



Practise Architecture Well

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with Alan Jones

RIBA 
Architecture.com

Acknowledgements

A guide like this is impossible without help. The authors would like to thank the following for their generous contributions in time and knowledge:

- Maryam Al-Irhayim, RIBA Vice President for Students and Associates
- Harbinder Birdi, Partner and Head of Infrastructure, Hawkins\Brown
- Wendy Charlton, RIBA Vice President for Practice and Profession, and Operations Director, RCKa Architects
- Adrian Dobson, Executive Director of Professional Services, RIBA
- Kate Hunter, Project Manager, RIBA Future Architects
- Catherine Mallon, McGurk Architects
- Elena Marco, Head of Department of Architecture and the Built Environment, UWE
- Jessica McGarry, McGarry-Moon Architects
- Femi Oresanya, Chair RIBA Architects for Change, and Principal, HOK
- Sachin Puntambekar, Hawkins\Brown
- Andy Thompson, FaulknerBrown Architects
- Nicky Watson, RIBA Vice President for Education, and Director, JDDK Architects



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

This guide was part-funded by Queen's University, Belfast.

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President's Foreword

Practise Architecture Well is a practical guide for early-career architects helping them to, as the title suggests, practise well. By this we mean not just to do well professionally, although of course that is increasingly important, but also to have a beneficial impact on society and to stay healthy and happy in the process.

Its publication is timely. The profession is currently on an upward trajectory. Society is leaning ever more heavily on its compact with architects to meet today's big global challenges of climate change, environmental degradation, life safety, health, joy, a sense of pride, identity and belonging, and do so in a way that is economically and socially sustainable. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government Robert Jenrick MP recently lavished praise on British architects in the context of improving standards of housing in the UK. Also, the Government has just upgraded its definition of value in the Value Toolkit and enshrined the importance of good design in the planning system by publishing the National Model Design Code.

The challenges are enormous and so, self-evidently, business as usual won't cut it. Building on our core knowledge, skills and behaviours, future success will be underpinned by applying research, detailed reasoning, digital technology, and rapid learning from real world feedback.

Our profession, including our freshly qualified members, must be ready. To meet the future, we must look to work differently. As with every giant leap of progress, all the big answers are in the intersections between disciplines and their cultures, requiring greater collaboration and teamwork, mediated by the kind of analytical thinking that is architects' forte.

Fortunately, this shift is already under way in practice, where success depends on architects doing and staying well. This means deploying their hard-won skills, knowledge and behaviours to connect multiple fields of endeavour for cross-disciplinary thinking. It means developing what I call 'deep generalist' expertise to draw on a complex body of knowledge to help solve problems, balancing risk, opportunity, and interdependency across the whole raft of issues.

At a time when the Building Safety Bill is going through Parliament, it is right that we should focus on our technical, professional and ethical competence in this way, distinguishing our value clearly to help steer the construction industry towards better outcomes.

As this guide says, though, it should not be at the expense of our mental fitness, health and wellbeing. Professor Stephen Brookhouse has described practising architecture today as 'tough play', and it can be stressful. But I know and trust that there is fellowship and community enough within practices and in physical and online networks – not least the RIBA's many services to support its members – to protect you and help you on your way. A second opinion, a reference, resource, or a guiding hand is never far away.

Neither should a focus on professional competence be at the expense of commercial savvy. While most registered architects work for a practice or themselves, there is change afoot in the models they adopt to do so. Architects can only serve their clients and invest in the future from a sound business platform.

Of course, architects can also play an important role in improving society outside of 'traditional' practice. They may be commissioning projects on the client-side, within a property company, or elsewhere coordinating and managing, educating, researching, writing, advocating, or advising government. I suggest there is an onus on each architect to find the best role through which to have the most positive impact upon the world.

Just as important, the profession needs architects from different backgrounds with different experiences and cultural backgrounds to create more appropriate and better appreciated solutions. Inclusion is a necessity, with successful design requiring the fullest possible involvement of the broadest possible range of people.

Whatever you decide to do, know that as your career progresses, your contribution matters and that your wellbeing is precious. Let the advice in this guide help you along the way to professional fulfilment and personal contentment, and remember always not just to practise architecture, but to do it well.

Professor Alan Jones FRIBA FHEA Hon FRIAS Hon AIA Hon RAIC PPRSUA
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Introduction

The purpose of this RIBA guide is to help freshly qualified and early-career architects both to do well during their career and, importantly, to stay well as they cope with the stresses and strains of being a member of the profession. It is a companion to *Study Architecture Well*¹, which is aimed at architecture students.

1 Introduction

| About this guide

The purpose of this RIBA guide is to help freshly qualified and early-career architects both to *do well* during their career and, importantly, to *stay well* as they cope with the stresses and strains of being a member of the profession. It is a companion to *Study Architecture Well*¹, which is aimed at architecture students.

The word 'well' has a number of meanings:

- in a good or satisfactory way
- in a thorough manner
- in good health; free or recovered from illness

When the guide talks about 'practising well', it intends all of them.

The guide focuses on information that has immediate practical use to you as you set out on your professional career, and includes advice not just on how to cope but how to actively flourish.

The scope is limited mostly to advice for early-career architects working as employees. However, with setting up in business for yourself such a popular choice even among recently qualified architects, we briefly touch on issues to do with self-employment too.

Being an architect can be an immensely rewarding career path that opens many doors to a fulfilling life.

Like everything worthwhile in life, though, it can be challenging, even to the point of upsetting your mental wellbeing.

Celebrating the upside benefits of this wonderful career without confronting its downside risks would be irresponsible and unhelpful to the next generation of professionals.

This guide aims to offer that balance. In writing it, the authors researched the relevant literature and available advice for doing and staying well, consulted key people in the profession, and subjected their work to review.

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The world of professional practice

As you will doubtless already have found out from your years of work experience leading up to professional qualification, working as an architect is rarely 'just a job'. More often than not you will develop a passion for it that is deeply motivating and personally fulfilling.

2 The world of professional practice

As you will doubtless already have found out from your years of work experience leading up to professional qualification, working as an architect is rarely 'just a job'. More often than not you will develop a passion for it that is deeply motivating and personally fulfilling.

Here are some of the reasons why.

| Architecture makes the world a better place

Done well, design improves the quality of human life by facilitating comfortable and safe homes, inspiring educational facilities, productive workplaces, healing hospitals, fun cultural and leisure venues, accessible government offices, and countless other public and private spaces.

Good design not only creates beautiful, inclusive places and spaces that meet pressing client and user needs but addresses the physical, economic, social and environmental concerns of their local communities.

It helps to ensure that private and public investment of money and finite natural capital results in valuable, sustainable and equitable outcomes, with the potential to play a central role in, for example, mitigating global climate change.

| Architecture is endlessly fascinating

Working as an architect means never (or least, rarely) being bored. Because the core design skills can be applied in many ways, you are not limited in the kinds of project that you might end up working on or, indeed, where they are located. You can work on housing, offices, art galleries, laboratories, and emergency disaster relief shelters, either in the UK or abroad, for businesses or charities, governments or billionaires, the family down the road or multinational conglomerates.

| Architecture can serve and influence society

Although the rough-and-tumble of winning work and completing contracts in today's built environment sector can leave you cynical, rest assured that your work is still highly esteemed in society as a whole. The knowledge and skills you have and professional standards you maintain are rightly recognised as proof of competence, good citizenship and caring about ethics.

Your voice is listened to, which allows you to command respect and influence the public debate. This can be very satisfying and motivating, reminding you that you are held in high regard and have good things to offer. This is particularly true for tackling sustainability, so much of which is threatened by the multi-trillion pound global construction industry.

| Architecture opens many doors

The many skills you've already acquired and will going on developing – complex problem-solving, analytical thinking, team-working, technical understanding, digital competence, and 3D design – are not only highly transferrable but also much sought after.

You are valued for adjacent roles (sometimes with extra training) in the wider construction industry – project management, construction management, property development, estate management, engineering, manufacturing, planning, surveying, landscape and interior design, and various legal roles from contract management through to dispute resolution, mediation and adjudication.

Your qualification also opens doors into countless roles beyond the construction industry, such as graphic design, illustration, art production, industrial design, product design, set design, game design, research, academia, journalism, film-making, and software development.

This should give reassurance that you will probably land on your feet no matter what life throws at you.

Going above and beyond: codes

Architects Registration Board's *Architects Code*²

One of the reasons why architects are held in high regard is because of their professional status, which holds them to scrupulously high standards of conduct and behaviour. This is backed up in law: Section 13 of the Architects Act 1997 requires the ARB to issue a Code laying down the standards of professional conduct and practice.

Called the Architects Code, this document commits you to:

- Be honest and act with integrity
- Be competent
- Promote your services honestly and responsibly
- Manage your business competently
- Consider the wider impact of your work
- Carry out your work faithfully and conscientiously
- Be trustworthy and look after your clients' money properly
- Have appropriate insurance arrangements
- Maintain the reputation of architects
- Deal with disputes or complaints appropriately
- Co-operate with regulatory requirements and investigations
- Have respect for others

Note that it covers your private life where your conduct may affect your fitness to practise as an architect or public confidence in the profession and that you are expected to:

- be guided in your professional conduct and professional work by its spirit as well as by its express terms
- observe it wherever in the world you work.

Failure to comply can constitute unacceptable professional conduct or serious professional incompetence, which could lead to your being struck off the Architects Register.

Royal Institute of British Architects' *Code of Professional Conduct 2019*³

The RIBA has its own code for individual chartered members: the Code of Professional Conduct. Largely replicating the *Architects Code*, it goes further, in effect holding members to much higher standards.

Structured into three Principles – Integrity, Competence, and Relationships – it sets out a number of duties, with useful guidance notes.

As well as providing the standard against which members can be disciplined, its purpose is 'to promote good conduct and best practice' and empower practitioners to 'reflect critically and to continually strive to improve'.

RIBA *Code of Practice*

The RIBA also publishes the Code of Practice, which holds RIBA Chartered Practices as legal entities to high standards and thereby helps to differentiate them positively from other kinds of practice.

| How much do architects earn?

While you have as good a chance of becoming a millionaire as anyone, it is unlikely to be simply because you are an architect.

Although there was considerable variability depending on location and practice size, the 2020 RIBA Business Benchmarking survey⁴ found that the median annual salary for architects with less than 5 years' experience ranged from £30,000 in practices of 3 or 4 employees, rising to £36,250 for practices with over 100 staff.⁵

For architects with more than five years' experience, the same range was £35,200 to nearly £45,000.

For partners, directors and sole principals, the same range was £37,875, to £154,550.

Note that none of these figures includes the value of so-called 'fringe benefits' (such as health insurance, life insurance, a pension, or company car), which, for architects registered for 5 or fewer years, were worth £1,000 on average in 2020.

Note also that while the value of pay varies from location to location, it does not affect your buying power in the way that you might think. After you factor in the cost of living, a higher salary in central London, for example, does not necessarily leave you better off than a lower one in Cumbria.

Salaries for architects
with less than 5 years'
experience – from

£30,000

The gender pay gap in architecture

Since 2017, the UK Government has required all legal entities that employ more than 250 people to publish data on the pay gap between men and women. Since there are only a handful of architectural practices that meet the threshold, very few do so.

Nonetheless, the RIBA is encouraging practices to evaluate their gender pay gap data, share it, and take action to narrow the gap through best employment practices. To help them, it published recommendations⁶ based on information supplied by the Government Equalities Office.

One of the headline figures is that, whereas women make up half of entrants to schools of architecture, they occupy only 20 % of senior roles in practice. The objective is to change the profession so that more women will stay and reach senior positions – not just because this is fairer but because it leads to more diversity, and more diverse companies perform better.

Note that the gender pay gap does not measure whether women and men are paid the same for work of equal value, important as that is. Instead it finds the averages (mean and median) of all the men's salaries in a business and compares it to the same figure for women. It is thus a measure of the relative share of seniority (or at least, higher pay) in a practice.

Government data shows that the gap is slightly less in favour of men across the architecture industry compared to the figure for the economy as a whole. Nonetheless, there is still a 10.4% (mean) and 15.2% (median) disparity when parity would be 0 %.

The long-term trends indicate that the gap is closing. As the RIBA report says, "While the rising tide of women qualifying in the profession increases the likelihood that equality will, in time, be achieved, there is no room for complacency and much can be done to ensure that the Gender Pay Gap is actively closed."

The report includes a range of best practice strategies for levelling the playing field for women from recruitment through to progression and retention.

| Working for yourself

Even though the majority of young architects start by working for others, many aspire to set up in business for themselves.

Research by PolicyBee⁷ in 2018 found that architects who answered their survey became self-employed after about eight years of working as a salaried architect, on average. Interestingly, about one in ten did so immediately post-qualification.

Clearly, being your own boss is attractive. Because you are in control, it appeals on many levels. It gives you creative freedom. At the same time, you choose the kind of work you chase, the clients you take on, how you deliver your work, and your preferred work-life balance.

Any profits (after tax) are yours to do with as you see fit. Depending on your ambition, you can stay small, which affords you a certain agility and the flexibility to fit work around your lifestyle.

Alternatively, if you're up for the adrenalin rush of growing your business, you can invest and, indeed, borrow. As a qualified architect, your ability, commitment, and tenacity are proven, so why not? The sky's the limit.

Of course, making a success of it is challenging. Winning work to keep the money coming in is a constant priority, difficult to balance against delivering contracted work. Also, you take on many financial, legal and administrative responsibilities beyond just adhering to the Architects Code⁸, which can be onerous, especially if you employ staff.

Regardless of business owners' experience, talent, work ethic, or ability to 'make their own luck', they always owe their success to some extent to a fair wind and following seas. Factors that are beyond your control – the general macro-economic conditions, regulations, and trends in society, and so on – can easily shipwreck you despite your best efforts.

To mitigate these risks, new practices are exploring innovative set-ups that afford them independence without going it entirely alone. For example, informal groups such as the Dalston Architecture Collective⁹ allow micro-practices to pool job-winning resources to punch above their weight, and franchises such as Pride Road¹⁰ can give you an established branded platform to operate from.

Also, advances in digital technology are disrupting traditional business models, allowing practices like Facit Homes¹¹ to blur the boundary between disciplines in new, value-adding ways.



🔍 CASE STUDY

Jessica McGarry, Principal of McGarry-Moon Architects – choosing self-employment

Jessica met her future husband and business partner Steven Moon while studying at Dundee University. They secured their Part 3s while working in London before almost immediately setting up in practice for themselves in 2004 and returning to their native Northern Ireland soon after that. Their mainly residential work has given them opportunities to work throughout Europe.

