



# Working out in Architecture

A student guide to getting a job and getting the best out of work experience

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# Contents

	Introduction	1
	Is work experience really necessary?	2
	What is the right sort of experience to look for?	3
	What the RIBA recommends your 'year out' should cover	5
	The basic rules of job hunting	7
	<i>Advertised Jobs</i>	7
	<i>Developing Your Contacts</i>	7
	<i>The Curriculum Vitae (CV)</i>	9
	<i>Making Contact</i>	9
	<i>Telephone Tips</i>	11
	<i>The Portfolio</i>	12
	<i>Personal Presentation</i>	13
	<i>The Interview</i>	13
	<i>Presentational Tips</i>	14
	<i>Employment Status</i>	15
	<i>Salaries</i>	16
	Getting the best out of your work experience	17
	<i>Priorities</i>	17
	<i>Getting Started</i>	17
	<i>The Diary</i>	19
	<i>Project Materials</i>	19
	<i>The Logbook</i>	20
	When is it time to move on	21
	Overseas Work – Will It Count?	22
	What to do when things go wrong	23
Appendix 1	Example of a Curriculum Vitae	24
Appendix 2	RIBA Student membership	26
Appendix 3	Guidance for Overseas Students who are not nationals of the European Economic Area	28
Appendix 4	The Work Permit	29
Appendix 5	Further Information	30





# Introduction

This guide has been written, at the request of the AA Students Forum, by Alastair Robertson, who was the Professional Studies Advisor (PSA) at the AA between 1975 and 2015. He was also responsible for Part 3 at the Royal College of Art and the University of Cambridge for several years.

The guide is designed to help students get the best out of their periods of work experience, normally when they take a year out at the end of their third year.

It gives a great deal of emphasis on how to find the right sort of job and contains a number of useful (if subversive) tips on getting to the head of the queue in the job market. The guide also sets out the basic requirements for practical training laid down by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), and includes a summary of the conditions that students from overseas must meet in order to work in the UK and satisfy their visa requirements.

Practical training and work experience are an integral part of the requirements for students planning to register as architects in the UK. The Architects Registration Board (ARB) requires a minimum of two years of supervised experience and training in practice before a student is eligible to sit the Part 3 Examination. This experience can be at any time after a student has commenced a recognised course in architecture. Although two years is the minimum, in most cases, students will need around three years experience before they are really ready for the Part 3 exam, primarily because some of the key experience they need - running projects on site, in particular - is not likely to come before they are regarded by their employers as competent to do so - and this takes time.

The year out is not about experience alone. Students should also begin the process of developing their knowledge and understanding of the legal, contractual and procedural framework of the construction industry and what rules govern their professional role within it through reading and by attending relevant courses on professional practice issues.

## Is work experience really necessary?

A few students, a very few, go through their full five years of study without spending any time working in an architectural practice. There is no rule which says this should not be done - but it is not generally a good idea. The normal pattern throughout the UK is for students to take a one year break (the 'Year Out') after their 3rd year and spend most of this period gaining experience of general practice in architecture.

Taking a break at other times is also possible, sometimes desirable, and sometimes necessary for financial reasons. However, students wanting to take an earlier or a later break should take advice first from their Unit tutors and then ensure they have agreement from the Registrar's Office.

All students wishing to register as Architects in the UK and gain a professional qualification are required to have a minimum of two years experience of practice and the Year Out counts towards this - whenever it is taken.

Gaining work experience during the course is of practical help in other ways as well: The opportunity to develop greater technical proficiency; to learn about the legal and regulatory systems which govern how buildings are designed and built; and also to see the products of design taking shape on the ground are immensely important not only as preparation for later employment but also to set a wider and richer context for project work in the Diploma School.

Future employers also expect Diploma graduates to have had some work experience during their course and those that cannot include examples in their portfolios of technical and design work carried out on real projects may have difficulty finding the sort of job they are looking for after Part 2

Short periods of work experience, in vacations for example, can also be valuable, particularly if students establish a continuity of contact with the same office. Typically, the minimum period of work experience that adds real value to learning is around 5 months.

For students from outside the EU / EEA and on a UKBA visa. It is quite critical that they obtain sufficient UK-based experience within the timeframe of their visa, otherwise their ability to complete the requirements of the final Part 3 exam may be in jeopardy, hence they should seek to spend their year out within the UK.

## What is the right sort of experience to look for?

There is no prescription for what you should do in your year out. If you have no previous experience in offices you must be prepared to do a lot of very basic things to begin with while your employer assesses where he or she thinks you can contribute best to the work in the practice - but things usually get better!

Ideally, you want to be in a practice where there is a lot going on with projects at different stages of development. This gives you the chance to see where and how architects get involved in projects as they progress through the development cycle. It also gives you the opportunity to meet the other key players in the building game: contractors, clients, other construction professionals and those that regulate the system including Planning and Building Control Officers.

Big offices are not always best, not because they are bad employers, but because they are generally highly structured and you may not get as much diversity of experience and direct contact with clients, specialists and contractors as you would working in a smaller office.

Working on big projects can also be a disadvantage, particularly if you get locked into a lot of repetitive work on just one aspect of the project. Smaller projects are more interesting in that they tend to move more quickly and therefore you get involved in more of the project stages.

As a general rule, you should be looking for an office that offers the widest range of learning experiences and avoid jobs which are narrow, repetitive and keep you isolated from the rest of the design and building team. The fact that you may be a first rate CAD technician or are able to knock off brilliant conceptual drawings for competitions does not mean that that is *all you do* on your year out.

Architects get drawn into a very wide range of design projects including urban design, landscapes, interior design, exhibitions and so on. These areas are all relevant to your work experience and you should get involved if you have the opportunity. Some major contractors and client organisations employ their own architects and it is quite acceptable to gain experience in the architect's department within these types of organisation.

Working in other design disciplines and for contractors, even where there is no qualified architect to supervise you, can be very interesting and useful experience for a short period. The RIBA rules on practical training allow for up to 6 months of such experience to be counted towards the minimum of 2 years required before you are eligible to take the Part 3 examination. However, for

students working under UK Border Agency (UKBA) visa regulations, only experience working for a UK registered architect is permitted.

