Accessing Architecture
Starting Out
For students, careers advisers and guardians

Architects for Change
Accessing Architecture — Architects for Change

Foreword

Architects for Change (AfC), the RIBA’s Equality and Diversity Committee supports, encourages wider access and progression in this professional sector to reflect the society it serves. Key to our programme is equality of access to education and career opportunities as a driver to a social transformation in attitudes towards inclusivity and accessible design in the built environment.

We believe that contributions from designers from a wide range of experiences and backgrounds can enrich and improve the places we live, learn and work in; helping to ensure that buildings and spaces are socially sustainable and inclusive.

I am, therefore, delighted that these 3 guidance documents, which aim to encourage and support potential future practitioners, their influencers and employers, are now available to all.

Danna Walker,
Chair Architects for Change

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The RIBA
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Contributors to the interviews
The Architects for Change Panel

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Introduction

Architecture is the design and development of buildings and environments for society; it affects the entire population and should be inclusive and accessible to all. As a profession, addressing inclusiveness and disability is integral to our work, our professional environment, our contemporary society, and the clients and communities we design for.

The UK’s Equality Act 2010, defines disability as a physical or mental impairment that has a ‘substantial’ and ‘long-term’ negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.

In the UK there are over eleven million people with a limiting long-term illness, impairment or disability covered by the Equality Act.¹ In 2009/10, 33% of disabled young people were in higher education at age 19 compared to 41% of non-disabled young people.² Though representation of disabled students in architecture does appear to be higher than for the overall student population, the number of architects with impairments currently practising seems to be quite low.³

The RIBA wish to foster and encourage a diverse and inclusive profession and increase representation to promote the development of an inclusive and accessible built environment and of a wider participation in planning, design, construction and maintenance of the built environment to reflect the communities we design for.

This guide by the RIBA Equality & Diversity Forum ‘Architects for Change’ (AfC), builds upon the main recommendations of the Disabled Architects, Unlocking the Potential for Practice Report commissioned by the RIBA to the University of West England

http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/et/research/sustainablepe/projects/disabledarchitects.aspx

It has been devised to support you in your journey into and through the study and practice of Architecture.⁴

By providing simple best practice
guidance with regard to pursuing a career in architecture with disabilities, there is the opportunity to support: parents, students, academic institutes, practitioners and practices.

1.0 Introduction

“To other parents faced with fulfilling a similar role, we would say, you have to trust your instincts and strength of mind to survive what can be a journey into the unknown where the outcome cannot be predicted, because there are not certainties”

(Parents of architect with disability)

“I came into architecture because I was passionate about it”

(Michael Ongini, part 2 architect)

The practice of architecture is concerned with the planning, design and construction of buildings. Roles within an office may involve preparing computer models or animations, developing details, making models, carrying out research, specialising in contractual issues and making presentations to clients. There are also many opportunities in consultancy or for employment overseas, as all the large construction and engineering companies operate throughout the world, with British qualifications widely accepted and respected in many countries.
Architects can also work as lecturers in universities or move into specialist fields, including: project management, planning, landscape architecture conservation and much more.

Architectural training in the United Kingdom involves a combination of five years of academic studies at a university and a minimum of two years of practical experience before final qualification.

As a person with disability thinking of studying Architecture, you should know that having a higher education qualification provides the potential opportunity of much improved job prospects. In fact, research from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisery Services (AGCAS) shows that, at graduate level, disabled people achieve very similar levels of job success to non-disabled people.

The legal definition of disability is very broad and can include specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, medical conditions and mental health conditions, such as depression. Though the range and severity of disabilities differs widely, all impairments affect learning and work in a range of ways. You don't need to accept the word 'disability' as a label, but understanding disability can ensure you receive the support you need.

1.1 The Course

The typical route to qualifying as an architect includes:

**RIBA Part 1**: this undergraduate three years degree programme of full-time academic study is designed to provide the student with the opportunity to develop a broad range of skills and architectural understanding.

**RIBA Part 1 professional experience/year out**: lasting typically one year in duration, this period of experience is followed under the guidance of an architectural practice. It is formally recorded by the student and monitored and endorsed by the Professional Studies Adviser appointed by the university.
**RIBA Part 2:** this two years degree programme of full time academic study is designed to enhance students’ architectural knowledge and understanding of project complexity.

