

RIBA



Royal Institute
of British Architects

RIBA PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL LECTURE

President – Sunand Prasad

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The City of London Academy

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am very grateful to you for taking the trouble to come and listen to me. Until not so long ago it was customary for incoming RIBA presidents to set out their vision and in giving this address I am reviving a tradition. Perhaps this tradition lapsed, because such an address nowadays was thought to be grandiloquent. Anyway I thought it worth taking the risk for the sake of communication and more importantly recruitment – recruitment to a cause – the cause of creating the best conditions for excellence in the design and construction of places and buildings; and for the place of architecture in our culture.

I am very grateful to the City of London Academy for letting us hold this event here. This school won the Prime Minister's Better Buildings Award in 2006 and is a living example of the RIBA's key messages: good architecture and urban design improves our lives; architecture and urban design must combat climate change and environmental degradation; and to achieve these aims architects and all those who believe that architecture matters must win commercial and political influence. I am also grateful to my partners and everybody at Penoyre & Prasad because actually the sacrifice is theirs; they work so that I can do this work, and I am very grateful to them and to all those who are here from the practice.

I am going to spell out where the RIBA is headed, but will only be able to make the contribution I plan because of the momentum that has been built by my predecessors, by the contribution of members, and by our Chief Executive Richard Hastilow and his staff over recent years. It would be disappointing if you did not see significant change in the next two years, and I will try and take as much credit for it as I possibly can; but it would be stupid as well as mean spirited if I did not acknowledge the platform that has steadily been built following a period in which the RIBA seemed to be too often wrong footed. That happened with the rise of Design and Build, with PFI, with the Latham and Egan reports, with epochal changes in the construction industry that architects – at least temporarily – utterly failed to keep up with, it let alone anticipate. The foundation of CABE and its success were also a shock to the system – here was quite a small government sponsored organisation actually delivering the RIBA's charter "...the advancement of architecture and the promotion of the acquirement of knowledge of the arts and sciences connected therewith." CABE was able to make a decisive shift to the public valuing of architecture and away from all pro-architecture arguments being dismissed as self-serving for the profession and the profession owes a debt to all those who set up CABE and then so brilliantly levered its influence.

Advancing architecture in the public interest is the RIBA's mission but members pay their dues for not purely altruistic reasons. This is a familiar duality in most professions: their charters are about public benefit but they were also created to protect trade interests. The cynical view is that the public benefit is just a fig leaf. The reality is that doing your job and earning a living while also behaving ethically is a perfectly normal human mode of behaviour. Through behaving ethically in the collective interest we are often able to do our jobs better, but some of the current audit culture does not quite seem to recognise that.

I suggest that it is useful to restate the RIBA's mission as being "...to create the optimal conditions for the practice of architecture". Not only is that the way to advance architecture as required by the charter, but it is also the best way to promote the contribution of architects. Architects are necessary, but quite insufficient by themselves for the creation of architecture; but let us pause to remember Ayn Rand's architect hero, Howard Roark from *The Fountainhead*, played by Gregory Peck in the film. He is not yet quite extinct: "I don't intend to build in order to have clients. I intend to have clients in order to build."

The emphasis on the *creation of conditions for practice* to me means the practice of everyone involved in the creation of architecture and the built environment, and it brings effective focus to the RIBA's role. Why do we criticise current public procurement policies? Because they make it difficult to produce good architecture. Why do we campaign for proper resourcing for and adequate capacity in the planning system? Because that is how the system will encourage the best and filter out the bad. Why do we criticise some of the actions of ARB, especially in the past, in areas which we hold to be outside its remit? Because to us they are in the way of creating the best conditions for the practice of architecture, by confusing the picture in education, insurance and practice.

So this is my simple answer to the question "What's the RIBA for?" It is for creating the best conditions for the practice of architecture and it goes without saying that must mean good architecture. Like architects the RIBA must work with others to achieve this aim. We are still, perhaps only just, in the middle of a boom in both private and public sector construction. Many in the construction industry and especially in the professions have found that the abundance of opportunity to build in quantity has not been accompanied by an abundance of opportunity to build-in quality. So, how do we redouble our collective efforts to change that?

Consider this: in 2009 it will be 175 years since the formation of the RIBA. As it happens, it is about 17.5 years since the biggest post-war downturn, since the beginning of the end of the 'traditional' contract as the dominant method of procuring buildings, since risk turned from a fact of life to a philosophy in management. It is also roughly 17.5 years since the word 'sustainability' started entering our lexicon. And I have just 1.75 years left of this Presidency. So here are three timescales at powers of ten. By looking at what happens over these timescales, we might better understand where to put our energies. Let us simplify them as 200, 20 and 2 years.

A 200 year timescale

The formation of the architectural profession is part of the story of the formation of the new professions as political power started to spread in the second quarter of the 19th century beyond the land owning class and to the emerging middle class. Like the engineers and surveyors the architects modelled themselves on the three old professions, the clergy, law and medicine. It is not the most obvious thing to do if we position architecture, engineering and surveying as part of making things for the needs of society, as manufacture – the manufacture of the built environment. For then you would not seek to separate so starkly the intellectual and manual elements of the building. You would not distance yourself both from commerce and from labour. But that was necessary, or thought necessary, to defining the architect/engineer or surveyor as a gentleman worthy of a place at the top table.

