

REPORT - RIBA Student Destinations Survey 2015

Introduction

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

The project has been designed to provide a picture of the employment situation for RIBA Part 1 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, 2013, 2014 and 2015 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 the previous year(s) (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), 2012 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010 or 2011), 2013 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011 or 2012), 2014 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012 or 2013) and 2015 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 or 2014).

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. In 2013, once again over a period of a month, **46** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2012) responded, **32** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **23** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010. In 2014 **72** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2013) responded, **44** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2012, **36** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **41** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010. In 2015, once again over a period of a month, **57** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2014) responded, **59** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2013, **35** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2012, **43** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **37** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010.

These represent relatively small numbers; especially for the 2012 survey, a factor that must be taken into account in the reporting of results. However, it is also worth noting that the 2015 survey response number was the highest yet and bodes well for future years of the study.

Findings

1. Attitudes to architectural studies

On a very positive note when focussing on those who had very recently completed their RIBA Part 1 (in the previous year), only 3% of 2010 graduates in the 2011 survey, 4% of 2011 graduates in the 2012 survey, 2% of 2012 graduates in the 2013 survey, 8% of 2013 graduates in the 2014 survey and 0% of 2014 graduates in the 2015 survey disagreed when asked whether they were glad they chose to study architecture at University. Of those 2010 graduates in the 2012 survey only 5% disagreed when asked whether they were glad they chose to study architecture at university while 4% of 2011 graduates in the 2013 survey disagreed with this statement. The 2010 Graduates in the 2013, 2014 and 2015 surveys were slightly more inclined (13%, 11% and 11% respectively) to disagree with the statement, although this was based on a small sample and the respondents may have been the same individuals. This may indicate that the further graduates get from the completion of the course the less satisfied with their choice of course they were. It will be interesting to see how these trends develop in future years. 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. In the four years of the survey the graduates highlighted areas which required more emphasis in architectural training. When all respondents in the 2015 survey were included the top five responses were:

- IT (35%)
- Management (44%)
- Consultation skills (48%)
- Construction knowledge (57%)
- Project management (61%)

These five areas were also the most commonly identified areas in the previous four surveys emphasising the need for universities to ensure students are provided with the opportunity to develop these skills.

2. Employment situations

79% of all graduates completing the survey in 2015 were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 16% were undertaking further studies or training. 78% of all graduates completing the survey in 2014 were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 20% were undertaking further studies or training. 62% of all graduates completing the survey in 2013 were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 20% were undertaking further studies or training. This compares with 73% of graduates in some form of paid employment and 22% undertaking further university studies in 2011 and 71% of the graduates in some form of paid employment and 17% undertaking further university studies in 2012. Among 2010 graduates completing the survey in 2015 unemployment levels were at 3% and among 2011 graduates completing the survey in 2015 it was at 10%, 18% for 2012 graduates, 14% for 2013 graduates and 15% for 2014 graduates, indicating little difference in levels of unemployment between the different years of completion among those undertaking the most recent survey. 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 2015 small numbers of work hours were uncommon with more than four fifths of respondents working 35 hours or more a week and approximately a third working 42 hrs a week or more. These trends are similar to the previous three years.

i) Employed in architecture

In the 2015 survey of those 2014 Graduates in employment 84% were working within architecture. This compares with 79% of those 2013 Graduates in employment working within architecture in the 2014 survey. This is similar to the 78% of 2012 Graduates in the 2013 survey, 75% of 2011 Graduates in the 2012 survey and 78% of 2010 Graduates in the 2011 survey. This indicates a fairly static picture. Approximately a sixth of all graduates responding to the survey in 2015 had more than one form of employment (with similar percentages in the previous three surveys). Over half of all of the survey respondents in the 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 surveys stated that the additional employment was in order to, 'earn a living / pay back loans'. This was the most common response when asked why they undertook additional forms of employment. 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. When focussing on all 2015 survey respondents under 10% envisaged not working in architecture for all or most of their career although there were a number who were unsure of their future career plans. There was however some concern about the difficulty in remaining in architecture and employment opportunities. For instance, only than 5% of all graduates in the 2015 survey strongly agreed that there are lots of paid employment opportunities available in architecture. One respondent in the 2015 survey claimed that 'It's generally hard (to get a job in architecture) without having contacts from what I understand. As I do not have any contact other than the one I had I find it hard to find another job in my field'. A further 2015 respondent stated 'I have found that the industry and career in general is not as rewarding as

I had hoped. With too few jobs - most dishearteningly underpaid given the intensive training needed - and little chance of promotion or responsibility due to the high level of over-retirement age architects, there is little satisfaction to be gained from architecture as a career'. Another 2015 respondent stated that 'there are enough architects in the world, what we need are game changers, people ready to be the next Richard Branson, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs - leaders who aren't afraid to innovate and take risks in life, not follow the path necessarily set before them regardless of their educational upbringing or social background'.

