UK Architecture Declares Climate and Biodiversity Emergency

Summary of 2019/2020 signatory feedback

June 2020

UK Architects Declare

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UK Architects Declare is one of a growing number of international declarations under **Construction Declares.**

Website www.constructiondeclares.com

2019/2020 Steering Group members

Andrew Waugh - Waugh Thistleton

Caroline Cole - Colander

Clara Bagenal George - Elementa/LETI/GLA Design Advocate

Jacqueline Wheeler - Haworth Tompkins

Julia Barfield - Marks Barfield

Kat Scott - dRMM/ACAN/LETI

Lauren Shevills - Mae Architects/ACAN

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Steve Tompkins - Haworth Tompkins

Contents

Introduction

UK Architects Declare is a network of architectural practices committed to addressing the climate and biodiversity emergency.

Originated by architects Steve Tompkins and Michael Pawlyn, and launched on 30 May 2019 by the then 17 UK recipients of the Stirling Prize, it quickly attracted hundreds of other architectural practices from across the UK.

Under the wider banner of 'Construction Declares', it has now spread to more than 20 different countries, with over 5,000 signatories, and has been adopted by other built environment disciplines that have signed up to variations on the original 11-point declaration.

Architects Declare is about encouragement, with every signatory organisation expected to self-govern its progress toward achieving the commitments it has made. On the basis that no single architect is currently meeting every part of the radical commitment to change, a firm 'no public blame and shame' policy is in place.

Left: Architects Declare held its first meeting for signatories at the Battersea Arts Centre, London in November 2019. This photograph was taken during the group discussions on each of the declaration points.
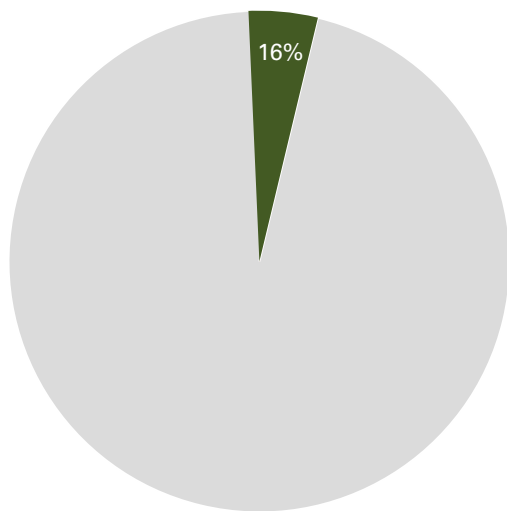
Photo by Jacqueline Wheeler

16%

Figure 1. Number of practices who participated in the survey, out of the total number of practices who were signatories at the time.

66.0% Director/partner/owner
7.6% Associate/senior management
2.7% Senior/project architect
9.0% Head of Sustainability
3.5% Sustainability team member
2.1% Architect
4.2% Architectural assistant
1.4% Marketing/communications
3.5% Other
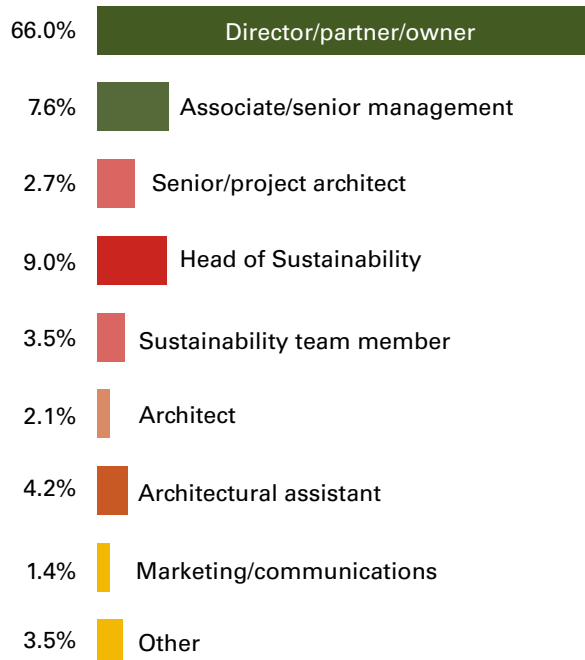
Figure 2. Distribution of those who responded on behalf of practices

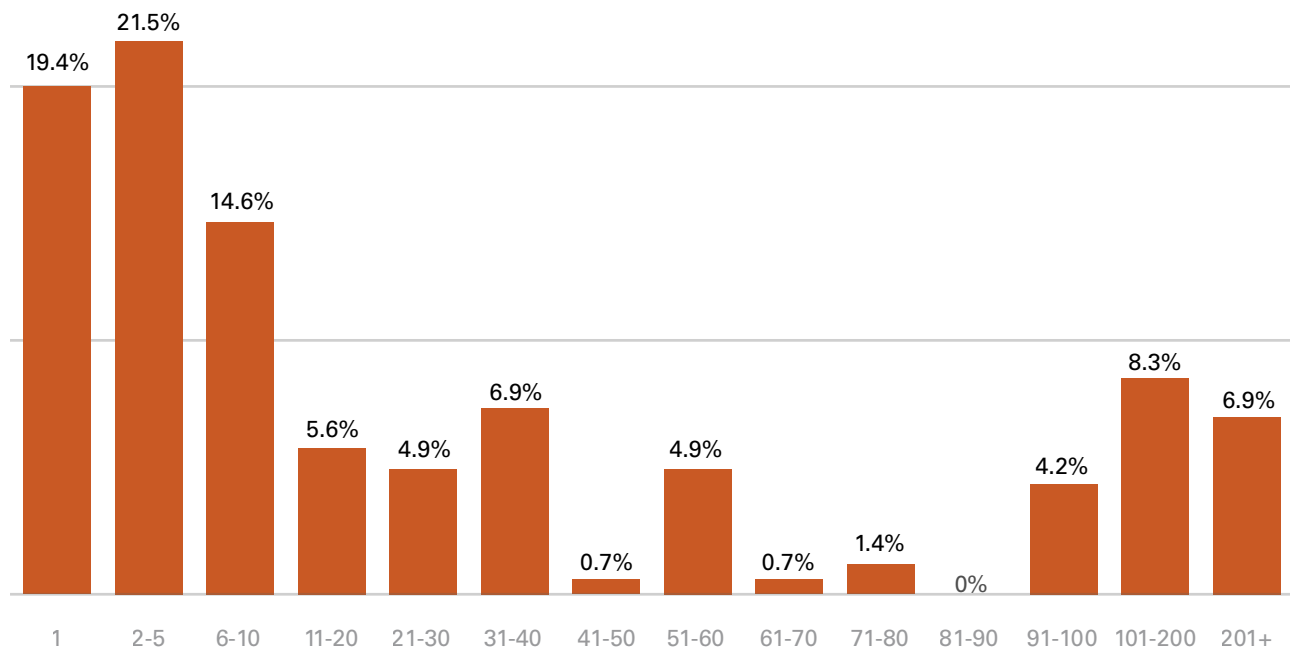| 1	2-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	81-90	91-100	101-200	201+
19.4%	21.5%	14.6%	5.6%	4.9%	6.9%	0.7%	4.9%	0.7%	1.4%	0%	4.2%	8.3%	6.9%

Figure 3. "How many architects work in the practice you are completing this survey on behalf of?" Distribution of practice sizes of those who responded to the survey.

Survey overview

In May 2020, the UK Architects Declare Steering Group invited practices to complete an inaugural survey, to share experiences of their first year of being a signatory of UK Architects Declare. The intention was to gather feedback, and to help shape the future direction of this ever-growing initiative.

This report is a summary of the aggregate data from this survey. In the spirit of the Architects Declare commitment for 'knowledge sharing on an open sourced basis', we hope that this report will be useful to signatories to learn what others are doing to meet the Architects Declare commitments, and to understand the general picture of how well the profession is faring in meeting these commitments.

Of the 935 practices who were Architects Declare signatories at the time of the survey, 149 have participated. This is a response rate of c. 16% (Fig. 1). While the Steering Group had hoped for greater participation, we still feel that the results give a useful indication of how practices' first year, or months, as signatories have been.

