

# RIBA Principal Designer Register Handbook

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# CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	03
2. STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE	05
3. JOINING THE REGISTER	07
4. REAPPLICATION	12
5. APPEALS AND FEES	14
Appendix 1: Competence Criteria	17



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1

# INTRODUCTION



The RIBA Principal Designer Register allows individual RIBA Chartered Members in the UK to demonstrate that they meet the competence criteria to act as Principal Designers.

The RIBA Principal Designer Competence Criteria, as shown in Appendix 1, covers the competences necessary to perform the principal designer role effectively. Registrants will have demonstrated knowledge, skills, experience and behaviours to support the dutyholder role under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and the new principal designer role under the amended Building Regulations. RIBA is naturally concerned to support its members to acquire, attest and maintain their competence to perform the role's duties.

The Register simplifies construction clients' potentially onerous duty to satisfy themselves of principal designers' competence.

This document describes the RIBA Principal Designer Register ('the Register'). It has been written for the benefit of candidates seeking inclusion on the Register but it may be of interest to others (including construction clients, regulators and insurers) who might want to understand how the Register works.



# 2 STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE



# Structure

'Principal Designer' is a regulated dutyholder role required on many construction projects in the UK under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 and, in England, under secondary legislation introduced by the Building Safety Act 2022.

There are three possible attainment levels:

1. **Principal Designer Domestic**, certifying that the individual meets the Register's assessment criteria for principal designer competence to work on projects on behalf of domestic clients only.
2. **Principal Designer General**, certifying that the individual meets the Register's assessment criteria for principal designer competence to work on projects other than higher-risk buildings.
3. **Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings**, certifying that the individual meets the Register's additional assessment criteria for principal designer competence to work on all projects including higher-risk buildings – note that 'Principal Designer' level is a prerequisite to applying for 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings'.

To avoid conflicts of interest, the RIBA has set out separate governance and staffing for the four key areas associated with the Principal Designer Register:

- Standard setting
- Assessment of individuals
- Complaints
- Training

# How the Register is governed

The RIBA recognises that the Register must be trustworthy for its stakeholders (RIBA Chartered Architects and their clients) and the RIBA protects this objective with five processes that dictate all activities and are overseen by RIBA senior management and our governance:

1. Impartiality and independence
2. Confidentiality
3. Security and fraud
4. Management systems, record-keeping, and conformity
5. Effectiveness and reliability

3

# JOINING THE REGISTER





## What makes you eligible

Under the relevant regulations and legislation, principal designers must have control over the design work. The Register is open to designers who are Chartered Members of the RIBA.

Applicants must not currently be under investigation by ARB or the RIBA for a disciplinary matter, or the subject of a suspension order by ARB or the RIBA. You are not required to have undertaken specific training to acquire the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed in the principal designer role. However, applicants may find undertaking training a useful approach to building the necessary knowledge to help meet the competence criteria.

To apply for the 'Principal Designer Domestic' attainment level of competence under the Register you must only be working for domestic clients. If you are carrying out domestic project work for a commercial client, you should apply for the 'Principal Designer General' attainment level.

To achieve the 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' attainment level of competence under the Register, you must have experience of working, or shadowing work, on higher-risk buildings as part of, or in collaboration with, an organisation providing the principal designer or lead designer roles.

## How to apply

Applicants wishing to have their principal designer competence assessed under the Register should apply online at [RIBA Principal Designer Register Assessment](#).

You must:

- Login to the RIBA Academy with your RIBA membership number and password.
- Pay the application fee (a separate annual Register fee will apply if you are successful in your application).
- Progress through the two stage assessment for the domestic attainment level or three stage assessment for the General/ Higher-Risk Buildings attainment level within the 'application window' (see below).

## Application duration and expiry date

The RIBA will hold your application open for 12 months, after which it will expire. This period is called the 'application window'.

Once your application has closed, you must reapply and start again following the process under 'How to apply', if you later decide that you want to join the Register.



## How you are assessed

You are assessed against the Register assessment criteria in two or three stages, subject to your application route.