Most students get invited from time to time to take on small private commissions, sometimes in their year out. Although the RIBA rules do not permit self employed practice experience to count towards the minimum Part 3 requirements, if such opportunities arise and they are within your capability they may be worth taking on. However, be very, very careful! It is not a very good idea to take on private work at such an early stage in your training without having a qualified architect or other construction professional to act as your mentor. You really will need an experienced person to advise you on correct procedures and on matters such as Building Control and Planning; to check over your detailed proposals; and to advise you on contractual matters. Preferably, if you decide to take on private work, do so in addition to building your experience within an established practice. Also remember - you cannot describe yourself as an Architect until you have passed Part 3 and have registered with the Architects Registration Board. An additional problem is that it will be very difficult, if not impossible for you to get Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII). Without such insurance, all your financial assets are put at risk if something goes wrong as a result of your designs or related actions.

For Home and EU students, working overseas during your year out is permissible and can often be just as worthwhile as working in the UK. Up to one year of experience outside the EU / EEA counts towards the minimum Part 3 requirements. However students subject to visa regulations will compromise their visa entitlements if they do this. Of course the value of non-UK experience depends on the type and scale of jobs you are working on and the experience and training you are gaining in the office. The only real disadvantage, if you have not worked previously in the UK, is that when you come to look for a job at the end of the Diploma School, UK employers may be a little concerned at your lack of local experience.

To sum up: you need to get as wide a range of experience as possible in your year out. You need to meet all the main players in the building game - and have time to find out what they do, how they do it and how they think. It is as much about experiencing a cultural journey as it is about technical development. You also need to build the basis of a good work-based portfolio. So make sure you keep samples and examples of the work you have done. The reason for this is that it will be extremely valuable when you are job hunting after Diploma School. Of course employers will be interested in your School portfolio, but you will build their confidence immensely if you can show them good examples of work you have done on live projects.

# What the RIBA recommends your 'year out' should cover

The RIBA, the largest professional body for architects in the UK, indicates in its guidance that Professional Training Experience should include the following:

1. Give students reasonable opportunities to gain an adequate breadth and depth of experience from the range described in the Professional Education and Development Record (PEDR). This is likely to include:
  - attending meetings with clients, including discussions on the brief and project drawings
  - attending preliminary site investigations and meetings with local authority officers
  - involvement in preparation of design and production drawings, specification & schedules
  - attending meetings with contractors, Qs and specialist consultants
  - involvement in pre-contact job management, contact procedures, writing correspondence & reports
  - making site visits, site meetings with contractors and sub-contractors
  - involvement in post-completion procedures, defects liability inspection and final accounts
  - involvement in office organisation, administration and management

*NB This is a list for the whole of practical training, and at Part 1 some of these areas are likely to involve 'sitting in on meetings' & 'shadowing'.*

2. Provide an office supervisor (normally referred to as a 'mentor') - an experienced architect who will be personally responsible for directing a student's work so that adequate experience is obtained. The supervisor should have 5 years experience themselves of architectural design and contract administration, who is readily approachable by the student, but well enough placed in the office structure to have a good knowledge of the overall work of the practice, and able to arrange involvement / experience for the student. This person will be responsible for signing the students PEDR record on a monthly basis. In some situations, and with the approval of the PSA, another construction professional can take on this role.
3. Allow visits / contact with the professional training adviser from the student's school of architecture.
4. Allow the student a minimum 10 working days per annum for professional activities recognised as broadening their practical training. This may involve them in time out of the office to attend seminars arranged by their school; or

attending site visits or meetings arranged by the office on jobs unconnected with their own job in the office. This educational / training time should not affect their normal leave entitlement or pay. Students should expect to devote an equivalent amount of their own time to such activities.

# The basic rules of job hunting

***Most jobs in architecture come through personal contact not through job adverts - developing a good network is the best investment you can make. But don't ignore the advertised jobs either***

## ***Advertised Jobs***

The main published sources of jobs in architecture are Building Design and the Architect's Journal. Both are worth looking at regularly to give an idea on what sort of work is available and are a reasonable guide to the sort of salary you can expect. If you see something you are interested in - move quickly. Telephone for more details; check out the sort of people they have in mind; ask if it is possible to visit the office to see what sort of work they do.

Detective work helps - Look out for multiple adverts from the same organisation, even if they are aimed at more senior staff - it may mean they are putting a new project team together and while they have advertised the senior jobs they may also have some more junior posts to fill that have not yet been advertised. Follow the editorial section as well. Practices that have won major competitions and commissions may need more staff and have not yet got round to advertising for them.

The RIBA has a web based job and information service for architectural, design and project management professionals.

<http://www.ribaappointments.com/jobs/results.aspx> that provides both students and practices with an electronic bulletin board for advertising their availability and skills (students) and student training vacancies (practices).

## ***Developing your Network***

At the AA you have a ready made network of qualified architects among the staff. You may also have friends or relatives that are in practice. The initial step in the process is to ask them for their suggestions about architects they personally know who might be prepared to talk to you about getting work experience. DON'T ASK THEM FOR A JOB - *If you do and they don't* -they will may not only be embarrassed by having to turn you down but may also be defensive about giving you the contacts that you need. *If you don't and they do have work they think you could do* - they will make the offer without being asked. This is the start of your network.

The next stage is to make personal contact (preferably face to face or by telephone) with the individual you have been referred to. The line you should take is that you need some advice on job search and they have been recommended to you as someone who could help DON'T ASK THEM FOR A JOB either, for the same reasons as stated above. Ask whether it would be possible to bring along your Curriculum Vitae (CV) and portfolio for them to look

at and give their (hopefully) constructive comments on it. If they have a job they think you would be suited for, they will probably make an offer. If they haven't, you will get the benefit of their advice. However, you also want their suggestions on who you might approach for possible employment. **YOU WANT NAMED INDIVIDUALS WHO THEY KNOW PERSONALLY.** Don't leave without them.

Congratulations! You are widening the net. It is now down to you to repeat exactly the same process with your new set of contacts. Always making personal contact. Always seeking advice rather than asking for a job directly. Always asking for recommendations about people who might be interested in your work. Always writing a 'thank you' note afterwards.

