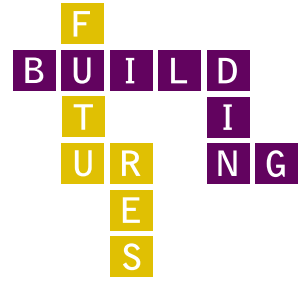


THE FUTURE FOR ARCHITECTS?



RIBA 



"IN 10 YEARS WE PROBABLY WILL NOT CALL OURSELVES AN ARCHITECTURE PRACTICE, IT WILL BE SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY."

ARCHITECT
Small metropolitan boutique practice

GLOBAL POPULATION GROWTH 2000-2050



70%

WILL LIVE IN URBAN AREAS BY 2050



INFRASTRUCTURE CONSTRUCTION GROWTH



2010 - 2020

SHARE OF GLOBAL CONSTRUCTION



BY 2020

MORE PEOPLE, BIGGER CITIES, MORE CONSTRUCTION...

REDUCTION IN DEMAND FOR ARCHITECTS' SERVICES

2008

-40%

TODAY

"ARCHITECTS HAVE SHED PROJECT MANAGEMENT, CONTRACT ADMINISTRATION, AND COST, AND ULTIMATELY IF THEY LOSE DESIGN COORDINATION THEN YOU HAVE TO ASK WHAT THEY ARE THERE FOR..."

PROJECT MANAGER
Global consultancy

"THE INVASION OF THE ARCHITECT'S ROLE SHOULDN'T BE SEEN AS A THREAT BUT AS A NATURAL CHANGE THAT CAN BE EXPLOITED- WE MUST FIND OUR OWN NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND EDUCATION SHOULD SHIFT TO ACCOMMODATE THAT."

ARCHITECT
Large global practice

"I THINK WE NEED TO STOP BEING OVERLY POLITE AND LEARN HOW TO BE BUSINESS PEOPLE."

ARCHITECT
Medium sized design-led practice

ONLY
50%
OF PRACTICES
HAVE A
BUSINESS
PLAN

INTRODUCTION

In this study Building Futures sets out to explore the future role of architects, asking: who will design our buildings in 2025; what roles will those trained in architecture be doing then and how will architectural practice have changed as a result? Through a series of one-to-one interviews and round table sessions the study aims to examine the breadth of those who shape the built environment: including traditional architects and those working in expanded fields of practice, as well as clients, consultants and contractors. The resulting speculations should be an opportunity for discussion and interrogation- an exploration of the imminent changes likely to affect the industry over the next 15 years.

"OUR MAIN THREAT IS NOT BEING PAID FOR THE WORK WE DO - PARTICULARLY THE BRIEF MAKING PART. BUT WE NEVER TURN DOWN UNPAID WORK BECAUSE IT MIGHT LEAD TO PAID WORK IN THE FUTURE."

ARCHITECT
Small metropolitan boutique practice



WHO WILL DESIGN OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT IN 2025?

"WE WILL NEVER OUTSOURCE AND WILL COMPETE WITH THOSE WHO DO BY DOING IT BETTER."

ARCHITECT
Medium sized design-led practice

"DETAILED DESIGN IS INCREASINGLY COMING THROUGH THE SUPPLY CHAIN – AND THIS IS EXACTLY THE RIGHT PLACE FOR IT. WITH INCREASING COMPLEXITY OF BUILDING TECHNOLOGY YOU CANNOT EXPECT ARCHITECTS TO HAVE THAT ROLE."

ENGINEER
Global firm

PARTS OF THE INDUSTRY THAT COULD REMAIN RELATIVELY STABLE:

1) The Small Local General Practice
Will be judged by its ability to produce a personal service, with one-stop-shop design at lower cost and faster than their competitors: the 'plan-smiths' and the contractors.

2) The International Star Architects
Will be judged by their ability to produce eye popping, 'wow-factor' design and raise both funds and the profile of their client.

3) Specialist Niche Practices
Will be judged by their ability to provide increasingly complex, niche services as part of a larger design team and process.

4) Traditional Regional Delivery Driven Practices
Will be judged by their ability to provide cost effective, process driven services to lay clients who have little interest in design for its own sake.

PARTS OF THE INDUSTRY WITH THE GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH IN THE NEXT 5-10 YEARS:

1) Practices in Emerging Economies
Will be judged by their ability to produce reliable design at lower cost and faster than their western competitors.

2) Global Inter-Disciplinary Consultancies
Will be judged by their ability to consistently complete projects at a range of scales, particularly large, at low cost, quickly and with an integrated service - and will also increasingly be judged on the quality of their design and their international credentials.

3) BOOT (Build-Own-Operate-Transfer) Designers
Will be judged by their ability to generate, realise and manage mixed scale projects with little risk for the client organisation.

4) Subcontractors/Specialist Suppliers
Will be judged by their ability to keep up to date with the latest developments in construction and I.T., and to increasingly take on more and more of the design process.

