

Assessing online

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RICS is revamping its online APC process to offer candidates more support, to enable easier access for counsellors and to expedite submission, says Kirsty Gould

We constantly review our process for assessments to ensure their objectivity and rigour is maintained, any potential confusion over routes to membership is avoided, and they are globally consistent. Based on RICS' most recent analysis, our assessments continue to evolve so that they are fit for purpose.

Our research has revealed some areas in the assessment methodology where processes could be improved, however, together with opportunities to increase rigour and consistency. The evolution of the membership assessments plan has been defined to ensure that RICS assessment procedures remain reputable, cutting-edge and relevant around the world.

The plan is based on 7 pillars of work. One of these is for us to provide greater candidate support, and the project team want to share how we are doing this.

Currently, the assessment process for the majority of candidates is manual, with limited support and connection for candidates or counsellors throughout the process. It also includes around 6,000 candidates who are no longer engaged, and have stopped working towards their assessment; lack of support has been identified as a reason for this by both candidates and employers. Our stakeholders have said they need the process to be simpler, clearer and available online.

Online pilot test

We introduced an online application for enrolment in the UK in July 2015, as a pilot test. More than 3,000 people had used this facility by the end of October, with 1,400 progressing to become fully enrolled candidates or student members. As this functionality is integrated into the RICS systems, we can now see those who part-completed the application, allowing us to contact them on an individual basis to help and support them through the process.

The assessment environment is not simply about having a system or an online presence, but improving the entire experience. Success will lead to:

- personalised candidate communication
- improved stakeholder satisfaction
- greater understanding of candidates' experience throughout the process
- increased global performance
- reduction in administrative tasks, with greater resources invested in engagement and support
- increased data security
- increased quality and reduced duplication of content for candidates.

Counsellors

As part of the online facility there will be a dedicated area for counsellors, with a dashboard offering full tracking and audit of their candidates' progress. Counsellors receive notifications when a candidate has added experience against their competencies or submitted their case study for sign-off. Counsellors can also send messages regarding key dates and material, as well as 121 templates for meetings and virtual training for their role.

The assessment environment is designed to cover the enrolment and progress of candidates and combine the various elements of the submission and information that are required for them to apply for final assessment. Only when all the key elements are complete – including mandatory competencies, technical competencies, ethics module, ethics test, case study, relevant education and employment history – and signed off by the counsellor will the option to apply for final assessment become available. The candidate's work will then be merged into a pdf, pulling together their profile and submission documentation ready for assessment.

Assessors will also have an area where they can provide details of their availability, the pathways in which they can assess, and access to the latest marksheets and guidance notes. They will also be able to download the candidate assessment submissions if they wish.

Global roll-out

It is expected that the online assessment process will be available globally in August 2016 and become mandatory for all new candidates. Transitional arrangements will be introduced for those candidates already working on their APCs.

In the meantime the project will include all new candidates from the RICS School of the Built Environment in India, all current and new candidates from the North America and Caribbean region and between 100 and 200 UK candidates, which will cover students on a mixture of pathways and assessment types and at different stages.

The simple step of moving assessments online increases the security of the candidate's information and documents, streamlines the process, obviates the need to post hard copies to all assessors and saves on the assessment panel's paperwork.

Kirsty Gould is RICS Global Assessment Operations Manager

Further information

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