This is an intensive process - but it is *much* more likely to succeed than a cascade of CVs in the post to unknown practices. You also get a lot of good advice along the way.

***Be prepared - so you can respond quickly as opportunities arise***

Being prepared means having:

- a short, interesting CV you can put in the post, fax or e-mail within half an hour.
- a tidy, compact portfolio, preferably A3 size, with some really good examples of your work
- an A-Z that will help you find your way to someone's office easily

***The Curriculum Vitae (CV)***

*(See also Appendix 1)*

CVs have a standard format - and employers expect you to comply with this:

- personal details and contact telephone number, address etc.
- basic educational details and qualifications listed in date order with GCSEs first
- work experience listed in the reverse order with your most recent experience first
- publications (if any)
- other interests, experiences (e.g. travel) and capabilities (e.g. language skills, sporting achievements)

Although some employers will ask for fuller details, you should keep your basic CV to two pages if you can.

A flattering photograph can be helpful sometimes but avoid the passport 'mugshot'. Thumbnail graphics of work you have done can be added - but with care as you will be constantly updating them.

At this stage, it is helpful to include all your work experience including holiday and part-time jobs. Also include any voluntary work you have done. Where your work experience is very limited, it is often helpful to expand a little on the student projects you have been involved in so the CV does not look too bare.

In presentation terms - be innovative, use colour - you want to catch the attention of the reader. However, be careful that the graphics and layout do not obscure the essential details you need to get across.

You will probably create the document electronically. As you may need to e-mail as a file. Irrespective of what software you use to create it in, make sure you have one version in Word 97 with all the graphics in JPEG or PDF format and the text in a standard Microsoft font (e.g. Arial or Times New Roman). Remember it will probably be opened up on a standard desktop PC which will not support fancy fonts or graphic software like Photoshop.

Test the finished CV on a photocopier to make sure that it comes through these reprographic processes without losing clarity and readability. If you have an digital version, send it to someone with a basic PC and ask him or her what it looks like.

***Find out who is the decision maker and make direct and personal contact as soon as possible - it helps to be at the front of the queue.***

It might also be a good idea to set up a basic website. This will give you the opportunity to put up more stuff about yourself. Don't use social media to set up your website as others can add unhelpful and embarrassing comments and they are difficult to navigate around. However social media like LinkedIn are good for building networks.

### ***Making Contact***

Never, ever write a letter that starts " Dear sir/madam" or set up an interview without knowing the name of the person you are supposed to be meeting. You must always take the trouble to find out the name of the person to whom you should write or talk to about a job.

How do you do this?

If you are 'cold-calling', that is if you have no introduction to the organisation, then telephone and ask the receptionist the name of the person who is responsible for recruitment (and how it is spelled) - and their job title - thank them and hang up. Ring back a little later and ask for their 'secretary' or PA - check that the information you have been given is right and if it is, ask when it would be a good time to telephone them directly - say thank you and hang up again. Avoid speaking to the person directly at this stage if you can - you are not prepared.

Even if you do have a contact name in an office, telephone their secretary or PA to check their name, title and availability.

If you are following up an advertised job, you should also use this opportunity to ask whether there is a standard form of application and ask for one to be sent.

You now know who makes the employment decision, so how do you make personal contact quickly and effectively? Face to face is best and before a formal interview is better.

**If there is a job advertised**, the action to take is to telephone the person in the organisation (whose name you now know), indicate your interest in applying and ask whether it might be possible, informally, to make a *very brief* visit to their office and see the sort of work they are doing. If they ask why? Then your answer is threefold:

- You are *really* interested to see what work they are doing
- It will help you prepare your formal application and
- It will help you select the right sort of work to show them - if you are selected for interview.

This strategy is not always successful in getting you a visit - but it does convey your enthusiasm and interest and, if you do get offered an interview, this will give you a head start over the competition.

If it does work and you are invited for an 'informal' visit, make the most of it, but remember, although it is supposed to be informal, they will be looking you over very carefully. Do look at their website before you visit so you know a bit about their practice and their clients. Don't take your portfolio (unless they specifically ask you to - in which case they are treating this as your formal interview), but do take a couple of tidy copies of your CV. Show a lot of interest in the sort of work they are doing *and* the people you meet and *don't* ask about holidays or pay! Try to remember the names of the people you have been introduced to, the projects they have done or are doing and the clients they are working for - this will be really useful if you get to a formal interview. Finally, keep it short and thank them afterwards.

**If no job is advertised**, but you think there may be an opportunity for one, you can either use the 'Portfolio' routine described previously or, if they are a practice with a good reputation for particular types of work or are involved in any well publicised major projects, you can use the 'Interested Scholar' approach. It will need a little research, but back copies of the leading architectural journals will have all you need for this.

The 'Interested Scholar' wants to talk to people on the design team. So your telephone research should be aimed at tracking down the design team leader for the project you have decided to be so interested in - not the recruitment officer. When you have tracked the right person down, why do you *need* to visit the office? You have many options:

- You are interested in the building and want to understand more about how it was carried through from concept to construction
- You want to understand how a building of that scale / type / complexity is designed
- You have never visited a major architectural practice before
- You would like to see the detailed drawings....etc. etc.

Whatever your given reasons, be sure you have done your background research on the project in which you have declared an interest and on the practice itself. If you do get invited to visit, you will be expected to follow through with some intelligent and well informed questions about both.

However, remember that the main purpose of your visit is to find out if the organisation is likely to be recruiting staff, but don't play this card until the very end. If the person showing you around is impressed by your interest in the work of the practice and sees your questioning as intelligent and well informed, they will not take offence if you ask them, *at the end of the visit*, what opportunities their might be for you to come and work in the practice.

If there does appear to be a possibility of a job , promise to put a copy of your CV in the post. Don't hand one over on the spot - even if you have one with you - you will blow your cover story wide open! Send a copy of your CV to the person you met - even if they give you the name of another contact person in the organisation

If there is no work currently available, write a thank you letter anyway. You have made a good contact that you may well wish to follow up in the future.

