

Royal Institute of British Architects

Architects Registration Board: Professional Practical Experience
Commission – call for evidence
April 2024

The Royal Institute of British Architects is a global professional membership body driving excellence in architecture. We serve our members and society in order to deliver better buildings and places, stronger communities and a sustainable environment. Being inclusive, ethical, environmentally aware and collaborative underpins all that we do.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Architects Registration Board's (ARB) call for evidence on Professional Practical Experience.

RIBA are committed to helping deliver a more accessible, inclusive and diverse profession.

We recognise that dialogue across the architecture sector – between academia and practice – is critical. Academia must address the needs of architectural practice and practice must take greater responsibility for the appropriate training of those who have yet to reach the Register. It is time to develop education structures which ensure fair access for a diverse range of students, support well-being and address matters of competence.

To bring about meaningful change, we look forward to working together to support and encourage innovative proposals which deliver opportunities for additional support, time and funding for students.

14. What is your view or experience of professional practical experience for architects?

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) welcomed the finding of the ARB's Tomorrow's Architect consultation (2023) that further investigation was required into the professional practical experience element of architectural education; and that removing the minimum duration (currently 24 months) would not address some of the inherent problems with the current requirements. RIBA and the ARB have historically shared in common the underpinning PPE requirements, though using them in different ways; the RIBA as a pre-requisite to sit the RIBA Part 3, and the ARB as a threshold for access to the Register.



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We are committed to working with ARB and our expert stakeholders such as SCOSA (the Standing Conference of Schools of Architecture) and APSA (the Association of Professional Advisors) to identify meaningful solutions to address the barriers to obtaining professional practice experience. For example, our recent Interface events, which focus on the interface between education and practice, discussed these issues in detail.

As outlined in our submission to the Tomorrow's Architect consultation, we advised that reform is necessary to ensure that students can access the Register, that practices must recognise their role in the training of future generations, and that non-traditional, practice-based education routes must be encouraged and supported.

Our first concern is around terminology, generally, at the stage where PPE is being undertaken, participants are graduates; yet commonly, the sector refers to them as students right up until the completion of Part 3. This raises an interesting question about whether continued references to students contributes to misconceptions about their skills and knowledge, unlike graduates in almost any other discipline who completed their studies and then look for a graduate level job. Reframing PPE roles as 'graduate' jobs could have a meaningful impact on the perceived value of a job at this level.

RIBA has previously presented a proposal (RIBA Education White Paper/ RIBA Tomorrow's Architects response) whereby architecture students should have access to the Register on graduation from Part 2, after which they would be required to work under licence, or certain restrictions, to complete the appropriate practical experience before fully accessing the Register. While we recognise that this would require an amendment to the Architects Act, it would place graduates on a par with their peers from other disciplines across the built environment. We continue to advocate for this approach.

Currently, RIBA and the ARB share the main practical experience criteria and a set of underpinning definitions. RIBA uses the criteria for the purpose of admittance to the oral examination stage of Part 3; whereas the ARB uses it for the purpose of admittance to the UK Register of Architects:

“Candidates for the RIBA Part 3 oral examination stage should have recently completed a minimum of 24 months’ practical experience under the direct supervision of a professional working in the construction industry, which should include at least 12 months working in the EEA¹, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man, under the direct supervision of an architect.”
(RIBA Validation Procedures, Section 8.4)

¹ ARB specify that practical training should include at least 12 months working in a 'Relevant European Territory' which is defined as the British Islands (the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man), States in the European Economic Area (EEA), and Switzerland.

As a regulated profession in the UK, those applying for registration must prove they have met the required experience, but there is no pool of public employers, unlike the many other regulated professions such as medicine, nursing, midwifery, pharmacy, dentistry, social care, teaching etc, where placements for graduates are offered through the NHS or local authorities.

For architects, there is no guaranteed pool of employment, or regulation of employers, other than by national legislation or by application of ARB and RIBA Codes. With the vast majority of students working in private practice (with a very small number in public practice such as with a local authority), their experience can therefore vary hugely, depending on the employer's workload, sector, size etc. Critically, job availability can vary considerably according to the prevailing economic conditions. These impact a graduates' practical experience.

The RIBA's Professional Experience and Development Record (PEDR) platform is a cost-effective way for students to evidence their experience in practice. The PEDR is an online record for them to record project hours and activities, reflect on their experience and seek feedback and approval from their employment mentor and their Professional Studies Advisor. Quarterly record sheets are produced and can be submitted at the Part 3 stage to evidence the minimum 24 months experience. RIBA can draw out data entered by students to feed into calls for evidence such as this. Currently there are in the region of 4,500 students actively using PEDR to record their experience and this figure has stayed broadly stable over the last 3 years.

