



Architects Registration Board

Communications Annual Report December 2018

Introduction

Effective communications support our reputation as a trusted, independent regulator of UK architects and source of public information. It is an important part of the success of the Architects Registration Board (ARB) and integral to some of our organisational priorities.

Our primary stakeholders include:

- Users and potential users of architects services
- Architects and potential architects
- Government
- Schools and students of architecture
- Built environment and consumer protection organisation

In February 2018 a new individual joined the ARB team as Communication Lead, to take forward the role in a full time capacity. Currently, the Communications Lead is responsible for communications related strategy and reporting, directly produces some content (social media, press content), has oversight over some functions (the Annual Report, Stakeholder Research) and assists ARB staff in other areas (website content, ARB literature). The function is supported by specialist contractors where required and the essential support of the wider ARB Team.

Despite the change in personnel and unanticipated demands on wider organisational resources, communication outputs have been maintained, and in some areas, increased, across 2018. The year has also presented some challenges such as Brexit and responding to Dame Judith Hackitt's Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety. Time was needed for the new Communications Lead embed into the role and the increased focus on the function has highlighted the need to revitalise, and in some cases establish, written procedures, SMART objectives and systematic performance analysis and reporting.

Objectives

ARB's primary [purpose](#) is to *deliver the Architects Act 1997* in the public interest. Two objectives underpin all our work, to *protect users and potential users of architects' services* and to *support architects through regulation*.

In order to deliver its objectives, ARB has considered the [priorities](#) which it should focus on during 2017-2020. Beyond our statutory obligations, our priorities included commitments to *engage effectively with our stakeholders* and *increase public protection through informed choice*.

Strategy Aims

The [Communications Strategy applicable to 2018](#) identified three key aims:

- i. *To increase public and professional awareness of the role and functions of ARB.*
- ii. *To continue to raise awareness of the Register, specifically explaining to users of architectural services what registration means, and the importance of checking the Register before engaging an architect.*
- iii. *To extend the network of stakeholders to support ARB to deliver its business plan*

Strategy Focus

The strategy also outlined a number of areas focus:

1. *Expanding the communications tools we use*
2. *Expanding the resources available to stakeholders*
3. *Build working relationships with opinion formers*
4. *An equality and diversity focus*
5. *Internal communications*
6. *An operating framework for our communications*
7. *Evaluating our communications performance*

Business Plan Objectives & KPIs

ARB's [2017-2018 Business Plan](#) contained 30 objectives each with multiple actions assigned to achieve these aims, as well as a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Communications activities were a factor in achieving a number of these objectives and KPIs, including:

Objectives

- D1. *Raise public awareness of the standards expected of architects*
- D2. *Uphold the value of the Register by increasing its use*
- D3. *Encourage architects to promote their registered status to increase awareness and value of the Register*
- E8. *Stakeholder Research Project*
- E10. *Explore and take up opportunities to work with stakeholders and partners to deliver ARB's objectives*
- E15. *Manage ARB's reputation to ensure there is public confidence in the regulation of architects*

KPIs

- a. *Publish Annual Report and Financial Statements*
- b. *Issue post-Board eBulletins*

Actions

This section reflects some of the key communications achievements for 2018. The *Report on Delivery of 2017/2018 Business Plan* will give details of all of ARB's activities in 2018.

It should be made clear and from the outset that none of the achievements would be possible with the collaborative effort of the wider ARB Team.

Objective	Action
<p>SF 1 - Expanding the communications tools we use</p>	<p><i>Tools</i></p> <p>We secured an 80% discount on a media monitoring tool which enabled us to cost effectively explore the benefit of automated analysis and reporting for the organisation.</p> <p>We also secured a 50% discount on our existing social media scheduling software having identified a 'non-profit' reduction.</p> <p>Digital performance analytics have been utilised on an informal basis through the year with the intention of formalising this process in 2019.</p>
<p>SF 5 - Internal communications</p>	<p><i>Internal</i></p> <p>With the support of a 'Tone of Voice' project group and internal Writing Style Guide was launched in late 2018 to support staff in giving a consistent voice to ARB.</p> <p>The internal digital noticeboard, PintoMind was utilised in order to share our social media posts with the office to encourage engagement and understanding of this area of Communications.</p> <p>Significant Communications developments, such as media interest or new content releases, have been shared with staff throughout the year to ensure they are involved and informed.</p>
<p>BP-O D1 - Raise public awareness of the standards expected of architects</p> <p>SA i - To increase public and professional awareness of the role and functions of ARB</p> <p>SA ii - To continue to raise awareness of the Register, specifically explaining to users of architectural services</p>	<p><i>Articles</i></p> <p>By December 2018 five articles generated by ARB have been published across 2018, with many more articles being generated as the result of ARB press releases.</p>

