

# Board Paper

for Open session

Subject: **Chief Executive's Report**

To note a report from the ARB's Chief Executive on matters relating to the running of the Board's business

Board meeting:

22 May 2024

Agenda item:

12

Action:

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

## Purpose

To provide an update from the Chief Executive on matters relating to the Board's business.

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## Recommendations

The Board is asked to note this paper

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## Annexes

None.

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## Author/Key Contact

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## 1. Open Session

- 1.1. This item will be noted in the open session of the Board meeting.
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## 2. Background and Key points

- 2.1. This paper updates the Board on key operational developments including progress to delivery of our key strategic priorities.

### **Update on Strategic Priorities**

#### Continuous Improvement

2.2 Since the go live of the CRM system, over 1400 architects have joined the Register for the first time, and a further 700 have rejoined the Register (either after non-payment of the retention fee, or after a previous resignation). We have commenced a programme of sampling these groups to gain an understanding of how our guidance on using CRM feels, and whether there are any improvements we can make to the system in phase 2. We are particularly focussing on EU first-time applications, where almost a third are closed, either as a result of ineligibility, or because the correct documentation has not been submitted. We will be reviewing results over the summer.

2.3 We are about to seek expressions of interest from existing examiners and assessors, to implement the Board's decision on plagiarism checks, using software. The software will check both copied text/unreferenced material, as well as AI generated passages. Anyone applying for a Prescribed Examination from the start of June will be subjected to these checks, and those exam applications in the system will be retrospectively reviewed. We have reviewed our guidance to support candidates.

2.4 We delivered the first (of two) refresher training days for Prescribed Examiners. The focus of the online training was on best practice for reviewing materials in the portfolio, and providing useful feedback to candidates in the event of a failure. Group workshops reviewed real (anonymised) material, and was facilitated by an experienced examiner, along with the Registration Team. The focus was consistency of decision-making, and exploring the mechanisms and guidance that can be revised without impacting on the International Routes to Registration project stream. The second date, after which all examiners will have participated in the refresher training, is scheduled in May.

#### Modernisation of Initial Education and Training

2.5 At its last meeting, the Board received a summary of the responses to ARB's engagement exercise on accreditation fees. The engagement exercise closed on 16 February 2024. We received 33 unique responses, with 12 official responses from learning providers or other organisations, and 21 additional responses from individuals.

- 2.6 A summary of the engagement exercise has been published online here: <https://arb.citizenspace.com/policy-and-communications/fees-for-accredited-learning-providers/>
- 2.7 Following the decisions made in the last Board meeting, we have updated the fees for accredited learning providers and communicated the new fees widely via direct email and through meetings. We have updated the fee schedule and prepared new FAQs on our website here: <https://arb.org.uk/information-for-schools-of-architecture/policies/fees-for-accreditation/>
- 2.8 We have now received two applications for new qualifications under the accreditation system and are anticipating several more as a result of a series of in-person and online meetings with providers. We are adding to the existing Accreditation Handbook as we develop materials, and using the Education Transition Reference Group to test material. The link to the Accreditation Handbook is at <https://arb.org.uk/information-for-schools-of-architecture/accreditation-handbook/>
- 2.9 The Chief Executive attended a meeting of SCOSA members on 19 April and provided an update on progress to deliver the new accreditation model. There were a range of questions about the model and progress to implementation. Further requests were made for ongoing communications. No questions were posed about fees.
- 2.10 The PPE Commission's call for evidence was launched in February and coincided with our announcement of the remaining Commissioners being appointed. It was publicised across our channels, and we directly contacted individuals and organisations who we thought would be interested in responding, including previous consultation respondents and university staff and students we had spoken to recently. We also supported one of the Commissioners to write in the Architects' Journal about the Commission's work and call for evidence, helping to generate more interest and responses. The call for evidence closed in April and we received 124 responses. Each question required respondents to submit written answers sharing their thoughts and views. There were no closed, 'tick box' questions because we were not making proposals and testing their agreement. The engaged nature of the Call for Evidence means we'd expect responses to be lower than we'd see in a closed question survey. We're content with the number and quality of responses we received and will now analyse these for the Commission.
- 2.11 Alongside the call for evidence, we have continued to support the Commission by planning and participating in visits. In March we visited the University of Sheffield to speak to staff and students about their approach to incorporated practical experience into their courses. Then, in April, we heard from the University of Portsmouth about their approach to courses, including apprenticeships, and the

Commissioners met with staff, students from apprenticeship and full-time courses, and architects from the university's network of employers. Future visits are now planned for Scotland, London and Wales.

