA-accredited degree were considered to be **traditional** in task force discussions and for this report. And applicants who have acquired the competencies to meet ARIDO's education requirement from education that is not accredited by CIDA, and who may have relevant work experience, were considered to be **non-traditional** for the purposes of this report.

Completion of an accredited education program prepares students for entry-level interior design practice and also gives ARIDO applicants a direct path into Intern Membership. Continuing on the path to becoming a registered member means completing the supervised work experience requirement as well as passing NCIDQ exams (see *APPENDIX B: ARIDO Application for Registered Membership*).

For ARIDO, there is currently a process to handle non-traditional applicants (including foreign-trained) which involves the Membership Committee (see *APPENDIX B: ARIDO current application process for intern membership , ARIDO current application process for transition from intern to registered member, and ARIDO Pre-interview questionnaire for interns*). This committee independently reviews the applicant's education and experience; they can also request an in-person interview and portfolio review during the process. That being said, there is no formal assessment tool or framework guiding decisions, nor is there specialized training or support for committee members to help them determine how to assess competency in a consistent manner.

This recommendation report presents the results of a task force review of ARIDO's current registration requirements and practices that took place between June and December 2014. The task force focused on competencies rather than on the recognition of specific credentials and it tried to find the best ways to ensure that non-traditional applicants have a chance to prove that they have competencies required to meet ARIDO's education requirement. Having fair access to meet the education requirement is the first step on the path that leads to registered membership.

Objectives

The main purpose of this voluntary review was to self-assess and identify recommendations for self-improvement in ensuring fair access for non-traditional applicants. It is ARIDO's first fair access review and it hopes to establish a process of self-assessment for future reviews.

The ARIDO Board of Management set the following objectives for the task force:

- Alternative Pathways (Phase 1):
 - to justify the current standards in relation to minimum competency requirements for the practice of the profession
 - to identify potential gaps that may exist with current minimum standards and competency required to practice the profession
 - to identify all acceptable regulatory practices for pathways addressed to non-traditional applicants into ARIDO membership
- Fair Registration Practices (Phase 2):
 - to identify fair registration practices into ARIDO membership

Scope

Registration requirements were reviewed in a summary manner, as follows:

- review interior design body of knowledge
- review scope of practice
- identify the gaps between:
 - competencies acquired as a result of current pathway
 - minimum competencies required to practice the profession unsupervised
- review regulatory principles and acceptable practices for pathways into the practice of the profession
- research and review examples of recognized alternative pathways
- identify gaps with regulatory principles/acceptable practices and current ARIDO procedures
- evaluating the effectiveness of alternative pathways that uphold a defensible review and assessment of competencies
- build a proposal for approval by the ARIDO Board of Management
- participate in member comment periods and collect feedback
- review, evaluate and incorporate changes from member feedback, where applicable
- finalize recommendation for alternative pathways into ARIDO

Registration practices were examined in depth, as follows:

- review regulatory principles and acceptable practices for fair registration practices
- review Ontario Fairness Commissioner (OFC) Evaluation Questionnaire for fair practices
- build a proposal for approval by the ARIDO Board of Management
- participate in member comment periods and collect feedback
- review, evaluate and incorporate changes from member feedback, where applicable
- finalize recommendation for fair registration practices

Review Questions

- Does ARIDO unintentionally exclude or limit certain applicants from membership?
- What changes could be made to address gaps, improve registration practices, and remove obstacles for non-traditional applicants?

Methodology

The task force was made up of nine ARIDO members in good standing who were appointed by, and accountable to, the ARIDO Board of Management for the period of May 1, 2014 to December 31, 2014. The board also hired an independent consultant with a background in standards and competency assessment to guide the review process and co-facilitate meetings with the executive director and registrar of ARIDO.

The materials reviewed included a variety of primary and secondary sources (see *Works Consulted*):

- ARIDO documents
- OFC research and publications
- interior design industry standards documents
- credentialing industry standards and competency assessment research

Since this was the first time this type of review has been conducted at ARIDO, the secondary sources of information were used to help structure and guide discussions while providing reference points and background for consideration as the task force determined what was most relevant for ARIDO.

The appointed task force members had a diversity of education, experience, and practice areas:

- There was representation across all **practice areas**:
 - residential
 - corporate
 - commercial
 - healthcare
 - institutional
 - retail
- **Practice experience** was not restricted to experience in Ontario and the majority of task force members had more than 15 years of experience.
- In terms of **interior design education**:
 - most task force members had completed one of the following programs:
 - Bachelor Degree in interior Design
 - 3-year Interior Design Diploma
 - the remaining members had taken a combination of programs, including:
 - Bachelor Degree of Technology in Architectural Science
 - 2-year certificate in Architectural Technology

- Most of the task force members had provided **mentorship** to a recent graduate or intern.
- Several of the members had current and relevant **professional involvement** experience serving on an Advisory Committee for an interior design education program. And most of the task force members had served on a board for other key interior design industry associations or stakeholders.

