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Update on ARB's Communication Plan

This document outlines progress made by ARB in the area of communications since the last full update which was provided at the Board's meeting on 18 September 2014.

Effective communication is central to ensuring that ARB delivers on its aims and overall objectives, which are set out in its' annual business plans.

ARB's Communications Strategy, which was noted by the Board at its meeting on 12 February 2014 identifies the following key communications aims:

- i. To increase public and professional awareness of the role and functions of ARB.
- ii. To continue to raise awareness of the Register, specifically explaining to users of architectural services what registration means, and the importance of checking the Register before engaging an architect.
- iii. To extend the network of stakeholders to support ARB to deliver its business plan.

The 2015 business plan included a series of objectives, which documents how we would deliver on these overarching aims, and identified indicators of success to evaluate progress on awareness raising activities.

The communications related objectives listed in the 2015 business plan are listed in the table in annex B.

This report sets out in detail the action undertaken and progress made as well as identifying our plans for next steps.

This report focuses on the development of stakeholder relationships as a significant element of our work on communications has been to work with others to raise awareness of ARB, our role and the statutory Register. Nonetheless, this report also provides an update on other elements of our work including our website, social media, ebuletin and other communication tools.

Stakeholder Relationships

Substantial progress has been made in the area of stakeholder relationship building. Prior to 2014 some strong relationships already existed with architects, professional bodies, schools of architecture and students. These stakeholders are core to our work and we report on our interactions with these organisations, groups and individuals via the regular Operational Activity Report which is presented at each Board meeting. However, despite well-established links existing with these parties, it was recognised that there was a need to build contacts with consumer and client organisations. We have put a great deal of effort into this area since the beginning of 2014 with contacts established and relationships cultivated. Information outlining progress made with these new relationships is provided below:

TrustMark

TrustMark is an organisation which aims to provide reliable information about construction professionals to the public. A number of meetings have been held with TrustMark culminating in a high level meeting between ARB's Chair and Registrar and their counterparts at TrustMark. Conversations have explored TrustMark's licencing agreement with the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills (BIS). Discussions are on-going to establish whether a formal link can be made between the TrustMark website, which displays over 500,000 construction professionals' details every month to the public, and the Register of Architects. Our aim in establishing such a link is to provide consumers with information about the benefits of using a registered architect.

HomeOwners Alliance

HomeOwners Alliance is a membership organisation; it provides unbiased advice and support to homeowners and aspiring homeowners. The HomeOwners Alliance is growing in popularity with its website receiving 1.5 million visitors in 2014. We have built a relationship with the Chief Executive of HomeOwners Alliance, this has led to the organisation displaying details about ARB and the Register of Architects on its website as well as publishing ARB's 'Meeting your architect' tool online. The links to ARB on the HomeOwners Alliance website have already resulted in nearly 600 referrals to our websites.

Which?

Which? Group includes a charity which champions consumer issues as well as other legal entities delivering consumer services. Following a meeting with the policy lead for Which?, we began work with 'Which? Local'. 'Which? Local' is a popular website, where Which? members post recommendations of local tradespeople and professionals they have employed. It has 228,000 registered subscribers, lists 77,000 businesses and contains 140,000 moderated business reviews. Our work with the 'Which? Local' team led to them creating a separate category for architects on their website and displaying the ARB logo alongside the names of architects recommended by members.

Citizens Advice Service

Citizens Advice service is the UK's largest provider of advice services, offering advice on consumer affairs and housing issues, in addition to a whole range of other matters. An initial meeting was held with Citizens Advice who provided ARB with data regarding complaints received by the service

relating to architects and architectural services. Citizens Advice expressed an interest in providing their advisers with succinct briefing information about the regulation of architects and the protection the legislation affords consumers. Staff changes at Citizens Advice have meant that contact has had to be re-established. Nonetheless, we consider it well worth putting the effort into this important relationship, Citizens Advice has substantial reach with over 2.5 million people going to the organisation for advice in 2014/2015.

Houzz

Houzz is an international online home renovation and design platform for consumers and suppliers which enables them to share images and information. Houzz's popularity has grown dramatically since its launch in 1995 and it now has over 35 million unique monthly visitors. We have met with Houzz's Industry Marketing Manager for the UK & Ireland and are in discussions to encourage Houzz to create a category for architects linking through to the statutory Register. We are also discussing displaying the ARB logo on the profile pages of Houzz members who are architects.

