

# GOLD

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## **GOLD STANDARD OR FOOL'S GOLD?: THE REGISTRATION OF ARCHITECTS**

*Without registration one cannot legally use the title architect, practice alone, nor enter for awards run by the institutes of architecture in many countries, including Australia, New Zealand and the UK. There was a struggle in the nineteenth century within the growing architecture profession in the UK between those wanting to consolidate and regulate the occupation and those who considered architecture to be an art that should be unsullied by concepts of professionalism. Registration was a pivot point for these two factions, with the former pro and the latter anti, but was finally instituted in the early decades of the twentieth century in Australia, New Zealand and the UK.*

*However, the split present at the beginning of the profession continues and recent research, which will be detailed in the paper, shows the degree to which registration is still a point of contention in architecture. For some, it is the gold standard denoting they are a 'proper' architect; for others, it has very little value and is irrelevant for their lives and work in architecture. These contrary estimations of the worth or value of registration to the individual architect are the subject of this paper. Drawing on historical and contemporary sources, mainly from Australia but also New Zealand and the UK, this research reveals further dimensions to the seemingly bifurcated history and perception of registration. Rather than a stable standard (which proponents of registration as a gold standard would maintain), registers of architects are remarkably fluid with architects moving regularly on and off them.*

*In discussing the value of registration in the context of its history and perception, this paper asks whether it might be a gold standard or only ever fool's gold.*

Registration sets the benchmark that determines whether someone legally call themselves an architect and work independently, as such it might be described as the gold standard for architects. This paper discusses registration as a gold standard for individual architects mainly in the Australian context, but also considering that of Britain and New Zealand. As former British colonies, the Australian and New Zealand architecture professions descend from the history of the profession in the United Kingdom.

### Forming a Profession

Traditionally, professions are described as a particular way of organising the work of an occupation that is based in specialised, complex, and esoteric knowledge and skills learned via a lengthy period of tertiary education followed by work training and experience.<sup>1</sup> Membership of the profession is achieved through formal testing of that knowledge base and experience in a sometimes legally mandated licensing process, and through the joining of a professional body, which sets a code of ethics and behaviour. All these measures are considered to assure the public that the professional person has reached a certain standard and that the public is protected from the unqualified and unprincipled.

Underlying this pragmatic description of a profession are layers of ideology, class aspiration, and self-justification. Professionalisation involved the staking out a territory of work and strictly controlling the entry to it and was therefore to some degree a class strategy.<sup>2</sup> During the nineteenth century, a number of emerging middle-class occupations sought to become professions in order to attain the gentleman status associated with the much older trio of learned professions: law, medicine, and the clergy.<sup>3</sup> To counter suspicions that the professions were about self-interest, the idea that professions provided a sophisticated and high value service to society was firmly established at this time. Daniel Duman argues this 'disinterested' service became a "moral imperative" and "an article of faith" for professions.<sup>4</sup> Overall, Julia Evetts concludes that the professions are, at best, a useful and "uniquely desirable method of regulating, monitoring and providing complex services to the public" and, at worst, an "ideology [leading to] market closure and monopoly control of work."<sup>5</sup>

Although architecture claims an ancient history, it only began to become a profession in the nineteenth century following the pattern outlined above. Previously, architecture in the UK had been the province of some talented amateurs, but predominantly building-craftsmen who both designed and built structures.<sup>6</sup> There were a number of factors that coalesced in early half of the nineteenth century that made the formalizing of architecture as a profession seem necessary. Industrialisation heralded a period of great change and consequent chaos in the building industry: it had brought with it new materials and the science of engineering. It also led to economic growth that resulted in more complex buildings. Additionally, building regulations were instituted to mitigate poor living and working conditions caused by industrialisation. These factors exceeded the capacity of the existing system to produce buildings. In particular, Andrew Saint argues, literacy was required to interpret and apply regulations.<sup>7</sup> Literacy means education and is the first step towards establishing a profession.