1. **The multiple-choice knowledge test** on the role of the principal designer and understanding of the legislative framework that applies to the dutyholders requires completion under both the 'Principal Designer Domestic' level or the 'Principal Designer General' level, with the further 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' level only required for those applying to be on the Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings Register. This test must be passed before Stage 2.
2. **The written submission**, templates are provided within the RIBA Principal Designer Register Application Form, comprising your Curriculum Vitae and Case Study to demonstrate your skills, knowledge, experience, and behaviours in relation to the principal designer role based on experience within the last five years. A minimum standard must be demonstrated to proceed to Stage 3 for applicants under the 'Principal Designer General' and 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' levels. Applicants of the 'Principal Designer Domestic' level, will be advised at the end of Stage 2 if they have met the criteria for inclusion on the Register.
3. **The competence assessment interview** to confirm the evidence assembled from Stages 1 and 2 and decide on your level of attainment – 'Principal Designer General' or 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings'.

The Register assessment criteria are set out below:

### Stage 1: Online multiple-choice knowledge test

Applies to all attainment levels:

- Comprises 40 randomised questions to be completed online.
- Results (pass or fail) are confirmed on-screen including the number of correct and incorrect answers. The pass mark is 80% (32 correct answers).
- You have 5 attempts, to be used at your own pace during the application window.
- If you fail all attempts, your application is paused and you can contact the RIBA to discuss next steps.
- If you pass, you may proceed to Stage 2 or undertake the Stage 1 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' test.

Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings test (optional but necessary for the RIBA Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings attainment level):

- Comprises 20 randomised questions to be completed online.
- Results (pass or fail) are confirmed on-screen including the number of correct and incorrect answers. The pass mark is 80% (16 correct answers).
- You have 5 attempts, to be used at your own pace during the application window.
- If you fail all attempts, your application is paused and you can contact the RIBA to discuss next steps.
- If you pass, you may proceed to Stage 2.

### Stage 2: Written submission

- You are required to submit evidence using the templates in the application form via RIBA Academy of your professional experience (within the last five years) in designing for health and safety, managing health and safety risks, and managing building regulations compliance to demonstrate experience against the competence criteria.
- Your submission must include case study based responses reflecting on your personal role in working, or shadowing, alongside or as part of an organisation fulfilling the function of principal designer or lead designer on a construction project(s).
- You must submit your written submission before your application window expires.
- Your submission is sent to two assessors who assess it against the competence criteria prior to Stage 3, or on completion of Stage 2 for 'Principal Designer Domestic' applicants (where the assessors decision will also follow the three possible outcomes noted under Stage 3).

### Stage 3: Competence assessment interview (does not apply to Principal Designer Domestic' applicants)

Following successful submission of evidence at Stage 2, you will be invited to attend an interview by the same two assessors at the next pre-scheduled interview date, usually monthly (on a 'first come, first served' basis). You must present your submission case studies to them, and they will ask you questions to confirm your level of skills, knowledge, experience and behavioural competence to act as a 'Principal Designer' or 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings'. When your interview slot is booked, we ask you if you have any special requirements. Within reason, we will accommodate them.

Once you have selected an interview slot, we will confirm special requirements, date, time, names of your assessors, and other relevant information via email.

The interview lasts approximately 45 minutes and is usually conducted remotely using videoconferencing software. We recommend you should be comfortable, free from distractions and interruptions, and confident in your privacy and your internet connection for the duration.

If the interview happens in person, we will email venue details with the date and time confirmation. During the interview, you must not refer to other devices or materials that allow you to misrepresent your skills, knowledge, experience or behavioural competence.

The assessors report their decision (with reasons) and RIBA representatives relay this information to you within a week of the interview.

Assessors' decision from this Stage must be unanimous. There are three possible outcomes:

1. If both assessors confirm a pass, the RIBA will notify you and advise you on the next steps (ie inclusion on the Register and associated annual fee).
2. If both assessors assess you a fail, the RIBA will notify you and your application is closed, subject to appeal (see section on Appeals below).
3. If there is a split decision, the matter is referred to a third assessor, called a Moderator, who has the casting vote which will then follow outcomes 1 or 2 above.