### **Telephone Tips**

- 1 Always smile when you are talking to people on the telephone - smiling changes the voice tone and this communicates positively to the listener!
- 2 Don't be shut out by 'gatekeepers' when you are trying to telephone a particular person in an organisation. Receptionists and secretaries often see it as their duty to block calls from people *they* don't know.
  - You must have the right name of the person you want to talk to (see above).
  - You will normally be asked for your name - give it.

- You may be asked what organisation you are from - tell them the "Architectural Association" or whatever School you are a student at (never student from...).
- You may be asked what the call is in connection with - tell them it is 'personal' (surely discussing a job is a personal matter!).

It is a very brave secretary or receptionist that will block a personal call - anyway you are not applying to the office secretary for a job, are you!

***Find out about the organisation before you see them - they are proud of what they do and will be impressed if you know about it.***

Architect's have to be good team players, both outside with others in the construction game and inside with others in the design team. Teams usually succeed best when they share common values and goals. Architects, as employers, are often as concerned about whether new recruits will 'fit in' to their design team as they are about their portfolio. Where students can demonstrate at interview that they have taken the time to try to understand the ethos and the values of the organisation - it can be very reassuring to the employer. However, these are not always transparent, so having some knowledge of their best work can serve a similar purpose.

***Only show those interviewing you examples of your best work - let them guess whether the rest is just as good***

### ***The Portfolio***

Getting your portfolio right is the second most important thing you must do (the first is to get the invitation to show it!)

It is probably true to say that an experienced architect or interview panel will have made up their mind about your technical and creative ability and its 'fit' with the job they are interviewing you for after looking at the first six drawings in your portfolio.

You therefore need to make a real impact, particularly with those first six pieces of work.

What are the key things to get right in the portfolio?

- Presentation is very important. Searching for a space to open up an A1 portfolio in a crowded office; unravelling and trying to hold flat drawings curled in a tube and picking up sheaves of unbound manuscript from the floor is both embarrassing and unnerving in an interview situation. Unless there are overwhelming reasons for going large, use an A2 or preferably an A3 size portfolio, with everything reduced or properly mounted to fit in it.
- Show diversity in your portfolio - include a mix of creative material (including design development sketches), technical detailing, freehand and CAD - Only

include the very best examples, and keep the overall number of pieces of work to around 20. More than 30 pages and the interviewer will get bored. However, examples of research work and written material, neatly bound can also be important.

- Avoid silly mistakes - make sure that none of the material you present has any silly errors or inaccuracies. In the same way that one silly spelling mistake can destroy the credibility of a letter, an obviously inaccurate piece of detailing on a drawing can destroy the credibility of that piece of work - getting someone else to check your work is a good idea.
- Clear signposting helps - make sure that each piece of work is clearly and simply described. (e.g. 2<sup>nd</sup> year project - April 1999 - Barcelona Fountain - isometric projection - scale / ABC Partnership - House for Godot in Fresnes - September 1999 - Detail of atrium roof - scale). You can write more, but much more won't be read at interview.

***How you present yourself is important - it's not about posh frocks, suits and ties - it is about presenting the sort of image that the interviewer would expect you to present to their clients.***

### ***Personal presentation***

This is where an advance visit to the office can be helpful. You can quickly judge the dress code that is the norm - and every office has one. Looking too smartly dressed in a laid-back office can be just as out of place as looking really scruffy in one where more formal dress is expected.

The key thing to put across is that you are well organised and have got your act together. This means:

- not being late for your appointment (always plan your journey to be there 15 minutes in advance)
- knowing the name of the person you are supposed to be meeting
- looking tidy
- having a well presented portfolio

### ***The interview***

There is no standard format for a job interview. In smaller offices, there may just be one person who will interview you and it may be very informal. In larger organisations and in public sector organisations it may be quite a formal process with several people involved. When you are offered an interview it is worth asking how many people will be on the panel.

***Remember - the person interviewing you may be just as anxious as you are to perform well. They will usually have to justify their decision to colleagues and if they make a bad recruitment decision it is their credibility which is at stake - not yours.***

### ***Presentational tips***

Make sure that you:

- Act as naturally as you can and try to convey a positive 'can-do' attitude
- Sit up straight - it gives the impression of alertness and interest
- Don't fidget, wave your hands about or play with your face and hair - it is distracting and conveys anxiety
- Keep eye contact with the person while they are asking you questions - if you avert your eyes or stare at your feet all the time it can convey a lack of confidence or dis-interest
- If there is more than one person on the panel, make sure that you make regular eye contact with each person while you are talking - if someone feels you have ignored them they will not be positive towards you
- Listen carefully to the questions being asked and ask for clarification if you don't fully understand the question
- Be brief and precise in your answers to questions - long and complicated answers may not be understood and can give the impression that your thinking is muddled

***Convey the right attitude - what can you do for the organisation?***

Your task is to convince the interviewer that employing you will be a positive advantage to their organisation. This means concentrating on what you can do for the organisation - not what the organisation can do for you. One of the best ways of getting this message across is making sure you know a little about the organisation before you come to the interview and also show a positive interest in the organisation and its work during the interview itself.

Employers will expect you to be flexible, so don't give the impression, for example, that you are only prepared to work on particular types of project or that you are not prepared to do certain types of work.

You will normally be expected to present your portfolio at the interview. It is a good idea to talk your interviewer(s) through the material. Make it short and interesting. An anecdote or a little story about a key aspect of each project will help bring the portfolio to life.

Most employers will appreciate it if you show an interest in learning new skills. In this context, it is a good idea to ask what opportunities there might be for you to do different sorts of work on different types of project.

Although you will need to know the basic terms under which you will be employed, avoid asking detailed questions at the interview about things like holidays, working hours, overtime and so on. These can be clarified after a job offer has been made. You can always turn the job down if they are unsatisfactory. If you are not an EU / EEA citizen, you will need to tell them about this and state that your mandatory practical training is covered by your Visa.

Also, as an AA student, the A School is your Sponsor and no additional permission from UKBA is required. Tell them that they can verify this with the AA Registrar's Office if they wish.

