

REPORT - RIBA Student Destinations Survey 2012

Introduction

The RIBA Student Destinations Survey is a partnership project between the RIBA and the University of Sheffield. It is a longitudinal study to be delivered over a ten-year period. It is currently in its second year.

The project has been designed to provide an accurate picture of the employment situation for RIBA Part I graduates. At present very little is known about where RIBA Part 1 graduates eventually end up working, such as:

- What proportion of graduates stay in the profession?
- The effect of student fees on who enters architectural education?
- If graduates leave the profession, why do they leave and how useful was their education in securing work in another field?
- How prepared are graduates are to move to other parts of the world to find employment?

We need this information in order to make architectural education more needs led in the future, to improve the employability of RIBA Part 1 graduates and to gain a better understanding of what happens when graduates leave school to join the profession. Therefore, this information is crucial to the development of the profession.

Methodology

For the pilot phase in 2011, seven schools of architecture with different profiles from across the UK were invited to participate. The University of Sheffield, in collaboration with RIBA and the participating schools, created a pilot questionnaire to send out to recent Part 1 graduates. This survey was emailed as an online version via 'survey monkey' directly to graduates from their own university. In 2012 the same questionnaire was utilised with the identical schools sending out the questionnaire to recent Part 1 graduates and also those who had been sent the survey in 2011 (many email addresses had changed on their databases which resulted in expected attrition). The process received ethical approval through the University of Sheffield ethical review process.

The seven participating schools of universities were:

- Birmingham City University
- Cardiff University
- Kingston University
- Northumbria University
- Queen's University
- Robert Gordon University
- University of Sheffield

The collection process enables an analysis of the responses of those who completed the survey in 2011 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates from 2010) and 2012 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010 or 2011).

In 2011 the survey was open for one month and **138** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 responded. The following year, 2012, also saw the survey open for a month and **55** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 responded and **37** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010 (**23** of which had previously completed the survey). These represent relatively small numbers; especially for the 2012 survey, a factor that must be taken into account in the reporting of results.

Key:

2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12): This is the combined responses of those who had completed their Part 1 in the most recent academic year when undertaking the survey. So in the 2011 survey they completed their Part 1 in 2010 and in the 2012 survey they completed it in 2011. The findings from the 2012 survey of those individuals who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010 are excluded.

2010 Graduates (S2012): These are just the responses of those who completed their Part 1 in 2010 and were answering the 2012 survey.

2011 Graduates (S2012): These are just the responses of those who completed their Part 1 in 2011 and were answering the 2012 survey.

2010 Graduates (S2011): These are just the responses of those who completed their Part 1 in 2010 and were answering the 2011 survey.

Graduates (2012) or (S2012): This is all of the 2012 survey responses, combining those who completed their Part 1 in 2010 and 2011.

Findings

1. Attitudes to architectural studies

On a very positive note, only 3% of 2010 Graduates (S2011) and 4% of 2011 Graduates (S2012) disagreed when asked whether they were glad they chose to study architecture at University. Of the 2010 Graduates (S2012) only 5% disagreed when asked whether they were glad they chose to study architecture at university. This indicates that there was very little difference year on year between those who had recently completed the course and also between those who had recently completed their RIBA Part 1 and those who had completed it a year previously. Generally the respondents felt that they had developed a wide range of transferable skills in the course of their training, though many would have liked to have learnt more about certain skills to enhance their employability. All of the Graduates highlighted areas which required more emphasis in architectural training. The 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) top five responses were:

- Management (31%)
- Consultation skills (46%)
- Construction knowledge (58%)
- Project management (43%)
- IT (40%)

There was very little difference in the responses between 2011 Graduates (S2012) and 2010 Graduates (S2011) responses. There was also little difference between the 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) and 2010 Graduates (S2012) responses with the same five areas receiving the highest scores. The only considerable difference was in relation to IT skills which 54% of 2010 Graduates (S2012) stated was an area which required further emphasis at University.

2. Employment situations

76% of the 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 17% were undertaking further studies or training. There were slightly higher rates of employment and lower rates of studies and training among 2011 Graduates (S2012) than 2010 Graduates (S2011). Furthermore, unemployment was at 15% among 2011 Graduates (S2012) compared with 9% of 2010 Graduates (S2011). Among 2010 Graduates (S2012) unemployment levels were at 16% while further studies or training was common (30%). While not all of the respondents who were unemployed were looking for further employment it is important to monitor levels of employment in future surveys. Of the all Graduates in employment in 2011 and 2012 small numbers of work hours were uncommon with more than three quarters of respondents working 35 hours or more a week and approximately 40% working 42 hrs a week or more.

i) Employed in architecture

Of those 2010 Graduates (S2011) in employment 78% were working within architecture compared with 75% of 2011 Graduates (S2012).

Approximately a fifth of 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) had two jobs (with similar percentages in each survey). Of the 2010 Graduates (S2012) only a tenth had two jobs. More than half of all of the survey respondents in 2011 and 2012 stated that the additional employment was in order to, 'earn a living / pay back loans'. This was the most common response. Given that the second job was, invariably, not from within the sphere of architecture it is perhaps not surprising that little emphasis was placed on the experience it provided or it fitting in with career plans.

Of those 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) who were employed in architecture only 3% envisaged not working in architecture for all or most of their career and only one 2010 Graduate (S2012) did not envisage working in architecture for all or most of their career. There was however some concern about the difficulty in remaining in architecture. One 2010 Graduate (S2011) elaborated that they 'love the job but with poor prospects from a working class background I expect to fight tooth and nail for a good job.' Furthermore, fewer than 10% of all 2010 Graduates (S2011) and Graduates (2012) agreed that there are lots of paid employment opportunities available in architecture.

