

## Edge Debate 60 – Edge Commission on Future Professionalism: Session 1 - The Environment

Should it be a professional requirement to address environmental issues, including responsibility for long-term performance and reporting?

5<sup>th</sup> March 2014 – The Building Centre, London.

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### WELCOME

**ROBIN NICHOLSON CBE** – Edge Convenor; Senior Partner, Cullinan Studios

Robin welcomed everyone. He thanked The Ove Arup Foundation for sponsoring the Commission's work, Rehauf for sponsoring the series of debate sessions and Paul Morrell for agreeing to chair it.

### CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

**Paul Morrell OBE**

Is the role of professional bodies under threat? How can they serve the public good if this puts them at odds with their members? What exactly is professionalism in an ever changing and challenging world? Are professional bodies too self-serving, and thus prevent collaboration that would serve society better? These are the sort of questions and dilemmas the Edge Commission on Future Professionalism has been set up to grapple with over a series of debates.

- What do you do when acting for the public good sets you in an opposing position to your client? And how does this sit with the thing that is meant to distinguish professionals – that is they act in the public good, that's why they are awarded a charter?
- What happens if an institution takes a position on an issue if its members don't want it to? And if it does take a stand on an issue like climate change, does that create a new series of obligations and so on?
- How do institutions position themselves in the marketplace in representing the public good and their clients and how do those professionals position themselves? How do they increasingly represent their very diverse membership?

### Emerging themes

- Little consensus emerged on the role of professional bodies from the different speakers
- Professional bodies should take broad positions on issues like climate change – but then it's up to individual members how they act on a project by project basis. Members should engage with clients who weren't buying into the climate change agenda.
- Members need guidance to help them through ethical dilemmas.
- More collaboration needed by professional bodies to tackle challenges like climate change.
- Professional bodies need to modernise to remain relevant for today's world – 'can't be run by amateurs.'
- Professional bodies are often too self-serving – lobbied by their members – rather than acting for the public good.

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### SPEAKERS

#### Keith Clarke CBE - Keynote

Keith Clarke was speaking in his capacity as an independent professional, but he is a member of the ICE and has helped draft a new code (of ethics?). It describes how you should approach the consideration of the environment. He says:

“Without being a standard it's a level of behaviour so that's quite new.”

Highlights of his talk were as follows.

What it means to be a professional:

- Professionals should strive for a higher standard than legally obliged to – it's also their role to raise standards and educate your client or customer or peers or society in the area that you are a professional.
- I think it's the role of professional institutions to spread that knowledge where a lot of small practices, leading practices and even large practices don't have the time to do.
- Professional bodies are social networks, they are people who know each other and trust each other and speak their own bizarre language. So that's quite important that they are looking to progress that in a way.

Professionalism and climate change

- The science is there. It's not for you to judge any more than you should judge how a surgeon behaves on a brain tumour. You don't have that skill. But we know the science is there and we should then take that science and look at the effect on the work that we are doing now, which is about decarbonising the economy and getting to an 80% reduction by 2050.
- How do the professions cope with climate change?
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- Lots of research going on in academia. And what do we do as professional bodies? We watch. We support, we do not participate. But we get in involved with the development (as in the D in R&D). Be ahead of government and let the policy chase us. And convince your clients that that's actually morally correct, socially correct, and economically correct and future proofs their business. Increasingly we see people worried about climate change as a risk to their business models.

Professions on lobbying

- Lobbying when you've got a diverse membership group is quite difficult. Instead, showing how to moving beyond investment standards, is a much easier route for professional bodies.

**Stephen Matthews**, Chief Executive Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers (CIBSE)

Paraphrasing, Matthews says that:

- Professional institutions are no longer fit for purpose – though still doing some exciting things
- Board/ active members are no longer the bosses of big companies. Now they are people who work for themselves, sole traders or “perhaps people with too much time to spare time on their hands.”
- Institutions need to be interlinked and working together – there's talk of collaboration but “I wonder whether it's just hot air”. Institutions can modernise and become fit for purpose.

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### Chris Blythe, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)

- If you go back to the question should it be professional requirement to address environmental issues, I'd say it's a resounding yes. But I also doubt whether it can actually be done, for a number of reasons. We have within our responsibilities to carry on our professions for the public good. My own charter the CIOB is very explicit. It says to promote the science and practice of building and construction for the public good. The Charter doesn't actually mention a single word about members. And I sometimes think that we get too obsessed with the members. It's the members who are there to deliver the public good, and work towards the public good.
- Too often we become an organisation about membership services, but in this modern world, it becomes a very difficult proposition for professional bodies to keep that focus on the public good, because people are looking for more of a transactional relationship with their professional body than one that is built on the ethos of when they were originally set up.
- Professional bodies like law society have far less power than they used to have, and why is that? It was because the professions were inward looking and too interested in serving themselves rather than that broader public interest.
- The world is moving on so much faster now, that I really do question the capacity of professional bodies to be able to keep up with the changes that society demands, and if we go back to our role of being there for the public good, our track is to follow that broader public good. And that's not decided necessarily by the professionals, that's decided by governments and what society at large puts forward as a consensus is what our role is.
- Professional bodies are very wide ranging now and have members that cover all aspects of profession. I suspect you will see people in RIBA who do very much the same roles as people in the CIOB, so it is very difficult to come to a consensus across all those occupational areas and all those different special interests, and, as Stephen eluded to, the makeup of people who get involved in professional bodies now is quite interesting, it's not what it was. CIOB used to be owners of firms. Now it's way down the pile. And when you get into the one man bands and what have you, you can get very special interest groups and there is a tendency at times to see some almost extremism. And how the professional body keeps on top of all of that is actually quite a challenge to avoid being hijacked in one direction or another. So there are some big challenges for professional bodies in making that go.
- Society requires us to address environmental matters. Whether professional bodies can do it, and do it to the level required, I doubt. And I think that the only professional bodies that survive will be those that stay really relevant to the needs of society, more so than the needs of members. And that's a really big ask when we're in the 'what's in it for me', and members looking at a transactional relationship with their professional bodies. A more altruistic relationship which was there at the start is more relevant now than it ever has been.

