

Surviving Brexit: Five things every practice needs to prepare for

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Architects need to closely follow Brexit negotiations on issues such as residency rights and materials to cope with the UK's rupture from Europe, a former top official at the Bank of England has warned

After more than three years of delays and negotiations, the UK is finally set to leave the European Union at 11pm tonight (31 January) and move into an 11-month 'transition period'.

Preparing architects for the year ahead, David Green, director of Belsize Architects and former head of the European division of the Bank of England, said: 'All sizes of practice will need to stay alert to how the negotiations evolve and what they mean for their own practices and, probably more importantly, their clients.'

As the UK formally leaves the EU and begins trade negotiations, Green set out five key questions for architecture practices to ask themselves:

1. **Are my existing and potential future staff entitled to live and work here?**
2. **Are my own and my staff's professional qualifications recognised?**
3. **Am I going to be able to specify EU-sourced materials that will satisfy UK requirements?**
4. **Will work on site be able to rely on just-in-time delivery?**
5. **How will Brexit affect my clients, their willingness to commission and their ability to pay?**

He described the issue of qualifications as 'a moving target' and warned people to be alert. 'There are processes to be gone through for existing residents and employees, but the future is still subject to negotiation. So, keep an eye out.'

Currently EU and UK materials standards are the same, he said. 'But the government has said that it wants divergence of standards, without saying in which areas or how or when. This is not just subject to the imminent negotiation, but will be an issue for the indefinite future.'

On just-in-time delivery, he said it was unclear what Brexit might mean in terms of schedules and work on site: 'There will be new checks to be gone through and perhaps tariffs to pay. Both price and delivery times will become less certain, but it is not possible to say now how they will be affected.'

But the impact on clients could be the biggest change. 'The chancellor has said recently there are bound to be losers from Brexit and from decisions made by the government to diverge from EU standards,' he said. 'Are my clients among those affected, or other firms in their supply chain, or consequently those they employ? It will be necessary to keep the ear much closer to the ground to find out which clients are affected, how and when.'

While he urged practices to heed these points, he added: 'Nothing can substitute for practices remaining constantly alert to the changes Brexit will bring. The future is likely to be very different from the past.'

Meanwhile, the RIBA has warned the government of the consequences of a trade deal that denied market access to the UK's architecture practices.

With one in five ARB-registered architects coming from Europe and 6 per cent of construction products sourced from EU countries, the future trade agreement was crucial, the institute said.

It urged the government to urgently:

- strike a new agreement over mutual recognition of qualifications, allowing EU architects to train and practise in the UK and vice versa;
- secure a Trade in Services Agreement that enables the UK and European market for architecture services to grow; and
- ensure that high standards for construction products continue and goods can be easily imported and exported.

In respect of visas, Jo Bacon, managing partner at Allies and Morrison and RIBA vice president international, said that about 40 per cent of employees at Allies and Morrison come from overseas, and 20 per cent of projects are located outside the UK.

She said: 'Our work contributes to a vital UK income stream of almost £450 million per annum secured by RIBA chartered practices across the world. It is therefore absolutely vital that we continue to have access to new work and the best talent globally after we exit the European Union.'

Barbara Kaucky, co-founder of Erect Architecture and chair of the RIBA Small Practice Group, added: 'Qualifying salary thresholds should be kept low and immigration procedures should be affordable and straightforward. We are currently employing an architectural assistant under a Tier 2 visa and are finding the process admin-heavy and expensive.'