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Review of Legislation Regulating the Architectural Profession

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This submission addresses two education-linked aspects in supporting the retention of a regulated architectural profession in Australia.

1. *Potential Impact on Architectural Education in Australia*

The present regulated environment for architects in Australia is a significant contributing factor sustaining international standards for architectural education in this country. International standards are expressed by the International Union of Architects (UIA) and UNESCO Charter for Architectural Education (June 1996) and by the other major international body for architectural standards, the 'Commonwealth Association of Architects' [CAA]. The charters and policies of these bodies call for a minimum of five year of academic study and two years of practice experience and are based on international consumer-protection objectives. There are no other non-profit, advancement-oriented internationally based bodies for the education and practice of architecture for the benefit of society (acknowledging that there are history groups, research groups and the like).

International standards are based on quality assured assessment of education and preparedness for practice deriving from three key factors: critical self-evaluation by schools of architecture in the context of internal university requirements, relationship with the profession's national education policy; and, relationship with statutory regulatory authority requirements (at present State based in Australia but potentially Nationally unifiable). Both the professional body and the regulatory body policies and procedures for maintaining quality and for maintaining a consumer protection focus are informed by and linked with international standards. This tripartite 'system' has proven to be very robust over many decades.

If one of the key participants in assuring internationally acceptable standards for architectural education (being the registration authorities) is removed through de-regulation, then Australia runs the serious risk of having its architectural education down-graded, both in fact and in the perception of other countries. This would be to the long-term detriment of Australian architects exporting their services, and to the short and long-term detriment of Australian architectural education.

A 1999 IDP Education Australia report indicates that between A\$55 and A\$60 (million dollars approximately) flows into the Australian economy each year as a result of international fee-paying students undertaking architectural education here through their fees and through their living and related costs. It is widely held, by heads of schools of architecture in Australia from anecdotal experience of such students, that a significant reason for students coming to this country to pay to study architecture is that qualifications here meet international standards for knowledge, skills and consumer protection. Australia's architectural educational standards are the equal of the best in any country and are internationally portable because of this.

In the present funding shortfall for Australian university education, architectural education has suffered very significantly because of its studio-project-based, reflective practice model. While the studio form of education has been heralded by educationalists (eg; Schon, Boyer) as possibly the best model for all professional education, it is quite teaching-labour intensive and to achieve internationally competitive outcomes, it requires resourcing at higher levels than can be sustained by current Australian Government funding. In Australian schools the funding shortfall is currently being largely met through the fees of international students. If this source is diminished as a result of reduced participation by international students, educational standards for domestic students will fall. At present international students subsidise architectural education in Australia.

2. Architects Body of Knowledge

Essential characteristics of education and practice standards required of the above mentioned international bodies are that education and preparedness for practice are assessed by peer-group review based on internationally compatible standards.

The UIA 'Recommended Guidelines for the Accord Policy on Registration/Licensing/Certification', outlines the minimum standards of competency for education, experience, and examination to ensure that the public interest is served. This UIA document (p1) identifies five generally acceptable criteria for the need for registration... 1. Unregulated practice poses a serious risk to a consumer's life, health, safety or economic well-being and the potential for harm is recognisable and likely to occur, 2. practice requires a high degree of skill, knowledge and training, 3. The functions and responsibilities of the practitioner requires independent judgement and members practice independently, 4. The scope of practice is distinguishable from other licensed and unlicensed occupations, 5. The economic and cultural impact on the public of regulation is justified. The document further emphasises that architects express the roots of a society's culture and aesthetic values through design and that they do this as well as provide technical and business services. All of this requires a broadly based substantial body of knowledge covering technical, historical, theoretical, business and legal aspects and the skill to richly interweave this knowledge through application in practice. No other built environment design related profession matches or even claims the scope and integration capacities of architecture and the sub-profession of building designers addresses only part of the scope.

While in recent times Australia has established numerous consumer protection codes related to the built environment in the areas of health, safety and harm, and this is considered to be good, such aspects do not cover the wider scope of architects activity. As well as adhere to the first criteria for the need for registration, shown above, architecture delivers on all of the others. Taken as a full set only architecture can deliver in them all. Architecture bridges between the sciences and the arts and between client and consumer and has a central role in raising the quality of life for society, in serving the public interest and in contributing to the Nation's heritage.

As mentioned earlier the international standard for architectural education is five years of full-time study plus two years of practice experience (a seven year package). This is considered necessary in order to acquire the scope of knowledge and to demonstrate its application in practice at a satisfactory level. A de-regulated environment in Australia would deny international wisdom about architecture's minimum standards for scope and depth of knowledge and skills and would equate it to a narrow subset of skills as provided by TAFE level courses of two or three years duration.

In a de-regulated environment, there is a strong chance that fewer people will undertake the higher level of preparation because they can complete much shorter and lower level [TAFE] courses and still portray themselves as architects. Such a situation would fail the international test of consumer protection and thereby undermine Australia's standing in the world.

Consequences that may follow a down-grading of architecture in Australia include:

- Over time there being fewer, in international terms, 'properly' educated and trained architects, thereby posing the dilemma for society (as a whole in having an impoverished profession to reflect National aspirations) and for consumers (of not having a reliable basis for selecting an architect or for evaluating standards).
- Triggering a crisis in architectural education in Australia through reduced income to sustain the internationally acknowledged necessary type of education, because of fewer international fee-paying students (unless other sources of income are found), and triggering a crisis in university architectural education, through pressure to reduce the scope and length of courses to remain viable compared with lower levels of education.

REFERENCES

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