The development of the education of architects followed a particular pattern: from self-taught to pupillage or articles, from classes that supplemented articles to courses that complemented them, from classes and courses being casual to formal, and from part time to full time.<sup>8</sup> Each step made architecture more formalised and coherent as a profession. Supporting and sometimes generating these moves were the professional institutes and societies of architects that formed in each country. The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) was established in 1834, gaining royal charter in 1837.<sup>9</sup> Institutes in the individual states in Australia formed followed the example of the RIBA over the latter half of the nineteenth century, but did not become a national institute until 1930 (also receiving a royal charter).<sup>10</sup> And the New Zealand Institute of Architects (NZIA) formed in 1905.<sup>11</sup>

The next step in securing the profession was legally-mandated registration, which the institutes all supported. However, this was resisted by those who considered architecture to be the province of those who were already gentlemen, rather than those who aspired to such status.<sup>12</sup> For these men, art was the only basis for architecture and any formality was a restriction of (if not seriously detrimental to) the individual artistic imperative. Others saw registration as a means to stake out the domain of architecture from the encroachment of others in the building industry and to set a trustworthy standard for architects in a time of great change. Saint describes how, in a curious blurring, it was the art aspect of building that was staked out as the area of expertise (market) of an architect, although it was an art underwritten and supported by technical knowledge.<sup>13</sup> More accurately, design as a "literate and highly esteemed skill" was promoted as the province of the architect.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the debates for and against registration were typically framed in oppositional terms as art versus the profession,<sup>15</sup> and lasted decades. Despite the resistance, legislation for the registration of architects was passed in New Zealand in 1913, in Australia for all states between 1921 and 1939,<sup>16</sup> and the UK in 1931.<sup>17</sup>

### Architecture as a Profession

The process of professionalisation is ongoing and dynamic as professions must maintain themselves and adjust to changing historical and jurisdictional specificities and challenges.<sup>18</sup> Mirko Noordegraaf describes three mechanisms of professionalisation that make and remake members of a profession, and structure and legitimate their existence.<sup>19</sup> First are cognitive mechanisms of knowledge and skills, which begin with education and training and are continued by conferences and specialised media. Second are normative mechanisms, including membership criteria, selection criteria, entry barriers, certification and codes of conduct, which include sanctions and discipline. Finally, there are symbolic mechanisms: the rites of passage, stories, heroes, codes of ethics, and ideals. Amanda Roan et al analyse architecture in terms of these mechanisms and conclude that, while the architecture profession is strong in the first and third, it has relatively weak structural normative mechanisms.<sup>20</sup> These control the ability to work in a particular occupation and include membership of professional bodies and registration.

This structural weakness is evident in statistics. Looking at the institutes of architecture, not all registered architects belong. In Australia, barely half (57%) of them belong to the Institute.<sup>21</sup> In the UK, the RIBA estimates they capture 75%.<sup>22</sup> The NZIA claims a higher proportion at 90%,<sup>23</sup> but still not all.

Moreover, not all those working in architecture are registered. Undermining registration as a gold standard is that in Australia, New Zealand and the UK the profession has not managed to limit who can do the work of architecture.<sup>24</sup> Different countries have different degrees of restriction, but for these three countries registration simply protects the title of 'architect'.<sup>25</sup> Because of this, it is perfectly possible to work in architecture without registration and many do. Just over a third of the Australian architectural workforce (as counted by the Census) is not registered.<sup>26</sup> There is also a well-documented low uptake of registration among architecture graduates, in Australia and internationally. For New South Wales, Rob Cowdroy concludes that "the proportion of graduates eventually registering is unlikely to reach thirty percent."<sup>27</sup> More recently in South Australia, Susan Shannon and colleagues tracked every graduate from the state's schools between 1999 and 2011 and found a 26% registration rate.<sup>28</sup> In a similar 2010 NZ study, Errol Haarhoff found an average of 38% registration for those who graduated between 1987 and 1999; no individual graduation year exceeded 50%.<sup>29</sup> Although this might indicate that many graduates of architecture do not work in the profession, none of the authors suggest that this is the case.