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**Scott Steedman CBE** – British Standards Institute (representing the Royal Academy of Engineering – though stressing the views expressed are his own)

- Dilemma doesn't really face an institution; it faces an individual in a situation. But institutions have the duty of supporting their members through the process. So for me this is really all about equipping professionals with the skills to deal with ethical dilemmas. So I think we need to talk a lot about skills and what we can do to not only deal with ethical issues, frankly to recognise them in the first place.
- The Academy has been very active in promoting ethical considerations for years drawing on its fellowship. It published a statement of ethical principles some years ago, which you can download, and that is supported by a much more substantial guide on engineering ethics in practice
- The document sets out four fundamental principles of ethics in practice for professionals. They are: accuracy and rigour; honesty and integrity; respect for life, law and the public good; and responsible leadership, and our role as institutions to help guide people through that thought process. We can't be there and take a decision for them. There is no right or wrong answer
- It is possible you could consider the promotion of ethical principles to the profession through the development of an international standard. That might be able to be deployed within a contractual relationship in a supply chain through clients who wanted to demonstrate their commitment, and that might help the professionals deliver their work in a manner in which professional institutions are keen to support.

### QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMISSION PANEL

*Q: Can an institution take a position on climate change and expect certain behavioural standards of its members in pursuit of that science?*

**KC:** Firms should work with clients who aren't engaged with climate change – because professionals can win them round.

“I advised the Qatari government - the most climate intensive country in the world - and I do it with a clear conscience that as an advisor we've managed to delay £70 billion worth of infrastructure which they don't need and carbon impact of that is pretty considerable. It pays for my flight in those terms. That is an engagement which sometimes fails but if you don't engage and you don't argue attractively with knowledge you are not a professional. You might lose, but that's not the problem.”

**CB:** Professional bodies have been run by amateurs in the past – their members – rather than professionals. That is changing. The great danger is with the amateurs they want the professional body to stay where it was when they joined. Professional bodies have to develop relevance with the modern world.

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**SM:** I think that there is no point in having a professional body unless you are prepared to make a stand for what you believe is morally right. I think that occupying the moral high ground as best as you can with the evidence available is incredibly important.

If the evidence changes and you have to say I'm sorry we made a mistake then I think that's absolutely explainable. But sitting by and not making a statement actually we're not earning our rations, there is no point in doing it. The issues we are facing as a sector and as an engineering profession are severe. Climate change is one of them but is that the only one. Currently we are predicting that we need to double the number of engineers that this country produces from 51,000 to over 100,000 to meet the needs by 2020. We need to train an additional four and a half thousand technicians to meet the need. I don't see any of the professional bodies coming together and saying this is an important issue and what are we doing about it?

**SS:** I think institutions should state a policy position which is used to guide those professionals. Institutions in my time have been known to upset a few members by trying to tackle hairy issues and actually I think institutions need to take a bit more risk in this area but they need to be very careful about this because it's about stating a principle they are committed to rather than a detail. It would be unethical for the institution to take a highly detailed position on a particular project for example.

*Q: How can the professional bodies can take on this role of developing standards that go beyond legal compliance and is there common ground between some or all of the bodies? And what is the potential for collaborating on some of these steps?*

**SM:** I'm absolutely clear that the professional bodies need staff that can engage in the regulatory framework and have the confidence of whichever officials that they are dealing with and be able to call upon the advice of their members. I think that works quite well at CIBSE but I'm perhaps biased.

**CB:** I think the reason why it's hard to lobby professional bodies is what I was saying earlier, professional bodies collectively have been tarnished by the rampant self-interest they displayed in the past, and that makes it very hard to get to the policy makers. I think that comes back to the fact that we still have a lot of amateurism in the professional bodies and we do need to shift that some further away and make it more professional

**SS:** It is extremely important that you have horses for courses. So if you're delivering policy messages to the Prime Minister or to levels of government you are delivering it at the right level with the right authority and community behind it. When you get into the more technical issues then you may take experts. But but wouldn't it be nice if instead of writing these enthusiastic amateur documents( and that put it very unfairly because there are some really expert stuff out there) if we did take the trouble and find a mechanism whereby we could engage the stakeholder community that were being touched by the issue, like fracking, for example.