Chartered Trading Standards Institute

The Chartered Trading Standards Institute is a membership body for trading standards professionals. Meetings have taken place with the Chief Executive and Policy Manager of the Trading Standards Institute. The Registrar and Communication's Coordinator attended the 2015 Annual Conference to meet a number of bodies working in the consumer affairs sector. Additionally the Trading Standards Institute has published an article about ARB in its journal, Trading Standards Today. It informed Trading Standards officers about how ARB could help them and provided officers with key information to pass on to consumers.

Legal Services Consumer Panel

The Legal Services Consumer Panel provides independent advice to the Legal Services Board about the interests of users of legal services. ARB staff met with the Consumer Panel Manager who provided information on the Panel's flagship Consumer Impact Report. This report uses a consumer insight survey to identify future priorities and represents a best practice approach to responding to consumer needs.

Regulators Communications Group

We are a member of a group of communications professionals working for regulators. This network has given us an opportunity to share best practice in the field of regulatory communications, which presents its own unique opportunities and challenges. This has been a forum for sharing advice, case studies, news and policies. We are also working with colleagues from other bodies to re-launch the UK Inter Professional Group (UKIPG), a network of bodies with a regulatory remit which currently provides us with a cost effective way of sharing and benchmarking information with peers in other regulatory bodies.

Members of the Public

Members of the public are increasingly undertaking major home improvement schemes on their properties; in addition to this, the number of consumers opting for self-build projects is growing. Our focus, when communicating with this key stakeholder group, is to support the public to make informed choices. We want the public to understand the benefits of using someone on the statutory

Register; understand what issues they must discuss when engaging an architect and know about the role of the ARB and how and when the regulator can help.

We exhibited at the Home Building and Renovating show and Grand Designs Live to provide face to face advice to consumers and to listen to their experiences and concerns. We also received a substantial volume of enquiries via phone and email from members of the public asking for advice on how to find an architect and some raising concerns about an architect's conduct or work.

Periodic Review

During the Periodic Review the government requested information about bodies who could contribute a consumer standpoint to the consultation process so that the review could incorporate this fundamentally important perspective. We were able to pass details of the key contacts we had made to DCLG, to enable the Department to get in touch with them independently.

Communications Tools

Meeting your Architect Tool

In response to the questions we received from members of the public we have developed a 'Meeting your architect' tool which is a form aimed at guiding consumers through an initial meeting with an architect so that they ask about the issues which if not clarified can lead to complaints later on. This form has been extremely well received, 2150 copies have already been distributed since it was launched in October 2014.

Annual Report

As a public body we are committed to providing accessible reporting information about our organisation and how we deliver on our statutory remit so that the values of transparency and accountability are at the heart of how we operate. As such our annual report is an important tool for providing information to stakeholders and publishing data about our performance against our objectives so that it is a matter of public record.

In 2014 we made changes to the information we provide in our annual report, bringing it into line with the style used by other regulators. We included information about our regulatory role and how we have delivered on this as well as narrative information from our report against our business plan.

Following these changes, the 2013 annual report (published in 2014) was well received with readership up on the previous year. The open rate for the eblast, which contains headline information, rose from 21% in 2013 to 31% in 2014. Additionally, unique visits to the microsite, in the week after it was launched, increased from 939 in 2013 to 1290 in 2014. Reporting data on the 2014 annual report (published in 2015) shows that whilst the open rate for the eblast remained constant at 31% the number of people visiting the microsite in the first week was down to 938. We have a number of communication activities planned to further highlight the site including an article in the September ebulletin and social media messaging.

Ebulletin

The ebulletin is an extremely important tool for us because it is the medium we use to proactively contact the profession. We send out five ebulletins annually, they are sent out within a few days of each Board meeting. In February 2015 we refreshed the design of the ebulletin, it was updated to encourage stakeholders to read more of the content as well as providing more detailed tracking information on which stories are the most popular with readers. One of our objectives was to use the ebulletin to raise awareness of the Code of Conduct and to address this matter we launched a regular 'Dear Architect' column where we include information about the Code and related issues.

Information asking architects to provide updated contact details has been moved to a more prominent position in the ebulletin. This has had a significant impact on the number of architects updating their contact details, the week after the July ebulletin was sent out we received 733 contact detail updates, compared to 93 the previous week. In addition to this, we are working to increase audience numbers so readership has been opened up to all through the addition of a new sign-up feature. These changes, together with new admissions to the Register, have impacted on ebulletin

readership with average circulation up from 21,980 for January – June 2014 compared to 28,340 for the same period in 2015.

Online Videos

In the last few years we have noticed a significant shift in users accessing information online, we have responded to this demand by developing online services, thus encouraging architects to apply for registration online, and moving away from paper applications.