The majority of task force meetings occurred at the ARIDO offices in Toronto. Each meeting lasted approximately two hours and included an agenda identifying key issues for discussion, review of key outcomes, and working definitions (see *APPENDIX A: Working Definitions, and APPENDIX D: Meeting Agendas & Minutes*).

The approach for this review included the following steps:

- **Materials review** to identify relevant sources and documents required as key inputs for task force work.
- **Discussion** at task force meetings to review key issues and identify ARIDO gaps.
- **Solutions development** to identify the best ways to address identified gaps.
- **Recommendations development** to provide a set of formal written recommendations based on the outcomes of task force work.

The result of this review process is **four recommendations** for improving fair access for non-traditional applicants. This report is organized around the task force findings and analysis leading to those recommendations.

Findings

The findings summarized below are key outcomes from task force meetings:

June 24, 2014

- After much discussion, the task force confirmed the applicability of the CIDA *Professional Standards 2014* (for the education requirement) and the NCIDQ *2008 Analysis of the Interior Design Profession* (for the experience and examination requirements).
- Emphasis was placed on the importance of aligning any non-traditional path to be consistent with meeting these existing standards across the current standard pathway of education / experience / examination and to ensure that non-traditional candidates are not made to meet any additional requirements.

July 15, 2014

- ARIDO's current application process results in some non-traditional applicants being either outright rejected or invited to undergo a review process for which there is currently no published documentation or criteria available to applicants to show how they are being assessed or decision-making overall occurs.
- ARIDO's existing application process needs to be reviewed in detail in order to identify potential gaps in meeting the OFC's fair access principles (*see Appendix B: OFC Founding Principles Chart*).
- Attention was drawn to the OFC's viewpoint that "all registered professionals are qualified and all qualified applicants are registered" and a fair way for us to proceed would be to establish criteria based on competencies, rather than credentials, in order to assess the qualifications of applicants, distinguishing those who are qualified for ARIDO membership from those who are not.

July 29, 2014

- The following common elements were identified as being the most effective (from the OFC exemplary practices the task force has reviewed to date) and ARIDO should consider integrating these to address gaps:
 - use of visuals/graphics
 - avoiding text-heavy explanations and representations providing overviews with hyper-links to relevant sections/policies for applicants illustrating clear paths, timelines, costs and decision points easy access to materials and information options that made it easier for applicants to find out information and determine options on their own
- The tools most commonly used to address gaps in meeting OFC principles:
 - charts – process/flowcharts including timelines
 - explanatory tables
 - applicant-targeted guides/handbooks/online reference tools/hyper-links/portals

July 29, 2014 – continued

- It was reported back that the Membership Committee expects applicants to use a “common interior design industry language” to describe processes/phases.
- ARIDO doesn't have a language proficiency requirement, but applicants are expected to use this “common language” during the application process.
- The OFC's stance on registration requirements was noted:
 - each and every requirement must be demonstrated by the regulator as being “necessary and relevant” to the practice of the profession
 - any minimum language proficiency, if required, must be documented, measurable and must not have differential impact on applicants
- Given that the task force's review of registration requirements is at a summary level, the task force won't proceed with any action around setting language requirements
- The current expectation that applicants use industry “common language” during the portfolio review and interview process was considered to be realistic for now.

August 11, 2014

- If applicants' qualifications are assessed based on their competencies, all applicants should fall under either **traditional** (CIDA-program graduates) or **non-traditional** (all others); identifying additional paths based on specific applicant education credentials should not be necessary.
- Supervised work experience is a part of ARIDO's registration requirements and since ARIDO is accountable, it would be fair to consider verification of not only the number of hours but also the type of experience being logged (and have that be based on areas of competency).

August 25, 2014

- Moving forward, the use of plain language is important for how we review, revise, report, and publish information. (see *APPENDIX C: Plain Language Checklist*).