The decision to set up in business was easier than it would have been later, Jessica explains. “There was no mortgage to pay or kids to look after. We had nothing to lose – if it didn’t work out, we would just get jobs.”

Launching so soon after her Part 3 was useful in some senses because the professional learning was still fresh in her mind. As she says, “We were used to it, so the learning curve just continued. We dealt with every problem as it arose rather than get overwhelmed by the whole thing.”

Although their many subsequent awards attest to their architectural talent, Jessica is quick to admit that they were lucky, too. Not only did they set up during an economic boom, they also found themselves in the right place at the right time.

It hasn’t all been plain sailing, though. “When the recession hit in 2008, we were probably just one job away from it all falling through, and now with COVID, we don’t know what the knock-on effect is going to be.”

Running your own business is never comfortable – you have to be tenacious and prepared to take a chance. That said, there are compensating positive upsides. It’s given her the flexibility to carry on working after becoming a mum, and presented travel opportunities that would probably not have emerged otherwise. “Believe it or not,” she says, “I think it’s easier to get the home/work balance right working for yourself because you’re able to prioritise.”

Of course, what you do depends on the type of work you’re interested in. “If you want to work on the huge projects, then you need to really get into a large practice and work your way up.”

But if you choose to set up for yourself, she’d advise doing it young – so long as you love what you do and are endlessly ambitious.

What about the future of the profession?

Like many other professions, the role of the architect is changing. In the biggest shake-up in a generation, the RIBA is introducing 'mandatory competences'¹² that will, in effect, require you to be re-accredited every five years to retain your chartered status. This is partly in response to draft Building Safety Bill,¹³ which introduces a power for the Architects Registration Board to monitor architects' continuing competence as a condition of staying on their register (see **ARB position on maintaining competence** on page 49).

With the delivery of governmental commitments to the environment and health and safety becoming increasingly important, the pressure to specialize has never been greater.

Furthermore, with advances in artificial intelligence, digital technology and manufacturing techniques, some commentators foresee the gradual evolution of the architect's role as tasks traditionally in their ambit are automated.

The current trend to offsite manufacturing, while still accounting for just a tiny proportion of the sector's overall output, is growing and quoted as evidence of this change.

It certainly has the potential to dramatically affect the relevance of what architects currently do if building typologies are standardised and commoditised to any significant extent.

Traditional silos between construction industry roles are likely to blur as success depends increasingly on creating greater financial, social and environmental value through better efficiency and long-term outcomes.

At the time of writing, this prospect is still in the distant future. That said, designing for manufacture and assembly (DfMA) is very much with us and an important novel area of activity for architects that you would be wise to keep abreast of.

Even if, decades down the line, large parts of the architect's current role are automated, it will almost certainly generate new and as-yet undreamed of tasks requiring precisely the complex problem-solving, adaptability and team-working skills possessed by today's architects. The agile architect will monitor the state of the technology, assess the market trends, and shift their offerings in readiness.



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3

Finding a job

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3 Finding a job

| Setting a strategic direction

Since you are just at the start of your career, you are unlikely to have experienced much more than a fraction of what's on offer or to have fully challenged yourself in any particular field of professional endeavour.

When you come to hunt for a job you might feel, with some justification, that *any* job will do, particularly if they are in short supply.

However, there are trade-offs in every decision, with some more likely to close off other opportunities that you might later regret. Thus, even if you are thinking that beggars can't be choosers, it is worth being strategic to the extent that your personal circumstances permit.

For example, just as specialising (in sustainability, for example) shows commitment and sets you on the road to becoming an expert in that field, it can also channel you away from other options that you might be equally or better suited to.



Know yourself

A good tactic is honestly to work out your strengths, preferences, interests and ambition with the object of identifying your ideal kind of job.

To do this, it helps to work out what motivates you. The well-known research-based 'career anchors' model¹⁴ of eight motivation types offers a useful framework.

While they will all resonate to a certain extent, most of us gravitate towards just one or two predominant types. To work out yours, ask yourself which of these most accurately describes your primary motivation. The drive to:

1. use, develop and deepen your skills in one specialism
2. lead and manage teams, and organise projects well for favourable outcomes
3. be autonomous and flexible in delivering your work
4. be secure and stable in your job and avoid risks
5. be entrepreneurial and innovative because you get bored easily
6. do good in the world and be helpful to others
7. solve problems, challenge yourself and try new things
8. achieve an ideal balance between work and home life, even at the expense of promotion

It is worth noting that these are all part of the rich diversity that helps to generate the best outcomes and so are equally valid in the workplace – see **Many different kinds of practice** below. Don't assume that you have to be thirsty for promotion and enjoy a stiff challenge to do well.

Whether you use this model of motivation or some other system, the point is to know yourself and set a strategic direction that will help to give your job search focus. This will allow you to train your sights away from jobs that aren't right for you, the better to devote your energies to securing ones that are – even if they are just stepping stones on the way to your ultimate goal.

It's important to say that your strategy can – and almost certainly will – change as you develop your knowledge and skills in the light of experience.

Many different kinds of practice

A 2011 report by the RIBA's Building Futures think tank, *The Future for Architects?*, identified a number of types of practices, including, in no particular order:

- Small local general practices
- International 'starchitect' practices
- Specialist niche practices
- Traditional regional delivery-driven practices
- Global interdisciplinary consultancies
- Build-own-operate-transfer designers
- Design houses/creative agencies
- Medium-sized, design-led practices
- Small metropolitan boutique practices

The RIBA's Future Architects network has adopted an updated list created by Kate Marks¹⁵ that identifies the following 'common company types':

- One-man bands
- Micro-studios
- Small-to-medium boutique design agencies
- Black cape architects
- Cooperatives
- Business disguised as 'design'
- Family

However you characterise them, the point is that each practice is thought to have its own challenges and opportunities, making them distinct from each other and in need of staff with different skills and motivations. This means that, no matter what your career anchors or goals are, there will almost certainly be a home for you.

Note also that you do not have to work in an architectural practice. There are many other organisations that need architects, especially in the public sector, and you should not discount them from consideration.

| Formulate a plan

Once you have calibrated your compass, it is time to plot a route. There are many possible paths, each with their advantages and disadvantages.

Making decisions is rarely down to logic alone. Where rational appraisal runs out, trust to your intuition to make choices.

As a general rule, whereas larger practices tend to offer greater opportunities for promotion, smaller practices tend to expose you to a richer, more varied range of experience sooner.

Beyond that, the main variables to consider are:

Type of practice

Ask yourself:

- Would you like to work with:
 - purely architectural practices or multi-disciplinary firms?
 - established practices or newer, younger ones?
 - specialists or generalists?
 - concept, delivery, or both kinds of designer?
 - practices with strong environmental and social governance objectives?
 - practices that chase awards?
 - practices that only work in certain niche sectors?
 - practices that are working at the cutting edge of design technology?

Location:

Ask yourself:

- Would you like to be based:
 - in the UK?
 - abroad?
 - in the city-centre, suburbs or a rural location?
 - somewhere that is within walking or cycling distance?
 - somewhere that is affordable to live in;
 - near your friends, family and support network?
 - somewhere new, fresh, exciting?
 - where you are more likely to grow your professional network faster and have access to more professional or, indeed, personal opportunities?

Type of employer

Ask yourself:

- Would you like them to be:
 - an RIBA Chartered Practice (see info box below), or aspire to behave like one?
 - Part of a larger group? A limited company? A partnership?
 - Employee-owned?
- Would you like them to:
 - have a good reputation as employers?
 - offer long-term, written contracts of employment?
 - offer transparent promotion trajectories?
 - nurture a supportive, fair, friendly office culture?
 - have overtly pro-employee policies such as:
 - sensible working hours,
 - flexible working arrangements,
 - active health and wellbeing care, such as offering yoga classes,
 - paying your RIBA membership fees?

At the start of your career when your experience is limited, this exercise is primarily about *ruling out* options that you know you definitely are not interested in without being overly prescriptive.

Note that we haven't mentioned salary yet. While massively important, it should not be the only consideration. Too much focus on income can lead you take wrong turns. Always consider the bigger picture and the ways that your next move will further your career goals.

Of course, nothing is terminal. If you stray off path, it's should not be the end of the world: you can always get back on track later. It's all experience, and experience is an excellent way to learn.

What is an RIBA Chartered Practice?

Only certain architectural practices may become RIBA Chartered practices, which are thought of as the gold standard for architectural practices in the UK.

As well as meeting minimum qualifying criteria, they must be accredited and regularly audited by the RIBA to ensure that they continue to meet the high standards of this designation.

The status is a mark of quality assurance for clients and employees. To qualify, the ratio of professionals to the total number of staff must exceed certain minimum thresholds and the practice must maintain appropriate levels of professional indemnity insurance, run a quality management system, operate an environmental management policy, and have a health and safety policy in place.

Importantly for employees, Chartered Practices must behave in accordance with the RIBA Code of Practice¹⁶ and have a written employment policy, CPD framework, and an equality, diversity and inclusion policy in place. In particular, they must ensure that The Living Wage¹⁷ is paid to all architectural students working for them. At the time of writing, the RIBA was trialing The Compact¹⁸, an ethical framework that would require Chartered Practices to focus on the needs of work experience students.



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🔍 CASE STUDY

Catherine Mallon, early-career architect – the value of work experience

Catherine Mallon became an architect in 2018 while working for McGurk Architects. Her route to qualification started in 2006 at Queen's University, Belfast, where she gained her BSc in Architecture in 2009.

At the time the country was in the depths of an economic recession, and Part 1 jobs were thin on the ground. Despite sending her CV to 'thousands' of employers, she had no luck. Out of desperation, she eventually accepted an unpaid placement with a firm in Wales.

Although it did get her onto the Part 2 course, she did not enjoy it. Indeed, she now looks back on the experience as having had a lasting damaging impact. As she says, "I undervalued myself in years to come. My confidence was seriously knocked."

Partly in reaction to that, she held off trying for her Part 3 for five years by doing a variety of other things. When she finally made the decision to go for it, the scars from her earlier experience resurfaced. "I was scared that I would be laughed out the door for having taken such a long break, and that I had no Part 2 work experience to speak of."

In the event, her fears were misplaced. She sent out three CVs, secured three interviews, and accepted the job at McGurk Architects, where she was able to finally complete her Part 3.

She is clear that you should avoid unpaid work. "Don't go just because it will give you exposure. Good working practice means reasonable working hours and being paid correctly for the work you do."

She advises students seeking work experience that all practices have different ways of working and so to survive you mustn't be timid: "Talk to the people around you – ask, ask, ask!"

| Job-finding strategies

Now that you have a clearer idea of what you're aiming for and the kinds of practice you definitely would *not* like to work for, you can begin to hunt for a job.

There are no hard and fast rules for doing so. If you are lucky, employers, mentors, or head-hunters will approach you, perhaps because they know you from your work experience or because someone in your network has tipped them off about your talent and availability (see **The value of networking** below).

More likely, you will have to search for a job by yourself.

You can go down the route of looking at adverts on social media, in architecture magazines and websites such as Dezeen, or by signing up with employment agencies such as RIBA Jobs.¹⁹ Following the practices you admire on social media, especially LinkedIn, is an especially good way to learn about job opportunities as they arise.

Alternatively, you can write on spec to practices or ask around your network of contacts. Arguably, this latter route is a better strategy because it shows initiative and, more cynically, it could save the employer agency or advertising fees, which is bound to cheer them up!

Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when jobs are thin on the ground, it may pay you to consider employers other than architectural practices.

Remember that architects are valuable to many other kinds of company, including but not limited to multi-disciplinary practices, structural engineers, contractors, specialist subcontractors, urban designers and even, for example, a shopfitter's.

Also, you are not constrained to jobs just in the UK. Brexit stopped automatic recognition, but that does not mean that you cannot work in the EU – check with the relevant country's competent authority.²⁰ With appropriate sponsors and paperwork, it is possible to work elsewhere in the world, too.

So long as the experience keeps you on track to your career goals and the employer's profile fits the bill, go for it.

The value of networking

Professional practice is about who you know as well as what you know – especially when it comes to securing employment. Everyone is potentially helpful and valuable to you and your career, so talk to everyone, make friends and don't burn any bridges.

So, join industry bodies. Show your face by attending events, lectures and social events. Talk to speakers, lecturers, attendees. Widen your circle to include other kinds of construction professional: as well as having a lot to learn from them, they are often in a position to put in a good word about you to potential employers.

Follow all this up by building contacts on social media, especially LinkedIn, Instagram, and Twitter, which are all great platforms for staying in touch and spotting opportunities.

Having a wide-ranging, relevant network makes you more employable. When you join a practice, they instantly benefit from the contacts you import. As Katerina Examiliotou, an architect at Grimshaw, says, "Well connected people are valuable people."²¹

Note that the networking skills you learn will be invaluable to you if you ever decide to set up in business for yourself. Winning work – the life blood of any practice – is at least in part dependent on word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals. The wider your network, the more likely you are to be thought of, and the closer your ear is to the ground when it comes to opportunities for direct work, competitions, and bids.



Having a wide-ranging, relevant network makes you more employable. When you join a practice, they instantly benefit from the contacts you import.



What do UK employers say they are looking for?

Some employers complain that newly qualified architects aren't ready for professional practice to the extent that they would like.

Regardless of whether you see this as a valid criticism of your education – many don't – the bias is out there and must be overcome.

The solution is to take matters into your own hands. An RIBA survey²² in 2020 asked architecture students what advice they would give to those going into work. Their top tips were to brush up on your digital skills and your knowledge of the industry's commercial, legal, regulatory, procurement, and project management frameworks.

Digital skills

Skills in coding and current software packages such as Revit/AutoCAD, Sketchup, Grasshopper and C++, along with presentation packages such as InDesign and Photoshop, are thought to increase your employability dramatically.

If you are lucky, the software packages you are already familiar with will be those used by your target employer.

If they aren't, that need not be a barrier. Provided you show a willingness (and ability) to learn quickly, they will probably be happy to train you up.

There are formal training courses for all these bits of software that lead to recognised certificates. Alternatively, there are many free online resources to help you get started.

Business understanding and client focus

Employers are also looking for candidates with a good working knowledge of the real-world commercial realities of practice where cost and service are king.

Being able to put yourself in your clients' shoes²³ and demonstrate familiarity with the RIBA Plan of Work,²⁴ the UK construction industry's legal framework (including the Building Regulations, health and safety legislation, and planning law) and the different procurement routes and forms of contract is extremely valuable.

Other attributes

*21 Things You Won't Learn in Architecture School*²⁵ by Adrian Dobson contains a wealth of information that will help as you start in practice.

