

Board paper

for Open session

Subject:

Proposed Corporate Strategy 2026-2030

Board meeting:

10 December 2025

Agenda item:

08

Action:

- For noting
- For discussion
- For decision

Purpose

To approve a new Corporate Strategy for 2026-2030.

Recommendations

The Board is asked to agree that ARB adopt and publish the proposed new Corporate Strategy for 2026-2030.

Annexes

Annexe A – Draft Strategy

Author/Key Contact

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1. Open Session

- 1.1. This item is being taken in the open session. The Annexe will not be published as part of the papers. This is to avoid confusion because the text of the strategy will only be finalised after the Board's discussion.

2. Background and Key points

The need for a new strategy

- 2.1. ARB is an independent professional regulator, established by Parliament as a statutory body, through the Architects Act 1997. The law gives us a number of core functions. We ensure only those who are suitably competent are allowed to practise as architects, by approving the qualifications required to join the Register of Architects. We set the standards of conduct and practice the profession must meet and take action when any architect falls below the required standards of conduct or competence.
- 2.2. ARB's sponsoring Government department is the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). ARB and MHCLG have agreed a framework as to how we will operate and work together. This [Framework Agreement](#) sets out the responsibilities of MHCLG, along with those of ARB's Board, Board Chair, Registrar and senior staff.
- 2.3. Amongst ARB's responsibilities is the need to have a strategic plan that must 'set out how the ARB will achieve its Strategic Objectives' (paragraph 7.1). It must include ARB's statutory duties and be published, as should an annual business plan.
- 2.4. Any good strategy should set out why an organisation exists, including its purpose and therefore, in ARB's case, how our role is defined in law. It should set out what we intend to achieve, how we intend to achieve it, and identify a coherent set of actions by which we intend to deliver it. A good strategy will not exist in a vacuum: it must respond to the current context in which ARB and our stakeholders operate, respond also to government policy, and realise the Board's ambitions.
- 2.5. ARB's [current Corporate Strategy](#) covers the period of 2022-2026. It is a highly ambitious strategy that identifies a range of reforms to modernise the regulation of architects and learning providers, as well as ARB's own approach, systems and processes. Four years into that five year strategy, much has changed and significant progress has been achieved. There is now a need to take stock and articulate our ambition for the next five years ahead.

Developing the new strategy

- 2.6. Between January and March 2025 we examined progress against our outgoing strategy, and considered both the internal and external context in a series of meetings that included ARB Board members, and colleagues including the Senior Leadership Group and Heads of service from various teams.

- 2.7. We also took into account the feedback gathered through our ongoing consultations, events and stakeholder engagement about the challenges within the sector and what was felt to be ARBs role in rising to those challenges.
- 2.8. After discussing the current political, economic, environmental and sectoral context in which ARB and architects operate, we identified what we believe to be the greatest opportunities and challenges. Two stood out as presenting both the greatest opportunity, and the greatest risk:
 - i) safety, in light of the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the government's Inquiry and the safety policy agenda, and
 - ii) the state of the architects' profession, in light of ARB's 2024 [research into professional culture](#) which identified several concerns, alongside a slow and sometimes negative response from registrants to new mandatory requirements to develop their competence.
- 2.9. The Board also considered a more strategic question about the level of ambition necessary to achieve our objectives, the risks involved and how we might mitigate those. As the Government's own Orange Book ¹guide on the Management of Risk states, "*Public Sector organisations cannot be risk averse and be successful.*"
- 2.10. At the same time, the Board was keen that ARB sees through the reforms and modernisations started under its previous strategy. Whilst ARB should not stand still, neither should it introduce change for the sake of it. A sense of continuity was needed, helping those we regulate respond to and embed those changes.
- 2.11. Discussions and developmental work continued throughout the year with staff and Board Members. In addition, we have used all our external engagement, including events, to listen to feedback and inform our strategy. In particular we listen to feedback at our Culture 35 conference, which took place in October, which was an opportunity to discuss the emerging focus of the strategy with architects, academics and related stakeholders.
- 2.12. We have also shared our thinking and a draft of the Strategy, as required by the Framework Agreement, with senior officials at MHCLG.

The proposed strategy – key points

- 2.13. The **strapline** of ARB's new strategy has developed from our discussions on the greatest opportunities and risks faced by the profession, and its relationship to and influence over the wellbeing of the public. A strapline should summarise the essence of what we stand for in a way that is understandable and memorable to audiences. It should relate to our purpose and explain what we're about in a nutshell.
- 2.14. Our proposed strapline is:

ARB exists to maintain the public trust and integrity of the architects' profession. Over the next five years our regulatory efforts will prioritise improvements in **safety, competence and culture**.

