

# **REPORT - RIBA Student Destinations Survey 2017**

## **Introduction**

The RIBA Student Destinations Survey is a partnership project between the RIBA and Northumbria University. It is a study to be delivered over a ten-year period. It is currently in its seventh 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 to move to other parts of the world to find employment?

We need this information in order to inform architectural education in the future, improving 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 future 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, 2015 and 2016 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

De Montford University joined the study in 2016, becoming the eighth university to participate.

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), 2015 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 or 2015), 2016 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 or 2016) and 2017 (who were RIBA Part 1 graduates in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 or 2017).

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. In 2016, **42** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2015) responded, **37** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2014, 38 graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2013, **24** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2012, **26** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **41** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2010.

In 2017, over the same period of a month, **30** graduates who had recently completed RIBA Part 1 (in 2016) responded, **17** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2015, **9** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2014, **13** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2013, **16** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2012, **4** graduates who completed their RIBA Part 1 in 2011 and **11** 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. Unfortunately, the number of respondents in 2017 represented a reduction in numbers compared to 2015, which was the highest yet.

## **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, 6% of the 2015 graduates in the 2016 survey and 2% of the 2016 graduates in the 2017 survey that filled in the 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. The 2010 Graduates in the 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 surveys were slightly more inclined (13%, 11%, 11%, 6% respectively) to disagree with the statement, although this was based on a small sample and the respondents may have been the same individuals. 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 six years of the survey the graduates highlighted areas

which required more emphasis in architectural training. When all respondents in the 2017 survey were included the top ten responses were:

- Project Management (60%)
- Construction Knowledge (59%)
- Consultation Skills (47%)
- Management Skills (35%)
- Knowledge of Sustainability (30%)
- IT (33%)
- Management (34%)
- Consultation skills (45%)
- Construction knowledge (55%)
- Project management (55%)

Interestingly, there has been a slight shift in the areas identified in the previous surveys; with IT skills increasing to 33% and knowledge of sustainability becoming an additional skill that universities need to ensure students have to assist with their future employability.

## **2. Employment situations**

82% of all graduates completing the survey in 2017 were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 14% were undertaking further studies or training. This compares with 80% of all graduates completing the survey in 2016 who were in some form of paid employment (this figure includes part-time employment and those who are self-employed/freelance) and 18% who were undertaking further studies or training. 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 2016 unemployment levels were at 2% and among 2011 graduates completing the survey in 2016 it was at 8%, 0% for 2012 graduates, 11% for 2013 graduates, 11% for 2014 graduates and 10% for 2015 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 2017 small numbers of work hours were uncommon with all of the respondents working 35 hours or more a week and approximately a quarter working 42 hrs a week or more. These trends are similar to the previous six years.

### **i) Employed in architecture**

In the 2017 survey of those 2016 Graduates in employment 70% were working within architecture. In the 2016 survey of those 2015 Graduates in employment 83% were working within 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, although it was the lowest this time and requires some monitoring. 11% of all graduates responding to the survey in 2017 had more than one form of employment (it was approximately a 6th in the previous six). Over half of all of the survey respondents in the 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 surveys and a quarter of 2017 respondents stated that the additional employment was in order to, 'earn a living / pay back loans'. This was typically 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 2017 survey respondents under 5% 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 6% of all graduates in the 2017 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 2017 respondent stated 'I believe universities should have stronger relationships with architectural firms so that we can have a better chance of finding employment.'

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. A 2016 respondent stated 'I love designing and architecture. Have studied for 8 years so I could be an architect'. '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 2016 respondent felt 'architecture provides a mentally stimulating working environment, with global opportunities and endless innovation'. Other participants in 2017 raised concerns over mental health and rising debt as issues, with one respondent commenting, 'I think that there is a lack of mental health support within the architecture community, not just for students but for professionals as well.' One respondent suggested, 'There should be more funding options for RIBA part 2 if you been out of uni more than 2/3 years, you can't get student loans and the pay is not enough to live and save for the course.' A second respondent stated, 'I would be amazed if 80% of architecture students (who go on to complete Part 2 and 3) from 2012 onwards will pay off their student loans'.

## **ii) Employed outside of architecture**

In the 2017 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 5% stating that they were no longer interested in architecture as a career. There was some evidence of people struggling to find employment with a 2017 respondent stating 'I planned

(to work in architectural practice) but could not find employment after 60+ applications and had to get another job to survive.’. These figures echoed those responses in the previous six 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 2016 respondent stated ‘remuneration versus expectation of work and long hours may put me off in favour of a more sociable career path’. Another 2017 survey respondent stated that ‘for such a pressured career path, there is a disproportionate lack of support for both students and professionals. I also believe that there is not enough financial support for architecture students’. In fact one respondent in 2017 stated that ‘You enter into a profession which is constantly pressured. Unless you are naturally incredibly able to deal with all of this, you are going to experience to some degree a mental illness such as stress, depression or anxiety during your architectural career. There needs to be more support from both the government, architecture schools and official architectural bodies’.

### **3. Alternative paths**

The survey shows that when considering all respondents in the 2017 survey, 17% were working outside of the UK. This represents a similar figure to the previous six years of surveys. They were generally quite conservative in their career path, sticking to the standard architectural route. Over the course of the six 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 some of 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 2017 survey 29% of those undertaking further study were mainly funded through family support in the form of a trust fund, inheritance or allowance. This is slightly less than the previous surveys. Just over half of all the graduates in the 2017 survey had had to work during their degree to manage financially (which is very similar to the previous year). However, approximately 83% of respondents said that the issue of student debt had not influenced their career path. This may become more of an issue in the future. However, under half of 2017 respondents who did the course in 2010 said they would still have done it with fees. Respondents in 2016 had different attitudes towards student debt. For instance, one respondent stated ‘I am currently ignoring the huge debt I have, and have chosen to pursue a job I enjoy, even though it is not particularly well paid. However, this is not sustainable for the long term’. Another respondent in 2017 stated that ‘I started my course in 2013, so I have the maximum student debt. It has made me want to qualify as quickly as I can as I don't want the government to put fees up even higher...which they now have’. It has also continued to influence decisions regarding employment and further training. One respondent discussed ‘I would like to do a masters but worry about debt implications on top of existing unpaid debt’ and another respondent stated ‘I chose part time at Part II because of money, but after leaving work I acquired a loan anyway as I felt the course was more important to complete well than to have some extra money.’

Family background seems to have been an important influence on whether students enter into architectural education. In the 2017 survey where responses were provided 47% of graduate’s father’s and 40% 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'. This is slightly lower than in 2016, however, it is still evident that a large number 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 45% of the 2017 graduates surveyed). In the 2017 survey and similarly to previous years, it was evident that men were more likely to be employed on a permanent, open ended contract on a full-time basis or be self-employed/freelance than women. When all income from employment was combined men were more likely than women to be in the highest earning categories in 2017. Furthermore, when the seven 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.

## **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 interesting will be to see how the perceptions and experiences of these architecture graduates change over the next couple of years, one that may radically change the profile of the profession.

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