

Royal Institute of British Architects

House of Lords European Affairs Committee: the UK-EU reset April 2025

The Royal Institute of British Architects is a global professional membership body driving excellence in architecture. We serve our members and society in order to deliver better buildings and places, stronger communities and a sustainable environment. Being inclusive, ethical, environmentally aware and collaborative underpins all that we do.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) welcomes the opportunity to provide further detail on the UK-EU reset following the oral evidence session on 1st April 2025.

The UK architecture sector is world-renowned and a global success story. It serves as one of the most visible expressions of our country's creativity and cultural significance. Architecture is also a cross-cutting sector, with relevance to construction, the creative industries and professional and business services. [RIBA's Business Benchmarking survey](#) highlights that, in 2024, RIBA Chartered Practices generated £4 billion in revenue, while exports reached a record £934 million.

British architecture exports are truly international, with high-quality buildings designed by UK practices on every continent. Not only does good design provide a greater quality of life but can also increase productivity. Architecture is vital to the Government's vision for growth and contributes to key priorities such as building 1.5 million homes, creating new towns and achieving our net zero goals. The sector creates high-quality jobs and fosters economic development across the UK and abroad.

A Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) for architecture with the EU would help to further grow the sector through services exports and help to attract top talent to the UK and protect the skills pipeline.



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Current arrangements for UK architects wishing to work in the EU and vice versa

In the UK, architecture is a regulated profession. You cannot call yourself an architect unless you meet the requirements set by the UK regulator, the Architects Registration Board (ARB), and are approved onto the Architects Register. It takes at least seven years to become an architect, with most people taking around ten years to qualify. This, and the highly skilled nature of architecture, means that it is difficult to recruit from the existing labour force and the pipeline of talent does not always reflect current needs.

EU architects who registered with ARB prior to 31st December 2020 continue to have their qualifications recognised. After this date, ARB put in place interim arrangements for EU architects wishing to come and work in the UK. From 1st January 2021, EU architects are eligible to apply for registration in the UK if they:

- Hold qualifications that are listed in the ‘frozen’ version of Annex V.7.1 of the former Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive, as it existed at 11pm on 31 December 2020.
- Have access to the profession in the state/country that the qualification was issued.

These arrangements are not intended to be permanent, so they could change. New qualifications introduced by EU countries that are not included in the ‘frozen’ list are not recognised by ARB.

However, these arrangements are not reciprocal. UK qualified architects must satisfy the individual requirements of each member state should they wish to practise there. Arrangements vary by country, with requirements and decisions being a matter for each jurisdiction and its regulator.

Therefore, it is currently easier for many EU architects to register in the UK than it is for a UK architect to register in most EU countries. We recommend that a MRA for architecture qualifications between the UK and EU should be signed to help alleviate this issue.

There is one exception to the above. ARB and the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (RIAI) agreed a memorandum of understanding that preserves arrangements that were put in place under the former Mutual Recognition Qualifications Directive. This agreement also applies to any new qualifications that are accredited by ARB or RIAI since it was signed. This will remain in place until a future MRA with the EU is in place.

MRAs help to export architecture services

As requirements to register as an architect in the EU vary state to state this creates additional costs and bureaucracy for architecture practices wishing to work in Europe. These issues are particularly pronounced for smaller practices, which are less able to bear the additional cost and administration burdens to overcome these barriers. At present, the propensity to export in the architecture sector varies greatly by size. If we want to help practices export more and grow their business, MRAs are one way to help.

MRAs can help address skill shortages

Despite ARB continuing to recognise many EU architecture qualifications, we are still seeing a decline in the number of EU architects in the UK. Previously, the EU served as an important source of talent for UK practices, with EU architects comprising 20% of the UK's architectural workforce. Since the Brexit referendum, there has been a decline in registrations from EU architects, with only 16% of the UK Register holding EU qualifications.

We are also attracting less young talent. UK architecture courses are world-renowned; the UK is home to some of the best universities for architecture in the world. But according to the [Architects Journal](#), EU students on UK architecture courses halved in the first year after Brexit.

