

*Architecture: its teaching and practice – for promoting the public’s use and enjoyment. A note for those concerned* (25 June 2010)

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The ARB Business Plan (in 3 parts) has been prepared with some care and deserves more than blinkered or unthinking acceptance, either of its detailed proposals or of the stated and tacit assumptions. Footnote 1 below offers a steady view for policy-making, and footnote 2 offers an opinionated reminder of basics.

In these straitened times, and as so often before, the statutory Register of Architects (of which the ARB is today’s keeper) has again become a policy topic; but the usefulness of the debate may be clouded if there is reluctance to admit what foresight had warned of and experience has shown.

Often the divergence of opinion has become too much, and the profession has reverted to a default position, the name of which is “protection”. Those who were of age at the time of the [Warne Report](#) in the 1990s have had time to compare what happened with what was meant to happen.

When “protection” becomes a dominant theme, meaning and purpose are threatened. An outcome can be seen in the Business Plan which the ARB is now (June 2010) proposing for itself, and at the same time has exposed for public debate.

Is it too difficult for policy-makers and the profession generally to re-examine present and future arrangements for the teaching and practice of architecture in the light of this fact: **there is no viable way of sustaining “protection” in this country beyond maintaining the integrity of the RIBA professional membership qualifications (or similar in the case of comparable professional membership bodies) and the constant endeavour to promote “excellence”**, together with the law which governs all who are engaged in the work of building design and construction, and the public and private clients who are the users of their services?

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Footnotes:–

1. *A steady view for policy-making:*

The [“Framework” document](#) shows that the Whitehall establishment looks upon the ARB as an offshoot of the civil service/quango (NDPB) system, despite ARB’s own [assertions](#). That is the context in which ARB is placed. It is the system which the incoming coalition government is expected to review as a whole, for overhaul and reform.

The practical effects will remain unknown for some time. Meanwhile, for the ARB it will be reasonable to avoid attempting a legislative rearrangement for operating the Register of Architects. In order to rectify the overgrowth or misalignment of activities which had been allowed to develop, it should suffice to acknowledge a framework designed to revert the ARB to the minimalist role which it was meant to fulfil under the reconstituting legislation of 1966/67.

2. *An opinionated reminder of basics:*

The ARB Business Plan (“Part 3”) makes repetitive use of “consumer” in a way which indicates a persistent error about the ARB’s primary and secondary functions. This renders the document practically valueless except as evidence that the Board has been and continues to be accustomed

to proceeding on the basis of one or more false assumptions.

Of particular interest is what the Plan contains about the principal function, *viz*, annual publication of the Register. How is it that, after countless centuries in which the art of register-keeping has been developed and practised; somewhat fewer centuries of using bookbinding and printing techniques for making and publishing copies; the lapse of many decades in which the Register has in fact been maintained and published; and the coming in more recent years of micro-processing applications as an aid to such activities – how is it that this should now be other than a straightforward and cost-minimal routine operation, about which there is practically nothing further to be discussed?

3. *Two other relevant documents:*

In connection with the critique of “protection” (a) *see also* the ARB document “[Professional Bodies: Regulation of Title – Roles, Powers and Responsibilities: The Results of a Benchmarking Exercise and Market Research](#)” (November 2005); and (b) *compare with* Sir Christopher Ball’s sagacious [report of December 2009](#) for the RIBA “On the Registration and Regulation of Architects: *Rules and Responsibility*”.