

2015 RIBA Student Finances Survey

The pilot Student Finances Survey was conducted by the RIBA Education Department in March 2011, and has been run every two years since then. The intentions of the studies are to track any changes in the financial situation of students as well as their opinions and attitudes to financial hardship.

The feedback from the survey is again intended to inform the work of the RIBA Education Trust Funds Committee, who administers grants and scholarships to support students of architecture, particularly those suffering from financial hardship.

The main findings of the survey can be found herewith.

Income and Expenditure

- 16% of respondents have a monthly income of £500 or less compared to 37% respondents in 2013 and 57% in 2011.
- While income may be increasing, so is expenditure. Only 8% state that they spend £500 or less (compared to 14% in 2013 and 26% in 2011); 27% spend between £501 and £800 a month.
- 61% spend more than £800 a month when 35% have already indicated that they only have an income of up to £800 a month.
- 39% of students do not receive financial support from their family, and 23% receive the equivalent of less than £80 a month.
- 45% of respondents to our survey reported working in paid employment for 15 hours a week or more during term time (up from 29% in 2013 and 39% in 2011). 51% of students who worked at the same time as studying said it adversely affected the quality of their academic work.
- The cost of **study trips** is still felt by students to be a key area of financial pressure, with 46% of respondents spending between £300 and £700 on study trips in the academic year. 36% of respondents stated that the study trips they undertook were compulsory (20% stated that some were and some were not), but only 7% were able to pay for the trips through a university grant.
- As in previous surveys, spending on **course-related materials** came up as an issue for the students. Respondents identified field trips, equipment and printing to be the most expensive elements of the course. 63% of students spent over £700 on course-related materials (including equipment) in an academic year, and 35% spent over £1500.

'The variation of costs between different course types and the difference in expectation placed upon the student to finance elements of the course-for example, the majority of architecture courses require a certain element of large-scale printing, even before final presentation stage which can be a waste of money and resources as opposed to courses with more self-study whereby coursework can be submitted electronically.' **Part 3, North West**

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Attitude to financial hardship

53% of the respondents to our survey described themselves as experiencing 'basic financial hardship' (69% in 2013; 67% in 2011). This is described in the following broad terms:

22% described it as having to budget carefully

- There is a general consensus that applicants are not made aware of realistic costs prior to starting the course.
- As in previous years, the amount available through student loans remains an issue – students still raise the point that a maintenance loan only just covers the costs of rent, leaving very little for bills, food, travel, and course-related costs.

'The student loan simply isn't big enough for funding without parents. My accommodation costs along (one of the cheapest accommodations I could find) start at £600 a year more than my maintenance grant. This means my parents have to cover for accommodation, food and everything else I choose to do at university.'
Part 1, Year 3, South West

21% describe it as being unable to afford extracurricular activities and 22% described it as being unable to afford entertainment

- When asked if there were any aspects of student financial hardship which this survey did not cover, one respondent stated '*Social pressures and exclusion if unable to afford activities.*' (Part 1, Year 1, London)
- Some students also point to the lack of time as well as money available for entertainment or extracurricular activities due to course commitments.

20% described it as having debt

- If a student received the maximum tuition fee available and a maintenance loan for 5 years full-time study, students starting in 2015 will graduate with between £67,825 and £85,045 of debt.¹ This excludes overdraft and other debt repayments. The majority of respondents in this survey are unlikely to reach these levels as only 12% were in their Part 1 – full-time continuing students who started their Part 1 course before September 2012 are generally treated as continuing students.
- 45% of respondents said that they are graduating from Part 1 with more than £15,000 debt.

'You asked me if I had the financial skills to make decisions at university. In hindsight I wish I had had better skills before going to university as I would have avoided it completely, therefore saving myself from escalating debt and poor job security and salary. I feel I was very young and naive to have been allowed to commit to such an expensive course at 18 years old when the same people supporting such a decision, e.g. teachers and family would have in the same breath persuaded me to not get a credit card (which I now realise was the same sort of financial product as my education).' **Part 3, London**

¹ Based on the maximum 2015/16 figures for tuition fees over 5 years (£9,000) and the maintenance loan of between £4,565 and £8,009.

9% described it as being unable to afford essential course-related costs

- The issue of course costs were raised several times by respondents. It was felt that there was huge pressure to spend money on course materials/trips, and many students felt that additional funding should be available either through Universities or through Student Finance.

