
News release

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Statement: Effect of top-up fees on architectural education

The RIBA submitted its views on the Government's proposed Graduate Contribution Scheme to the DfES in April 2003. Since then the RIBA has been monitoring the effect of the proposals on architectural education, and will continue to do so.

The RIBA advised the DfES in April 2003 that a combination of high graduate debt (we estimate up to £36,000 for architecture students for the full five year course) and low graduate salaries (a survey in March 2000 indicated that average salaries of students graduating after 5 years of full time study in architecture is just £17,125), will have an adverse effect on the recruitment of students from non-traditional backgrounds. The architectural profession has had a poor track record in recruiting & retaining female students, ethnic minorities and those from low incomes. Although we have made good progress in the last 10 years to redress this imbalance, with initiatives such as 'Listen Up', undertaken with the Cabinet Office Women's Unit, we are concerned that the proposals will prevent the further development of widening participation in the profession.

The RIBA does recognise that extra investment required in Higher Education should come from those who benefit most, i.e. graduates, but that the system should ensure that those most disadvantaged in society still have the opportunity to study on lengthy courses such as architecture. Current proposals to reinstate a means assessed non-repayable grant to poorer students is welcomed, however, we do not believe that

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Page 1 of 1

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current proposals go far enough to encourage those from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds study long, intensive courses such as architecture.

With regard to research, the RIBA welcomed the Government's intention to substantially increase funding in research, to improve the training and salaries of researchers and the establishment of the Arts and Humanities Research Council. However, the Institute does not support the proposal to focus research funding on larger, more concentrated research units within fewer institutions. We do not agree with the assertion that there is no connection between research excellence and teaching quality. RIBA Visiting Boards, consisting of senior academics and practitioners, visit schools of architecture every four/five years to validate their courses. The evidence they provide convinces the RIBA that there is a strong link between good research performance and good student output from architectural courses.

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