- 2.12 Other activities during this period have included the first meeting of the Expert Reference Group (a small group of different organisations and individuals who will help to inform the Commission as it progresses) and supporting the Commission with further research into their areas of interest. This includes the research into workplace culture described under the 'Professionalism and Code of Conduct and Practice' section of this update.

### Continuing Professional Development

- 2.13 The new CPD scheme went live January 1, 2024. The Portal was opened 22 January for Windows operating systems and for all other devices by 21 March.
- 2.14 A communications campaign has supported the launch of the scheme to help raise awareness of the new scheme and what the requirements are. Key activities for the campaign include an article in our newsletter, Insight, an email blast between January and February, and a webinar in February with 944 attendees. In addition, messages on the new scheme were added to staff signatures and to the 2023 retention fee payment notifications, as well as social media.
- 2.15 As of 8 May there have been 3084 users of the CPD section of the portal. 112 who have uploaded documents and 2972 who have entered data into their CPD log. This is approximately just under 7% of the total number of total number of Registrants. We will continue with the communications campaign to help raise awareness of Registrants responsibilities.

### Eos Transformation

- 2.16 ARB's strategy on infrastructure was to move to a 'cloud first' approach. The aim was to reduce reliance on our own network infrastructure and to de-risk by moving our infrastructure into 'the cloud' and licence this from one of the big providers. This IAAS (infrastructure as a service) project is now complete with all our core network infrastructure off site from Weymouth Street and now cloud based.
- 2.17 As a result, a key strategic objective to de-risk Weymouth Street office has been achieved. Only those IT resources directly linked to the offices remain on premise (e.g. door entry software).
- 2.18 We have completed the roll-out of secure laptops to all staff. For those that need ARB mobile phones, these have been issued with secure systems and integrated functionality to MS Teams. This also allows for better disaster recovery and emergency response as well as improved data security and document management.

- 2.19 We have completed the AV upgrade within Weymouth Street (which was designed with a 'lift and shift' capability and will move to ARB's new premises at 70 Gray's Inn Road.
- 2.20 We continue to make significant progress by moving from network storage to using SharePoint with Teams integration supporting collaborative working. Importantly, we are also going through an intensive period of document 'tagging' and coding to support more efficient file storage, but also to enable us to have greater automation of records retention.
- 2.21 Collaboration has enhanced through Teams Channels and Instant Messenger functionality has taken some getting used to but there has been positive feedback from staff through the IT survey.
- 2.22 In the 2024 staff engagement survey, three-quarters of ARB staff (76.8%) now agree or strongly agree that they have the necessary technology and equipment to do their work, up from two-thirds (59.1%) in 2023.
- 2.23 The replacement of ARB's software applications is designed around a new CRM system, Dynamics 365. The core management of the core regulatory functions, the registration database and applications processing as well as the professional standards case management system, will be built in Dynamics.
- 2.24 Other critical applications which need to be upgraded, including a new finance, payroll and HR system, are designed to work alongside and communicate with Dynamics.
- 2.25 Phase 1, which was the designed and delivery of a new registrant database and applications portal has been approved. Although delayed, the CPD module was delivered in February 2024 which now means registrants can use their self-service portal and complete their CPD online in the ARB database.
- 2.26 The system has stabilised somewhat after a very challenging two months; however we are expecting further remedial work to be carried out to ensure that stability exists when we have the 2024 annual renewal cycle.
- 2.27 We are carrying out further analysis of the problems with our IT provider Intergence, before committing to Phase 2 of the CRM project, which involves implementing the case management system in MS Dynamics.
- 2.28 We have already begun work to deliver the new Finance, payroll and HR system with the introduction of Sage People (HR) Sage Intacct (Finance) and Sage Payroll. We hope to realise a range of benefits from the introduction of this new software

package, not least the ability to move away from manual paper-based reconciliation, greater integration with registration and professional standards work, improved regular reporting (something that has rightly been pushed by both ARAC and People Committees) and a much more efficient annual financial reporting process.

