
Recession proofing for students

The RIBA has collected together a number of simple suggestions that may have practical value to students and graduates, as well as those candidates contemplating the part 3 Professional Practice examination. All those studying architecture are at different career stages, and inevitably face different challenges.

We believe that this is not just a recession in the construction industry, and construction related disciplines; it is a pan-continental slowdown consequent on systemic problems within the globalised economy. Architecture as a profession is always subject to cyclic change; many practices do not have the resources (or expectation of work) to sustain the high levels of employment that may have been taken for granted for over a decade.

Part 1 student still studying

- in agreement with your school, consider changing from full time to part time mode; although deferring the point at which you qualify, this will offer a chance to subsidise your studies and gain professional experience (or other transferable skills)

Part 1 student about to embark on first year out of practical experience

- if work is scarce or slow to materialise, agree with your school to defer the first year out and carry straight on to part 2
- consider working in another construction discipline (e.g. engineering); this may still count towards your practical experience, and offer insights not necessarily available in an architects' practice
- look for site work with a contractor; the insights into the practical implementation of construction will be invaluable, and may also be logged on the PEDR
- look into work based learning part 2 courses where employment in practice is integral to the academic pathway (e.g. Cambridge University, the University of Cardiff, Sheffield Hallam University, and pilot schemes at the universities of Kingston and Westminster)
- consider a brief career sabbatical, and assemble some other, transferable skills in a different discipline or occupation; do not take for granted the really important abilities you develop as a result of studying architecture

Part 2 student still studying

- augment your income with part time teaching in local evening classes on architecture and design; there is demand for these subjects and where there isn't, make your local authority a proposal, and feed back what you have already learnt in university
- if you have well developed skills in 3D visualisation, advertise your services; you can operate in all territories where work is happening, and develop a new network of practice contacts
- if you can identify specialist skills that relate to the CPD core curriculum, contact your local provider's network and ask if you can make a paid contribution
- working with friends, undertake open competitions to develop your design skills; do not underestimate your capacity to win - and publicise your talent

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Part 2 student about to embark on second year out of practical experience

- if work is scarce or slow to materialise, learn another world language (e.g. Spanish) to increase the number of countries you may be able to find work in
- if work is scarce or slow to materialise, enrol on a specialist Masters' course both to upskill yourself for when the work returns, and distinguish your CV from other applicants to practices
- consider working in another construction discipline (e.g. engineering); this may still count towards your practical experience, and offer insights not necessarily available in an architects' practice
- look for site work with a contractor; the insights into the practical implementation of construction will be invaluable, and may also be logged on the PEDR
- work overseas where payment may be in kind for accommodation and subsistence, but where the work experience may still be eligible for the PEDR
- use alumni contacts from your university to increase your networking, and possible job opportunities
- enlarge your network of contacts (and possible job opportunities) by getting involved in non-architectural activities
- undertake funded research bids, and offer your successful tender bids to universities who may consider you for a paid research fellowship
- defer taking part 3 until you are absolutely confident your practical experience has given you the breadth and depth of experience to succeed in the examination; it is demoralising to take the exam and not succeed because your case study is based either on inappropriate material - or insufficient evidence
- consider a brief career sabbatical, and assemble some other, transferable skills in a different discipline or occupation; do not take for granted the really important abilities you develop as a result of studying architecture

10 top tips to gaining your professional experience

Graduates need to:

- Create a well designed, graphically appealing CV with good visual material (and an emphasis on the practical experience you already have) to distinguish your application.
- Write a brief but specific covering letter to the practice you are approaching. Make it clear that you like their work and approach by referring to their projects. Generic letters are swiftly dispatched.
- Send many CVs and letters and follow them up as practices will be inundated with job applications. Target brand name offices by all means, but do not discount a local practice that will minimise your travel time (and costs) and still give you a decent vehicle for a part III case study.
- Consider work overseas but beware of burning too many boats unless you are certain you see yourself as a future global operator.
- Find out all you can about the practices you approach through your own networks.

Tips at interview

- Edit your folio to A2 size at most as people don't like struggling with big drawings, and space may be limited.

- Don't attempt to show too much work at the interview— a five-minute display of work may be enough to make a decision.
- Let the interviewer do the talking unless they specifically ask you to offer a commentary on the work.
- This is an interview, not a design jury so the theoretical context of your projects may be of less interest to interviewers than other issues.
- Demonstrate you can write by including in your folio short, well illustrated written projects. Show that you are aware of the technological context of architecture by including technology research and submissions from your part II.

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