Assessor Handbook

For Chartered APC, Associate and Legal Associate Assessors

Published January 2020

This guidance is applicable to all APC, Associate & Legal Associate Assessors from January 2020.

It replaces Assessor Handbook published in September 2016.

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1. Introduction: The role of the assessor

Membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has been the hallmark of professional expertise and integrity for over 100 years. Chartered Town Planners (MRTPI) are recognised by employers, clients and the wider community, for the high quality of skills and experience that are held. They know that they can rely upon the designation MRTPI as a sign of competence and professionalism.

Candidates applying to become a Chartered Town Planner, must complete an Assessment of Professional Competence (APC). From January 2017, there are three APCs, all of which are assessed by assessors:

- **Licentiate Assessment of Professional Competence (L-APC)** – for those who graduated from a fully RTPI accredited degree in 2005 or afterwards.
- **Associate Assessment of Professional Competence (A-APC)** – for Associates (who will not have a fully RTPI accredited degree) to progress from Associate to Chartered membership.
- **Experienced Practitioner Assessment of Professional Competence (EP-APC)** – for experienced planners to apply directly for Chartered membership.

Candidates applying to become an **Associate (AssocRTPI)** are also assessed by assessors, as their submissions follow the same format as the APC process and require the demonstration of competencies at a level appropriate to this partial professional qualification.

Legal Associate

- **Legal Associates (LARTPI)** – for legal practitioners who can demonstrate enough experience to give specialist advice in planning law.

Candidates' submissions for chartered membership are reviewed by Chartered Town Planners and by Legal Members and Associates for the Legal Associate class, who are trained annually by the RTPI.

Assessors play an essential role in one of the key stages of a planner's career. Assessors are crucial to ensuring that the RTPI's high professional standards are maintained. It is vital that assessors carry out assessments in a thorough, constructive and professional manner. This ensures that all candidates receive a consistent standard assessment and constructive feedback on their submissions.

Each year the RTPI receives between 600 and 700 first-time applications for Chartered membership, Legal Associates and the Associate class. First-time submissions are accepted on four submission dates within the year. There are also four dates on which candidates who have been unsuccessful can make resubmissions of their initial applications.

1.1 Purpose of the Handbook

The assessor handbook includes:

- the details of the various stakeholders involved;
- the practicalities of the assessment process and annual schedule;
- advice on completing the Candidate Feedback Forms;
- the role of Reflective Journal or examples of professional work in the assessment;
- the key differences in assessing the different routes and classes; and
- the assessor monitoring process and the restrictions on advising candidates.

The RTPI publishes guidance to support candidates applying for membership. Assessors will also need to make use of this when reviewing submissions against requirements. In addition to this guidance, the RTPI's webpages contain podcasts for candidates, guidance for mentors as well as top tips and advice from successful candidates. These can be found at: www.rtpi.org.uk/apc.

1.2 Assessor options

All assessors are trained fundamentally to assess the L-APC route, and new assessors will only assess this route.

Assessors with at least two years' assessment experience within the last three years may also apply to upgrade to assess candidates submitting through non-accredited routes. This means that assessors will assess a broad range of candidates applying for the Associate class and for Chartered membership through the A-APC and EP-APC.

All applications require the same core submission documents, but the word count, number of case studies and competencies will vary according to the class and route. Submissions for Associate membership are shorter and have fewer competencies, as it is a partial professional qualification. The A-APC and EP-APC submissions are longer than the L-APC and have additional competencies because these candidates do not have fully RTPI accredited degrees.

As the assessment process is consistent across all these applications, this handbook mainly gives advice and information applicable to all application types. Section 5 summarises key differences between the L-APC and other routes, with detailed information in the guidance for each route or class.

1.3 Assessor Service Agreement with the RTPI

Assessors are vital to the membership assessment process and to ensure that roles and expectations are clear; assessors enter into a formal agreement with the RTPI. This also ensures that applications are assessed in a timely and accurate manner. The details of the formal agreement between the RTPI and the assessors are set out in the Assessor Service Agreement document. The service agreement includes the requirements for assessors to:

- attend an annual training session in January/February prior to undertaking assessments;
- complete mid-year online training at the request of the RTPI;
- agree to assess applications within the assessment periods of the four rounds for first-time applications within the year (the actual number will vary depending on number of applications submitted and the total number of assessors);
- review resubmissions from candidates, whose first-time submissions they have assessed previously, within the resubmission assessment periods; and
- undertake these assessments within the time-frames indicated in the schedule.

Please read the service agreement for further details of the expectations for the relationship between the assessor and the RTPI. The service agreement must be signed by the assessor, on an annual basis, and countersigned by the RTPI's Head of Membership.

2. The assessment process

2.1 The people involved

The assessment process involves a number of different stakeholders including candidates, assessors, the RTPI Membership Team and the Membership Assessment Advisory Panel.

CANDIDATES

In order for candidates to apply for membership, they must meet certain requirements. Details of these requirements are in the relevant guidance document for the class or route.

ASSESSORS

At the beginning of each year assessors will be paired with a co-assessor who they will work with to review submissions for that year.

The assessors will be informed of their pairings by the Membership Team – usually at the annual training day in January. Assessors will be required to continue to work with their previous co-assessors on previous years' resubmissions.

Assessors are requested to complete a Contact Availability Form that will be returned to the RTPI and forwarded to their co-assessor. The form includes the assessor's contact details as well as their availability to discuss submissions with their co-assessor (in terms of contact methods and types of times e.g. during business hours / evenings / weekends). **It is vital that assessors notify the team of any changes to their contact details and if they have any restrictions on their availability.**

Assessor pairs should make contact initially to determine the most convenient way to complete the assessments. As the pairing will be assessing together throughout the year, it is important that assessors maintain a dialogue with each other.