If you doubt that was the aim, look at where they built their headquarters. The ICE (1894) is at no.1 Great George Street, and has division bells in the lounge so that the parliamentarians who have dropped in can be called to the house to vote. The RICS at 12 Great George Street (Alfred Waterhouse 1899), overlooks Parliament Square. And few doors along at 1 Birdcage Walk is the IMechE. It looks like the architects did not make enough money and so ended up in 1934 at 66 Portland Place over a mile from the House. If influence is proportional to the distance from the House, then this has seemed to be uncomfortably so at times. But of course architects have not been alone in struggling for influence. IStructE is in Knightsbridge and CIBSE is in Balham. In the 1860s the Plumbers union considered that the 7 year training of a plumber deserved recognition comparable to that of a doctor, and they started awarding PDs trying to position it as an equivalent of an MD. The effort lasted for 7

or 8 years but the idea did not catch on: there were some losers as well as some winners in this scrabble for a place next to the top table.

What is the relevance of that? Firstly within architecture the divorce of design from cost and commerce has had an enormous effect. The aloofness from the grubby business of money was integral to the formation of the profession. The main controversy in the second half of the 19th century was whether the architect was an Artist or a Professional – Norman Shaw co-authored a book with this title. Only in the second half of the 20th century was the question raised as to whether it was a profession or a business, and not until the late 80s did it become possible for architects to be directors of construction companies. This separation remains firmly embedded in the rearing, so to speak, of architects; in the way they are trained and taught to think from the beginning.

Secondly the rise of the general contractor in the middle of the 19th century was a consequential development, significant for the architectural profession. On the one hand here conveniently was someone who organised all the trades, which used to be separately engaged by the client and often organised by the architect. On the other hand the general contractor accumulated capital and emerged as a powerful and ultimately competing entity. Although organised centrally, the building trades remained almost entirely handicraft based until the middle of the 20th century; craft understood as much more than manual dexterity, and including the knowledge of performance of materials and their assembly.

The huge innovations in manufacture going on in an increasingly industrialised economy impacted only on individual components in the main and almost never on the whole building as a manufactured entity. Sophisticated building products emerged, manufactured with modern methods, but they were mixed with techniques almost unchanged for centuries and their assembly remained manually based.

It is interesting, if perhaps pointless, to speculate what kind of built environment would have arisen if design and construction had become integrated rather than disaggregated in the late 19th century. Some may argue that that is exactly how most housing and quite a lot of commercial and industrial buildings were produced. But my point is that the best minds in design were not part of the mode of production – few architects or even engineers ever ran construction companies; they were content to treat it as an inferior activity.

The final push to divide intellectual and manual labour in building – or design and delivery as we say nowadays – happened after 1945. Building science emerged as a subject and with it the idea that all the details of a building should be worked out and specified by the architect led design team in advance. In this arrangement the builder would be simply carrying out instructions. It worked well for a surprisingly long time, relying on culture and the unspoken trust between people and the tacit knowledge within the industry. But the ever thickening JCT contracts seemed to be a good indicator of the long term unsustainability of this kind of disaggregation of what should be an integrated activity. Today the intellectual labour in product and specialist constructor contributions is rising fast and is heavily relied upon by architects. 'Design' does not stop with architects.

The main lesson for me of this 175 year story is that the convergence and reintegration of skills and knowledge required to make the built environment is historically inevitable. You could even say that the way the professions were formed was, if not an aberration, certainly out of line with other manufacture, which has benefited far more from scientific and technological advances than has building. Many architects seethed at having the building industry compared to car manufacture by John Egan. But the main point he was making was how close car manufacture had

come to collapse because of outdated industrial processes and how it had managed to reinvent itself by adopting Japanese techniques based on focusing on value to the user and thereby going beyond crude mass production. The building industry could leap-frog the mass production phase altogether and go straight into what is fashionably called 'mass customisation' in other industries. I think it is bound to do that. For buildings have an incredible density of knowledge and experience embedded in them. They are amongst the most reliable of artefacts around. Just imagine if they were only as reliable as computers, which we think of as paragons of modern science and technology. Imagine the equivalent of a frozen network and denial of access. "Sorry today the doors will not open and no you cannot move around between rooms". Imagine the equivalent of a fatal hard disk failure.

Another long term trend that we have to bear in mind is that the professions as a whole are no longer automatically held in high esteem because of changes in society, which have also seen a decline in the influence of unions and the Churches. The BMA is worried about the trend towards suing doctors for being wrong, and the NUT worries about teachers' loss of authority in classrooms. We have to prove our value much more actively now, which means communicating and listening more intensely. Some ethical, professional attitudes drilled into our professional formations are the very ones we need to challenge. The question for architects is how will they position themselves in fast evolving new picture of an integrated construction industry. Will they be the 'process integrators' they are so well placed to be, or become mere subcontractors to others who take on that role.

A 20 year timescale

Looking back, the recession of the early 1990s appears as more than just a trough in the economic cycle. 40% of architects had lost their jobs, a big blow whose impact has still not passed through our system. A number of medium sized regional builders also went out of business. This was the tipping point of the ending of the 'traditional' way of procuring buildings. The conceptual enlargement of the meaning of 'risk' was the driver for this change. Risk management, in practice, has tended to translate into risk aversion, just as 'value engineering' translates into cost cutting.

