

# RIBA Education White Paper

January 2023

# Executive summary

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The architecture profession faces unprecedented challenges – and both education and practice have a key role in addressing these societal, economic and environmental challenges. Education and practice are the cornerstones of the RIBA, uniquely placing us to provide insights into how the sector can, and should, adapt.

This White Paper outlines the problems facing architecture students today and provides clear steps that should be taken to recruit and maintain a competent, skilled and diverse pipeline.

Firstly, we need to remove barriers and offer shorter and more flexible modes of study. We must also mitigate any unnecessary burden and confusion by reducing duplication – for architects, architecture schools and architecture students.

This also means reducing student debt. The current system results in too many students burdened with enormous amounts of debt. The salary earned on entering the register is not comparable with the length of time it takes to get there.

Ensuring architecture students have the skills to address key societal challenges such as the climate emergency, levelling up and building safety is also critical. We have undertaken a significant review of the curriculum and developed the Themes and Values for Architectural Education. We recommend that the ARB adopts these overarching themes and values to create consistency for the sector.

While we must expect a certain level of competence, we cannot expect a graduate, on their first day of practice, to be able to do everything. However, we need graduates who are adaptable and can respond to new challenges and environments.

Ongoing learning through continued professional development (CPD) exists so architects remain capable in a changing landscape. Registration upon graduation, after a year of structured practice, would help address this concern.

Practice also has a key role to play here – ensuring that any practical experience provides the right support to achieve the required outcomes.

Finally, the Government must also recognise that the funding allocated to universities to teach architecture is inadequate. All UK courses that are part of the route to becoming an architect should be re-classified to comparable disciplines such as civil and structural engineering. High-teaching costs means funding levels must improve to ensure we produce the next generation of highly skilled professionals.

The RIBA believes that simplifying and improving architectural education will ensure a diverse architecture sector, leading to better buildings and places for everyone to benefit from and enjoy.

We are committed to sharing our expertise with the Architects Registration Board (ARB), education providers, practice and Government, so that together we can create an education system that works for all.

## Introduction

Our profession faces unprecedented societal, environmental and economic challenges. The UK Architectural Education system needs to address these, while practice must also recognise the important and growing role that they play in the education system.

For many years, RIBA has been stressing the need for a more accessible, inclusive, and diverse profession, which we originally proposed in the 2015 RIBA Education Review, through the delivery of both shorter and more flexible modes of study. Any changes to the educational model cannot avoid or compromise this necessity.

In April 2022, RIBA was one of six professional membership body signatories to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the built environment. One of the three objectives is to understand the transition from education and employment; therefore, a dialogue across the architecture sector between academia and practice is critical.

As we stressed in our 2021 report, [The Way Ahead](#), RIBA's Education and Professional Development Framework, it is undoubtedly time to develop qualification systems which ensure fair access for a diverse range of students and address matters of competence. The ARB has a responsibility to work closely with RIBA, using our established and globally recognised education and Continued Professional Development (CPD) systems, and to avoid unnecessary bureaucratic and financial burden upon architects, architecture schools and students.

## RIBA's place in education

Education and practice are the cornerstones of RIBA, and the centrepiece of the original 1834 Royal Charter. Established in 1863 and made compulsory in 1882, successful completion of RIBA's examinations was essential for those seeking membership of the Institute. In response to requests from schools of architecture – and as an alternative route to membership – RIBA developed systems for recognising courses that achieved the standard for exemption from the Institute's examinations, and in 1924 RIBA visiting boards, comprising academics and practitioners from an expert panel, were established to evaluate courses and examinations preparing students for professional practice. These visiting boards, formed from the 140 members of our present expert panel, are the foundation of the current RIBA validation system.

Today, RIBA validation is an evidence-based, peer-review system working nationally and internationally as a *critical friend* to schools of architecture, monitoring courses to improve median achievement, encourage excellence, and ensure a positive student experience.

