

Architects must get to grips with working outside the Single Market

5 JANUARY 2021 - BY DAVID GREEN



Architects looking to work in the EU or to employ EU nationals face new barriers after the UK failed to secure mutual recognition of qualifications in Brexit negotiations, writes *David Green*

The trade deal the UK has reached with the EU is unique in that it deals with by how much barriers to trade are to be raised, rather than reduced, which is the normal aim of free trade agreements. It is also unusual in that its focus is exclusively on trade in goods, rather than in services, which is where the bulk of the UK's trade with the EU arises, including, of course, in architecture and related services.

The ramifications will be extensive and will also take time to emerge. They will affect different practices in different ways, depending on the markets in which they seek to work. As the AJ [has already reported](#), UK architects wishing to practice in the EU will now have to seek recognition of their qualifications on a country-by-country basis. Architects are not alone in facing these new barriers, which also cover other professions, and are a consequence of the UK failing even to ask for mutual recognition.

There are also issues with permission to work. Some countries are reported to be insisting, at least in other professional disciplines, that there should also be residence in order for qualifications to be recognised, and there are new requirements for visas. This will be a field for continuing negotiation and the practices concerned will need to keep close to the discussions the RIBA is likely to have with European regulators.

These new frictions only impinge directly on those practices seeking to work in the EU. But all practices which employ or are seeking to employ EU nationals are affected. Here, prompted by vigorous lobbying, the UK government is putting in place arrangements for recognition of EU qualifications and also for a somewhat more liberal regime for immigration for architects than originally envisaged. However, this will need to be watched carefully over time as, of course, much of the pressure for Brexit came from those who wanted British nationals to replace EU nationals in as much employment as possible.

We all now know about frictions in relation to cross-border trade in goods, which may cause cost increases, delays and, in some cases, a decision that the effort is no longer worth it. It is too early to know what the impact will be on material supplies.

What we do know is that nearly all forecasts for the economy say that Brexit is going to make a bad situation worse. The timing remains unclear. For instance, the fact that fewer City jobs than originally expected have moved does not at all mean that there are not more moves to come.

So, the bottom line remains: keep very close to the finances of your clients, and indeed prospective clients, because the financial climate is not going to improve any time soon, nor is the outlook for architects' fees.

David Green is a director of Belsize Architects

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