

Upskilling to deliver high-quality architecture for a beautiful, sustainable and inclusive environment

Statement published on the occasion of the conference organised by the Architects' Council of Europe and the European Association for Architectural Education on Thursday 20 April 2023 in Brussels.

As recently acknowledged by the Council of the EU¹, architects play a significant role in achieving a high-quality built environment and thereby contribute to the public interest and the common good.

Therefore, the skills and competences of architects and other building professionals lie naturally at the heart of the New European Bauhaus (NEB) – a beautiful, sustainable and inclusive built environment can only be the result of the work of highly skilled professionals. In the context of the 2023 European Year of Skills, and while the digital and green transitions are reshaping the economy and labour markets, the present Statement recalls the commitments of ACE and EAAE to promote the highest standards in architectural education; continuing professional development; research and the dissemination of the architectural culture.

Advancing the highest standards in architectural education

While the excellence of European schools of architecture is internationally recognised, ACE and EAAE continue to promote the highest standards in terms of architectural education in Europe. They support the internationally established standard of five years' full-time education at university level, supplemented by a minimum of two years' full time professional practice experience, as set out in the *UIA/UNESCO Charter for Architectural Education*.

ACE and EAAE consider that Article 46 of the EU Directive on Professional Qualifications has stood the test of time well, defining in eleven succinct and clear points the minimum standard of knowledge, skill and competence required of architects. They will actively contribute to any future discussion on its content.

¹2019 Council Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022

2021 Council conclusions on culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key elements of the NEB

ACE and EAAE actively promote the clear exposition of architectural education and practice standards as they apply in the EU to ensure that highly skilled EU architects have appropriate access to international markets, and that migrant architects coming to the EU meet the same standards required of EU qualified professionals.

ACE and EAAE are happy to see that a growing number of students of architecture undergo part or all of their education in a Member State other than their home country². However, they are alert to the fact that these students, due to their mixed qualifications, are likely to encounter difficulties when seeking to satisfy access to the profession requirements in their home country, or another EU country, and thus their mobility as professionals is hindered.

Professional traineeships enable young professionals to develop their skills, apply their knowledge and enhance their chances of securing employment and enabling employers to avail of new skills and knowledge. ACE and EAAE urge companies to offer only high-quality traineeships that comply with the principles set out in the Council *Recommendation on a Quality Framework for Traineeships* and the *European Quality Charter on internships and apprenticeships*, developed by the European Youth Forum - this includes among other things, proper working conditions, defined learning outcomes and a fair remuneration.

Architecture curricula: from a linear approach to a systemic thinking

As recalled by the EAAE position paper on Principles and Practices of Architectural Education³, Architecture is a complex discipline that requires a combination of technical skills, creative thinking and problem-solving abilities. Beyond the acquisition of these skills and competences, architectural education should be a project that develops the attitudes, values, and behaviours necessary to respond to the global challenges of our times, whilst creating conditions for students to engage, locally, as active citizens in their communities. It is necessary to overcome rigid categorisation (Architecture, Engineering, etc.) to enter a new systemic condition of teaching through training courses which favour teamwork and stimulate collective intelligence.

Ensuring the upskilling of professionals

Life-long learning is firmly ingrained in architects' professional deontology⁴ and continuing professional development (CPD) is strongly encouraged and supported by professional bodies and higher education institutions, the latter being the main providers of CPD programs in many countries.

²According to the 2022 ACE Sector Study, more than one architect in five studied in another country in 2022.

³Towards a Charter on Architectural Education - Principles and practices of architectural education: a position paper of the EAAE Education Academy

⁴According to the ACE European deontological code for providers of architectural services, "all providers of architectural services shall ensure that they continually maintain and develop their professional knowledge and skill in all areas relevant to their practices".

Indeed, CPD appears to be a necessity and has become a common practice in the profession, because of:

- the significant and rapid evolution of construction techniques and their increased complexity, as well as the expansion of the regulatory and standardisation framework;
- the increase in the need for specialist skills for new work areas and challenges that architects are facing in the area of sustainable development;
- challenges associated with safely and profitably running a business;
- the need to deliver for and engage with clients, stakeholders and communities.

The ACE encourages its Member Organisations to implement mandatory CPD requirements and develop Guidelines to support them in setting up CPD systems.

It has also created a CPD Register to help architects access training across Europe. While CPD is encouraged by the Professional Qualifications Directive⁵, ACE and EAAE are dismayed to see that CPD is still listed by the Commission's Regulatory Restrictiveness Indicator as a regulatory restriction to the mobility of professionals in Europe.

Driving innovation in the sector through Research

Research knowledge can enable architectural practices, both large and small, to evidence their role in meeting the key challenges of our time and show how high-quality architecture contributes to creating value and meeting sustainable development goals.

The collection of data on the value of architecture generated through research is essential to secure the architect's position as client advisor and leader of project teams and to bolster the business case for investing in design.

ACE and EAAE call for research funding streams, in particular small starter funds, to encourage engagement from architecture practices, most of which are micro enterprises, in research and foster collaboration between practicing architects and universities to explore design value and impact and apply research knowledge in live building projects.

⁵Article 22 b) of the Directive on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications

Developing an awareness and appreciation of high-quality architecture

Although architecture is of public interest, it is surprisingly the least well known of all the arts. ACE and EAAE call for the introduction of Architecture into secondary school curricula, in order to foster an appreciation for the built environment and develop an ability to see, question and understand the relationship between humans and their environment.

ACE and EAAE recall that the Council of EU invited Member States and the EU Commission to “contribute to creating a (...) shared culture of high-quality architecture by further raising awareness, e.g. through formal, non-formal and informal education from an early age on⁶”.

Such a dissemination of architectural culture could also contribute to form a generation of civil servants and policy-makers, which will have the ability to articulate a vision of the desired quality for the outcomes of any given planning and construction process.

Architects provide intellectual services based on specific professional knowledge, skills and competence, gained through a demanding initial academic training and enhanced through continuing professional development. By supporting and investing in the education and life-long learning of architects, architectural research and the dissemination of the architectural culture, public authorities can bolster a high-quality built environment, in line with the ambitions of the New European Bauhaus.

While the ACE and EAAE provide platforms for reflection, discussion and exchange of best practices at EU level, national professional organisations and schools of architecture are at the frontline to tackle these challenges and are the key interlocutors for public authorities to develop innovative policies and financing tools to further improve architects' skillset and support innovation in the sector.

⁶2021 Council conclusions on culture, high-quality architecture and built environment as key elements of the NEB