



**Subject**                      **Communications Annual Report**  
**Purpose**                        **For Note**  
**From**                            **Communications Lead**

If you have any enquiries on this paper, please contact Sandra Ison at [sandrai@arb.org.uk](mailto:sandrai@arb.org.uk) or on 020 7580 5861

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## 1. Summary

To note the Communications Plan update for ARB. The Communications Plan update is included as **Annex A**. The Communications Strategy is included as **Annex B** and the Communications related objectives, as set out in the 2017 Business Plan, are included as **Annex C**.

### For Note

## 2. Open Session

## 3. Contribution to the Board's Purpose and Objectives

In delivering the Act, ARB's objectives are: To protect the users and potential users of architects' services and to support architects through regulation.

To do this ARB works to increase public and professional awareness of the role, functions and culture of ARB and the UK Register of Architects. It proactively communicates with stakeholders to maintain and enhance the reputation of ARB as an independent statutory regulator which maintains professional standards and public confidence in the profession.

The Board agreed ARB's Communication Strategy at its meeting on 12 February 2014 which outlined our planned communications activity and identified three key communications aims to support the delivery of the business plan.

Communications is a business function which is used to support the delivery of ARB's remit, as such communications objectives are agreed alongside other business planning activities and published in the annual business plan. The 2017 communications objectives formed part of the 2017 Business Plan and are included in Annex B. This report focuses on the delivery of the communication related objectives. Other business areas referred to in Annex B were reported on at the Board meeting on 14 July 2016 in the Mid-Year Report Against the Business Plan and are not covered here.

## 4. Key Points

- i. **Stakeholder relationships** - Building and maintaining stakeholder relationships remains a key component of ARB's communications activity, as a relatively small organisation it is essential that we tap into the networks of others to expand our

reach. Key successes in this regard in 2017 have been to establish constructive working relationships with Which? and Citizens Advice to share information about ARB with their audiences.

- ii. **Communications tools** - We employ a range of communications tools including online resources, social media, face to face meetings and attendance at exhibitions amongst many others. Different tools are selected depending on the message and the audience. In 2017, significant progress has been made in developing our online resources including a refreshed website and Annual Report microsite both of which were mobile compatible, thus easier for our users to access and navigate.
- iii. **Communications themes** – Three key themes run through our communications activities.

One is to convey our role as a regulator, setting out what this means to our stakeholders and informing them of how we have delivered on our remit.

The second is to encourage all architects to keep their contact details and their awareness of their regulatory responsibilities up to date.

The third is to convey the notion of informed choice. We do not recommend architects, rather we work to provide consumers with the information they need to make informed decisions. We work to share this message with the public and we also encourage registrants and other stakeholders, such as local authorities and consumer bodies, to provide links to the Register.

- iv. **Looking forward** – Over the last twelve months substantial progress has been made to improve our online presence through the launch of a redesigned website and Annual Report.

Additionally, we have developed relationships with a range of stakeholders from the consumer and construction sector who have shared information about ARB with their own networks.

A constructive next step would be to conduct some research to take stock of the views of stakeholders and refine our approach (both in terms of messaging and the tools we use) according to the responses we receive. This would enable us to measure our impact and to ensure that we are making the best use of the resources available. We are exploring options on how to carry out this research and have included this objective in the draft 2018 business plan.

## 5. Resource implications

The communications objectives are included in the draft 2018 business plan and have been factored into the proposed 2018 budget.

## 6. Risk Implications

The reputation of ARB is impacted not just by what the organisation delivers on but also by how ARB communicates with those who have an interest in its work. Inadequate or inappropriate communication presents a reputational risk in terms of misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the role of ARB and the context within which it operates.

The Communications Plan sets out the tasks which are undertaken to achieve the aims of the Communications Strategy. ARB mitigates reputational risk by communicating in accordance with the goals, methods and values agreed in the Communications Strategy. This Strategy provides the Board with clarity and reassurance that the organisation is operating within clearly defined parameters, thus building and protecting its reputation as an effective statutory regulator.

An independent review of ARB's stakeholder activity was undertaken in 2016 by the Board's internal auditors to explore risks related to this area. This resulted in the implementation of an enhanced press handling policy to mitigate the reputational risks linked to dealing with press enquiries. It also led to a stakeholder audit being conducted to capture information about new contacts. Additionally, the new website is based on an IT platform which is easy for staff to update and where duplicate pages are not present. This change has substantially reduced the risk associated with outdated, and therefore incorrect, information remaining on the site, which the staff team had identified as an area of concern.

## 7. Communication

The Communications Strategy is available in the policy section of the website. Regular updates are provided to the Board via the operational activities report giving the Board an opportunity to regularly review progress.

## 8. Equality and Diversity Implications

As set out in the Communications Strategy, ARB is committed to communicating in a way which reflects its role as an inclusive organisation.

The Board and staff team have undertaken a proactive approach to deliver on this responsibility. For all concerned our work in this regard represents a genuine undertaking to do things properly, not simply a tick box exercise. We have worked to gather more Equality and Diversity (E&D) data from those who use our services. We have also met with organisations who work in the E&D sector to gain insights into their thinking and policies. We continue to embed what we have learned into our day-to-day work. We want to be sure that we carefully consider the data we collect and have the skills and processes to respond to any issues it raises.

Our communications will continue to be based on the principle of promoting equality of opportunity for everybody who has dealings with us, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, religion, belief system, sexual orientation or age.