

## Response to Institute Member Survey 2012

### *Introduction*

In late 2012 the Institute conducted a survey of members to ascertain levels of satisfaction with the current products and services offered and to provide members with an opportunity to give feedback on their membership experience. Members would be aware that the quantitative data from the survey was reported in the [2012 Annual Report](#) along with an analysis of trends for the past three years. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the qualitative feedback to two survey questions:

- What areas should the Institute focus on in future to ensure its strategic objectives are met?
- Do you have any other feedback or comments you would like to provide?

Where possible this report seeks to address the common themes and to update members on current and planned initiatives. The information has been organised under 13 categories as follows:

Advocacy

Lobbying

Practice matters

Regional issues

CPD

Small practice

Awards and events

Environment

Institute operations

Education

Archicentre

Membership

Communications

## **1      *Advocacy***

There appears to be consensus that greater advocacy and promotion of architecture by the Institute is sought, particularly in relation to highlighting the relevance and value of architects to the broader community and the overall benefit of good design. Greater public understanding of what an architect does, what clients should expect to pay for an architect's service, and the benefits of engaging an architect were all recognised as gaps in current public understanding.

It was also stated that the impact of architecture on our day-to-day lives is another key message that needs to be further promoted – how architecture and good design affect our health and wellbeing. Members would like architects to be positioned as playing a leading role in this and for architects to become an integral and respected part of the community.

Advocacy has always been a key objective of the Institute and we strive to focus on proactive campaigns which are of long term value and which meet the changing needs of the profession.

In October 2013, the Institute, [Archicentre](#), [Architext](#) and [Architecture Media](#) will join forces to participate in Grand Designs Live exhibitions in Melbourne and Sydney to promote architecture to a broad consumer market. Institute members will be asked to volunteer some time to chat to members of the public in an informal setting about what architects do and how they do it. We are hoping for broad support from members to make these events a success and to take advantage of this opportunity to showcase architecture, and we will be calling for volunteers shortly.

Collaborative advertising campaigns associated with programs such as Grand Designs Live and the Lifestyle Channel, the PR and advocacy work of Archicentre, government relations and lobbying, various community engagement strategies, presence at Home Shows and many other similar activities enable the Institute to promote to consumers the value of engaging an architect.

TV and radio campaigns were cited by a number of members as the preferred communication tool to promote architecture to the wider public with programs such as *Grand Designs Australia* deemed very successful.

The Institute's media team have developed strong relationships with major national publications and media outlets including *BRW*, the *Australian Financial Review*, the *Australian*, *WISH Magazine*, Channel Seven's *Better Homes and Gardens* and ABC Radio.

## **2      *Lobbying***

There is a strong preference for the Institute to lobby on behalf of members on issues affecting the profession, good design and the quality of the built environment, by increasing its profile both in the

media and with government. Members also asked the Institute to support them in their own lobbying activity at a local level.

The Institute's policy and advocacy team is keen to explore ways the Institute could more actively empower members to advocate on built environment issues at a local level. Specifically the Institute will explore the merits and feasibility of the American Institute of Architects' grassroots advocacy program for possible application within the Australian setting.

Members also raised a number of policy issues they would like the Institute to lobby on, and encouraged a collaborative approach with other built environment stakeholder organisations.

Over the last seven years the Institute has developed a series of public policies on a range of relevant profession and built environment topics. These policies underpin the Institute's advocacy to government. For the last four years the Institute has regularly surveyed members to ascertain policy issues of importance. The information from these surveys provides one element for National Council's consideration when determining the Institute's policy and advocacy priorities.

National Council agreed upon the following policy priorities for the period 2011-2013: Sustainable Communities, Procurement and Planning Reform. National Council also recognised the importance of advocacy in promoting the value of architecture and good design, through the call for Government Architect positions.

Identifying these issues as the Institute's policy priorities, does not preclude the Institute from taking an active approach and/or responding to other policy issues as appropriate. Over the last four years the Institute has made over [45 submissions](#) to the federal government on behalf of members.

In addition, the Institute has established strong, collaborative policy networks within the built environment sector. For instance the Institute is a member of the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council (ASBEC), Australian Services Roundtable (ASR), the Australian Construction Industry Forum (ACIF), Built Environment Meets Parliament (BEMP), Livable Housing Australia (LHA), and the Liability Reform Steering Group (LRSG). Through these memberships, the Institute actively engages on joint projects, research gathering, position setting and lobbying. The Institute also collaborates with other organisations on joint issues of interest; for example, the recent roll out of BIM information with Consult Australia through the [BIM website](#).