RTPI MEMBERSHIP TEAM

The Membership Team manages the assessment process and supports the stakeholders in meeting the relevant requirements and deadlines. This includes carrying out pre-assessment checks on all applications and post assessment checks on the feedback forms.

Any specific queries about the process can be directed to the team who can also provide additional support, the Membership Team can be contacted on: +44 (0)20 7929 9462

Assessors: apcassessors@rtpi.org.uk

Candidates: membership@rtpi.org.uk

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THE MEMBERSHIP ASSESSMENT ADVISORY PANEL

The panel is a sub-committee of the RTPI Membership and Ethics Committee and will take delegated responsibility on its behalf for scrutinising routes to Chartered membership and inputting into the management of all Assessments of Professional Competence (APCs) and assessments for membership of the Associate and Legal Associate classes.

MAAP overseas all assessors and provides a formal mechanism for stakeholder input into the management of the membership assessment process. The Panel consists of representatives from various stakeholder groups, including assessors, Learning Partner employers and Young Planners.

The responsibilities of the panel include:

- recommending strategic and operational changes to the requirements and application processes for Chartered, Associate and Legal Associate membership;
- monitoring access, pass rates and any complaints or feedback;
- reviewing candidate and assessor guidance;
- reviewing and confirming L-APC Commendations;
- supporting RTPI officers to ensure quality and consistency of assessments, including monitoring the performance of assessors;
- monitoring feedback from stakeholders including nations and regions; and
- ensuring the membership assessment process remains current and relevant.

2.2 The assessment schedule

In the third quarter of each year, the RTPI publishes a schedule of the submission deadlines and timeframes of assessment rounds for the following calendar year. This schedule allows assessors and candidates to plan their commitments more effectively and to ensure the process is managed in tight time frames.

It is necessary for all stakeholders to strictly adhere to the deadlines to achieve these time frames. The full schedule (including details of the administration and assessment periods) are set out in the annual Assessor Service Agreement document. The candidate submissions and results dates are listed the website here[1].

[1] https://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/assessment-of-professional-competence/how-to-submit/

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2.3 Submissions

Candidates submit their applications to the RTPI electronically as PDF files or Word documents. The RTPI Membership Team processes these application documents and record the details of each application. RTPI officers also carry out a number of pre- assessment checks before notifying the assessor pairing with a list of the submissions via email to carry out the assessment.

The core submission documents:

- Completed application form
- Personal details and payment form
- Written submission comprising of three sections
  - Practical Experience Statement (PES)
  - Professional Competence Statement (PCS)
  - Professional Development Plan (PDP)
- Sponsor declaration form
- Corroboration covering all experience covered in the written application
- Scanned copies of any relevant degree certificates, academic transcripts, apprenticeship completion
- Proof of payment of the assessment fees

Submission documents that vary according to route:

- Reflective journal detailing a minimum of 12 months' recent experience (L-APC and A-APC only)
- Examples of professional work (EP-APC only)
- A statement of planning content of degree if applicable (EP-APC and Associate class only under Educational Background B)
- Scanned Copies of proof of legal qualifications as specified in the guidance document (Legal Associate only)

PRE-ASSESSMENT CHECKS

The RTPI Membership Team conducts a number of pre-assessment checks on each application and records the details of the application received.

Core pre-assessment checks ensure that the candidate has:

- listed the required amount of experience on their application form
- produced a written submission that is within the word count and of the correct standard stipulated in the relevant guidance
- provided a sponsor declaration form from a current Chartered Town Planner (the details are cross-referenced against the RTPI membership database)
- provided corroboration for each period of experience included in their submission
- used the correct format for the Professional Development Plan (PDP) and that the plan is current at the point of submission covering the next two years; and

- submitted the application fee and all other application components as required for the route [2]or class.

Pre-assessment checks which vary according to route ensure that the candidate has:

- successfully completed a fully-RTPI accredited degree (L-APC only);
- provided the relevant proof of educational background (EP-APC and Associate class only);
- the required period of membership in the relevant class (L-APC and A-APC routes only);
- provided Reflective Journal covering at least 12 months of recent experience (L-APC and A- APC); and
- provided examples of professional work (EP-APC).

The Membership Team deals with a large volume of applications. Whilst every effort is undertaken to ensure that all checks are carried out thoroughly it is vital that assessors also pay close attention to the documents submitted to them.

Corroboration will be checked by the Membership Team before the application is forwarded to the assessors, however, assessors should read the corroborating documents and check that the information contained is consistent with the work set out by the candidate in their submission.

2.4 Receiving the submissions and confirming receipt

Assessors must confirm receipt of submissions and that they have checked for any potential conflicts of interest within two working days with their co-assessor and the Membership Team.

This allows the Membership Team to resolve any technical issues and resolve any conflicts of interest by reassigning submissions to a different assessor pairing.

[2] The guidance documents state an overall required word count and also contain suggested word counts for each of the three sections of the written submission. However, it is ultimately up to each candidate to decide how to divide the word count between the three sections. Footnotes are not included in the word count. It is not acceptable, however, for a candidate to over use or misuse footnotes primarily to increase their word count. The Membership Team checks the word count as one of the standard pre-assessment checks; this is not something assessors are required to do.

The RTPI Membership Team will send an email to the assessors with a list of submissions. Due to data protection requirements, the payment information and personal details form will be retained by the RTPI.

Assessors must notify the Membership Team immediately if their employer changes or their e-mail address has changed to ensure the RTPI has the correct contact details to use when sending the assessments. When receiving the initial submissions email, assessors must check:

- The email which will contain a list of the submissions and instructions on how to access the OneDrive
- That they can access the OneDrive and the relevant folders for the submissions.
- That there is no potential conflict of interest with any of the submissions.

