

RIBA



Royal Institute
of British Architects

Commissioning architecture

Whether you intend to construct a new building, expand your current facility, or adapt an existing structure to a new use, it makes sense to consult an RIBA Registered Practice. This leaflet explains how to select, appoint and work with an architect





Anthony Gormley Studio, London N7, David Chipperfield Architects. © Benedict Luxmoore/Arcaid

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The architect's contribution to a building extends far beyond form and aesthetics. It can influence the perception, performance and value of your business.

Brought in early and given the opportunity to understand your business, an architect can design a building, masterplan or interior that is tailored to your needs, both now and in the future; one that is not only productive but also a pleasure to work in and visit.

Consulting an architect at the earliest planning stages opens the door to cost savings, both in the construction and operation of the building, from innovative design solutions. Allowing an architect to manage your project and coordinate the work of consultants and contractors can save you and your staff time.

An architect's fees may be charged as a percentage of the total construction cost or, depending on the service supplied, at an hourly rate or as a lump sum. Hourly rates (as of January 2005) may range from £55.00 for general work by a qualified architect to around £150.00 per hour for complex work by a senior practice member.*

A sound investment?

Good advice has its price and the price of skimping on design quality is far higher. Design fees will usually constitute just a small fraction (typically around 10%) of the total construction cost of, say, a new headquarters building. However, they pale into insignificance when measured against the company's total operating costs over the 20 year lifespan of the building.

High quality design can reduce those operating costs by maximising the efficiency of the building. A building that has received the input of design professionals from inception will be cheaper to run and command greater value in the long term. As the Government is now advising, procuring design services by fee competition will not buy the best value in the long term.

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More information on fees and budgeting can be found in the RIBA booklet, **A client's guide to engaging an architect** (£5.00), available from RIBA Bookshops, www.ribabookshops.com.





Royal Ballet School – Bridge of Aspiration, London WC2, Wilkinson Eyre Architects. © Nick Wood

The selection process

Your shortlist of practices provided by RIBA Client Services will offer a number of alternative architects, handpicked for your scheme. How do you decide between them?

First, confirm which practices can be considered. Call each one, describe your project and its approximate timing, and check their ability to accommodate it. If they can help, request practice literature with details about the firm's qualifications and experience. If they cannot, contact RIBA Client Services on 020 7307 3700 and we'll supply a replacement name for your list.

Why use an RIBA registered practice?

The RIBA Register of Practices was set up to clarify the status of each architectural practice, its expertise and the services it offers. To register, a practice must meet the following criteria:

- It must hold *Professional Indemnity Insurance* cover appropriate to the scale and type of work it undertakes.
- At least one partner or director in the practice must be a *Chartered Architect* (a member of the RIBA)
- 80% of its registered architects must be *Chartered Architects*
- It must have in place management procedures to ensure that its architects comply with the RIBA's *Continuing Professional Development (CPD)* obligations and adhere to the RIBA Code of Conduct.

Do some research

Visit the websites of your shortlisted firms and look at their entries in the RIBA's online directory (www.ribafind.org). Listen to recommendations and contact their previous clients to discover what they are like to work with.

There may be names on the list whose work you already know and admire, and would like to appoint. However, to establish whether the fit between your requirements as a client and your architect's skills and services is a good one, you'll need a structured selection process.

Interview the candidates

Meeting each of your favoured practices in an interview situation will give you an indication of whether the chemistry between you is right. It will need to be for the project to succeed. The interview should tell you how compatible their style, approach and personality are with your own. Find out about their track record and whether they have the design and management expertise to handle your project.

Try to interview three to five firms – enough to gauge the range of approaches on offer but not so many as to cloud the issue. Insist on meeting the key personnel who would work on your project, allowing them plenty of interview time and access (to the site and existing facilities) to answer your questions fully.

What to look for

The purpose of the interviews is to compare and evaluate the candidates' different approaches. Ask how they would resource the project, how they would gather information, establish priorities and make decisions. What do they consider to be the most important issues on the project, and the biggest challenges?

Look for the best balance between technical competence, professional service and, of course, design ability. Look for new ideas and a fresh outlook on the project. Find a good fit between your needs and the services offered. Do not underestimate, though, the importance of empathy, and of finding an architect that shares your aims and expectations for the project.

As soon as you've made your decision, inform all the practices included in the selection process. Be prepared to pay a fee or honorarium to any firms that you requested work from as part of the process.

Engaging an architect: guidance for clients to quality based selection (£8.00), published by the RIBA, offers advice on the best method of selecting an architect. To order a copy, visit www.ribabookshops.com or call RIBA Bookshops on 020 7251 0791.

