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RIBA and ARB ethical codes attacked

1 July, 2015 | By Colin Marrs, [Will Hurst](#)

Jeremy Till, Paul Morrell and David Roberts questioned the profession's ethical guidance at a Bartlett event earlier this week

The RIBA and the ARB have defended themselves from accusations that their codes of practice are too weak to prevent ethical abuses.

Several speakers at an ethics symposium at the Bartlett held on Monday criticised the ethical codes adopted by the RIBA and ARB, claiming they lack teeth and are vague and un-enforced by the two organisations.

Head of Central Saint Martins Jeremy Till claimed the 12 point ARB Architects' code 'gets architects off the hook'.

He said most of the points had nothing to do with ethics but were instead about serving the client.

'These are the ethics of the marketplace – simply about how one subscribes to the value system and phoney ethics of the marketplace and yet we are told by ARB that this is a source of ethical guidance,' he said.

Bartlett PhD student David Roberts said: 'RIBA's code is almost as self-protecting as the ARB's. It calls for honesty, integrity and competency, as well as concern for others and for the environment. However, the code of the Royal Town Planning Institute calls for members to 'fearlessly and impartially exercise their independent professional judgement', which is far stronger.'

He also cited the code adopted by the Institute for Civil Engineers, which calls on its members to 'always be aware of their overriding responsibility to the public good'.

'All of these institutions go further than architecture bodies,' said Roberts, 'and move towards the idea collective consequences.'

Roberts said that the weaknesses in architecture's ethical codes put more responsibility on architecture schools to inculcate ethics in students.

'If ethics are inferred rather than enforced then consideration (of ethics) should extend to wider teaching environment,' he said.

Also speaking at the Bartlett event, consultant Paul Morrell, the author of the recent Edge Commission report and former chief construction adviser to the government, reiterated his criticism that architects are relying on ethical codes which are not enforced.

He said: 'Codes of ethics are not enough on their own. Even FIFA has a code of ethics. It is easy to have one but if it is not enforced and not lived then it is not effective.'

However, Simon Howard, professional standards manager at the ARB rejected the idea that its code was weak.

He said: 'ARB's view is that the code of conduct is of vital importance for architects.'

'It makes clear to architects and the public the standards of conduct to be expected from member of the profession.'

However, he added that the ARB is considering whether the current version of its code remains fit for purpose. It launched a

consultation in May, which is still running on its website.

‘Criticisms and suggestions are encouraged,’ Howard said.

RIBA president Stephen Hodder said: ‘RIBA has always placed significant value on ethics and the role of the profession in supporting public interest.

‘Ethics is a core focus for the Institute’s strategy for 2016-2020; and earlier this year we announced our co-founding of an International Ethics Standards Coalition.’

Hodder also noted that the RIBA has committed to develop more guidance for members in the area of social responsibility and ethical practice following the recommendations of an international task force report last year.

‘Whether to include changes to the code of conduct is part of our very active discussions on the matter,’ he said.

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