



Subject Update on ARB's Operational Activities
Purpose For Note
From Registrar & Chief Executive

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1. Summary

To update the Board on ARB's operational activities since the last Board meeting.

2. Open/Confidential Session

Open session. Any confidential matters will be discussed in a separate report in the confidential session.

3. Contribution to the Board's Purpose and Objectives

In delivering the Act, ARB's objectives are:

Protect the users and potential users of architects' services, and support architects through Regulation. ARB's Operational Activities Report keeps the Board informed of activities which ensure that ARB meets its purpose and objectives, and delivers against the Business Plan 2016.

4. Key Points

Stakeholder Relations

Consumer Shows

Over the last few months we have exhibited at two major consumer shows for members of the public who are considering construction projects. We had stands at the Homebuilding and Renovating Show at Excel in London from 22 – 24 September and at Grand Designs at the National Exhibition Centre (NEC) in Birmingham from 19 – 23 October. Additionally, as reported previously, we exhibited at a further Homebuilding and Renovating Show at the NEC in April of this year.

These shows provide us with a valuable opportunity to speak directly to consumers to inform them about our regulatory role and the Register of architects. We have invested in a spot survey tool which enables visitors to use tokens to answer simple questions about their decisions regarding the appointment of an architect; this engaging idea has proved helpful in providing us with useful data as well as prompting discussions with visitors. Many consumers talk about the importance they place on recommendations and reputation and this provides us with a useful starting point to have conversations about the title architect and how they can check the Register to make informed decisions.

Over the course of the three shows we estimate that we spoke to 2,200 visitors, the majority of these were consumers but we also met architects, retired architects and students. Our 'Meeting with your Architect' form continues to be a popular handout within the region of 2000 hard copies distributed over the course of the three shows and a further 430 electronic copies downloaded so far this year.

Additionally, we are mindful that we need to update registrants about our work to inform consumers about the Register so that they can see we are undertaking a proactive approach to this issue, a commitment we made in the business plan. Consequently, we have included information about these exhibitions in our ebulletins and have had a drive on social media messaging, particularly for the Grand Designs show.

Local Authority Project

We are currently working on a project to ask the planning departments of local authorities to add hyperlinks from their websites to the online Register. For many consumers, these websites are their first port of call when they are considering undertaking construction projects and so this piece of work is about getting information to a target audience at the right time and in the right place. As a result of our recent endeavours, 16 local authorities have added links to the Register in the last few months and a further 20 have agreed to add this information. This means that a total of 40% of London Councils now have links to the ARB with many more committing to add this information to their websites. Additionally, following a contact we made through this project, we have been asked to present on this issue at a Planning Society Meeting in London in the coming weeks.

Architects Benevolent Society (ABS)

We had a very positive follow-up meeting with the ABS. It was decided that, during the 2017 retention fee collection period, we would trial a light-touch joint approach whereby registrants who contact us, advising us that they face financial hardship could be directed to the ABS for possible assistance. One of the ABS welfare officers recently presented to members of the ARB team about the Benevolent Society's remit and role so that our staff can signpost registrants appropriately.

General Medical Council (GMC) Consultation

The GMC has been consulting on whether it should extend the scope of the information contained on the medical register. As part of our work to maintain relationships with other regulators we submitted a response to this request. Our submission did not offer a view on whether or not the medical Register should contain further information but simply offered factual observations from the perspective of another regulator on the importance of providing accurate high quality data to the public.

EU Referendum

Further to a series of requests, we have been providing relevant information and feedback to both the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS) regarding the areas of the Architects Act 1997 which could be affected by the UK's exit from the European Union. We have also been providing relevant statistics regarding the composition of the Register and the numbers of EU

applicants for registration where these have been requested. We are continuing to work closely with our Government contacts and will keep the Board updated as matters progress.

Standing Conference of Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA)

We were due to hold one of our regular ARB/SCHOSA liaison meetings in mid-September 2016, however due to there being no developments on either ARB or SCHOSA's part, it was decided to postpone the meeting until later in the year. SCHOSA held its Autumn Forum in early November 2016 in France; given the position and as no significant developments in relation to the Periodic Review or the UK's exit from the European Union had occurred, we decided not to attend the Forum on this occasion. We remain, however, in close contact with the Chair and Secretary of SCHOSA and will use our next liaison meeting to catch up on any relevant discussions which took place at the Autumn Forum.

Association of Professional Studies Advisers in Architecture (APSAA)

We attended APSAA's Autumn Forum in mid-November 2016. APSAA invited us to participate in the Forum so that we could update APSAA members on our work and the latest developments regarding the review of the UK routes to registration as well as the impact of the EU Referendum and the publication of the Periodic Review Report. Any relevant outcomes/feedback following the Forum will be reported to the Board on 24 November 2016.