Compared to population growth there has been a stabilising of the number of registered architects per capita in Australia over the last thirty years. (Figure 1) The federal system in Australia means that some architects are registered in more than one state and therefore counted more than once; nonetheless, the overall pattern is the same.

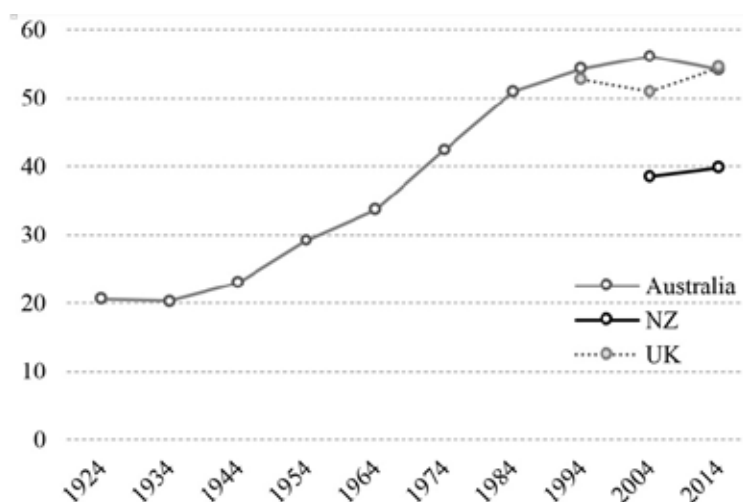


FIGURE 1 Number of registered architects for every 100,000 people, Australia, UK and NZ

Sources: see footnotes <sup>30 31 32</sup>

Although there is less historical data for the UK and NZ, there appears to be a similar levelling. The Fees Bureau, which collates statistics on the architecture profession in the UK, notes that the number of registered architects there remained relatively constant from 1989 to 2009, growing by only 7%. They call this “a remarkably stable number, considering how workloads have mushroomed.”<sup>33</sup> That stable number is a result of architects leaving the register, rather than limited growth. According to the UK ARB web site there is “almost constant movement in the Register.”<sup>34</sup> The extent of this movement can be seen in historical UK registration data shown in Table 1:

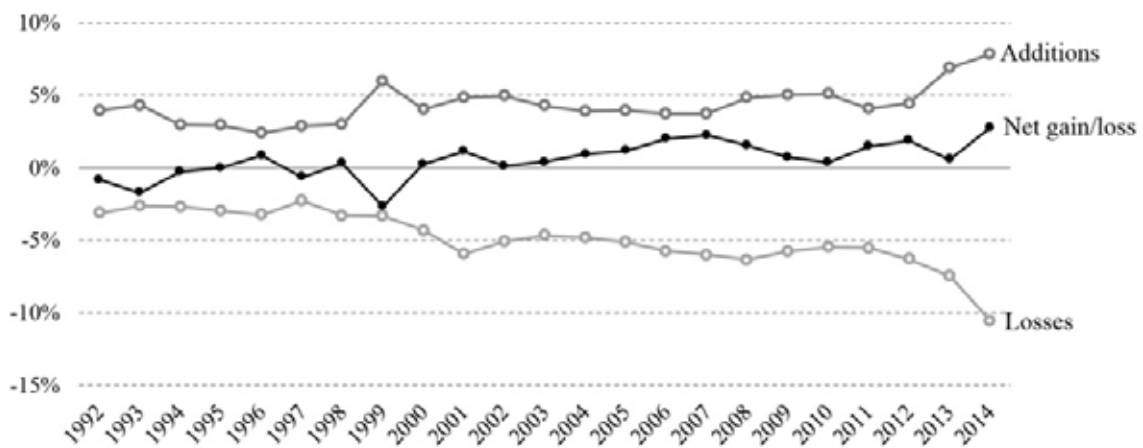
TABLE 1 UK Architects Register, Additions and Subtractions, 1991–2013