5) Design Houses/Creative Agencies
Will be judged by their ability to move easily between disciplines, to solve problems creatively in any field and to gather a vibrant and mixed range of skills under one roof.

PARTS OF THE INDUSTRY UNDER THE GREATEST PRESSURE:

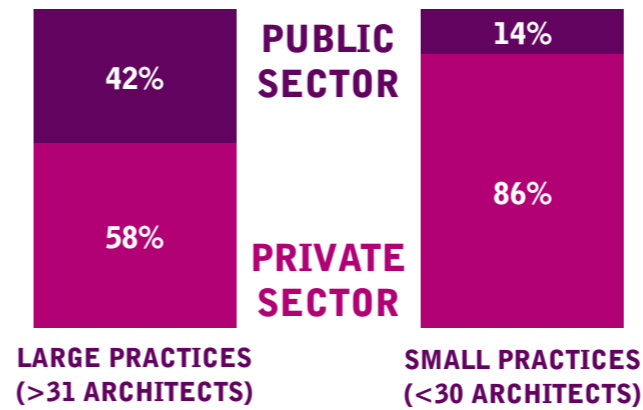
1) Medium Sized Design-Led Practices
Will be under pressure from larger practices that have bolted on design talent and speak the commercial language of clients.

2) Small Metropolitan Boutique Practices
Will be reliant on design aware clients who are looking to commission exciting and boundary pushing design, whilst broadening their skill set, working collaboratively and managing their client's risk.

"THE UK HAS A FINITE MARKET – ANYONE WHO HAS LARGER SCALE ASPIRATIONS IS GOING TO HAVE TO LOOK OVERSEAS."
CLIENT ADVISOR
Global consultancy

"BIG CLIENTS ARE MOVING TOWARDS USING ONE-STOP-SHOP GLOBAL SERVICE PROVIDERS – THE PROFESSION WILL HAVE TO KEEP IN LINE WITH THAT."
DEVELOPER
Large UK based company

WORKLOAD OF UK PRACTICES



50%

TOTAL UK WORKLOAD IS FOR CONTRACTOR CLIENTS

WHAT ROLES MIGHT THOSE TRAINED IN ARCHITECTURE HAVE IN 2025?

In the future we may see more practitioners working in broad, interdisciplinary, creative and strategic businesses, as well as holding positions of seniority in the construction industry.

"I THINK THE WORLD NEEDS MORE COLLECTIVE, EMPATHETIC GROUPINGS OF ARCHITECTS; COLLECTIVES CAN HAVE A BIGGER IMPACT THAN AN INDIVIDUAL, AND MORE COLLECTIVES WOULD GIVE THE PROFESSION A BIGGER IMPACT."

ARCHITECT
Large global interdisciplinary practice

EXPANDED MODES OF PRACTICE

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to look in more detail at what architects are doing now. Although the core of local, traditional, delivery-led practices remain, many of the practices we spoke to had expanded upon the type of work that would traditionally be considered the architect's field – offering a broader range of services. A number of the practices we interviewed said that they had at times felt restricted by the term 'architect', and that it was often the reason they were not able to charge a fee for work that does not fall into the traditional perception of the role. Those who most strongly voiced this opinion considered themselves instead to be 'spatial agencies' or 'design houses'. Many were not 'architects' in the formal sense recognised by the RIBA and the ARB, yet still have a significant role in affecting the built environment – unsupported and unrecognised by the profession. There are architects working in the fields of set and stage design, public art, installation design, design of public space, brand design, community consultation, research, think tanks and urban

design. The younger members of the profession that we spoke to expressed a strong desire to be part of this much broader reaching, interdisciplinary concept of architectural practice – suggesting a future of much looser definitions and more slippery modes of practice. The RIBA might need to consider evolving the 20th century definition of what it means to be an architect in order to fit better with the 21st century reality of the profession. Working towards a broader definition of an architect would position graduates to move into career paths leading to a wider range of roles in the built environment professions – and to better respond to the changing nature of practice. In order to survive, the architect must design beyond buildings – and in turn should be supported to do so by regulatory and membership bodies.

THE BROADER CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

In addition to these expanded modes of practice, there is also a growing shift towards those trained in architecture moving into other parts of the construction industry. Given that the past 30 years has seen a dramatic shift away from architects being employed by the public sector, from 50% in the 1970s to less than 9% now, there is no reason to believe that a similar profound change could not affect the profession in the next 15 years. Already, over 50% of UK architects' workload is now for contractor clients – a statistic that would have seemed unimaginable 20 years ago. Those clients are already introducing a future in which in-house teams work under design directors or

external subcontractors to manage the detailed design and construction stages. Despite the decline of the traditional architect's role beyond stage D, the number of trained architects holding senior positions across the industry seems to be gathering pace. As the demand for conventional skills declines and the architect's role becomes circumscribed, the opportunity for architects to take roles in the rest of the industry increases, with a number of prominent positions on the client and contractor side already held by architects. This is compounded by the fact that architectural education continues to produce more qualified and part qualified architects than the profession can accommodate in traditional roles. We may see an increasing number of graduates doing things other than RIBA stages A-L.