¹ [The Orange Book – Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts](#)

2.15. There is strong evidence that the public, the profession² and the government see safety as a non-negotiable focus for regulation in the built environment.³ The need for an improved approach to competence was also raised by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, is a key expectation of the public,⁴ and runs through the core purpose of the Register, covering safety and sustainability. Architects must demonstrate their ongoing commitment to competence through ARB's recently introduced CPD Scheme. And improvements to culture have been raised as a priority by architects themselves,⁵ by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, by trainees and ARB's earlier PPE Commission, and links to the importance the public ascribe to empathy and communication.⁶

2.16. The **structure** of the strategy builds towards safety, competence and culture improvements by sorting our functions and projects into three pillars, shared across all our internal departments:

- **Strengthening education and training of future professionals.** This pillar includes all our work on accreditation, embedding our education reforms and relevant aspects of our EDI Strategy, and completing our changes to PPE requirements.
- **Upholding confidence and trust in the profession.** This pillar includes all our work to maintain the Register, including our work to set and uphold standards through CPD, the Code and our disciplinary work, relevant aspects of our EDI Strategy, and the international and other routes we maintain to support competent professionals in joining the UK register.
- **Delivering modern, effective and efficient regulation.** This pillar includes all our operational work to deliver our functions and objectives, including research, engagement, customer services, our information and technology strategies, our people strategy and relevant aspects of our EDI strategy, our performance monitoring framework, governance and finance.

2.17. The vision we set for each of these pillars, and the key activities we're committing to in order to deliver that vision, are detailed in the draft Corporate Strategy at **Annexe A**.

2.18. The draft Strategy is intended to convey the Board's level of ambition, demonstrating where we need to make further improvements to deliver our ongoing reforms, but also allow change to bed down.

2.19. This tone is further conveyed through the activities we set out under each of the pillars. Most of the activities are about completing projects, embedding them or evaluating them. There are a few notable exceptions.

² Safety received highest support of all 11 proposed guidance topics in 2024 Code consultation (80% of respondents agreed). The majority (96%) of architects said safety is increasingly important in their work in research we commissioned from SQW in 2020.

³ Research into public and client views of architects' professionalism, that we commissioned from Thinks Insight and Strategy and published in 2024.

⁴ Research into public and client views of architects' professionalism, that we commissioned from Thinks Insight and Strategy and published in 2024.

⁵ Research into workplace culture in architecture, that we commissioned from Thinks Insight and Strategy and published in 2024.

⁶ Research into public and client views of architects' professionalism, that we commissioned from Thinks Insight and Strategy and published in 2024.

- 2.20. New projects we intend to start in our next Corporate Strategy include exploring a work-based route to qualification, which we believe is important to investigate in light of changes in the education sector, including increasing costs to students and trainees.
- 2.21. This is something that we've seen introduced in other countries through our work with our international counterparts, and we would like to investigate further. Also new to this Strategy would be our intention to exploit AI and other technology to ensure that we are effective and efficient, and working with government on their regulatory reform agenda.
- 2.22. Another theme through the Strategy is our commitment to evaluation, recognising that all change comes with some level of risk and that we should be willing to update or amend our approach if the evidence tells us it is not working, having unintended consequences, or if the regulatory burden is too great.

3. Resource Implications

- 3.1. Each year, the strategy will be translated into an annual business plan setting out the anticipated activities towards its delivery. This will be accompanied by a financial plan.
- 3.2. The vast majority of ARB's costs are covered by fees to be met by the architects and learning providers we regulate, and the Board sets these fees on an annual basis. We have set out to develop a strategy that delivers all ARB's statutory functions efficiently and effectively; that meets the Board's ambitions; and that meets the Board's expectations for ARB's financial sustainability and, as such, for proportionate fees.
- 3.3. Most activities required by the new strategy are intended to deliver and continue to embed and improve the reforms and modernisations delivered under our previous strategy. There are a small number of entirely new activities that will need to be resourced, and ARB will also have to resource any potential changes to our statutory role, should the government make any.
- 3.4. The Board set ARB's fees for 2026 at its October 2025 meeting. The fee setting exercise was informed by the direction this draft strategy was taking, and we believe that the delivery of the first year of the new strategy will be met within the proposed budget for 2026.
- 3.5. Any future increases in resource would be covered in future business and financial plans.

4. Risk Implications

- 4.1. Articulating our long-term approach to achieving our purpose and meeting our statutory functions will help us to manage and mitigate risk. The Strategy sets an overarching plan to support annual business plans and resource allocation, and will be linked to an amended organisational risk register.

- 4.2. Since the majority of the projects in this Strategy focus on finishing work we've already started, the level of new risk introduced is likely to be low. But this will be assessed properly when we revise our risk register in accordance with it.

5. Communication

- 5.1. We will promote this new Strategy widely, sharing it on our website and referring back to it as we develop our work. It will be shared with all architects through ARB Insight and will be shared with wider stakeholders through a dedicated email campaign, a media release, and across our digital channels.

6. Equality and Diversity implications

- 6.1. If the architects' profession is drawn from and representative of different types of communities and lifestyles, it will be better equipped to design environments for different types of communities and lifestyles. Access to the profession should be a matter of competency, without structural or other barriers distorting the makeup of the profession.
- 6.2. We know from our research and data that the architects' profession has some way to go before it reflects the composition of society. The same applies to its culture, which is why this is addressed in our strapline.
- 6.3. We therefore intend to foster a culture of equality, diversity, and inclusion in our own organisation, and to take action to ensure change occurs in architecture. Our EDI Strategy is fully embedded throughout all three pillars of our Strategy, and referenced throughout the document.

7. Recommendations

The Board is asked to agree that ARB adopt and publish the proposed new Corporate Strategy for 2026-2030.