	Off the register				On the register			Nett gain/loss	As a % of the full register				
	Deaths	Resign	Remove	Total	Reinstate	New	Total		Deaths	Resign	Remove/Reinstate	New	Growth
1991	157	935	613	1,705	129	918	1,047	-658					
1992	144	495	595	1,234	281	700	981	-253	0.5%	1.6%	1.0%	2.2%	-0.8%
1993	119	416	812	1,347	204	610	814	-533	0.4%	1.3%	2.0%	2.0%	-1.7%
1994	121	355	424	900	246	572	818	-82	0.4%	1.2%	0.6%	1.9%	-0.3%
1995	123	370	402	895	206	691	897	2	0.4%	1.2%	0.6%	2.3%	0.0%
1996	138	193	395	726	229	765	994	268	0.5%	0.6%	0.5%	2.5%	0.9%
1997	119	323	447	889	187	507	694	-195	0.4%	1.1%	0.8%	1.6%	-0.6%
1998	134	569	208	911	193	811	1,004	93	0.4%	1.9%	0.0%	2.7%	0.3%
1999	132	1,112	586	1,830	149	864	1,013	-817	0.4%	3.6%	1.4%	2.8%	-2.7%
2000	101	380	727	1,208	304	980	1,284	76	0.3%	1.3%	1.4%	3.3%	0.3%
2001	77	480	892	1,449	518	1,265	1,783	334	0.3%	1.6%	1.3%	4.2%	1.1%
2002	121	657	722	1,500	412	1,124	1,536	36	0.4%	2.2%	1.0%	3.7%	0.1%
2003	98	610	585	1,293	289	1,128	1,417	124	0.3%	2.0%	1.0%	3.7%	0.4%
2004	81	486	615	1,182	351	1,115	1,466	284	0.3%	1.6%	0.9%	3.7%	0.9%
2005	100	472	638	1,210	425	1,146	1,571	361	0.3%	1.5%	0.7%	3.7%	1.2%
2006	70	438	651	1,159	493	1,285	1,778	619	0.2%	1.4%	0.5%	4.2%	2.0%
2007	74	429	680	1,183	502	1,391	1,893	710	0.2%	1.4%	0.6%	4.4%	2.3%
2008	85	719	747	1,551	550	1,496	2,046	495	0.3%	2.2%	0.6%	4.6%	1.5%
2009	65	768	819	1,652	509	1,377	1,886	234	0.2%	2.3%	0.9%	4.2%	0.7%
2010	78	746	853	1,677	542	1,261	1,803	126	0.2%	2.3%	0.9%	3.8%	0.4%
2011	49	504	792	1,345	582	1,244	1,826	481	0.1%	1.5%	0.6%	3.8%	1.5%
2012	75	664	750	1,489	633	1,481	2,114	625	0.2%	2.0%	0.3%	4.4%	1.9%
2013	66	917	1,358	2,341	1,031	1,504	2,535	194	0.2%	2.7%	1.0%	4.4%	0.6%
2014	41	598	2,043	2,682	1,718	1,906	3,624	942	0.1%	1.7%	0.9%	5.6%	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,368</b>	<b>13,636</b>	<b>17,354</b>	<b>33,358</b>	<b>10,683</b>	<b>26,824</b>	<b>36,824</b>	<b>3,466</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>
<b>% total</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>52%</b>		<b>29%</b>	<b>71%</b>			<b>Average yearly</b>				

Source: Data compiled from UKARB, “Annual Reports,” 2000–2014, *Architects Registration Board UK*, <http://www5w.arb.org.uk/annual-report>.

Over the twenty years shown, death accounted for an average of 7% of the total losses for the register. Just over half were removed, primarily due to non-payment of annual fees, and an average 62% of those were reinstated. However, despite the work involved in becoming registered and its value as a benchmark, a significant proportion (38%, amounting to over 6,500 people over the more than twenty years) chose to not maintain their registration. More than twice that number (13,636 and 41% of the losses) simply resigned. While new registrations added to the register each year by an average of 3.5%, this figure was markedly undercut by these losses, so that the average yearly growth was just 0.5%, although year on year there is considerable fluctuation. Figure 2 shows this.

