

---

## **Royal Institute of British Architect's response All Party Parliamentary Group for Excellence in the Built Environment's call for evidence: The impact of Brexit on future skills needs in the construction industry and the built environment professions**

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) is a global professional membership body that serves its members and society in order to deliver better buildings and places, stronger communities and a sustainable environment. We provide the standards, training, support and recognition that put our members – in the UK and overseas – at the peak of their profession. With government and our partners, we work to improve the design quality of public buildings, new homes and new communities.

Whilst it is unclear what deal the UK will negotiate upon exiting the EU, the RIBA has identified a number of potential challenges and opportunities Brexit poses for future skills in the architecture sector, and corresponding recommendations for Government.

In summary, we recommend that:

- In the immediate term, Government should confirm as a matter of priority that EU nationals currently employed in the UK will be able to stay, to mitigate against a potential loss of a quarter of the UK architecture sector's talent pool during and after the Brexit negotiation period.
- In its negotiations on the departure from the EU, the UK Government should ensure that UK-qualified architects will be able to continue to register and practice in the EU and vice versa via continued mutual recognition of qualifications.
- In the longer term, the UK should seek to forge new trade agreements and mutual professional architectural qualification agreements with non-EU countries to provide the UK with access to a wider architectural talent pool.
- Government should take steps now to ensure that future generations have the skills needed for a flourishing architectural and broader build environment sector including by reviewing the shortage occupation list to ensure that it includes key skills in the construction sector, including architecture, which have previously been sourced from the EU as well as elsewhere.

We expand on these points in our response to the specific call for evidence questions below.

---

## 1. How the impact of Brexit could potentially impact on the UK architecture sector skill pool

Architecture produced £4.33 billion of Gross Value Added to the UK Economy in 2014, a rise of 16.4% from 2013 (£3.72bn). The UK's export market for architecture is also strong – valued at £451 million in 2014<sup>1</sup> – and growing.

The success and productivity of the UK's architecture sector relies critically on its ability to attract, retain and develop creative talent and highly specialised skills from all parts of the world, including – but not only – the EU.

Access to the best talent also helped the sector to remain resilient in the face of the last global economic slowdown. By 2014, the UK architecture sector had recovered all the lost ground caused by the recession and had added 7% more value to the UK economy than at its previous peak year in 2008<sup>2</sup>.

As the profession has recovered from recession the number of registered architects in the UK has grown and this has satisfied the uptick in demand for staff. The net increase in the numbers of architects available to service the UK market has largely been as a result of those registering with non-UK EU qualifications.

Whilst the impact of Brexit on the architecture sector talent pool is difficult to gauge without clarity from Government as to what Brexit will entail, we have identified a number of potential immediate to medium-term and longer term impacts which we believe Government should consider in its exit negotiations with the EU, and in its domestic policy following departure from the EU.

### **Potential immediate to medium-term impact**

It is unclear how many EU architects would lose their ability to remain and/or practice in the UK in the case of a Brexit that restricts freedom of movement of EU labour or imposes non-tariff barriers in the form of professional qualification recognition restrictions, as there is no data on how many non-UK practitioners will have secured a permanent residency and or British Citizenship.

However, if we saw tighter immigration controls in relation to EU citizens or the UK withdrew from the current mutual recognition of architectural qualifications with the EU then that could undoubtedly result in a skills shortage that might impact on future growth, particularly as a quarter of registered architects in the UK are currently of a non-UK EU nationality, and circa 50% of new architectural registrants in the UK are non-UK EU architects<sup>3</sup>.

In the immediate term, therefore, we believe the Government should confirm as a matter of priority that EU nationals currently employed in the UK will be able to stay. Early confirmation would provide important reassurance to key employees and reduce the risk that they will look for work elsewhere in the EU in advance of the UK's exit.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Department for Culture Media & Sport Creative Industries Economic Estimates January 2016](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Ibidem](#)

<sup>3</sup> Data obtained from the Architects Registration Board (ARB) in September 2016

Additionally, in its negotiations on the departure from the EU, the UK Government should ensure that UK-qualified architects will be able to continue to register and practice in the EU and vice versa via continued mutual recognition of qualifications.