### **3      *Practice matters***

Most comments in this category related to the [Acumen](#) database. Much of the feedback about Acumen is related to navigation issues, and this appears to be directly related to user understanding of the various search options and how/when to use them. In particular, feedback suggests that users

are not using the [A-Z Index](#) and only use the *search bar* when trying to find a particular topic. The Institute recognises that the search function is not operating adequately but an upgrade of Acumen and our other websites in terms of navigation and search functionality will be enabled by a new internal business system which will roll out progressively in 2013 and 2014, and address this issue. In the meantime we encourage members to use the [A-Z Index](#) to find advisory material.

Other comments suggest that Acumen content is not as comprehensive as the Advisory Notes were, however the only material that was not transitioned to Acumen from the Advisory Notes was content determined to be duplicated, out-of-date or to pose an unacceptable risk to members or the Institute – and this resulted in very little content being omitted. But still this perception is a common one.

In November 2012 National Council established a Content Review Task Group to provide advice on the best way to manage and develop Acumen content into the future. The Task Group will put a recommendation to the August National Council meeting based on consultation with a broad range of members and investigation of various options. It is anticipated that a Review Panel of practicing members will oversee the commissioning and approval of content as well as keep a watching brief on existing material.

The Institute continues to believe Acumen is an extremely valuable resource and is keen to work with members to ensure its long-term viability.

There was also a perception that the Institute does not adequately focus on aspects of architecture such as documentation, drafting and technical knowledge about construction and associated trades. Both the [National Seminar Series](#) and [Continuum](#) offer CPD options addressing the four National Competency Standards in Architecture: design, documentation, project management and practice management. The particular competency addressed is specified with the course material. ‘Best practice’ information, across all competencies, is distributed via [Acumen](#) and the [PALS](#) program for graduates.

## **4      *Regional Issues***

Clearly, some of our members in regional locations feel disenfranchised by distance and by lack of access to face-to-face opportunities enjoyed by city-based members. The Institute is committed to increasing our regional outreach through presentations, talks and awards programs, and there is now a higher level of connectedness with members outside capital cities.

Members suggested that we should work on better delivery of CPD in regional and remote areas – and this is certainly a priority. Whether mandatory or not, we know that members value CPD and we need to work hard with new technology to deliver the best possible product at an affordable price. The [National Seminar Series](#) has visited a number of regional areas in the past year and some chapters are

making a concerted effort to increase their reach outside the capitals, such as the Perimeter Series throughout Victoria and various chapter offerings in regional NSW and Queensland. Later this year the '[Spirit of Place](#)' conference will be held in Cairns to give Queensland members an opportunity over a two-day program to see a range of national and international speakers and to access formal CPD.

## **5 Continuing Professional Development**

Feedback suggested the need for more webinars and live stream events. We have been working on this and are now able to offer all six of the National Seminar Series events via live stream from Melbourne and they are available to regional members to access for \$30. The Institute has recently upgraded the live streaming equipment and the quality for users has improved significantly. We are also investigating options for chapters to use this technology for local events.

Understandably many members have regular commitments which mean if CPD is offered on the same date and time each week some people will never be able to attend. Feedback suggested we should mix up the days and times that CPD is offered. Chapters are encouraged to offer as many options as possible to suit a majority of members. Online CPD at [www.continuum.com.au](http://www.continuum.com.au) and live stream events are options available for busy and time-poor architects.

Our online CPD service at [www.continuum.com.au](http://www.continuum.com.au) offers more than 60 courses, covering the four competencies of design, documentation, project management and practice management. We routinely upload National Seminar Series presentations to Continuum as well as selected National Conference key note sessions to grow our online CPD options.

While the cost of CPD varies from state to state and from event to event, in comparison to many other professional industries it is reasonably priced. Also, CPD is tax deductible (if you are able to claim self-education expenses). The price of national CPD for students and graduates has been reduced in 2013 to \$20 for student members (down from \$44 in 2012) and \$40 for graduate members (down from \$63 in 2012). Live streaming of the six National Seminar Series events has recently been made available complimentary to all graduate members.

The Institute is investigating ways it can further bundle services to offer more discounts to members.

The Institute's new IT business system which is being introduced in 2014 will provide an online CPD participation record as an option, as clearly this is a priority for some members. Members will be able to log in to their 'My Profile' page and access their personal information including their personal CPD record. All Institute CPD will automatically be recorded as verifiable attendance under the attendee's record and members will be able to add external CPD activities. This will act as a central location to record CPD and attach handouts, receipts and any other records of CPD attendance.