Whilst we had a wide distribution of practices responding to the survey in terms of scale (Fig. 2), this survey has a greater representation from smaller (61.1% of respondents employed up to 20 architects) sized practices, and less so from medium (19.5% of respondents employed 21-90 architects)

and large sized practices (19.4% of respondents employed over 90 architects). We are aware that the influence of larger practice is greater than the weight of their responses in this survey, given the greater number of projects and employees, and often their raised visibility outside of the architectural community.

Of the individuals who completed the survey, 66% were Directors/Partners/Owners of signatory practices, and 9% were Heads of Sustainability (or similar), suggesting that the survey has been well-considered by practices at the highest levels. However, we are mindful that the experiences of those in leadership may be different to that of those working 'on the ground' and we will consider for future surveys how to ensure these experiences can be shared too.

It is also worth noting that the length of time that respondent practices have been signatories for ranges from those who were founding signatories on 30th May 2019, to those who became signatories in the weeks or months leading up to the survey's release.
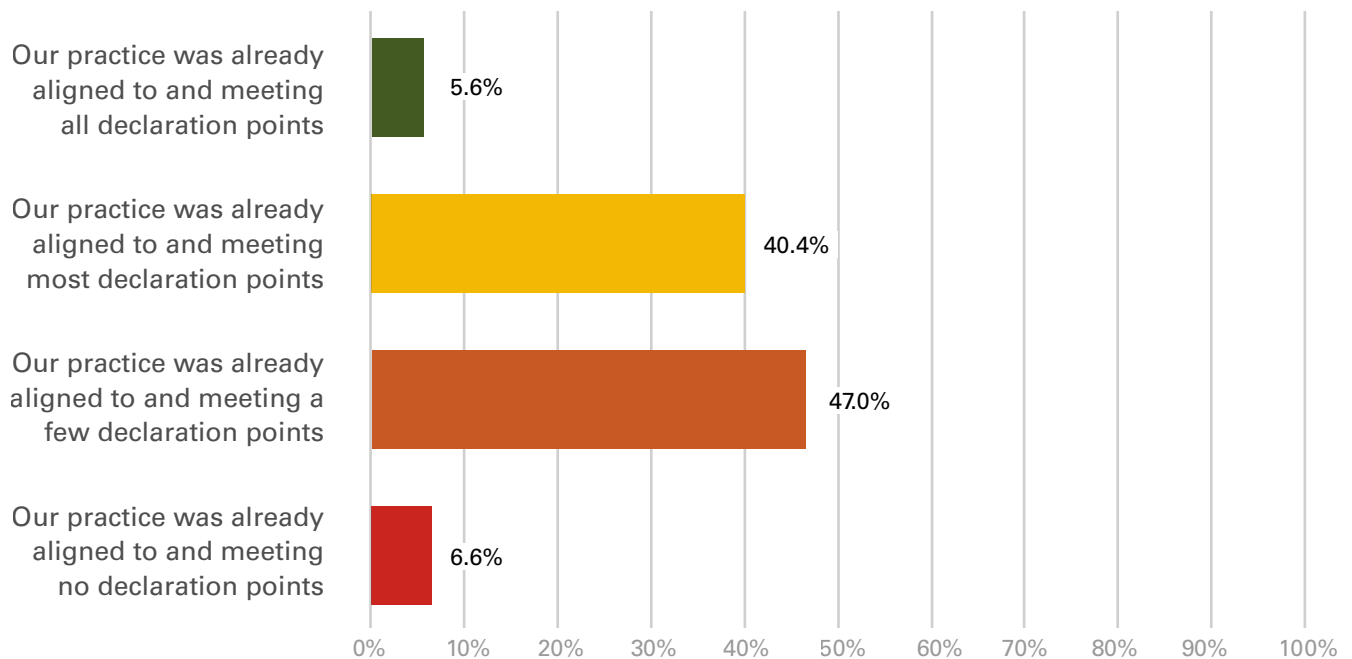
Our practice was already aligned to and meeting all declaration points — 5.6%

Our practice was already aligned to and meeting most declaration points — 40.4%

Our practice was already aligned to and meeting a few declaration points — 47.0%

Our practice was already aligned to and meeting no declaration points — 6.6%

Figure 4. How much do you feel your organisation was aligned to, and meeting the declaration points when you became a signatory?

Yes, significantly changed — 19.1%

Yes, somewhat changed — 60.5%

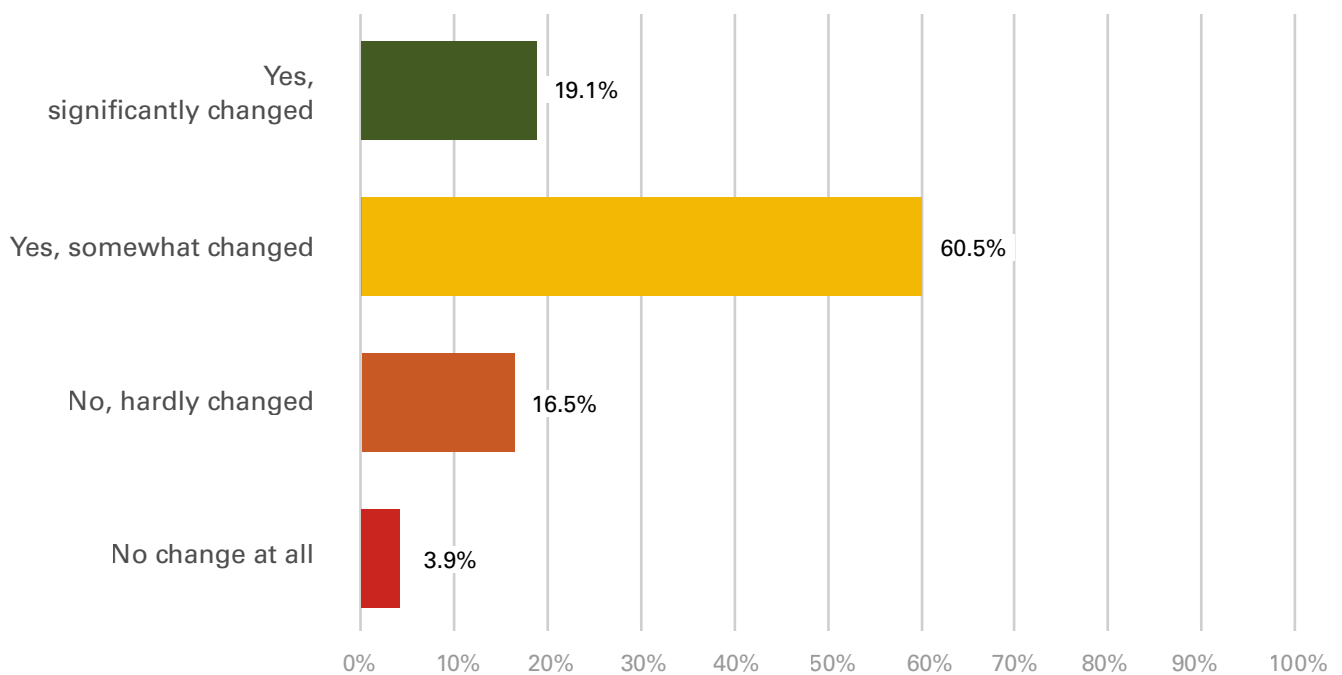No, hardly changed — 16.5%

No change at all — 3.9%

Figure 5. Has becoming an Architects Declare signatory affected your organisation and your approach to projects?

The impact of the declaration

Q. How much do you feel your organisation was aligned to, and meeting the declaration points when you became a signatory?

Of those surveyed, just 5.6% of respondents said that their practices were already meeting all of the declaration commitments at the time of becoming a signatory, while 40.4% of respondents said their practices were meeting most of the commitments. The majority of those surveyed felt that they were meeting only a few (47%) of the commitments, while a minority of respondents felt that their practice was not meeting any of the Architects Declare commitments (6.6%) at the time of becoming a signatory. In aggregate, this shows that the majority (53.6%) of practices were not meeting most of the Architects Declare commitments when they became signatories. The declaration commitments were therefore a break from the status quo for most signatory practices, and to meet the declaration commitments change would need to be enacted. Other questions in the survey addressed making change, and what has been implemented by practices so far.