#### **Potential long-term impact**

In the longer term, leaving the EU provides the UK with the opportunity to forge new trade agreements with non-EU trading partners, which could help to widen the pool of skills UK businesses could draw from. For this to benefit the architecture sector, the new trade deals would need to be complemented by the UK negotiating mutual recognition of professional architectural qualifications with new partner countries (see section 2).

### **2. What could the Government do to mitigate the potential impact of Brexit on future skills in the architecture sector (during negotiations; and via domestic policy)?**

It is necessary that the Government takes steps to secure the supply of skills and talent through effective domestic interventions, a reformed migration system which enables the UK to attract and retain key talent from around the world, and seeking mutual recognition of architectural qualifications with EU and non-EU countries.

#### **A reformed migration system**

In the immediate term, Government should confirm as a matter of priority that EU nationals currently employed in the UK will be able to stay, to mitigate against a potential loss of a quarter of the UK architecture sector's talent pool during and after the Brexit negotiation period.

Government should also ensure that any future migration system allows for easy access to critical skills and talent from both the EU and non-EU countries. The UK's departure from the EU offers the opportunity to adapt its migration controls and visa systems to ensure that those with key skills and talents which are required for architecture (and other sectors) can easily come to work in the UK from anywhere in the world.

#### **Mutual recognition of architectural qualifications with EU and non-EU countries**

In addition to a reformed migration system, retaining mutual recognition of professional architectural qualifications between the UK and EU is a crucial element to mitigate the potential impact of Brexit on future skills in the architecture sector.

Any professional licensing restrictions following the departure of the UK from the EU would represent a key non-tariff barrier for architecture professionals. This is a separate issue to the movement of labour, and could not be managed via any work visa regime e.g. visas granted to professionals on a skill demand basis.

Although equivalence could be sought through the Architects Registration Board's (ARB) examination, this would bring new bureaucratic processes, adding costs and time; it would deter UK practices from employing talented overseas individuals; and

ultimately limit the development and competitiveness of Britain's architectural industries.

However, the UK's departure from the EU also presents the opportunity to forge new mutual recognition of professional architectural qualifications agreements with non-EU countries. This is something which had been almost impossible to do for the UK whilst within the EU, as all negotiation has to be at the EU level which is both timely and costly. Yet before the UK joined the EU, it had mutual recognition of qualifications with a much broader range of countries across the globe.

Trade deals with the USA or China alone would give the UK a trade area almost twice the size of the EU, and mutual recognition of professional architectural qualifications with these countries would give the UK architectural access to a significant pool of talent. For example, to the 105,847 registered architects in the USA<sup>4</sup>.

### **Effective domestic interventions**

The Government should take steps now to ensure that in the longer term future skills can be home-grown. As part of this, the Government should review the shortage occupation list to ensure that it includes key skills in the construction sector, including architecture, which have previously been sourced from the EU as well as elsewhere. The Government should also seek to increase access to architectural education, and better target training to meet specific current needs.

### Increasing access to architectural education

The majority of those entering the UK architecture industry do so from higher education. The UK is home to 3 out of the top 10 universities for architecture in the world.<sup>5</sup> However, a third of architecture students in the UK are currently non-UK EU nationals, a proportion which has been increasing over the last decade. If the UK's departure from the EU results in restrictions in the ability of foreign students to study in the UK and/or in professional licensing restrictions, this may lead to a longer-term negative impact on architectural skill supply.

A reduction of EU and other foreign students would amplify the existing issue of high non-continuation rates of students undertaking an architectural degree in the UK<sup>6</sup>. Students often quote financial hardship as a barrier to their architectural education<sup>7</sup>.

Over the past decade, the context for all involved in the UK's higher education provision has changed dramatically, with the introduction of variable tuition fees in 2006 and their rapid increase to a maximum of £9000 p.a. in England. With long courses such as architecture, student debt has now escalated to very serious levels.