If you are asked what salary you expect - don't quote a figure - you could lose a really good job by going just a bit too high. Instead, throw the question back and ask what they would normally pay someone with your level of qualifications and experience. If it is too low, you can always say so. If you really like the job, but the salary offered is below what you are expecting it is always worth asking whether they would be prepared to review your salary after say, 3 months, when you will have had the opportunity to prove your worth.

If you are changing jobs or have had previous experience, you may be asked why you left. Be careful what you say about previous employers and avoid casting them in a bad light (even if it is justified!). Draw out the positive things from the experience.

Finally, be as honest as you can with your answers and don't be tempted to exaggerate what you have done and can do.

If you have a medical condition or a disability which may significantly effect your performance at work, you must disclose this. A failure to do so may put you and/or your employer at risk and your job in jeopardy; but do it in a positive way and indicate how you deal with the condition or disability on a day to day basis.

At the end of the interview, thank them for their time.

***Follow up quickly - if an offer is made, write to confirm your interest. Even if you don't get the job, write to thank them for considering you - you never know when you may be back!***

If you don't get the job, it is worth telephoning to find out the reasons why. There may be some useful things that you will learn from the feedback.

***Be sure about your employment status***

### ***Employment status***

When you are offered a job, you should receive a letter stating clearly what your employment status will be. If you are being hired as an employee it will either be on a full-time or part-time basis<sup>1</sup> and your employer will be responsible for making national insurance payments and dealing with tax. By law, you should also receive a contract of employment (though some employers are lax about this) that sets out your hours, holiday entitlements etc.

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<sup>1</sup> If you are subject to UKBA visa requirements, part-time employment is not permissible.

If your status is 'self-employed', you are being effectively hired as a contractor and are responsible for own tax and National Insurance payments. The RIBA advises strongly against trainees working as self-employed and non-EU / EEA students undergoing practical training are not permitted to work as self-employed under UKBA Visa regulations.

**Salaries**

There are wide variations in what students get paid, particularly in the present climate:

The most recent RIBA salary survey (2012) indicates the following:

<b>Position</b>	<b>Annual Salary</b>	<b>Hour Rates</b>
Part 1 / First Year Out Students	£17-21,000	c. £10-12
Part 2 Assistants / Recent Post Diploma	£23-27,000	c. £14-16
Part 2/ 1-2 Yrs Post Diploma	£27-31,000	c. £16-18

Higher figures can be achieved, but be careful, a high paying employer may want you to do a very specific type of work (e.g. CAD operating) and not be so prepared to give you a range of training and learning opportunities.

# Getting the best out of your work experience

## **Priorities**

What is important in the early stages of work experience is to gain an insight into

- who does what in the construction industry
- how they do it
- how they work together
- how roles, relationships and responsibilities are defined
- what rules and procedures govern the design and construction process and
- the sequence of activities and key stages that are involved

You also need to learn the basic skills and procedures that enable you to pay your way as an employee.

## **Getting Started**

If it is your first job in an architectural practice, you may find that for the first few months you will be given a range of fairly routine tasks to carry out. The employer will probably do this in order to find out more specifically what you are good at, whether you fit in with the office and who you get on with best. Also, they will be giving you the chance to learn the basic routines.

If you already have some experience, they may throw you straight into a project team and expect you to get on with it.

Either way, it is easy to get locked into doing basic and fairly routine tasks and not get the opportunity to move on and learn new things and expand your knowledge and experience - this can get very boring. However, there are ways of overcoming this:

***When you start the job - ask for regular progress reviews - say, every 3 months.***

Inviting criticism of your work may sound a little threatening, but most employers will welcome the suggestion as it indicates to them that you are not only keen to learn but also want to get things right. You will find it gives you the opportunity to talk with your team leader not only about how you are getting on and things he or she thinks you need to learn or do better, but also it provides an opportunity for you to negotiate your way into new areas of experience.

It should be a 'formal' review in the sense that it is planned well in advance, the purpose of the review is clear and both you and your team leader have prepared for it properly.

Without a formal process for finding out how you are getting on and what new things you need to learn or do better it is sometimes difficult for a team leader to give you advice in a way that does not appear as personal criticism. Similarly, a

request from you to do something different may easily be misconstrued and lead your employer to believe you are unhappy with the job you have been given.

On the down-side, if an employer is genuinely dissatisfied with what you are doing or is actually not prepared to give you wider experience - it is better to learn about this sooner rather than later and give yourself a chance to do something about it before it leads to a formal confrontation. On the up-side, you will probably learn a great deal from the dialogue that will be useful and help build your confidence and it will generally lead to a much wider range of experiences than would otherwise be offered.

### ***Never stop asking questions***

The cost to an architectural practice of errors in design information and of departures from laid down legal and contractual procedures can be catastrophic. In theory, all the work you produce as a trainee should be rigorously checked by a qualified person. However, in a busy practice, particularly when projects are being produced under pressure of time, much of what you do may not actually be examined in detail. Although legally you are unlikely to be held personally liable, as a trainee, for errors in documents or drawings that result in claims; as a professional in the making, you most certainly owe a duty of care to your employer to make proper checks to ensure that your work complies with normal standards of good practice.

What are normal standards of good practice? Most probably, you will be unfamiliar with most of them when you start your first job and the practice you join will probably not have a formal training process to explain them. The majority of trainees, regrettably, have to pick up the rules as they go along. Those that prosper, ask questions - relentlessly. Those that don't, keep quiet, make guesses or copy previous, similar work - all of which are actions which can have disastrous consequences.

As a trainee, asking questions when you don't understand things will not be seen as a nuisance or a reflection on your intelligence or ability. The opposite, in fact. It will be seen as a genuine desire to learn, to get things right, not to make mistakes and a concern to protect the reputation and standards of the practice.

Being an effective questioner is a skill and good role play is important if you are to get the answers you need. The role relationship you need to establish with those who can be of most help in advising you is that of Master and Apprentice. As 'the apprentice' you must cast yourself as the willing learner and show respect for the wisdom and experience of the 'master'. Few experienced practitioners can resist being helpful when cast in this role and will often go out of their way to provide the appropriate coaching and instruction. You do not use this tactic with everyone in the practice, particularly those who quite evidently know little more

than you do - or your cover will be blown. Also, the relationship demands that you actually do follow advice that has been given.