5% described it as struggling with everyday expenses and 3% as being unable to afford to eat everyday

- Some students highlighted the impact that struggling financially had in terms of their psychological welfare.

'After three years of Part 1 undergraduate I saw myself, deteriorate in my health, not eating from time to time as there no time to eat, or I cannot afford a healthy meal therefore living off biscuits or coffee, or possible free food that is sometimes supplied at presentations in university. Seeing myself become depressed unknowing what I'm doing and slowly hating myself and lacking in confidence.' **Post Part 1, East**

Widening participation

In order to widen participation to the profession, the following issues raised (most of which recur from 2013 and 2011) need to be addressed:

Means testing

- Students with parents on higher incomes receive less through loans, and are limited in terms of grants – many students struggle with this, with or without additional parental support.

'As my parents earn just over the threshold for any maintenance loans or grants I was never eligible for any of these however they are also unable to help me financially, this has made studying architecture very hard as it is such a long course. This has meant I have taken a lot longer to get to the stage of part 3 than a lot of my peers who I started part 1 with as I have had to work a lot longer between studying to fund myself.' **Part 3, South East**

Parental dependence

- 43% of respondents receive over £500 an academic year from their family, with 25% receiving over £1,500. 43% of respondents answered that their parents, guardians or partners helped fund their study trips. Some students find it problematic relying so heavily on their parents, and indeed parents can find it difficult to sustain the same level of support. While 31% of Part 1 respondents received no financial support from their family, this rises to 55% at Part 2 level.

Course costs

- Throughout all three surveys, the course-related costs are consistently raised as an issue that are unique to an architecture degree.
- One student states:

'I am from a working class family, upon completing part 1 I would not recommend the course to anyone unless they are from a middle/upper class background, no matter how talented they are. I will never pay off the ridiculous sums of money I have had to pay for my degree.' **Post Part 1, London**

Numerous students pointed to issues in the professional landscape of securing paid experience at Part 1 or 2 level and then to the salary expectations once qualified. Many of the students felt that they should be being paid more for their Stage 1 and Stage 2 experience. If a student is already struggling financially at Part 1, and is then unable to identify strong future career prospects, it may well result in increased drop-out rates from Part 1 to Part 2, particularly in students from low-income backgrounds.

Architectural graduates are still not afforded the adequate remuneration for the time spent at university, or expectation to work long hours once in employment.

Further there is no/little protection for the salary expectations of a student, despite RIBA salary guides, with many large practices still expecting graduates to partake in low or unpaid internships. **Part 3, Yorkshire**

13% of the respondents (compared to 11% in 2013) considered themselves to be in 'severe financial hardship'.

Conclusions:

The work of the RIBA Education Department can continue to support students to minimise some of the financial pressures they face so that they can make the most of the opportunities an architectural education can provide.

The results show very little change from 2011, and consequently the objectives of the Education Department must remain the same. It is important that this work is sustained and developed in order to combat the financial difficulties faced when studying architecture.

We will maintain the following areas of work:

- We can work to increase the funds available for the **RIBA Student Hardship Funds**, which supports students in financial hardship with grants ranging from about £500-£2,000.
- We can work to make funds available to for students embarking on Part 2 courses to **reduce the dropout rate** after Part 1 (such as the RIBA Part 2 Bursaries and the RIBA AHR Stephen Williams Scholarship).
- We can work to create funding specifically available for **materials and field trips** and can create more generous bursaries to help contribute more substantially towards **living costs** (such as the RIBA AHR Stephen Williams Scholarship and RIBA Wren Insurance Association Scholarships).
- We will work with the RIBA student representatives on Council, to discuss ways in which we can liaise more directly with students across the UK and aim to **support student led initiatives**.

- We can provide **guidance** to students on the costs of studying architecture, on how to secure additional funding, and direct them to resources on how to budget accordingly.
- We can encourage **good practice** in schools of architecture specifically providing information on how the costs of field trips, materials and equipment impact financially on students.
- The Education Department will repeat this survey in 2017 and every two years thereafter to provide a statistical backing to ongoing research on the impact of the increased tuition fees and general student experience, and to help the ETFC to evaluate the impact of the grants and bursaries programme.

Currently the RIBA Student Hardship Funds are performing an important role, but without increased funding, the ability of this scheme to make a real difference to students of architecture will be compromised. If you are interested in supporting the Fund, please contact Roger Cooper on roger.cooper@riba.org or +44 (0)20 7307 3817.

RIBA Education Department
April 2016