FIGURE 2 Percentage gains and losses to the UK register 1992–2014



Source: As for Table 1.

Australia does not have equivalent data; however, Table 2 shows a calculation combining data from the registers and new admissions for most of the states since 2004.<sup>35</sup>

TABLE 2 Estimation of gains and losses to the Australian registers, 2004–2012

2004 registers count	10,266
Additions 2004 to 2012	5,129
Expected total	15,395
Actual 2012 registers count	10,757
Difference (loss)	4,638
Nett increase	491
% additions since 2004	50%
% loss since 2004	45%
% nett gain	5%

Sources: 2004 data from Whitman, *Going Places*, 31; 2012 data and admissions data sourced from state registration boards, email request June 2012.

As with the data for the UK, the number of admissions is undermined by the numbers of those leaving the registers generating an overall modest growth of the registers. The UK ARB argues that people leave the register because of retirement and family, while others leave architecture altogether.<sup>36</sup> But it is also possible that architects continue in

practice and simply relinquish registration, a possibility that is discussed later in the paper.

### A Note About Gender

There is much current discussion regarding the situation of women in architecture.<sup>37</sup> An activist group in San Francisco pointedly called itself 'The Missing 32%' to highlight the large and continuing gap between the numbers of women students and registered architects.<sup>38</sup> Certainly this gap is significant, but when considering the growth of registers over time by gender, the growth in the number of women is substantial, Table 3:

TABLE 3 Growth of registers by gender, Australia, New Zealand and the UK

	Australia				New Zealand				United Kingdom			
	Female	Male	Total	% F	Female	Male	Total	% F	Female	Male	Total	% F
<b>2004</b>	1,593	9,662	11,255	14.2%	203	1,361	1,564	13.0%	4,674	25,889	30,563	15.3%
<b>2014</b>	2,827	9,895	12,722	22.2%	354	1,439	1,793	19.7%	8,857	26,300	35,157	25.2%
<b>Difference</b>	1,234	233	1,467		151	78	229		4,183	411	4,594	
<b>% increase</b>	<b>77.5%</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>13.0%</b>		<b>74.4%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	<b>14.6%</b>		<b>89.5%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	

Sources: As for Figure 1.

There is a strikingly similar pattern between the three countries: female registered architects accounted for most of the growth of the registers over the period, and the number of registered men remained relatively static. This growth is despite the proportion of women becoming registered not matching their graduation proportion. Haarhoff found that women were significantly less likely to register than men (17% of the women and 27% of the men had registered).<sup>39</sup> Shannon et al also found gender disparity, although not as marked: 22% of the South Australian women graduates had registered and 27% of the men had.<sup>40</sup>

Table 4 shows the Australian data of Table 2 by gender to show in more detail the dynamics of women's numerical growth.

TABLE 4 Estimation of gains and losses to the Australian registers by gender, 2004–2012

	Female	Male	Total	% Female
2004 Registers count	1,490	8,776	10,266	14.5%
New to registers 2004 to 2012	1,578	3,551	5,129	30.8%
Expected total	3,068	12,327	15,395	19.9%
Actual 2012 Registers count	2,265	8,492	10,757	21.1%
Difference (loss)	803	3,835	4,638	17.3%
Nett increase	775	-284	491	
% Additions since 2004	106%	40%	50%	
% Losses since 2004	54%	44%	45%	
% Nett gain	52%	-3%	5%	

Sources: As for Table 2.

While a substantial proportion of women did leave the registers (54%), more entered the registers. Unlike the men, where (for this period of the data) the numbers actually dropped. The loss of women is likely to be due to family since there are very few retirement-age women architects. But retirement is unlikely to be claiming the nearly 4,000 men who left over the eight years, they are either leaving architecture altogether or relinquishing their registration (as might be a proportion of the women).

Dana Cuff calls registration a "rite of transition," marking the moment when an individual can be legally called an architect and work independently.<sup>41</sup> Given that registration can on these terms be seen as a key moment in the process of becoming an architect and that it is important enough that it represents the official count of architects, both the reluctance to register and that some might relinquish it are further signs of the structural weakness of the profession and lessen the ability of registration to be considered the gold standard for the profession.