Q. Has becoming an Architects Declare signatory affected your organisation and your approach to projects?

19.1% of respondents said that becoming an Architects Declare signatory has significantly changed their organisation and approach to projects, while 60.5% said that they have somewhat changed. 79.6% of respondents say they have changed their organisation and approach to projects as a direct result of becoming an Architects Declare signatory either somewhat, or to a significant extent. Of those practices that had hardly changed (16.5%) or made no change at all (3.9%) as a result of becoming an Architects Declare signatory, it is important to note that these totals include those who already felt they were meeting all or most of the Architects Declare commitments at the time of becoming a signatory. There are also those who say that they have not yet been able to make change to meet the declaration due to limiting factors. Refer to pages 14-15 for more on the challenges practices have faced in making change. Overall, it is evident that Architects Declare has already catalysed change in most practices. It is clear from later questions that there is more change to be done, both at a system level, and at the level of the practices.

Architects Declare Embodied Carbon
Workshop, 2020

Source: Feilden Clegg Bradley

Architects Declare commitments

Q. Please rate how well you are meeting the Architects Declare commitment items

Raise awareness of the climate and biodiversity emergencies and the urgent need for action amongst our clients and supply chains.
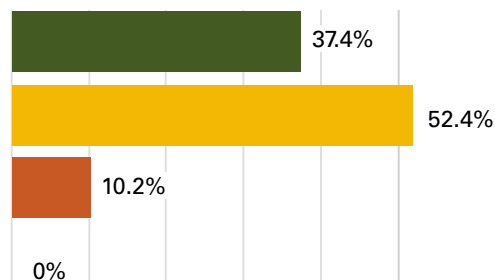
37.4%
52.4%
10.2%
0%

Advocate for faster change in our industry towards regenerative design practices and a higher Governmental funding priority to support this.

25.7%
38.5%
35.8%
0%
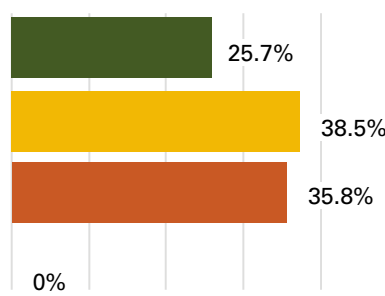
Establish climate and biodiversity mitigation principles as the key measure of our industry's success: demonstrated through awards, prizes and listings.
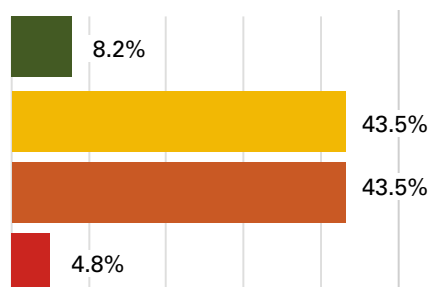
8.2%
43.5%
43.5%
4.8%

Share knowledge and research to that end on an open source basis.

20.3%
50.0%
29.7%

Key

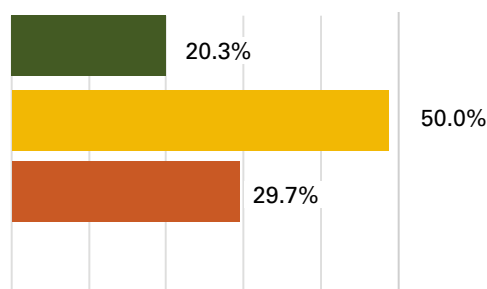| ■ Completely able to meet this commitment	■ Mostly able to meet this commitment	■ Hard to meet this commitment	■ Impossible to meet this commitment

Evaluate all new projects against the aspiration to contribute positively to mitigating climate breakdown, and encourage our clients to adopt this approach.

37.8%
45.9%
14.2%
2.1%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%
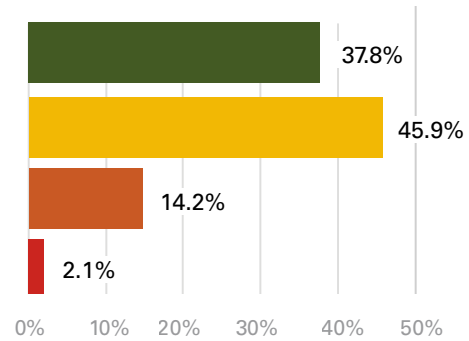
Figure 10.`

Upgrade existing buildings for extended use as a more carbon efficient alternative to demolition and new build whenever there is a viable choice.

32.4%
47.3%
19.6%
0.7%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

Figure 11.`

Include life cycle costing, whole life carbon modelling and post occupancy evaluation as part of our basic scope of work, to reduce both embodied and operational resource use.

6.8%
28.4%
60.1%
4.7%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%
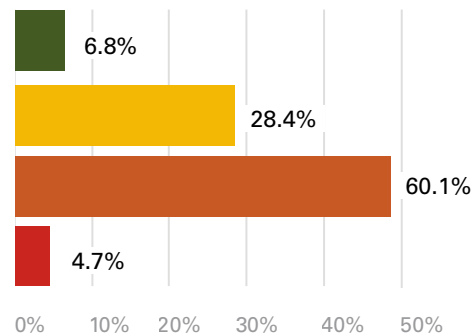
Figure 12.`

Adopt more regenerative design principles in our studios, with the aim of designing architecture and urbanism that goes beyond the standard of net zero carbon in use.

17.0%
52.4%
29.3%
1.3%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%
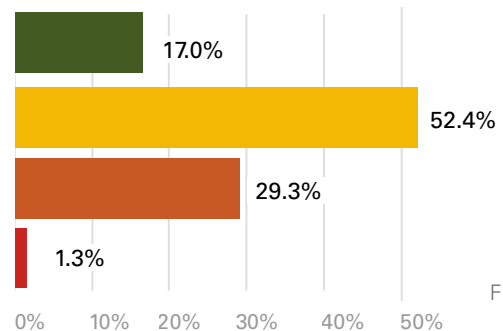
Figure 13.`

Collaborate with engineers, contractors and clients to further reduce construction waste.

28.4%
50.0%
20.9%
0.7%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%
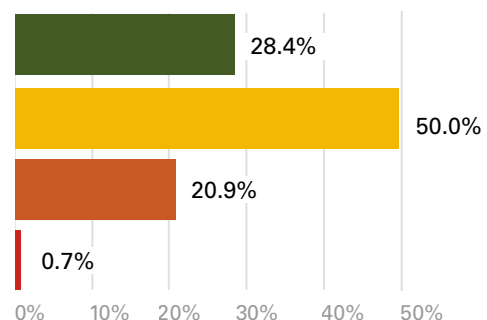
Figure 14.`

Accelerate the shift to low embodied carbon materials in all our work.

Figure 15.`

Minimise wasteful use of resources in architecture and urban planning, both in quantum and in detail.

