

MINUTES

SPECIAL MEETING

CALIFORNIA ARCHITECTS BOARD

November 20, 2012

Sacramento, CA and Various Teleconference Locations

A. CALL TO ORDER – ROLL CALL – ESTABLISHMENT OF A QUORUM

President Marilyn Lyon called the meeting to order at approximately 2:05 p.m.
Vice President Sheran Voigt called the roll.

Board Members Present

Marilyn Lyon, President
Sheran Voigt, Vice President
Hraztan Zeitlian, Secretary
Matthew McGuinness
Fermin Villegas

Board Members Absent

Jon Alan Baker
Pasqual Gutierrez
Jeffrey Heller
Michael Merino

Guests Present

Kurt Cooknick, Director of Regulation and Practice, The American Institute of Architects, California Council (AIACC)
Glenn Gall, Professional Qualifications Committee
Bob Holmgren, Supervising Personnel Selection Consultant, Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) Office of Professional Examination Services (OPES)
Sonja Merold, Chief, DCA OPES
Nicole Woods, Project Manager, DCA OPES

Staff Present

Doug McCauley, Executive Officer
Marcus Reinhardt, Program Manager Examination/Licensing Unit
Don Chang, Assistant Chief Counsel, DCA

Six members of the Board present constitute a quorum. There being five present at the time of roll, a quorum was not established and the Board meet as a committee.

B. PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Ms. Lyon said the meeting was being convened to discuss the recent events related to the California Supplemental Examination (CSE) and the Board's Executive Officer, Doug McCauley, along with OPES would provide details.

C. PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION

There were no public comments.

D. DISCUSS AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON CSE RESULTS

Ms. Lyon asked Mr. McCauley to present this agenda item.

Mr. McCauley said the latest form of the CSE was launched on October 1, 2012, and shortly afterwards, as is standard psychometric practice, OPES began conducting its analysis of the examination form's items. He said during analysis of the first group of candidate responses, it was determined the pass rate was below expectations. He added that during an analysis of a second group of candidate responses the pass rate was still low, but appeared to be psychometrically improving. He said the number of candidates within the two groups analyzed represented only a small fraction of the typical yearly quantity (approximately 1,000 candidates) who would take the CSE. He said a third group of candidate responses were analyzed and the analysis results indicated the examination form being administered was not performing to expectations. He also said in discussions with OPES regarding the performance it was recommended administration of the current examination form be suspended. He stated the matter was discussed between himself and Ms. Lyon and it was determined the correct course of action would be to suspend administration of the current examination form effective November 9, 2012.

Mr. McCauley said an alternate examination form can be launched in place of the currently administered one beginning December 11, 2012. He added that candidates whose appointments were canceled would be allowed to reschedule at no additional cost and those who failed the CSE would be permitted a retest at no additional cost.

Mr. McCauley introduced the management and staff of OPES who were attending the meeting and would provide details to the Board regarding recent events. Bob Holmgren, from OPES, said after the current CSE form was launched, OPES began routine test scoring and item analysis (TSIA). He said OPES conducts TSIA's approximately every 15 days to evaluate how the examination performs. He stated with respect to the first group of CSE candidate responses, the TSIA showed that of the first 24 candidates no one had passed the examination and that it was suspect for poor performance. He also said the OPES Examination Developer (a member of OPES staff) contacted Board staff to inquire about the composition of the first group of candidates. Mr. Holmgren stated that the information provided by Board staff indicated a number of the first group of candidates had previous taken and failed the CSE (in some cases multiple times) and/or were reciprocal licensure candidates. He said such candidates can potentially create an instability in the TSIA conclusions. He then said that after approximately 30 days from launch a second group of candidate responses were analyzed and while the examination had substantially improved psychometrically, it was still not performing at an acceptable level.

Mr. Holmgren said after the first two groups were analyzed OPES began more formal discussions with Board staff to consider contingency plans. He said during the TSIA for the first group the Examination Developer confirmed the test vendor (PSI) had accurately received the responses, the examination items were as expected and properly delivered, there were no miskeyed responses, and the correct examination key was used. He said the Examination Developer took a sampling of the “project” examination items and presented those to an ongoing test development workshop for review by the architect subject-matter experts (SME).

Mr. Holmgren said the result of the review was that none of the SMEs answered any of the examination items correctly. He said the Examination Developer then had the SMEs review each item individually to verify the correct answer. He said this prompted a discussion among the SMEs whereby they realized the items had been answered with little or no use of the related project plan. He also said the SMEs realized that had they used the project plan they would have answered the items correctly. He stated the SMEs reviewed the three item distractors (answers that are plausible but not correct) and the item stem (the question part of the examination item) for clarity, and verified the difficulty level was at the minimum acceptable level of competence.

