

## Open session

**Board meeting:** Wednesday 15 February 2023

**Agenda item:** 10

**Subject:** Professionalism research update

**Action:** For decision

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### Purpose

To update on research being undertaken on professionalism and the public's expectations of architects. The resulting evidence base will be used in our engagement with architects and will ultimately support a review of the Code of Conduct.

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### Recommendations

The Board is advised to note the planned approach to the project and the next steps.

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### Annexes

Annexe A - Project aims

Annexe B - Main audience groups

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## 1. Open Session

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## 2. Background and Key points

- 2.1. ARB intends to undertake research and engagement to understand what professionalism means in the context of the architects' profession. We want to understand what the public and architects' clients expect of them, and what values and behaviours architects themselves would define as professional. This shared understanding will inform an update to the Code of Conduct and Practice.
- 2.2. Section 13 of the Architects Act 1997 requires ARB to issue a Code laying down the standards of professional conduct and practice expected of persons registered as architects under the Act. Architects are expected to be guided in their professional conduct by the "spirit of the Code" as well as adhere to any explicit terms.
- 2.3. The most recent update to the Code was in 2016 (published in 2017). Since then, events such as the Grenfell Tower fire, the climate crisis and calls for a more accessible and inclusive profession have shaped policy and legislation but are not reflected in the 2017 Code. Whilst the existing Code sets out the professionalism expected of architects, we want to consider how the concept of 'professionalism' could be made clearer and in a way that better matches expectations others have of architects.
- 2.4. Our research and engagement for other regulatory areas (such as the CPD scheme and education review) have highlighted some potential areas of improvement. ARB intends to reflect these developments in an updated Code of Conduct. This new Code must be outcome-based to set a clear picture of what it means to be a professional. It must also set architects clear standards that can be called upon by the Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) in their decisions. We already have a body of evidence drawn from our PCC cases in relation to standards which will help shape the design of our research and which will be considered as part of this work.
- 2.5. To understand what professionalism means in the context of architects, we need a rigorous evidence base to inform our policy development. One key group we're looking to gain insight from is members of the public, as end users of designed spaces. Given that roughly half the profession works on smaller residential projects, we will also aim to use the research to reach individual homeowners who have commissioned the services of an architect.
- 2.6. We are commissioning a research agency to develop insights into the standards the public and small-scale clients (i.e., homeowners) expect of architects. Using a research agency means our evidence-base will be impartial and will be designed by




experts who can advise us of the most appropriate methodology to reach our target audiences and achieve our aims. We are therefore outlining our research aims to agencies and inviting them to devise a methodology and explain its benefits. We envisage a qualitative approach would be best given the topic, and that the research group should be broadly reflective of those using services of architects (noting that due to our regulatory role, we have limited data on the clients who use architects).

- 2.7. Another benefit of using a research agency is the independence and ability to access a public audience in a managed and professional way. ARB does not have direct contact with architects' clients, particularly small scale ones such as individual home owners.
- 2.8. In addition to the research into public views, we want also to hear from architects and others working with them in the sector. We will use the initial research findings to initiate a conversation with architects and other relevant stakeholders on the topic of professionalism. We therefore intend to hold three roundtables in various UK locations, with architects, larger clients and contractors, and others in the sector such as representative bodies. In the roundtables we will share the research findings and use them to identify areas of consensus and divergence of views, to develop a full understanding of the meaning of professionalism.
- 2.9. Annex 2 identifies the main audiences we want to hear from as part of our research and engagement.
- 2.10. Our research and engagement should address the following aims. (These are not the specific research questions we will ask audiences, but rather the things we want to find out.)
  - What does it mean to behave in a professional way?
  - What values and behaviours would architects describe as professional?
  - Beyond the standards and regulations, they are required by law to follow, what standards do architects expect each other to keep?
  - How familiar are architects with the Code of Conduct ? What is its impact? Is it something they use when things have gone wrong in their practices, or do they use it to guide their work?
  - What standards do the public, contractors and clients expect architects to keep when using their services?

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### 3. Resource Implications

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- 3.1. A budget for the research and engagement part of the project has been set at £20,000.
  - 3.2. A project team has been established made up of staff from the Standards and Policy and Communications Teams.
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#### **4. Risk implications**


- 4.1. While the current Code sets out the professionalism expected of architects, it is outdated in the sense that it does not outline the concept of 'professionalism' in a clearer, outcomes-focused approach that better matches expectations others have of architects.
  - 4.2. We want the updated Code, like ARB's updated educational requirements, to be outcome focused . We want it to provide a clear and comprehensive framework under which supplementary guidance can sit to provide more detail where needed, with our research and engagement helping to identify where that would be useful.
  - 4.3. Additionally, events in recent times such as Grenfell Tower fire, the climate crisis as well as calls for a more accessible and inclusive profession have shaped recent policy and legislation. There is an opportunity in this project to improve public confidence in the profession.
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#### **5. Communication**