## **6      *Small practice***

Some members perceive that the Institute is focussed on large, corporate practice, rather than small practice that make up the majority of Institute members.

The Institute values all members regardless of practice size and strives to offer a range of programs and support to all members. The integration of Archicentre into the Institute offers a range of new possibilities, including as a channel for support of particular membership sub-groups. Exploration of these opportunities will be undertaken over the coming year and the Institute welcomes further input from members in this area.

Small practice networks exist in a number of chapters and are seen as a valuable resource for members. In those which do not have such networks, members are encouraged to consult their Chapter Manager or Chapter President about starting one.

## **7      *Awards and events***

While positive aspects of the Awards program were highlighted, a number of members felt that categories should expand and develop in alignment with the changing direction of architecture.

Smaller practices also stated that the application cost is a barrier to Awards entry and therefore believe many practices and worthy projects miss out on the opportunity to be peer reviewed and recognised. Categories suggested to address this issue included sub-categories divided into various budgets, allowing more emphasis on promoting small and emerging practices. Some members perceive that high budget projects currently dominate the awards.

The Institute seeks to promote all architecture, whether small or large projects, and thus has a Small Projects category which is designed to be flexible enough to include projects that are either 'small' in terms of area or budget as determined by the jury.

A number of members suggested we open up the opportunity for jury positions to all members, rather than selected high profile architects, while others stated that they would like to see all projects in the awards program visited by the jury. Unfortunately it is not feasible due to time and financial constraints for the state and national juries to visit every project with the number of entries received each year (a total of 954 entries were received in 2012). However, all entries are judged according to the same core judging criteria (see the [Awards, Prizes and Honours Policy](#)) and are required to provide the same information, including plans, photographs, project details and descriptions and all short-listed projects at chapter and national level are visited. At the national level, the National Awards Jury is also required to consult with the chair of each Chapter Awards program so they can be properly briefed on all matters taken into account in the initial judging at chapter or regional level.

There was a request for more publicity in promoting the role of architects in society, and using the Awards program to leverage this.

The Institute endeavours to open up the Awards to the wider public through products such as [INSPIRE](#), the annual publication which acts as a celebration in print of the Australian Institute of Architects' National Architecture Award winners. Last year, we collaborated with *Grand Designs Australia* and the Lifestyle Channel to promote the publication, with a campaign that reached an audience of 100,000+ through the e-newsletter campaign alone. Partnerships with the likes of *WISH Magazine*, that receives exclusive coverage of the National Awards, are also very effective in opening up the Awards program to a wider audience.

## **8 Environment**

Members expressed support for a holistic approach to sustainability (environmental, social and economic) and for sustainability to be an embedded part of the Institute and architectural practice rather than an 'add on'.

The Institute actively promotes the role that the built environment can play in reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. We believe that the built environment is central to the climate change mitigation and adaptation agenda and the Institute has made considerable investment and research into the contribution that design and more efficient operation of buildings can make to promote sustainability within Australia. On a very practical level we have an extensive range of sustainability activity from policy, to education to the National Awards program including:

- The National Sustainability Committee, established as one of our four national standing committees. Its purpose is to be the point of reference on sustainability matters for the Institute and to promote the principles of sustainability to architects, government, and community in all areas of development.
- The Institute's current sustainability and environment policies are being reviewed by the National Sustainability Committee with a view to redraft to address all facets of sustainability including environmental, cultural, social and economic. A draft policy will be submitted to the August National Council meeting.
- The [Environment Design Guide \(EDG\)](#) has been produced for over 17 years. EDG consists of over 250 peer reviewed papers addressing a multitude of sustainability design issues and is the most comprehensive source of knowledge in the industry.
- A relatively recent change has been made to the National Architecture Awards whereby the Sustainable Architecture Award is no longer offered as a separate entry category but instead will be selected from all entrants. All Awards entrants are required to complete a sustainability statement as part of their entry into any category of the Awards program.

- The Australian Achievement in Architecture Awards includes a Leadership in Sustainability Prize, providing a higher level of recognition for individual recipients of prizes.
- Through our participation in the Australian Sustainable Built Environment Council, we contribute to new research to support the role that the built environment can play in reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.
- The Institute's redevelopment of [41 Exhibition Street, Melbourne](#) underscores its commitment to sustainable design as it represents a leading exemplar project which will serve as an example to the market of what is possible both in design excellence and sustainability terms. The development has achieved 5-star Green Star office design v3 certified rating and is targeting 5 star NABERS as well as carbon neutrality over 30 years including embodied carbon, operational carbon, transport and waste components.