The RTPI administration periods are fixed dates before and after the assessment period. Following the assessment period (but within the administration period), The Membership Team will contact the assessors if there are any errors within the feedback form that require further clarification, i.e. if unclear, tone.

2.5 Reimbursement (Honorarium)

Assessors receive an honorarium for each submission assessed to cover the assessment, providing feedback on the initial submission and any first-time resubmissions received (the fee also covers any incidental printing costs). **This honorarium is subject to tax and must be declared.** Further details of the Honoraria amounts are in the Assessor Service Agreement.

The payments for each round are normally processed after the published results date, once all the feedback forms, welcome packs and letters have been posted. Once the Membership Team has processed the information, the payment request will be passed to the Finance department who will make the payment within two weeks' time. Please note that BACS payments are made in batches on a two week cycle, so assessors should allow **4-6 weeks** for payments to reach their accounts.

Assessors must contact the RTPI Finance department directly if their bank account information or contact details change, or they have specific requests about the payment of the honorarium – finance@rtpi.org.uk.

2.6 Conflict of interest

The application form lists the candidate's name, their place(s) of study as well as details of their current and previous employers.

If assessors feel that there is a potential conflict of interest that would prevent them from assessing a particular submission they must inform the Membership Team within two working days of receiving the submissions. If assessors are unsure whether their knowledge of the candidate constitutes a conflict of interest they should check with the Membership Team.

Possible conflicts of interest may be that an assessor:

- knows the candidate personally;
- taught the candidate;
- attended university with the candidate;
- currently works with the candidate (this could be working for the same organisation even if the assessor and candidate do not work in the same office or branch); or
- has worked with the candidate in the past six months.

2.7 Assessing submissions

ASSESSING SUBMISSIONS AGAINST THE REQUIREMENTS

Candidates' submissions must be assessed against the requirements within the relevant guidance documents. These can be downloaded from the membership pages of the RTPI website: www.rtpi.org.uk/membership. Occasionally, the RTPI will update the guidance documents and this will be indicated in the publication date. It is important that you always refer to the relevant publication date in feedback. Please see Appendix 1 for an overview of the main parts of the submission for each route and class.

ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

Assessors will formally assess and provide outcomes for the following parts of the submission:

1. Professional Experience Statement (PES)
2. Professional Competence Statement (PCS)
3. Professional Development Plan (PDP)
4. General Presentation.

Applications can be assessed as:

- Successful (if all elements are assessed as successful)
- Successful – PDP Support Phase (if only the PDP does not meet the requirements)
- Unsuccessful/Deferred (if either the PES and/or PCS do not meet the requirements)

Occasionally, there is also the possibility of Rejection for applications to the Associate and Legal Associate class and EP-ACP route only. See section 5 Key differences.

PDP SUPPORT PHASE

If assessors have found a candidate's PES and PCS to be successful (and therefore the candidate has demonstrated their competence) but one or more elements of the PDP to be unsuccessful then they will be elected as a Chartered Member, Associate and Legal Associates will be required to enter a PDP Support phase. These candidates will need to complete and submit an updated PDP addressing the feedback from the assessors within one month of their election to membership. If the PDP is successful, candidates cannot be referred to the PDP Support Phase.

FEEDBACK FORMAT

The outcome for all the assessed criteria will be recorded on a Candidate Feedback Form (both on the front sheet and the main body of the feedback report). A blank feedback form will be emailed to all assessors at the beginning of each round with the submissions. The Membership Team will review all final draft feedback forms and may return the form to the assessors and seek clarification if there are inconsistencies within the form, the feedback is ambiguous or the feedback does not provide candidates with enough details.

Best practice on providing feedback to candidates can be found in Section 3.

RESUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Assessors should also detail the resubmission requirements for unsuccessful candidates on the feedback form. Candidates who have not met any or some of the PES or PCS criteria can be asked to resubmit either the full section or provide a supplementary statement. (See sections 3.3 and 3.4 for further details and word counts). If any part of the PDP is unsuccessful the assessors can only request a full resubmission of the section.

For a full resubmission, candidates will rework the outstanding competencies within the body of the original text, but cannot be reassessed on any of the criteria in which they were deemed successful. When resubmitting a full section, candidates can place less emphasis on the criteria that have been successful, but the section must still make sense as a whole.

2.8 Agreeing the outcome and feedback with a co-assessor

Both assessors in the pairing will consider the submission independently of each other and then arrange to confer and agree on the outcome and feedback. It is up to each assessor pairing to agree how they will work together to do this. The RTPI would recommend that both assessors in the pairing must first individually review the applications against the requirements. To inform discussion with their co-assessor, each assessor is recommended to complete an initial draft of the Candidate Feedback Form as they assess so that they record their initial thoughts and findings. They must then contact their co-assessor to agree the outcomes for each application.

Assessors will agree between themselves who will have responsibility for compiling the feedback and completing the final feedback report for each candidate – this role should be shared throughout the year.

When completing the Candidate Feedback Form assessors must ensure that the outcomes recorded in the boxes on the front sheet match the results contained in the body of the feedback report. Carrying out this check will save time in the long run, as the Membership Team will require further confirmation of the outcomes from assessors if the outcomes do not match. Assessors should also proof read the written feedback reports.

Once the final feedback form has been drafted it must be sent to the co-assessor for approval and a final proof read of the written content. The assessors should then upload the feedback forms onto the OneDrive and email a notification to the Membership Team by the relevant assessment deadline.

If the assessor pairing cannot agree an outcome, they must contact the Membership Team in advance of the assessment deadline and outline the reasons why an agreement could not be reached. The Membership Team will seek to resolve the situation and provide additional input as appropriate to aid agreement of the outcome.