### People Strategy

2.29 Updates on our People Strategy are set out in the separate update paper including updates on our property move, appointment of consultants to support our EDI work as well as our 2024 staff survey.

### Professionalism and the Code of Conduct

2.30 On Tuesday 19 March ARB hosted a Professionalism conference in central London, which was attended by over 60 architects and additional expert speakers. The conference included a presentation from Thinks Insight & Strategy on the findings of their research into the expectations that small scale clients and members of the public have of the architects' profession. We published the research report the same day and it was covered in architectural trade press.

2.31 The conference included an expert panel discussion on the role of the Code of Conduct and Practice and participative workshops to discuss the purpose, content and format of a new Code. On 17 April we held an online participative workshop so that architects unable to attend our event in London could also contribute to our engagement. This was attended by over 50 architects.

2.32 The findings from our conference and workshop, and from our ongoing engagement meetings with the representative bodies of contractors and other built environment professionals, are now feeding directly into the development of the new Code. A new draft Code, along with a recommended schedule of supporting guidance notes, will come to the Board this summer and be subject to public consultation thereafter.

2.33 Alongside this work, we have commissioned Thinks Insight & Strategy to undertake some follow up research. Concerns about workplace culture and behaviours have surfaced through recent consultations (for example, in response to our education reforms), have been raised with ARB staff when we've met with early career professionals, and have also been the topic of articles in the architecture press or on social media. This research seeks to understand the perceptions of the profession amongst those working in the sector. It will address the values they associate with the sector, their positive experiences, and whether there are cultural issues related to misconduct and mistreatment within the architects' profession. This will include the prevalence of issues and the demographics most impacted (e.g. whether those with different types of protected characteristics, or those working in certain regions, experience the sector differently).

2.34 The findings of the research will feed into the future Code of Conduct and Practice, in particular any additional guidance that might be needed to help underpin the Code. It will also be used by the Commission on Professional Practical Experience, to help them understand and develop recommendations to improve the experience and quality of work for future architects.

#### International Routes and the Prescribed Exam Overhaul

2.35 The work of the internal Project Team to rationalise international routes to registration and overhaul the prescribed exam continues. This update follows on from our previous update in the Chief Executive's Report at its February 2024 meeting.

2.36 We held a useful internal workshop to determine the scope of changes we would like to make to both the prescribed exam and the UK Adaptation Assessment (UKAA). In this workshop we considered evidence from our survey of EU and international architects about the competency of internationally qualified architects and their readiness to practise safely in the UK context. We intend to test our preliminary conclusions at an online event ARB is hosting on 16 May 2024.

2.37 The event is targeted at previous candidates, employers, and potential candidates who have not taken the prescribed exam due to eligibility criteria or personal concerns that discouraged them from sitting it. In the event we will invite attendees to share their experience of the exam, make suggestions as to how we can improve it, and hear our early thoughts about how we can overhaul the exam.

2.38 Building on our early conclusions and the feedback we receive at this event; we intend to draft a 'green paper' to outline a proposed new approach to both the exam and the UKAA. We aim to bring this paper to the Board this summer and publish it for engagement soon after. The proposals will include a timeline for our changes.