With 235 validated programmes around the world in over 120 Institutions, spanning five continents, RIBA's national and international reach and influence in architectural education is clear, contributing to the UK's worldwide reputation for the quality of its architecture sector and its success in attracting global talent. Data from the RIBA Business Benchmarking Survey shows that in 2022 the UK architecture sector derived £524 million of revenue from international work. UK architecture schools attract large numbers of international students, with the 2021 RIBA Education statistics showing that 35% of applicants to UK Part 1 courses and 36% of applicants to UK Part 2 courses come from outside the UK.

## The current position of students

We are concerned that the traditional model of university study to master's level (3+2 years) plus practical experience (minimum 2 years) is too long and, critically, too expensive for students to bear, in the context of a relatively modestly remunerated profession. The debt of +£100K that can be accrued over this period discourages diversity, reinforcing privilege.

The average time taken for students to reach the register now sits at 10 years, rather than the intended 7-year timeframe, which is symptomatic of a dysfunctional system. While many practices recognise their role in the training process of architecture students, there are many examples where students are not sufficiently supported to get the appropriate and timely experience to meet the requirements of the Part 3, extending their route to registration. This elongated time to entry of the register, is reducing the diversity of the workforce and acting as a barrier to inclusivity, creating resentment and a profession which is inaccessible to those whose experience and expertise does not yet meet the required standard, chiefly through lack of appropriate opportunity in practice rather than lack of commitment or ability. The salary received on entering the register is not comparable with the length of time to get there, nor might it be seen as value for money by those who have invested significantly in their education.

## Routes to Registration and RIBA Membership

Over the last decade, RIBA has been actively championing initiatives that encourage new models for architectural education to emerge through our evolving global validation work. The transformation and modernisation of architectural education set out in *The Way Ahead*, including more flexible, accessible and inclusive study routes with a focus on competence and sustainability, will help us attract the best talent and support a more representative profession.

Working closely with the ARB, RIBA continues its work to ensure, through input from members and stakeholders, that new models of education promote and enable a truly inclusive profession.

### We recommend:

- The continued growth of different models of education including, apprenticeships and collaborative practice models. In addition, we should develop routes for overseas graduates and associated non-cognate graduates at advanced stages, with a test of competence prior to accessing the register and RIBA Chartered membership.
- The development of a 5-year integrated and *accelerated* pathway (including practical training and a test of competence) as an acceptable route to registration and as a variation on the traditional 3+2+2-years route. There remains value in a general undergraduate degree in architecture – giving students choice to pursue alternative career paths or transfer between institutions.
- Consideration of a ‘registration upon graduation’ model, where study has included appropriate structured experience. The Part 3 content is crucial to competence and would need to be fully integrated within the course structure. Restrictions may need to be placed on recent graduates, but ARB could undertake this as part of its protection of the register and CPD requirements.

### The curriculum and its ongoing review

Ongoing curricula change is necessary in key areas such as climate change, building safety and business skills. However, this should not become a bureaucratic exercise of developing multitudinous competence tick boxes. The RIBA has already undertaken a significant review of the curriculum and developed the Themes and Values for Architectural Education, as outlined in *The Way Ahead*, which set out a simple and easily understandable framework for Schools of Architecture to address each

of these areas. We recommend that the ARB also adopts these overarching themes and values and lays out an appropriate breakdown of core competences under each. This would align the two systems which must be a shared objective.

If the ARB was to follow this model, which would allow for the identification of each individual competency and place them under the umbrella of six core themes and values, it would remove unnecessary duplication from schools and ensure a clearly defined and overarching system for both the ARB and RIBA. If this route is pursued, it would also be necessary to review the criteria used for architectural apprenticeships. This would align the three and remove a significant amount of administrative burden from the schools.

The RIBA Validation system is widely recognised and highly regarded with over 140 practice and education experts involved and is therefore best placed to be both recognised by the ARB, and positively integrated into the new ARB process as a vital asset.