Figure 16.`

Rating average over all Architects Declare commitment points

Figure 17.`

Summary

70.6% of Architects Declare signatories are able to mostly or completely meet most of the commitment points (Fig 17). In particular, it is clear that practices are finding they are most able to 'Minimise wasteful use of resources…' (Fig 16), 'Advocate for faster change in our industry' (Fig 7) and to 'Evaluate all new projects against the aspiration to contribute positively to mitigating climate breakdown…' (Fig 1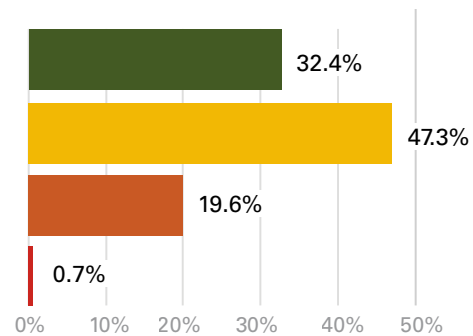0). The commitment item that practices found hardest to implement is to 'Include life cycle costing, whole life carbon modelling and post occupancy evaluations as part of our basic scope of work, to reduce both embodied and operational resource use'. (Fig 12). This may be due to clients being unwilling to pay for additional services such as WLC modelling, or it may be that this is more of a technical challenge than other commitments. Architects Declare will continue to support its signatories in knowledge-sharing, particularly on those declaration points that have been harder to adopt, as well as using Architects Declare's platform and agency to help with the broader system level change needed to help signatories to meet the declaration commitments.
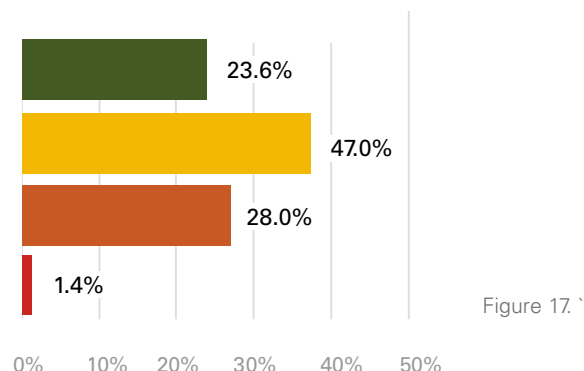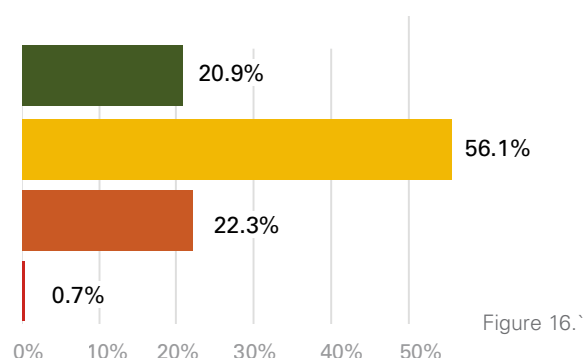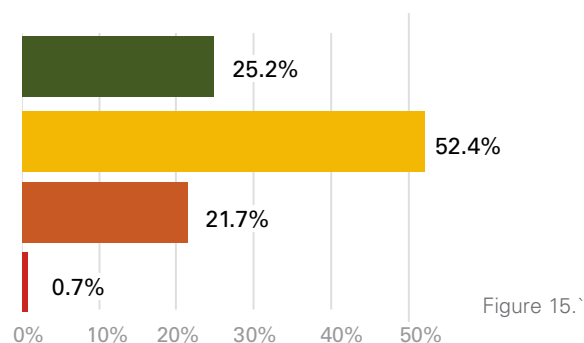
Public perception changes — 44.4%
Client priorities changing — 33.3%
Your staff demanding change — 43.1%
Attending/joining groups relating to Architects Declare commitments — 27.8%
Sharing knowledge with other Architects Declare signatories — 19.4%
What you have learnt through Architects Declare events & communications — 29.2%
Other — 31.9%
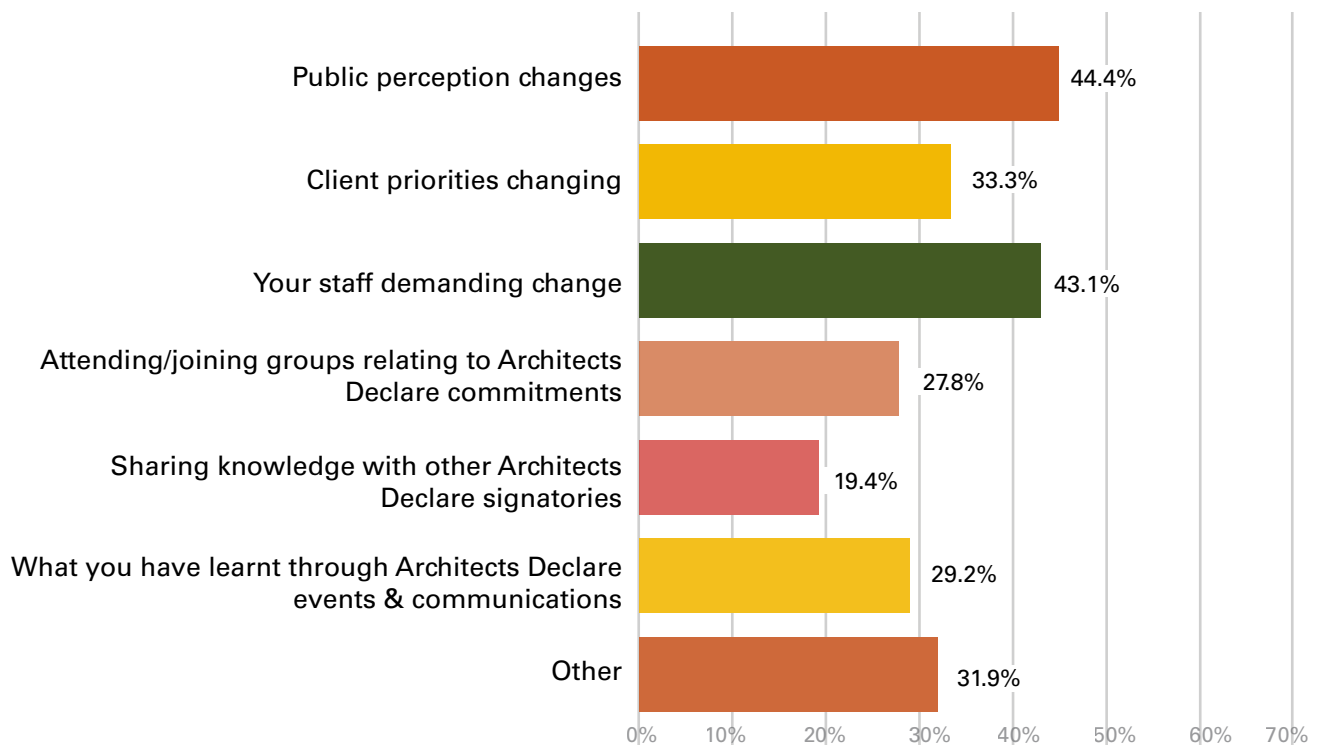
Figure 18. If you have made changes since become an Architects Declare signatory, please indicate what have been the other most significant drivers behind these changes?`

Business strategy reasons — 12.3%
Skills & training implementation — 34.3%
Time & resourcing — 46.6%
Knowledge level — 46.6%
Financial — 34.3%
Clients — 55.5%
Supply chain — 29.5%
Sharing knowledge with others — 8.2%
Other consultants — 15.8%
Regulatory factors — 31.5%
Other — 11.6%

