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Board Paper

Open session

ARB’s Code of Conduct

Board meeting:

21 May 2025

Agenda item:

7

Action:

* For noting
* For discussion
* For decision

# Purpose

To issue a revised code laying down standards of professional conduct and practice expected of registered persons, as required by section 13 of the Architects Act.

# Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Issues the Architects Code: Standards of Competence and Practice at **Annexe A**
2. Agrees for that the new Code be effective from 1 September 2025

# Annexes

Annexe A: Proposed Architects Code: Standards of Competence and Practice

Annexe B: Marked up Architects Code, showing the changes proposed following consultation

# Author/Key Contact

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## Open Session

## Background and Key points

New Code of Conduct and Practice

* 1. Section 13 of the Architects Act sets out ARB’s legal obligations to issue a code of professional conduct and practice. There are further obligations to keep the code under review and consult on it.
  2. The Grenfell Tower disaster and ensuing building safety crisis, the Climate Emergency and changing societal attitudes towards equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) have transformed the environment in which architects practise, and represent important issues which ARB felt ought to be covered in an updated Code.
  3. In July 2024 the Board agreed to the publication of a new draft Code of Conduct and Practice for consultation. The revised Code was designed to act as a positive statement of what professionalism and ethics mean to architects. It is based on six outcomes-focussed Standards, each of which is underlined with example behaviours. The Standards were intended to be underpinned by guidance, and a list of proposed guidance topics was published as part of the consultation. The Standards are:
     + Honesty and integrity
     + Public interest
     + Competence
     + Professional practice
     + Communication and collaboration
     + Respect
  4. The draft Code was prepared through an evidence-based approach that included:
     + [independent research](https://arb.org.uk/architect-information/architects-code-standards-of-conduct-and-practice/professionalism-in-architecture/) into the needs and expectations of the public and small-scale clients;
     + feedback from architects in [workshop discussions](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dtt1A8x1GSs) at a conference and online, and through one-to-one meetings with their national representative institutes; and
     + feedback from other professionals who work with architects, including large scale clients, through one-to-one engagement meetings and with representative organisations.
  5. [Further research](https://arb.org.uk/architect-information/architects-code-standards-of-conduct-and-practice/workplace-culture/) was published during the consultation period for the Code, on the workplace culture experienced by architects and those working alongside them in architectural practice. The vast majority of architects are good professionals and the research found that they take pride in their work and demonstrate accountability and commitment. But for many this was undermined by feeling overworked and undervalued. The research also revealed that architects suffer from higher levels of discrimination and sexual misconduct than in other professions that publish similar research – including, for example, academia and parts of the medical profession.

The consultation

* 1. The consultation ran from 12 September 2024 and closed on 12 December 2024. The Board considered the results of the consultation at its meeting on 11 February, and it was published soon after (<https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Consultation-on-the-Architects-Code-of-Conduct-and-Practice-Analysis-Report.pdf>)
  2. In summary, the proposed Code and accompanying guidance received high levels of support, although there were a significant number of drafting suggestions that might improve the clarity of the document.
  3. We analysed all the drafting proposals, and where we considered that they could improve the initial draft we incorporated them into a revised version of the Code. The Board considered the revised version at its February meeting and is at **Annexe B**.
  4. The suite of guidance in support of the Code is under development, and dealt with in a separate Board paper.

Implementation

* 1. Issuing a new Code has significant strategic and operational impacts.
  2. It is vital that the profession has an awareness and understanding of the professional standards they will be accountable to meet. In advance of the implementation of the Code we will take the opportunity to communicate what it means for architects and what actions they must take.
  3. The introduction of the new Code will also have operational impacts. All of those involved in the disciplinary process (staff, Investigations Panel members, Professional Conduct Committee, lawyers) will need to be trained on the new Code and its application. We must also amend our standard correspondence, guidance and publications.
  4. While it is important that the new Code is implemented without undue delay, a three-month period is sufficient time to put these steps in place, so we can be confident that all of those being affected by the change understand the consequences of it.

## Resource Implications

* 1. All communications materials and resourcing for the new Code can be covered by ARB staff, to reduce external costs, and is accounted for the in 2025 business plan.

## Risk Implications

* 1. Finding an appropriate balance between upholding a high level of professionalism and being realistically achievable by architects is the key risk in establishing a Code of Conduct.
  2. On the basis of the strong support received for each of the Standards, the consultation has reduced risk by providing reassurance that the majority of architects support professionalism as it is articulated in the Code.
  3. We are proposing modest changes to the Code in light of the feedback we have received, to improve clarity and reflect the language that will be best understood by the profession.

## Communication

* 1. We will promote the final Code once it is approved by the Board, and the schedule of consultations on draft guidance documents. We will email it directly to all Registrants.
  2. We learned through our consultation that architects are keen for clarity as to what regulatory requirements are in place at any one time. We will therefore publish the new Code with clear information about how and when it is being introduced, and a clear schedule as to the status of each guidance document. Our previous communications work to promote the consultation and our report on that consultation provide a useful foundation to build upon.
  3. Publishing the Code will only be the first step: we will continue to use our regular communications channels to help promote the intent of the Code and its role. These will include social media posts on aspects of the Code; articles on conduct in ARB Insight; highlighting it and the guidance documents as part of our CPD scheme communications; threading appropriate messaging into other work where relevant, for example our PPE changes, the publication of our new EDI strategy, and our workplace conduct work.

## Equality and Diversity implications

* 1. The Code sets out EDI elements under the Respect Standard, and we proposed to support that with more detailed guidance on how a commitment to EDI might look in practice by setting out the approach architects should take to creating a culture that supports it within the architecture and built environment sector.
  2. The consultation showed overall support for the relevant Standards and guidance – although a small group expressed strong disagreement with elements of both.
  3. Underrepresented groups in the profession were more likely to ask ARB to strengthen EDI in the Code. Whilst we will not do this in the Code Standards, we will engage with these groups in developing the EDI guidance.

## Recommendations

* 1. It is recommended that the Board:

1. Issues the Architects Code: Standards of Competence and Practice at **Annexe A**
2. Agrees for that the new Code be effective from 1 September 2025