September 10, 2014

- A review of meeting outcomes against OFC principles clearly shows that gaps around being “impartial” haven't been addressed and that the following discussion points raised by the task force are not yet reflected in findings:
 - no hidden policies or practices
 - provide clear communication around policy and processes
 - provide assessors with detailed orientation and training
 - publish the complete process for non-traditional applicants
 - report decisions to non-traditional applicants in terms of required competencies
 - continue recommending the CIDA accredited degree as the entry point for the path for traditional applicants and as part of the 3 E's

September 10, 2014 – continued

- provide tools and options for applicants that are:
 - easy to find
 - easy to understand
 - linked to other relevant information
- provide opportunities to help applicants better document competencies acquired from formal and informal learning at the level expected from students graduating from CIDA-accredited programs
- a self-assessment matrix could help applicants document how they acquired (formal and informal learning) the competencies required to meet the education component of the registration requirements
- a guide with examples could help manage expectations for the portfolio review and interview for non-traditional applicants
- provide easy application tracking for applicants
- emphasis was placed on the importance of continuing to learn from what other regulators of Ontario professions are doing
- task force members recognized the role they play in championing the implementation of future recommendations and they each prepared and delivered a 30-second elevator speech in plain language to explain:
 - what we are doing
 - how we are doing it
 - why we are doing it
- The need to clearly explain the work of the task force to the ARIDO membership-at-large was identified and it was agreed that an infographic created to explain the work around alternative pathways (see *APPENDIX C: Alternative Pathways for meeting ARIDO requirements*) was appropriate for distribution at the fall regional regulatory round-table sessions.

September 22, 2014

- ARIDO will need to engage the stakeholders identified by the task force in order to implement recommendations (see *APPENDIX B: Stakeholders and Participants*)
- Review of the current range of alternatives (see *APPENDIX B: Acceptable Alternatives Pathways*) being used in Ontario led task force members to identify that direct assessment and bridging program options seem the least sustainable for ARIDO (the perception is that there seems to be a relatively small number of non-traditional applicants, and there is currently insufficient data available to confirm a critical mass of applicants to justify either of these as viable options).
- discussion points identified around sustainability, staff resources, costs, and time
- decision criteria need to ensure that the alternatives are attainable
- initial findings will be used to create a framework for developing recommendations

October 6, 2014

- The following criteria were used to rate acceptable alternatives:
 - **accessibility** – the degree to which a product, device, service, or environment is available to as many people as possible
 - **affordability** – the extent to which something is, as measured by its cost relative to the amount that the purchaser is able to pay
 - **efficiency** – the accomplishment of or ability to accomplish a job with a minimum expenditure of time and effort
 - **effectiveness** – the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result
- It was noted that the Office of the Fairness Commissioner's report *Academic requirements and acceptable alternatives*, also focuses its analysis on the design and implementation of acceptable alternatives based on the same criteria.
- The decision criteria were then used to rate all of the current acceptable alternatives identified by the OFC (see *APPENDIX B: Decision Matrix, and APPENDIX C: Acceptable Alternative Pathways*) and scoring from highest to lowest was as follows:
 - paper-based
 - advanced standing
 - self-paced
 - direct assessment
 - bridging program
- A rationale for the direction of recommendations was identified.
- Structure for developing and reviewing recommendation statements was put in place to ensure that recommendations are specific, action-oriented, and based on findings.

October 22, 2014

- Draft recommendation statements were approved for circulation to ARIDO's Membership Committee for comment; this stakeholder group is currently the decision-makers for non-traditional applicants and who will also be the key participants as recommendations are implemented.

November 3, 2014

- To ensure that we are saying what we mean to say and how we want to say it, the recommendation statements were edited to ensure that all suggestions were heard and understood before final review and approval took place. Use of plain language was emphasized throughout the discussion and revision process.
- The need to explain how traditional and non-traditional paths should be handled was identified. An infographic developed to compare both paths under competency-based qualifications assessment was distributed and discussed for inclusion in the recommendation report (see *APPENDIX C: Traditional & non-traditional paths: Competency-based qualifications assessment for ARIDO Intern Membership*).

Analysis

The task force conducted a summary review of the current registration requirements and agreed that these requirements are based on current and relevant industry standards for ensuring the competent entry-level skills needed for an interior design practice. The in-depth review of current registration practices, however, led the task force to conclude that ARIDO is unintentionally excluding and limiting certain profiles of applicants from membership based on education credentials.

The task force also clearly determined that ARIDO's move to only accept a CIDA-accredited degree after July 1, 2017 as the only way to meet the education requirement (which qualifies applicants for ARIDO intern membership) unfairly excludes a relatively significant proportion of non-traditional applicants and needs to be addressed in the recommendations.