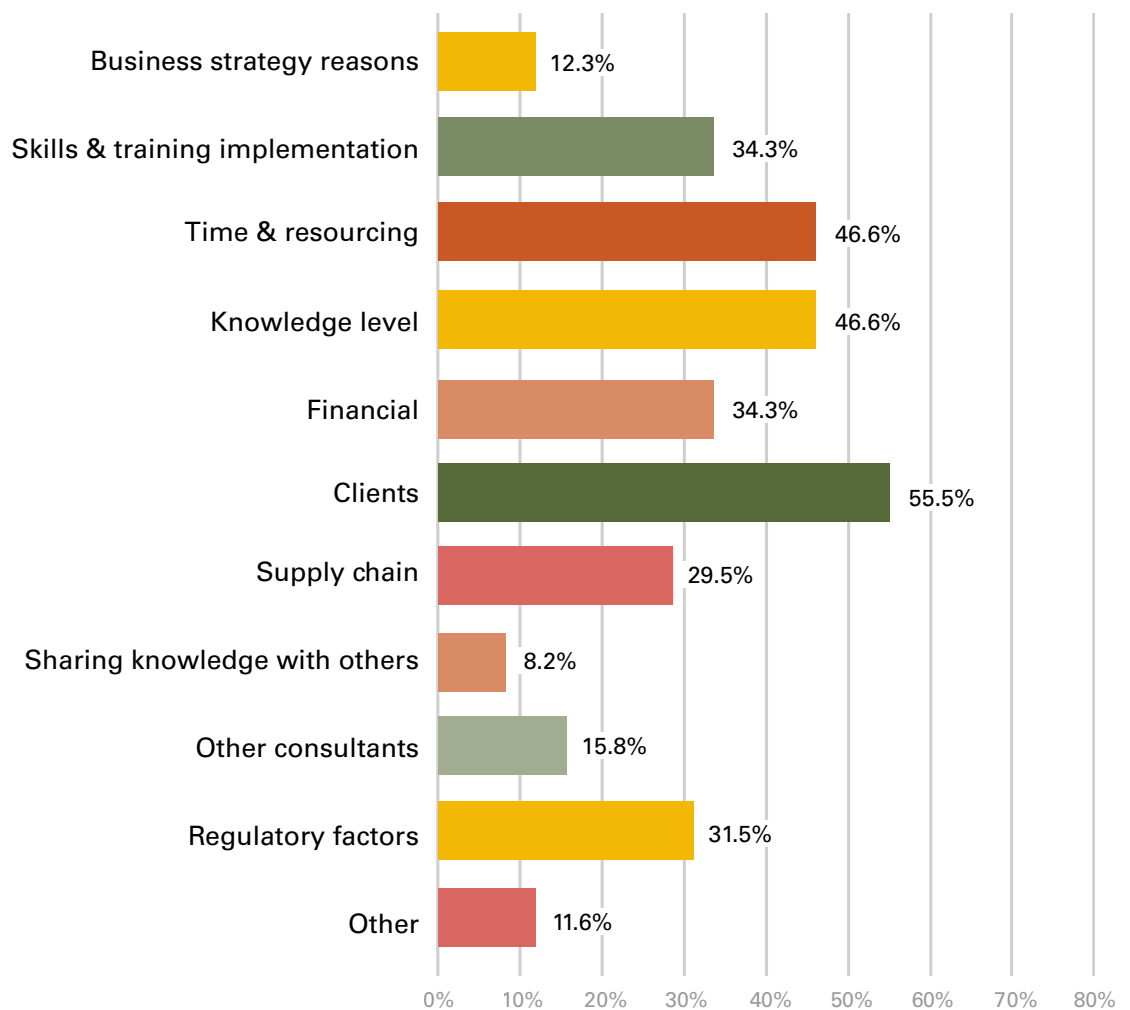Figure 19. If you have encountered challenges in implementing change, please select which have been the most significant.

Making change

Q. If you have made changes, please indicate what have been the most significant drivers behind these changes?

From Fig 18, it is clear that 'staff demanding change' has been the most significant driver, suggesting that there has been a shift in employees' attitudes to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, and that this is being listened to by practice Directors/Partners/ Senior Management. In addition, 'public perceptions changing' is a significant factor. Client priorities have acted as a driver for change, although it can be seen in fig. 19 that clients have also acted as a significantly challenging factor. Of those who listed 'Other' factors driving change, the main trend was for respondents to feel they have a personal, moral responsibility to be doing the 'right thing' in the face of the climate and biodiversity emergency. Practices also have said that their staff being engaged with other groups, such as ACAN and LETI, have also helped drive change in their organisations. Other reasons include:

"Personal conscience, simply making good on our signing up to the declaration"

"Always wanted to [make changes], but societal changes have given me greater confidence that it will be successful."

"Change is being sought at all levels from the youngest members to directors "

Q. Has becoming an Architects Declare signatory affected your organisation and your approach to projects?

Practices appear to be facing a multitude of challenges. Most striking is that 55.5% of signatories see Clients as a challenge to making change. Other leading factors that are creating challenges include Time & Resourcing (46.6%), Knowledge Level (46.6%), Skills & Training Implementation (34.3%), Financial (34.3%), and Regulatory Factors (31.5%). Of those who listed 'Other' factors, the main trend has been challenges in using timber in light of the combustibles ban, and in Appointments/Scope. This suggests there is a general need for continued upskilling in the Architecture profession, as well as wider system change beyond the profession, including making a business case for delivering architecture in line with Architects Declare commitments, e.g:

 "To meet the rigorous targets involves a step change in consultant scopes and legislation. The Architect can not do this alone and needs aligned, collaborative engineering teams, which relies on client fees and instruction."

Practice operations

Internal processes

Practice operations

Design approach

Design approach

Project reviews

Sustainability working group

Less travel

Other commitments e.g RIBA 2030

Resourcing

New staff

Software

WFH & improved work/life balance

Project suitability

Internal sustainable champions

External consult-ants

Refurbishment & retrofit

Sustainable specification

POE

Procurement

Appointment

Social value

Advocacy

Advocacy

Knowledge

Training

Embodied carbon

LCA & embodied carbon

Clients

Research & data disclosure

Collaboration with other architects

Circular economy

Material reuse & less waste

Operational carbon

Energy

Fabric first

Ecology

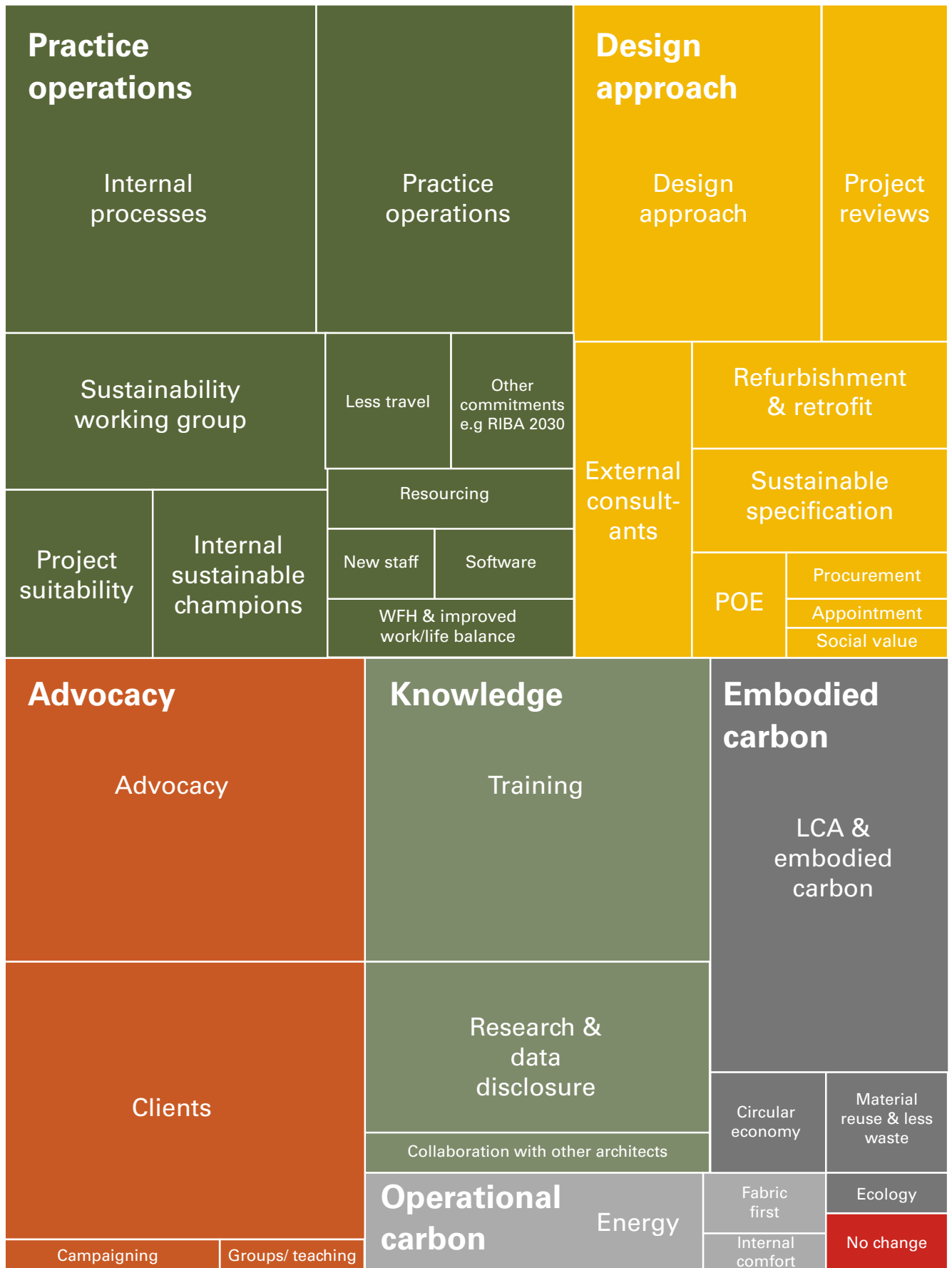Campaigning

Groups/ teaching

Internal comfort

No change

Figure 20.If you have made changes to your organisation and your approach to projects, please outline three changes you have implemented. Results plotted as a tree map, following Grounded Theory