**RIBA Part 2 professional experience:** a minimum period of 12 months experience in practice, under the direct supervision of an architect, is required before the graduate can sit the Part 3 qualifying examinations.

**RIBA Part 3:** this is the final qualification and it requires the candidate to prepare for the formal examination whilst he or she is undertaking Part 2 practical experience.

Having successfully completed the parts 1, 2 and 3 qualifications you can register as an architect with the Architects Registration Board (ARB). The title ‘architect’ is protected by law to ensure that the public know they are dealing with a properly qualified architect.

To find out more about the routes to qualify as an architect you can visit The RIBA’s website:
http://www.architecture.com/ EducationAndCareers/BecomingAnArchitect/Becominganarchitect.aspx#.UjdKo-CaJLQ

“I have chosen architecture because I was interested in a creative course that could offer a financially reliable career”
(Imogen Webb, part 2 architect)
“Being an architect is not what it used to be. Today the profession offers a truly broad range of potential careers”
(Jane Tankard, Senior Lecturer and Tutor, University of Westminster)

“We can prepare students to see themselves as being graduates who can excel in a range of fields. That’s hard because for architecture there is a sort of ideal career path”
(Julian Williams Course Leader BA Architecture. University of Westminster, London)

1.2 Finding out about Architecture

“As my career advisers were unable to provide clear information, if any, I researched Architecture online.”
(Michael Ongini, Architect)

Being fully informed about your university and course will allow you to concentrate properly on studying and enjoying academic life.

There are currently 52 University offering architectural courses in the United Kingdom; you can find the list via The Complete University Guide’s web site:
http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings?s=Architecture

“Numbers of disabled students have been steadily increasing due to the awareness of the opportunities that are now available for them. This is mostly the result of word of mouth as there is little information available.”
(Monica Grinfeld, Faculty Disability Tutor, University of Westminster)

Each school’s prospectus and website provide most of the information about the course content, structure and support provided and can help you decide if Architecture will suit you. It is also important to visit schools on open days or at the end-of-year degree shows to get a sense of your potential new study environment and to view first hand students’ work.

A careers adviser can provide you with
independent and impartial careers advice, usually through online, email or phone support. However, as a young person with a learning difficulty and/or disability you are also entitled to face-to-face careers guidance as required by the Statutory Guidance for Schools.

You can find further information here on the Disability Rights UK’s website: http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/applying-higher-education-201314-information-disabled-students

1.3 Key aspects to consider as a disabled pupil thinking of studying architecture

The study of Architecture involves a combination of academic and practical work. While architectural design is a key area of the course, other activities include:

- Reading study material
- Producing written work
- Using multimedia (film, photography, computer animation)
- Making models, drawing (by hand or computer aided)
- Making notes
- Using a computer
- Taking part in tutorials
- Site visits (existing buildings and construction sites) and fields trips (UK and beyond)

You may find some of these activities quite demanding. However, to enable you to make the most of your studies, universities offer:

- Information about the types of study materials used and the provision of alternative formats, which may suit your needs
- Support, expert advice and a range of support services including assistive technology
- Alternative exam or assessment arrangements

The Equality Act 2010 calls the arrangements that your education provider makes to meet these needs ‘reasonable adjustments.’ When making reasonable adjustments, universities have an ‘anticipatory’ duty, i.e. they have to anticipate the needs of
all disabled people.

For more information about this, see the Disability Rights UK and the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s web site at the following links:
http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/adjustments-disabled-students#genadjust

1.4 Applying to study Architecture

“I was studying engineering at my local college and my teacher suggested I studied architecture because I was very good at drawing”
(Stephen Ware, part 2 architect)

Many subjects studied at school and college are relevant to Architecture, this allows you the flexibility to choose your favourite subjects. To apply to Architecture, you should, ideally, have gained a broad secondary education with a mixture of arts and sciences subjects including at least two subjects at A-level or one A and two AS levels. In addition, you must generally have passed at least five GCSEs which normally include English Language and Mathematics. Many schools of architecture also recognise other further education qualifications. You should check with each school their specific entry requirements. Though the study of art is not a requisite, you should:
- Enjoy drawing,
- Have an interest in design
- Making 3D work
As most schools of architecture will require you to present a portfolio at interview.