A very similar tactic can be used with those outside the organisation in which you are working from whom you also wish to learn. As long as you cast yourself at the outset as the 'learner' and them as the 'wise man' (or woman) - and ask sensible questions - you will find that most senior people in the industry (often at great length!) will be very pleased to explain what they do, how they do it and why. After all, what many people most enjoy talking about is themselves.

### ***Keep a record of everything you do***

An essential discipline that all architects must follow is to maintain a comprehensive record of what they have done, what agreements have been reached, what decisions they have made and what they plan to do next. Most maintain a running day book in which meeting notes are maintained, details are sketched, to-do tasks are recorded and all project-related telephone conversations are summarised.

### ***The Daybook***

Now is the time to start this process. It has a practical short as well as long term value. Practically, it will be useful for recording your day to day activities, conversations and actions, for later transfer to your PEDR file (see below), it will be essential for recording visits and other activities for which expenses can be reclaimed, and it will also be of longer term value as a record of your learning and development. Most offices will require you to record your time and activities against the specific projects on which you are working, and your daybook will be a helpful prompt for this.

### ***Project Materials***

You will probably produce quite a lot of technical material during your year out. It is a good idea to keep copies of as wide a sample of your work as possible. Technical drawings, reports, surveys, competition drawings, site photographs and so on. This material will be extremely important once you start job hunting after Part 2 or if you change jobs during your year out. While it may not be as intellectually or creatively interesting as your school work, it may be equally as important when you are going for a job. Be careful to ensure that your team leader knows what you are keeping copies of and why as there may be issues of confidentiality and cost involved.

### ***The PEDR***

You are required to regularly maintain the RIBA on-line PEDR (Professional Education and Development Record) file, and use it as the basis for meetings during your year out with your school Professional Studies Advisor. Ultimately you will be required to submit it as part of your Part 3 examination.

**For all year out students the RIBA's PEDR format (for which you pay an annual fee) is mandatory.** For students on visas it is the only acceptable evidence that they are compliant with visa regulations. This can be viewed and obtained from the Internet: [www.pedr.co.uk](http://www.pedr.co.uk).

The PEDR website provides excellent guidance for both students and employers on how to use the on-line record. It is reasonably clear and straightforward and should be read and followed. Where the guidance can be slightly misleading is in relation to work experience that does not technically comply with the RIBA requirements for the Part 3 Examination. Private commissions, for example, do not count towards the minimum, two years work experience you will need to be eligible for the Part 3 Exam. The best rule to follow is to record all your experience in the PEDR file. If you don't record things as they happen - once you get to the Part 3 stage you will find it extremely difficult to reach five years into the past and remember what you actually did - and what you have forgotten may be crucial. The PEDR is structured as a three-month record that MUST be verified by your employer within 2 months of the completion of the period. You record what you have done; it is signed off by a professionally qualified superior and/or your office mentor (if you have one). You should bring it with you to meetings with the school's Professional Studies Advisor (PSA) - who will countersign each completed page. However, most students send it to the PSA as a .pdf attachment to an e-mail on a regular 3-month cycle.

### **Visit your Professional Studies Advisor (PSA) regularly**

**It is a mandatory requirement that all year out students register with a PSA – even if you intend to switch schools you must remain registered with the AA until you transfer that registration to another course.**

How often you meet the PSA during your year out is up to you. Most Year Out students manage two or three meetings, the first soon after they have started a job. The basic purpose of the meetings is to give you an opportunity to talk about what you are doing and check whether there are things you should be doing that you are not. For those working overseas, there is an e-mail route to the PSA and tutorials can be given using Skype. The PSA can also advise if things are not going quite as you thought. For example, if you are having problems with your employer or are wondering about changing jobs. The PSA will also visit you in your office if you think this will be helpful. It is a service that all year out students in UK placements are entitled to and does not involve additional fees.

## When is it time to move on?

Work experience for periods of less than 5 months do not normally count towards the RIBA minimum requirements for the Part 3 examination. This is a realistic minimum for several reasons. Firstly, it normally takes two or three months to settle into a new office and for the employer to assess how best to use you within the project team. Secondly, over a short period there is little time to establish relationships with others in the office to the level at which they will take you into their confidence. Thirdly, in a period of less than 5 months it is very difficult to see more than a few steps in the cycle of the development of a project and you really need to see as much of the process as possible. For these reasons alone, you need to have very strong reasons for leaving early.

However, if the practice clearly has no useful work for you to do or is intent on locking you entirely into a repetitive and undemanding work role - then you should move on. The key issue is whether the diversity of what you are doing is sufficient and whether you are really getting the opportunity to acquire new skills and learning. Ironically, some of the most capable students often get the worst deal. Those with high level CAD skills, or a flair for model making for example, can find themselves for a whole year doing nothing else.

If you are in any doubt about what decision to take, you should talk the issues through with your PSA.

All AA students **must** notify the School if they move office or residential address. This is a legal requirement for students on UKBA Visas. Contact the Professional Practice Co-ordinator and supply details. There is a form you can download from the memory stick handed out at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

## Overseas Work – Will It Count?

The Year Out is a good time to spread your wings a little, sample practice outside of the UK and, if you are a Home or EU / EEA student, to enjoy some memorable architectural study visits to enrich your Part 2 programme. If you are on a UKBA visa, then the AA advises against this as it reduces your entitlement to UK based work experience.

As far as ARB and RIBA requirements are concerned, overseas work experience can be included in the minimum two years practical training - **but all students should discuss and agree this with their PSA before they embark on this.**

The AA has a wide international Membership and these can often provide a first port of call when you are travelling. The AA Membership Office may be able to advise you on how to make contact. Similarly, information on RIBA overseas chapters and member practices is available for RIBA student members from the RIBA International Affairs Department at Portland Place.

## What to do when things go wrong

Projects do not always come in on cue, jobs do not always go as planned and the people you are working with are not always as pleasant and co-operative as you would like them to be.

