

Board Paper

for Open session

Subject: Impact evaluation research on accessibility in ARB's education reforms

To agree to fund initial research into how we can evaluate the impact ARB's education proposals have on access to the profession

Board meeting:

6 September 2023

Agenda item:

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Action:

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

Purpose

To set out our ambitions to conduct impact evaluation in relation to ARB reforms to the initial education and training, including the impact on access to the architects' profession from groups traditionally underrepresented.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to agree the establishment of a research project which will evaluate the impact of ARB education reforms and in particular access to the profession from groups traditionally underrepresented within the profession.

Annexes

None

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1. Open Session

- 1.1. This decision will be made in the open session of the Board meeting.

2. Background and Key points

The need to improve access to the profession

- 2.1. The profession does not, at present, reflect the composition of society.¹ ARB data demonstrates that women and some ethnic minority groups are underrepresented in the profession. Other sources of data suggest that people from less affluent socio-economic groups are also underrepresented. Whilst the profile of new Registrants joining each year is more diverse,² we want to do more to support that change.
- 2.2. At the start of our work to review the education and training of architects, we commissioned independent research into the competencies architects need and the routes through which they gain them.³
- 2.3. A consistent and widespread view reported through the research was that there is a need for new, more flexible entry routes to the Register. Architecture appears to be out of line with other professions in the UK and architectural practice in other countries in having under-developed non-academic routes. The research found that this is likely to be a barrier that is impacting on diversity and inclusion within the profession. In particular, we heard that the requirement to complete an ARB-recognised Part 1 course was a barrier to those who have transferable knowledge or skills from related disciplines.⁴

Views on how to improve access

- 2.4. We summarised this research in our discussion paper on modernising education and training, and invited views on our ambition and vision through a survey.⁵ Our qualitative analysis of the written responses found that stakeholders offered the following views on how to improve access:
 - One hundred and thirty-two respondents (19%) suggested there should be more flexible ways of studying and training.
 - A total of 132 (19%) respondents expressed the view that the cost of Parts 1, 2 and 3 is an issue. They raised the cost of university, fees, and the impact of related debt.

¹ See our analysis at <https://arb.org.uk/architects-today/>

² See our research at <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ARB-EDI-Report-April-2023.pdf>. See pages 11 and 12 for the gender of new Registrants; page 13 for UCAS data on undergraduate architecture students' gender (no such data exists for ethnicity) and page 17 for the ethnicity of new Registrants.

³ The research was undertaken by SQW and is available here: <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Review-of-architects-competences-report.pdf>. The findings are summarised in our discussion paper on modernising education and training, published in 2021 available here: <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Modernising-architectural-education-and-training-2021-1.pdf>

⁴ See para 4.16 in our discussion paper on modernising education and training

⁵ See the results of our 2021 survey here: <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ARB-Education-Survey-Report-June-2022.pdf>

- One hundred and four (15%) respondents expressed the view that the length of the current educational requirements is a deterrent to them completing it.
 - Ninety-five respondents raised issues about the conditions in which architects work or study. Some respondents explained that they saw the working conditions as a deterrent to people joining the profession. Some thought that salaries can be too low to support the initial investment in their education to be able to qualify as architects. Others also mentioned that a poor work-life balance made the profession undesirable.
- 2.5. In our engagement with stakeholders we have also heard that the culture of the profession and a lack of role models reduce accessibility and inclusion.

