

Time to engage

Christine Hawley's *cri de coeur* (p.5) on the outcome of the UK Government's latest Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) may be dismissed by some as sour grapes. Others, however, will welcome the robustness of her warning and hope that, at long last, the research dilemma in university architecture schools will be given the airing it deserves. One body in particular should facilitate such a debate – the Royal Institute of British Architects – but it has never shown much interest in the subject (**arq** 5/4, p. 291).

Research is now the remit of two Institute committees – the Education Committee's largely inactive Research Advisory Forum (which, despite their intimate connection do not appear to talk to each other) and Building Futures (formerly Future Studies). Just how these two relate to each other and to the Practice Committee is unclear. Little wonder that Sir John Fairclough's recent report, *Rethinking Construction Innovation and Research* never mentions design or the RIBA.

The funding that flows from a good RAE result is critical for individual schools – and thus for the profession. This year's outcome was the best to date – but, as the funds have to be spread more widely, the benefits have not been as great as expected. So, in order to survive, some schools will focus all the efforts of full-time staff on research. Individuals with a sound publishing record (on whatever subject) will be sought to join them, and the gap between academic work and studio will grow ever wider and the schools ever more divorced from practice.

Of course, it doesn't have to be like that. The three top-performing schools in this latest RAE have established a good balance between teaching, practice and research. But others have greatly distorted that balance in favour of research. And the balance achieved by some may indeed have been undervalued by a curiously composed assessment panel. Whatever the rights and wrongs, this is an issue that the RIBA cannot ignore any longer – and, in engaging with it, should put its own house in order.

This issue of **arq** contains design features by practitioner teachers (pp. 14–31 and 32–48) at the two university schools which dropped a grade in the RAE: it is, arguably, such teachers who are most at risk in any retrenchment. The three other principal features (on history, theory and practice) are also based on university research. And, finally, in a report from an AIA conference in San Francisco (pp. 11–12), another academic points to the accelerating drift of young architecture graduates away from architectural practice. Yet another reason to sort out where we all stand and for what we would wish to be judged.

THE EDITORS