The older way of doing things was, with some justice, seen as inefficient and the time and prevailing cost over-runs in public projects as intolerable. But the response, as is so common with governments was a bureaucratic one: the institution of an audit and managerial culture first under John Major's Prime Ministership and then continued by New Labour. In such an environment watching your back tends to become the default reflex of the employee at most levels, and avoiding failure rather than achieving success becomes the goal. The risk-averse reflexes of the public sector ironically increases the likelihood of failing, grandly or partly.

One consequence of risk aversion is the focus on a single point of responsibility for projects. The best leaders in the industry have turned a negative imperative into a positive driver for the genuine integration of design and construction. They rely on the collaborative spirit that has always been there in the industry, whatever the procurement methods. More on collaboration later, but first, there are some gaps in client side as well as professional skills that I want to touch on.

Not so long ago almost half of all architects were employed by local and central government. As in-house architects' departments were dismantled during the Thatcher years many of the architects became sole practitioners or small practices, radically changing the nature of the RIBA membership. But there was an equally great impact outside the profession: the removal of client-side expertise from the public commissioners of architecture and construction without any reliable replacement.

As an example, the Department of Health used to have 500 in-house architects. There may be much to criticise 1970s hospitals for, and we do, but they did enshrine what was then the best knowledge about hospital design, systematically built up. When the next huge hospital building programme was launched hospital trusts found themselves being first and only time clients, unused to commissioning buildings and rarely able to provide the leadership required to create excellent buildings. Naturally therefore the early products of the new public building programme were disappointing in design terms because they were not as good as established best practice. Their delivery, mostly through the Private Finance Initiative, did become more sure footed – over two-thirds of public sector projects used to be over budget and over time and now less than a third were. But at what overall additional cost, it is still not clear, being hidden within the unitary charge associated with the PFI term contract.

What had not changed from the previous public sector dominated times was the lowest cost mentality. CABE's most significant achievement has been to persuade no. 10, the Treasury and the ministers of many spending departments that good design pays for itself in the long term. However, translating that to actual practice on the ground is much more difficult. For example, the Office of Government Commerce' gateways reviews, which should safeguard project quality, do not consistently make it from guidance to actual practice.

My own biggest lessons at this timescale are how little is achieved in the long run by persuading ministers, because in operational matters their own powers are quite limited, and how our political system militates against taking the long term view. For instance, look at the changes in personnel at Government level since 1990, such as the Secretaries of State for Culture, and the Secretaries of State for CLG and its predecessors; or the Ministers for Architecture and for Construction. There have been on average 7 or 8 succession in each case I think of Stuart Lipton's procrustean efforts as CABE Chairman to successfully barge down ministerial doors, only to find that soon there was someone else in post. Convincing the Treasury was thought to be the key, but it is only part of the key, as the RIBA has found through its partially successful 'Smart PFI' campaign.

The mantra of value for money can really only be meaningful in the long term. It must enable spending now to realise greater value in the future – not only through greater durability of design but through children learning better and patients recovering faster. And by the way, that most people in an audience like this will immediately comprehend that kind of phrase is one of the best things about this last period because there has been a real shift in the recognition that good design improves many kinds of outcomes. But the budgets for England's 3500 secondary schools to be rebuilt or fully refurbished in the next decade are already set. 'Value for money' in reality becomes 'value for budget' and there is little chance of factoring in outcomes. That is why the Government's recently announced additional spend on schools for sustainability measures is so very welcome. It is heartening that, in this endemically short termist context, it appears to be possible to make half a million pounds available per school to safeguard some elements of the future.

There has also been significant good news for design in this period. As well as much higher popular interest in design and architecture as evidenced by media coverage we now have

- Client Design Advisors to help ensure good client side skills;
- Design champions for much needed leadership;
- Design Quality Indicators and CABE's Design for Life standard for a common language of design quality;

- Design review panels as a growing part of the planning process.

These are all solid achievements of the recent past, and what we have to do is to use them and to persuade client bodies one by one to use them, because they are not going to do it en masse. We have to go on lobbying and exhorting the government, but implementation of good practice is going to be up to us, and when I say 'us' I do not mean architects but all of us involved in development, design, construction and the management of buildings and places.

In this period there has been increasing polarisation of the architectural profession in size of practice and the types of work they do. There are more small practices and many more larger practices, but fewer medium sized practices due to procurement changes, client risk aversion and operational needs such as research and development capacity. The RIBA small practice survey 2007 showed that the smaller practices are now primarily reliant on the residential sector - squeezed out, like mid sized practices, from local public sector work, schools, healthcare buildings etc. I value diversity of practice as much as I do diversity in people's lifestyles and origins; but it is a big challenge in the current procurement culture both public and private, and the challenge is to the practices as much as to the clients.

This 20 year timescale is one over which sustainability has become part of our vocabulary. The argument between capitalism and socialism is history. Charles Jencks said, "Isms soon become wasms". Perhaps not, but now we seem to have an 'inability'. Sustainability is a generally accepted as a good thing, but what is it, exactly?

Sustainability is nothing if not about the long term. The 1986 Brundtland Report stated that development is sustainable *if it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*. By introducing the idea of intergenerational equity, sustainability held the promise of enshrining the long term into the making of the built environment like no other concept ever has.