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**QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

[in accordance with Edge practice these are unnamed]

*Questioner: Should these various professions represented here actually be done for mis-selling buildings that supposedly work but actually they don't?*

**CB:** Yes

**KC:** Yes if you've made a commitment to a performance criteria which is never met you should clearly be done for miss-selling

**SM:** Yes

*Questioner: Are the institutes willing to lobby for legislative fiscal change?*

**KC:** Predominately no, absolutely. It's a cop out to get government to change the rules.

*Questioner (formerly a chartered architect): I don't think they can be done for mis-selling because at the moment all the built environment professions and institutes and everything else are focusing on delivering a building. And that's the big problem. Land Rover was focused on delivery of a car. Tata realised that focus on a customer experience and service level were key.*

*We are an industry that has institutionalised collectively the creation of output and we've built a whole belief structure that has become our whole method and ethics. We have forgotten that its buildings in use that matter and I'm afraid it's things like BREEAM [that has driven this] I can give you a catalogue of BREEAM excellent buildings that are shocking in use and saying that people just don't know how to use them is frankly an insult. How would land rover sell a car, if you didn't know how to drive it? Sorry. It is diabolical? So my thing is that we need a shift from output to actually service to focus on what we're doing.*

**SM:** Yes normal engineering.

**CB:** And I would agree and I would use the example of the A380, which is essentially a building that goes at 500 miles an hour. And it's all about outcomes. it delivers

*Questioner: What ethical structures would you apply to a professional that you wouldn't apply to, on the one hand a plasterer, a steel fixer a carpenter, or to somebody who is behind the counter at Wickes or B&Q? I think it's important to explore that difference because its one of the things that really annoys people, speaking as an architect, is when architects strike ethical positions as if they know what they are and others don't?*

**SS:** The professional is making decisions in their professional work to deliver something beyond the mechanical operation of a process I think. So being professional means having to accumulate information from a range of sources and advance that by taking a decision to do something. And that's not the same as someone who with all due respect is operating a till at Tesco. They are simply following a mechanical process. You can then apply those principles that helped that professional understand how to balance different knowledge in the decision-making process which a technician involved in supermarkets stacking doesn't have to do. So it's about knowledge and making decisions based on a collection of incomplete data to deliver something that is hopefully performance and outcome based.

**CB:** I am horrified. I mean you talked about humility earlier you know and I think that is the antithesis of humility, a professional. I think someone working at the till in Tesco would probably have a much higher level of ethics. I mean if someone left their purse behind what would they do, put it in their pocket?

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**SM:** I can't sign up to that either. Actually my experience of life is that most people know when they're doing a good job and when they doing a bad job. And actually what you need to do is create an environment where someone who knows the job is not going well for whatever reason is brave enough to put up their hand and say I am not doing my best job and actually the organisation can cope with them

**SS:** I didn't realise that was the question.

*Questioner: My question is, are the institutes willing to lobby for legislative fiscal change? [he talks about the professions turning a blind eye to abuse of labourers in Qatar]*

**KC:** There's a whole bunch of discussions going on in that government, and that government do it privately because of the culture.

*Questioner: Why is it done privately? Why is it not done in public?*

**KC:** Because that culture does not respond to people looking in from the outside. You cannot apply western values to other cultures and expect the government to play the same. That's not the same as saying that they should have a different way of behaving, but if you'd expect the decision-making to be the same around the world as it is in London then you just don't understand the world, you absolutely don't understand the world. So there is a role if you want to influence people where you engage. You can and say nothing should ever happen, say there should be no immigrant workers. Well actually the UK economy wouldn't work on that basis. The question is how you do it ethically and treat people decently. Asking for the government to give you a better rule is a cop out for professionals.

If we're lobbying the government to make rules for us make building more efficient, should we lobby not for the next carbon budget to be 30% should we lobby it to be 50%? Is that viable? How about we actually try and do something where we can show as an industry we might actually produce the stuff that will get it to 30% because we're not doing it now. Actually get on and talk to manufacturers differently. Saying it's all about rules is not professionalism. There are plenty of people who do lobbying better than we do

*Questioner: in terms of a yes or no answer then is your answer no?*

**KC:** Predominately no, absolutely. It's a cop out to get government to change the rules

**SM:** There is no question we are not allowed to lobby, what we are allowed to do is articulate and inform the view that carries the collective agreement of the sector

*Q: As Keith said there are about three cycles of buildings before we have to really crack this [slashing carbon dioxide emissions]. We talk about collaboration to solve this problem, if we talk about things we don't know about we will get it wrong. So do you think we have a responsibility to collaborate between the different institutions because it's outside of our competencies to talk about the things we don't know?*

**KC:** Yes. Intellectually what's so exciting about climate change, if you ignore the effects of it, it is the most exciting professional revolution since the industrial revolution. I mean it is more interesting than the digital revolution because it brings in all disciplines - economist, psychologist, politics, technology organisational theory, you name it, it's in that pot and you can't do anything without most of those people. That's why it's so exciting. And it's a pretty risky journey and it's going to be full of glorious mistakes.