2.9 Essential stages in working with your assessor

1. Confirm receipt of submissions with your co-assessor.
2. Agree on the best available times to discuss your initial thoughts.
3. Share out taking the 'lead' on assessments.
4. Keep in touch with each other throughout the assessment period.
5. Reply promptly to emails or calls.
6. Make suggestions and offer guidance to your co-assessor where necessary.
7. Proof read each other's feedback, ensuring professional standards are followed.
8. Get approval from your co-assessor before forwarding the final version to the RTPI.

2.10 APC Commendations

At each round, assessors are able to nominate candidates for commendation whose submissions they considered to be of an excellent standard. Commendations are available for all Chartered APC routes (L-APC, EP-APC, and A-APC).

Only candidates whose submissions were successful on all elements in their initial application are eligible to be nominated for a commendation. Candidates can be nominated on:

- Whole Submission

However, if a candidate has met an exceptional standard in one or more of the following sections, they can also be nominated for a commendation.

- PES only
- PCS only
- PDP only

Assessors can nominate a candidate by completing an APC Commendation Nomination form. MAAP will discuss each nominated candidate's submission (along with any comments provided by the assessors on the nomination forms) before selecting the top candidates for the accolade on an annual basis.

The accolade highlights the positive contribution our Chartered APC candidates make to the profession and the level of commitment they have in developing professional competence. Successful candidates are expected to serve as an inspiration to future candidates and the tips they provide on the RTPI website are designed to support future candidates through the process.

2.11 Resubmission process

All candidates will receive their assessment and feedback report on the published results day. Those who are successful will be elected as Chartered Members, Associates or Legal Associates if applying to that class of membership. The candidates who have not been successful will have to resubmit the parts of their submission that have not met the criteria, focusing on the specific competencies or criteria that were not demonstrated. If the candidate is unsuccessful, they will be required to resubmit any revised or supplementary materials for assessment by the original assessor pairing. Candidates have up to two years to complete the resubmission process; after two years, candidates are required to make a full new application. If the candidates include any new experience and/or case studies within their resubmission then they are required to provide new corroboration for this.

If the candidate is unsuccessful in demonstrating criteria in all sections, they will resubmit all sections. If they are unsuccessful in one, they will only resubmit the one section. The candidate can continue to resubmit until they are successful.

A candidate cannot be reassessed on a competency or criterion that has previously been deemed to be successful. The assessment of the resubmission will only focus on the elements of the submission that were marked as unsuccessful in the previous round.

Candidates can only resubmit their applications for the published resubmission dates. The Membership Team will send the resubmission documents to the original assessor pairing at the start of the relevant resubmission assessment period. Assessors should again check for any possible new conflict of interest as well as confirming receipt to the Membership Team and their co-assessor within two working days.

Assessors will not be sent a copy of the original submission, as they will only be reassessing the issues they raised for concern in the previous assessment. If an assessor does, however, feel that they need to refer to the original submission they should contact the Membership Team.

Assessors should record the outcome of the resubmission on the original Candidate Feedback Form, which will be emailed to them with the resubmission material. Assessors should detail their findings in the 'Resubmission Feedback Report' that will be found on the last page of the form and update the boxes on the front sheet to reflect the resubmission outcomes. The detailed feedback report for the initial submission should be left unchanged.

Assessors do not receive an additional fee for assessing the material provided at the candidate's first resubmission attempt as this activity is included in the initial assessment fee payment. If the candidate is then unsuccessful for a second time an additional fee will be paid to the assessor to review the application again, to be repeated for any additional submission attempts. Full details of the honorarium fees are available in the Service Agreement.

3. Providing feedback on APC submissions

3.1 Purpose of the feedback

The Candidate Feedback Form provides advice and guidance to the candidate, regardless of whether they are successful or unsuccessful. **Assessors should take a professional and constructive approach to providing the feedback, as well as including a good level of detail throughout.**

If the candidate has been marked unsuccessful on any element, it is vital that as much information as possible is provided. The candidate needs to know why a competency or section was deemed unsuccessful. The RTPI does not expect assessors to "spoon- feed" the answers to candidates in order for them to produce a successful resubmission. Assessors should, however, provide prompts to unsuccessful candidates to point them in the right direction.

If assessors are concerned that a candidate has not addressed, or even may not have read, the published guidance it may be appropriate to refer the candidate to the published material rather than provide detailed advice in the feedback if this would duplicate the guidance. To assist candidates, references to the guidance in feedback should refer to the title of the guidance (including the publication date) and include specific references to particular sections, pages or paragraphs within it.

Feedback on elements that have been successfully demonstrated is also very important. The assessment is the culmination of education, experience and a substantial written submission. If the candidate has done something well, let them know.

3.2 Providing constructive feedback

Providing detailed and clear feedback to the candidate reduces the need for candidates to contact the RTPI (and therefore, indirectly, the assessors) for additional clarification at a later date. When providing feedback, assessors should:

- Refer back to the submission (using either paragraph or case study numbers or referring to specific content). This builds confidence that the assessors have carried out a thorough and professional assessment.
- For unsuccessful elements, explain why the evidence provided does not meet the requirements.
- Indicate whether the candidate could build on case studies already provided or if they should introduce new case studies in their resubmission.

Assessors can use either bold or italics for emphasis in their feedback, however, they should not use exclamation marks or block capitals as this can easily lead to candidates misinterpreting the tone of the feedback. For the same reason we ask that assessors avoid using phrases such as: "The assessors were frustrated that the candidate…"; "This is not acceptable for a submission of this nature..."; "It was disappointing for the assessors that

...". Some candidates, particularly on the EP-APC route, may be in senior roles and the feedback should reflect this and avoid a tone that may be perceived as patronising.

Assessors are recommended **not** to refer to the candidate using their first name and to instead use either "you", "the candidate", or "the Licentiate" or "the Associate" (if applicable). If assessors are unsure of the candidate's gender, they should use "their" rather than guessing at "his" or "her".