Main changes signatories have made

Q. If you have made changes to your organisation and your approach to projects, please outline three changes you have implemented

Of the 131 respondents to this question, only three noted that they had not made any changes to their practice since signing the declaration. There was a general feeling that many of the practices have to change their working methods to incorporate the AD principles, focusing on the way they operate as a business (60%), changing approaches to projects (54%), improved knowledge sharing/training (47%), and increasing advocacy for AD and its principles (43%). Many practices noted that they now have a formalised sustainability group and an increased review procedure to ensure that projects deliver on their declaration, with three practices hiring specific staff to assist with their transition, and four investing in new software. Practices also noted that they were starting to talk about sustainability with the client far earlier, raising questions during the tender process and beginning to make difficult decisions about the projects they want to work on. Increasing staff knowledge was a key focus, either through internal CPDs or engaging with external consultants to train and assist during projects. Particular areas for support were around the impact of materials, zero operational carbon, and the ecology of sites.

"Learning, talks and CPDs have taken a climate crisis focus. Formation of Climate Emergency research group."

"A heightened emphasis on assembling the consultant team at the beginning of a project and setting a stronger sustainability agenda with our clients."

"We advertise our membership of AD in fee letters, website and in presentations"

"Knowing other practices are thinking in a similar way has given us confidence - especially with regard to challenging our clients"

"Regular reviews of current projects (early stages and later construction stages)"

"Re-assessing our own office practices from a sustainability perspective"

"New full time member of staff employed"

"No change to organisation, but a stronger belief and conviction"

"Prefacing each new commission with discussions with our clients regarding the place of architecture in addressing climate change and how this affects how we work as a practice"

Knowledge

Knowledge sharing

Research & upskilling

Training

Advocacy

Client engagement

Advocacy

Raise awareness

Lobbying

Industry

Carbon efficiency

Embodied carbon focus

Net zero carbon projects

Whole life carbon focus

Smart material use

Targets

Meeting the declaration points

New sustainability policy

RIBA 2030

Analysis

POE

LCA

Metrics

BIM & tech

Design

Regenerative design

Retrofit

Circular economy

Collaborate

Collaboration with specialists
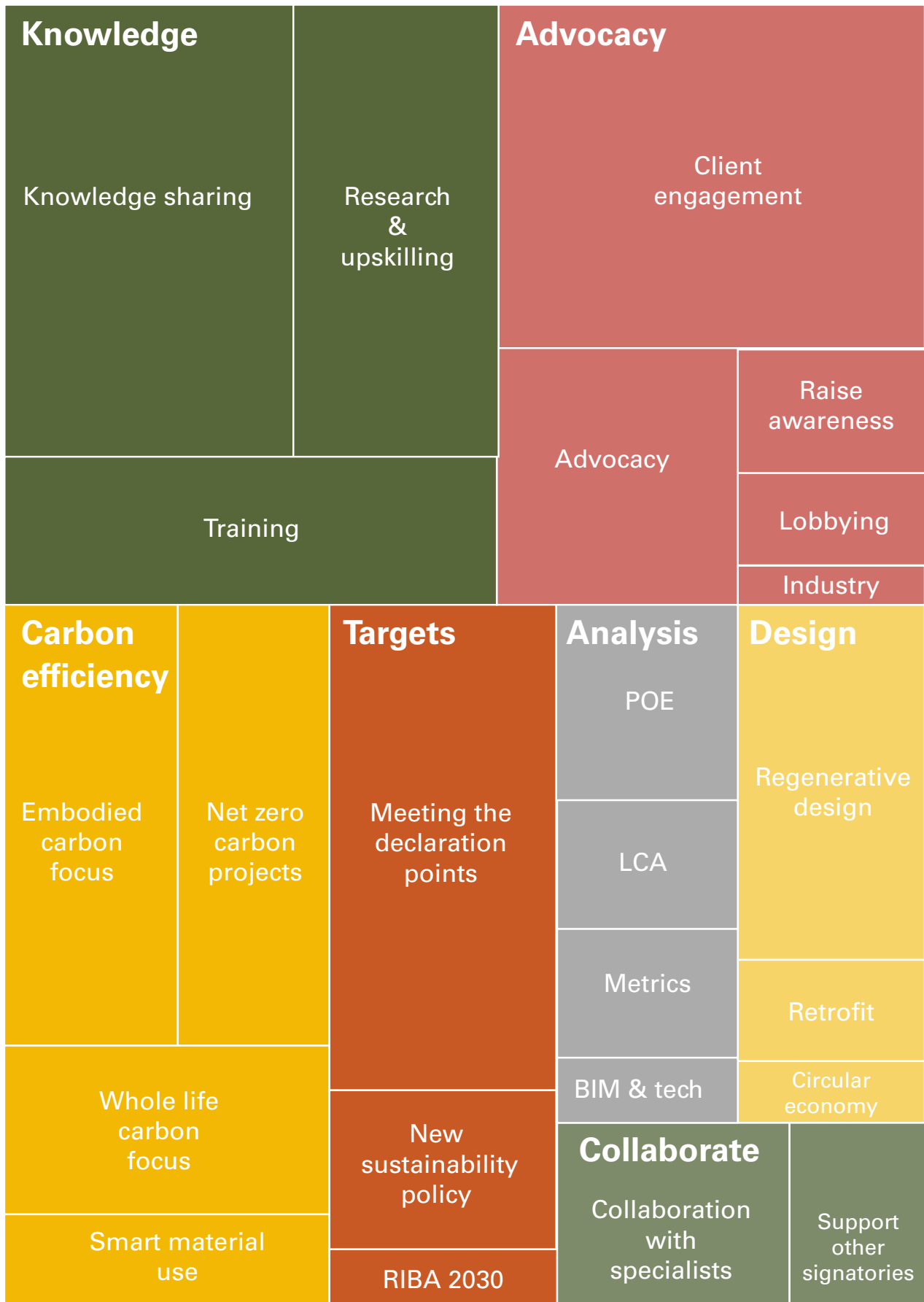
Support other signatories

Figure 21. What is going to be your main strategy going forwards as an Architects Declare signatory? Results plotted as a tree map, following Grounded Theory

Signatories' strategies for the future

Q. What is going to be your main strategy going forwards as an Architects Declare signatory?

140 practices answered this question. 35% of practices stated that their main strategy will be Education and Knowledge. This included practice based Research and awareness on knowledge gaps for up-skilling from (10.7%), Training (8.6%) and Sharing Knowledge outside their practices (15.7%). Another primary strategic theme was Advocacy, with 30% of respondents stating this to be their primary strategy for the future - including engaging more with clients (17.1%) and being advocates inside and outside the industry (7.9%). Carbon efficiency in design was a significant trend for signatories' future plans, with 27.1% of respondents including this in their answer. Of these, 9.3% of respondents plan to have a focus on Embodied Carbon reduction through design, and 7.9% plan to ensure their projects will be Net Zero, and meeting best practice benchmarks for this by RIBA 2030, LETI or others. 18.6% of respondents identified that internal policy change was needed, including reviews of how well they are meeting the declaration commitments. Collaboration is an important feature in the answers given, between other signatory practices, or with specialists. And there is a movement towards more analysis of projects, and focus on regenerative, circular and retrofit design approaches.

"Enshrine climate awareness as the one of the highest considerations in our working methods, our practice and our product. Raising awareness, defining metrics and being self accountable and transparent."

