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Recent developments in architectural policy across the UK and Ireland

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This paper describes recent developments in architectural policy across the UK and Ireland.

Key Points

- In UK terms, Northern Ireland has a relatively large architecture sector.
- DCAL has had a policy called *Architecture and the Built Environment* since 2006, and a Ministerial Advisory Group since 2007.
- DCMS does not currently have an architecture policy for England or the UK, but in 2013 commissioned the Farrell Review.
- The Scottish Government has recently published a new architecture and place policy statement.
- A number of features are common to the architecture policies in place in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, including:
 - an intention to incentivise good, sustainable and efficient design beyond the cheapest construction option;
 - the consideration of the broader built environment rather than buildings designed and constructed on a case-by-case basis;
 - the need to make clear the relationship between architecture bodies and planning bodies;
 - the degree to which the public, special interest groups and local councils are consulted and have input into key architectural projects;
 - and the ways in which awareness of architecture is embedded within the education system.

Executive Summary

This paper describes recent developments in architectural policy across the UK and Ireland. Specifically, the policies in place in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland are described.

Compared with other areas of the UK, Northern Ireland has a relatively large architecture sector. DCAL has had a policy called *Architecture and the Built Environment* since 2006, and a Ministerial Advisory Group since 2007.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) does not currently have an architecture policy for England or the UK, but in 2013 commissioned the Farrell Review to assess issues such as design quality, ways in which the economic benefits of architecture could be maximized, the role of cultural heritage, and the extent to which education, outreach and skills could be improved. One outcome of this review may be an architecture and built environment policy.

The Scottish Government has recently published a new architecture and place policy statement.

A key feature of such policies is the intention, firstly, to provide sufficient vision and incentive for architecture to be raised above the cheapest construction option, and, secondly, for there to be some degree of coordination so that whole areas and streetscapes, rather than just individual buildings on a case-by-case basis, can be approached in a coordinated fashion.

A further common feature of architecture policies is to make clear the relationship between public bodies responsible for reviewing or assessing architectural quality, and the planning process. In Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, specific planning guidance exists on architectural design.

Such planning guidance does not exist in Northern Ireland, though the DCAL Ministerial Advisory Group on architecture and the built environment does play a role in reviewing design aspects of significant projects.

Other issues include factors such as sustainability; the degree to which the public, special interest groups and local councils are consulted and have input into key architectural projects; and the ways in which awareness of architecture is embedded within the education system.

Contents

Key Points 1

Executive Summary 3

Contents 5

1 Introduction: The current situation in Northern Ireland..... 7

 1.1 Architecture as a discipline 7

 1.2 Existing architecture policy in Northern Ireland 7

2 Recent developments elsewhere 8

 2.1 UK policy 8

 2.2 Policy in Scotland 9

 2.3 Policy in the Republic of Ireland..... 10

3 Potential issues 12

Annex 1: A timeline of developments in architecture policy by jurisdiction

1 Introduction: The current situation in Northern Ireland

1.1 Architecture as a discipline

Architecture is regarded as one of the 13 sub-sectors which collectively make up the creative industries. In Northern Ireland, it is the second largest sub-sector within the creative industries (after software), contributing £149m Gross Value Added (GVA) in 2008, and £95m in 2009. While this figure fell between 2008 and 2009, probably as a result of the economic downturn, the number of architecture businesses actually rose markedly, with 160 'reporting units' in 2008, and 420 in 2011.

Almost a third (31%) of all creative industries in Northern Ireland in 2011 were in the architecture sector. Indeed on a UK-wide basis, Northern Ireland architecture businesses made up 3.6% of all UK architecture businesses in 2011, the highest proportion of any other creative industry.

1.2 Existing architecture policy in Northern Ireland

DCAL has a policy on *Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland*, published in June 2006.

This policy contains three guiding principles, as follows:

- *Creativity and innovation;*
- *Heritage;*
- *Sustainable development.*

In addition, the current policy includes five objectives:

- *Objective 1 – Delivery of Good Design;*
- *Objective 2 – Planning Policies;*
- *Objective 3 – Knowledge and Skills;*
- *Objective 4 – Awareness;*
- *Objective 5 – Integration of Art.*

Nine specific architectural arenas are defined to which the policy should apply:

- **Amenity:** including urban parks and landscape spaces;
- **Community:** particularly in terms of planning neighbourhoods;
- **Crime prevention:** for example, design features that facilitate natural surveillance;
- **Education:** for example, the design of classrooms and schools;
- **Healthcare:** including design which creates both stress free, calming spaces, but also safety and the facilitation of good, hygienic maintenance;

- Housing: the policy emphasises the importance of design which minimises ill-health, vandalism and anti-social behaviour;
- Libraries: the policy emphasises good interior design in particular;
- Offices: the policy states that good ventilation, natural light and good views can reduce sickness and increase productivity;
- Investment in good design: it is stated that whole-life costs for the running of a building can be minimised through good design and investment in the early stages of a project.