5. European Issues

European Stakeholders

Architects Council of Europe (ACE)

We attended the Professional Qualifications Directive/Professional Practical Experience/Continuing Professional Development and Regulatory Questions and Issues Working Group meeting, as well as the Finance Committee and General Co-ordination meetings since the last Board meeting.

The Working Group meeting provided a useful opportunity to catch up on developments at European Commission level. Amongst other things we learned that the Commission is considering the development of a Proportionality Directive, which will formalise the way in which member states should undertake proportionality tests, which look at how member states regulate professions. We will continue to monitor the position in relation to this area. The Commission is also continuing its review of the operation and effectiveness of the Services Directive. The Commission is considering the introduction of a Services Passport, which is similar to the Professional Card. To date, ACE member organisations and members of the European Network of Architects Competent Authorities (ENACA) are reluctant to support the development of a Services Passport, on the basis that the existing mechanisms for exchanging information works well and that the introduction of a Services Passport will increase costs for the organisations which are responsible for issuing them/the registrants seeking them. We will again, continue to monitor this area, providing our feedback and views at the appropriate level. The Working Group has been continuing to gather information regarding member organisations' accreditation processes, i.e., the processes by which qualifications in architecture are recognised at national level, as well as member

organisations continuing professional development regimes. This information will be collated and used to inform future discussions about mutual recognition agreements and the development of the Qualifications Directive. We will be attending the ACE General Assembly in early December, at which the special session will focus in more detail on the above mentioned areas. Senior staff from the European Commission will be present at the session and will provide member organisations with further information and updates on these issues.

European Network of Architects Competent Authorities (ENACA)

We attended the Autumn meeting of ENACA in early November 2016. The agenda focussed on finding ways to continue work to embed the recently revised Qualifications Directive and discussions in relation to the interpretation of the professional traineeship requirements, which form part of the '4+2' model of architectural training which can be used for the purposes of automatic recognition. Good progress was made in terms of developing a common understanding of the '+2', what it looks like and what should be notified to the European Commission when member states are seeking to list qualifications/professional traineeships under this model. Further, more technical details in relation to this latter discussion will be provided at the Board's European briefing session which is taking place in December.

EU Mutual Recognition Agreement with Canada

At both the ACE and ENACA meetings, we were provided with updates regarding the progress of the Mutual Recognition Agreement which is being negotiated between the EU and Canada. Within the fringes of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), discussions have been taking place between representatives of ACE and the Canadian Architectural Licencing Authorities (CALA) to negotiate the terms of a mutual recognition agreement between the EU and Canada. The agreement is aimed at facilitating the movement of appropriately qualified architects between Canada and all EU Member States, and vice-versa. Members of ACE have had several opportunities to review and comment on the proposed draft agreement concerning the movement of architects and we have participated in this process. Whilst ACE is leading on this, we have also had opportunities to comment as the UK's Competent Authority through various other channels too. The proposed draft agreement has recently been signed by both ACE and CALA representatives. Our understanding is that the ACE/CALA agreement will now be formally picked up by the European Commission and taken through a series of formal approval processes at European level. This is likely to include discussions with Government at some stage. We have therefore continued to keep the DCLG and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (DBEIS) up to date with developments as matters have progressed. Board Members responsible for EU matters have also been made aware of progress. We have undertaken some checks and if the agreement was to be formally approved and applied across all European Member States, changes would need to be made to the Architects Act 1997 in order to allow for the mutual recognition of Canadian-qualified architects. ACE has reported that formal discussions regarding the approval of the mutual recognition agreement could commence in Spring 2017, and whilst there is scope for delays and issues to arise throughout this approval process, progress could be made quite quickly. Further, more technical details regarding the proposed agreement will be disseminated to the Board at its European briefing session.

6. Communicating ARB's work

Architects Code of Conduct and Practice

We are publicising the updated Code of Conduct before it comes into force on 1 January 2017. A postcard introducing the new Code and highlighting the twelve standards was included with the retention fee mailout. We are also planning an e - Communication, social media messages and an ebulletin article to inform registrants about the new Code, and will be trying to get some press coverage to note its publication.

eBulletin

The September ebulletin was again popular with registrants, with nearly 12,000 unique opens. As expected, the retention fee guide was the most popular article with 763 views, closely followed by the 'Dear Architect' information column with 685 views. Nonetheless, the two pieces about the Investigations Pool vacancies and the Examiner vacancies also both fared well with 666 and 564 views respectively.

Website

Work continues on the website redesign project, this involves moving the content to an updated platform which is both mobile compatible and easier for the team to update. As part of this project, staff have been planning further changes to the website structure and content to improve navigation and access for our stakeholders.