In particular, it contains contributions from prominent architects to explain what it is that they are looking for in job applicants.

Simon Allford of Allford, Hall, Monaghan and Morris and now RIBA President-Elect, suggested that it is all about what you can contribute, implying that your career will naturally follow in its wake.

Soraya Khan of Theis & Khan Architects warned that it is an extremely competitive professional environment in architecture, and you have to stand out, suggesting that "enthusiasm also goes a long way."

Several others emphasized the importance of being honest about yourself, your skills and where you want to be. For example, Simon Allford said, "There are many different practice cultures and you need to think carefully about where you can best contribute."

Marianne Davys of Marianne Davys Architects, encouraged you to be picky: "Decide what kind of work you like and which architects inspire you and try to work for them." She also emphasized the importance of contacts and connections – consultants, contractors, clients, suppliers: "They can all be sources of work in the future."

Caroline Buckingham, working for HLM Architects at the time, advised, "Identify your strengths and weaknesses and decide which facets of architecture really appeal. If you can find a niche that interests you – say, passive energy design or healthcare design – and become expert in it, then that can set you apart from your peers."

Confidence is important too. Sunand Prasad of Penoyre and Prasad said that it is important to know your worth in an "honest, self-analytical way." Shankari Raj Edgar of the Nudge Group, said, for example, "If you aren't really good with people then perhaps there are other areas on which you can focus. If your skills are in the resolution of technical problems then that might be an area in which to specialise."

Satwinder Samra, from the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, took the point further: "I would also encourage young professionals not to undersell themselves. Don't work for nothing."

Defining Contemporary Professionalism,²⁶ co-edited by current RIBA President Alan Jones and Rob Hyde, is another good source of intelligence. The contribution by Zoe Hooton is particularly relevant. In her capacity as an employer, she warned of the dangers of graphic style in CVs (see below) and portfolios over workable substance, which is why she looks for applicants who can explain themselves clearly and listen as well as demonstrate creative flair.

All this is echoed in Kate Marks' HR for Creative Companies,²⁷ which lists 'obvious' generic attitudes that employers want to see in their staff, including good timekeeping, reliability, a positive attitude, and good interpersonal skills.

The RIBA Future Architects network has recently published information²⁸ that will give you more insights into what architects are looking for.

| Evidence of employability

Employers get swamped with applications, so you must be able to show evidence of the kind of candidate you are, your interests, skills and attitude. The following are useful:

- a CV, including a history of your relevant work experience in architectural practices and, of course, your academic record, including any training certificates you might have picked up along the way to show proficiency in design software packages.
- An up-to-date portfolio of your work, tailored to the needs of the practice or job you are applying to.
- Letters of recommendation from previous employers, mentors, or tutors.
- Employers are looking for well-rounded people with real life skills and experience, so evidence of outside interests, pastimes, hobbies and volunteering work is also useful.

| Your CV

Your CV is an advert about you as both an architect and a person designed to persuade employers that you will fit in with their strategic direction and are worth the salary. Its content must grab the busy director or HR manager's attention quickly and seductively.

While you are likely to have a baseline CV, you should always tailor it before sending it to your target employer. This is a basic courtesy, demonstrating that you have researched the practice and their work, and actively want to work for them.

So, browse their social media stream; explore their website; ask your personal network about them; and reflect your findings in your application.

If you are answering a job advert and it asks for certain skills and attributes, explain how you qualify. Don't be put off if you lack one or two of the things they are looking for. A little lateral thinking will show that you have some similar experience or, at the very least, the proven capacity to learn them quickly.



Structure and format

When it comes to designing the information, put yourself in the employer's shoes. Position whatever is likely to be most important to them first.

If you have relevant work experience, put it near the top of the list, with the most recent experience first.

Avoid the temptation to exaggerate skills, experience or ability, especially as you might be tested if invited to interview.

Don't leave gaps in your employment timeline. Always say what you were doing between jobs.

Whether on paper or digital, keep it short, preferably no more than the equivalent of two A4 pages.

You might order your information as follows:

- **Basic information about yourself:** your name and contact details.
- **Personal statement:** not strictly necessary but if used, state your skills, accomplishments and ambitions concisely.
- **Work history:** List all your relevant work experience, and briefly explain your roles and achievements. Say how your efforts helped to keep a project to schedule and budget, how you saved money, or added value. Mention any leadership roles you took on. Include illustrations of your work, listing the context, the software used, and how long it took.

If your experience from practice is limited, include other paid or voluntary work experience. Highlight any transferable skills from this experience.
- **Technical skills:** state your skills and proficiency honestly, emphasizing training in software packages. Practices still love hand-drawing skills, so if you're an accomplished draughtsperson, say so. Other useful skills include model-making, contract negotiation, project management, and the many soft skills that underpin successful communication, including written or oral communications.
- **Education:** Include your ARB registration number, qualifications, marks, the name of the course, the university/education provider, and when you attended. List other achievements here, too, such as competitions or prizes you've won.

- **Other skills:** Having other languages, first-aid qualifications, a driving license, and so on can be helpful, so list them.
- **Extracurricular roles or positions of responsibility, hobbies and interests:** Your extracurricular activities, hobbies and pastimes also yield useful information for potential employers. It helps them to understand what sort of person you are and is another way to demonstrate loyalty, strategic thinking, leadership qualities, and so on.
- **References:** If possible, one of these should be from your most recent boss or manager. If you don't include them, it will arouse suspicion and you should be prepared to explain why you have not included them. Other good candidates for referees include your employment mentor, Professional Studies Advisor, or a member of the teaching staff from your time at university. You can also include a personal acquaintance, ideally a trustworthy person who has known you for five or more years. It is polite to ask permission to use people's names before giving them as references.

Presentation

Avoid grammatical, spelling or typographical errors.

Your creativity will come out in your portfolio, so keep your CV simple, clean, legible, and easy to read. That said, you are applying for a role as a designer, so it is worth making the layout pleasing to the eye.

If including images, be sure that they are suitable for reproduction at the size and scale you intend.

If submitting it digitally, it helps if the file you send can easily be matched back to you and the job you are applying for. Include your target job's title and/or reference number, your name, and your submission date in the file name.

Ask someone you trust to check everything before you send it out.

| Your portfolio

Your portfolio is where you demonstrate your relevant skills, creativity and design ability in images with the aim of persuading your target employer to hire you.

Always keep it separate from your CV, even if presented as a digital file.

If sharing digitally, save it as a PDF, and keep the file size under about 5MB. Ensure that the file is clearly labelled with your name and includes a way to contact you. Once again, the best way to do this is to include your target job's title and/or reference number, your name, and your submission date in the file name.

Keep the number of pages down to ten or fewer.

Make sure that the work you include:

- Is entirely or substantially your own. Acknowledge others' contribution to it, and use it as an opportunity to explain how you work as part of a team.
- Shows off your recent work – recent relevant work is more useful than older work, no matter how aesthetically pleasing the older work is.
- Demonstrates specific skills – how you resolved a problem, for example.
- Demonstrates the full range of your abilities, including photographs, hand-drawings, perspectives, 3D images, as well as computer-aided illustrations.
- Is captioned to explain the project, when produced, the skills on display, how you produced the image, what software package you used, and so on.
- Cross-refers easily to your CV.

The RIBA Future Architects network has published guidance on writing the perfect CV²⁹ and portfolio.³⁰

Employment agencies can offer you additional guidance. For example, the RIBA Jobs website contains advice and a free template³¹ for you to download.

| Approaching potential employers

Don't just send out blanket applications with boilerplate content. Research potential employers to make sure that they meet your criteria, and pay them the compliment of tailoring your communications to them.

Your interactions with them should do two things:

1. Reflect your intelligence, passion, grit, honesty, curiosity, friendliness, positivity, and confidence – all important characteristics for employers.
2. Reassure that you will communicate politely, professionally and effectively with others. Be appropriately formal, use plain English, and avoid grammatical and spelling errors.

The covering letter

Always include a succinct covering letter or message with your CV and portfolio, if possible addressed to the right named individual.

Keep the tone professional. Briefly say why you believe you are suited to the practice or, if responding to a job advert, the post. Demonstrate that you have researched the employer and say why you would like to work for them.

If answering a job advert, precisely follow the instructions for how they want applications submitted. In particular, clearly identify the job's title or reference number.

If approaching employers on spec, think about how you can achieve maximum impact with the minimum of annoyance. This is a matter of good design, and since you are a designer, getting it right is especially important.

As ever, avoid spelling and grammatical errors, and make it visually attractive – but never at the expense of legibility. Most important of all, get the content right. Employers are unlikely to be hoodwinked by style over substance. Always get someone else to review what you've written before sending it.

Online interviews

One of the many consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been to shift everything online via videoconferencing software, including job interviews.

The advice³² for doing well is the same as for in-person interviews, with some added considerations:

- **Privacy:** if possible, find a spot where you will not be interrupted, even just by people walking by in the background.
- **Technical glitches:** have a plan for the possibility of problems with your connection. For example, have the interviewer's phone number to hand in the event that your internet connection fails you.
- **Formality:** the interview is a formal process. Don't let the fact that you are in the relaxed, informal sphere of your home, for example, lull you into dropping your standards of punctuality, dress, appearance, and professionalism.

| The interview

Interviews usually last about 45 minutes, although of course it can vary greatly. Employers want to get an impression of you as a person as well as to confirm the claims you make in your covering letter, CV and portfolio. They also want to assess your 'people' skills: communication, performance under pressure, empathy, and so on.

If you are successful at the first interview, you will often be asked to attend a second interview as part of the employer's system for confirming initial impressions and perhaps allowing more senior people in the company to meet you.

Preparation

As much as job-hunting can be exhausting, time-consuming and dispiriting for you, employers also find the process of recruiting new staff onerous. Therefore, it is an everyday politeness – as well as totally in your interests – to turn up on time, look presentable, and be well prepared.

Research your target employer and write a list of information that you hope to find out from them – see

What to ask the interviewers below.



Read their invitation to interview carefully to understand what to expect. If it tells you who will be interviewing you, find out a bit about them and what they look like from the company website, LinkedIn or some other source. You might be facing an interview panel, in which case, try to find out a little about all of them. If anything is unclear, give them a call to ask for clarification. This will help to avoid surprises and settle your nerves when you come to actually meet them.

Also, if you claimed some technical competence – for example, in a certain piece of software – be prepared to have it tested.

Don't forget your physical portfolio, which should include the work that you submitted in your application. Tailor what you want to say about it to your target employer, and rehearse. Sachin Puntambekar, a Part 3 student with Hawkins\Brown, recommends you think through how your Masters project relates to the interviewer's practice. As he says, "If you did a large infrastructure project and you're applying to a small residential practice, carefully consider how it relates to the work of the practice."³³

Finally, remember to turn off your mobile so that you cannot be interrupted during the interview.

First impressions

Interviews are as much about who you are as what you can do. The employer wants to know if you have skills that they need, but they also are trying to find out if you would fit into their team – to the extent that their inclusion policies permit.

People very often form hard-to-shift impressions of each other within seconds of meeting, so it pays to work that initial moment to your advantage.

This is why turning up on time, your dress, physical appearance, cleanliness, and even how you smell (!) matter, and why it helps to smile, establish eye-contact, adopt an open, respectful body posture, listen attentively, and tick all the other non-verbal cues that denote reliability, respect, friendliness, competence, confidence, and honesty.

Your verbal cues are equally important. Speak clearly, respectfully, engagingly. Show genuine interest in the practice and enthusiasm for the job. Use your interviewers' names. Do not badmouth previous employers, and always cast your answers to questions in a positive light – perhaps by reflecting on what you learnt from a situation. Confidence is an attractive quality, but don't make claims you can't back up, and never overstep the mark into egotism.

There is a jumble of pop psychology advice out there on interview techniques and ways to build rapport, which can be confusing and distracting. It is probably safest simply to put your best authentic foot forward and concentrate on *what* you say rather than focus too rigidly on *how* you do it.

What you might be asked

Your interviewers will want to probe your professional knowledge, perhaps by following the STAR structure. STAR is a handy acronym (situation, task, action, result) that prompts questions and helps the interviewer to assess answers.

From your point of view, be ready to be asked about particular situations – usually involving some challenge – and how you dealt with it. Along the way, explain your task, what action you took, and what the outcome was.

Kate Marks' HR for Creative Companies includes a cribsheet of questions for the benefit of interviewers. It includes questions in the following categories:

- Your knowledge and experience of computer software packages
- your experience on site
- types of projects you've been involved in
- your problem-solving skills
- your ability to work with and coordinate teams
- how you relate to and communicate with others – i.e. your emotional intelligence

If you don't have much to say in some of these categories, don't worry too much. However, be ready to explain why and think laterally: you could very well have experience in different areas of your life that might be relevant.

Things to look for in a good employer

The qualities that workers value in their employers vary from person to person and are hard to discern without actually working there. Nevertheless, there are indicators that consistently mediate workers' experience of employment. Developed by the EU-funded, evidence-based QInnE³⁴ project (and adopted by the UK Government-commissioned *The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices*³⁵ in 2017), these indicators will give you a sense of what matters for job satisfaction:

Wages, including:

- Fair and consistent pay

Employment quality, including:

- Permanent employment status
- Job security
- Internal promotion opportunities
- Predictable working hours

Education and training, including:

- Opportunities to learn on the job
- Opportunities to receive good quality training

Working conditions, including:

- The right balance of autonomy and support
- Variety of work
- The right intensity of work

Work-life balance, including:

- Some control over the scheduling of working hours, particularly long or unsocial hours
- Some personal control of when you work
- Flexibility to take time off to attend to personal needs

Consultative participation and collective representation:

- Direct participation in organizational decisions
- Presence and involvement of a trade union

What to ask the interviewers

Asking questions during the interview serves a couple of useful functions.

First, it straightforwardly allows you to find out information that is not immediately apparent elsewhere. (Note that you should not ask for information that is freely and easily available elsewhere – particularly, if answering a job advertisement, the job description – because that will show that you have not done your homework.)

Second, it shows that you are interested, engaged, and prepared – all important qualities for a practising architect.

The questions you could ask fall into three basic categories:

Information about the practice, for example:

- What are the company's strategic goals? For example, does it plan to grow, move into new sectors, extend its reach into new territories?
- Are they confident about future workloads?
- What is the main source of fees and how do they secure it – repeat business, entering competitions, winning bids?
- How is the office structured? Is there a strict hierarchy of seniority?
- What software and hardware do they use?
- How do they approach environmental and social responsibility?
- Do they actively foster team bonding or encourage extra-curricular get-togethers?
- Is there a culture of working long hours or through the night?
- How do they support mental and physical wellbeing?