In terms of wider support for architecture, DCAL provides funding, through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, for the charity PLACE, an architecture centre in Belfast.

DCAL also has a Ministerial Advisory Group for architecture and the built environment, the purpose of which is to 'advise the Minister, who will assume the role of Ministerial Design Champion, on the implementation and development of policy'. The policy document *Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland* states that 'a key role of MAG will be to appoint Design Review Panels to review design aspects of significant projects, including projects referred by the Planning Service'.

2 Recent developments elsewhere

2.1 UK policy

At UK level, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport commissioned a review of its architecture policies in March 2013. The review, conducted by Sir Terry Farrell, is examining issues such as the Government's role in promoting design quality; the economic benefits of architecture; the relationship between cultural heritage and the built environment, and how to promote education, outreach, and skills¹.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) has responded to this review with a number of recommendations, including the following:

- the idea that a detailed design brief should accompany all strategic public sector land disposals;
- that a Design Quality Audit could be conducted to better understand how the different sectors of the industry are performing and identify areas of market failure;
- that the Government should produce a cross-cutting Built Environment Design Policy;
- the proposal that a Chief Government Built Environment Design Adviser could be appointed;

¹ The Farrell Review: <http://www.farrellreview.co.uk>

- that a Design Quality Task Force to review its policies, and that the use of architectural competitions for public construction projects could be encouraged in order to encourage innovation.

The call for evidence closed in July, and will now be followed by a series of workshops. It is expected that a set of recommendations will be completed for DCMS in 2014.

In its own response to the review, the DCAL Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) on Architecture and the Built Environment emphasised that having a formal architecture policy owned by government can be 'enormously helpful in encouraging better outcomes'. Reflecting on the *Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland*, the MAG states that 'it has taken several years and excellent Ministerial leadership to give it confidence and connections that are now making real differences to places week by week and establishing methods of working in central and local government as well as in local communities'.

In terms of better presence of architectural awareness in education, MAG's response to the Farrell Review consultation cites the Seeing Project, as part of the Walled City Partnership and the UK City of Culture, as an excellent example of engaging P3 pupils with architectural subject matter².

There is currently no overarching UK policy on architecture, nor indeed such a policy for England. While DCMS has a specified responsibility for architecture, with Ed Vaizey as Minister, current government intervention on architecture and the built environment is in practice the responsibility of a number of different departments and Non-Departmental Bodies.

2.2 Policy in Scotland

The Scottish Government has recently published a new architecture and place policy statement, *Creating Places*, following a consultation which considered themes such as how the built environment can be embedded in wider government policy agendas, and the cultural value of architecture, urbanism and heritage³.

The policy statement sets out the Scottish Government's position on architecture, and 'the policies contained in this document are material considerations in determining planning applications and appeals'.

The first half of the new document emphasises a number of key points about architecture, such as the importance of sustainable development with a low carbon impact; the notion that well-designed physical and social environments can have a positive impact on physical and social well-being; and that distinctive, well-designed architecture can make a contribution to culture and identity.

² The Seeing Project: <http://seeingproject.co.uk>

³ Scottish Government. 2013. *Creating Places: A policy statement on architecture and place for Scotland*. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2013/06/9811>

The document contains a specific *Strategy for Architecture and Place*, which sets out seven strategic intentions. Some of the details of these intentions can be summarised as follows:

Architecture and planning	Architecture and planning are two related disciplines: 'There are a range of design issues related to architecture policy influenced or regulated by the planning process'. A 'Masterplanning toolkit' is advocated focusing particularly on town centre design. A 'Place Standard assessment tool' will also be developed in collaboration with the design and development sectors to create 'greater certainty around quality of place'.
Investment: Decisions informed by place	The strategy emphasises the value of 'whole-life building costs', in contrast to cheaper up-front costs potentially at the expense of societal, environmental and economic efficiencies in the longer term.
Developing our potential	The strategy states that 'Scotland's design heritage and design talent should be celebrated and the next generation developed and promoted'. Actions include working with schools so that architecture and design becomes part of the curriculum, publishing an annual review of emerging Scottish designers, and developing the evidence base on the value of good design.
Design for a low carbon economy	Brownfield sites are to be incentivised; the UK Government will be lobbied for a reduction in VAT for building repairs; and a new Bronze, Silver and Gold awards scheme for the construction of sustainable schools.
Cultural connections	This section states an intention for the Scottish Government to work with the British Council, Architecture and Design Scotland, and the Scottish Council for Development and Industry to develop a programme of international 'opportunities' to promote Scottish architectural practice.
Engagement and empowerment	It is advocated that community participation in the design and planning process be strengthened through 'charrette' workshops and other forms of engagement.
The role of Architecture and Design Scotland	Architecture and Design Scotland (A+DS) was established in 2005, but is given a prominent role in this strategy. A+DS is an Executive Non-Departmental Public Body operating as a Company Limited by Guarantee and funded by the Scottish Government.