"THE PROFESSION IS HEADING TOWARDS CONSULTANCY. I THINK THAT ARCHITECTS WILL HAVE THE GREATEST INFLUENCE IF THEY CONCENTRATE ON HIGH-END CONSULTANCY AND STRATEGIC THINKING."

PROJECT MANAGER
Global consultancy

"WE'RE INTERESTED IN CONSORTIUMS OF ENGINEERS AND ARCHITECTS WHO ARE NOT THE SAME COMPANY BUT WHO LINK UP."

ARCHITECT
Small metropolitan boutique practice

"I THINK THE ENTIRE RANGE OF MIDDLE SIZED PRACTICES FROM ABOUT 25-150 PEOPLE WILL BE GONE, AND WE'LL END UP WITH TWO VERY DISTINCT TYPES OF PRACTICE AT EACH END OF THE MARKET" CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Global consultancy

"THE PROBLEM IS THE SEPARATION BETWEEN WHAT ARCHITECTS WANT TO DO, AND THE REALITY OF THE MARKETPLACE." CLIENT ADVISOR

Global consultancy

HOW MIGHT PRACTICE CHANGE BY 2025?

In the future architects may work in a more consultative, networked manner. There will also be a focus on identity and differentiation in the marketplace.

BRANCHING INTO GENERAL CONSULTANCY

Architects possess a huge range of skills, many of which go unnoticed, unused or most importantly unpaid! The vast majority of these skills come under the 'pre-project' – all the community consultation and analysis, brief development, strategic thinking and preparatory work that lies behind the early design stages. There was agreement from the client side that these skills are really valued but that a culture shift was required to persuade them to pay for those skills in the same way that they pay for traditional architectural services. A number of the practices we interviewed had already or were planning to formalise the diverse services that they offer. This formal splitting of skills and jobs can enable architects to provide services that clients do not traditionally look to an architect to do. Importantly, it can also enable them to advise other architects and collaborate with them without being competitive. This approach can allow a practice to position itself on the client/user side of the table – opening a broader spectrum of opportunities.

COMMERCIAL VS DESIGN LED PRACTICE

In order to compete against the cheaper workforces from the emerging markets and the financially savvy mega consultancies, the architect must learn to speak the language of the client – particularly to become financially literate. The contemporary division between design practices – the classic studio architect and the more commercial consultancy appears to be becoming increasingly polarised. It is the continuing distinction between these two that threatens the former. An architect needs, as a matter of urgency, to be able to sell their skills with reference to cost to be of use to the client. The profession must face up to the reality that the context within which it now practices has changed so dramatically that the skill set required must also shift – financial skills should now be considered core. In addition to financial literacy, the client-savvy architect must be able to see beyond 'building a building' and offer a service that embraces the client's broader aims – becoming a problem solver as well as a designer.

NETWORKED PRACTICES

The effects of globalisation and integrated working (BIM) were themes in many of our interviews, with particular speculation about the threat

of outsourcing and highly skilled workforces in Asia mobilising to outbid western practices, as well as the increasing use of technology to meet client demands for better integrated design and delivery service. A forward thinking practice could mobilise outsourcing to great effect by stripping down to a small number of core employees, with all other work, particularly technical, being outsourced to a network of trusted consultants – becoming far more nimble and light on its feet. In this respect, this practice would be able to keep up with advances in technology, programming and skills – having access to the absolute best in each field. This mode of practice would be far leaner, cutting down a huge amount of the overheads of running a practice. Another mode of networked working which would appeal to large clients is a practice that provides a one-stop-shop service through a network of consultants offering a full range of services. This type of practice would rely heavily on integrated working and associated advances in technology to provide a seamless service.

INTEGRATION OF EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

The majority of practices we interviewed felt very strongly that a connection with the schools of architecture was very important, and in some cases integral, to their practice. Many spoke of the opportunities, contacts and networking afforded by teaching, and of the all important supplement to a dwindling income. For others it was a vital source of employees and a method of establishing a practice's corporate culture within a school

and setting up a talent pool. For small, boutique practices whose ethos is essential to the vision of their practice, teaching offers an opportunity to develop that ethos – testing it against the rigours that teaching provides. The success of existing and new courses that see teaching integrated into practice, suggests a mode of future practice inextricably linked to education.

THE CULTURE OF PRACTICE

It appears that the culture of practice is becoming increasingly important – enabling distinctiveness and diversity in a climate of homogeneity. A number of architects and designers we spoke to had built their brand on the basis of a very particular way of working, or a set of founding principles. This was consistently tied to ideas of longevity and of survival beyond the founding partners. The young professionals and students frequently described practices in terms of culture – describing their ideal employer with very specific provisos regarding underlying ideas, ethical stance, attitude and many other culture-related themes. This may not be a new phenomenon, but could be an increasingly vital part of practice in the future.

RIBA

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