## Unforeseen circumstances

If your circumstances change during Stage 3 so that you are forced to rearrange your interview date, you must notify the RIBA as soon as possible by email at [PDRegister.Assessment@riba.org](mailto:PDRegister.Assessment@riba.org)

## Competence criteria

The Competence Criteria Table set out in **Appendix 1** sets out which competences are to be demonstrated during the three stages of the assessment process. Items in orange text are specific to Higher-Risk Buildings.

## Terms and conditions

Once you have passed the assessment process to the satisfaction of the Register assessors you qualify to be admitted to the public register under the following terms and conditions:

- Paying the annual registration fee during the payment window.
- Abiding by the rules for the use of the Register, including avoiding any misrepresentation of the assurance that it confers.
- Complying with the rules for responding to complaints against individuals listed on the Register, which include agreeing to refrain from:
  - *Continuing to promote yourself as on the Register if suspended*
  - *Referring to having a registered 'Principal Designer Domestic', 'Principal Designer General' or 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' status when it has been withdrawn*
  - *Referring to having a registered 'Principal Designer General' or 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' status, when competence only evidenced for 'Principal Designer Domestic' status*
  - *Referring to having a registered 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' status, when competence only evidenced for 'Principal Designer General' status.*
- Alerting the RIBA to any events that affect your ability to remain competent or otherwise meet the conditions of continued listing on the Register, including suspension or erasure from the ARB register, or incapacity due to ill-health.
- Alerting the RIBA to any changes to your personal details, including name or contact details.



# 4 REAPPLICATION



# Reapplication

If you wish to extend your listing on the RIBA 'Principal Designer Domestic', 'Principal Designer General' or 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' Register beyond the end of your fifth year on the Register, you must successfully complete a reapplication before the end of your fifth annual subscription window.

This process is identical to the initial application process, and incurs an application fee in addition to your annual register subscription.

The principal designer role and its associated body of knowledge have the potential to change substantially over five years. RIBA monitors this change and updates the Register's assessment criteria accordingly. Should this result in further action to ensure competence, the RIBA will be in contact using the email address provided within your application (see 'When things change').

# Increasing competence attainment level

Reapplication is the opportunity for individuals to increase their attainment level from 'Principal Designer Domestic', 'Principal Designer General' to 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings'. In this instance, individuals may apply earlier.

# 5

# APPEALS AND FEES





# Appeals process

You may appeal assessors' decisions at Stage 2 and 3 of the assessment process.

You may appeal the assessors' decisions to give you a fail or a 'Principal Designer General' attainment level rather than a 'Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings' attainment level.

Your opportunity to appeal – the 'appeal window' – lasts for one month after you are notified of your result.

There is no financial cost to you for appealing decisions. The process is kept confidential and, regardless of the outcome, results in no discriminatory actions against you.

Appeals are heard by the RIBA's senior management team and the relevant RIBA governance committee.

Appeals must be valid and sufficient, and sent to the RIBA at: [PDRegister.Assessment@riba.org](mailto:PDRegister.Assessment@riba.org)

To be valid, an appeal must include:

- Your name
- Your unique application number
- What decision you are appealing: Stage-2 fail, Stage-3 fail, Stage 3 attainment level
- Your grounds for appeal

**NOTE:** *You may also include other information, provided it is relevant to your appeal.*

To be sufficient, an appeal must be on the grounds of:

- Substantial procedural irregularity or technical inaccuracy, for example, the assessors' decisions being based on issues other than the assessment criteria.
- Unexpected personal issues, including emotional trauma or medical emergencies, that affected your performance and could not have been anticipated in advance.
- Evidence of bias or discrimination against you from the assessors.
- Unexpected personal issues are not grounds for appeal – [PDRegister.Assessment@riba.org](mailto:PDRegister.Assessment@riba.org) should be contacted so the interview may be rescheduled where feasible.

The RIBA will acknowledge your appeal within two working days and confirm whether your grounds are sufficient.

All appeals are logged and the aggregated information is reviewed regularly to identify and implement improvements.

# Fees

The application (either the 2-stage or 3-stage assessment) and annual subscription fees (the Register) are payable by the Principal Designer Register applicant at published rates.

Applicants who do not achieve the required pass levels at Stage 1 or 2 can contact the RIBA to discuss next steps.