Table 1: Summary of some of the intentions in Scotland's new *Strategy for Architecture and Place*

2.3 Policy in the Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, a new *Government Policy on Architecture 2009–2015*⁴ was published by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in October 2009. This document replaced a previous version which ran from 2002 to 2005. The *Government Policy on Architecture 2009–2015* supports a government policy statement on architecture, created in 1997, which states that the government will:

- Promote high standards of design and construction in building works for which it is responsible and support the pursuit of high standards of building;
- Develop an organisational framework that facilitates the application of knowledge and skill concerning the built environment;

⁴ Department for Environment, Heritage and Local Government. 2009. *Government Policy on Architecture 2009–2015*. <http://nia1.me/1qo>

- Ensure that the architectural heritage is conserved and maintained to a high standard;
- Foster the demand for high quality architecture in the community as a whole;
- Promote the concept of sustainable development; and
- Encourage innovation in architecture.

The *Government Policy on Architecture* is intended to provide closer and more detailed guidance about how the broad intentions of the policy statement should be achieved. In doing so, it 'seeks to promote awareness and understanding of the contribution of good design to the daily life and well-being of society as a whole'⁵.

A set of 45 actions are included within the policy. These actions cover a number of recurring themes, such as:

Research	Commissioning research in areas such as building energy performance, factors affecting the social sustainability of settlements, the range of research going on in other European countries, and best practice in sustainable 'place-making'.
Greater awareness	Promoting greater awareness of architecture among school children, among teachers, and in higher education. Also, encouraging a greater degree of public awareness and engagement with architectural design through exhibitions, events, television programmes and Architect in Residence Schemes.
State Architect role	The creation of a State Architect role, with responsibilities such as advising on the implementation of the Government Policy on Architecture, and acting as an advisor on legislation and regulations affecting the built environment.
Architecture forum	The creation of a forum, chaired by the State Architect, and consisting of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Office of Public Works, and representatives from the public and private sectors. The purpose of the forum would be to oversee implementation of the Government Policy on Architecture.
Local council action	Close liaison between the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and local councils to establish how policy actions can be implemented at local level. Also, the potential appointment of City or County Architects to promote architectural quality at local level.
Incentivisation schemes	The examination of incentivisation schemes, led by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Office of Public Works, to encourage the private sector to follow best practice in future-proofing buildings.
Sustainability	Developing guidance documents on sustainability best practice in buildings; guidance on how traditional buildings can be made less carbon reliant. Encouraging public authorities to make greater use of existing building stock through adaptation and conservation.
Better procurement	Developing quality guidelines for the procurement phase of public buildings; increasing the number of architecture competitions.

Table 2: Summary of some of the actions stated in Ireland's Government Policy on Architecture

⁵ *Government Policy on Architecture*, as above: p2.

3 Potential issues

This brief summary of architecture policies in place throughout the UK and Ireland suggests a number of issues which commonly occur in such documents.

- Beyond the setting of planning policy and the conservation and construction of public buildings, what is the role of the state in guiding architectural design?
- Many of the architecture policies referred to in this paper focus particularly on public sector-funded developments. However, such documents take slightly different approaches to private sector development. These approaches vary between simply seeking to inspire better private sector architectural creation, to active incentivisation of the private sector, to guidance and indeed regulation.
- What is the inter-relationship between architecture policy and the planning process? How do the relevant agencies (usually, a culture department for architecture and environment department for planning) coordinate and interact?

Annex 1: A timeline of developments in architecture policy by jurisdiction

Northern Ireland	England	Scotland	Wales	Republic of Ireland
<p>2003: Arts Council Northern Ireland publishes <i>Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland: Policies, Strategies and Actions</i>.</p> <p>2004: A steering committee of representatives is formed.</p> <p>2006: <i>Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland</i> is published.</p> <p>2007: DCAL established the Ministerial Advisory Group (MAG) for Architecture and the Built Environment.</p> <p>2009: A Call-off List of expert advisors is recruited.</p>	<p>1999: Commission on Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) is formed.</p> <p>2011: CABE is abolished and some of its functions merged with the Design Council.</p> <p>2013: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport commissioned the Farrell Review into architecture and the built environment.</p>	<p>1999: Scottish Executive publishes <i>A Policy on Architecture for Scotland</i>.</p> <p>2005: Architecture and Design Scotland is established, with an accompanying Scottish Planning Policy document (SPP20).</p> <p>2013: Scottish Government publishes a new architecture policy <i>Creating Places</i>.</p>	<p>2002: The Design Commission for Wales is created by the Welsh Assembly Government.</p> <p>2009: Technical Advice Note (TAN) 12 is published, providing 'advice on good design'; in the same year, Design Statements become mandatory.</p>	<p>1996: Publication of <i>Developing a Government Policy on Architecture: A Proposed Framework and Discussion of Ideas</i>.</p> <p>1997: A policy statement on architecture is published for the first time.</p> <p>2002: <i>Action on Architecture</i> is published.</p> <p>2005: Establishment of the Irish Architecture Foundation.</p> <p>2009: The current document, <i>Government Policy on Architecture</i>, is published.</p>