

Look outwards

'We're going to start by researching research' says RIBA Vice-President Jack Pringle (pp. 104–106 of this issue). It's a statement that will send shivers down the spine of all those who recall the boring and generally useless lists of university research published by a well-intentioned *Architects' Journal* in the 1970s. But read on – for Pringle emphasises that 'the complicated thing is bringing everything together' into the quite ordinary buildings and places designed not by 'star' architects but by the vast majority of the profession.

Just how this revolution will take place is not entirely clear but it's a good sign that the new Research Committee is to be 'owned' by the Institute's Education and Practice Committees – both of which are presently chaired by practising architects. Furthermore, the Research Committee's chairman is to be an academic from the Bartlett which, *pace* the Research Assessment Exercise assessors, is an unquestionably research-strong school. Let us hope that he is supported by a balanced mix of practitioners and academics and that the old days of the Institute's exclusive, largely inactive and utterly visionless Research Advisory Forum are firmly at an end.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the Research Committee's work could be the start of the long fight back to a stronger profession. As Harry Charrington points out in his letter on architecture and design in Finland (pp. 100–101), the strength and vitality of the architectural profession in that country is based not on protection of title by the likes of the UK Architects Registration Board – but on what the members of SAFA, the Finnish Association of Architects, consider to be important. The constant revitalisation through research and innovation necessary for an effective knowledge-based profession is not part of the ARB's remit.

Such research-based practice came naturally to Michael Brawne and Cedric Price (pp. 107–112 and 113–118). Like so many gifted architects, they did not build nearly as much as they should have done. However, in rather different ways, their own research, deeply intertwined with design and collaborative learning, was vastly influential.

In his article on a research strategy for the built environment, Richard Lorch, editor of *Building Research and Information*, reminds architects of their membership of (or, as many prefer it, relationship to) the construction industry. Some may claim that there is plenty of money available for architecturally-related research while others strongly dispute this. What is undeniable is that there is a deeply damaging disjunction between that research which considers building as a verb and that which views it as a noun: only an industry-wide strategy can resolve this.

The RIBA's new Research Committee should beware of becoming too exclusively architectural. For, as John Worthington so eloquently reminded us (6/2, pp. 104–105), 'unless we are prepared to look outwards, our standing in research could sink ever lower'.

THE EDITORS