In the last couple of years the widespread acceptance of the reality of Climate Change has given a new twist to the case for sustainability. There is always a danger in the holistic view of life that everything becomes so interconnected and tangled that it is difficult to find a clear path, and I fear that that happened to sustainability. But the known facts about atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases should brook no such confusions. We in the UK emit 10 tonnes CO₂ equivalent per head and on current estimates we have to reduce it to a maximum of 2 tonnes. Today Gordon Brown has actually agreed with that number and he is asking for an 80% reduction in our CO₂ emissions, whereas the government were for a long time hanging on to 60% by 2050. The construction and use of buildings accounts for half of greenhouse gas emissions and I reckon it has to be reduced to near zero if we want to go on travelling and eating well. There are only three ways of reducing or eliminating CO₂ emissions – through lifestyles changes, through energy efficiency and through decarbonising the energy supply. There are a thousand ways of doing each of these but the next 10 years are vital.

Before leaving this section I want to note that 20 years is the time horizon of RIBA Building Futures, which amongst other things is working on adaptation to climate change, and so adaptation is the fourth arm dealing with climate change.

A 2 year timescale

In relation to the timescale of a RIBA presidency, I must first mention our recently agreed Strategic Development Plan. Our operational model is changing from

Committees and Meetings to Projects and Communications. I personally am very much in favour of people having projects and not turning up to meetings to have meetings.

We work on three levels:

At the political level, there is our highly successful Manifesto for Architecture, and our lobbying and campaigning activities, being a 'critical friend'. And if we are critical, we are even more self-critical. This is the kind of thing that appears in our workshops: RIBA should stand for Relevant, Influential, Bold and Adding-value; it should not be Reactive, Insular, Bureaucratic and All-over-the-place.

At the industry level the big word is 'Collaboration', which was also the title of our recent annual conference in Paris. It is the ruling characteristic of practice today. I was moved to see that that Jean Nouvel showed a series of images of which none was his: he showed what others had done to bring to fruition the buildings of which his office was the architect. Collaboration requires attitude, leadership, skills and tools. The first two explain themselves. An example of a tools and associated skill is Building Information Modelling. Modern techniques, tools and skills, are going to make possible new levels of collaboration; for example to build a building virtually in advance before it is on site, complete with erection sequence, and ensuring that there are no unforeseen clashes and mismatches on site. The same model can help costing, compliance with regulations and eventual management of the building. It is the job of an institute like the RIBA to support members on this kind of path ahead and make it available as part of its knowledge base.

The collaboration between members of a design team needs to have an institutional parallel through partnerships, and that means the RIBA working with other professions, which I will come to in a moment. I am also interested in championing the contribution of other professions, especially, for example, landscape architects, planners and urban designers, who have been particularly neglected in certain sectors of development and the construction industry, such as house building. We need to recruit more engineers – a recent survey of children's perception of engineering was that it was dirty, grimy and underpaid – the image of an engineer was 'car mechanic'. We have to change that perception to, let us say, 'environmental magician'. It always puzzles me why, at a time when so many schoolchildren are interested in the environment, engineering professions are finding it difficult to recruit.

At Member level, harnessing the network is the key. The RIBA relies more heavily than other professional institutes on membership ownership and engagement. When I say 'harnessing' the network, I am conscious of a great asset: our 40,000 members and their knowledge, which should be to be collated and harvested and used in a powerful way.

I also want during my Presidency to hold a proper discussion about the regulation of the profession where we calmly debate the merit and demerits of protection of title. Other professionals do not have protection of title and they seem to be doing better than architects. I have no fixed outcome in mind; just to have the conversation rather than avoid it.

Current action

The 200 plus staff of the RIBA and its many member volunteers are engaged in a number of core activities such as member services, CPD, regional programmes, awards, education and the library and information service which includes the 4.5 million item collection including 80% of all known Palladio drawings. The RIBA's

second largest staff complement is involved in the Library, which will soon become open for public access. We want to digitise the library and collection and make it available to members and to others. Then there is developing policy, participating in the Government's and other consultations and sitting on some of the hundreds of external panels and committees that influence conditions of practice. A further 250 staff in our trading company RIBA Enterprises provide a high quality services to the industry and good income to the Institute, and we rely on that income.

So that is, if you like, business as usual, but already underway through Jack's presidency and before that, there have been specific campaigns and programmes on planning, on procurement, sustainability and client design advice. Now there are a number of projects currently under way that have a change agenda rather than a service agenda. On procurement for example, following on from the RIBA's Smart PFI proposals we hope shortly for some good news coming out of the current review of the way the Building Schools of the Future programme is procuring design and construction. I am happy to say that there are the beginnings of cross-industry collaboration now on housing and on climate change. We have a developed climate change policy, including RIBA support for the Global Commons Institute's Contraction and Convergence model, which calls for international agreements to limit CO₂ emissions to stabilise atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. We are developing international chapters and the RIBA Trust is establishing fund raising on a firmer footing in order to achieve a critical mass of activities. There is a special drive going on in respect of member communication because as the recent membership survey has confirmed that the RIBA has become better at communicating outwards but it is not yet engaging with its members sufficiently or helping them to be 'ambassadors' for architecture. Another programme is Chartered Practice, a key part of improving the quality of the profession's offer. There is also our work with ARB, the Diversity Task Group, the Teaching Practice initiative and the development of the Regional Network.