The Construction Industry Council (which includes the RIBA) publishes more detailed guidance on selecting architects and other professionals:

A guide to quality based selection of consultants: a key to design quality (£15.00) is available from www.cic.org.uk.





Hoyle Early Years Centre, Bury, DSDHA. © Martine Hamilton Knight

Appointing an architect

The agreement you sign with your chosen architect must detail the scope and cost of the services you will need.

Together, you should discuss the demands of the project, agree on what's expected and put it in writing. You may find it useful to formulate your brief first (see section 10), to establish your vision of the project and what it entails.

On smaller projects, an exchange of letters may suffice as a contract, as long as it covers everything. For larger schemes, use a standard form of contract.

RIBA Appointment Contracts

These are flexible documents that can be tailored to cover a wide range of project types and procurement paths, from restorations to new builds, from design-and-build to management contracting. They include a Memorandum of Agreement or contractual letter, a Schedule of Services and a Schedule of Fees. If you make modifications to the standard agreement, have them checked by your legal advisor.

Which procurement path?

Construction management? Design and build? Or the traditional route? There are several alternative procurement paths open to clients, and your architect can advise you on the most effective for your business and project.

The RIBA's published policy on procurement* recommends that the route chosen provides:

- the best value to the commissioning client, present and future users, the public and society in general
- a clear, collaborative and creative process
- an appropriate balance to be reached between economic, social and environmental factors
- an appropriate balance to be reached between conservation and innovation.

*

To obtain a copy of the policy contact the RIBA Practice Department on 020 7307 3749.

The quality of your finished building will reflect the quality of your brief. This is the key document defining your vision of the finished building, and of how the project will be managed. For your architect, it is the central reference point that will guide the direction they take and the services they provide.

How to get it right

Wherever possible, your brief should be clear and unambiguous. It should enshrine a common understanding between you and your architect.

Seek their help in formulating the brief. The process may foster a number of discussions and help to establish the dialogue between you that the project needs. Above all the document should describe:

- Your motivations and expectations: what do you hope to achieve by this project, in the short and long term, for your organisation and others? An image change? A more comfortable or better-equipped working environment? An asset for the community?
- The functions of the finished project: who will use it, and what activities will they be engaged in?
- A design direction: contrasting or in keeping with existing buildings? Contemporary or traditional? Are there certain materials, fixtures or finishes you favour? Is sustainability an issue for you?

- Authority for decision-making: who will sign off decisions about design, about costs and about day-to-day matters on-site?
- Timetables and budgets: when should key stages be completed, how much should they cost, and how will they be financed?

You may still be uncertain about some of these issues, in which case your architect may be able to carry out some preliminary research or feasibility studies that will help you firm up your requirements.





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Being a good client

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It is vital to find the right architect to work with. However, to be a success, your project will need the right kind of client too.

Have your own structure in place

The project will need to be properly resourced and managed at your end as well as by the architect. It may be necessary to appoint a committee of carefully chosen people to share decision-making and review responsibilities.

These might include areas such as: planning (deciding what or even whether to build); scheduling; budgeting and fundraising; and cost control.

Make sure that one person becomes the designated point of contact with the architect. They should carry authority as your representative at planning sessions and project meetings.

10 factors for success

Finally, a checklist. In 2003, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) published a comprehensive guide for clients on creating excellent buildings*. Its list of the key skills and attributes shared by clients on successful projects is reproduced here. Follow its advice and keep your project on track.

- _ Provide strong client leadership
- _ Give enough time at the right time
- _ Learn from your own and other successful projects
- _ Develop and communicate a clear brief
- _ Make a realistic financial commitment from the outset
- _ Adopt integrated processes
- _ Find the right people for the job
- _ Respond and contribute to the context
- _ Commit to sustainability
- _ Sign off all key stages

*

Creating excellent buildings: a guide for clients can be downloaded free of charge from www.cabe.org.uk/publications.

Further information

For more help in selecting and appointing an architect,
contact the RIBA Client Services office in your area:

RIBA Headquarters and London cs@inst.riba.org 020 7307 3700

RIBA East riba.east@inst.riba.org 01223 566 285

RIBA East Midlands riba.eastmidlands@inst.riba.org 01522 837 480

RIBA North riba.north@inst.riba.org 0191 232 4436

RIBA North West riba.northwest@inst.riba.org 0151 703 0107

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Wales (RSAW) rsaw@inst.riba.org 029 2087 4753

RIBA Bookshop

All the latest books, guides and documentation
on architecture and construction - everything
to help you select an architect and run a
successful project - are available for order
at www.ribabookshops.com

Or call the Public Information Line on
0906 302 0400, 10.00-17.00 (GMT), Mon-Fri.
(Information line calls charged at 50p per minute
in the UK. These lines cannot be accessed from
outside the UK.)