The number of visits to the main ARB website and the Register are both up on 2015. Visits to the main site from January to October 2016 reached 244,250 compared to 229,000 for this period in 2015. Additionally, visits to the Register increased to 240,500 for January to October 2016, compared to 233,100 during these months last year. We have noticed however, that searches of the Register have fallen, between January and October 2016 these stood at 318,263 compared to 326,047 last year.

Another point to note in relation to the website is the popularity of the EU Referendum Frequently Asked Questions which we added to the website in July, 1,400 visitors have now viewed the information.

Social media

We continue with our work to adopt a more engaging approach to social media, where possible messages are now accompanied by an image or infographic. The photographs we posted of the team meeting consumers at recent exhibitions have proved popular as have the updates about local authorities who have added hyperlinks to the Register. Many of our messages direct people to further information on our website and this has clearly been a success area in 2016, with 653 social media referrals to the ARB site by the end of October this year compared to 331 for the same period last year.

7. Administration of the Register and Organisational Efficiency

Accuracy of the Register

The Accuracy project is on-going, with staff amending records when accessing the database as well as the use of dedicated time through cross-team working.

Two specific projects are currently underway to ensure records are up to date:

- Architects without an email address are being contacted and being encouraged to provide one. In January 2016, 84% of architects removed from the register for non-payment had not provided an email address, indicating a genuine need for this information.
- We receive a report after any mass emails are sent out (such as the e-bulletin) which indicates where emails have bounced and ran a report showing which emails on our database are invalid. In September 2016 we began checking the relevant records and contacting architects where it is suspected the email address is either no longer valid or was recorded incorrectly upon entry. We have successfully updated over 760 since we started.

Section 11 Project

On 29 February 2016 a letter was sent to 620 architects whose address we were aware was not up to date. We were aware of the majority of these architects due to their annual retention fee invoice being returned. Any architect who currently pays their retention fee by direct debit was sent a letter via their bank on 3 May 2016.

As of 31 October 2016, 537 architects had been successfully contacted and up to date details provided. There are 83 remaining who have not. We have made attempts to contact all of the remaining architects and will continue to do so over the next month via telephone, LinkedIn, and through internet searches. If any architects have not made contact by 29 November 2016, their name will be removed under Section 11 of the Act.

2017 Retention Fee Collection

The payment site went live on the website on 26 September 2016. The first email notification went out on 13 October 2016 and the postal invoice on 24 October 2016. As of 31 October 2016, 2840 architects had paid their fee.

The Retention Fee Staff Action Group continues to meet regularly to explore how we can publicise the deadline and ensure minimal strike off come January 2017. We have publicised the fee in the e-bulletin and have contacted a number of the larger practices to ensure the list of people they have working there matches our records. Any amendments were made in advance of any retention fee communications being sent out. We also cancelled any direct debit we anticipated would become dormant and have contacted the architect in question to inform them.

In terms of resourcing, we have changed our print provider this year and have made a saving

of £10,000 on the printing and sending of the invoice (excluding postage costs) despite higher volumes and having added an additional leaflet regarding the Architects Code of Conduct.

Prescribed Examination - Independent Examiner and Examiner Recruitment

The recruitment exercise for Examiners and Independent Examiners concluded in mid-November, with interviews having taken place from 7 November 2016. The deadline for applications was extended after an initially slow uptake, though it concluded with a total of 61 applications for the Examiner posts and 14 for the Independent Examiner posts. The recommendations regarding the appointments will be taken to Prescription Committee in December 2016 and the Board in February 2017.

Email management system

We are in the process of trialling email management systems to assist with the management of information about the number of emails we receive, measuring our performance against key performance indicators and ensuring that emails are not missed. We have trialled one system and are due to begin the next trial during November.

8. Committee Meetings

Prescription Committee – 15 October 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 17 to 19 October 2016

Audit Committee – 20 October 2016

Investigations Oversight Committee – 21 October 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 24 and 25 October 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 1 November 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 3 November 2016

Remuneration Committee – 4 November 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 7 to 9 November 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 14 to 16 November 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 21 to 23 November 2016

9. Future Meetings and Events

Professional Conduct Committee – 29 November 2016

Prescription Committee – 1 December 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 1 and 2 December 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 6 to 8 December 2016

Professional Conduct Committee – 15 December 2016

10. Resource Implications

Staff resources continue to operate at capacity. We are requesting an additional staff post in the area for corporate support. Please see item 11.

11. Risk Implications

ARB's Operational Activities Report provides the Board with an update on business activities, progress against the Business Plan, as well as highlighting any emerging risks which may impact on delivery.

12. Communication

The update on ARB's operational activities, updates the Board on ARB's work and any risks which may prevent the delivery of ARB's operations.

13. Equality and Diversity Implications

ARB takes equality implications into account in all areas of its work and where appropriate, specific impact assessments are undertaken.

14. Further Actions

These are referred to within the key points set out above.