### The importance of ongoing competence

Architects are the only regulated profession within the construction industry and play a key role in realising Government commitments of reaching net zero, improving building safety and levelling up across the country. The future generation of architects need to be appropriately skilled, competent, and knowledgeable to address these complex issues. The competencies that the ARB require architecture programmes to meet are extensive and onerous, and this is before the Part 3 taught content is added.

While we must expect a certain level of competence, we cannot expect a graduate, on their first day of practice, to be able to do everything; architectural practice is broad and varied and so, vitally, we must have graduates who know how to adapt and respond to a variety of new environments and challenges. CPD requirements exist – as we and the ARB agree – because ongoing learning and engagement is essential for the profession to remain capable in a dynamic world.

The requirements set for the process of practical experience in relation to competencies that students must meet, must be equitable to this. As part of its Education and Professional Development Framework, as laid out in *The Way Ahead*, RIBA has resolved that architects must encompass a fundamental level of awareness and understanding of priority subjects for them to be competent to practice and to provide public assurance. The ARB should recognise the place of the

ongoing education of an architect as they enter practice as opposed to the requirement for them to be fully competent to practice independently.

## The role of practice

Practices must also recognise their role in the training of future generations. This means that any outcomes-based approach to practical experience must be coupled with the necessary support and time to achieve those outcomes. The ARB model should ensure that early-career professionals are not left in an unfocussed cycle of practical experience which does not lead them to the register. The practical training aspect of architectural education must have a specified length of time, with outcomes that can be achieved within the set timeframe, and practices need to acknowledge their responsibility in the training of future generations. RIBA requires all Chartered Practices to meet obligations on employment conditions and provide appropriate training and experience for architecture students undertaking practical experience. Further details are set out in the RIBA Chartered Practice Employment Policy Guide.

## The financial model for architectural education

As part of any change to architectural education, the financial model must be safeguarded. The current education structure has special dispensation in terms of Government funding of student fees whereby students can undertake the current 3+2 year model within the undergraduate fee scale. This current provision, with recognition of variations across the UK nations, must be carefully considered and protected.

However, the pedagogical model of architectural education is significantly different from the subjects that it has been aligned with for academic funding. While Government figures recognise that the cost of delivering education for future architects is amongst the highest of any discipline, the current funding model fails to reflect this, with current funding inadequate. As such, the cost to teach an architecture student is higher than the income accrued from the fees paid by that student, with the balance being met through the higher fees of international students.

The RIBA have been calling for the UK courses that are part of the route to becoming an architect be re-classified into Price Group B, alongside comparable disciplines such as civil and structural engineering.

Applying Price Group B subject funding per student of architecture would bring an additional £25 million per year to architectural education and enable a greater focus on specialised and resource intensive education in areas including fire safety, sustainability, digital fabrication and computer modelling.

We also believe that architecture should be re-classified as a STEM subject to receive the appropriate associated governmental funding.

The UK is a global leader in building design – investing to further boost this will bring huge benefits at home and to our country's international profile. The combination of the growing demands on the technical and professional competence of architects and high-teaching costs means funding levels must improve to ensure we produce the next generation of highly skilled professionals.

## Next steps

- These ideas will be discussed at the forthcoming RIBA Education and Practice Away Day “Interface” on 18 January 2023. This is an opportunity to hear voices from across the sector and consider concerns and insights about the interface between architecture education and practice. It will allow attendees to collectively strategise, enabling new ideas to emerge and connections to be formed.
- We will share this White Paper with the ARB, practice and other key stakeholders, continuing an open dialogue about the importance of a competent, diverse profession; outlining the key steps, as shared in this document, that are needed to achieve this.
- Finally, we continue to call on the Government to provide the funding needed to ensure that UK university architecture courses remain some of the best in the world and produce the brightest and best architectural talent.

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