# Complaints-handling process

## Complaints about individuals on the Register

Complaints about certified individuals are managed following the RIBA Disciplinary Rules, last updated in 2021 and available on [architecture.com](http://architecture.com)

## Complaints about the Register

We define a complaint as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction with the services provided by RIBA’ including:

- The conduct of a member of our personnel
- Our disciplinary procedure
- The quality of the service that we provide
- Failure to keep you informed or to keep our promises
- Poor administration or communication
- Dissatisfaction with our complaints process

Complaints are handled under the RIBA's independent, impartial complaints-handling procedure, and should be addressed in writing to:

Specialist Registrar  
Royal Institute of British Architects  
66 Portland Place  
London  
W1B 1AD

Or you can email [info@riba.org](mailto:info@riba.org)

# When things change

## Changing the scope of assessment

The scope of ‘Principal Designer Domestic’, ‘Principal Designer General’ or ‘Principal Designer Higher-Risk Buildings’ Register assessment criteria may change if:

1. Changes to the CDM Regulations affect the competence needed.
2. Changes to secondary legislation introduced by the Building Safety Act affect the competence needed.
3. Normative clauses in PAS 8671 and/or BSI Flex 8670 change.
4. A supervening accumulation of evidence emerges from case law, the Building Safety Regulator/HSE/ insurers or other authoritative source.
5. Accumulation of evidence from appeals and/or complaints in connection with the Register indicate that the scope of certification/assessment should change.

RIBA senior management is responsible for monitoring and instituting change supported by expert advisers. A delay between the changes being published and their coming into force will apply.

# APPENDIX





# Appendix 1: Competence Criteria

The Competence Criteria Table sets out which competences are to be demonstrated during the three stages of the assessment process, or two stages under the 'Principal Designer Domestic' route. Items in orange are specific to Higher-Risk Buildings.

Behavioural competence criteria	
<b>B1</b>	Evaluate the limits of their own competence and, if relevant, their organisations capability sufficient: a) not to take on a specific Principal Designer dutyholder role when the needs of the project in question are beyond the individual's competence and, if relevant, the organisations capability; and b) to ask for help from other appropriately competent persons when needs emerge during a project that can no longer be met by the individual's competence or, if relevant, the organisations capability.
<b>B2</b>	Demonstrate the integrity to identify and report design work (for building work) that cannot conform to relevant requirements.
<b>B3</b>	Demonstrate the integrity to voluntarily report safety occurrences where design work (for building work) cannot conform to applicable requirements.
<b>B4</b>	Evaluate how to cooperate with all dutyholders in a way that achieves design work compliance, including by: a) assisting clients to provide information to dutyholders; and b) liaising with principal contractors to share relevant information, and having regard for the principal contractor's comments in relation to compliance.
<b>B5</b>	Apply interpersonal communication skills to: a) encourage designers to perform their own duties, including to cooperate with other dutyholders; b) challenge designers to rework designs if design work shows either, or both: - insufficient evidence of compliance - insufficient design compliance c) challenge the principal contractor's comments if they compromise design work compliance.
Legislative and regulatory framework competences	
<b>L1</b>	Applies the legislative and regulatory framework related to how designers and design work meet legal requirements (attention is drawn to the following legislation and regulations: a) Building Act 1984; b) Building Regulations 2010; c) Building Safety Act 2022; d) Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015).
<b>L2</b>	Apply understanding of the duties and behaviours required of Principal Designers.