- 5.1. The project is being developed internally but we will soon invite research agencies to pitch to ARB their approach to public research. A timeline will be agreed with the successful agency. Once we receive initial research findings, we will engage with architects and larger clients through a series of invite-only roundtables, to test their views on professionalism against those derived from the research.
  - 5.2. Research outcomes and engagement insights will be published in autumn 2023 and promoted to architects and other relevant stakeholders. The new Code will be drafted at the end of the year and be published for consultation in early 2024.
  - 5.3. Further information on communications milestones is listed as part of Annex 2.
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#### **6. Equality and Diversity implication**

- 6.1. One of the aims of this work is to explore whether the Code can be made stronger in areas like equality and working culture. This must also reflect ARB's




modernisation proposal, approved in 2022, which will outline an outcomes-based approach to provide a new flexible and inclusive approach to education and training in architecture.

- 6.2. A successful research agency will demonstrate how they can capture a representative sample of the population. Part of our invitation to pitch requests that agencies apply an inclusive approach to their research, mirroring ARB's commitment to offering those who might have previously been excluded an opportunity to give their views.

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## **7. Recommendations**

- 7.1. The Board is advised to note the planned approach to the project and the next steps.



## ANNEXE A – Project Aims

To undertake research and engagement to understand and articulate the meaning of professionalism in the architects' profession, and how this benefits the public.

To use the insights gained from the research and engagement to review and draft an updated ARB Code of Conduct that will outline and reinforce the instructions within the Architects Act, but also set out improvements in the standards it covers.

The new Code must comply with our [requirements under the Architects Act 1997](#) which include:


- Issuing a Code laying down standards of professional conduct and practice expected of registered persons
- Consulting professional bodies and others before changing it
- Providing a Code where failure to comply with its provisions can be taken into account in any proceedings against an architect under section 14 (professional misconduct and incompetence)

Beyond these minimum requirements, we propose an approach where:

- We want the new Code to be clear in stating our regulatory expectations so that the profession and the public understand what is expected of architects, with clarity where there is something architects must do
- We want the Code, like ARB's updated educational requirements, to be outcome focused
- We want it to provide a clear and comprehensive framework under which supplementary guidance can sit to provide more detail where needed, with our research and engagement helping to identify where that would be useful
- We want it to set expectations of professional standards for registered persons, as a positive view on modern architectural practise, rather than simply setting a minimum standard for compliance

An updated draft could also make improvements to the Code so that it can:

- Be a Code that is more explicit about topics and issues facing the profession and wider society that accurately reflect an architect's work in 2022. Architects would be required to keep up to date on issues and high level principles

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- Be a Code that better reflects expectations of professionals when working within society and in relation to place
  - More clearly identify standards of professionalism and culture that architects are expected to adhere to, including architects' own understanding and expectations of themselves and one another as professionals. As part of this:
    - Explain expectations in relation to multi-disciplinary team working and leadership
    - Set out expectations in relation to behaviour

A short 10-point guidance note could accompany the launch of a new Code.

## ANNEXE B – Main audience groups

### Research

Public	Members of the public who have used the services of an architect (i.e., homeowners who have commissioned small scale design projects)
	Members of the public in general, as users of the built environment and public buildings designed by architects

### Engagement

Group	Who this includes
Profession	ARB Registrants
	Architects Engagement Group (AEG)
	Employers Engagement Group (EEG)
	Small Practice Group (architects who have identified themselves as working in smaller practices in other survey responses, such as CPD, and agreed to be contacted again)
	Previous survey respondents
	Architect special interest groups (i.e. FAF, ACAN, FAME)
Clients and contractors	Housing Associations
	Property Developments
	University Campus' (Directors of Estates)
	Construction Companies
Representative Institutions and other built environment professionals	Universities
	RIBA + equivalent Regional Bodies
	DLUHC (and Office for Place – TBC depending on their status)
	Building Safety Regulator/HSE
	Construction Leadership Council
	RTPI
	RICS
	LGA
	Chartered Institute of Building
	Planning Authorities
	Building Control Officers
	Chartered Town Planners



	Chartered Building Engineers
	Civil Engineers
	Environmental Engineers
	Quantity Surveyors
	Director of Estates
	Project Managers
PCC/IP Members	Members of this group as end users of the Code who deal with its application in a disciplinary context will have expertise to test its feasibility

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>
Research + Mapping/Comparison of relevant Codes of Conducts	Jan 22	Mar 22
Research proposals to be drafted , reviewed by the project team and approved by the Chief Executive	Nov 22	Dec 22
Research agencies invited to pitch; procurement and appointment	Jan 23	Jan 23
Agency undertakes research and delivers report	Mar 23	Jun 23
Three focus groups held for groups across the profession – audience drawn from across England, Wales, Scotland, and NI. From June – August	Jun 23	Aug 23
Publish research outcomes and engagement insights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What we did</li> <li>• What we heard</li> <li>• Insights from the engagement</li> </ul>	Sep 23	Sep 23
New Code Drafted	Oct 23	Early 24
Consultation launched on new Code	Early 24	TBC