Looking at quarterly record sheets completed between 2022 to the present day, 2% were based upon experience completed in the EEA, Channel Islands or Isle of Man; 8% based on experience completed overseas and 90% based on experience completed in the UK. RIBA would welcome the opportunity to further expound on this data with the ARB and the Professional Practical Experience Commission as part of their ongoing investigations.

RIBA also offers a variety of support and guidance to students, employers and academics relating to the key stages of professional practical experience. This includes resources from our Future Architects network on job hunting; support through RIBA Jobs, our recruitment agency; our Student Mentoring scheme; the Part 3 handbook and other titles from RIBA Publishing and events in person or online through RIBA Academy.

We carry out a monthly Future Trends survey of members to identify the employment and business trends affecting the profession and to help to identify implications and inform further RIBA activities, and an annual Benchmarking survey of Chartered Practices. Again, evidence can be drawn from this data to help inform the Commission.

15. Have you experienced or witnessed any good examples of professional practical experience, from within the UK and abroad?

RIBA consider good professional practical experience to be *paid employed work* to at least the Real Living Wage set by the Living Wage Foundation. RIBA believe that *effective management and supervision* of one gaining professional practical experience should also include mentoring, where a student is not only supported day-to-day with their duties but is encouraged to consider their longer-term prospects in the profession. Regular and timely reviews or appraisals through the RIBA's PEDR process can assist the student to understand their strengths and identify gaps for development, which a good mentor can help them to fulfil. While RIBA recognises that individuals should be supported, it also believes that the content and extent of the experience is important. Exposure to the various stages of the RIBA Plan of Work is critical, though students may be encouraged to learn through observation as well as direct participation in projects.

All architecture students employed within a RIBA Chartered Practice completing eligible professional practical experience and recording on the PEDR are to be offered opportunities for training and experience equally to help them complete their professional architecture education.

From the outset of employing a student, practices should discuss the student's chosen route (PEDR monitoring service or Part 3 course) and agree both an appropriate amount of paid study leave and the timeframe to which this arrangement refers. The student's employment contract should clearly state the agreed study leave and whether this is to be matched by an equal amount of their own annual leave. In addition, any contribution by the practice to course fees should also be discussed. The contract should also clearly set out the circumstances which course or training fees are liable to repayment in the event of the student leaving the practice.

As is best practice and a commitment to supporting students, RIBA strongly recommends all RIBA Chartered Practices consider granting paid study leave for attending PEDR monitoring recall days. At Part 3 stage, given the significant commitment studies and future career that a student will have demonstrated by reaching this point, granting paid leave for Part 3 course attendance and additional paid study time, particularly in the lead up to assessment submission and examinations, will be crucial to the achievement of a successful outcome. Students should be given access to any appropriate in-house or external CPD and other staff development opportunities and can log this on their PEDR record.ⁱ

Like many Part 3 course providers, RIBA's own Part 3 programme team undertake a survey of its student cohort every year. The survey highlights both good and poor practice and although anonymously submitted, the cohort are informed about where to find help and support if needed, and in extreme cases, are signposted to the RIBA's Professional Standards team for guidance. We would be pleased to share these findings directly with the PPE Commission to help inform its work. APSA are also working on a longitudinal survey with a number of Part 3 providers, which will provide further useful data.

Whilst it is not always feasible, in some cases Professional Studies Advisors are able to carry out practice visits which can be an extremely useful tool in setting out expectations for all parties and dealing with any concerns.

16. Have you experienced or witnessed any examples of professional practical experience which you think could be improved?

As the Professional Body, both in the running of its own Part 3 programme and its own oversight of professional experience, RIBA is informed of both good examples of experience and those which could be improved.

As mentioned previously, RIBA's own Part 3 team undertake a survey of its student cohort every year. The most common areas of concern that are raised to us are:

- Pay not meeting the requirements set out in the RIBA Code of Professional Conduct
- Students failing to get time off to attend classes and examinations or being expected to do this on an unpaid basis or by using their annual leave to cover the time.
- Students working excessive hours of unpaid overtime or not being given TOIL.
- Students not getting the experience they require to meet the requirements of the Part 3 examination.
- A lack of flexibility within the workplace for students with caring responsibilities, particularly in relation to long working hours
- Mentors refusing to sign off students' PEDR sheets or not signing them off on a timely basis.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, we heard of multiple instances of those undertaking PPE being retained in practice to cover the responsibilities of more senior architects who had been placed on furlough.

At our most recent Interface Education and Practice Away Day, where we considered matters of culture, equality and diversity in education and at its interface with practice, evidence was presented demonstrating there is limited access to suitable employment, and lower salaries for some students, particularly black female graduates. This must be addressed if we want there to be equity of opportunity to progress in our profession.

