Architects Registration Board

Building Safety

Supporting guidance for the Architects Code of Conduct and Practice

Publication date: **02/04/2026**

Status: **Draft**

1. Introduction

1.1. The Architects Registration Board has developed this guidance to support architects in meeting their obligations under the Architects Code of Conduct and Practice (the Code), particularly Standard 2 (Public interest).

1.2. Standard 2 requires architects to act in the public interest, including by protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of those who use, construct, maintain and are otherwise affected by buildings.

1.3. Architects influence and make decisions that have a direct impact on building safety. These responsibilities arise throughout the lifecycle of a project and cannot be avoided or ignored through contractual arrangements or informal delegation.

1.4. This guidance outlines practical ways in which architects can meet their obligations in relation to building safety. It focuses on professional judgement, ethical behaviour and compliance with legal duties, rather than technical instruction.

1.5. While compliance with this guidance is not mandatory, it may be taken into account when considering whether an architect has met the standards expected under the Code. Any architect who departs from it should be prepared to explain their reasons, having exercised appropriate professional judgement.

1.6. This guidance should be read alongside ARB's competence guidelines relating to fire and life safety design. While the competence guidelines describe the

knowledge, skills and experience architects should maintain, this guidance focuses on how architects are expected to exercise professional judgement and ethical responsibility in relation to building safety.

2. Why building safety matters

2.1. Building safety is fundamental to the public's trust in architects. Safety in this context includes fire safety, structural stability, and the long-term health and wellbeing of those who live in, use, maintain or construct buildings. Failures in safety can lead to serious injury or loss of life and cause lasting harm to individuals, communities and the reputation of the profession.

2.2. As an architect you should place the safety of building users above commercial pressure, client preference or contractual constraints.

2.3. Meeting legal and regulatory minimums is essential but does not, by itself, discharge your professional obligations where foreseeable safety risks remain.

3. Design responsibility and professional judgement

3.1. You should design with safety in mind from the outset of a project, rather than treating it as a late-stage compliance exercise. You should do this regardless of your seniority, but it is particularly important that you do this if you have responsibility for others and their work.

3.2. You should understand the safety implications of your design decisions and how they may affect those who construct, occupy, maintain or alter the building.

3.3. Work within the limits of your competence. Where safety-critical issues fall outside your expertise, you should seek appropriate specialist advice and coordinate effectively with others. Receiving specialist advice does not remove your responsibility to understand its relevance to your design decisions and to act on it appropriately.

3.4. You should share safety-critical information clearly, accurately and promptly with clients, consultants, contractors and others who may require it.

3.5. You should also consider how safety information is handed over at the end of a project and whether building users, facilities managers or future designers have sufficient understanding of key risks, design intents and maintenance needs.

4. Legal duties and regulatory context

4.1. You should understand the legal framework relevant to your work, including building regulations, fire safety legislation and health and safety law.

4.2. Under the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 (CDM), architects acting as designers must take reasonable steps to eliminate, reduce or control foreseeable risks arising from their designs.

Acting as Principal Designer

4.3. Where you are appointed as Principal Designer under the CDM, you are legally responsible for planning, managing and monitoring the design work to ensure that health and safety risks are addressed so far as reasonably practicable.

4.4. This includes coordinating the work of other designers, ensuring that they comply with their duties, and that foreseeable risks are identified and managed.

4.5. Where you are appointed as Principal Designer for building regulations purposes under the Building Safety Act 2022, you are responsible for planning, managing and monitoring the design to ensure compliance with the Building Regulations.

4.6. This role includes coordinating design work, monitoring competence within the design team, managing safety risks (particularly fire and structural risks), and contributing to the maintenance of accurate safety information as part of the statutory requirement to maintain a 'golden thread' of safety-critical information throughout the building's lifecycle.

4.7. These roles require active oversight and sufficient authority, time and competence. Accepting a Principal Designer appointment in name only, without genuine authority or resources to influence design decisions, is unlikely to be consistent with your obligations under the Code or the Building Regulations.

5. Fire safety

5.1. Fire safety is a critical element of building safety and a fundamental consideration in architectural design.

5.2. You should ensure that fire safety is considered early and throughout the design process, and that design changes do not undermine agreed fire safety strategies. Where changes are proposed that could affect fire safety or structural integrity, you should assess their implications and formally advise whether the change maintains compliance and aligns with the original safety intent.

5.3. Proceeding with design work while uncertain about fire safety implications may place building users at risk and may be inconsistent with your professional obligations.

6. Challenging unsafe practice

6.1. There may be circumstances where you encounter decisions or instructions that would compromise building safety or the safety of those involved in construction.

6.2. In such situations you should raise concerns clearly and promptly, escalate issues where necessary, and refuse to support unsafe outcomes. This may include escalating concerns within an organisation, formally advising the client of risks, or—where necessary—raising concerns with appropriate authorities.

6.3. Where client priorities conflict with safety considerations, you should explain the risks clearly and advocate for safer alternatives. Document your advice and decision-making to ensure there is a clear record of professional judgement.

6.4. Simply disengaging from a project may not be sufficient where there is a foreseeable risk to life or serious harm. Where there is a foreseeable risk of serious harm, silence or inaction may itself be inconsistent with your obligations under the Code.

6.5. Fostering a culture where safety concerns can be raised without fear of reprisal is part of your responsibility. You should encourage openness within your team or practice about safety-critical decisions.

7. Maintaining competence

7.1. Building safety expectations, regulation and best practice continue to evolve. You should keep your knowledge and skills up to date through appropriate continuing professional development, including in relation to fire and life safety. This includes maintaining the level of competence appropriate to your role, as set out in ARB's competence guidance.

7.2. You should reflect honestly and regularly on whether you are competent for the work you undertake, particularly where safety-critical responsibilities are involved.

8. Further information

Health and Safety Executive - Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015

The Building Safety Regulator

Duties of Designers and Principal Designers under the Building Safety Act (England)

Home Office – Fire Safety Guidance

ARB Competence Guidelines – Fire and Life Safety Design

RIBA CPD – Health, safety and wellbeing