### Perceptions of Registration

As part of a wider research project, perceptions of registration were investigated in the staff of a number of large Australian architectural firms.<sup>42</sup> Of the more than 200 staff eligible to be registered across the firms, almost two-thirds were, with just over a third not. Although this is a relatively small sample and particular conditions might apply in large firms, this proportion of non-registered does roughly match that for the profession as a whole.<sup>43</sup> Notably, 10% of those who were registered had relinquished it. Questions about registration were asked of all staff and their answers reveal a series of perceptions, some conflicting, including what registration assesses and how it does so, its necessity, and its meaning?

### What Does Registration Assess?

The legislation under which registration operates is often framed as consumer protection. To that end, and to a large extent, the process tests applicants on the legal liabilities of the building process to ensure that candidates have reached appropriate levels of competency and would be able to practice independently without harming clients or bringing the profession into disrepute. In Australia the process has three parts: a logbook of the candidate's experience, a written exam, and an interview.<sup>44</sup> Because of this focus on legal and procedural matters, it is not, and never has been, a measure of design or creative ability. Paul Jones argues that the architecture profession valorises some aspects of what architects do and devalues others, and the most-valorised is the 'symbolic logic of aesthetics'.<sup>45</sup> This argument is confirmed by a number of studies of architects that stress the importance of being creative for architects' identity.<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, even though registration marks the achievement of a standard and confers particular rights, it is not a measure of a key cultural value for architects. John Cullen observes that the process of professionalisation (which includes registration) is a process towards standardisation, but standardisation is contrary to creative work.<sup>47</sup> This tension present at the very beginning of the profession continues to impact on perceptions of registration. When the ideal is no standard, then even a gold standard is suspect.

### How Does Registration Assess?

A number of those spoken with maintained that the registration process seemed to assess something other than the apparent matters of registration - matters even more removed from the perceived cultural core of architecture. The written exam was noted as an exercise in English comprehension rather than knowledge, but, in particular, the interview component of the registration process was seen by some as highly problematic.

Garry Stevens argues that interviewing is the most effective way to assess the individual's embodiment of the values and identity of the profession.<sup>48</sup> Because of this, it is a mechanism whereby covert or unconscious biases can operate to exclude particular people. In the nineteenth century, class played an important part in the professionalisation of architects and this exclusion was overt; in this century, the exclusion is more subtle, more unconscious. For two interviewees who had failed this final part of the assessment, there was a suspicion that not being Anglo-Australian



contributed to their failure. A number of women spoke of either delaying registration until they felt absolutely certain of their knowledge or of discouraging interviews. Susan Shannon et al likewise record women describing registration as more difficult because of their gender.<sup>49</sup> Amanda Roan et al report specific instances of gender bias in the registration interview process.<sup>50</sup> Despite declarations of impartiality, interviewers are a product of their culture and are therefore likely to be introducing bias into their evaluations.

That registration is partly a determination of whether someone is capable of working independently seemed to be used specifically to exclude those in large practices:

I actually sat it four years ago and failed. They said that the process was for people wanting to run their own firm and my experience was always working in teams. (Male, 11–15 graduated)

I did get a weird comment [...] “Well, you don’t always get to work on \$20 million projects.” [...] Most of the projects I work on are at least fifteen million plus. [...] I just think: you just don’t really understand what I do! (Female, 11–15 graduated)

In these comments, registration is revealed as reinforcing an idea of the architect as an individual practitioner - team work does not count for the interviewers in these cases. Such ideas support the model of the nineteenth-century individual art-architect. Despite registration not assessing design ability, here it more subtly reinforces a similar message through excluding those whose experience is in teams working on large projects.