Information about their employment policies, for example:

- What is the holiday entitlement?
- Is there a work pension?
- Do they allow flexi-time or working from home?
- What are the opportunities for career advancement and promotion?
- How do they decide on pay rises and do they pay bonuses?
- Do they pay overtime?
- How do they manage continuing professional development?
- Are there any perks that come with the job? For example, do they pay your professional registration renewal fee?
- How do they approach equality, diversity, inclusion in the workplace?

Information about the role, for example:

- What kind of employment contract are they offering?
- What is the salary?
- What are the contracted hours?
- How does the role you are applying for fit into the structure of the company and future plans?
- If you got the job:
 - would you work in a team, and who would you report to?

- what kinds of job would you be working on, and at what stages of development, and how much variety would there be?
- would you be managing others?
- What hours would you work?
- Would you be asked to waive your rights under the EU Working Time Directive?
- Would there be a probation period?

It is courteous to disclose any future commitments you might have – such as holidays booked – during your interview so that it doesn't come as an unwelcome surprise to them later if they offer you the job.

In mulling over a prospective employer, be fair. Most architectural practices are microbusinesses and so the human resources function is usually carried out by a director whose primary competence is in architecture. While you should expect them as professionals to go beyond the regulatory minimum, they are unlikely to have the resources or capacity to be able to provide the kind of HR services you will find at larger companies. In all probability, they will not have had any specific training in HR or people management. Despite this, many British practices go to extraordinary lengths to meet the needs of their staff, a reputation that is celebrated in the Employer of the Year category³⁶ of the Architect's Journal influential AJ100 annual awards.



The long hours culture and the EU Working Time Directive

Architects have a reputation for working extremely long hours, resulting in a poor work-life balance and negative impacts to their mental and physical wellbeing – see **Chapter 6**. This is an anti-social legacy from a bygone era, still unfortunately perpetuated in some schools of architecture and by some employers who believe that you should work yourself ragged ‘for the love of it’.

A recent survey by the Architects’ Journal³⁷ found that nearly a quarter of 3,000 architect respondents had, at the request of their employer, signed away their rights under the EU Working Time Directive that would otherwise limit their workload to 48 hours a week.

Worryingly, signing away this right was either explicitly or implicitly a condition of being accepted for a job, a symptom of a power imbalance in the system. This came to a head towards the end of 2019 when salaried architects formed a union³⁸ (the United Voices of the World Section of the Architectural Workers³⁹) to campaign collectively for better conditions.

While not affected by the ARB’s Architects Code, this kind of behaviour- i.e. pressuring staff to sign away their rights – is explicitly in contravention of the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct.

| Getting a job offer

Getting a job offer is always a fist-pump moment that deserves celebration.

However, don’t jump the gun. Wait to get it confirmed in writing. Employers do not *have* to make offers in writing but it is certainly good practice and something you would expect from reputable companies. Also, it is very much in your interests to have documentary evidence of the job offer.

Contract terms and conditions protected by law

It helps to know what employers are legally obliged to offer when you start in full-time employment.⁴⁰ They must:

- pay you
- let you have various statutory leaves – maternity, paternity, parental, adoption, shared parental, dependent care
- pay you statutory sick pay
- give you time off for jury service

They must also give you a ‘principal statement’ setting out the conditions you will work under. It must include:

- the employer’s name
- your name and job title or a description of work
- a start date (which is usually negotiable)
- how much and how often you will be paid
- hours and days of work and if and how they may vary (including any anti-social hours)
- where you will be working
- the legal entitlement of 5.6 weeks’ paid holiday (which usually includes public holidays)
- how long a job is expected to last (is it open-ended or is its term fixed?)
- how long any probation period will last and conditions surrounding it
- any other benefits (for example, childcare vouchers and lunch)
- obligatory training, whether or not this is paid for by the employer

Responsible employers will also want to set out the notice period, their sick leave policy, their disciplinary procedure⁴¹ and who to go to with a grievance⁴², details of any trade union agreements, and details of any pension arrangements.

Contracts in the UK also carry implied terms – i.e. terms that apply even though they are not explicitly set out. These tend to be common-sense matters such as your employer providing a safe and secure working environment and your not stealing from them.

The letter offering the job should state the salary and include your terms and conditions of employment (see **Contract terms and conditions protected by law** above), a job description, and possibly additional information such as an employee handbook that sets out various policies – for example, for health and safety, looking after your mental wellbeing, or their commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

If this extra information is not forthcoming, it might be because the practice is very new or very small, in which case it is understandable. Alternatively, it could be because they are not very organised or staff-friendly, which should set off some alarm bells.

Whatever the reason, always insist on seeing this information as a matter of due diligence. Give yourself time to fully understand it, and if you still have questions, be sure to ask the employer for clarification as soon as possible, before you sign.

Start dates are usually negotiable to account for your prior commitments and, of course, any notice that you may have to serve if you are changing jobs.

Employers usually understand that you may need time before you finally accept. This period of grace is useful if you are waiting on decisions from other job applications, for example, but be fair and don't expect the offer to stay open for longer than a few days. Practices often recruit in response to a specific, time-bound need and so will welcome quick decisions.

Satisfy yourself that you really do want the job. Most offers involve some element of compromise against your dream job criteria; the important thing is to understand how it fits in with your career goals, and go in with your eyes open so that you can have no regrets later.

The employer is obliged to ensure that you have the right to work in the UK and so will probably ask to see your passport even if you are British or from the EU. If you are from elsewhere in the world, they will want to see a valid work permit as well as your passport.



Satisfy yourself that you really do want the job. Most offers involve some element of compromise against your dream job criteria; the important thing is to understand how it fits in with your career goals, and go in with your eyes open so that you can have no regrets later.



4

Starting work

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There will be times of uncertainty when you don't know what you should be doing or who to talk to or where to go, which can be stressful.

Rest assured that this feeling will almost certainly pass quickly.

Unless you are very unlucky, everyone around you will be rooting for you. Recruiting new members of staff is always in response to need and so your new colleagues should be grateful for your presence, and strongly motivated to help you find your feet.



Starting work during COVID-19

One of the dramatic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the switch to virtual working.

Although a feat of extraordinary adaptation and creativity by employers, the impact on workers has not been without cost. The change has been tough for those with young children, living by themselves, no dedicated office space, or poor internet access, and particularly so for those *starting* a new job under these conditions.

New starters might be months into their contracts without ever have met their colleagues in person. They might have none of the encouraging group experience of working in the same space, none of the benefits of learning by observing, and will have no clear feel for the practice's distinctive culture or atmosphere.

Responsible employers are painfully aware of this lack and have tried to alleviate the difficulties in various ways. For example, if you find yourself in this position, your manager might be in touch regularly to offer moral as well as managerial support, and the practice might organize voluntary virtual coffee mornings or quiz nights as a way of team-building or simply affording you the opportunity to meet or catch up with colleagues in a social context.

At the time of writing it seems likely that most practices will go back to working in offices once the vaccination roll-out allows a return to some normality, perhaps with a more accepting attitude towards flexible hours and home-working. After all, there are considerable benefits from virtual working, notably the savings in time and carbon dioxide in not travelling.

However, some practices might abandon the notion of a dedicated physical office altogether, a factor that might affect how you feel about working for them.

| Your first week

Employers will want you to get up and running as soon as possible but realize that there is much to sort out, learn and get used to first.

Your induction will vary from practice to practice, of course. As a general rule, the larger the practice, the more there is to absorb but also the more organised, formal and in-depth the process.

Before you get properly stuck into any fee-paying design work you will be introduced to key people who will tell you everything you need to know to get started, a process that, in larger practices, could easily take a week or longer.

The first task will probably be to finalize your appointment for legal compliance. If you haven't already shown them to your employer, take along your passport, bank details, and your P45 (the form issued by your last employer that shows how much tax you've paid on your salary so far in the tax year).

This might also be the moment that you sign your contract of employment. If so, be sure to read through the copy you sign (to check that it is the same as the one you should already have seen) and to retain a countersigned copy for your own records.

Next you might meet your immediate team and other key people in the office. Some practices allocate you a 'buddy' to help you with extraneous things like where the toilets and kitchen are, who is who, and which are the best sandwich shops nearby, and so on.

Then you might be introduced to the departments and procedures that underpin how the office functions, including:

- Human resources: staff handbook (if any), their staff appraisal system, and key policies including those related to CPD and equality, diversity, and inclusion.
- Health and safety, including fire safety, what to do in the event of fire, first aid, workstation assessment (correct posture, height, angles to avoid aches and pains), and any particular hazards.
- Information systems: logins, the network structure, CAD standards/protocols, and IT policies.
- Your director, who might give you a potted history of the company and its mission and values.
- Finance: how you will be paid, protocols for claiming expenses, and so on.
- Administration: filing standards, template documents, supplies, office security.
- Marketing: key projects and clients; the image the practice likes to project through members of staff.

You will eventually find yourself back with your manager or team leader, who will introduce you to the project you will be working on, its brief, where it is up to, and precisely what you will be doing initially.

Note that very few practices have staff dedicated solely to HR functions; they will usually be undertaken by someone whose primary competence is in architecture, very often a director (who might also be your direct manager) with many other responsibilities.



Protection from discrimination

The world of work in the UK is bound by employment law that is too complex and wide in scope to be adequately covered in a short guide like this.

However, there are some basic principles that you should know, the most important of which is that you are protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.⁴³

The 'protected characteristics' are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, nationality or ethnic/national origin, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

There are four types of discrimination:

1. direct discrimination: treating someone with a protected characteristic less favourably than others.
2. indirect discrimination: putting rules or arrangements in place that apply to everyone, but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage.
3. harassment: unwanted behaviour linked to a protected characteristic that violates someone's dignity or creates an offensive environment for them.
4. victimisation: treating someone unfairly because they've complained about discrimination or harassment.

Thus, your employer cannot disadvantage you compared to others because, for example, you are dyslexic or have been diagnosed with generalized anxiety.

Responsible employers take these protections very seriously but even so might slip up inadvertently. For example, they might reward staff who stay late to get a job over the line – a well-meaning and generous gesture – without realizing that doing so disadvantages staff who were unable to stay late because of, for example, their parental commitments.

Of course, there are always examples of bad employers, in which case you have the right to pursue a grievance formally and, if not satisfied through their in-house procedures, seek legal remedy.

| Fair treatment in the workplace

As well as being protected by the Equality Act (see **Protection from discrimination** above), you are to a certain extent protected by architects' commitments under the *Architects Code* and, if they are RIBA members, the *RIBA Code of Professional Conduct* (see **Going above and beyond: codes** on page 9).

For example, Standard 12 of the *Architects Code* states that architects should 'treat everyone fairly'. Standard 4 states that architects should, where appropriate, ensure that they 'have sufficient suitably qualified and supervised staff to provide an effective and efficient service to clients.'

The RIBA's *Code of Professional Conduct* confers much more protection:

- Principle 1, Competence, imposes the duty to exercise 'proper supervision' of all work done under members' authority.
- Principle 3, Relationships, imposes several relevant duties, including:
 - To comply with good employment practice in their capacity as an employer.
 - To conduct professional activities in a manner that 'encourages and promotes equality of opportunity and diversity', meaning that they shall not discriminate, victimise or harass, and shall treat all persons fairly and treat beliefs and opinions of other people with respect.
 - To have regard for the maximum weekly working hours and the 48 hour working week under the Working Time Directive and ensure that the hours worked by their employees are reasonable and allow for a healthy work-life balance.
 - To provide employees with:
 - a fair, safe and equitable working environment.
 - a full written contract of employment
 - fair pay
 - encouragement and opportunity to develop professionally.
 - To have in place written internal procedures to enable proper whistleblowing by employees, and to protect and support whistleblowers.

RIBA Inclusion Charter

The RIBA recognises that the power imbalance between employee, especially from marginalised groups, and employer makes it difficult for the various safeguards in place under the law and in the codes to be used as intended.

As part of that, it has launched a voluntary Inclusion Charter⁴⁴ urging practices and individuals to:

- Acknowledge the urgent need for inclusion in the architecture profession and wider construction industry
- Commit to setting inclusion targets and an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) action plan for their practice
- Commit to developing their workplace culture, talent pipeline and ways of working to support inclusion
- Commit to publicly reporting on progress of their EDI plan – transparency and accountability are vital to drive cultural change
- Commit to embedding inclusive design in all projects, and contributing to the development of inclusive environments.

| The reality for employers

Most practices are microbusinesses under continuous pressure just to keep the work coming in and manage the existing professional workload so that commitments can be met and bills paid. This responsibility is onerous for the directors and one that you should understand and, as far as possible, support.

This isn't just because your getting paid depends on it, although that is certainly true. It is also because it shows teamwork, which in turn builds good mutual respect and trust.

Teamwork is especially important in smaller practices where the peaks of pressure can sometimes deflect directors' attention away from other issues. Small teams are in it together and success is only possible through compromise and forbearance.

Of course, you should never neglect critical issues that might be affecting you personally or professionally, but do temper how you address them. Reflect on the best way of resolving them in the context of your team or practice's immediate concerns, and escalate them accordingly. So, engage in what's going on in the practice, listen to what's going on around you, and remember that no matter how deserving your needs are, your bosses are unlikely to be able to cater to each and every one of them to your preferred timetable.



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5

How to do well
in the workplace

5 How to do well in the workplace

The next three chapters address the main spheres of practising architecture well:

- Doing well in the workplace
- Developing as a professional architect
- Flourishing as a person.

The three are deeply intertwined and are all critically important factors in a successful career.

Exactly what counts as success, and what is experienced as positive or negative along the way, is personal to you but is central to living a good, fulfilling life.

If you followed the advice in **Chapter 2**, you will already have begun to work out what motivates you and what your broad strategic career goals might be.

The following chapters explain the kinds of thing to expect in work, what control you have over them, and how you might cope with the considerable stresses and strains of succeeding in the world of professional practice.

| Taking responsibility for your career

One of the keys to staying healthy, happy, and productive in work is to take active control of your career. You can do this by keeping an eye on the extent to which your interests remain aligned to your employer's.

Here's how it works in principle. When you agree a contract of employment with a practice, you are entering into a kind of partnership: the two parties' interests are aligned in pursuit of a common goal.

Interests aligned

When this works well, it presents you with wonderful opportunities to learn and grow, build lasting friendships, and, of course, earn a decent living.

In return, the employer gets a deeply engaged, productive, happy member of staff who fits in, is good company, and helps the business to thrive commercially.