## 9 *Institute operations*

We received some very positive comments describing the Institute as a 'model' organisation and 'by far the most professional and organised' among similar organisations, however there were also some suggestions for improving the Institute's organisational structure. Some of the issues raised were matters over which the Institute has only limited influence, such as architectural salaries, heritage, registration, insurance and the role of other organisations such as Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA), Building Designers Association (BDA), and the Association of Consulting Architects Australia (ACAA).

While no single overriding theme emerged from this feedback, the importance of maintaining focus on the 'grass roots' needs of members rather than on bureaucracy or process was mentioned a number of times. The key role of members as volunteers, through various committees and groups, was also emphasised.

Critical insights and suggestions for operational improvement extended from the specific, 'the strategic objectives totally miss the mark' and that it would be 'well worth revisiting the strategic objectives to determine whether they are current' to the very broad – 'the Institute has lost its personal connection to me' and the need for 'more open communication prior to major decisions'.

In 2012 a working group of Institute members and staff developed a [Member Consultation Policy](#) to guide decision-making around processes affecting members. The Member Consultation Policy aims to achieve professional, respectful and constructive engagement with members and stakeholders. The policy adopts a comprehensive and ethical approach, grounded in acknowledged best practice principles.

Other comments on Institute operations related to the need to ensure effective resourcing of chapters.

National Council reviews the [Strategic Plan](#) annually as the first step in the operational planning and budget process. This review of the Strategic Plan is then followed by the development of operational plans by each chapter and business unit setting out the resources required to deliver their planned initiatives. The National Council then approves the budget for each chapter and business unit in line with the Strategic Plan at the December meeting.

Some of the more positive feedback related to the quality of the Institute staff team, and there were a number of comments that recognised a significant improvement in Institute services and support over the past year. The current focus on women in architecture through partnership in the ARC-funded research project, [Equity & Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership](#), and the value generated by our international relationships, were also mentioned positively.

## **10      *Education***

It is clear that some members have issues with the ‘work readiness’ of students and members have suggested the Institute should give guidance to the universities about the skills students need to attain and for the Institute to develop programs that bridge the gap between the student and professional worlds.

Currently the distinction between the ‘education stage’ and the ‘professional stage’ is not clear in the National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA), and over the years architecture schools have urged the Architects Accreditation Council of Australia (AACA) to clarify its expectations of students and graduates of architecture. A review of the NCSA is currently underway as part of a five-year review cycle and the Institute is coordinating a response involving chapter and National education committees.

The issue of work readiness generated a lot of feedback from members and indicates a lack of internship opportunities available to students. The opportunity for gaining real work experience through internship is highly valuable; however, opportunities are very rare. Some of the chapters currently offer mentoring programs and the Membership team is reviewing our approach to mentoring to assist graduates to gain professional skills and experience.

The ‘[Agony Architects](#)’ program (a series of six short films of interviews with architects) was designed to provide guidance to students and graduates with real life examples and experience from practicing architects about attaining a first job, putting a folio together, interview techniques and other tips about starting out in architecture. A second series is in development on the theme of gaining registration. We are very grateful to members who donated their time to be part of the first series.

The [PALS](#) pre-registration course has been developed for graduates to cover the full scope of issues that architects deal with on a daily basis. The objectives of the PALS program are:

- to consolidate knowledge and skills in architectural practice as a sound foundation for successful completion of the Architectural Practice Examination
- to improve capabilities more broadly in day-to-day practice within the profession
- to act as a refresher course for those coming back to the profession or moving here from another country.

## **11 Archicentre**

The key theme of feedback in this category was that members would like Archicentre to focus on support for members, and could be a conduit for support of small practices as well. Members also suggested Archicentre needs to generate more work in all States and Territories as well as uphold high service delivery standards.

With the recent integration of Archicentre into the Institute has come a range of opportunities to rebuild and refocus the Archicentre business, and also explore opportunities for sharing of services and membership support across the Institute. Over the next year, Archicentre will focus on becoming more aligned with the Institute's strategy, re-engaging with its valuable architects' network around Australia, rebuilding the Archicentre brand and generating more high quality work for members.

## **12 Membership**

Some feedback expressed the view that members should automatically gain access to products such as Acumen and EDG along with more substantial discounts to events and CPD as part of their membership. We are sensitive to the costs associated with membership and strive to minimise them where possible, without compromising quality. The [A+](#) membership initiative introduced in 2009 which has grown to 1865 A+ practices and 4705 A+ members in four years, was designed to bundle services for convenience and cost savings and to allow all eligible staff of a practice to become members.

