Professional bodies and education for the built environment in the UK

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Overview

• Accreditation bodies and UK higher education
• Professional bodies and built environment education
• The benefits and tensions of accreditation
• The example of UK planning
Accreditation

Accreditation is the establishment or re-statement of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme or module of study\(^1\)

\(^1\) From Harvey, 2004
Accreditation bodies and UK higher education

- **University Quality Assurance:**
  - Quality of learning, teaching and assessment
  - Learning benchmarks
  - Subject benchmark standards

- **Professional bodies:**
  - Safeguards the public interest
  - Maintains interest of the professional practitioners
  - Maintains interest of professional or regulatory body.
Accrediting bodies and the Built environment

- Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
- Architect’s Registration Board
- Royal Institute of British Architects
- Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS)
Accreditation arrangements

- Initial accreditation
- Partnership Boards
- Threshold standards
- Learning outcomes
- Routes to professional membership for students:
  - Initial education
  - Assessment of Professional Competence
  - Continual Professional Development
Expected Learning outcomes: initial planning education

- Typical graduates from a programme should be expected to display competency in at least 19 areas, including:
  - Generate visionary and imaginative responses to spatial planning challenges;
  - Demonstrate effective research and appraisal skills;
  - Recognise the role in the planning process of such skills as negotiation, mediation, and advocacy and the importance of team-working;
  - Recognise the political nature of decision-making in planning;
  - Appreciate the importance and process of design in creating high quality places and enhancing the public realm for the benefit of all in society;
  - Understand the relationship between market processes, built form, different development models and patterns of movement;
  - Appreciate and respect diversity of cultures, views and ideologies;
  - Appreciate the meaning of professionalism
The pedagogical benefits of accreditation

- Maintaining standards
- A form of public accountability
- Marketing of courses
- Uniformity across a subject
- Increases ‘real world’ relevance of education
- Increases dialogue with practitioners
- Accrediting bodies as useful external allies
- A voluntary process?
The pedagogical challenges of accreditation

- Ultimately accreditation is a struggle for power.
- Standards not quality
- Tensions arise from:
  - Content
  - Programme delivery
  - Bureaucracy requirements
  - Other forms of control
  - Academic and practitioner cultures
Accreditation tensions: the case of UK planning

- Changes in Educational Policy
- Adjusting to changes in higher education:
  - Declining professional engagement amongst staff
  - Changing recruitment profile and disciplinary backgrounds
  - Declining empathy and academic-practitioner dialogue
Summing up

- Accreditation is an important, but power-laden process.
- It increasingly controls UK built environment disciplines and gives rise to key tensions.
- These need further reflection and understanding.
- The Indian context?