Your employer and the people around you will be rooting for you to do well, threading you and your particular personal and professional strengths into the overall weave of the practice culture. Sachin Puntambekar, a Part 3 student found this to be the case when he joined Hawkins\Brown: "The big thing for me was to find my own niche. Find something that works for you and for the company. It works both ways... It does them a favour as well."⁴⁵

Ideally, the contract will be a match made in heaven: the practice is everything you ever dreamt of and they love having you around.



Interests misaligned

More often than not, though, the partnership will face at least some bumps along the way that threaten this alignment of interests. These strains, which can arise from any number of factors, are the inevitable consequence of the never-ending changes that affect us all the time.

The extent of misalignment, its likely duration, and your ability to tolerate it are all critical factors in how you should respond.

If the situation is, on balance, contributing towards your career goals, you should grin and bear it. After all, you don't give up just because something is hard. Not only is it personally satisfying to overcome challenges, it is also a valuable learning experience that strengthens your CV.

How to react in theory

However, if the misalignment is making you unfulfilled or unhappy, looks set to worsen, is standing in the way of your achieving your career goals and there are fruitful opportunities elsewhere then, with due consideration for your employer, you should hand in your notice.

Bear in mind that you are a professional committed to ethical behaviour, and that your employer is owed some loyalty. They take a risk in employing you. They invest in you in various ways, give you the chance to acquire valuable experience, and contribute to your employability.

Give them the benefit of the doubt, especially early on when your relationship with them is only just bedding in. Allow for the possibility that you might be misreading the situation or that your expectations are set unreasonably high. Communicate openly and responsibly, and remember that good teamwork is about mutual support and compromise.

If the situation persists after due effort on both sides, your employers also deserve to avoid having to deal with the increasingly unpleasant consequences of any worsening misalignment of interests. If you are demotivated or made unhappy by the situation then you are less useful to them. The longer the misalignment persists, the more it stokes up problems down the line in the form, eventually, of either disciplinary procedures (they are dissatisfied with your performance) or raising grievances (you don't like how they are treating you) – see **When things go wrong** below.

Given the choice between resignation, where *you* decide to leave (ideally for positive reasons), and dismissal, where the employer fires you after concluding a lengthy, highly stressful formal disciplinary procedure, there is no contest: resignation is the healthier, more constructive choice for all parties.

So, actively monitor how well aligned your interests are with your employer's, strive to re-align them wherever possible,

but if the situation looks set to worsen, devise a positive exit strategy as soon as possible.

The theory in practice

Taking responsibility for your career in this way is fine in theory but less achievable in practice, particularly when jobs are in short supply.

For most of us but especially newly qualified architects on a comparatively low salary and with little professional experience and, perhaps, increasing domestic commitments, there simply isn't the financial cushion, opportunity, or mental bandwidth to hop onto a new career stepping stone at will.

As a consequence, you are more likely to put up with a greater misalignment of interests for longer than is optimal, which can be detrimental to your mental and even physical wellbeing (see **Chapter 7**) and, of course, leads to friction with your bosses – see **When things go wrong** below.

There is no magic wand to fix this predicament. However, there are coping strategies that will mitigate any stress while you set up a way out either by getting a new job or deciding to go self-employed. Remember also that your skills are highly transferable and valued outside of architecture. You should never discount the prospect of switching away from practising as an architect if the circumstances and your mental wellbeing demand it.

| Doing well in the workplace

Your ability to thrive in the workplace is defined a good deal by your employer, its culture, and the people who happen to be part of the staff.

If you followed the guidance in **Chapter 3**, though, you will have done all you can to ensure that you've ended up with an employer who suits your needs – even if only for the time being.

You might feel that, despite your years of studying, being in practice is like starting afresh. That's a misconception. The educational curriculum equipped you with a strong foundational knowledge. The skills you learnt in successfully concluding your architectural education and qualifying as an architect will help you to hit the ground running.

More importantly, the soft skills, behaviours, and good habits you've picked up along the way – a strong work ethic, time-management, the ability to communicate well, listen actively, and face criticism openly – will all smooth your way too.

For an overview of this background, refer to this guide's companion volume, *Study Architecture Well*.⁴⁶

🔍 CASE STUDY

Andy Thompson, early-career architect – asking for help

Andy completed his Part 1 degree at Leeds Metropolitan (now Leeds Beckett) University and his Part 2 qualification at Northumbria University in 2016. He passed his Part 3 with FaulknerBrown Architects and now works for them as a project architect. Since the COVID-19 pandemic struck, he's also been appointed as the Chair of the RIBA North-East Region's local Young Architect Practitioner's Forum.

Whereas most people join the Architects Register as competent designers, he thinks that they are less sure about the technical, regulatory and legal side of architecture. "Students are worried that they'll get it wrong and get themselves into trouble, or design themselves into a corner because they don't have that big a picture," he says.

The trick is to know when to ask for help. He says that most young architects want to become autonomous as soon as possible and don't want to ask for fear of being a burden. They also suffer to varying degrees from imposter syndrome – where you doubt your skills, talent and accomplishments, and have a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud. While natural, the feeling tends to inhibit your asking for help. As Andy puts it, you don't want to 'tell on yourself' by asking questions.

Andy was taught that this is wrong. "The greatest skill in being a professional", he says, "is about knowing where to look and who to ask for answers. You should ask *all* the questions, all the time!"

Another core aptitude for young architects is to be keen, friendly and approachable, which you can demonstrate by getting involved and learning as much as you can.

It was this mindset that led to his becoming Chair of the YAPF. "I'm not a natural extrovert: the idea of networking makes me want to cringe. But I just had a year when I was going to say yes to everything, and that's where I ended up."

He recently undertook Mental Health First Aid training, which taught him the importance of self-care at home as well as in the workplace. The truth is that practising architecture can have moments of high pressure and is unlikely to be plain sailing, with the result that you are likely to encounter moments of stress.

A lack of time is one of the big causes. As Andy says, "It would be great if you were able to say that you need an extra week, but unfortunately it doesn't work like that!"

The cure is to build resilience so that you can deal with things when they go wrong. For example, the way to deal with the stress of having too little time is with better time management, which Andy says is about good planning and 'seeing around upcoming corners'. Whatever the problem, he says, having the confidence to speak up can make a big difference.

| Getting ahead

Despite our differing motivations, most of us want to progress beyond junior early-career roles into more senior, more interesting ones.

This is a complex and gradual process. It requires you to dip your toes into different tasks with increasing levels of responsibility to build confidence. In large part it involves continuing to learn as a professional and mature as a human being. However, it is also about earning your bosses' and colleagues' trust and respect.

The Health and Safety Executive has identified six key factors⁴⁷ affecting productivity and wellbeing that mediate this transition:

1. **Demands**, including your workload, working patterns and the work environment.
2. **Control**, i.e. how much autonomy you have in the way you do your work.
3. **Support**, i.e. how your employer encourages you and provides you with the time and resources to do your job.
4. **Relationships**, i.e. the extent to which your employer promotes positive working to avoid conflict and how they deal with unacceptable behaviour.
5. **Role**, i.e. how well defined your role is and how it fits in with your colleagues' roles.
6. **Change**, i.e. how your employer introduces, communicates and manages organisational change.

Ultimate control over all these factors is with the employer, of course, but that does not mean that the employee is without agency. After all, the business is only as good as its workers, and the more that staff endorse the way that managers handle the six factors, the better it is for them.

Asking for help

A good way to exercise this agency is to ask for help. If staff don't ask for help, the bosses don't know there is a problem, critical factors aren't managed, and the workplace begins to fall into disharmony or, worse, the business is exposed to avoidable risks.

Managers would much rather you asked for help – as soon as possible – so that any problem can be nipped in the bud. Remember that knowing the limits of your knowledge, skills or ability is a duty on you as a professional. Exercising the duty shows maturity and generates trust.

Even if you understand this in theory, asking for help is still hard to do in practice. The chief difficulty is connected to the sense that, as a qualified architect, you should already know everything and be able to cope no matter what is thrown at you. You think, wrongly, that confessing otherwise makes you look bad.

The difficulty is compounded by the misapprehension that your managers, as busy people, won't have the capacity or patience to deal with your insecurity and uncertainty.

You must overcome your hesitation. Passing your Part 3 and registering as an architect does not mean that you enter the world of professional practice perfectly formed. It is merely a gateway along the road of lifelong learning (see **Chapter 5**).

As Karen Fugle – a career coach specialising in architecture – says, “Architectural practices operate in teams, think in terms of team goals”,⁴⁸ and so of course individual members have each other's backs. This includes offering psychological as well as professional support.

So, to be clear, do not be afraid to discuss your responsibilities or consult colleagues to find solutions. They've been in your shoes and will respect your speaking up.

The only thing they will be disappointed by is if you don't know when to ask for help ... and perhaps if, having been helped, you don't learn from the answer.

A great way to overcome your hesitations is with a mentor. Some practices match you with one to help you on your professional journey from day one. Even if there is no such scheme, try instituting something similar informally. Mentors can be a great sounding board and, assuming they work in the same practice as you, can be a wonderful go-between in asking for help. Since the concept is written into the code of conduct, try approaching architects. They will be open to the idea, especially if they were themselves once helped in a similar way.

| Promotion

There are three strategies for progressing from junior to more senior roles:

1. Moving to increasingly senior roles with a succession of different jobs with different employers,
2. Becoming self-employed, and
3. Rising through the ranks in the same practice.

Rising through the ranks is called promotion, and is highly motivating because it is clearly earned. The recognition in the form of a new job title and, most commonly, increased salary, makes you feel valued and trusted in the workplace. It proves that hard work pays off and always takes you a step closer to your long-term career goals.

Why employers promote staff

In a profession where business success depends on talent, practices face a constant battle not just to attract and retain the best talent but to nurture a positive work culture that keeps the workforce motivated.

Promotion is one of the tools for achieving these ends.

By virtue of the fact that they have more employees, larger practices are likely to have more career promotion pathways than smaller practices. They are also more likely to be able to absorb increases in their wage bill. These factors mean that, as a general rule, you have a better shot at promotion with larger practices than smaller ones.

Note, however, that the speed at which you acquire the requisite experience for promotion is likely to be comparatively slow in larger practices. A quicker way is to work in a small practice early in your career. You get to do a little of everything, from visiting sites and measuring and surveying to administering the office and picking up the phone to potential clients, all of which help you to take on more responsibility later.

Qualities that lead to promotion

A critical aspect of the work that merits a promotion is that it helps the practice to succeed in business.

Practices vary in their commercial priorities but the kinds of measures they might be looking at are higher profits, more fees, acquiring new clients, greater market share, less risk, and any number of other outcomes.

The important thing is that your work helps them to hit their business objectives or achieve their business strategy. The backroom nerd who saves design time by writing clever algorithms can be just as valuable and deserving of promotion as the charismatic speaker who attracts clients from the public podium.

In her book *HR for Creative Companies*, Kate Marks looks at promotion from the employer's point of view. Although her list is by no means comprehensive, the characteristics she says they look for are:

- Dependability/reliability
- Respect and consideration for others
- Ability to make good decisions
- Integrity
- Flexibility
- Charisma/gravitas.

She also lists the criteria that employers use to assess whether someone is ready for promotion:

- Significant contribution in an area of the business
- Bringing in business
- Coaching/mentoring
- Interpersonal skills
- Contribution to the company.

Joanna Pawlas, an Associate Partner at Foster + Partners, believes that the ability to run a project autonomously has generic value, serving as a kind of master key to all subsequent roles. She believes that this should be every early career architect's objective: "It is not just about having talent. Architects ultimately have to have that project-running experience in order to progress: proof that you have the organisational skills to manoeuvre a team operation, or a multi-team one."⁴⁹

A crucial aspect of this is having the capacity to manage both your own and the team's time, emphasizing once again the importance of time management in architectural practice.



By virtue of the fact that they have more employees, larger practices are likely to have more career promotion pathways than smaller practices.



Time management tips

If you've been through the architectural education system and qualified as an architect, the likelihood is that you will have become good at managing your time without necessarily being aware of it. However, time management is a skill that can be learnt and refined, and the better you are at it, the more valuable you become in practice.

Success depends crucially on three factors:

- **Formulating a time-bound plan:** the first step is to understand your project and sub-divide it into discrete tasks with targets for when they should be completed. Note that a 'project' can be fee-earning or any other in-house goal.
- **Accurate self-awareness:** your plan needs to be tailored to you and how you work on average. If you tend to only draw five details a day, make sure your plan doesn't rely on your drawing twice that amount.
- **Ability to monitor and adapt:** if you keep missing deadlines, don't stick your head in the sand: revisit your plan to understand the consequences and adjust accordingly.

Erich C. Dierdorff⁵⁰ has these tips for becoming an expert time manager:

Formulating a plan:

- Use a calendar.
- Divide up tasks into manageable chunks.
- Don't just list tasks – prioritize them and identify 'pinch points'.
- Important tasks deserve your attention more than urgent ones.
- Beware of over-optimism about how much you can get done.
- Your plan should explain the importance of each task fully so that you don't miss a step.

Boosting self-awareness:

- Work out when during the day or week you are most productive and account for that in your plan.
- To learn your realistic pace for various jobs, record how long you take against how long you had planned.
- As much as possible, fit your time management plan around your existing habits.
- Budget time as you would money; try not to overspend!

Learning to adapt:

- Have contingency plans in the event that things go wrong.
- Always appraise the future value of what you are currently doing for the project as a whole and be ready to move on. If you've spent ages on a feature that you now realize no longer works, don't hesitate to ditch it.
- Experiment with project tracker apps, remembering that the benefit of using them must outweigh the cost.
- Work in short concentrated bursts of effort, with breaks in between; this will help you to avoid procrastination.

A strategy for accelerating your progress is, in career coach Karen Fugle's term, to 'manage up'. This means proactively seeking new experience and responsibilities by suggesting it to your manager. (Remember that your manager is very unlikely ever to have had any formal training in how to manage effectively. If they have any shortcomings, it is forgivable, and giving them a helping hand in this way is a pragmatic work-around.)

Of course, you should only do so if you have the capacity and a convincing case for why should be allowed to do it. Fugle thinks of it as stretching out to pull new responsibilities into your comfort zone. As she says, "Emphasise your strengths and your values. Make sure you have a sense of purpose when asking for an opportunity."⁵¹ If you can frame your bid in terms of how it helps the practice, so much the better.

Note that even if your career anchors and ultimate goals don't align to the kinds of qualities outlined here, it does not mean that you can't be promoted. Employers are all different and value different things. For example, they have been known to create tailored roles to accommodate or retain the right person.