3.3 Feedback on the Practical Experience Statement (PES)

In the PES, candidates should detail how they meet the planning experience requirements as outlined in the relevant guidance. The Membership Team will check the application to ensure the dates of employment provided add up to the required amount of experience, however, it is assessors' responsibility to ensure the work described by the candidate in the submission is of a suitable type and level as defined in the relevant guidance for the class or route. For candidates for Chartered membership, assessors can refer to the Reflective Journal (for L-APC and A-APC candidates) or the examples of professional work (for EP-APC candidates) for more detail or clarification if required.

If the candidate is successful, the feedback should outline how they demonstrated the experience requirement. If the candidate is unsuccessful, the feedback should explain what parts (if any) of the experience is acceptable and where experience is lacking. For unsuccessful candidates, the feedback should also outline in the resubmission requirements what extra information they need to provide in their resubmission, and how much more experience (or experience of a different type) they need to gain before resubmitting. If the candidate needs to clarify an element of the PES, assessors should request a supplementary statement of 400-1,000 words. A full resubmission should be requested if clarification on the majority of their experience is required.

Regardless of whether the PES was successful or not, the remainder of the application should be assessed and feedback provided. If an assessor has any concerns or queries about assessing the remainder of the application after determining the PES to be unsuccessful then they should please contact the Membership Team.

3.4 Feedback on the Professional Competence Statement (PCS)

The PCS should demonstrate how the candidate meets all of the required competencies as outlined in the relevant guidance using the required number of case studies.

To ensure clarity, assessors should provide feedback under each of the competency headings provided for an initial assessment and indicate in brackets after each heading whether the competency was successful or unsuccessful. There are also check boxes for each of the competencies on the front page of the Candidate Feedback Form to be selected to indicate outcomes within the results summary. Assessors should give specific feedback about how candidates have demonstrated each competency (for example, through a case study), rather than just stating that the competency has been demonstrated.

If the candidate has not fully met the criteria for the competency, it will be required to be resubmitted as a whole. However, the assessors must ensure they are clear and concise within the feedback to where the candidate has met the competency.

Example

Candidate has met criterion A and B, however has not fully met criterion C, this would require the candidate to resubmit the competency as a whole.

More detail may be needed where candidates have been unsuccessful to help them understand where further work is required.

The resubmission requirements should clearly indicate to the candidate whether they need to provide a complete resubmission or a supplementary statement of a defined word limit. If the candidate is unsuccessful on four or more PCS competencies, assessors should normally request a complete resubmission. The assessors are given discretion to request a full resubmission if fewer than four competencies were unsuccessful, if they feel this is more appropriate (for example, if the candidate is unsuccessful on 'core' competencies).

For a full resubmission, the candidate will rework the outstanding competencies within the body of the original text, but cannot be reassessed on any of the competencies they were deemed successful in.

If the candidate is unsuccessful on three competencies or fewer, assessors should normally request a supplementary statement of between 300-1,500 words. The minimum length of 300 words should be sufficient for the candidate to cover one competency (as well as setting the context), with an additional 300 words requested for the second and third competencies, if required, as shown below:

Number of unsuccessful competencies	Minimum word count for resubmission
One	300 words supplementary statement
Two	600 words supplementary statement
Three	900 words supplementary statement
Four	1200 words supplementary statement
Five	1500 words supplementary statement
Six or more	Complete resubmission

This applies to all routes and classes with two exceptions:

1. Candidates on the EP-APC route who are unsuccessful in demonstrating the optional competency C14 Leadership in spatial planning. The word count for a resubmission of C14 should be 1,000 words, as this is the amount of words a candidate is advised to allocate to this competency (because they do it in place of C3-C6).

2. Candidates applying for the Legal Associate class who are unsuccessful in demonstrating the optional competency C15 Identifying and analysing legal issues, and assessing alternative courses of action. The word count for a resubmission of C15 should be 1,000 words, as this is the amount of words a candidate is advised to allocate to this competency (because they do it in place of C3-C6).

The resubmission requirements should also indicate whether the candidate could build on existing case studies to demonstrate the outstanding competencies or if it is recommended that they introduce new case studies.

3.5 Feedback on the Professional Development Plan (PDP)

The PDP should be current at the point of submission and should outline the plan for the subsequent two years. The content should cover the requirements and checklist outlined in the relevant guidance. Candidates are required to use the PDP template that can be downloaded from the RTPI website. The PDP is assessed on the three elements:

1. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis
2. Goal and Objectives
3. Action Plan

Assessors should provide their feedback to candidates on their PDP under each of the three headings provided and indicate in brackets after each heading whether the element was successful. There are also check boxes for each of the three elements on the front page of the Candidate Feedback Form, within the results summary, to be selected to indicate outcomes.

Assessors are reminded that the level of candidates' career aspirations will vary. Assessors should therefore be assessing the relevance of candidates' goals, objectives and actions to their development as professionals and their weaknesses (not the level of ambition).

If any element of the PDP is unsuccessful then the candidate is required to resubmit the entire PDP. It is difficult to treat the three elements of the PDP separately as they flow from one to the next. The submission may provide an acceptable SWOT, for example, but the Goals and Objectives and Action Plan may be unsuccessful. In this case the whole PDP is still resubmitted but only elements 2 and 3 would be reassessed.

Unsuccessful areas might include:

- a lack of linkage between SWOT weaknesses and the goals, objectives or actions;
- lack of specificity and depth of goals and objectives; or
- lack of SMART characteristics within the action plan. (Full details of the SMART model are in the guidance.)

Feedback and resubmission requirements should be sufficiently detailed to enable candidates to understand why they have been unsuccessful. For example it is not enough to say that an action is not SMART, it would be more useful to explain why the action is not SMART.