<b>L3</b>	Apply understanding of the purpose, structure and scope of the legislative and regulatory framework to appraising and challenging evidence of design work compliance.
<b>L4</b>	Understand how to find and apply information in the legislative and regulatory framework governing: a) how design work, including HRB design work (where relevant to your application), if built, is expected to comply with relevant and/ or applicable requirements (as applies generally and to HRBs respectively); and b) how Principal Designers and other dutyholders are expected to perform their duties, follow prescribed procedures, and comply with legislation, including when working on HRB design work.
<b>L5</b>	Analyse their understanding of the legislative and regulatory framework related to designing HRBs, including in relation to pre-scribed procedures and information.
<b>L6</b>	Evaluate duties of other BSA dutyholders in the context of HRB projects for the ways they could affect the BSA Principal Designer's duties and design work compliance by the designers.
<b>Management competences</b>	
<b>M1</b>	Evaluate and apply general principles of management to plan design work compliance, and to manage, monitor, and coordinate designers and design work in relation to compliance during the design phase. a) set the plan for achieving design work compliance b) control changes to the plan and monitor risks to design work c) co-ordinate designers' work related to achieving the plan d) liaise with the principal contractors about design work e) monitor progress against the plan through to the end of the design phase
<b>M2</b>	Demonstrate understanding of how clients' project briefs, key performance indicators, programmes, designers' competence re-quirements, and, if relevant, their own organisational capability can affect design work compliance.
<b>M3</b>	Demonstrate understanding of how the scope of relevant insurances, the limitations of relevant warranties, the terms and condi-tions of appointments, and the allocation of risk in appointments and contracts can impact on design work compliance; Management competence
<b>M4</b>	Create strategies for managing design work compliance
<b>M5</b>	Apply understanding of how to manage the recording, maintenance and approval of evidence of design work compliance;
<b>M6</b>	Understand the effect of designers' duties and, in the context of a specific project, their contracted responsibilities;
<b>M7</b>	Analyse ways to identify and manage gaps in designers' competences, capabilities, or capacities sufficient to coordinate design work compliance;

<b>M8</b>	Analyse how to monitor identified risks to compliance and control changes affecting design work compliance;
<b>M9</b>	Evaluate how to manage the process for achieving consensus from designers that coordinated design work is compliant.
<b>M10</b>	Evaluate and apply information management systems sufficient to carry out the Principal Designer duties.
<b>M11</b>	Evaluate the system of regulated procedures and information related to working on HRBs and their implications for the performance of the BSA Principal Designer's duties, including contributing to the golden thread of information, reporting safety occurrences to the Building Safety Regulator, and making competence and compliance declarations.
<b>M12</b>	Evaluate ways to establish and maintain throughout the construction phase a system for inspecting HRB design work for safety occurrences and promptly reporting safety occurrences.
<b>M13</b>	Create ways to instruct BSA reporting persons about the system for mandatory safety occurrence reporting related to working on HRBs.

### Technical framework competence

<b>T1</b>	<p>Principal Designers shall be able to understand general principles of building design, general principles of construction, and the “core criteria for building safety” set out in BSI Flex 8670 sufficient to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>appraise designers' evidence of design work compliance;</li> <li>manage the process for designers to achieve consensus that coordinated design work complies with relevant requirements;</li> <li>appraise Principal Contractors' comments affecting design work compliance.</li> </ol> <p><b>NOTE:</b> <i>The “core criteria for building safety” in BSI Flex 8670 are set out under the following headings:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>fire safety, structural safety, and public safety;</i></li> <li><i>managing building safety;</i></li> <li><i>knowledge management and communication; and</i></li> <li><i>buildings as systems, building systems, and construction products and material.</i></li> </ol>
<b>T2</b>	<p>Understand the purpose, structure and scope of technical guidance, and standards governing building design and construction compliance.</p> <p><b>NOTE:</b> <i>The large number and complexity of technical guides, codes of practice, and standards makes it unlikely that any Principal Designer could know their content in depth. However, Principal Designers should know enough about the overall system of such guidance and standards to be able to look up relevant information or to consult a specialist.</i></p>

<b>T3</b>	Understand how to find and apply information in technical guidance, and standards sufficient to: a) appraise and challenge designers' evidence of design work compliance; b) manage design work compliance when different packages of design work are coordinated and when design work is coordinated with building work; c) contribute to identifying risks to compliance.
<b>T4</b>	Evaluate the potential impact of identified risks on design work compliance.
<b>T5</b>	Understand general principles of construction sufficient to appraise Principal Contractors' comments about compliance.
<b>T6</b>	Understand information management systems sufficient to arrange for the establishment and maintenance of ways to: a) record strategies for achieving design work compliance; b) manage the strategies; c) control changes affecting design work compliance.  <b>NOTE:</b> <i>In controlling changes, Principal Designers should pay attention to all considerations, including the effect of changes on interdependent design features or strategies, and systems of quality assurance for works, services, products and materials, and their limitations.</i>



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