

'A Day in the Life' of an Architect

1) Please introduce yourself and give a brief description of what you do & the company you work for?

I'm a chartered architect working as an Associate Director at AD Architects in Hertford. AD Architects specialises in education and healthcare sector projects.

2) What does your average day entail? Where do you work? (Environment - Office, home, studio etc.) What is your work pattern? (full time/part time etc) What are the main activities during your day? (i.e. meetings, emails, practical tasks, visiting clients etc)

I work full time and am usually based in the office in Hertford, though we also have a shared office in London. I visit construction sites for progress meetings, inspections etc. I spend most of my day working on a computer producing information describing the design, for example by sketching, CAD drawing, scheduling information, briefing others or coordinating information with other design team members (e.g. structural and mechanical engineers, cost consultants). I attend meetings with clients and users (e.g. doctors and nurses of a new healthcare facility) to establish their requirements. I liaise with Statutory Authorities to obtain approvals, for example planning permission and Building Control approval.

3) What skills and qualification are required for your role?

A degree in architecture and professional experience are required to be formally qualified as an architect. Skills needed include good communication and interpersonal skills, spatial imagination, attention to detail, teamwork, and the ability to work under pressure to tight deadlines. Design flair is required at the early stages of a project, while technical understanding is more important when the project is on site. Good computer skills are essential, and being able to model in 3d will become increasingly important.

4) What do you enjoy most about your job? What are your least favourite aspects of your job?

I enjoy being able to create something – seeing the initial idea take shape. I enjoy working on schemes which benefit society, for example hospitals and schools. Working for some client that can make decisions, or continuously change their mind, can be difficult. Design integrity is sometimes compromised by clients in order to make savings.

5) What were your favourite subjects at school? Why? Do these link/relate to the job you do now?

I enjoyed maths, physics and art. Architecture combines technical and creative elements.

6) How did you get to where you are now? (i.e. academic routes, professional development, career opportunities)

I studied architecture for Bachelor and Masters degrees, followed by a professional certificate while working. I also completed an MSc in Project Management. I'm a chartered member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). I've worked for a number of practices in London and more recently in Hertford. I started working in healthcare architecture when I joined a company specialising in this field.

7) What advice would you give to our aspiring students who are interested in pursuing a career in your profession?

Be patient, it takes a long time to qualify and after university rather than designing award-winning buildings by yourself you might be doing toilet layouts for a while. Don't go into architecture for the money – pay isn't bad, but other profession and sectors are better paid. You might also want to consider work-life balance. Working on competitions in a trendy, international office into the night and weekends might be exciting for a while, but isn't really compatible with family life.

8) In your current profession what are the potential development and progression opportunities?

Taking more responsibility in running the practice with the goal of becoming a partner. Other potential development options would be to specialise further, for example in sustainable architecture or Building Information Modelling (BIM), or work in a different region (e.g. Middle East)