3.5.1 Feedback for candidates entering the PDP Support Phase

If the assessors have found a candidate's PES, PCS and general presentation to be successful, but one or more elements of the PDP to be unsuccessful, then they will be elected as a Chartered

Member, Associate or Legal Associate, are required to work with the RTPI in a PDP support phase. If assessors have determined the PDP to be successful then the candidate cannot be referred to the PDP support phase. Assessors can, however, make suggestions and provide advice that could aid candidates with future PDPs and this can be particularly useful for borderline cases.

Assessors are still required to provide full feedback, including resubmission requirements, for the PDPs of candidates entering the PDP Support Phase. When referring candidates to the PDP support phase assessors may find it useful to add the following wording (or similar) to their PDP feedback:

> *"Given that the PDP needs improvement the candidate will be required to undertake the PDP Support Phase. The candidate is encouraged to use the RTPI's PDP resources together with the feedback from the assessors to prepare a revised PDP which should be submitted within one month. Further details are available in [please insert the title and date of the relevant guidance document for the class or route].*

3.6 Feedback on the General Presentation

The general presentation of the candidate's submission is assessed in addition to the assessment criteria. The submission is expected to be of a high professional standard and meet the requirements outlined in the relevant guidance.

Assessors are expected to provide written feedback on general presentation for all candidates. Even if the candidate is successful in this section, feedback should be included to acknowledge when they have been successful – this could be a simple comment i.e. "Overall good presentation".

If all the criteria have been demonstrated, but the submission is not to a professional standard, then it should be assessed as unsuccessful and a full resubmission requested. A candidate should not be unsuccessful solely because of an out of place comma, however if grammatical errors were repeated throughout the submission that would suggest a lack of care and attention and the assessors would be justified in requesting that the submission is proof read and resubmitted to a professional standard.

Assessors are able to show some discretion with this part of the assessment especially in instances where it is suspected, or maybe known, that English is not the first language for example. If assessors are in any doubt as to how to proceed please contact the Membership Team, before completing the Candidate Feedback Form, to discuss the appropriate course of action.

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND DISABILITIES

If a candidate has indicated to the Membership Team that they have a disability or learning difficulty then a note will be made when logging their application. To prevent the possibility of prejudgement of the candidate's submission, and due to the confidential nature of this information, this will not initially be disclosed to the assessors.

The Membership Team will review the assessors' feedback for these candidates before it is sent out to ensure that the learning difficulty or disability has not had an impact on the assessment and check that the feedback is not in any way insensitive to the candidate. The Membership Team may inform the assessors at this point and ask for the feedback to be amended if necessary. Again, if assessors are unsure or have any concerns relating to learning difficulties and disabilities then they should contact the Membership Team.

3.7 Feedback on resubmissions

When a candidate makes a resubmission, the Membership Team will insert an additional page with a 'Resubmission Feedback Report' section into the back of the original feedback form. The Membership Team will also retain an un-amended copy of the original feedback form on file for internal audit purposes. Assessors will be sent the candidate's original Candidate Feedback Form (with an inserted 'Resubmission Feedback Report') along with any resubmitted sections, supplementary statements, additional corroboration or Reflective Journal if relevant.

Assessors should detail the findings of their assessment of the resubmission documents into this 'Resubmission Feedback Report' (that will be found on the last page of the form) and update the boxes on the front sheet to reflect the resubmission outcomes. The detailed feedback report for the initial submission (or previous resubmissions) should be left unchanged.

When providing feedback on resubmissions assessors should follow the best practice guidance outlined in sections 3.1-3.6. Assessors are also recommended to add the relevant PCS competency headings and PDP element headings to the resubmission feedback report when providing feedback on PCS and PDP resubmissions. Assessors are also reminded that when reviewing resubmissions on the PCS or PDP, the candidate cannot be reassessed as unsuccessful on an area of the PCS or PDP that was previously determined to be successful (as stated in section 2.11).

3.8 Top tips on providing feedback

- Identify and explain how or where the candidate has gone wrong.
- Provide prompts to point the candidate in the right direction.
- Consider appropriate resubmission requirements – is it a supplementary statement with an appropriate word limit or a complete resubmission?
- Proof read your feedback – ensure the correct boxes are marked, there are no spelling or grammatical errors, and that all sentences make sense.
- Make specific reference to paragraph numbers or events outlined in case study.
- In borderline cases, use the Reflective Journal to help you make a decision (the candidate should reference the specific Reflective Journal entries – see section 4).
- Be encouraging – if a candidate has done something well, congratulate them.

4. The role of the Reflective Learning and examples of Professional Work

4.1 Referring to the Reflective Journal (L-APC and A-APC routes only)

Candidates submitting through the L-APC or A-APC are required to produce a Reflective Journal covering a minimum of 12 months' recent experience as a Licentiate or Associate. The Reflective Journal is submitted to the assessors for reference only – it is not formally assessed, but can be helpful for understanding the background to the statements made elsewhere in candidates' submissions. The Reflective Journal is maintained by the candidate for two reasons:

- to aid them in their development and when preparing their submission; and
- to aid the assessors by providing further background and context to their experience.

There is no word limit for the Reflective Journal and a lot of candidates choose to cover more than the mandatory **12 months of experience** (so it can become a very large document).

Assessors are not required to read the full Reflective Journal, but it is good practice to do so and will help them gain a greater understanding of candidates' experience. The guidance documents make it clear that candidates must refer the assessors to the Reflective Journal if they wish the assessors to read specific information contained within it. To make the process of cross-referencing easier for all concerned, candidates are asked to use paragraph numbering and refer assessors to specific entries within the Reflective Journal.

