

RIBA response to ARB's Engagement Survey on modernising architectural education and training

Introduction

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 RIBA is committed to continuous enhancement of levels of competence in the profession, through initial education and practical training and CPD and professional development. The RIBA education and professional development framework set out in *The Way Ahead*, includes important competence enhancements in both the pre-registration education of architects and post-registration professional development.

The RIBA welcomes the opportunity to engage with the ARB on the details of the proposed education and training reforms recently announced. The broad scope of these now appear to align with our long-standing commitment to assessing outcomes and capabilities rather than inputs.

As stated in our initial reaction, over the last decade, the RIBA has been actively championing initiatives that encourage new models for architectural education to emerge through our evolving global validation work. We believe that 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 diverse and representative profession.

We want to work closely with the ARB, with input from members and stakeholders, to ensure any new models promote and enable a truly inclusive profession, and we urge the ARB to collaborate with the RIBA, using our established and globally recognised education and CPD systems, and to avoid any unnecessary bureaucratic and financial burden or duplication upon architects, architecture schools and architecture students.

Executive Summary of RIBA Response

Whilst we support the ambition to reform architectural education by considering more flexible study routes and a point of access to the profession based on outcomes and capabilities, in conjunction with a need for greater emphasis on key competencies, we are concerned that the ARB has not yet shown a clear vision and strategy as to how it will meet these aims. As the professional body, in 2020, the RIBA set out a flexible new education and professional development framework in *The Way Ahead* that meets these aims. We recognise the need for a refocus on key matters such as climate and health and safety, and also the role that the ARB has to act as gatekeepers to the profession. Although this ambition for reform is stated to aim to increase flexibility, we are concerned that what is being discussed will result in a highly prescriptive, inflexible and expensive parallel system to the RIBA's internationally recognised Validation led by Visiting Boards. In particular, we note that the ARB has already stated, in its Corporate Strategy 2022-26, that it intends to move away from its "paper-based model of prescription to a blended approach, informed by risk-assessment and including visits to institutions".

While enhanced competencies for architects are welcome, the ARB must work with us to ensure new requirements support and bolster existing systems and we strongly encourage the ARB to implement the key recommendations of the most recent Government Periodic Review of the ARB and Architects Regulation (2017) and use this educational reform to:

- Explore opportunities to streamline the prescription of qualifications in architecture
- Consider a reduced frequency of renewing prescription and monitoring where qualifications are unchanged
- Consider the flexibility in length and structure of architecture qualifications

Our profession faces unprecedented societal, environmental and economic challenges. The ARB has a responsibility to work closely with the RIBA, using our established and globally recognised education and CPD systems, and to avoid any unnecessary bureaucratic and financial burden upon architects, architecture schools and architecture students.

ARB Survey Question 10: Chapter 4 of the discussion paper sets out the evidence we have analysed to date, and the conclusions we've reached. Is there anything you believe is missing from these conclusions, that we should also take into account as we start developing the outcomes-based approach?

The majority of UK architecture students undertake their qualifications at universities. These institutions operate in a highly pressured and regulated environment, and have had to make rapid and significant changes in the wake of the current pandemic; adapting delivery whilst maintaining adherence to professional and statutory body requirements. At the time of writing, the outcomes of the long-anticipated Spending Review in relation to Higher Education and a full response to the Augar Review have yet to be announced. It is possible that future possible changes which have been mooted, such as setting minimum GCSE standards for entry to courses; lowering the threshold at which student loans are repayable and changes to funding bands, could all assert an influence on architecture courses which is beyond the control of the ARB; and the possible impacts of these should be taken into account when any new approach is developed.

The RIBA's *Way Ahead* emphasises a new approach to the development of professional skills and competence, set out in detail in the new Themes and Values for Architecture Education which are now incorporated into the RIBA Validation Procedures. We therefore strongly support the ARB's finding that additional competence in sustainability and fire and life safety is vital for students to gain during their education, and we would define competence as a combination of an architect's knowledge, skills, experience and behaviours. We firmly believe that the education and training of architects makes them the only profession with an inclusive knowledge of all aspects of design, development and construction, who understand how individual specialists need to be brought together and co-ordinated. As part of its education and professional development framework, the RIBA has resolved that architects must encompass a fundamental level of awareness and understanding of priority subjects in order for them to be competent to practise and to provide public assurance. The 'Raising the Bar' construction industry fire safety competency report revealed the need to raise levels of professional competence, and the quality of administrative controls, in relation to building safety and we fully acknowledge the ARB's increased legislative power and responsibility in meeting this. The RIBA also recognise these needs and in 2020, RIBA Council approved the introduction of a mandatory level of health and life safety knowledge, including fire safety, for all chartered members.