17. What changes to policy or practice would improve the quality and coherence of professional practical experience?

Professional practice skills cannot be taught or experienced solely through academia, and students can sometimes leave university feeling unprepared for working in practice or future self-employment. As such, RIBA recognises the need for Professional Practical Experience. However, the traditional 'year out' and architectural assistant periods of experience should not be the only way to gain experience. The profession needs more varied work/study models, better quality and coherence of architectural training, and expanding the benefits for students to gain 'on-the-job' training which

connects their education and practice settings. Students working in cross-disciplinary practices should be further encouraged and reflected in the criteria for PPE, creating fairer access to opportunities.

The RIBA Studio and architectural apprenticeships both pave viable routes for professionals wanting to earn a salary and while also gain necessary qualifications to join the register. These pathways also allow students to simultaneously study, and gain experience in practice counting towards the minimum 24 months required for Part 3/registration.

There are other existing architecture programmes which combine work and study; however, students cannot use this time spent in practice towards the current 24 months' requirement due to the 'double counting rules.' To adapt to the current time, changes to this policy, as well as further flexibility in acceptable professional experience must be considered. Current and next generation students face high tuition fees with minimal grants and financial support. This represents a significant change, but requirements for PPE have not adapted. In the past, much lower university fees meant that students had more work options open to them.

ARB has previously acknowledged that qualification awarding bodies will be required to oversee the period of practical experience and attainment of the practice-based outcomes. Therefore, any institutional qualification that tests the new practice outcomes will have a timeframe and the period of formal practical experience will have a duration.

RIBA has no objections to an accelerated version of this qualification and see that there is a place for experience that is undertaken while on a formal programme, and which holds academic credits, to be counted as Professional Practical Experience.

The RIBA Themes and Values framework outlines the necessity for architecture students and professionals to have the knowledge, skills and experience required to respond to the challenges facing our world, society and profession. Ethics and business management need to stem from basic employment rights, upholding standards for pay; agreement of hours worked and arrangements for overtime and study leave; wellbeing in the workplace and fair access to opportunities for those from diverse backgrounds. RIBA sees these as vital components of any future professional practice examination; bearing in mind this final stage of architect training is inextricably linked to the accompanying professional experience phase.

The RIBA Compact pilot explored an ethical framework setting out obligations for students, practices, schools of architecture and RIBA to meet – mutually committing to improve practical experience of students. The Compact obligations were underpinned by models of best practice and policies, focused on improving the quality of PPE and bridging collaborations between all stakeholders. RIBA aims to further the work on the Compact in the coming year and we are willing to share these developments with the ARB and the PPE Commission.

Looking at the bigger picture, the quality of PPE should be analysed through correlations in funding cuts for architectural training, policy barriers for international students (for example, visa and immigration changes) and restrictions within Student Finance funding across the devolved administrations. The mechanisms for students to move from education to practice are restrictive, forcing students to change or leave the profession. RIBA's Education Statistics from 2021/22, found a fall in student admissions into architecture and a significant reduction of students from overseas or from EU countries.ⁱⁱ

18. Do you have any further reflections or personal experiences about professional practical experience that you would like to share?

Undertaking a period of practical training is fundamental to put into context the knowledge gained through academic study. The student uses that experience to inform and consolidate their skills. RIBA's concerns are that, on average, it takes students much longer than the minimum to reach the Register. One of the main reasons for this is their ability to attain the correct experience and support from practice to do so. Practical experience must be a help, rather than a hinderance, to a student on their journey to the register.

While they can be responsible for the standards of their institution, schools of architecture do not have the power to ensure that students get appropriate experience to meet the required professional practical experience outcomes. This directly impacts the length of time it takes students to reach the register, and, without setting out responsibilities or standards for practice (as well as learning providers) this is unlikely to change. As mentioned above, architecture, unlike medicine, pharmacy and others, does not have a regulated pool of employers and we are keen to work with ARB to find an appropriate solution to this problem.

Practical experience must be reformed to ensure that students can gain the necessary experience to access the Register. Practices must recognise their role in the training of future generations. This means that any outcomes-based approach to practical experience must be coupled with the necessary support and time to achieve those outcomes. Any educational reform must address this aspect of an architecture student's training and RIBA would welcome the opportunity to further discuss with ARB how this might be achieved.

Non-traditional practice-based routes must be encouraged and supported. Academia and practice, working together, must have the opportunity in the framework to innovate in the development of new routes to the Register.

Early-career professionals must not be left in an unfocussed cycle of practical experience which does not provide them with appropriate experience. The practical training aspect of architectural education must have outcomes that can be achieved within the set timeframe.

To bring about meaningful change, we look forward to working together to support and encourage innovative proposals which deliver opportunities for additional support, time and funding for students.

ⁱ The RIBA Code of Practice for Chartered Practices, section 6.8

ⁱⁱ <https://www.architecture.com/knowledge-and-resources/knowledge-landing-page/education-statistics>