<p>what registration means, and the importance of checking the Register before engaging an architect</p>	
<p>BP-O D2 - Uphold the value of the Register by increasing its use</p> <p>BP-O D3 - Encourage architects to promote their registered status to increase awareness and value of the Register</p> <p>SA ii - To continue to raise awareness of the Register, specifically explaining to users of architectural services what registration means, and the importance of checking the Register before engaging an architect</p>	<p><i>Register</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media referrals to the Register increased by 10% - MISSED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In 2018 referrals increased by 6%, totalling 756 compared with 713 in 2017. • The number of Register searches increased by 5% - MISSED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There were 389,038 searches in 2018. This is a decrease of 9% compared with 2017. • Visits to the Register increased by 5% - ACHIEVED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sessions (visits) on the Register increased by 14%, with 350,788 sessions in 2018 compared to 308,436 in 2017. • External links to the online Register increased by 10% - MISSED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 83,603 sessions in 2017 and 82,160 in 2018 – a 2% decrease.
<p>BP-O D3 - Encourage architects to promote their registered status to increase awareness and value of the Register</p> <p>SA i - To increase public and professional awareness of the role and functions of ARB</p>	<p><i>Logo</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downloads of ARB logo from website increased by 10% - ACHIEVED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Visits to the logo download page for architects have increased by 91% in 2018 compared with the previous year, from 1,461 visits to 2,794. ➤ Visits to the logo download page for schools were not tracked in 2017. There were 655 visits in 2018.
<p>BP-O E8 - Stakeholder Research Project</p>	<p><i>Stakeholder Research</i></p> <p>Project work was delayed due to the introduction on a new Communications Lead however our Request for Proposal generated 16 eligible submissions which were shortlisted before the contract was awarded to the successful tenderer. The project is underway and is expected to conclude Autumn 2019.</p>
<p>BP-O E10 - Explore and take up opportunities to work with stakeholders and partners to deliver ARB's objectives</p> <p>SA iii - To extend the</p>	<p><i>Advocacy</i></p> <p>Relationships were developed with at least five external organisations that resulted in advocacy for ARB (e.g. Magistrates Association article, ARB-RIBA collaborative article, LABC article, ACE article, Scottish Self Build Portal article, ARB-ABS collaborative article).</p>

network of stakeholders to support ARB to deliver its business plan	Relationships were also developed with key stakeholders which could support ARB's wider strategic aims (e.g. Consumer Protection Partnership, Westminster Trading Standards).
BP-O E15 - Manage ARB's reputation to ensure there is public confidence in the regulation of Architects SA i - To increase public and professional awareness of the role and functions of ARB	<i>Strategy and performance</i> Performance against KPIs has been published twice throughout the year, and an audit of management information carried out. Online analytics for arb.org.uk have been affected by GDPR implications on cookie consent and the ability to track user behaviour. For this reason the below figures represent a comparable period of Jan-April 2017 and 2018. Social referrals to arb.org.uk are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook 69% increase • Twitter 255% increase • LinkedIn 78% decrease • YouTube 0 to 22 referrals
BP-KPIa - Publish Annual Report and Financial Statements SA i - To increase public and professional awareness of the role and functions of ARB	<i>Annual Report</i> Despite requiring the attention of the new Communication Lead within week of joining the organisation, the ARB 2017 Annual Report (including Financial Statements) was published on time, to specification and received an unqualified audit opinion.
BP-KPIb - Issue post-Board eBulletins SA i - To increase public and professional awareness of the role and functions of ARB	<i>eBulletin</i> The eBulletin has been published in a timely manner throughout 2018. The design has been refreshed in order to align with the website branding, ready to be launched with the first 2019 eBulletin edition. In November 2017, 159 people had signed up to the eBulletin mailing list. The December 2017 edition was sent to 37,796 recipients in total. In Dec 2017 there were 189 people on the mailing list and the December edition was sent to 39,895 recipients in total.
In Addition	<i>Board Recruitment</i> Working with short time frames a comprehensive recruitment campaign was delivered to deadline and resulted in over 50 people attending an information evening and 136 applications for the new constituted Board.

Impact

Through our activities in 2018 we have increased our reach through advocacy content, eBulletin publications and, most notably, social media. This is likely to have increased awareness of ARB (and the support it can offer the public and profession) and the Register, whose effectiveness as a public protection tool depends on users knowing of its existence and benefits.

By engaging effectively with stakeholders, new opportunities arose in 2018. As an example we reached out to Westminster Trading Standards which resulted in a meeting to explore partnership working and intel sharing in the area of title misuse. This also led to an invitation to a Trading Standards forum and the opportunity to inform key personnel of the public protection we offer. This is information they can share with colleagues, potential misusers and members of the public, further raising awareness of the Register and the work of ARB.

Communications can support the functions of ARB directly as well as through awareness raising and public relations. The eBulletin for example, forefronts architects' Register details and prompts them to check and update the information. In 2018 detail update increased by 345% on average in the week after the eBulletin compared with the week before.

There are some areas of impact which are not yet routinely reported on but which suggest Communications is delivering notable impact in raising awareness of the Register and ARB. For example followers of our LinkedIn page increased by 99% from 2,721 to 5,425.

Looking forward

With the recent Period Review, Dame Hackitt's *Building a Safer Future* report recommendations and Brexit there has been a greater spotlight on the profession and the activities of ARB. We need to be able to respond effectively to this increased scrutiny and ensure ongoing public, professional and governmental trust in our activities.

While it is a concern that certain 2018 aims, objectives and KPIs were not achieved, before working to address this shortfall it would be wise to first consider whether these are the right targets for the Communications function.

Since February 2018, the Communications Lead has scoped and reviewed the operations of the function. In recent years, much good work has been done to establish a range of communication outputs for ARB. To develop the effectiveness of the function, we must move from a 'tool' focused approach to a strategic one.

To secure public and professional confidence that we are maintaining standards in the profession in the public interest, it will be important for the ARB Team to be clear on how communications align with ARB's strategic objectives and for us to have a robust understanding of our stakeholders. We also need to build a strong operational and procedural foundation for the function, where internal roles are clearly defined, impact is routinely measured and decisions are evidenced based.

In addition, the ARB Business Plan 2019 contains items relevant to Communications that will be delivered in part or in whole by the function in the year ahead. This includes providing guidance to our stakeholders on the impact Brexit, increasing staff resource in title regulation and conducting stakeholder research.