

## **The APC is tough for good reason**

**With rising demand to prove competence in building control, candidates shouldn't be deterred by the rigour of the APC process – which is designed to ensure they maintain the highest standards.**

### **Adam L'Aimable**

**Months before sitting the interview for my APC in November last year, I spoke with a colleague who had passed his own assessment many years before. His words stuck with me, as the enormity of what I was about to do loomed over me.**

At our monthly virtual team meeting, he had asked how my preparation was going. As a full-time working father of two in the middle of a global pandemic, my initial answer was 'slowly'. He then paused and said: 'There is no short cut, and the panel will find any shortcomings in your knowledge. You will be challenged more than you ever have been before. Ensure you are prepared.'

Although I knew the areas that would be covered – principles, parameters and key criteria – it was in this informal conversation with my colleague and supervisor that I realised I would have to dedicate everything to passing my APC.

### **Training options**

RICS offers two structured training routes, the length of which depends on your experience. If you have up to five years' experience you require 24 months of structured training, and between five and ten years, 12 months. But with ten or more years experience there is no minimum structured training requirement.

Having four years' prior experience, I initially enrolled on the 24-month structured training route in 2012. My plan was to complete this while keeping diary records of my day-to-day activities.

However, shortly after enrolling work became increasingly busy so I put my plans on hold. Several years passed and in 2016 it became apparent that if I were to wait for two more years I would have more than ten years of experience and qualify for the non-structured training route.

Overall, this suited my professional and personal commitments, and meant that I could continue to learn and gain experience from the exciting and varied projects at London Building Control before the time came to prepare my case study.

4 months before I had applied for the second assessment session of 2020 and with the words of my colleague still ringing in my ears, I reflected on the gaps in my knowledge for my selected competencies. This involved extensive reading and attending as many CPD events as I could manage.

I then moved on to the process of reviewing the Building Control pathway guide and highlighted everything the competencies required of me. I cross-referenced this information with my submission, and created a revision timetable schedule that I would follow daily.

To complement all the knowledge I would need to be confident in, I took the time to revisit the vast array of project types I had worked on over the past ten years. I could then ensure I would be able to explain adequately at interview how I had carried out my work on each.

I understood that the assessors would be looking at the way I conducted myself during the interview. I took this to mean that my professional conduct would be under particular scrutiny, so this would be an area that I needed to be mindful of throughout. My preparation therefore had to be intensely thorough, and the need to dedicate the correct amount of time and assiduity to it was vital.

### **Tough test**

My personal goal was to achieve chartered status, while professionally I felt that – in an industry that constantly wants you to prove your competency – I wanted to demonstrate that I had earned the professional designation MRICS.

Other chartered professional bodies provide titles for different specialisms in the built environment, but no other offers the prestige of using the chartered building control surveyor designation. It has always been regarded within the industry as the hardest to obtain, but also as the highest standard across the industry.

The pass rates were a constant concern throughout my preparation. I had read an article in *Building* magazine by Katie Puckett in 2007 that stated: 'RICS' APC is renowned as one of the toughest chartership programmes you can take. The average pass rate is 70%, but this drops to 59% for the building surveying faculty.' [<https://www.building.co.uk/careers/assessment-of-prolonged-cruelty/3101066.article>]

These statistics had stuck with me, I found myself constantly pondering why the pass rates for Built Environment vs Land & Property Faculties are so consistently different.

As my own preparation picked up pace, the answer became abundantly clear: the breadth of knowledge required of building control surveyors is staggering.

It all comes back to the fundamental point that this process is not meant to be easy. Passing the APC shows that a panel of your peers agree that you have met, and in many cases surpassed, the requirements to demonstrate that you are a trusted professional. You have been shown to understand the Building Regulations, the wider built environment, and the expectations of professional conduct for RICS members. Effort must be applied if you are going to pass.

### **A methodical approach**

I know many surveyors who conduct themselves at the high level expected of the RICS, but who would state the APC process is difficult or time-consuming.

Don't doubt yourself or be daunted by the APC process.

There is no short cut: just be strict with yourself and set a minimum number of hours a week for your preparation.

Don't approach the APC in its entirety. The APC consists of multiple parts that allow you to prove your competence- Summary of experience, Case Study, Presentation and Interview. Tackle each of these elements individually so you keep making consistent progress without feeling overwhelmed.

The APC process is certainly the most in-depth assessment I have participated in; but then nothing that is worth having is handed out freely. The introduction of the Building Safety Bill following the Grenfell disaster has placed emphasis on proving competency. The shareholders in the construction process and of course the actual Building Safety Regulator will require a standard of competency to be proven in the future. Given the rising demand for demonstrating competence in building control and indeed across the entire built environment, everyone should be pushing to achieve the higher standard and achieving RICS membership.

### **APC advice**

Whether you are close to sitting your assessment or even just considering joining RICS, I would offer the following advice.

- Speak to colleagues working in local authorities and the private sector as Approved Inspectors. We conduct similar functions and you may need to work together occasionally, so it is important you know how these functions differ and relate according to which sector you work in.
- Organise at least one external mock interview. It should be conducted in a fashion as similar to the actual interview as possible and should involve being interviewed by experts in your field who are unknown to you. If you can't arrange this, try at least to have an informal questioning from your colleagues. Being familiar with the process of the RICS interview questioning will give you a boost in confidence on the interview day.
- Practice your presentation as much as possible. It is the first impression the panel will have of you and can set the interview up for a positive start.
- Reread your submission. The importance of this cannot be overstated: the panel will ask about it and have questions relating to your chosen competencies, so ensure you continually read further into and around the topics you address in your submission up until your interview date. The panel will ask questions related to your submission but can ask questions that are hypothetical. For example, how advice given to a client may have changed since your submission following legislation changes.
- Be the assessor. Read through your submission and try to create questions based on what you have written – you will be surprised how many of these you will get asked at the interview. It is also a good idea to ask colleagues to review the submission and come up with some questions.

### **Passing the interview**

There are plenty of examples that show the process of the actual interview such as:

<https://www.rics.org/uk/events/e-learning/e-learning/apc-mock-interview>

You will be nervous in the build-up, but the nerves will soon fall away when you start presenting. The amount of effort you have invested will show, and the interview panel will appreciate it.

During the interview, don't be concerned if you are unsure of a question. You will be asked a variety, so it is fine to suggest coming back to one question in particular at the end.

After the interview, you will have five working days to wait until an outcome is published on the Assessment Resource Centre [<https://www.rics.org/uk/surveying-profession/global-professional-network/candidate/assessment-resource-centre-arc/>].

From my own experience of passing the APC the sense of accomplishment is unparalleled, and every early start or late night feels entirely justified when you log into ARC and see the banner 'Many congratulations, you have been successful'.

So, it's important to move away from asking why the APC is so tough and instead focus on how to ready yourself and thus pass.

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