I have set out an analysis of some of the long and medium term developments I see as most relevant to the current condition. Inevitably it only scratches the surface of a very rich history. I have also touched on the change programme of the RIBA, in addition to its many 'business as usual activities'. To end with, here is what I will be focusing on in my 1.75 remaining years as President.

The role of the professions

To my mind we have to remember that buildings and places more than any other 'product' give or release their value over a very long time. Try to imagine cities without old buildings and squares and think of how much benefit we get from the actions of past generations.

But balancing the long term and the immediate is difficult –as society oscillates between adult and child impulses: instant gratification as opposed to deferred gratification the lack of ability to invest now for a greater return later. The Stern report described Climate Change as “the greatest market failure in history”. One of the Governments key roles is to look after the long term on all citizens' behalves; but the evidence is not encouraging.

So who is to be the custodian of the long term? The Church and the Trades Unions used to play a significant role but they are now in decline. The professions have often claimed this territory too. But to make good on this promise the professions have only advocacy to rely on and not industrial muscle or, so to speak, spiritual muscle. The advocacy of the professions can only be based on our knowledge. But while quiet friendly advice is generally the right approach, the ethical role expected of the professions requires having to take a stand from time to time.

It seems to me that this has immediate relevance in the context of Climate Change and Peak Oil, the assured decline of fossil fuel stocks. I have to say to some of our fellow professional institutes that I wish they would go outside their functional remit just a little bit and say things, which they believe to be in society's wider interest. I am proud that the RIBA has, for example, adopted the principles of Contraction and Convergence as a principle for achieving international agreement on emission limits. It may not be the only way, but it brings focus to some very serious implications including political ones as regards the inequitable and unsustainable relationships between the North and the South in the world.

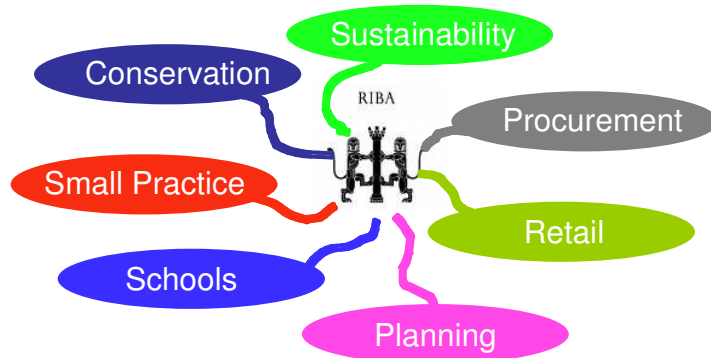
I want to work to join together the professions not only in construction, but outside the construction industry, starting with action on climate change and seeing where it might lead. Ideally they would agree to press governments to rapidly make international agreements to set equitable national limits on emissions. The professions are international communities, which have a remarkable unity of practice despite their huge diversity and are uniquely placed to press for a global solution to this global mega-problem. The RICS, for example, already has events in which other professions, such as accountants and medics come together, There's something rare and to be built on.

Knowledge communities

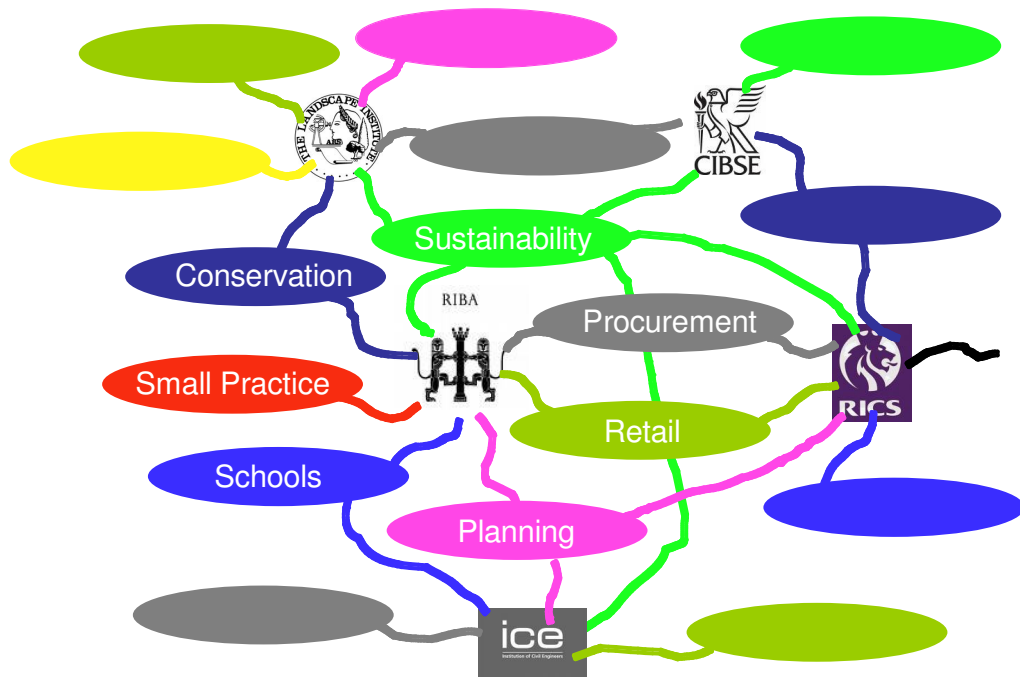
My next area of focus concerns harnessing the member network and using our knowledge more effectively; for a profession's greatest asset is knowledge. When you hear people complain of 'professional silos', remember that these silos did not appear by accident. The professions represent perhaps the most confusing mix of ethics and self interest yet devised. A profession is a tribe but the tribal model is no longer adequate, no longer fit for purpose. It has an emotional value, which is not to be underestimated. I find myself being quite tribal, especially when it suits me, and the tribal identity can be deployed tactically. But its great weakness is that the tribal identity no long matches the 'knowledge identity'. There are many more kinds of architect now than ever and some kinds of architects have more in common with some members of other professions than their own profession. Even the core skills of an architect are difficult to capture. Just in the last few months I have encountered so many different types of architect: a conservation practice in Shrewsbury, a solo practitioner in Somerset, the MD of a commercial practice in Manchester, a member of the Young Practitioners Panel wanting to be, and confident of being, at the cutting edge, living and breathing architecture.