How promotion qualities are monitored – the appraisal

As a junior architect in a larger practice, not only is your input difficult to discern against competing claims from colleagues, you also tend to be distant from the person who decides on promotions.

Employers acknowledge this issue, and institute formal systems of appraisals or performance reviews to address it.

Typically conducted yearly or every six months, the appraisal is a chance for you to focus on your career goals in the context of your current role.

Done well, it is a chance to receive coaching, work out what success looks like for someone in your role, receive constructive feedback about your progress and achievements, agree your CPD and training needs, and find out about any promotion opportunities within the company. It is also a good moment to talk about ‘managing up’ – how you could take on more responsibility.

During the appraisal you should agree SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-related) targets to keep your career in alignment with your employer’s interests. These targets should be recorded so that your progress against them can be monitored and recognised.

If your practice carries out appraisals, their usefulness of course depends on the skill and commitment of the appraiser. However, it is also in part down to you. If you are cynical or unprepared to talk honestly and are closed to receiving feedback, it definitely won’t work. Taking responsibility for your career means making the most of the tools at your disposal, and the appraisal is your best avenue for advancement.

Things are slightly different in smaller practices. Because your work is likely to be well known to the principal, i.e. the person who decides on who deserves a promotion, and because smaller practices tend to have less bureaucracy than larger ones, a formal system of appraisals can seem a bit stilted and unnecessary. After all, you and your appraiser are likely to work very closely together day-in and day-out and you might wonder what purpose it can serve.

Put aside any qualms. The opportunity to focus on your career free from distractions is precious and should not be wasted.

If your employer does not run a formal appraisal system, you might suggest an informal one just for you. Their reaction will yield useful insights about them and the extent to which their interests are aligned to yours.

Flexible working

Although many employers were gradually freeing up their policies on when and where staff could work in any case, it’s fair to say that the lockdowns necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the trend.

The received wisdom that teams must all be in the same physical location to be most effective, while not completely disproven, has been found to be less true than previously thought. Videoconferencing software supported by online project collaboration software and good hardware and internet connections are now ubiquitous and relatively glitch-free, adequately substituting for co-location.

Also, with childminding options and schools closed, employers have been forced to allow staff who are also parents the flexibility to fit their work around caring for their children. While far from ideal for all concerned, the flexibility has been an adequate substitute for regular hours.

Of course, there are significant silver linings with both concessions, which might compensate for or even outweigh the downsides long-term. Dispensing with the need to co-locate frees up time and minimizes travel. Flexible hours allow staff to better manage the particular circumstances of their lives. Both combined could contribute to happier, more committed and productive staff.

Exact details of working hours policies will vary from practice to practice. Some will just trust you to work your hours and, provided the work is done, won’t examine it too closely. Some will specify core hours but allow flexibility to accommodate a fixed routine (such as the school run) – provided your hours are worked. Others will implement an official flexitime policy where hours worked are banked, with any surplus time yours to draw down as and when needed – to look after a sick child, for example.⁵²

Whatever its details, the policy must apply equally to all staff in line with the Equality Act – see **Protection from discrimination** above.

| Holidays

Whether you work full-time or part-time, you have the right to paid holiday, which you accrue from the day you start working, including when you're on a probationary period, sick leave, or maternity, paternity, adoption or shared parental leave.

Exactly how many days' worth you get beyond the statutory minimum (28 days of paid holiday per year, 8 days of which can be the year's bank holidays) depends on how many hours you work and the agreement you have with your employer.

If you work part-time, your entitlement reduces in proportion to how much less than full-time your job is. For example, if you work 3 days a week, you're entitled to 16.8 days' paid holiday a year.

You are still entitled to statutory annual leave if you work irregular hours, such as zero hours contracts.⁵³

| Work absence

What happens when you are absent from work for any reason is defined in your employer's absence policy and so it is always worth checking that it seem reasonable to you before saying yes to the job offer. Some aspects of work absence are constrained by the law, especially what happens in the event that you are sick for physical or mental health reasons.

Sickness leave

If you are off sick for more than seven days, you should supply your employer with a sick note (sometimes called a 'fit note') from your doctor. Before then, the employer should take your word for it.

If the sick note says that you *could* be fit for work under certain conditions, your employer might make reasonable adjustments to allow it and/or arrange a phased return to work. If you have a disability, by law your employer must make reasonable adjustments.

Your employer can ask to see your medical records but they must only be released with your consent.

Sick pay entitlement

If you are off on sick leave for physical or mental health reasons, at the very least your employer must pay you statutory sick pay. Employers usually top this up with additional payment – bound by certain limits, particularly the duration of your sick leave.⁵⁴

Other entitlements

You have rights to other kinds of leave such as maternity, paternity, adoption leave. To find out more about these, consult the Acas website.⁵⁵

| When things go wrong

Things can and do wrong in the workplace. Professional work can at times be challenging, with peaks of high stress that can affect people in different ways.

For example, it might be that you are bewildered by how organisational changes are introduced, communicated or managed. You can be overwhelmed by the demands of the job, frustrated at your lack of autonomy, or feel abandoned by a lack of support. You might encounter personality clashes with colleagues or your boss, or find that your role keeps changing or growing unnoticed. Suffering these impacts concurrently will worsen your experience and possibly affect your mental wellbeing – see **Chapter 8 About mental wellbeing**.

The employer won't necessarily be aware of the problem – especially if you don't tell them – and might instead misinterpret your reactions to mean that you are not fitting in or performing as expected.

No matter how these impacts arise and compound each other, they are undesirable and should not be ignored, even if you think they are short-lived and likely to go away by themselves.

Talk to your boss about it confidentially. If the boss is the problem, tell some other senior person. If there is no other senior person, talk to your colleagues. The idea is to acknowledge the problem and to give the employer a chance to help sort it out.

Be aware that some stressors lead to cognitive distortions, affecting the accuracy of how you interpret and experience situations (see **Common cognitive distortions** on page 54). If you remain convinced that there is a problem even after reflection, consider your options.

The positive moves are to:

- accept the situation without regret and carry on.
- fix the problem informally.
- plan an exit strategy.

These moves keep you in charge of your career and will protect your mental wellbeing.

The negative moves are to:

- let the problem fester and worsen.
- escalate the problem into an eventual formal grievance, and/or
- let the problem affect your performance, which could escalate into a disciplinary action.

All of these moves can be very stressful, upsetting, and distracting for you.

Grievance and disciplinary procedures

When you feel that you have been mistreated by or have a valid complaint against your employer, and probably only after other reasonable attempts to resolve the issue have failed, you can raise a grievance against them. Before you do so, collect evidence to support your case. There are various ways of doing this but keeping a diary of events is the most common tactic.

When the employer feels that you are not performing as they have a right to expect and all other efforts have failed, they can start disciplinary action against you. Disciplinary procedures can also follow if you are suspected of 'misconduct' (e.g. harassment, bullying, or refusing to work) or 'gross misconduct' (e.g. fraud, physical violence, and putting others at risk).

In theory, both grievance and disciplinary procedures are meant to be neutral, civilized mechanisms for fixing an acknowledged problem and, done well and in the right spirit, can work well. However, it is always undesirable to get to this stage because even the best run procedures are likely to be stressful.

For you the employee, the stress arises not just from the grievance but also from having your reputation, competence, integrity, and honesty questioned and, ultimately, your livelihood put at risk.

For the employer, the stress arises because the procedures are distracting, time-consuming, and full of legal jeopardy. Believe it or not, they are also upsetting for the senior members of staff involved.

On receipt of a formal grievance notification or when contemplating a disciplinary action, the employer must follow a full and fair procedure such as the Acas Code of Practice.⁵⁶

Although the Acas Code is not the law, it is recognised as best practice, and a record of how your employer handled your case will be taken into account in the unhappy chance that it should reach an employment tribunal.

For more information, visit the Acas website.⁵⁷

Dismissal

Dismissal is another term for being sacked or fired. It means that your employer has ended your contract.

They can only do so after following a fair and reasonable procedure – such as a disciplinary procedure in line with the Acas Code of Practice.

The law only recognises five reasons for dismissal:

1. **Conduct** – when the employee has done something that's inappropriate or not acceptable.
2. **Capability** – when the employee is not able to do the job (through long-term illness, for example) or does not have the right qualifications.
3. **A legal reason** – when the employee cannot do their job legally. For example, a lorry driver who's banned from driving.
4. **Other substantial reason** – for example, a fixed-term contract ending, a client refusing to work with you, or your refusing to agree new terms and conditions of employment.
5. **Redundancy** – when the job is no longer needed because, for example, part or all of the employer's business is closing, or they are moving to a new location, or the market for the employer's services has changed.

Of the five reasons, redundancy is the odd one out since deciding on it has nothing to do with grievances, capability or misconduct. Nonetheless, employers cannot simply make employees redundant; they must go through a fair and reasonable procedure involving consultations, appeals, and working out your redundancy pay.⁵⁸

For help and advice, get in touch with the Architects Benevolent Society.⁵⁹ For more information, visit the Acas⁶⁰ or Citizens Advice⁶¹ websites.

| Resigning – your exit strategy

People usually leave a job by resigning or 'handing in their notice', usually for one or more of these reasons:

1. Their interests are no longer aligned with their employer's.
2. They are ready to move on in pursuit of their career goals.
3. Their personal circumstances are changing.

It makes sense to:

- **Leave for positive reasons.** For example, leaving to take up a more senior job, or one that is better aligned to your career or, indeed, life goals, is more protective of your self-esteem and mental wellbeing than leaving under a cloud of stress or because the job has become unbearable.
- **Leave on good terms.** The profession is a small world and you never know when a good word from your employer can benefit you in the future. It's even possible that you will return to work for them in a more senior position later.
- **Make sure that you can afford to resign.** This generally means that you have another, preferably better, job to go to, or you have the resources to set up in business for yourself.

Be sure to:

- **Give your employer notice in writing**, specifying your last day. The length of notice will be in your terms and conditions of employment. If possible, notify your employer earlier than stipulated as a courtesy to allow them more time to find your replacement.
- **Check your holiday entitlement** and how this might affect your final payment and length of notice.
- **Agree your final payslip**, making sure it includes everything you are entitled to.
- **Keep records of your workplace pension scheme.** The money is for your future, so don't lose track of it.

Your employer might ask you to attend an exit interview. The idea is to gather information that allows *them* to learn and improve: losing staff is expensive and disruptive and they will want to know your reasons for leaving in case it is something they can fix. Exit interviews can also be a last ditch opportunity to persuade you to change your mind. If you're persuaded, it is usually possible to withdraw your resignation provided you haven't already committed to working somewhere else.

| Starting your own practice

Many of you will be tempted to set up in business for yourself, and there are powerful reasons for doing so while you are still comparatively young, footloose and fancy-free. You have fewer ties and responsibilities and have the energy and resilience to survive the risks and uncertainty involved.

If you do it, it makes sense to have a plan. Many people do so gradually, taking side-gigs for friends and family, for example, while still working before finally taking the drastic decision to resign and do it properly. Remember that the Architects Code requires you to have appropriate professional indemnity insurance cover in place if you do this.⁶²

Note that starting a practice is costly and very demanding and can only really succeed if you give it your full attention. Even then, it is likely to take years before you are on a more even financial footing and your reputation and network are strong and broad enough to sustain you.

Advice about setting up in business is beyond the scope of this guide. However, there are excellent sources of intelligence on the architecture.com website,⁶³ and several first-rate books on the topic, including *Architect's Handbook of Practice Management*,⁶⁴ *Starting a Practice*⁶⁵ and *How to win work: the architect's guide to business development and marketing*.⁶⁶

6

How to develop
professionally

6 How to develop professionally

Working as a qualified architect is not easy. Your work has real-life consequences, which entails considerable responsibility.

As well as your professional duty to meet the brief, produce aesthetically pleasing work, and good social and environmental outcomes, your work has repercussions on the client's project budget and schedule, your project team partners' efficiency and effectiveness, your employer's legal liability, and the health and safety of site workers and building users.

Indeed, in the light of findings from the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry and the increasing expectation of more stringent proofs of competence, ARB is gaining new powers to check continuing competence and the RIBA is updating its educational and professional development framework (as outlined in its Way Ahead document⁶⁷).

In particular, the RIBA's Way Ahead introduces the idea of 'mandatory competences' – starting with health and

safety but extending to 'climate literacy', and 'ethics and social purpose' over time – that will be tested every five years. Chartered architects will thus in effect have to be periodically re-accredited to retain their chartered status.

While the proposal only applies to chartered architects (i.e. architects who are members of the RIBA), this move is likely to raise the bar across the profession and, in turn, raise expectations among clients.

With such heavy responsibilities, maintaining your competence through continuing professional development (CPD) is important from the point of view of not just professional and legal liability and contractual compliance but also for your mental wellbeing.

Being able to flourish in the role is thus directly correlated to your ongoing learning. This happens not just through formal, documented CPD but also through all the incidental learning that you pick up on the fly, through experience.



ARB position on maintaining competence⁶⁸

In its role as gatekeeper to the profession, the Architects Registration Board (ARB) provides the public with assurance that those on the Architects Register will carry out their work with appropriate knowledge and skill. ARB gives this assurance not just when they admit a new architect at the start of their career but on every subsequent annual renewal too, and will shortly acquire new powers to check.⁶⁹

Currently, architects commit to, but do not have to provide evidence of, keeping their professional knowledge and skills up to date under Standard 2 of the Architects Code. Practising architects must also have recent practical experience that is sufficient, in the opinion of ARB, to maintain their competence. (Note that this is changing to bring the regulation of architects into line with other professions. The change introduced by the draft Building Safety Bill⁷⁰ will amend the Architects Act to introduce a power for ARB to monitor ongoing competence more robustly, including requiring periodic re-accreditation.)

ARB issues guidance from time to time to help you understand what is likely to count. Note that you must ensure that you understand and can apply health and safety legislation accurately.

As well as formal CPD in the form of relevant courses, seminars and lectures, the ARB recognises work-based learning, teaching, active engagement in practice, professional activities and self-directed learning as ways to maintain your competence.

Although the ARB has its own Criteria, anyone satisfying the RIBA's requirements⁷¹ for CPD is likely to have maintained his or her competence in the eyes of the ARB as well. There are plenty of other CPD providers, not least the Royal Society of Architects in Wales (RSAW), the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA), and the Construction Industry Council.⁷²

The onus is on you to decide how best to maintain your competence. You should assess gaps in your knowledge, skills and understanding and set out a plan to address them. Importantly, you must record this learning, evaluate its success, and plan your future CPD needs. ARB does not mind how you record this information, and will accept information compiled using the RIBA's CPD Recording Tool.

