

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Supporting guidance for the Architects Code of Conduct and Practice

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1. Introduction

This guidance supports architects in meeting their obligations under Standard 6 (Respect) of the Architects Code. It outlines how to foster inclusive working environments and design for diverse communities. Everyone has a right to be treated with dignity, and to work and live in environments that support their safety, belonging and wellbeing.

Respect is a core professional value. It applies to how architects treat clients, colleagues, collaborators and communities. It also applies to how they design the built environment. Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in professional life helps build trust, improves outcomes and strengthens the culture of the profession.

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.

In this guidance, "must" is used where there is a legal or regulatory requirement. "Should" describes conduct that ARB would normally expect of architects in meeting their obligations under the Code. "May" is used where the appropriate course of

action will depend on the circumstances or where a particular outcome is not inevitable.

2. Why EDI matters

Architects shape the world around us. A profession that includes people from all backgrounds is better equipped to design safe, inclusive spaces. Inclusive teams can be more creative, effective and resilient. Inclusive workplaces are more likely to retain talent and promote wellbeing. Inclusive projects are more responsive to the needs of the public. Having diverse talent could also attract more clients and prospective employees who see your practice as visionary and forward thinking.

Evidence from our Workplace Culture report shows that many people in architecture still experience discrimination, exclusion or inequality. Our 2024 Workplace Culture¹ report found that architects suffer from higher levels of discrimination and sexual misconduct than in many other professions. As an architect, you share a responsibility to change this, not just through updating EDI policies but through your everyday behaviour and action.

You must also meet your legal duties under the Equality Act 2010. This includes avoiding discrimination based on protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. If you hold a position of responsibility – particularly one with influence over workplace policies or recruitment – you should ensure your organisation's policies and hiring practices meet these obligations.

3. Respect and inclusiveness

Respect is more than politeness. It means treating others with fairness, dignity and care, regardless of role, background or difference.

There is an important role for debate and discussion but demonstrating respect in practice means listening without interrupting, giving others credit for their contributions, and treating everyone with professionalism, regardless of background or role. It also means using inclusive language, avoiding stereotypes, and making sure everyone feels heard and safe to speak.

¹ [Workplace Culture - Architects Registration Board](#)

You should be mindful of how your words and actions affect others – both in the office and on site – and be prepared to challenge disrespectful or discriminatory behaviour when you see it.

4. Inclusive workplace culture

An inclusive culture is one where everyone feels safe, supported and able to contribute. Creating this culture is a shared responsibility, not just for those in leadership roles or those from underrepresented backgrounds.

In practice, fostering inclusion means being aware of who is given space to speak, how work is allocated, and whether some voices are being sidelined. Inclusion also means being open to feedback, recognising different ways of working, and not expecting underrepresented colleagues to shoulder the burden of culture change. Practices should aim for a culture where every employee feels able to contribute to and encourage positive changes within the workplace.

Example:

During coordination meetings, a junior colleague is repeatedly interrupted and their contributions are dismissed without proper consideration. The meeting chair intervenes, ensures that the colleague has the opportunity to contribute, and later checks whether this reflects a wider pattern. They set clear expectations for respectful participation and, where necessary, address the matter through the practice's appropriate reporting or management processes.

Rigid long-hours cultures, unclear promotion processes, or informal cliques can all contribute to exclusion. Practices should regularly review whether these dynamics exist – and take action to address them.

5. Designing inclusive spaces

Inclusive design is a core part of an architect's responsibility. It requires consideration of how different people can experience a space – not just in function, but in comfort, dignity and ease of use. This often means engaging with the people who will use or be affected by it.

Where appropriate, you should meaningfully engage with building users, local communities, and groups representing access needs, particularly in the early stages of design.

Examples of inclusive features might include:

- Step-free access and wide doorways
- Clear wayfinding and braille signage
- Sensory-friendly spaces with adjustable lighting and controlled noise levels
- Gender-neutral toilets or multi-faith rooms

Inclusive design is not about meeting minimum standards. It is about embedding an approach to designing for dignity, usability and equity. Everyone should feel welcomed into a designed space, and you should help facilitate this. Inclusive design allows for participation and interaction from people across society and aims to remove barriers that can create separation and discrimination. As an architect you should advocate for inclusive design with your clients where possible.

Example:

While designing alterations to a listed building, an architect identifies opportunities to improve access for disabled people. They discuss a range of proportionate options with the client and, where appropriate, seek advice from access and conservation specialists. They explain the benefits, constraints and likely approvals required, rather than treating heritage significance and accessibility as automatically competing objectives.

6. Leadership responsibilities

Architects in leadership roles set the tone for the profession. They have a particular responsibility to foster a culture of respect.

If you are in a leadership role, you should:

- Allocate work and opportunities fairly
- Encourage flexible working and discourage 'presenteeism'
- Resource projects appropriately to avoid excessive overwork
- Put clear policies in place for raising and addressing concerns
- Support the development of junior staff from all backgrounds

Leadership also includes recruitment and progression. You should ensure hiring practices are fair, inclusive and designed to attract a wide pool of talent.

Candidates must never be discriminated against on the basis of any of the protected characteristics.

You should aim to have resources easily available if your staff feel they have been discriminated against in the workplace. You can share the ARB guidance on Raising Concerns and Whistleblowing².

² [Raising Concerns and Whistleblowing](#)