

A recurring theme

Over the past year, one subject has dominated the Leader and Letters pages of each and every issue of this journal – the UK Government’s last Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). This final number in our sixth volume is no exception. Sparked off by Philip Steadman and Bill Hillier’s RAE review in **arq** 6/3 (pp. 203–207), three remarkable letters appear in this issue (pp. 292–293).

The first, from Richard Coyne, warns (as Steadman and Hillier did) of the imminent ‘balkanisation’ of architecture education. The second, from the RIBA Vice-President for Education, Jack Pringle, underlines the seriousness with which the Institute now regards the situation. The third, from Ian Davidson, was written a few days before his untimely death and views the present concerns as an opportunity for both education and practice. Let us hope that Davidson’s letter marks a turning point in this long-running saga.

Pursuing this theme, Gordon Murray’s Perspective piece (pp. 297–299) draws together education, research and practice and considers both the current stresses and some alternative frameworks. Given the continuing fall-out from the RAE – in which the 33 out of 36 university architecture schools that did not get a 5 will be increasingly starved of resources – this is a timely contribution. As Murray observes, little has changed in the seven years since **arq** first appeared – and yet the warning signs have been plain for all to see.

Astonishingly, Allford Hall Monaghan Morris’ (AHMM) competition winning scheme for a new health care centre (pp. 300–319) received little coverage when announced last summer. It’s no secret that the authors of some of the three other beautifully designed entries were more than a little shocked at the outcome. At first sight, AHMM’s approach has an almost 60s and 70s ring to it: it’s a very gritty, urban solution – and it appears to have been this very quality that appealed to the assessors and public.

The 60s and 70s are also recalled in the article by Robert Oxman and his Technion colleagues on ‘Casbah’ planning (pp. 321–336) – now becoming, like Case Study Houses and 50s architecture, a subject of interest to a younger generation. A generation which is, pleasingly, represented by two papers – on architectural modelling as a form of research (pp. 337–347) and tradition and Tadao Ando (pp. 349–362) – written by post-graduate students at the Universities of Sheffield and Cardiff.

Modelling of another kind features in Alan Day’s critical assessment of the use of computer-generated urban visualisations in a recent public inquiry (pp. 363–372). He suggests such tools have yet to achieve their full potential in raising the public debate about the design of our cities. And, finally, our Insight pages herald a new recurring theme – interviews with practitioners of moment.

THE EDITORS