CPD is critical. To continue to be included on the Architects Register in the UK, you must maintain your competence. The ARB does not stipulate how you should do so, leaving it to your professional integrity – although note that this is changing⁷³ (see also **ARB position on maintaining competence** above).

The RIBA is more prescriptive. It offers a whole infrastructure that makes it easier for you, including a core curriculum, a network of CPD providers and eligible learning opportunities, and an online method for recording all that you do (see **The RIBA CPD system** below).



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The RIBA CPD system

As an RIBA chartered member you must maintain your professional competence in a specified way, as follows:

- You must undertake 35 hours of CPD each year, which equates to devoting about 45 minutes a week to it. 20 of these hours must be from the ten topics in the RIBA Core Curriculum, and you must spend at least 2 hours on each.
At least half your CPD must be from 'structured' as opposed to 'informal' learning activities. You can acquire the learning at five 'levels':
 1. Micro-learning: quick informal updates of up to 30 minutes, usually digital, and self-directed
 2. General awareness: usually free, one hour's duration: doesn't lead to expertise
 3. Detailed knowledge: structured CPD of two hours to a half day's duration
 4. Deep learning: courses on a single subject of one or two days' duration
 5. Advanced learning: courses of at least three days' duration potentially leading to additional specialisations, certification or qualifications.
- You must then reflect on the value of your learning and award it between 1 and 4 learning points, where 1 = little learnt, and 4 = significant benefit. You must accumulate at least 100 points every year.
- Finally, you must record your CPD online using the RIBA CPD Recording Tool.

The RIBA CPD Core Curriculum comprises ten mandatory topics. Complemented by a useful CPD Primer,⁷⁴ they are:

1. Architecture for social purpose
2. Health, safety and wellbeing
3. Business, clients and services
4. Legal, regulatory and statutory compliance
5. Procurement and contracts
6. Sustainable architecture
7. Inclusive environments
8. Places, planning and communities
9. Building conservation and heritage
10. Design, construction and technology

Although you may use any CPD provider, the newly launch RIBA Academy⁷⁵ offers vetted courses covering all parts of the core curriculum for chartered architects (i.e. RIBA members). Also, the RIBA CPD Providers Network⁷⁶ is a useful one-stop shop, delivering relevant learning, for example, face-to-face in your practice, during factory tours, in RIBA events, at RIBA CPD Roadshows, or online.

While you might not be lucky enough to have your registration fee paid by them, your employers should afford you the time and opportunity to undertake qualifying CPD. After all, they have a vested interest in your maintaining your registration, especially if they rely on it to retain their Chartered Practice status.

Of course, simply being in practice is a never-ending learning experience. Every brief received, concept sketched, design drawn, report written, problem encountered, meeting attended, presentation given will be new and different and you cannot help but learn from it.

Indeed, since your value is in your knowledge (and time), it will pay you to adopt a learning attitude to everything you do. Not only will this ensure that you are alive to the learning opportunity, knowing that you are building up your professional experience and chances of being promoted will make every interaction more motivating.

As the RIBA CPD system shows, though, some learning has more value than others. While attending events, talks and seminars is useful, you are unlikely to give them the full four learning points. Courses that result in a formally recognised certificate or qualification will give you more in-depth knowledge and skills that are more likely to be useful to directly boost your career in various ways.

For example, you can engage in longer-term study to gain, for example, a Masters. If that seems like too much of a commitment, there are quicker courses that are nonetheless very useful. For example, you can train to become a certified Passivhaus designer or to bolster your competence in software packages such as Revit.



How to flourish as a person

It is not unusual for the pressures of professional work to be stressful. While that stress can be good and motivating, pushing you to go further than you might otherwise have gone, it can and does tip over into bad stress when it becomes too intense or goes on for too long.

7 How to flourish as a person

It is not unusual for the pressures of professional work to be stressful. While that stress can be good and motivating, pushing you to go further than you might otherwise have gone, it can and does tip over into bad stress when it becomes too intense or goes on for too long.

As **Chapter 8** shows, bad stress is the gateway to other, more serious mental health impacts such as anxiety and depression. In turn, these can leave you vulnerable to further impacts that compound the problem, such as insomnia, poor eating and drinking habits, and less inclination to exercise.

Your objective is to acknowledge the potential and set in place good behaviours that prevent these impacts from happening or, failing that, to have strategies in place to cope when they rear their unwelcome heads.

An RIBA survey⁷⁷ of architecture students conducted towards the end of 2020 asked them what advice they would have for their fellow students. Their advice was remarkably consistent and insightful, with their coping strategies mapping neatly onto the evidence-based 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' model⁷⁸ developed by the New Economics Foundation in 2008.

As the title suggests, this boils good wellbeing down to five simple actions:

1. **Connect:** interact with people to build social connections. It can be with friends, of course, but just as effective is engagement with others in, for example, paid or voluntary work and clubs or teams.
2. **Be active:** exercise your body to feel good and stay fit. There is a well-established and powerful link between doing exercise and good mental health.
3. **Be curious:** appreciate what you have, savour the moment, and be 'mindful'.
4. **Keep learning:** clearly, as an architect you are on a life-long journey of learning but it is worth trying something outside your professional interests, such as a craft, musical instrument, or other skill that not only uses your mind but is fun, too.
5. **Give:** volunteer, help a friend or stranger, and show appreciation of others so that you feel part of a community.

Of course, this is easier said than done but it is possible. The strategies can be learnt by anyone and involve combining the following tactics:

- work smart, not hard
- learn effective time management techniques
- speak up for yourself unhesitatingly and ask for help as soon as you need it
- Focus on what you can control.

The Architects' Mental Wellbeing Toolkit,⁷⁹ published by the Architects' Mental Wellbeing Forum,⁸⁰ is packed full of useful advice for individuals as well as employers about everything from the office culture to technology, and includes invaluable lists of further information.

Here are some of its top tips:

Coping skills:

- Develop better time management skills to help you to anticipate when a workload might be unrealistic.
- If you are struggling or concerned about a deadline, voice your concerns so that resources can be reviewed at an early stage.
- It is ok not to reply to emails immediately.
- Speak up if your office set-up isn't working for you.

Learn:

- Join in on every meeting, if invited: these are a good way to understand how the business operates.
- Speak to your boss if you feel training may help with a lack of software knowledge, or see if tutorials are available online (for example, on YouTube).

Contributing and good relationships:

- If you have an idea for a positive change in your office, put together a good case (with evidence of the wellbeing benefits) and present it to senior staff.
- Talk to colleagues sooner than emailing them.

Work smart:

- Take a lunch break!
- Try to switch off when you're not at work.

Exercise:

- Stay physically active throughout the day.
- Explore 'active commuting' – walk or cycle to work, or get off the bus one stop earlier to up your daily step count.

| The causes of workplace stress

Unfortunately, the tipping point from good to bad stress is unstable and varies from person to person, and so it is difficult for anyone other than the sufferer to know or predict when it might happen.

Provided there are no external stressors influencing you, the main cause of bad stress is a mismatch between, on the one hand, the professional demands and pressures on you and, on the other, your knowledge and abilities. The effect is likely to be exacerbated when you exercise little control and/or have little choice in the matter, and when you do not have adequate support from others.

The WHO identifies the known 'stress-related hazards',⁸¹ including:

Work Content	Work Context
<p>Job Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monotonous, under-stimulating, meaningless tasks • Lack of variety • Aversive tasks <p>Workload and work pace:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having too much or too little to do • Working under time pressures <p>Working Hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict and inflexible working schedules • Long and unsocial hours • Unpredictable working hours <p>Participation and Control:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of participation in decision making • Lack of control (for example, over work methods, work pace, working hours and the work environment) 	<p>Career Development, Status and Pay:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job insecurity • Lack of promotion prospects • Under-promotion or over-promotion • Unclear or unfair performance evaluation systems • Being over-skilled or under-skilled for the job <p>Role in the Organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear role • Conflicting roles within the same job • Responsibility for people • Continuously dealing with other people and their problems <p>Interpersonal Relationships:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate, inconsiderate or unsupportive supervision • Poor relationships with co-workers • Bullying, harassment and violence • Isolated or solitary work • No agreed procedures for dealing with problems or complaints <p>Organizational Culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor communication • Poor leadership • Lack of clarity about organizational objectives and structure <p>Home-Work Interface:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicting demands of work and home • Lack of support for domestic problems at work • Lack of support for work problems at home

| Cognitive behavioural therapy

If you do suffer from serious negative mental health impacts, identifying and acknowledging them allows us to confront and better prevent them.

This is a basic tenet of cognitive behavioural therapy, the most widely used and effective non-pharmaceutical treatment for many mental disorders, including anxiety and depression.

Naming and confronting fears clearly and rationally is the first step to actively learning to reinterpret facts with more accurate emotional labels (see **Common Cognitive distortions** below), a skill that sets you up for better mental health as you go through life and that anyone can acquire.

““
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Common cognitive distortions

Stress, anxiety and depression typically lead to negative thought patterns that are irrational or distort reality.

Common examples include:

1. **Mind reading.** You assume that you know what people think without having sufficient evidence of their thoughts.
2. **Fortune-telling.** You predict the future negatively: things will get worse, or there is danger ahead.
3. **Catastrophizing.** You believe that what has happened or will happen will be so awful and unbearable that you won't be able to stand it.
4. **Labeling.** You assign global negative traits to yourself and others. "I'm no good at design."
5. **Discounting positives.** You claim that the positive things you or others do are trivial. "Doing that well was easy, so it doesn't count."
6. **Negative filtering.** You focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives.
7. **Overgeneralizing.** You perceive a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident.
9. **Blaming.** You focus on the other person as the source of your negative feelings, and you refuse to take responsibility for changing yourself.
10. **What if?** You keep asking a series of questions about "what if" something happens, but you fail to be satisfied with any of the answers.
11. **Emotional reasoning.** You let your feelings guide your interpretation of reality.⁸²

Our responses to situations under stress are not always inaccurate, of course. However, it is wise to concede the possibility.

If you find yourself reacting more severely than normal, take a breath, rewind, and play the situation back with neutral ears. Reflect openly on it, and only take it further if you are certain that you are not distorting how things really are.

| Sleeping well

Teamwork and the good of the practice are important considerations for all workers and so pulling out the stops to stay late once in a while is fair enough. However, when there is a culture of working long hours as standard at your office, it can have detrimental effects on your physical and mental health. Add in the kind of stress that is not uncommon in professional practice and you have the makings of an unhealthy workplace that can lead to burn-out.

If you find that you are affected, it's important to learn the rudiments of good sleep, which start with solid routines or 'sleep hygiene'. The NHS recommends⁸³ that you work out a system that works for you and stick to it. While the detail is down to you, there are certain factors that seem to matter across the board.

1. Limit your alcohol and caffeine intake.
2. Eat healthily, and nothing too heavy close to bedtime.
3. Exercise, even if it's just a daily walk.
4. Get more exposure to sunlight.
5. Keep regular hours. In other words, wake up and go to sleep at the same time every day. Even if you've had a particularly poor night's sleep, stick to the same routine for the next night. This sets your body clock and gets you into a natural rhythm.
6. Give yourself enough time. Most of us need between 6 and 9 hours every night.
7. Wind down an hour or so before going to bed in a way that suits you best. Take a bath, write a to-do list (so that you don't fret about it in bed), do gentle stretches, listen to music designed to relax, read a book.
8. Avoid smartphone/tablet/computer screens for an hour or so before bed.
9. Make your bedroom sleep-friendly. This means a comfortable bed and mattress and a room that is dark, quiet, tidy, and with the temperature set between 18°C and 24°C. Keep electronic equipment out of it.

There are apps to help: give them a try. The NHS recommends Pzizz, Sleepio, and Sleepstation. The Sleepstation website⁸⁴ in particular has a library of helpful articles.

The idea is that good sleep will follow the introduction of a good routine. If your sleep continues to be disrupted despite your routine, keep a sleep diary and take your observations along to your GP, who will use it to help diagnose your sleep problem.

You can download a free diary template⁸⁵ from the National Sleep Foundation's website.

| Mindfulness

Many people swear by mindfulness to help with stress, anxiety and depression, and to maintain good mental wellbeing. The concept seems to mean different things to different people but at heart is about 'being present in the moment': noticing things in and outside of your body as they happen so that you do not take them for granted.

People are 'mindful' in a variety of ways. For example, for some it is merely being more observant as they go about their daily lives. For others it can involve a walk in the countryside, yoga, tai-chi, meditation, or breathing exercises.

If these options are impossible or do not appeal, try mindfulness apps. The NHS lists *Bluelce*, *Catch It*, *Chill Panda*, *Feeling Good: positive mindset*, and *Thrive*.⁸⁶

Architect Ben Channon, founder of the Architects' Mental Wellbeing Forum, recommends additional apps: *Calm*, *Five to Nine* and *Headspace*.⁸⁷

Interestingly, mindfulness complements CBT by encouraging you to identify and name feelings and emotions inside as you experience them, allowing you to know them for what they are.

Note that if you currently suffer from anxiety or depression, mindfulness is not a substitute for proven therapies such as CBT.⁸⁸ However, it can help you to maintain good mental health and is unlikely to do any harm.

Exercise

Taking regular exercise is proven to protect you against a huge range of health problems, including stress and depression. What's more, it boosts your self-esteem, mood, energy and quality of sleep.

Any physical activity is better than none, but the more you do, the better the effects. Aim for 150 minutes (two and a half hours) of exercise a week.

To reap long-term health dividends, this activity should at the very least raise your heart rate, make you breathe faster and make you warmer. For a better result, try vigorous intensity activity that makes you lose your breath and makes your heart pump hard.⁸⁹

Everything counts. For example, you can incorporate a fast walk, run or cycle to and from work and always use the stairs instead of the lift. Better still, take up a sport or active hobby. Not only will this fulfil your exercise quota, it will also broaden your horizons, allow you to meet people, and give you a break from work.



Taking regular exercise is proven to protect you against a huge range of health problems, including stress and depression.



8

About mental
wellbeing

8 About mental wellbeing

| What are mental health disorders?

There are many mental health disorders, often rather ill-defined and with many overlapping symptoms. The World Health Organisation classifies⁹⁰ them into several groups. The ones that are most relevant to early career architects are likely to be:

- Neurotic, stress-related and somatoform disorders such as anxiety, panic attacks, racing heart, and so on.
- Affective disorders such as depression.
- Behavioural syndromes such as sleep disorders.

These disorders are fairly prevalent in the population as a whole. Mixed anxiety and depression, for example, is the most common mental disorder in Britain, with almost 8% of people affected.