There is widespread acceptance that the built environment has an urgent role to play in responding to the climate emergency, and the RIBA 2030 Climate Challenge calls on members to try to meet net zero whole life carbon (or less) in the buildings they design by 2030. An enhanced focus on climate literacy must therefore become paramount in raising the value of architectural qualification.

One of the key findings in the research completed by SQW on ARB's behalf was that the general criteria could be strengthened by giving greater recognition to emerging skills and being more directive on the weighting that should be applied to some elements, especially technical skills. The RIBA Themes and Values for Architectural Education highlight the need for a renewed emphasis on professional competence and business ethics with 20% of any course required to address these issues. The RIBA Themes and Values are due to be implemented by schools of architecture from September 2022, demonstrating the urgency with which the RIBA has acted to address all the above issues; a timescale which appears to be lacking in the ARB's proposals.

The RIBA is very willing to engage with the ARB and draw on our membership and relationships with stakeholders to consider some of the suggestions made regarding professional practical experience. Our relaunched Professional Experience and Development Record (PEDR) digital platform gives us access to data which can be drawn on. However, it should be noted that unlike some other professions such as those in the health sector, which have a large and regulated need for trainee

placements; the vast majority of architecture students sign employment contracts in private practices – where educating future architects is important, but there are competing business needs and pressures. This limits the ability to mandate the experience that students should receive; although the proposed future introduction of the *RIBA Compact*, an ethical framework with a series of obligations for students, practices, schools of architecture and the RIBA to meet, should start to address some of the current issues. The aim of the *Compact* is for parties to make a mutual commitment to improve the experience of students moving into the workplace after graduating from Part 1 or Part 2.

ARB Survey question 11: Chapter 5 of the discussion paper sets out the vision for our new regulatory approach. To what extent do you agree with our vision? Please feel free to explain your view, and make any suggestions as to what is missing.

PUBLIC Ensure that anyone joining the Register is equipped to design a built environment that reflects the needs of society so that people can be safe and live well, and helps to tackle the fundamental challenges our planet faces
PROFESSION AND EMPLOYERS Provide future architects with skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours that they can develop and apply throughout their career
INSTITUTIONS Allow for flexibility and innovation by bodies that provide education and training, ensuring the UK remains an attractive place to study
FUTURE ARCHITECTS Enable anyone with the right competencies to become an architect by a route that is right for them
REGULATORY Through an effective and proportionate quality assurance model, give clarity about the accountability of ARB, the institutions, and students

The questionnaire asks respondents to tick under each box whether they strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree or strongly disagree. There is then a box for explanations and comments.

PUBLIC

The RIBA fully agrees that the fundamental role of the ARB is to critically safeguard entry to the profession and, thus, acting in protection of the public, must ensure that anyone joining the Register is competent and equipped to design a built environment that responds to the needs of society, and meets fundamental issues of climate crisis, health and life safety. It is, however, also important to ensure there is a clear continuity between initial education requirements and ongoing competence. It is not only joining the register through appropriate education and practical experience but staying 'competent' and developing further competence in relation to specific areas of practice and change and innovation whilst on the register that is of fundamental importance. A newly qualified architect cannot reasonably be expected to demonstrate the skills and knowledge that develop with years of practice experience (as would also be true of any other profession). There are critical links between this consultation and that previously undertaken on the topic of CPD; education and professional development need to be considered as a whole.

PROFESSION AND EMPLOYERS

The ARB must be careful that, within its vision for educational reform, it recognises that student experience in practice, at present usually completed between Parts 1 and 2 and post Part 2, is primarily undertaken by the private sector and as such, cannot carry core educational expectations in the same way as in medicine, for example, where training provision is part of the NHS structure. While many architectural firms, either sole practitioners or practices, do all they can to ensure that students in their employ have a rounded experience, it is not always possible to cover all aspects of practice as would be expected in a placement. Employers cannot be expected to provide students with all that they require in order to meet the given competencies. This situation is different in the current and evolving apprenticeship model. The key points that the ARB raises regarding competencies are already embedded in the apprenticeship structure. Employers of apprentices are having to structure the training in a more defined way in order to help them meet the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the apprenticeship standards.

The RIBA would encourage the ARB to reflect the concept of career long professional growth which underpins the *Way Ahead* within its own vision for education and training, acknowledging that the entry point to the profession cannot realistically be set at anything higher than the acceptable minimum standard required to enter professional practice as an architect.