At the same time 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 in the 2012 survey. A 2015 graduate said 'I wouldn't want to do anything else - this is the profession I wanted to be in since I was a child, and I wouldn't have it any other way'. A 2013 Graduate stated 'both my placement and my university have instilled a passion for architecture. It is all I want to do, no matter what hurdle comes my way I will be an architect'. Other participants also mentioned the length of time taken to complete the training as a real commitment.

ii) Employed outside of architecture

In the 2015 survey the great majority of the respondents that were 'not working in architecture or studying but were in other forms of employment' wanted to be involved in architecture with only 13% stating that they were no longer interested in architecture as a career. There was some evidence of people struggling to find employment. These figures echoed those responses in the previous four surveys. A number of participants identified their role as being in design, planning or construction rather than specifically architecture. When participants did not want a career in architecture stress was mentioned more than once. For instance, a 2015 respondent stated 'I found third year so utterly demoralising and stressful, that I just wanted to escape from the architecture world. I don't know what I'd like to do instead (all of our university career guidance was heavily aimed at us becoming architects) and I have very little confidence or belief in my own abilities following my architecture degree'. A 2013 survey respondent stated that they 'didn't want to be an architect, (it is) too stressful, too poorly paid for what is expected, takes too long to qualify and (there is) too much arrogance in the profession' and another commented that they 'wanted to get far away from the stress of architecture'. The role of universities was once again highlighted as problematic by a 2015 respondent 'quite frankly, architecture school completely put me off the profession for life. It felt like a bullying culture - where grown men (mostly) felt it was ok to rip apart work and reduce students to tears on a weekly basis. When questioned on why this was thought to be the best practice; "this is the process I went through with my tutors at school". The idea of progression and constructive criticism wasn't practiced - often it was just criticism. I did not want to be in a culture where I felt set up to fail for the rest of my life'. It is important to monitor such responses and ensure that they do not become more prevalent.

3. Alternative paths

The survey shows that when considering all respondents in the 2015 survey 20% were working outside of the UK. This represents a similar figure to the previous four years surveys. They were generally quite conservative in their career path, sticking to the standard architectural route. Over the course of the four surveys 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 perhaps not surprising.

4. Support and finances

The survey showed that parental support is important in architectural education. Among 2015 survey 38% of those undertaking further study were mainly funded through family support in the form of a trust fund, inheritance or allowance. Furthermore, approximately 27% of all of those employed in the 2015 survey found out about their jobs via personal contacts (although this is less than the previous surveys figure of 39%). It is more similar to the previous two surveys. Just over half of all the graduates in the 2015 survey had had to work during their degree to manage financially (which is very similar to the previous year). However, approximately 80% of respondents said that the issue of student debt had not influenced their career path. This is likely to become more of an issue in the future. A 2015 survey respondent who had recently completed their course stated 'I was considering doing a masters course however, due to the debt I am already in this seems more unlikely. I will reassess my financial situation again after a few years of employment'.

A respondent who graduated in 2014 in the 2015 survey stated 'if I had to pay for course tuition fees I would not have gone to uni'. A further 2015 respondent who also graduated in 2014 stated 'I don't know how I would fund my part 2 study with potential £22k plus debt. Architecture now seems to only for the rich ones'. 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. A 2014 survey respondent stated 'I am considering leaving the profession for a higher wage due to the student debt I am faced with'. A further 2014 respondent stated that 'the RIBA education path is far too long. The combination of many years of university fees and low pay in architecture is a bit of a killer'. Another 2014 survey respondent discussed having to pursue their education abroad as a result of costs. 'I decided to do Part 2 in Denmark where there are no fees and the system is competitively selective for talent over finance. I am concerned how in the UK the education system is overly skewed towards parental income'.

Family background seems to have been an important influence on whether students enter into architectural education. In the 2015 survey where responses were provided 74% of graduate's father's and 66% 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'. Therefore it is evident that the majority of architecture 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 just 50% of the 2015 graduates surveyed). In the 2015 survey it was evident that men were more likely to be employed on a permanent or open ended contract on a full-time basis than women. Furthermore, when the five years of surveys are combined 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. Therefore, gender may already be impacting on female respondents even at this early stage in their career.

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.

Dr Liam Foster
Professor Flora Samuel
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