The binding entity is best described through the concept of a 'community of interest', which leads to what we call the Knowledge Community model. One of the best examples of that in recent history in the professions is the British Council for Offices. Offices were the poor relation in architecture and construction and when I was at college nobody wanted to design offices, but the office industry got itself together and devised standards and a knowledge pool. It systematically addressed the problem of design and construction, and it did so by first of all joining together all parts of knowledge, without any silos and separations, and getting the demand and the supply side in the same place. There was no division between the two. Those who wanted things and those who would provide them were part of the same community. That is an embryonic knowledge community.

This series of diagrams starts with possible RIBA knowledge communities.



It then shows how other professions might share some of these knowledge communities, as well as having others of their own.



The final diagram shows the relationship between professions and knowledge community inverted like the BCO, where the Knowledge Community is at the centre.



This is related to that earlier reintegration story. If we are serious about the reintegration of construction and design and of all the knowledge that goes into building and using buildings then we have to reform along these lines. If in the future it leads so a reduction in the number of different professions that is well and good, but that is not the first point. We now have the British Council for School Environment as an emerging model. We badly need to make a coherent knowledge community focused on cities and urban design. This is an art that keeps falling

between stools. Architects claim knowledge about urban design and planning and yet when it comes to discussing cities and urban infrastructure you do not see many architects stepping forward.

At the December Council meeting the emerging model of knowledge communities will be debated and I fully expect adopted, although perhaps with some tweaks and revisions, and I want to delegate as much time as I can to develop its full potential.

Architectural Education

My third area of focus is a new compact with schools. The divorce of architecture and commerce is one of the biggest elements of the 175 year story. Today, it seems to me amazing that you can go through an entire architectural education without doing a single design exercise within resource limits; especially financial limits. So it not in architects' bones to work within limits. The relationship of profession, education and practice is something that I would like to see develop in a new and different way.

The RIBA is seen as more of a policeman than a leaned society amongst schools of architecture. I would like to see a much better engagement between the knowledge communities represented by the RIBA and schools. When our Librarian, Irena Murray, went and talked to a conference of heads of schools the atmosphere was almost electric – because the RIBA was appearing in academia as a body that brought knowledge rather than strictures

There is potentially reverse traffic here as well. Design review is one of the emergent tools in ensuring design quality in the built environment, particularly through the planning system. Schools of architecture are the specialists in design review and they could have a significant role in providing the intellectual guidance and skills for design review, perhaps working in partnership with local authorities or at a regional level.

We also need to improve the 'time to market' of ideas in architecture between being conceived and actually being realised on the ground. This goes back to what I said that we have to do it and not wait for government. Compared with the speed with which in sectors of manufacturing industry research and development in universities and research communities comes to market, the built environment community lags behind. You can have fantastic discussions or research in a school of architecture, say about the design of a city quarter, and then go to another event on a similar subject convened by officials or practitioners and find the discussion to be of a lesser calibre.

So I want to see a new relationship between the schools of architecture and the RIBA where the regulation of education is only the core part of a much wider and more creative dialogue. At the same time I would like to explore how the RIBA can help a bigger release of the intellectual capacity in schools to contribute directly to development in their localities and beyond. This could also have beneficial consequences for the relationship between universities and their schools of architecture, which are too often seen as peripheral.

Patronage

Finally, I want to talk about patronage and the RIBA Trust.

One of the great successes of CABE was to make the economic case for the value of design. Not only that good design will not cost more over the long term, but also that it added value to business (whether private or public) through efficiency (doing more with less), effectiveness (doing it better) and expression (communicating and

marketing what you are about). But CABE's mission went further than this essentially utilitarian argument. CABE said that its mission was to inject the value of design into the bloodstream of the nation, which suggests something far more fundamental – literally visceral. The economic value case is absolutely important but it leaves design having constantly to sing for its supper – in the UK now at least the song is being heard, for example there is at least a stated desire to see high design quality in the schools programme. But CABE's mission is proving elusive. The desirability of good design should be a given. You should have to justify why a building does not measure up – not why it should measure up. We have got it the wrong way round.