In addition, [RIBA's Future Trends survey from February 2023](#) found that 46% of RIBA Chartered Practices indicated that the current UK-EU relationship has made it more challenging to recruit and retain architects from overseas.

However, there are skills shortages in the architecture sector. A [Department for Culture, Media & Sport release](#) found that 84.6% of hard-to-fill vacancies in architecture are due to skill shortages, making it one of the most skill-constrained sectors compared to the creative industries (74.2%) and all sectors (62.5%). [Skills England](#) also identified architects as vital to achieving the Government's goal of delivering 1.5 million new homes.

The Government's proposed changes to the Growth and Skills Levy, which would require Level 7 apprenticeships to be funded by businesses outside of the Levy, will have an implication for the number of architecture apprentices. The feedback from our members is clear – if funding is not available through the Levy for Level 7 apprenticeships, many if not all, will be unable to employ architecture apprentices.

Architects are key to delivering Government ambitions on housing, new towns and net zero. But to do this we need to ensure a pipeline of talent. An MRA with the EU could help encourage more EU architects to come and work in the UK.

Current status of an architecture UK-EU MRA

During the Brexit negotiations, the UK Government proposed maintaining our mutual recognition of professional qualifications the UK and EU. This was rejected by the EU because the UK did not want to be a member of the single market.

RIBA, ARB and the Architects Council of Europe (ACE) have been vocal supporters of a UK-EU MRA. In October 2022, a Joint Recommendation for a UK-EU MRA was submitted by ARB and ACE under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

ARB and the ACE opted to use the TCA, instead of a regulator-to-regulator agreement as working within the TCA means that any agreement is fair and consistent, and it is enforceable in all EU Member States.

The recommendation was acknowledged within the EU-UK TCA, however, the European Commission rejected the proposal. The Commission viewed the proposal as ‘prejudicial to EU architects’ as it would require EU-qualified architects to sit a professional examination in the UK, but UK-qualified architects in the EU would not.

The professional examination referred to is the UK Adaptation Assessment (UKAA). The UKAA aims to make sure those registering through MRAs understand what is necessary for safe and effective practice in the UK. ARB surveyed architects across the EU and 74% responded that they sought out support or independent learning to adapt to UK practice, this led to the development of the UKAA.

There is precedent for the EU to agree an MRA, with additional study included. [The MRA between the EU and Canada for architects](#) requires EU architects in Canada to undertake a one-off ten hour course “...to satisfy domain-specific knowledge requirements on building regulation, construction documents, contract administration and professional practice.” Canadian architects do not have to complete an equivalent course to work in the EU, but the agreement stipulates that the EU reserves the right to introduce one.

The UK-EU MRA now sits with the UK Government and the European Commission to agree. We support ARB, ACE and the Government’s work to date, and continue to provide any further information needed to secure agreement.

The UK has signed other architecture MRAs

Brexit has provided the opportunity to explore new free trade deals and therefore open up markets for UK architects to export to. ARB has worked hard to negotiate two MRAs with their counterparts in the USA, and Australia and New Zealand. ARB have recently signed an MRA with the Regulatory Organizations of Architecture Canada.

ARB also has a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Hong Kong Institute of Architects. The MoU allows Hong Kong architects to have their Part 1 and Part 2 study recognised (equivalent to a bachelor’s and master’s degree), but they have to complete Part 3 study in the UK (equivalent to an advanced postgraduate diploma). UK architects going to Hong Kong have to take an assessment, the length and difficulty is dependent on their level of qualification.

Engagement with Government

We have had positive engagement with the current and previous Governments on the need for an architecture MRA to be signed between the UK and the EU, with both administrations keen to get a deal over the line.

We welcome the Labour Party’s ambition to seek an MRA as a means to break ‘down unnecessary barriers to trade’ and ‘help open up markets for UK service exporters’ as laid out in their 2024 manifesto. As mentioned above, we will continue to work with ARB, ACE and the UK Government to secure an architecture MRA.