In terms of **registration requirements**, the findings suggest an overall direction:

Stay the course and uphold our commitment to the 3 E's

- CIDA and NCIDQ are relevant standards
- continue recommending a CIDA-accredited degree for traditional applicants
- give non-traditional applicants a chance to prove competencies are at the level of CIDA program graduates
- make sure there are no additional barriers for non-traditional applicants
- supervised work experience needs to be documented and verified in terms of competencies

Think, talk, and act based on competencies

- move towards a competency-based qualifications assessment process
 - qualifications assessment will be based on competencies for all applicants
 - provide tools to help non-traditional applicants document competencies acquired from formal and informal learning (at the level expected from students graduating from CIDA-accredited programs).
 - a self-assessment competency matrix
 - a guide with examples would help manage expectations for portfolio reviews and interviews
- decision reports that address required competencies for non-traditional applicants

In terms of **registration practices**, the findings indicate specific items to address:

Get professional help

- improve our qualifications assessments system
 - design and develop our decision criteria and process
 - design and develop the decision/outcome reports based on competencies
- select assessors and provide detailed orientation, training and support
- establish oversight for this key function in order to better support it and outcomes

Spell out our commitment to continuous self-assessment and self-improvement

- formally adopt the OFC fair access principles to guide current and future improvement efforts
 - *Transparent* – No hidden policies or practices.
 - *Objective* – Clear and understandable criteria will be used by decision-makers.
 - *Impartial* – Decisions about applicants will be based on objective criteria
 - *Fair* – Decisions will adhere to published criteria.
- continue to learn from what other regulators of Ontario professions are doing

Be clear about what we need and how we support non-traditional applicants

- be fully transparent and communicate clearly about all policies, processes, and practices
 - address the perception that the current process is subjective for non-traditional applicants
 - publish the decision criteria and complete qualifications assessment process
- provide tools and options that make information easily available for applicants
 - easy to find - simple, concise, visually attractive
 - easy to understand - clear pathway, timelines, costs
 - links to other relevant information - indexed to find information easily
 - a guide with examples could help manage expectations for the portfolio review and interview for non-traditional applicants.
 - easy application tracking for applicants
- make sure there is access to an appeals process

Rationale for recommendations forwarded

Six months of task force discussions around ARIDO registration requirements and practices, along with careful consideration of the current regulatory environment, have led the Alternative Pathways Task Force to develop recommendations around the following types of acceptable alternative pathways:

- paper-based
- advanced standing
- self-paced

These types of alternatives for non-traditional applicants were rated by the task force as best meeting the following criteria:

- accessibility
- affordability
- efficiency
- effectiveness

Recommendations were developed to be attainable against these criteria in order to improve fair access for non-traditional applicants. Focus was also placed on how best to improve existing paper-based qualifications assessment since self-paced options are based on its outcomes and advanced standing programs should ideally align with it.

Recommendations

The Alternative Pathways Task Force recommends to the ARIDO Board of Management that the following actions be taken by 2017:

Adopt the fair access principles of the OFC

In order to effectively support non-traditional applicants:

- formally adopt the fair access principles of the Office of the Fairness Commissioner
- systematically review all policies, processes, and practices for compliance against those principles
- publish a resource for non-traditional applicants that provides access to all information on how to become an intern member on the path to registered membership

Conduct feasibility studies

In order to provide opportunities to address competency gaps for non-traditional applicants in meeting the minimum education requirement, conduct feasibility studies to determine:

- the viability of developing self-paced options
- the viability of advanced standing options

Implement competency-based qualifications assessment

In order to better meet the expectations of the current regulatory environment and to base decisions on the competencies required to practice Interior Design:

- retain consultants to conduct a comprehensive review and re-development of the current paper-based qualifications assessment tools and process
- develop a self-assessment matrix tool for applicants
- develop standardized decision reports for non-traditional applicants that focus on competency areas
- align with the fair access principles of the Office of the Fairness Commissioner
- make qualifications assessment completely competency-based

Support decision-makers

In order to better support assessors and to enhance objectivity and impartiality in decision-making:

- develop a detailed policy and procedures manual
- develop a comprehensive orientation and training program for assessors that aligns with the needs of competency-based qualifications assessment

In order to effectively implement these recommendations, the ARIDO Board will need to involve the stakeholders and participants confirmed at the September 22, 2014 task force meeting (see *Appendix B: ARIDO Stakeholders and Participants*).

Next Steps

The Alternative Pathways Task Force formally submits these four recommendations to the ARIDO Board of Management seeking approval at the December 2014 meeting of the board. Upon approval, ARIDO management and staff will develop an implementation plan to append to this recommendation report.

Works Consulted

The following sources have provided discussion points during the review, shaped initial thinking for self-assessment, and focused the development of recommendations.

The Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO)

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