“Schools need to be completely re-educated about entry requirements to architecture”
(Jane Tankard, Senior Lecturer and Tutor, University of Westminster)

Making a UCAS application

Most applications for full-time undergraduate courses go through the
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). UCAS applications are made online using UCAS Apply, a user friendly system that can be accessed through a ‘buzzword’ wherever there is an internet connection.

You can apply to UCAS:
- Through your current school or college where a member of staff will then add a reference, check your application and send it to UCAS on your behalf.
- As an individual, getting your own reference and cutting and pasting this into your application.
- Asking someone to help type your answers if you can’t fill in the UCAS application yourself.

“The architectural curriculum is largely course-work based and students get very engrossed in their work, but it is very satisfying”
(Julian Williams, Course Leader, BA Architecture, University of Westminster)

You can practice as much as you like, and make changes at any stage before you send your completed application which will then be automatically saved online and checked for progress through UCAS Track. Once you have sent you application, you’ll be
in control of communicating with your chosen universities. If you want a family member or support worker to give or receive information on your behalf, you can give them your personal 10-digit ID number.

The UCAS application is an early opportunity to tell the university or college about your impairment. You can do this by choosing a disability ‘category’ in the personal details section describing any additional study support needs.

Some of the advantages of being open about your impairment are discussed in the Disability Rights UK booklet Telling people about your disability (http://disabilityrightsuk.org/telling-people-about-your-disability)

Preparing for Interviews

Following application to a school of architecture you may be invited to interview, however, some schools make conditional offers on the basis of the information you include on your UCAS application form. This is most likely to be the case when your A level subjects are seen to be particularly relevant.

If you are invited for an interview, you should:

- Read through a copy of your application form – interviewers may ask you questions about the information you provided, including why do you want to study architecture
- Read the prospectus so you can explain why you have chosen architecture and that specific university
- Ensure the interview venue and process is fully accessible to you and your needs.

To reach the location of the interview or fully access the interview, you may want to arrange for support from your parents or other people such as a personal assistant or an interpreter. Your impairment is not going to be addressed during this interview as your application should be judged solely on your academic
ability and experience. Ideally, you will have already discussed this with the disability officer. As with all interviews do ensure that you are on time, presentable and polite and above all be positive.

Preparing your Portfolio

If invited to interview at university you will be expected to present a portfolio that can show a broad mixture of your work, including:

- Sketches and freehand drawings
- Photographs
- Technical drawings
- Life drawings
- Paintings
- Collage
- Models

Remember, schools are looking for evidence that you have the potential skills to benefit from an architectural education. The following sites provide useful guidance:

The National Union of Students
http://www.nus.org.uk/en/who-we-are/how-we-work/disabled-students/

Disability Rights UK
http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/how-we-can-help/helplines/disabled-students-helpline

Endnotes
1  Family Resources Survey 2010/11: In Great Britain, the most commonly-reported impairments are those that affect mobility, lifting or carrying. The prevalence of disability rises with age. Around 6% of children are disabled, compared to 16% of working age adults* and 45% of adults over State Pension* age in Great Britain.

2  Office for Disability Issues. Between 2005/06 and 2010/11, the percentage of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 achieving 5 or more GCSEs at grades A*-C has

- increased from 66.3% to 88.9% for students without Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- increased from 19.8% to 59.2% for students with SEN without a statement increased from 8.7% to 24.9% for students with SEN with a statement (National Pupil Database 2005/06-2010/11)
‘Supporting diversity in the architectural profession; developing a climate of success for disabled designers’ RIBA, UWE.

Overall there are for the academic year 2011-2012, 3,455 students studying Architecture, and 55,345 students studying Architecture, Building and Planning. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). HESA Data provided for 2008-2009 showed that 8.5% of students studying Architecture were disabled people compared to 7.2% of all students in higher education (HESA (a) and (b) 2008-9, Higher Education Information Database for Institutions (heidi) 2008-9). Analysis of HESA data on: http://www.heidi.ac.uk/index.php/