Changes within ARB's role and remit

- 2.6. Many of the barriers to entry into the profession are complex and are tied to wider societal and economic structures. ARB alone cannot resolve all of them, but this should never be used as an excuse for inactivity. We have therefore focused on the ways in which our regulatory approach can create unnecessary hurdles that may contribute to inaccessibility, and how we can remove these.
- 2.7. Our education proposals, which we published in February 2023 for consultation, attempt to reduce barriers into the profession by increasing the flexibility of the framework and creating more access points into training and education.
- 2.8. We hope that removing the regulatory requirement for an undergraduate degree will mean people with different degrees, or no degree but relevant professional experience, will be able to enter training and education at Master's level. Under the current framework, people in this position would have to start with an accredited undergraduate degree in architecture. At the Symposium in September, we spoke to academics and some of the other potential access points they mentioned included professional experience, and undergraduate degrees in, for example, construction, engineering, and interior design. This list is not exhaustive, did not reflect a consensus, and is speculative.
- 2.9. Following consultation feedback, we intend to provide guidance to help learning providers consider entry requirements for those without an architecture undergraduate degree.
- 2.10. A concern raised by consultation respondents is that our proposals will change the amount of student loan funding available to students. Following meetings with the Department for Education and devolved administrations, we understand our proposals will not change the funding status of students, meaning in future, those with a non-ARB accredited undergraduate degree in architecture will still be eligible for the same student loans at Master's level. We will keep this situation under review. We know that DfE intends to review funding this autumn, which would be happening whether or not our education framework changed.
- 2.11. In our discussions with government departments we have come to understand that, under the current funding framework, students with a non-cognate degree may not

be eligible for a student loan at Master's level. This would potentially limit funding access. It is important to emphasise that this is no different to the current funding model and we will explore further the impact on access to student funding for related or joint degrees.

Impact evaluation

- 2.12. Since our proposals concern future changes, we cannot accurately predict the impact our changes will have.
- 2.13. In our consultation, we did ask stakeholders whether they think the changes will help. We found that more respondents agree that our proposals will improve access than disagree.
- 2.14. To better understand whether our education proposals have the desired impact on access to the profession, we would like to commission an initial research project to consider how best we can evaluate the impact of our reforms and how that impact is felt over time. We propose that ARB carries out some Early Market Engagement to consider our research and procurement strategy. We would then refine the scope of our research ambitions and carry out a tender or procurement exercise.
- 2.15. There are many ways in which we could evaluate the impact of our proposals. We will need to consider the markers and data ARB can track to determine whether the changes, once implemented, improve the gender, ethnic and socio-economic diversity of those accessing education and training, and ultimately joining the profession.
- 2.16. The benefits of this work will be that ARB can track the impact of our biggest policy reforms to date, and understand what more can be done to improve accessibility if the reforms fall short. The evaluation impact methodology created through the research will benefit ARB in its evidence-based policy development, and ultimately benefit architects and public communities by helping to create an architects' profession that better reflects the makeup of the society it serves.
- 2.17. We also believe that there is potential for this work to provide a catalyst for larger scale policy and impact evaluation through sector-led applications to organisations such as the Economic and Social Research Council.

3. Resource Implications

- 3.1. The research cost will be outlined in future budget papers. It is intended that it will be funded through ARB's reserves, as a one-off cost for an important evidence-base that will be used by ARB and published for others to access.
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4. Risk Implications

- 4.1. Access and diversity have been recognised problems within the built environment and the profession of architects for some time. ARB's reforms are designed to enable innovation and support new models of delivery. We see this as a positive development and exciting. But innovation cannot be mandated and it will be important for us to evaluate the impact of our reforms; ideally to build on them and to demonstrate what works. But we also need to be willing to modify our policies and procedures if the positive impact we desire and innovation we wish to enable, does not materialise.
 - 4.2. As with any research, there will be risks and limitations in methodology. Getting the scope and focus of the research correct will be crucial. By doing some early market evaluation and testing, and informal engagement with stakeholders, we intend to mitigate poor research design and confirmation bias.
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5. Equality and Diversity implications

- 5.1. This paper sets out how the education reforms are intended to have a positive impact on the equality and diversity of the profession, and how we can measure and continue to improve accessibility into the profession.
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6. Recommendations

The Board is asked to the establishment of a research project which will evaluate the impact of ARB education reforms and in particular access to the profession from groups traditionally underrepresented within the profession.