4.2 Referring to the examples of professional work (EP-APC route only)

Candidates submitting through the EP-APC are making a direct application for Chartered membership and so do not have a period of time in another membership class during which they could compile a Reflective Journal. Instead they are required to submit five to ten examples of their professional work.

The examples of professional work carry out the same function as the Licentiate or Associate Reflective Journal in that they provide assessors with further background and context. The EP-APC Guidance sets out what kind of examples are accepted and what should not be submitted.

Candidates must submit a minimum of five and a maximum of ten examples in total. Where documents are lengthy, candidates are strongly advised to keep the examples focused by directing the assessors to the particularly relevant sections, using page and paragraph referencing, or highlighting.

4.3 Use of the Reflective Journal or examples of professional work for 'borderline' assessments

It is important that the overall assessment outcome is based on the information provided in the written submission. Assessors may wish, however, to refer to the Reflective Journal or examples of professional work to gain further information about a particular case study or gain a more holistic view of the candidate's professional development. This information may have some influence on the assessors' decision making where the demonstration of a competency is slightly weak or borderline in the submission, but there is clear evidence of the candidate meeting that competency in their Reflective Journal or examples of professional work. The assessors may use their discretion to reflect that, on balance, there is enough evidence to support that competency being successful.

This situation is different to situations where a competency is not demonstrated at all in the submission. In this situation it does not matter how much information is in the Reflective Journal or examples of professional work, they are not to be assessed in place of the submission.

However, assessors can use the information in the Reflective Journal or examples of professional work to make suggestions of possible alternative case studies for the resubmission.

5. Key differences (non-accredited routes and Associate class)

Assessors for the A-APC and EP-APC routes, and for the Associate and Legal Associate classes, will need to familiarise themselves with their guidance documents. The guidance contains some key differences from the L-APC route, particularly relating to the details of the competencies, word counts and number of case studies required. The following points summarise key differences of which assessors need to be aware.

5.1. Educational background

Candidates applying to the Associate class, or for Chartered membership through the EP-APC, who have a spatial planning degree which is not accredited by the RTPI and are applying under educational background b (set out in the guidance documents) will need to complete an additional statement setting out the planning content of that degree. In order to apply with the minimum experience equivalent to a partially accredited degree, candidates must demonstrate that their degree covers the same topics as an RTPI accredited degree.

Assessors must assess this statement to see that the content of the degree covers the following broad principles that govern planning operations (taken from the RTPI's Policy Statement on Initial Planning Education):

- Social science as an analytical framework
- The interplay between land use and transportation
- Design and the realisation of place
- Economic issues relating to development
- Environmental challenges
- Legal and institutional frameworks

Candidates whose degree covered a specific aspect or area of planning (such as urban design, regeneration) will need to show how it relates to the topics listed above. Candidates **must** demonstrate that 75% of their degree was spent on these topics.

If assessors find that the statement does not demonstrate that the degree meets these requirements, they have three options:

- Request a resubmission of this section, if it is felt that further information is required to make an adequate assessment.
- Advise the candidate to apply under educational background c (non-planning degree) which requires an additional year of experience (this may mean the candidate will have to wait up to one year before resubmitting).
- If the candidate already has the additional year experience, and this is assessed as acceptable, the assessors will discount the statement and assume the candidate has applied under educational background c (non-planning degree).

The statement is not required for candidates undertaking A-APC because, as they are already Associates, their educational background was assessed at the initial stage.

5.2. Optional Leadership in planning competency (EP-APC route only)

Assessors who themselves have strategic level experience may apply to assess EP-APC candidates who are taking this optional competency. Section 5 of the EP- APC guidance explains this further: it enables those who have significant strategic level experience to demonstrate their experience and competence in planning leadership.

As well as assessing the competency within the PCS, assessors will need to assess the candidate’s PES to ensure that they meet the requirements for taking this optional competency. Candidates taking this competency do so as an alternative to competencies C3-C6 and so will be expected to allocate a significant part of their PCS (about 1,000 words) to the Leadership in planning competency. Candidates are required to indicate whether they are demonstrating the optional competency as an alternative to C3- C6 in their application form.

If a candidate undertakes this competency, and the assessors determine that, their experience is not of a strategic level (in the PES) and/or they are having difficulty demonstrating the leadership in planning competency (in the PCS), the assessors should advise the candidate to change to the standard EP-APC route and demonstrate C3- C6. The following wording could be used:

"Whilst you clearly have extensive planning experience, the assessors are not confident that this is of a 'strategic level' or that the optional leadership in planning competency can be demonstrated. They would recommend that your resubmission addresses the standard EP-APC route, demonstrating competencies C3-C6."

5.3 Assessment outcomes (applications to the Associate class and for Chartered membership through the EP-APC only)

There is a key difference from the L-APC and A-APC routes in that candidates applying to the Associate class or for Chartered membership through the EP-APC can be rejected. (L- APC and A-APC candidates can only be made unsuccessful as a deferral). Assessors can only reject a candidate's submission subject to the following criteria:

- The candidate's experience, demonstrated in the PES, is short of the experience requirements by two years or more.
- A submission cannot be rejected the first time it is made. If assessors think that the candidate's experience does not meet the requirements, the candidate must be given the opportunity to clarify their experience in a resubmission.
- A submission cannot be rejected because the PCS and/or PDP do not meet the requirements. If the PCS and/or PDP do not meet the requirements, the submission will be deferred.

5.4 Legal Associates Class: Key differences

Assessors for the Legal Associate class will need to familiarise themselves with their guidance document published June 2019. The following points summarise key specifics of which assessors need to be aware.

1. ELIGIBILITY: AMOUNT OF ELIGIBLE EXPERIENCE

Candidates applying to the Legal Associate class do not just need to be qualified legal practitioners, but to have enough experience to show that they are able to give specialist advice in planning law. Candidates who practise only a very small amount of planning law will not meet the criteria for this specialist class (but may apply to the Affiliate or Associate class instead).