There was also almost a sense that it would be wasteful not to pursue a career in architecture given the time invested in it and skills developed. 'I study architecture because I love it, I work in architecture because I love it, I'll have invested half a decade in studying architecture so I better be damn good at it!' claimed a 2011 Graduate (S2012).

ii) Employed outside of architecture

The great majority of the respondents that were 'not working in architecture or studying but were in other forms of employment' (just over 20% of the 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12)) were keen to find employment in architecture with only 18% stating that they were no longer interested in architecture as a career, while 70% reported difficulties in finding employment in architecture. These responses echoed those of 2010 Graduates (S2012). These respondents were working in a variety of professions, many in the retail industry. One had moved into banking, another was a bingo caller, and a further person was a heating engineer. Interestingly one 2010 Graduate (S2012) highlighted the difficulty in getting an architecture job and concerns about their skills:

'It's been nearly two years and I have not got anywhere with [my architecture career]. I want to carry on and go back for my part 2, but it is so hard to get a job. My skills, such as Auto Cad are not to the standard there where when I graduated and I have had no support or direction from my university in finding a placement. I tried for over a year solid in finding a job anywhere in this country and got little or nothing at all back from practices other than to say they are not recruiting. I think I have been forgotten about and feel I have possibly wasted time and money!'

However, given the number of respondents now employed in architecture this kind of response is rare.

Interestingly nearly 40% of 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) said that they were prevented from working in architecture as a result of a 'lack of confidence', also a prominent response among 2010 Graduates (S2012) not employed in architecture. Of the 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) employed outside architecture 73% wanted to be employed in architecture while all of those 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) who were unemployed (17) definitely wanted to work in architecture with only 1 unsure. These trends were also apparent among 2010 Graduates (S2012). One 2010 Graduate (S2011) found work in an alternative profession stating that as architecture has 'low pay and stressful conditions the profession seems vulgar and impotent'. However, this type of response was in the minority.

3. Alternative paths

The survey shows that nearly 20% of respondents in the 2011 and 2012 surveys had found work outside of the UK. They were quite conservative in their career path, sticking to the standard architectural route. Very few of those undertaking further study were doing this outside of architecture and only a small number had entered into other creative professions. As the students have only recently graduated this is not surprising.

4. Support and finances

The survey showed that parental support is important in architectural education. Among 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) 40% of those undertaking further study were mainly funded through family support in the form of a trust fund, inheritance or allowance. Furthermore, approximately 30% of all of those employed in both the 2011 and 2012 surveys found out about their jobs via personal contacts.

About half of the 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) had had to work during their degree to manage financially while 77% of respondents said that the issue of student debt had not

influenced their career path. However as one respondent wrote: 'It will influence it if goes to £9K'. While continuing students are protected from the tuition fee rise it was acknowledged that student debt may affect their career path in the future, indicating the challenges the profession may face.

Family background seems to have been an important influence on whether students enter into architectural education. 78% of 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) father's and 72% of their mother's last employment was in 'Intermediate managerial, administrative, professional e.g. bank manager, teacher' or 'Higher managerial, administrative, professional e.g. chief executive, senior civil servant, surgeon'. The percentages are highest for 2010 Graduates (S2012). The vast majority of students come from relatively affluent backgrounds.

5. Diversity

With regard to gender the survey is already showing up some interesting findings. The experience of the men and women was reasonably similar in many respects (men represented 51% and women 49% of the 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12). Men represented 54% and women 46% of the 2010 Graduates (S2011). From the 2010/2011 Graduates (S2011/12) answers it was evident that men were also more likely to be employed on a permanent or open-ended contract on a full-time basis than women (35% compared to 27%). These differences were similar to the 2010 Graduates (S2012). Furthermore, women who did not work in architecture were more likely to state that they were prevented from working in architecture as a result of a 'lack of confidence' compared to men regardless of when they graduated. Men were more likely to report a lack of employment opportunities as a more significant barrier to architectural employment. Therefore, gender already seems to be impacting on female respondents even at this early stage in their career. Differences in ethnicity did not at this stage appear to be having any significant impact on the responses so far.

Key findings

Although this is only the second year of a ten-year study the statistics already suggest the following:

- Study – A large majority of the respondents continue to be pleased that they had studied architecture. They felt that schools should place more emphasis on helping students develop skills in IT and management in particular.
- Profession – The respondents generally enjoyed their education. They want to remain or enter into architectural practice despite it often being perceived as involving long hours and low pay.
- Levels of employment – There is a small increase in the number of unemployment individuals in the 2012 survey which needs to be carefully monitored.
- Access to architecture – A significant number of the respondents had been supported by family money and had got jobs via connections indicating that they come from privileged backgrounds. This trend was more prominent among 2012 survey respondents. We anticipate that this trend will become more marked with the introduction of student fees.

- Equality - Already there is some evidence that women are disadvantaged by their gender in the architecture employment marketplace.

Conclusion

These findings will not come as a surprise to anyone working in the sphere of architecture. The importance of this survey lies in creating a statistical foundation for the years that follow. What will be really interesting will be to see how the perceptions and experiences of these architecture graduates change over the coming decade, one that may radically change the profile of the profession.

Professor Flora Samuel

Dr Liam Foster

August 2012