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.ncarb.org/News-and-Events/News/2013/12\\_2013ArchitectsSurvey.aspx#sthash.Nmcn5Yo0.dpuf](http://www.ncarb.org/News-and-Events/News/2013/12_2013ArchitectsSurvey.aspx#sthash.Nmcn5Yo0.dpuf)

<sup>5</sup> [QS World University Rankings by Subject 2016](http://www.qs.com/World-University-Rankings-by-Subject-2016)

<sup>6</sup> Higher Education Funding Council for England 2016 Non-continuation rates: trends and profiles <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/analysis/nct/>

<sup>7</sup> 2015 RIBA Finances survey <https://www.architecture.com/Files/RIBAProfessionalServices/Education/2015/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

There is a clear role for Government in helping to improve access to architectural education, particularly to mitigate the potential impact of Brexit on future skills in the architecture sector.

The duration of professional courses, including architecture, is determined by EU law which in turn dictates the Architects Act 1997. The minimum time period for the full time study of architecture in the EU Directive 2013/55/EU, is based on a framework which considers learning in terms of time rather than credits.

The RIBA believes the Government should explore post-Brexit options which allow architecture students to complete their education in a diverse number of new learning frameworks – including those which enable graduation in a shorter period of time, based on accumulation of credits rather than years of study. This will reduce issues with debt and improve the perceived value of architectural education. To this effect the Architects Act should be revised to accommodate more flexibility than is currently allowed by EU law following the UK's departure from the EU. The RIBA's Education Review<sup>8</sup> sets out in detail how this might be achieved. The RIBA is committed to an ongoing process of improvement to architectural education in the UK (see next section).

#### Targeting training to meet specific current needs

There is an opportunity for Government to work more closely with professional bodies to help target training to meet specific needs more effectively in the construction sector.

The RIBA has a number of professional-body led courses and accreditation schemes which help to support the development of a pipeline of expertise in growth sectors where specialist skills are needed, and where there is increasing demand. For example, the RIBA Conservation Course and accreditation scheme had been created by defining core skills and competencies required in Heritage and Conservation architecture, and are being delivered to architectural practitioners via five courses in the UK annually, with one in Hong Kong in 2016.

Such schemes could be scaled up to provide the training and accreditation required to meet demand-driven by projects, such as the flagship Restoration and Renewal of the Palaces of Westminster, which at present is experiencing significant conservation skills shortages<sup>9</sup>.

### **3. What could the industry be doing itself to increase the talent pool?**

The construction and built environment industry should be improving access for a wider talent pool to jobs via high quality apprenticeships. The RIBA is currently supporting an employer-led Trailblazer Group in developing apprenticeship standards for architecture to improve wider access to the profession. Schemes like this could be

---

<sup>8</sup> [RIBA's Education Review](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster: pre-feasibility study and preliminary strategic business case](#)

rolled out across the industry to both increase the existing talent pool, and to train and attract more diverse and young people into the sector.

The industry should also take steps to better understand the specific current training needs in their sectors, and provide demand-driven training accordingly. The RIBA has just revised its mandatory CPD curriculum as a result of this exercise to ensure our profession will have relevant skills to meet future demand.

#### **4. Which existing schemes help to train and attract young people into the sector?**

A number of such schemes exist in the architecture sector. These include:

- [RIBA student grants and bursaries](#): the RIBA administers a number of bursary and scholarship schemes to support students of architecture.
- [RIBA Role Models](#): a mentoring hub committed to making architecture and the broader construction industry more inclusive.
- [RIBA Accessing Architecture](#): a project aimed at supporting people with disabilities entering or progressing careers in architecture.
- Examination route to architectural qualification: Oxford Brookes University offers a flexible route for achieving internationally recognised RIBA architectural qualifications for office-based candidates. The examination provides an alternative route to qualification for those who prefer to invest their personal development in practice. This 'earn as you learn' scheme not only allows students to remain in practice and earn a salary whilst completing modules and assessments in their own time under the guidance of a personal tutor; but the course fees are far lower than conventional taught courses as well.
- [Stephen Lawrence Trust](#): an educational charity which helps support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to follow a career in architecture through encouraging architectural practices to offer paid internships; providing mentoring programmes; coaching on interview techniques and CV preparation; and offering bursaries to students.