#### Development of International Routes/Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA'S)

##### **2.39 Canada, Hong Kong and European Union**

We are continuing to make positive progress in relation to the development of a mutual recognition agreement (MRA) between ARB and the Regulatory Organisations of Architecture in Canada (ROAC). Our discussions have centred around the qualifications which are likely to be in scope of the agreement as well as ensuring that our respective data sharing provisions will be sufficiently robust. We will continue to keep the Board updated as discussions move forward. Our discussions with our Hong Kong and EU counterparts are continuing. We are seeking to conclude discussions with the Hong Kong Institute of Architects/Architects Registration Board Hong Kong regarding the development of our Memorandum of Understanding with them later this year.

#### **2.40 USA, Australia and New Zealand**

Our existing MRAs with the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) in the USA, and with the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) and the New Zealand Registered Architects Board (NZRAB) have been in operation for almost a year. Our agreements make provision for the parties involved in the agreements to meet on at least an annual basis to formally discuss the agreements, their operation and any issues that any of the parties wish to raise. These are referred to as annual monitoring committee meetings within the agreements. Annual Monitoring meetings with NCARB, and with AACA/NZRAB will have taken place by the time of the Board Meeting on 22 May 2024. We will provide further verbal updates about the outcomes of these meetings at the Board's meeting.

#### **2.41 Republic of Ireland**

We have continued to keep the Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) updated in relation to any newly accredited or amended qualifications that fall within scope of our MOU, so that those holding those qualifications can continue to register simply and straightforwardly in Ireland. The RIAI are also aware of the changes we have made to the regulatory framework, the Competency Outcomes and the revised Accreditation process. The RIAI has similarly kept us up to date on matters impacting our MOU for their perspective.

#### Department for Business and Trade Recognition Arrangements Grant Programme 2024/2025

2.42 The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) is running Round 3 of its Recognition Arrangements Grant Programme. Regulatory bodies seeking to develop MRAs are able to apply for grants of up to £75k for the 2024/2025 financial year. We submitted an application for the £30k to support our work in relation to the ARB/ROAC MRA and are awaiting DBT's decision as to whether or not we have been successful.

#### Compliance with regulations regarding the recognition of qualifications from Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway (the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries)

2.43 Further to the Board's recent discussions and decisions in relation to the recognition of qualifications from Ireland, Lichtenstein and Norway, the Executive are in the progress of implementing the agreed recognition processes in line with those decisions. The updated recognition process should be fully operational from the beginning of Q3 2024.



## 2.44 Update on Board's Workshop Meeting held on 20 March 2024

### **Key Points**

- The Chair provided a brief overview to Board Members on the Professionalism conference which took place on 19 March 2024.
- The Board was provided with an update on Building Safety to enhance their knowledge and understanding around building regulations. A discussion was held about the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.
- Board Members received a recap on the IT transformation and operational environment for 2020/21, and an update on the project status to date. The vision for transformation within the Corporate Strategy was considered to reflect how this vision had progressed. The Board heard about the projected costs and what the executive was doing to mitigate risks.
- Board Members had received the externally facilitated Board Effectiveness Review Report in advance of the Workshop and were provided with the opportunity to provide a brief response to the report. Group Discussions had taken place amongst Board Members to consider the top priorities going forward, as a result of the Board Effectiveness Review Report.
- The remainder of the Workshop was dedicated to the follow up session of the development of Board Values and behaviours; the session was facilitated by an external consultant and Staff members were present for this session.

### **Actions**

- Executive to extract the recommendations from the NCVO Board Effectiveness Review Report, and ensure that these are brought to the May Board meeting.
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### 3. Resource Implications

3.1. There are no specific resource implications arising from the Chief Executive's report.

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### 4. Risk Implications

4.1. Risks relating to each of the initiatives set out in this paper have been considered separately, either as part of specific Board papers and discussions, or incorporated into project, programme or corporate risk registers.

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### 5. Equality and Diversity implications

- 5.1. There are no specific EDI implications arising out of this paper, however a number of key strategic priorities are either directly or indirectly designed to support and promote EDI. The People Strategy update also references the Executive's work in this area.
- 5.2. Our international work will directly have an impact on the diversity of the registrant population. The same applies to our education reform work, particularly looking at Professional Practical Experience.
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### 6. Recommendations

6.1. The Board is asked to note this paper.