Women are more affected than men, and are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with anxiety disorders.⁹¹

About one in seven people experience mental health problems in the workplace, with nearly 13% of all sick absence days attributed to a mental health condition. Within that, women in full-time employment are nearly twice as likely to have a common mental health problem as full-time employed men – 19.8% against 10.9%.⁹²

Other than gender, your vulnerability depends on the interaction between individual attributes (genetic factors or personality traits), social circumstances, and environmental factors. You are more likely to be protected if you have:

- Individual attributes of:
 - good self-esteem and confidence
 - the ability to solve problems and manage stress or adversity
 - good communication skills
 - good physical health and fitness.
- Social circumstances that include:
 - the social support of family and friends
 - good parenting and family interaction
 - physical security and safety from violence and abuse
 - economic security
 - scholastic achievement
 - satisfaction and success at work.
- Environmental factors that include:
 - equality of access to basic services
 - social justice, tolerance, integration
 - social and gender equality
 - physical security and safety from war or disaster.⁹³

Individual attributes are more readily controlled than social circumstances, while environmental factors are almost entirely out of your hands. The good news is that the protective individual attributes can all be learned, managed and maintained by you – as we saw in the previous chapter.

| Stress

Stress is the main gateway to psychological ill-health, especially anxiety or depression, which themselves cause stress, setting up a self-reinforcing pattern of feelings that can affect your work performance and other areas of your life.

One of the problems with stress and mental health issues generally is that we find it difficult to identify them in ourselves and are reluctant to admit to them.

The list of possible red flags is quite long, with physical symptoms accompanying the emotional ones.

The NHS⁹⁴ and mental health charity MIND⁹⁵ say stress can make you feel:

- irritable
- anxious
- restless
- tearful
- like you cannot enjoy yourself
- worried a lot of the time
- it is hard to make decisions
- like avoiding situations that are troubling you
- like eating too much or too little
- smoking or drinking alcohol more than usual

You may start to:

- have sleep problems
- find it hard to concentrate
- bite your nails, pick your skin, or grind your teeth
- feel short of breath or breathe very fast
- have panic attacks, i.e. sudden events that leave you sweating, dizzy, and gasping for air.
- have muscle tension
- have blurred eyesight or sore eyes
- lose interest in sex or be unable to enjoy sex
- feel tired all the time
- grind your teeth or clench your jaw
- have headaches
- have chest pains
- develop high blood pressure
- have indigestion or heartburn
- develop constipation or diarrhoea
- feel sick

These symptoms are not diagnostic – they might have other causes – but if you suffer from any of them, allow the possibility that you might be suffering from stress.

| Anxiety

Stress turns into anxiety when persistent, excessive or irrational feelings and behaviours stay with you even in the absence of a cause. The dominant symptoms are insomnia, difficulty concentrating, fatigue, muscle tension, and irritability, and ‘autonomic overactivity’, including panic attacks.⁹⁶

If you think you suffer from it, you are not alone: in 2017, an estimated 284 million people globally suffered an anxiety disorder.⁹⁷

| Depression

Depression affects your mood, leading to feelings of guilt or low self-worth, diminished self-confidence, loss of interest or pleasure, pessimism, disturbed sleep and appetite, low energy, and poor concentration.

Again, the incidence around the world is comparatively high, with an estimated 264 million sufferers in 2017, although it should be noted that the lowest prevalence is among those with a tertiary (i.e. university) education, especially if they are in work.⁹⁸

It is a common, everyday challenge and, while unpleasant and potentially serious, there is a good chance that you will recover.

What’s more, with small changes to your daily habits and mindset, you have the potential to emerge stronger and more mentally resilient, ready to take on the next stages of your life.

In 2017, an estimated
284 million

people globally suffered
an anxiety disorder

| Sleep disorders

Getting enough sleep is critical to our wellbeing, specifically for improving learning, recollection and emotional stability, which makes insomnia a particularly cruel aspect of anxiety and depression as we worry about things obsessively or irrationally.⁹⁹

Too little sleep for too long also increases your risk of serious medical conditions including obesity, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure and depression.¹⁰⁰

There are several sleep disorders but by far the most common is insomnia, where you have persistent, long-lasting difficulty in getting to sleep and staying there. According to Sleepstation, it affects about one in three adults in the UK and has been declared an 'epidemic'.

The problem is a very considerable risk for architects and should be taken seriously. As far as possible, avoid workplaces which have a culture of working 'all-nighters' or that believe that working very long hours is an acceptable practice.

| Loneliness

Starting a new job can uproot us from the places we know and, especially, our friends, loved ones and family. Unsurprisingly, the experience can lead to loneliness, which is a significant contributor to anxiety and depression. It also increases the risks of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, and early death.

According to the Campaign to End Loneliness,¹⁰¹ almost half of adults in England feel lonely occasionally, sometimes or often.

| Other risks

Clearly, architects are at risk from other impacts but there is nothing in the data to suggest that they are any more at risk than any other groups.

The risks from drinking and/or recreational drug-taking should not be taken lightly. Abusing drugs and alcohol or developing a dependency are serious issues that usually require specialist help.

If you suspect that you might be addicted, that's a sure sign that you have a problem. Either discuss your habits with your GP or counselling service, or go to specialist charitable services.

Use the Drinkaware website¹⁰² for problems with alcohol and the Frank website¹⁰³ for problems with drugs.

9

Keep on going

9 Keep on going

Starting work as a newly qualified architect is far from straightforward. There is the constant tension between feeling as though you are expected to know everything and yet still being at the start of a career of lifelong learning. There are challenging pressures to work accurately and quickly to meet tight commercial deadlines. And as you progress, there is the catch-22 business of proving you can take on more responsibility before you are trusted well enough to actually be *given* more responsibility.

All of this while coping with the ordinary strains of starting a new job surrounded by new people, in strange surroundings working to unfamiliar rules and routines: it would be surprising if you were not unsettled or stressed.

Imposter syndrome is common as you find your feet, and there is a tendency to work long hours to compensate. The cumulative effects can upset your mental wellbeing, exposing you to the possible risk of anxiety, depression, sleep disorders and burn-out (**Chapter 8**).

Following the advice in this guide should help. As we said in **Chapter 3**, it helps to have a career plan that is in harmony with your personal strengths, needs, and wishes. Even if you do not have a clear end goal, you should at least have narrowed down the options by ruling out paths that definitely do not appeal.

This career plan is your lodestar. It will tell you when to keep pushing even when your energy is low, getting you over the hill to be rewarded by the glow of personal accomplishment. It is the road to professional fulfilment and self-actualisation (**Chapter 7**).

Of course, your career plan will change as you grow. The more experience and knowledge you gain (**Chapter 6**) and the more tests you face, the better you know yourself and so the better you can adjust your career plan.

As we saw in **Chapter 5**, the key to making the most of your experience at work is to have good coping strategies, particularly around time management, and to monitor the extent to which your interests remain aligned with your employer's.

Being aware of when interests misalign is a kind of early warning system for when things are difficult – as they inevitably will be from time to time. It gives you the opportunity to take pre-emptive steps to make healthy adjustments either by confronting and addressing problems early, or, if the situation is beyond repair, by considering an exit strategy.

Your commitment to professional standards and the code of conduct allow you to work within a well-defined and well understood ethical framework. Just as you expect to be treated fairly, so you should treat others fairly, and that includes your bosses. Honest appraisal and early preventive action is the key to continuing good relationships. Not only does this protect your mental wellbeing, it ensures that you don't burn any bridges, an important consideration in the small world of architectural practice – especially if you ever decide to set up your own practice.

As society faces insidious but extreme global challenges of, among others, environmental threats, population growth and urbanisation, it needs a new generation of architects to meet them head on. By marshalling your creativity, developing your problem-solving skills, and persevering through the tough times, you will play a vitally important part in the continued wellbeing and sustainability of the world and its people. We salute and honour your commitment, ambition and achievements. Keep going and stay well!

10

Further help
and resources

10 Further help and resources

The following list is not definitive but should point you in the right direction if you need further help.

| Continuous professional development

A vision for **CPD** for RIBA Chartered Members:
<https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/the-way-ahead>

| Mental Health Support

Able Futures delivers the Access to Work Mental Health Support Service on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. <https://able-futures.co.uk/individuals>

The **Architects Benevolent Society** offers confidential advice, help with physical and psychological difficulties, and financial assistance for architects:
<https://www.absnet.org.uk/>

Big White Wall online mental health support community offering anonymous peer support, monitored by professionally trained 'wall guides'. Free for 6 months in some NHS areas – check for availability:
<https://togetherall.com/en-gb/>

CALM is the Campaign Against Living Miserably, a charity providing a mental health helpline and webchat.
<http://www.thecalmzone.net/>

Feeling Good, a 'positive mental training' app approved by NHS digital and available for university students at UK HEIs that have subscribed to the service:
<http://www.foundationforpositivementalhealth.com/listen-now/download-our-app-feeling-good/>

The **Samaritans**: <http://www.samaritans.org/>

| Mental Wellbeing

The **Architects Mental Wellbeing Forum** (<https://www.amwf.co.uk>) was set up to improve Mental Wellbeing throughout architecture. They have produced a free toolkit for practices: https://4efa479e-a68f-4327-a38f-07f6761a62ea.filesusr.com/ugd/fb91f8_33c556b0fe9b4855824da571826586d6.pdf

Be Mindful, a mindfulness guide from the Mental Health Foundation: www.bemindful.co.uk

Calm, a meditation app: www.calm.com

Ben Channon, Happy by Design: A Guide to Architecture and Mental Wellbeing, RIBA Publishing, 2018

Headspace, a meditation app: www.headspace.com

NHS guide to mindfulness: www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mindfulness

Mental Health Foundation about the connection between diet and mental health:
www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/d/diet-and-mental-health

Mindful – a website full of useful tips on mindfulness:
www.mindful.org

TED Talk – *All it takes is 10 mindful minutes*, a talk by mindfulness expert Andy Puddicombe about the transformative power of doing nothing
https://www.ted.com/talks/andy_puddicombe_all_it_takes_is_10_mindful_minutes

TED Talk – *The brain changing benefits of exercise*, a talk by neuroscientist Wendy Suzuki about the power of exercise to boost your mood and memory and protect against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's:
https://www.ted.com/talks/wendy_suzuki_the_brain_changing_benefits_of_exercise

Think Positive, Scotland's student mental health project, hosted by NUS Scotland aiming to support students experiencing mental ill health and tackle stigma and discrimination: <https://www.thinkpositive.scot/>

| Relating to Practice

David Chappell & Michael Dunn, *The Architect in Practice*, Riley-Blackwell, 2016

Matthew Cousins, *Architects Legal Pocket Book*, Routledge, 2019

Rob Hyde & Alan Jones (editors), *Defining Contemporary Professionalism: For Architects in Practice and Education*, RIBA Publishing, 2019

Nigel Ostime, *RIBA Job Book*, RIBA Publishing, 2019

| RIBA

The **RIBA** has a **career resilience hub** where experienced architects share their advice on how to:

- Kickstart your career and find the right job
- Stay sharp and focused in your practice
- Master presentations and communication with clients and peers
- Learn new skills in different sectors
- Know when to move on to advance your career
- Develop leadership skills and get promoted

<https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/career-resilience>

The **RIBA** has many different types of membership: Chartered /Associate/Affiliate /Student /Chartered Practice: <https://www.architecture.com/join-riba>

| Setting Up in Practice

Architects Registration Board information about setting up your own business: <https://arb.org.uk/architect-information/setting-up-own-business-for-the-first-time/>

Companies Made Simple, a short guide to starting your own practice: <https://www.companiesmadesimple.com/blog/creative-industries/how-to-start-your-own-architecture-firm/>

Foxell, Simon, *Starting a Practice: A Plan of Work*, RIBA Publishing, 2015

| Supporting Diversity

Architecture for All, **Black Females in Architecture**, and **The Paradigm Network** are networks of related professionals who champion diversity in the Construction Industry:

- <https://architectureforall.org.uk>
- <https://www.blackfemarc.com/why-bfa>
- <https://www.paradigmnetwork.co.uk>

The **FLUID Diversity Mentoring Programme** is a built-environment leadership programme addressing barriers to diversity and inclusion: www.builtbyus.org.uk/fluid

Part W, a collective pushing for intersectional thinking and are developing a series of actions intended to support women and girls from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, across generations and with different experiences: <https://www.part-w.com/>

| Year Out /Part 3 Students

For students working in practice, a wide range of supporting resources can be found in our sister guide - **'Study Architecture Well'**: <https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/support-guides-for-students-and-early-career-architects>

Endnotes

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- 2 <https://arb.org.uk/architect-information/architects-code-standards-of-conduct-and-practice/>
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- 5 It is important to stress that salaries are not regulated, controlled or set by RIBA, ARB, or anyone else. There are no legal minimum thresholds. Rates of pay are governed by the market and what employees will accept. The RIBA Benchmarking survey and, indeed, the RIBA Salary Guide, simply reflect real data about actual rates of pay.
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- 7 <https://www.policybee.co.uk/blog/starting-architecture-practice>
- 8 <https://arb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Architects-Code-2017.pdf>. The RIBA has its own Code of Professional Conduct <https://www.architecture.com/-/media/GatherContent/Test-resources-page/Additional-Documents/RIBA-Code-of-Professional-Conduct--May-2019pdf.pdf>
- 9 <https://www.facebook.com/Dalston-Architecture-Collective-100444395021624/>
- 10 <https://www.prideroad.co.uk/about-us/>
- 11 <https://www.facit-homes.com/>
- 12 <https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/the-way-ahead>
- 13 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-building-safety-bill>
- 14 'Career anchors' devised by Edgar Schein and John Van Maanen: <https://www.careeranchorsonline.com/SCA/about.do?open=prod>
- 15 <https://jobs.architecture.com/article/different-types-of-practices/>
- 16 <https://www.architecture.com/-/media/GatherContent/Test-resources-page/Additional-Documents/RIBA-Code-of-Practice--May-2019pdf.pdf>
- 17 <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>
- 18 <https://www.architecture.com/education-cpd-and-careers/the-compact>
- 19 <https://jobs.architecture.com/>
- 20 <https://arb.org.uk/eu-exit/eu-exit-faqs/>
- 21 <https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/knowledge-landing-page/what-leads-to-the-big-steps-in-an-architects-career>
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- 23 The RIBA Client Liaison Group's 2016 *Client & Architect: developing the essential relationship* report is a useful primer to understanding practice from clients' points of view: <https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/resources-landing-page/client-and-architect-developing-the-essential-relationship>
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ISBN 978-1-914124-43-3



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