It is worth noting that the Institute recently restructured the graduate membership offering so that it now includes access to [Acumen](#), [EDG](#), [HR+](#) and free live streaming of the [National Seminar Series](#). Student membership now also incorporates access to Acumen and EDG and '[Agony Architects](#)'. The awareness of benefits received as an A+ Member and a lack of member engagement with the Institute were also areas of some concern. Supporting A+ members to get the most out of their membership has recently been an area of focus for us and the membership team have developed a handbook that articulates the various [A+ member benefits and how to access them](#). The membership team is also happy to arrange in-office training to support practices to best utilise their membership.

Following feedback about A+ we are exploring options with SAI Global to address the limitations placed on access to Australian Standards, particularly the lack of ability to print individual standards.

There was some concern expressed about the low level of engagement with overseas international members, particularly in Europe. In 2005, through the establishment of our International Area Committee, we increased our engagement with overseas members by providing networking opportunities and offering an enhanced membership tailored toward their specific needs. An event to recognise the international entrants in the National Architecture Awards program was held last year alongside the World Architecture Festival and as a result, entrants in the international category of the Awards program have more than doubled this year. We are always looking for viable ways to increase participation and interaction with our overseas members and welcome feedback in this regard.

Finally there was some feedback about the timing of membership renewals (Dec/Jan) and the limited payment methods available. To address such concerns a Direct Debit option has been introduced as a payment method for membership fees and A+ fees are payable quarterly.

## ***13 Communications***

We received feedback on various aspects of our communications with members.

### **Website**

The Institute's website has undergone a major redevelopment and relaunch since this survey and this should have addressed many of the concerns noted in the feedback. The new site is designed to be easily navigated and directs visitors to their chosen destination clearly and efficiently, as well as effectively representing the Institute and architecture. Interactivity is important and the development of member profile pages and dashboards is in planning. Any comments on the new site can be directed to [digital@architecture.com.au](mailto:digital@architecture.com.au)

### **E-communication**

We are currently conducting a review of our e-communications. Issues that we are addressing are frequency, design, content, coordination and culture. We will be rebranding e-alerts according to subject matter to ensure members can easily identify the information they are interested in and relevant to them. Chapters will be the primary source of e-communications.

### **Social media**

Our use of social media was perceived as limited by a couple of members. Over the past six months since the survey, our use of and presence across social media has increased significantly. We are very

active on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and are now looking to increase our presence on LinkedIn and Google+.

## **SMS**

A member was keen for us to increase our use of SMS marketing for major events. We do use SMS on occasion – and will continue to do so where necessary.

## **Surveys**

We were asked to be more open in our approach to surveys – to provide more opportunity for comment and feedback. We do value member feedback and endeavour to address the issues and concerns our members might have in relation to the Institute. In 2012 we surveyed graduates of architecture on their views about the Institute, the profession and their aspirations. This led to a significant change to the services offered to graduates and to the establishment of EmAGN (the graduate network) as an official committee of the institute with representation on National Council. We intend to continue surveying members annually through this Membership Survey and to report back on the results. Stay tuned for the A+ Members Survey coming soon.

## **App**

The newly launched iPad App is the Institute's first step at developing a tablet application highlighting the Institute's products and services. The app has been developed in partnership with a third party provider, and as the technology progresses, the app and partnership will also evolve. This is an opportunity to platform the Institute and indeed the profession on a new digital format and the Institute is excited and eager to develop this further. The app featured at the National Architecture Awards in 2012 and at the National Architecture Conference in 2013.

## **Architecture Australia**

One of the major aims of *Architecture Australia* is to promote architecture – by showcasing the work of Australian architects. Also, its popular Dossier section offers a forum for meaningful discourse on issues affecting the profession. As a printed publication, however, lead times can impact the relevance of issues. For this reason Architecture Media has developed [ArchitectureAU](#), an online publication and resource that functions as a companion to the printed magazines. This site (and its bi-weekly newsletter) is very effective in covering industry news, up-to-the-minute commentary, reviews and profiles.

We are currently looking into providing *Architecture Australia* in electronic format to members.

## ***THANK YOU***

The Institute always welcomes feedback from members and would like to thank everyone who took part in this survey. You can be confident that we take your feedback seriously and that all suggestions and ideas are on the table as we strive to deliver a better organisation to members.

We encourage members to become involved in Institute committees, events, Awards, surveys, CPD and so forth, and to contribute to your Institute 'to help make the world a better place through architecture'.