Online videos are another aspect of our online offer. These videos provide key information to stakeholders in an engaging format as and when they need it. Since ARB posted its first online videos at the beginning of 2013 stakeholders have spent 725 hours watching our online videos which equates to 103.5 days of staff time. This is another example of how investing in online services makes it easier for stakeholders to resolve queries themselves. This saves staff time, which is ultimately paid for through the retention fee.

Online video for members of the public - We have recently developed an online video which outlines the benefits of using a registered architect. In the eight months since this video was launched it has already been viewed over 450 times. We intend to encourage consumer and client organisations to link to this resource to further increase audience numbers.

Online video for architects - As part of our commitment to inform architects about how they should act in order to comply with the Code we have also developed a video on how to avoid complaints. Since we promoted this on our website in July 2015 it has already been viewed over 100 times. We will be highlighting this to architects in future communications to increase views of this video.

Online examination videos - Feedback from exam candidates showed that many did not understand ARB's process for assessing exam eligibility nor did they understand what to include in a portfolio for the examiners to assess. In response to these views, we have developed three guidance videos for exam candidates to support them with making an application to take the prescribed exam and producing a portfolio of their work for assessment. These three videos were launched at the end of January 2015 and the combined total of views for all three videos is already over 1700. Since January stakeholders have spent 47 hours watching these videos which equates to over 6 and a half days of staff time. Due to the popularity of these videos we are planning to give them greater prominence on the website.

Registration Route Finder

Feedback from those applying for registration and enquiries dealt with by staff clearly identified an issue with prospective registrants struggling to identify which route to registration applied to them. Consequently, we developed an online route finder which supports applicants to identify which route to registration applies to them and directing them to the appropriate area of the website. This has proved extremely popular, since its launch in October 2014 it has had nearly 5,000 visitors.

This tool and the videos have been developed to support the objective of using self-service systems with a view to limit human resources required within the office, thus keeping running costs down as much as possible.

ARB Website and Online Register

Since the re-launch of the website in February 2012 and the corresponding launch of the online Register, efforts have focused on increasing the number of referrals to the website rather than undertaking significant changes to the structure and content.

This strategy has paid off with year to date visits to the website up 13% from 160,846 compared to 181,661 for the same period in 2014. Year to date visits to the online Register are also up 22% from 155,064 compared to 188,851.

Driving traffic to the website and online Register is directly connected to a number of our communications objectives including building relationships with other organisations to raise awareness of ARB amongst their audiences. The dramatic increase in visits to these sites is a reflection of the efforts made and successes achieved as a result of this work.

Website Focus Groups

Over the course of the last twelve months we have conducted interviews and a focus group with stakeholders as well as a focus group with members of the staff team to gain feedback on the website and our other online channels. Both external stakeholders and the staff team noted that whilst they felt the website content was useful, they often found the site difficult to navigate. They also commented that the terminology used to label different sections was very official in nature.

The methods by which users access our sites are changing as the use of mobile devices becomes more prevalent. We are currently exploring this in more detail with a view to upgrading some of our channels so our sites do not become inaccessible. Consequently, as outlined in the final section of this report, improving the website is a priority going forward.

Social Media

Prior to the end of 2013 ARB did not have a substantial social media presence. We have undertaken significant work over the last twelve months to grow our social media audiences and establish an internal process for developing and signing-off social media messages. We have the following social media channels – Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+ and YouTube. Key success areas have been LinkedIn where our followers have grown from 946 to 1,536 and YouTube where views have increased from 8,647 to 14,618 this year.

Our strategy with regards to social media is about building links with stakeholders and key spokespeople who have large audiences and asking them to share our messages with their followers.

Despite a steady improvement in the area of social media, participants of the in-depth interviews and focus group called for more engaging content, this view was also echoed during other direct conversations with stakeholder organisations. Users of our digital channels said adopting such an approach would make them more likely to share and respond to messages. We are working to develop our content accordingly, using more images, puzzles and key facts. We are investigating further options in this regard including using tools to conduct spot surveys on social media and considering the development of a blog to allow us to share alternative content about our role.

Press

Communications work with regards to press has focused on two key aims, to increase mentions of ARB in non-trade press and to ensure press releases for the trade press contain quotes referring to the organisation's regulatory role. We have seen good progress in both areas. ARB has been cited in national coverage on Sky, BBC's Rogue Traders, the Financial Times and House Beautiful Magazine in addition to two local newspapers. With regard to trade press coverage, articles tend to be balanced with any criticism offset by quotes from ARB spokespeople. On the whole ARB quotes have included reference to our regulatory role. Further work is planned to contact other publications to offer articles about ARB and our role.