INSTITUTIONS

The RIBA has consistently pressed for flexibility in the education model for architecture and proactively support it. In developing the RIBA Studio programme, we have developed a viable option for those who choose to work full-time while completing their studies at a distance. We also run three highly successful Part 3 courses overseas for those UK trained students who wish to work abroad but seek to complete their Part 3 and enter the register from their locale. There is a great desire among the student body to see flexibility in routes to the register and greater opportunity for international opportunities in this regard. As such, the RIBA would urge the ARB to pursue international Memorandums of Agreement on mutual recognition with tenacity.

FUTURE ARCHITECTS

While the RIBA is entirely supportive of the ARB's requirement for future architects to meet core competencies, it is important to note that there are other critical areas of study that must not be forgotten within the study of architecture. With the core competencies that have been mentioned in the vision, a number of the current ARB criteria around design, critical thinking and theoretical thought appear to be missing. What is presented within this vision would suggest that others from different disciplines who meet the competencies would be able to access the register, without developing the unique underpinning theoretical knowledge base and design skills of architecture as an academic, theoretical and technical discipline and design-based profession.

REGULATORY

Architecture is a distinct discipline which leads the design and management of architectural projects. It is critical that the ARB safeguard and manage the protection of this title, recognising that only after successful completion of the full process of education and training, is an architect deemed, under legislation by the Government regulator, to deliver and be liable, across the full timeline of a project from inception to occupation. The Government's most recent Periodic Review of the ARB and Architects Regulation (March 2017) recommended that the ARB should proceed with a review of the routes to registration to:

- Explore opportunities to streamline the prescription of qualifications in architecture
- Consider a reduced frequency of renewing prescription and monitoring where qualifications are unchanged.
- Consider the flexibility in length and structure of architecture qualifications.

The RIBA would urge the ARB to continue to pursue with urgency these recommendations with an approach that does not stray from its critical role of maintaining the register and the entryway to it.

Survey question 12: To enable institutions to innovate and to promote diversity, we think that the structure needs to change from the current approach of Parts 1, 2 and 3. What are your views on this?

UK architecture is a powerful and respected brand, represented on a global scale by the RIBA. The structure of UK architectural education was created by the RIBA and has been emulated around the world, where the RIBA validates over 120 schools of architecture. As we have publicly stated before, and demonstrate in *The Way Ahead*, it is undoubtedly the right time to develop more flexible qualification systems, to ensure fair access for a diverse range of students and to address matters of competence. However, we also believe there is more flexibility in the current system than is perhaps given credit. For example, students can qualify through the RIBA's own suite of Part 1, 2 and 3 qualifications (delivered through RIBA Studio) whilst working in practice; and the development of apprenticeships at Level 6 and Level 7, as well as a significant number of taught qualifications where time in practice is credited, shows that there are a variety of options in addition to the traditional structure, delivered by passionate and creative course teams working at some of the most globally recognised universities. Through the RIBA's new course assessment process, expert and tailored advice on course development can be offered that positively encourages innovation in education delivery. The RIBA's Education Review identified a number of ways in which courses could be structured, including that the test of professional competence or Part 3 could potentially be completed prior to the culmination of the Part 2. This can already be seen in the apprenticeship model where the Part 3 is delivered within the Level 7 so that the apprentice is eligible to apply to join the Register upon completion.

The RIBA has repeatedly called for structural change and greater flexibility in study patterns over many years. In the first instance, the RIBA would ask the ARB to reconsider the requirement for a retrospective Part 1 Examination for those who have already achieved a recognised Part 2 (or Part 2 and Part 3). The current situation imposes an unnecessary barrier and financial burden upon well qualified candidates and does not support diversity and inclusion in the profession.

The RIBA believes that the ARB should also offer prescription of the RIBA's qualification system, which is underpinned by a well-established, highly credible and thorough Validation system and Visiting Board process. This would support architectural education worldwide, would provide a route for graduates of international schools of architecture validated by the RIBA to registration in the United Kingdom, and would enhance the standing of the UK profession.

Survey question 13: We believe that the best way to describe the competencies architects need may be to describe what an architect must KNOW, what they must be able to DO, and how they must BEHAVE. To what extent do you agree?

Respondents are asked whether they strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree or strongly disagree.

This is the approach undertaken with apprenticeships, where the standards for the Level 6 architectural assistant and Level 7 architect set out the broad shared headings of the current criteria for RIBA validation and ARB prescription but expand into the detailed knowledge and skills that are required, with underpinning behaviours. Institutions offering architecture degrees or Masters degrees already create modules which contain learning outcomes designed to demonstrate how students have met the professional criteria.