Candidates will set out on their application form the numbers of hours a year they have been spending on planning law. The Membership Team, as part of the pre-assessment checks, will check that these accord to the number of hours required to become a Legal Associate, as set out in section 2.2 of the guidance document.

Assessors must assess the candidate's PES to ensure that the description of the work and experience undertaken is what would be expected from a qualified lawyer spending a significant proportion of their time on planning law. If assessors are uncertain as to whether the candidate has sufficient experience they should defer the submission and ask for further clarification from the candidate.

2. ELIGIBILITY: NATURE OF ELIGIBLE EXPERIENCE

Candidates applying to the Legal Associate class need to demonstrate that they have sufficient breadth of experience in planning law to give quality advice. This instils confidence in clients and other professionals.

Assessors must assess the candidate's PES to make sure that the candidate has covered at least five of the areas of practice in List A of section 2.3 of the guidance. Candidates may also demonstrate areas in List B but do not have to do so. Candidates cannot demonstrate areas from List B in place of those from List A. If assessors are uncertain as to whether the candidate has the right type of experience they should defer the submission and ask for further clarification from the candidate.

3. ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

It is possible for candidates applying to the Legal Associate class to be rejected. Assessors can only reject a candidate's submission subject to the following criteria:

- The candidate's experience, demonstrated in the PES, is short of the experience requirements by two years or more.
- A submission cannot be rejected the first time it is made. If assessors think that the candidate's experience does not meet the requirements, the candidate must be given the opportunity to clarify his/her experience in a resubmission.
- A submission cannot be rejected because the PCS and/or PDP do not meet the requirements. If the PCS and/or PDP do not meet the requirements, the submission will be deferred.

6. Assessor monitoring

6.1 The monitoring process

The Membership Team, supported by the MAAP, carries out a monitoring process in order to ensure the consistency of the assessment and feedback provided to candidates. A sample of assessor pairings will be selected for monitoring after each first time or resubmission round. The Membership Team will review the assessors' feedback forms alongside the candidates' submissions noting whether the assessment and feedback were provided in a clear, accurate, detailed, professional and constructive manner. The outcome and any points raised by the monitoring process will then be summarised and presented to the MAAP. It should be noted that assessors on the MAAP are subject to the same monitoring process as all other assessors.

6.2 Follow up

The assessor pairings will be notified of the findings of the monitoring process including any issues identified with their assessments and how they can address these issues. The assessors will be encouraged to discuss any points raised with both the Membership Team and their co-assessor.

If any specific and serious concerns have been raised in the initial monitoring, the assessor pairing will be picked up again for monitoring in the next round to ensure that the issues with the assessments have been remedied. If the previously identified issues with the assessments persist, or if additional issues are identified, the pairings will be notified by the Membership Team. The assessors will be contacted individually to discuss the issues prior to the next round to determine if there are any underlying problems that can be resolved.

The assessors will then have a second opportunity to remedy any issues at the following round. After that round, if the issues are not addressed, then the assessors will be referred to the MAAP who will decide whether to suspend their role as an assessor or whether there is further feedback, support or training that could be provided in order to resolve the issues. The assessors would then be notified of the decision and recommendations of the MAAP.

7. Advising candidates

Assessors are often approached to advise or mentor candidates through their application process. While the RTPI encourages candidates to use the resources available to them, managing such a relationship can be difficult. Assessors must not mentor individual candidates or comment on individual submissions, in order to maintain the overall integrity of the process.

When approached to act as a mentor or read a candidate's submission, assessors can offer to provide general guidance but cannot agree to take on the candidate as a mentee or comment on the submission. Any new assessors who have been mentoring candidates should immediately advise their mentees of this and, where possible, aid them in finding a new mentor.

As a line manager of a candidate applying for membership, there may be a need for an assessor to engage with their employees, however, they must remain within the requirements listed in sections 7.1 and 7.2 below. Assessors are sometimes invited by the Membership Team to take part in membership related events. This is perfectly acceptable as long as assessors comply with the requirements set out below.

The types of advice listed in sections 7.1 and 7.2 should provide clarity to assessors on managing relationships with candidates and understanding of what constitutes appropriate involvement. Ultimately, assessors should remain impartial and objective at all times.

While assessors are not able to be mentors, they are able to sponsor and corroborate membership applications

7.1 Types of advice assessors can provide

- Offer general advice on the assessment processes.
- Give general advice on what makes a good submission.
- Give candidates career advice if requested.
- Discuss the competencies and how these can be demonstrated generally.
- Give examples of common mistakes that candidates make.
- Encourage candidates to use support structures that are available to them (e.g. refer to guidance, attend a membership related event).

7.2 Types of advice assessors cannot provide

- Offer specific advice on individual submissions.
- Recommend specific case studies for submissions.
- Proof read individual submissions.
- Mentor individual candidates.
- Comment on whether they think a candidate has or has not demonstrated a particular competency.
- Comment on feedback made by other assessors.

We hope that you find this resource helpful and thank you for your support in maintaining the integrity of our assessment process. Please do not hesitate to contact the Membership Team if you have any queries or concerns

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Thank you for reading this guidance.

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Appendix 1

Overview of requirements

Word counts and core submission documents	PES	PCS	PDP	Reflective Journal	Examples of professional work	Number of case studies
Associate	1,000	1,500	1,500	x	x	1 - 2
Legal Associate	1,000	1,750	1,500	x	x	1 - 2
L-APC	1,000	3,000	1,500	✓	x	1 - 3
A-APC	1,250	4,000	1,500	✓	x	2 - 4
EP-APC	1,250	4,250	1,500	x	✓	2 - 4