It is important not to bottle up your concerns and anxieties, keep your head down and suffer in silence - it probably won't get better by doing nothing. Conversely, it is not generally a good idea to overreact to a set-back or criticism that you think is unjustified. It is therefore a good idea, providing he/she is not the source of the problem, to talk it through with your team leader. If they are the problem, then talk with the person who hired you or a more senior person in the organisation. Complaining to colleagues or others who can do nothing about the situation may actually make things worse and you could be putting people in the difficult position of having to take sides. This they may resent and end up not taking yours.

If the problems cannot be resolved by talking it through within the office, and most can, get in touch with your PSA - sorting such problems out goes with his job.

### ***Other things to read***

**Part 3 Handbook:** Questions of Professional Practice. Stephen Brookhouse.  
available from RIBA Bookshops and Mail Order Publications T: 0207-251 0791

**'A Student's Guide to the First Year in An Architect's Office'** by Roger Harper  
available from RIBA Bookshops and Mail Order Publications T: 0207-251 0791

# Curriculum Vitae



## Marvin Hawkesthorne

Address: 22 Manor House Gardens, Oakley Road, London E7 5ST  
 Tel : 0208 986 4585  
 Mobile: 0756 843 719  
 e-mail: marvinh@cix.com

Date of Birth: 24 Sept 1989  
 Marital Status: Single  
 Nationality: British

### EDUCATION

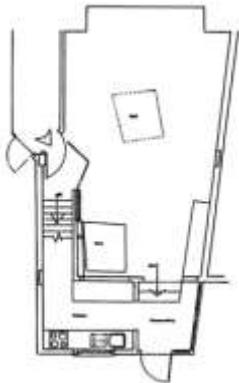
1997 - 2004 Monmouth School, Monmouth, Monmouthshire, Wales  
 GCSEs: English language, English Literature, Physics, Mathematics, French, German, Art, Biology, CDT  
 A Levels: Art, Economics, Geography  
 2005 - Architectural Association School of Architecture, London  
 Achievements: RIBA Part 1  
 Boyarsky prize (2013)

### Studio Projects



**St Petersburg Pleasuredrome** - 3<sup>rd</sup> Year project.  
 The design of a fun palace in the centre of St Petersburg to rival Disney World. Project included Unit visit to the proposed site in Russia. Issues addressed included visual integration with the architecture of the old city, what Russians do at play, available technology and economy of construction.  
**House for an astronaut** - 2<sup>nd</sup> Year project  
 An exploration of living spaces for a retired astronaut who had spent 10 years on the European Space platform  
**Mobile Home for 2150** - 2<sup>nd</sup> year project  
 Design studies for a mobile home for the future. Included an exploration of new materials technology, recycling of materials, sustainability and low energy.

### Employment



July 11- Sept 11 - Mark Stephanopolis & Associates, Covent Garden  
**Architectural Technician**  
**Design of Loft Apartment** in converted warehouse at Canary Wharf for James Hancocks.  
 Budget: £250,000.  
 Site survey. Sketch scheme,  
 Preparation of scheme design submitted to and approved by client. Liaison with QS.  
 Preparation of drawings for Building Control.  
**Conversion of basement flat** in Islington for Pedersen family.  
 Budget £140,000,  
 Sketch schemes prepared.  
 Liaison with Planning officer.

## Employment (Cont)

July 2012 - Sept 2012 - Barclay Homes plc, Reigate



### CAD Technician

Preparation of housing site layouts and presentation drawings in Esher and Windsor

Converting site survey data to digital format for variety of new sites  
Layout of headquarters office interior for Barclay Homes.

## Other Experience

Sept 2006 - March 2009 - Barcaldine Downs, Queensland, Australia

Jackaroo, Boundary rider, General Station Hand on 100,000 acre cattle station.

July 2008 - Sept 2008 - Intersport International, Brecon, Wales

Activities Supervisor at residential holiday centre for disabled children. Supervised wide range of activities including horseriding, swimming and canoeing

## Computer Skills

AutoCAD  
MiniCAD  
Quark XPress  
Photoshop  
MS Word

## Languages

English Mother tongue  
French Fluent in written and spoken language  
German Adequate for general purposes  
Arabic Basic conversational

## Publications

Eastern Promise in the East End of London.  
*Article on urban regeneration. AJ. March 2012*

City of Sand Castles.  
*Photographs of Timbuktu. GQ Magazine. August 2012*

## Exhibitions

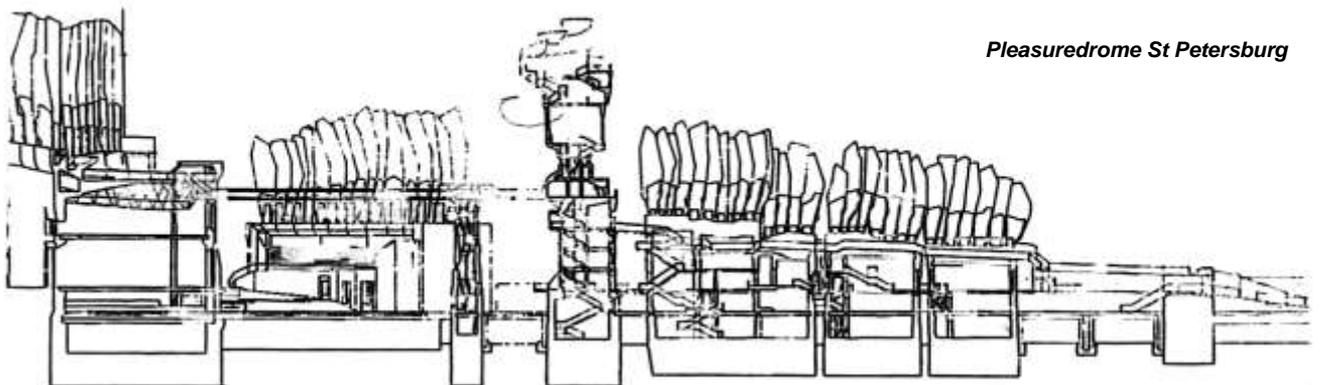
Photographs of Timbuktu - Courtauld Institute. April 2011

## Competitions

Headquarters and Stadium at Thirsk. November 2011  
*Horse Racing & Betting Levy Board. Highly Commended*

## Travel

April 2011 - June 2011 - Trans-Sahara expedition following old trading route from Marrakesh in Morocco to Lagos in Nigeria  
Widely travelled in Europe and Australia



## Appendix 2

## RIBA Student membership

### **Eligibility**

Student membership is open to those studying architecture, Parts 1, 2 and 3 at an RIBA recognised school – including years out..