Mr. Holmgren reported that during the TSIA for the second group the Examination Developer used a different batch of examination items in the same manner as they had the first group and using a different group of SMEs they came to the same conclusions that were previously made with the first group. He said the third TSIA conducted included responses of 74 candidates, and it was hoped the examination form would be performing at a level of psychometric quality that was acceptable for continued administration. He said the resulting data proved that not be the case even though the examination form had shown some improvement. He said at this point OPES formally approached Board staff and recommended suspending the administration of the poorly performing examination form and substituting it with one that had known psychometric performance. He added that OPES also contacted PSI to see how quickly this could be implemented. He said supplemental analysis has been performed in an attempt to ascertain the cause of the poor psychometric performance of the examination items, but there is insufficient data to test any of OPES hypotheses without continuing to administer the examination (ideally to a minimum of 200 candidates), which would be inappropriate. He said OPES is perplexed and unable to identify a definitive cause.

Mr. Holmgren said the best estimate of how to prevent such poor psychometric performance in the future would be to conduct an additional workshop for the pilot testing of examination items just prior to setting the passing score and launching a new examination form. He added there is already a provision in the current Intra-Agency Contract between the Board and OPES to allow for this action. He explained the workshop would allow the SMEs two days over which to fine-tune the examination items. He said it is believed this should resolve the issue of the poor psychometric performance of the examination items.

Mr. Holmgren also said OPES recommended a couple of actions that have already been taken: 1) suspending the current examination form and replacing it with one that has previously proven its psychometric quality; and 2) continuing analysis of the problem to ascertain the cause. He said building towards the future, OPES plans for the “general” portion of the CSE to utilize a greater percentage of items with a known psychometric quality. He added that ultimately the goal is to have 100% of the “general” examination items of this nature. He stated reaching this goal; however, could take up to two years.

Hraztan Zeitlan asked: 1) was any tutorial material made available to examination preparation services prior to the launch of the examination form; 2) was there sufficient time for the examination preparation services to be ready for the examination; and 3) does this factor into the OPES investigation? Mr. McCauley responded that part of the CSE test preparation material is contained within the CSE Test Plan and that while there is no content-based tutorial, there is an instructional tutorial available to candidates that guides them through the process of taking the computer-delivered CSE. Mr. Zeitlian opined that part of the reason for the poor performance of the examination may have been because private examination preparation services did not have sufficient time to prepare materials for candidates to utilize. He asked again if this was considered during the OPES investigation. Mr. McCauley responded that prior to the launch of the computer-delivered CSE there was a window of opportunity for examination preparation services to prepare material for use by candidates. He added that the current CSE form is driven by the same occupational analysis used to develop previous CSE forms, in addition to the same Test Plan and knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) statements.

Mr. Zeitlian asked how the information regarding the issue will be communicated to affected parties. Mr. McCauley stated the candidates who had their CSE appointment canceled have been contacted by telephone. He also said the information is posted on the Board's website and that a letter will be sent to all affected candidates as well.

Matthew McGuinness asked how often examination forms are developed. Mr. McCauley explained that examination development is an ongoing process and examination forms are routinely replaced, revised and developed. Mr. McGuinness asked if there was an issue with the examination instructions, given that once the SMEs who had previously reviewed suspect examination items read the project plans, they answered the items correctly. Mr. Holmgren also explained that the problem for the SMEs was they assumed they could answer the selected examination items without using the project plans. He stated candidates receive the project plan documents when they take their CSE. He said he could not; however, answer how often candidates respond to examination items without using the project plans, but each item has a statement that clearly informs the candidate they need to reference the relevant project plan to answer the item. He added that the cause of the poor examination performance could not solely be placed with the performance of the project items on the CSE because the "general" examination items are experiencing the same low performance. Mr. McCauley said that when the CSE was administered in the oral format, candidates were afforded a 20 minute review session where they could study the project documents. He stated some candidates took advantage of this review session and others did not. He add that each candidate tests differently.

Kurt Cooknick asked if the failure of the examination form is due to the questions and the answers not being properly aligned. Mr. Holmgren responded that these questions have been considered in the investigation into the examination form performance. He said early in the investigation it was considered that the candidate could be a causal factor, particularly given the composition of the first group of candidates analyzed. He said without more extensive data it would not be possible to make a proper conclusion. He then said with respect to whether the examination items could be at fault, OPES has been unable to identify any technical issue with individual examination items. He added there are numerous aspects to multiple-choice item writing that improve the more attention is given to the quality of the item. He said an example of this would be English as a Second Language (ESL). He explained that often ESL individuals learn the top-level context of English terms and this could create a confusion for such candidates taking a professional examination. He stated that it is very

important during the item writing phase to fine-tune the examination items with such candidates taken into consideration to minimize the ESL issues. He further said another consideration would be the style in which the examination item is written. He said it is more likely the issue could be corrected by improved item writing than addressing issues with candidates. He opined that both considerations could be causal factors, but which one is dominant is unknown.

