



**Subject** Update from the Chief Executive  
**Purpose** For Note  
**From** Chief Executive

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### 1. Summary

To provide an update from the Chief Executive on the operational activities of the Executive team.

### 2. Open 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, its statement of priorities and delivers against the Business Plan.

### 4. New approaches to external communications and engagement using IT based analytics

We have been exploring and testing the use of more innovative and targeted communications approaches, supported by direct email campaigns. This allows us to use, and build, intelligence relating to difference segments and preferences of the register. Proprietary analytical tools help us understand the reach of our communications, from the rate of opening of our emails, the best time of day, and the medium/device that architects are using to view our material. This helps improve future campaigns. Emails are generated, and use auto-populated fields from the register, to personalise the message. A myriad of mailing lists can be generated to ensure effectiveness; for instance, architects who have already paid the fee are not included in reminder emails.

We have piloted some approaches with communications relating to: providing information on preparation for EU Exit, for paying the retention fee, and understanding the appetite for setting up a direct debit and future payment preferences.

The first campaign combined EU Exit information with an update on the retention fee. There were links to pages on our website, and the onward click rate was measured.

The second campaign used survey tools to collect direct debit mandate information (bank account, sort code etc), and securely transfer directly to the register. This had a number of advantages: the process for the architect was seamless, only entering their data once; ARB staff did not have to see the financial information, making it more secure; there was no time spent re-keying the data, saving ARB team time; and the possibility of data entry error was eliminated. A cost benefit analysis of the direct debit campaign shows that it took around £150 to set up and administer to all registrants, and saved almost 2 weeks of full time data entry for the ARB team, saving roughly £1500 in staff time, whilst simultaneously reducing data entry errors.

The email was interactive, in that it offered a simple choice of set up the direct debit mandate, or tell us why you do not want to. The second option generated over 1600 responses, which can be used to target further campaigns. The most common reasons were: wanting to pay at a time of their choice; employer pays on their behalf; planning to retire before next fee is due. A number of registrants asked if we would investigate other forms of payment, such as paypal or apple pay. This fits with the trend to online payment generally, and perhaps a change in the confidence of paying via smartphone or tablet.

A summary of our pilot approaches includes:-

- 47% opening rate of our targeted email on EU Exit, and 51% on our direct debit campaign. These are good opening rates, and we also know that Monday and Tuesday at 2pm is the optimum send time.
- The drop off rate of these campaigns is around 72hrs from the initial send. Of the newly requested direct debits (700 at time of writing), 560 of them were made within the first 48hrs.
- 40% of those who interacted with our emails did so via an iphone. This has helped shape the amount of content per message, and how it is represented on a screen. Less detail and clearer pathways (with links via big buttons) has proved popular.
- The click through rate to FAQs or other areas was 5% for EU Exit, and 11% for direct debits. This may be due to the nature of interest in the topic, but both are considered reasonable rates.
- We have used the information and feedback to make incremental changes to our website, to make pathways to core information more clear. For instance, we have introduced large buttons that take architects direct to the online secure payment portal, prominent on the landing page of the website. Similarly, we have reduced the complexity of EU Exit messaging to: you need a certificate, here is how and where to apply.
- We have added automatic responses to our email inboxes, directing architects to self-service areas of the website, including updating their details, applying for prescribed exams or making complaints.

We have learned a lot about the possibilities of the application of this technology, and it is yielding immediate and incremental changes to our communications approaches. We consider it is a significant step forward in changing the way registrants interact with us, that reinforces the modern and effective way we want to continue to develop. We will continue to update the Board on the outcomes.

#### 5. Update on retention fee collection

The statutory notice for the 2021 retention fee was despatched in hard copy and electronically, on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020. Response rates have been favourable, supported by a number of targeted campaigns.

As time of compiling this update, 7216 registrants had paid their fee. This compares with 6593 on the equivalent day in 2019. This is around 10% higher than the previous year.

Additionally, the campaign to increase direct debits has resulted in nearly 700 new mandates, taking the total to 10,452. The direct debit payments will be taken on or around the 3<sup>rd</sup> December.

When the direct debits and already paid numbers are combined, 41% of the current register have paid or committed to pay the fee.

Payment preferences appear to be changing this year, with a much higher rate of BACS payments, and payment via our secure online portal for debit/credit cards. We are monitoring this carefully, and will provide a verbal update at the Board.

#### 6. Online Register

On 20 November 2020 we are relaunching the online Architects Register at [www.architects-register.org.uk](http://www.architects-register.org.uk)

The new site will be improved in terms of performance and data-security, and meet the new legal requirements for accessibility. It reflects ARB's corporate design and will be optimised for the purposes of online search tools (e.g. Google).

Communications promoting the new Register will be sent out in the days in advance of the launch, and the newly designed site will be greatly improve our ability to monitor its performance, and publish new and relevant subject material on it.

#### 7. EU Exit and mutual recognition of qualifications : joint communications

To support the ongoing communication on this topic ahead of the transition period ending on 31 December 2020, we have developed some joint statements with other organisations, to support architects.

We have developed a piece with the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) which appeared on their website from 10 November 2020. It reinforces the key messages and

responsibilities of architects, and directs to specific sections of the ARB website. A link can be found at:

<https://www.rsua.org.uk/news/mutual-recognition-of-professional-qualifications-in-architecture-post-eu-exit/>

A similar piece has been developed with RIBA and is awaiting go live at the time of writing this update. A verbal update will be given at the Board meeting.

We will monitor and respond to feedback, and have geared up to respond to requests, including making a clearer path to the appropriate guidance on our website.

#### **8. ARB office and staff team during lockdown**

Since the announcement of the second national lockdown, we have taken account of the government advice that *'everyone who can effectively work from home must do so'*. Staff members are only attending the office where they are unable to effectively carry out elements of their work from home, and at most, only attend the office one day per week. We continue to seek ways to support the ARB staff team while working from home, as they are ARB's most valuable asset.

#### **9. Resource Implications**

Only as identified in the paper.

#### **10. Risk Implications**

ARB's CEO's 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.

Further detail of specific risks to the organisation and in relation to operations will be provided in the confidential CEO's report.

#### **11. Communication**

The update from the Chief Executive, informs the Board of ARB's work and any risks which may prevent the delivery of ARB's operations.

#### **12. Equality and Diversity Implications**

Positive steps are being taken to increase the numbers and diversity of those applying to become a member of the Investigations Pool. We are particularly reaching out to candidates from a BAME background, which are currently under-represented in these roles at ARB.

#### **13. Further Actions**

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