The word Patronage encapsulates commitment to quality without repeated justification. The Arts lottery, Broadgate and Brindley Place, Jubilee Line, St Pancras and Terminal 5 are all examples of excellent architecture and design successfully procured. Why are the lessons of these not filtering steadily into public procurement? Why is it that, for example, in setting up the Olympics we did not systematically and transparently analyse the lessons of where the lottery projects went right and wrong, and how other highly successful projects worked? Compare Terminal 5 to Wembley, both great designs but Terminal 5 is an impressive example of good design as well as value and delivery on time and on budget, with no people killed on site. If its project performance were as industry average, they say that this £4 billion project would have been a billion pounds over budget, a year late and killed six people. We need to learn those lessons not only in terms of procurement but in terms of quality of design.

There is a dilemma in public policy on design: to hold out for excellence through instruments like CABE's Design Review or the RIBA awards systems or to invest scarce resource in raising the average through education, publication, enabling or client design advice. You sometimes hear this expressed as “the best can be the enemy of the good”. The concept of patronage does not have that problem because patronage is straightforwardly about investing in quality. You do not need to rehearse the argument endlessly – it is a frame of mind. I think the opportunity for the RIBA Trust specifically is to leave value for money to others and to promote the value of patronage. Look at our best buildings and places like the works of the great estates: it was patronage that made them the way they are. Is the legacy of our times going to be as good? The arguments for good architecture adding business value and improving lives are spot on, but what about the place of architecture in spiritedly sustaining a civilised culture? What better an agency than the Department of Culture Media and Sport to champion patronage of good architecture that matches any from previous historical periods?

Finally, if was to choose one thing to focus on it would be on realising the true potential of our knowledge, both to mobilise the members of the Institute but also to release the collective strength of the professions. I will be able to concentrate on this area only because so much of what matters to members is already being tackled under the leadership of the RIBA's senior team, staff and members.

That is my programme. I am looking forward to it very much and I am sure it will be tested by a fight or two along the way.

Thank you. I am happy to take some questions.

GERAINT JOHN: Mr President, thank you very much for that illuminating address. I think you are aware that today is the day they celebrate the revolution in Mexico. I wondered if you would care to speculate with us what you feel the most revolutionary aspect of what you have told us tonight might be, or maybe there is something revolutionary you would hope for that you have not told us about tonight?

THE PRESIDENT: Revolutions happen when conditions are right. I think the true revolutionary reads the picture. I think there is a revolution going on and I think we are being slightly left behind by that revolution as architects. We are rapidly catching up, but there is still a lot to sort.

Just taking one example, if in the making of an architect there were a consciousness that money is limited, that there is such a thing as management, such a thing as business, and people want value; and if that was considered as exciting as form, materials and the shape of a body or the habits of a musician, I think it would do the art of architecture an enormous favour because it would have more traction.

If it became normal for business and finance to be seen in Schools of Architecture as part of the interesting aspects of making buildings it need not take up much time. At the moment it is regarded as something to do with practice, which you do afterwards. Perhaps that is one of the reasons the fees are so low because unless you understand how to battle with limits and with resources and how you lever resources to get more out of them, it is difficult to value your own work properly. When architectural students are addressed in such terms by people who are passionate about the subject they get a great reception. This is a challenge to schools of architecture and I would be delighted to engage at that level: in order to release the best in architecture not in order to create some kind of practice fodder. Practice is actually quite good at taking the brilliant products from schools of architecture and training them up, but I think this has a longer term impact.

RICHARD SIMMONS: I was very interested in what you were saying about professional architecture and the other knowledge communities and I was thinking about what makes architects different. As members of the knowledge community I guess architects are the people who should be saying, "We should do this because it is beautiful and it will be beautiful". And yet you also talked about the durability of the built environment and it seems to me that that is an advantage but also a disadvantage because people tend to look at what has been built in the past and that is what they value – they do not necessarily value what is going to be built. I wondered what more do you think we can do to get people to look forward to new buildings and new forms rather than just looking backward?

THE PRESIDENT: To me the past is something that sets standards. People in their own conditions and time have produced amazing things. As Bruno Zevi said, Brunelleschi was a modernist or Bramante was a modernist because they invented a new architecture in the Renaissance. So the biggest lesson of the past is actually the confidence to invent in your own time. When you look at the work of the Victorian builders you do not look to them for lessons on composition or the disposition of ventilation systems. But you can admire their confidence. Or look at Hawksmoor – his work is mad, and it's inspiring; a very good argument for being just as mad but with control, with reason and with the phenomenal understanding that we are capable of in relation to how things work at this time. So to me there is no contradiction there about looking into the past, as opposed to having a nostalgia about the past. It is much more about understanding the past and drawing the right lessons from that.

SIMON FOXELL: As you have indicated, climate change is extraordinarily serious and the targets that we have to reach are extraordinarily onerous and well beyond our ability to do this by voluntary means. Do you believe that architects should be obliged by the RIBA to perform at a far higher standard than they are at the moment?

THE PRESIDENT: I am not going to start saying you must do this and you must do that, but what I will do is campaign, for example, for building regulations to tackle the scale of the problem we have in front of us and to set the right standards in terms of emissions. I will always encourage members to go beyond the regulations and, for

example, to recognise people who do better. As you know in entries for the Stirling Prize, emissions in kilograms of CO2 per square metre are disclosable. So I think we start with disclosure and seeing how people are doing and actually it should become pretty embarrassing soon either to non-disclose or to disclose completely unacceptable levels. I would go for it that way rather than any other way. There are means, for example in the Chartered Practice Scheme, to set quality standards, but I think it is quite difficult for them to mandate exceeding what the regulations say. I would like to rely far more on influencing architects.