### **Benefits**

Student membership is FREE and entitles you to a wide range of benefits and services to boost your development which include:

- being part of a prestigious and world renowned institute;
- free use of the RIBA library and Information centre;
- monthly RIBA Student newsletter featuring information about the latest architectural events taking place;
- preferential rates for seminars and lectures at the RIBA;
- access to RIBA Knowledge Communities and RIBAnet;
- discounted subscription to the RIBA Journal for only £37 a year;
- 10% discount at RIBA bookshops in store and online;
- exclusive funding opportunities available for students.

For details on any of these benefits and services, please call the Information Centre on 020 7307 3600.

### ***The Architecture Students Network***

It's time for a new wave of students to take on the role of representing students, the new organisation is ASN, the Architecture Student Network. It can be found at **theasn.org**. TheASN is taking on all of the roles previously carried out by archaos, representing students to the RIBA, the ARB, schools of Architecture and Government.

The Architecture Students Network (TheASN) will be an independent network of student representatives from schools of architecture within the United Kingdom. The aims of the network will be to work to support and promote architecture student events, harness student opinion, and engage with other established, relevant educational organisations both nationally and internationally.

We work with The Standing Conference of Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA) in raising student issues and sit on the RIBA Architects for Change Committee promoting Equality and Diversity in the profession.

We are always looking for students to help with TheASN team. Do get in touch with us.

## Appendix 3

### Guidance for Overseas Students who are not nationals of the European Economic Area

Registered full-time Students studying at the AA who are not nationals of a European Economic Area (EEA) country or have the status of 'UK Resident' and are subject to UKBA Visa regulations are not normally required to obtain permission to take spare time and vacation work.

Similarly, under the Tier 4 Adult Student Visa requirements students are able to undertake practical training as a mandatory part of ARB/RIBA requirements. Their training must be in the UK and they must make sure that the experience they are offered is compliant with ARB/RIBA guidance. Students on practical training placement must also maintain and submit their PEDR record to the AA PSA on a regular basis - as evidence of the work placement. They should check with the PSA at the AA if they have any queries

**The AA is required to act as the non-EU student's sponsor during their year out and post Part 2 practical training period. This requires the student to keep the Professional Practice Co-ordinator and the AA Registrar's office advised of their home and work contact details and any changes that take place.**

Information can be obtained from the UK Border Agency website which is listed at Appendix 4 or from the AA Registrar's Office regarding the latest visa arrangements for non EU students

## Appendix 4

### Work Permits

*(Normally a requirement for post Part 2 Experience in the UK for all students from outside the European Economic Area)*

To gain work experience after the completion of or exemption from Part 2 in the UK, candidates who are not nationals of the European Economic Area (EEA) or hold the status of 'UK resident' must have a valid permit to work from UKBA

#### **For workers from the European Economic Area and Switzerland**

[www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/eea/](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/eea/)

If you are a national of the European Economic Area (EEA) or Switzerland, you are free to enter and stay in the United Kingdom. If you are a national of a state that recently joined the EU you may have to register with the UKBA or apply for their permission before you start to work.

Details of these arrangements are available on  
[www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/)

Students who experience difficulty with these arrangements should discuss the matter with the AA Registrar's Office.

## Appendix 5

## Further Information

### **AA Professional Studies Advisor**

Contact through Rob Sparrow

### **Appointments & enquiries**

Rob Sparrow  
Professional Training Co-ordinator  
Architectural Association  
36 Bedford Square,  
LONDON WC1B 3ES

Tel: 0207 636 0974  
Fax: 0207 414 0782  
E Mail: [sparrow\\_ro@aaschool.ac.uk](mailto:sparrow_ro@aaschool.ac.uk)  
[www.aaschool.ac.uk](http://www.aaschool.ac.uk)

### **On-line appointments with PSA**

[www.aaschool.ac.uk/STUDY/PROFESSIONALSTUDIES/part3.php](http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/STUDY/PROFESSIONALSTUDIES/part3.php)

### **RIBA**

Royal Institute of British Architects  
66 Portland Place  
LONDON W1N 4AD

Tel: 0207 580 5533  
<http://www.architecture.com/Explore/Home.aspx>  
RIBA Bookshop: 0171-251 0791  
Books on-line: [www.ribabookshop.com/](http://www.ribabookshop.com/)  
RIBA Electronic Logbook: [www.pedr.co.uk](http://www.pedr.co.uk)  
Jobs on line: [www.architects-online.org/](http://www.architects-online.org/)  
Archaos: [www.archaos.org](http://www.archaos.org)

### **ARB**

Architects Registration Board  
8 Weymouth Street  
LONDON WIN 3FB

Tel: 020 7580 5861  
E-mail: [Info@arb.org.uk](mailto:Info@arb.org.uk)  
Website: [www.arb.org.uk](http://www.arb.org.uk)

### **APSAA**

Association of Professional Studies Advisors  
Website has some useful comparative info about schools for students

<http://www.apsaa.org.uk/>

### **UK Border Agency**

(Information on Visa & Permit enquiries)

Immigration & Nationality Directorate  
Lunar House  
40, Wellesley Road  
Croydon  
CR9 2BY

Telephone: 0870 606 7766  
Guidance & downloads of application forms [www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/](http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/)

## The purpose of this guide

This guide is designed for AA students who want to gain work experience in Architect's offices during the course of their studies. It sets out the basics, including the RIBA's requirements, and a number of tips on how and where to apply for jobs; who to go to for advice and, for overseas students, how to avoid problems over working in the UK.

### **Architectural Association School of Architecture**

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Fax: (44) 207 414 0782

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