"To increase our knowledge and application of whole life carbon and increase our post occupancy studies."

"I think that a limiting factor has been our failure to seek enough contact and communication with other architects and I would therefore hope to improve this situation."

"Measurements!! Without measuring we don't know how are doing. We must have internal bench marks and be aware of areas for improvements."

"Saying no to clients who don't demonstrate a strong commitment to combat climate change"

"Coming out of the coronavirus pandemic I'm determined not to 'bounce back' but to 'bounce forward'. Going back to the 'old' way of doing things makes no sense whatsoever. My main strategy is to refuse to compromise in the delivery of built environment projects that are positive for the climate, for people and for biodiversity."

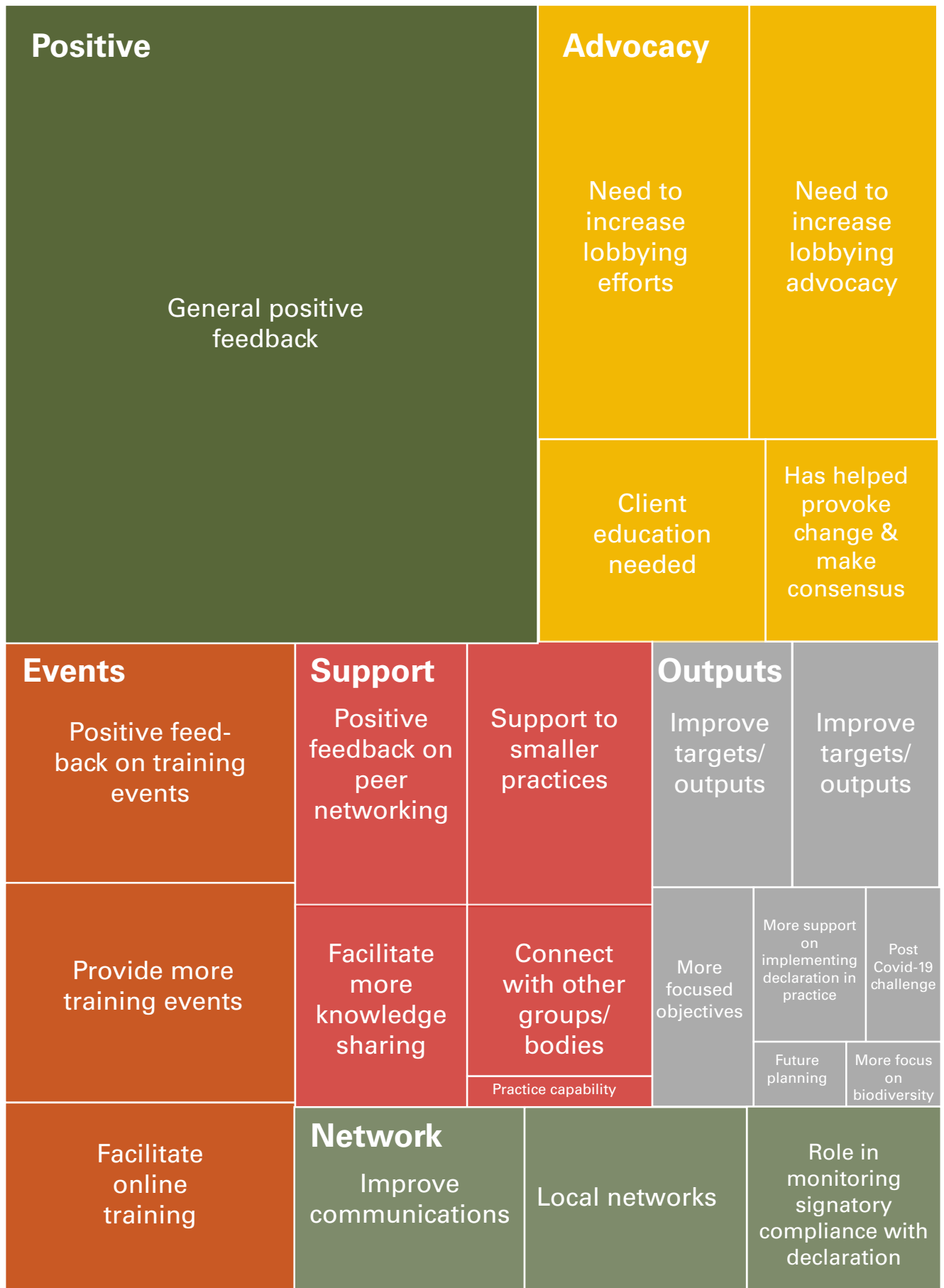*"Increase knowledge and skills of staff"*

Positive

General positive feedback

Advocacy

Need to increase lobbying efforts

Need to increase lobbying advocacy

Client education needed

Has helped provoke change & make consensus

Events

Positive feedback on training events

Provide more training events

Facilitate online training

Support

Positive feedback on peer networking

Support to smaller practices

Facilitate more knowledge sharing

Connect with other groups/bodies

Practice capability

Outputs

Improve targets/outputs

Improve targets/outputs

More focused objectives

More support on implementing declaration in practice

Post Covid-19 challenge

Future planning

More focus on biodiversity

Network

Improve communications

Local networks

Role in monitoring signatory compliance with declaration

Figure 22.What feedback do you have for the Architects Declare initiative in general?? Results plotted as a tree map, following Grounded Theory

Feedback on Architects Declare so far

Q. What feedback do you have for the Architects Declare initiative in general?

114 practices provided feedback on the first year of Architects Declare, covering elements of training, advocacy/lobbying, communications, localisation of Architects Declare, and peer-networking. 50.9% of participants gave generalised positive feedback, often qualified by adding they'd like to see more and for the Architects Declare initiative to continue to grow. Those that had attended training had a positive experience, but many wanted more training which could be undertaken remotely, with additional opportunities for sharing knowledge with their peers. This echoed a number of respondents that wanted Architects Declare and larger signatory practices to support small architectural firms, potentially through sharing case studies or mentoring. Similarly, an increase in more localised networks was also felt necessary to assist with peer support. Architects Declare as an entity was mentioned in a number of comments, with requests to formalise its role and identity. Many comments suggested that Architects Declare should increase its lobbying and advocacy role, particularly focusing on regulatory issues, by acting as an industry body. Some recommended additional targets/outputs to enhance the declaration (e.g. numerical targets). A small number of respondents (4%) recommended that AD begin holding signatories to account over work contrary to the declaration.

"Architects Declare amongst other similar initiatives has been an eyeopener, provoked us into action. The sharing of knowledge and various initiatives by practices has been inspirational and particularly useful."

"It has been a great initiative and has helped our practice focus on making big decisions and commitments to tackle climate change and deliver the declaration points."

"It would be good to have more quantitative aims. It is easy to 'declare' but not so easy to 'do'... so it would be great to have clear, realistic and measurable targets (appropriate to small as well as large companies)"

"At the moment we are a bit overwhelmed by everything that is going on. So developing a v distinct and clear role we think would be helpful. Understanding differences in challenges between large and small practices would be good."

"We would be happy to see this grow and become a more formalised body, that pushes more strongly for action and change, which curates resources, promotes or delivers training and advocates change within legislation, education and contributing industry professions."