CHRIS SMITH: I think one of the things the Institute has done very well is engaged with the media in getting our message across. Do you feel that there are ways we can improve on this to give our message mass market appeal?

THE PRESIDENT: I am tempted at this point to turn to Roula Konzotis RIBA Director of Communications. The techniques of engaging with the media are well known and there is not some startlingly new method on the horizon. There are people of course who sit in TV studios and invent new forms, such as Reality TV, and so on, and we have to be on top of those.

For example, the Stirling Prize has been a very big win for the RIBA, but what we have to understand is that such prizes are going out of fashion, and audience figures are declining. What is the next thing, and what will take the place of the Stirling Prize? That's one of the headaches we are grappling with.

The awareness of communication is itself the biggest factor – the constant awareness that we should be communicating. Whenever we do anything, thinking how it is communicated has to be one of the first considerations. It is not so much techniques of communication but a question of being focused on the importance of it and to make it an integral part of operations. That is the message that is steadily sinking in. We are very lucky in the RIBA to have some people who emphasise things like that and eventually more and more get hold of it and it becomes, or it will become part of every activity.

AZAR DJAMALI: Mr President, I would like to ask you a question regarding schools of architecture and collaboration with the practices. A lot of the schools are very short of staff and there is no connection between what is learnt in the schools and what is practised in the practice. Is there any strategy in your plan to connect the schools and the practices and to encourage the practices to send their staff to various schools for teaching and taking time off from work and dedicating that time to the education of architects?

THE PRESIDENT: The RIBA programme in this area is called *Teaching Practice*, an initiative of Vice President for Education, Simon Allford. It is quite a widely accepted idea to have a greater involvement of teaching with practice especially in Part 2. The VP initiative is mainly centred on students going to work in practice during their academic training but its full potential requires practitioners to also engage more with schools of architecture. Everybody is extremely busy and this idea has to have not just goodwill, but a business case behind it. As regards the schism between the schools and practice, that is often over-egged. The best thing schools do is teach people how to think about the built environment and that is their greatest offer. However, it is important that the profession helps to train its own members in the long run, especially in Part 2, and I think there is a lot of scope for that.

SUZANNE McCARTHY: First of all, I am delighted to have been invited tonight to hear you set out how you see the RIBA going forward. I am not an architect so for me to be involved in this community is very exciting. One thing that I am aware of, being on the Holdings Board is how much we are looking at the international perspective.

We have 'British' in the title of the RIBA, but Britain on its own cannot do the things you want to do. So I would like to hear from you, and I think the audience would as well, about the international connections that you feel the RIBA can make because you have RIBA members all over the world.

THE PRESIDENT: This is another of the things firmly under way as a programme. David Falla, our Vice President for International Affairs, has been very effective in pushing the agenda for better organising the international membership of the RIBA.

For example, I was in the United States last week at 'Build Boston' at the invitation of the New England Chapter of RIBA-USA and later met with members of the New York Chapter. RIBA-USA is the first international regional branch, if you like, of the RIBA. One extra staff member has recently been recruited specifically to look after the international members and get their engagement. They pay dues and they ought to get the services that every other member gets. But what has to go with that is a new re-thought package of benefits and scope of action for international members. One thing that will not go away is the fact that some countries' GNPs make our subs very high, so how do we deal with that? Another thorny question that we have to solve.

Hong Kong and Singapore between them have a bigger membership than some of our UK regions, so there are very, very loyal RIBA members overseas. Work is under way in the RIBA to recruit more of that energy and to put flesh on the fact that it is an international organisation. Other institutions have even bigger overseas member bases and I think there is something to be learnt from them.

ANNETTE FISHER: Mr President, my question is about small practices, which you have touched on, and about how small practices have been relegated to residential work. I just wondered, in your Presidency, what you will be doing to try to improve the remit of the small practice so that we can be more involved in some other sectors of work and also larger scale projects? I mean, in the States you do not have to be a big practice to work on a large commercial project but here you seem to have to.

THE PRESIDENT: The one effective area I can see that we have some purchase on is in public procurement. You have to make the case that small practices offer something that other practices do not. I do not think people will go to a small practice for the sake of going to a small practice, so we have to make the point about diversity of practice, about innovation and about what fresh thinking can bring to the client. I know that, partly through RIBA pressure, the Olympic Delivery Authority's design strategy includes a commitment to involving the diverse sizes of practice.

The other part of the work is the knowledge-base of those practices and how the RIBA can help those practices to organise themselves more effectively and to market themselves more effectively. As you probably know, the Small Practices Conference is one of the best attended conferences in the RIBA calendar and it generates an enormous amount of energy. Jane Duncan, who is now our VP for Practice has always taken a lead in that and I shall be relying quite a lot on her.

RICHARD BURTON: In the Seventies, leading up to the Eighties, the RIBA spearheaded energy conservation in buildings – "Building is the key to energy conservation", was what it was called. It was a highly successful venture and one day, if you like, invite me to the RIBA and I will tell you about it!

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Richard, and thank you everyone.