Key Communications Themes

We have identified key messages which we consistently communicate across all our channels. These are set out below:

Update your details – It is essential that we have up-to-date registrant details. This requirement is set out in the Act and is fundamentally important not least for the public, who check the Register to verify an individual's registered status. We also require these details to contact registrants about matters including the fee, complaints and consultations. The refreshed ebulletin has been designed to encourage architects to update their details and we have also pushed this message in articles in the ebulletin and via social media.

Use the logo if you are an architect – We work to encourage architects to visually display their registered status via the use of the logo on signage, marketing materials and letterhead to support the consumer to make informed choices. This message has been promoted to registrants in retention fee communications and via banner adverts in the ebulletin. We will explore whether architects require additional file formats and tools such as embed codes to make it easier for them to insert the logo into their websites.

Role of a regulator – Our remit as a statutory regulator is set out in an Act of Parliament. It is of paramount importance that we get this message across so that registrants, the public and other stakeholders have a clear understanding of what we can and cannot do for them. We consistently promote messages about our role as a regulator across all channels including press releases which, where possible, contain quotes referring to our regulatory role and in the Annual Report, which has been redesigned to incorporate more information about our statutory remit. On social media we have drawn on an idea used by the General Medical Council and created a set of messages on the theme of an A-Z of regulation.

Code of conduct – The Architects Code is central to our regulatory role in setting and maintaining standards. It is crucial that we communicate about the Code to all stakeholders, particularly architects and the public. Architects need to be familiar with the Code so they are aware of what they need to do to provide good service to their clients and avoid complaints. Consumers need to know about it so they know what they can expect when engaging an architect.

For architects, we have included messages about the Code across all our communication channels. In the case of press releases covering Professional Conduct Committee cases we explained why individual architects were reprimanded or found guilty to inform registrants of the issues which lead to complaints. We have also created an online video advising on how to avoid complaints as well as a new *Dear Architect* column in the ebulletin and briefing notes on topical issues.

For consumers and clients, we have launched a 'Meeting your architect' tool, this is a form designed to encourage consumers to ask key questions which if not clarified early on can lead to complaints. Also, through our contacts with consumers and consumer bodies, either directly at exhibitions or indirectly via the non-trade press, we push messages about the Code of Conduct and architects being

members of a regulated profession. As covered previously in this paper these measures have been successful and we plan to develop these still further.

Making informed decisions – A key principle of our work is the notion that we operate in the public interest, key to this is supporting the public to make informed decisions. We use this language widely across all our channels to encourage architects to highlight their registered status and to encourage the public to check the Register.

Looking forward

- **Continue to build and maintain relationships with client organisations** – This is the core of our communications strategy, and, as illustrated above, we have reaped the rewards of work in this area. Future communications work will continue to focus on this key task. We are currently arranging meetings with the Chartered Institute of Building and the British Property Federation.
 - **Continue to strengthen relationships with existing key stakeholders** – Other stakeholders including professional bodies, schools of architecture and associated groups, students and other regulatory bodies are key to our work and we will continue to strengthen these crucial relationships.
 - **Review and update all outward facing communications materials** – Including leaflets, handbooks and guidance to ensure they are up to date and consistent in language tone and design appearance. A staff task group is meeting on 16 September to commence this project.
 - **Undertake project to restructure the website** – Feedback from the in-depth interviews and the focus group suggest that the users experience of the website would be improved if the content were re-organised and re-labeled to make it easier to navigate. Funding is being requested via the 2016 Business Plan.
 - **Expand our online offering** – Use of online services to apply for registration, update contact details and provide information to service users has proved extremely popular with our stakeholders. There is a solid case for strengthening this further by making the website mobile friendly and further expanding our online offer.
 - **Develop additional informative and cost-effective ways of evaluating performance** – To better understand how the impact of awareness raising activities can be measured.
 - **Establish a category for architects with TrustMark** – To establish an architect category on the TrustMark website which links directly to the statutory Register.
 - **Strengthen relationship with Citizens Advice service** – To work with the team at Citizens Advice to provide briefing information for advisers and direct consumers to the ARB.
 - **Campaign to highlight difference between architects and architectural services** - Including contacting listing sites and informing them of the Act's protection of title function with a view to asking them to create separate listing categories. There is a need to inform the public that there is a difference between the two terms and what this means.
 - **Develop more engaging social media content** – To promote discussion and interaction using surveys, images and other tools to build audience numbers.
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