"I encourage AD to go further and faster in pushing for system change - that is what the industry needs and the signatories want"

Advocacy

More public speaking & advocacy

Lobbying

Greater presence outside architecture industry

Support

To share with signatories some key actions for how to meet the declaration commitments

More Architects Declare events & networking

Architects Declare CPDs on declaration commitments

Collective agency in campaigns & actions

Actively supporting signatories

Training

Steering group more visible

Knowledge

Facilitating knowledge sharing

Sharing best practice case studies

Carbon awareness

POE

Policy

Legislation changes

Mandate LCA

Retrofit encouraged

VAT reform

Network

Establishing regional Architects Declare networks

Collaborating with wider disciplines

Collaborating with other organisations
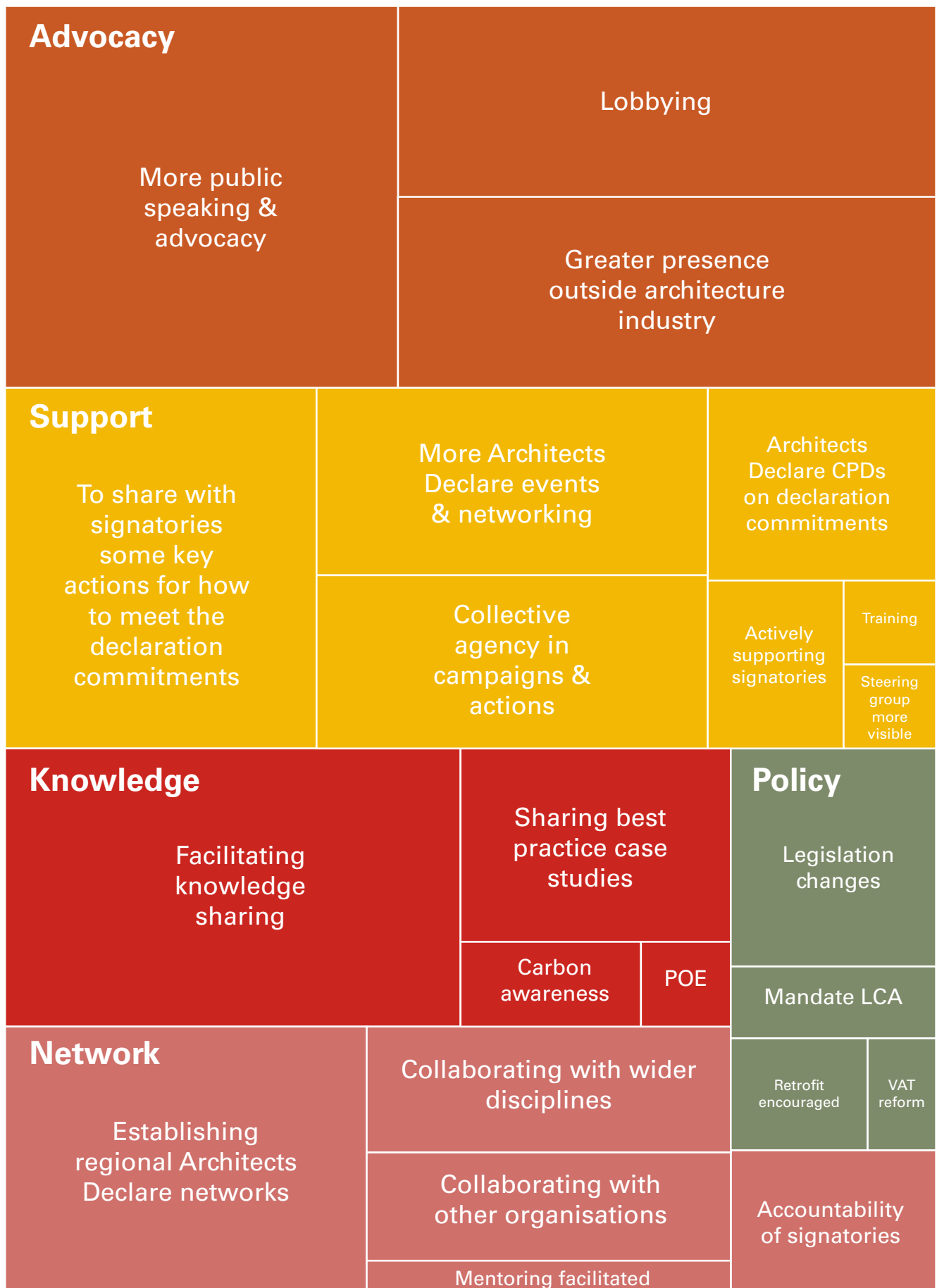
Mentoring facilitated

Accountability of signatories

Figure 23. What would you like to see from Architects Declare in its second year? Results plotted as a tree map, following Grounded Theory

The future of Architects Declare

Q. What would you like to see from Architects Declare in its second year?

The survey respondents listed a broad range of activities and efforts they would like to see from Architects Declare in its second year. Many of these focused on Advocacy (37.6%). Respondents asked for more Architects Declare events (8%) and CPDs (4.8%) going forward, as well as sharing resources with signatory practices on key actions that can help to meet the declaration commitments (21.6%). There was a general call for increased use of the collective agency of the initiative through action and campaigns. Signatories also said it would be important for Architects Declare to establish regional networks (10.4%), and particularly to support smaller practices in implementing necessary change.

Collaborations inside and outside of the construction industry were seen to be important to foster in the year ahead (20.8%). There were also four comments with regards to better understanding Architects Declare's policy on signatories' accountability against the declaration commitments, which the Steering Group have clarified since the release of the survey. There was one comment on the Steering Group being more visible and transparent in its functioning and activities in the future. Respondents would like clearer guidance on how to meet the declaration points, suggesting key actions or a roadmap would be useful (12%).

Q. Are you happy for Architects Declare as an organisation to comment publicly on issues pertaining to the climate emergency?
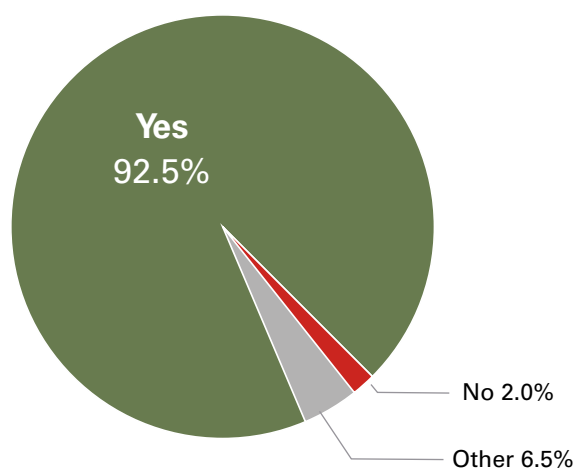

Figure 24. Respondents' views on Architects Declare commenting publicly on issues pertaining to the climate emergency.

94% of respondents stated that they would be happy for Architects Declare as an organisation to comment publicly on issues pertaining to the climate emergency. Many of those who chose 'other' did so on the grounds that this should be in line with the Architects Declare wording specifically, and that signatories could be consulted. It is felt that this response has given the Steering Group a clear mandate for Architects Declare to be more visible and vocal.

Architects Declare banners aloft at the
Global Climate Strike in September 2019

Source: UKGBC

Summary

The Architects Declare Steering Group would like to thank every practice who participated in the 2019/2020 survey, and all signatories for their ongoing efforts to meet the declaration commitments. We have found the feedback valuable in developing strategy for the year ahead.

More surveys will follow, to help determine our mandate on particular initiatives, and to continue to shape the direction of Architects Declare. We hope that for future surveys we will see a higher level of response to enable us to take a wider, more representative view.

This first year has been spent developing our strategy for change, and assembling a diverse Steering Group of volunteers from different backgrounds who meet regularly. Much of the work so far has been on growing the number of signatories both here in the UK and abroad.

We appreciate that the declaration commitments are a radical step change for most practices, and that each are facing their own challenges in working to meet the commitments. We see the role of Architects Declare as bringing individual practices together, and using this collective agency to help catalyse change at a system level, as well as facilitating knowledge sharing and support amongst signatories.

Regional support networks will be launched shortly, to assist signatory practices to be self-organising in their areas. We are also working together with other initiatives, such as the wider Construction Declares groups here in the UK and internationally, as well as Business Declares, Heritage Declares, Culture Declares, ACAN & LETI, to work together on necessary system level change.

The construction industry still has a long way to go in making the levels of change that are necessary to keep within planetary limits, while the climate and biodiversity emergencies are being continually better understood. We appreciate that these are difficult times, and we hope that signatories will continue to endeavour to meet the declaration commitments in the face of current adversity. There is more work to be done, and we hope you will continue to support one another in enacting necessary change both inside and beyond our profession.

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UK Architects Declare is one of a growing number of international declarations under **Construction Declares**

Website www.constructiondeclares.com