### Is Registration Necessary?

Given these complex cultural considerations, those spoken with placed variable value on registration. For a significant number, it was simply not necessary: one can “live without it” (Male, 6–10 years graduated). For others, there was an appreciation of the insight the process gave them into the workings of the profession. Those who considered registration important spoke of a personal sense of achievement, of ‘closing the loop’ or ‘completing the picture.’ For others, being labelled an ‘architectural graduate’ indefinitely was sufficient motivation.

There was a notable gender difference: unlike in the wider architectural community, the young women in these firms were registering earlier and more frequently than the young men. In an analysis of studies researching women’s careers, Deborah O’Neil et al found that qualifications and credentials counted significantly more for women than men in the progress of their careers.<sup>51</sup> In the studied firms over a two year period, more of the women were registered at the time of their promotion than men. Registration constitutes a credential in architecture, and it seems that the women understood its value. One senior manager spoke of registration signalling that someone was ambitious and willing to step up; another that they encouraged “registration as another thing that would help you become promoted.” However, the message was that it might be useful but not necessary.

There was also a perception that being registered did not affect the project opportunities an individual was given: “I wanted to be more professional. [...] But then [when you’re registered] nobody cares about it. Seriously, *nobody!*” (Male, 11–15 years graduated). In addition, some registered informants commented that continuing professional development (CPD) requirements were onerous and were considering de-registering. One said that he only maintained his registration because the firm paid the annual fee.

Overall, for a sizeable proportion of those spoken with, there was often insufficient incentive to register. Many were outright sceptical of the benefits, especially as the process was spoken of as being daunting, expensive, and time-consuming: “it seems to be a lot of effort to what advantage?” (Male, 6–10 years graduated). In addition, those who had considerable responsibility for projects were working long hours and thus found they had no time for the process.

### What Does Registration Mean?

Some informants considered registration to constitute the completion of their architectural education, and others considered it signalling the attainment of a particular level and type of practical experience, which was described as “being a ‘real’ architect” (in effect, the gold standard). The two are related as both relate to learning and that learning is necessarily supported by practice experience; nonetheless, some held more strongly that the experience was more important than the book work and others the opposite. Whichever end of the continuum between the two positions someone tended towards had an effect: those who thought it signalled learning generally registered within a few years of graduating, and those who considered it a mark of their experience tended to register much later.<sup>52</sup> Later registration raised the stakes for the consequences of failure, and a number of informants argued the registration process became harder with more experience.

While registration legally (structurally) confers the title ‘architect’, within these larger offices it had much less structural significance, having only a tangential impact on promotion and opportunities (although more so for women); it was not a prerequisite for advancement, nor even perceived to be required to affirm identity as an architect. Registration was, therefore, culturally not especially meaningful as a gold standard.

This structural weakness and cultural ambivalence helps explain why people might allow their registration to lapse. For such people (10% of those registered) registration no longer mattered and was dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders. This suggests that while the act of becoming registered might have once had some relevance, it did not have ongoing currency. If this is a pattern repeated across the profession beyond these firms, it is another indication of overall structural and cultural weakness.

### Registration as Gold Standard

Registration does not encompass all of those in the profession. It cannot measure the quality that architects consider to be the very core or essence of their profession – creativity; it is structurally weak because it does not protect the work of architects; and the process is prone to exclusion on bases other than the competencies it maintains to protect. Registration’s weakness is demonstrable in both statistics and perceptions and means that it occupies an ambivalent place in the profession and it therefore cannot be regarded as a true gold standard.

Yet registration is also fiercely defended. In the early 1990s, the Warne Report in the UK recommended that the legal protection of the title be removed, judging it to be largely irrelevant to the standing of the profession. But the membership of the RIBA emphatically said ‘no’.<sup>53</sup> In NZ, when, in the early 2000s, a new Building Act threatened to include architects with building practitioners, architects mobilised resulting in the 2005 Architects Act confirming protection of title. Similar threats in different states in Australia have also been fought off. Since the work of an architect is not protected, registration appears to give at least some acknowledgement of the years of study and experience that being registered represent and that aspect continues to be important to many in the profession. In that respect and for some, it remains some kind of gold standard, but one that is a little tarnished.

### Endnotes

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