Mr. Cooknick asked what information will be in the letters to candidates. Mr. McCauley responded the letter will communicate to candidates that during normal quality control analysis it was determined there was a need to suspend the CSE and that they would be permitted a retake of the examination at no cost. Mr. Cooknick asked how far retroactively the offer would be extended. Mr. McCauley responded the offer would be extended to those affected candidates from October 1, 2012 to November 9, 2012. Mr. Cooknick asked if this issue would cloud other CSE forms. Mr. McCauley responded it is unknown whether it would. Sonja Merold added that the current issue is an anomaly and there are other CSE forms that have been developed by OPES which are psychometrically performing well. Ms. Merjold stated that current situation is an anomaly and OPES is vested in producing a quality examination for the Board. She added that the other examination forms OPES developed for the Board are statistically reliable.

Mr. McGuinness asked whether the items on this examination form were completely new items and not on previous examination forms. Mr. Holmgren said that there were a number of examination items on the current examination form which had been on previous examination forms, and that it is standard practice to utilize questions from previous examination forms which are psychometrically sound. He said that analysis of these “anchor” items indicated they were all performing similar to how they had performed previously. He said this suggests the issue is not with the examination items. Mr. McGuinness asked how many questions are typically on an examination form and the pass rate for it. Mr. Holmgren said there are 125 examination items, of which 100 are scorable. He added the pass rate is determined each time a new examination form is developed with slight fluctuations but for the examination form in question was set at 73.

Glenn Gall asked if the “anchor” items in the current examination form relate back to the original examination form. He said this has been used in the past as a gauge by which to judge where a new examination form stands relative to its predecessors. Mr. Holmgren stated he could not answer the question directly, but explained that in prior examination forms the goal was to build a bank of new examination items to be used in future examination forms as “anchor” items. He further said that for an item to become an “anchor” it has to be administered over an extended period of time and show strong psychometric performance. He stated that for the next examination form it is planned that 50 percent of the “general” items will be from items that were previously administered.

Mr. Gall asked how rigorous the individual standard setters’ calibration is and whether this could or should become a focus to provide better consistency in SMEs setting the passing standards for the CSE. He said based on his experience with standard setting, that without a rigorous calibration there is the potential for too much sway in what constitutes minimum acceptable competence. He further asked that since there was such a small number of individuals among the three candidate groups analyzed, would that be sufficient data or would it be more advisable to hold on the standards setting until there is more data available. Mr. Holmgren said it became necessary for OPES staff to make a value judgement in the current situation and attempt to strike a balance between the poorly performing examination form and the interests of the candidates. He said this is what motivated the decision to make the recommendation to the Board of suspending the current examination form. Mr. Holmgren

said that during a standard setting workshop part of the process is to make certain the participating SMEs understand how minimum acceptable competence is defined in each of the content areas of the CSE. He said this is done by reviewing the Test Plan and discussing and understanding three levels of performance (below, at, and above minimum competence). He also said the method for determining whether an individual SME is properly calibrated is to have them set the passing point for examination items of known quality that have already had their passing point set.

Mr. Gall said that in the past pilot testing was done using recently licensed architects (individuals licensed less than one year). He asked if this was the intent with the forthcoming pilot testing. Mr. Holmgren said while it was initially proposed to do this, during internal OPES discussions it was determined, in light of the amount of information available on the Internet, this would not be advisable. He explained how easy it would be to inadvertently compromise a question on the Internet and thus risk the security of the CSE. He said OPES does not want to risk the compromise of examination content through pilot testing of the examination items. Mr. Gall said what he is suggesting is the pilot testers be newly licensed in order to provide feedback on whether the examination items are clear and understandable. He added this feedback had proven quite valuable in the past. Mr. Holmgren said OPES recommended using fewer SMEs with security controls to prevent a compromise of the examination content. He add this has been done for other licensing boards with good success.

Ms. Lyon asked what actions the Committee could take at this point given there is no quorum for the Board to take formal action. Mr. McCauley suggested the Committee make a recommendation to the Board of ratifying the action to suspend the CSE.

- **Sheran Voigt moved to recommend the Board ratify suspension of the currently administered examination form of the CSE.**

Matthew McGuinness seconded the motion.

Mr. Zeitlian asked Mr. McCauley to clarify the actions that have already been taken with regards to the issue being faced. Mr. McCauley summarized what he had previously stated about how the problem was discovered and the steps Board and OPES staff took to resolve it as transparently and expediently as possible.

The motion passed 5-0.

Ms. Voigt asked if there is anything further needing to be done in the interim while the replacement examination form is being prepared. Mr. McCauley stated that Board staff will need to follow-up with the letters to candidates and will coordinate with OPES on the additional measures Mr. Holmgren previously identified.

E. CLOSED SESSION – EXAM DEVELOPMENT ISSUES [CLOSED SESSION PURSUANT TO GOVERNMENT CODE SECTIONS 11126(C)(1)]

There were no items to be considered in closed session.

F. REVIEW OF SCHEDULE

Ms. Lyon reminded the Board members the next Board meeting is December 5-6, 2012, in Ontario.

G. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3:10 p.m.