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in partnership with the Royal Institute of British Architects

**Returners' Course  
for  
Architects who have been away from Practice**

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**1.00 Introduction**

Following a successful Pilot course in May 2008 London Metropolitan University's Department of Architecture and Spatial Design, in partnership with the Royal Institute of British Architects, is running their second Returners' Course in May 2009. The course is aimed at qualified architects who have taken a career break and now wish to return to practice.

London Metropolitan University (London Met) and the Department of Architecture and Spatial Design (ASD) are uniquely placed to run the course due to their existing emphasis on linking the profession and the study of architecture.

ASD has a strong base of practising architects who teach in the department, who run innovative and well-respected practices at a variety of scales representing many of the skills bases and contemporary challenges facing the profession. The Department has a strong belief that architectural training should involve hands-on practical experience of the building process, expressed through the inclusion of live projects in the curriculum, and is committed to providing support to young practices and recent graduates.

This ethos has recently been reinforced by the formation of ASD Projects, an in-house design and consultancy unit and RIBA Registered Practice that allows staff, graduates and students to undertake consultancy and commissions within a supportive professional environment. ASD Projects are responsible for administering the Returners' Course.

ASD Projects allows young practitioners to take on projects that they might otherwise be unable to do, by providing the legal framework, quality assurance, public insurances and professional back-up. Its remit is expanding into the incubation of young practices within the department, as well as forging collaborative partnerships with larger practices and taking on consultancy relevant to its particular expertise in participatory and socially engaged design.

## **2.00 Approach to the Returners' Course**

London Met's approach to providing training for returning architects is to provide skills and to build confidence whilst helping to establish a peer group that will support course participants after the course is completed. Accordingly our proposal establishes social as well as academic and professional structures

At the centre of our proposal is the use of a live case study which anchors and enlivens the learning process. We have therefore incorporated an in-depth study of a building as the means for the participants to gain a genuine understanding of all parts of the current procurement and building process. Through understanding a single building in all its stages – feasibility, commissioning, design, political and financial context through to tender, contract administration and site supervision – we consider that returners will have a more direct understanding of the architect's role than through a more lecture-based format that deals with each of these specific issues separately.

Each day is generally structured with more didactic areas covered in morning seminars when the participants will be fresh, and more practical and discursive sessions in the afternoon when they will be able to ask pertinent questions on site or in practice visits, prompted by their learning in the morning sessions.

Our approach sees the course as the central part of an ongoing learning and support experience, including a preliminary appraisal of the participants' needs and subsequent support, mentoring and follow-up, both online and by telephone, with an allowance for face-to-face support in addition. Advice on issues such as CPD and Lifelong Learning ambitions will also be offered for a period of 12 months after the course and participants will be welcome to attend all open lectures and seminars at ASD during this period.

ASD Projects draws upon a wide range of contacts within many scales of practice and one of the invaluable opportunities we can offer returning architects is the chance to network among professionals who not only can offer advice from an employer's perspective, but may also be able to signpost opportunities for short or long-term employment. This network of practices will also be able to offer participants of the course to attend their in-house CPD training and activities for a period following completion of the course.

More formally, the course will be lead by Anne Markey of ASD Projects who will spend the week with the returners, answer questions and prompt discussion when necessary to ensure that the participants gain the most out of the programme.

### **3.00 Aims and Objectives of Proposed Returners' Course**

#### **3.1 Course Participants**

The course is aimed at qualified architects who have taken a career break or have been working abroad for a number of years and who now wish to return to the profession as a practising architect.

To encourage maximum interaction between participants and course contributors each course will accommodate a maximum of 16 participants and a minimum of 12.

### 3.2 Course Content

Presentations and seminars are programmed generally to last between one and one and a half hours and are complemented by practice visits and site visits. The presentations and seminars will be led by London Met tutors and by professional consultants with a particular specialism such as project management, environmentally responsible design, interview skills and CAD who contribute regularly to the Department.

The core content of the syllabus will be prepared by Anne Markey, principal architect with ASD Projects and Gordon MacLaren course leader for the Diploma in Professional Practice.

### 3.3 Course Outcome

On completion of the course the participants will be expected to demonstrate skill and care in conformity with current standards of the architect's profession.

It is intended that award of the RIBA Certificate of Achievement will confirm to employers that the course participant has reinforced and refreshed their knowledge and understanding of the role and obligations of an architect and their ability to practice as such that they had previously acquired prior to their career break.

The learning outcomes of the course will make reference to the jointly held RIBA/ARB criteria for RIBA Parts 2 and 3, however the course doesn't intend to deliver the criteria in full. Rather the course will respond to the needs of particular students and cohorts, matching the learning experience to cover their requirements. It is intended that that subject to further consultation with RIBA and the ARB that the course will be recognised by both.

## 4.00 **Programme**

### 4.1 Preliminary consultation and preparation for the course

For some potential returners the course may not be necessary, or the best form of training, depending on what role within architecture they would like to return to. We would therefore aim to conduct a one-to-one phone consultation with each potential

attendee before they register for the course, to assess their particular needs and if necessary tailor the course accordingly. During this consultation and as part of the course, we would seek to advise the participants on the many options that they could follow in returning to architecture, which would use their 'soft skills' or experience gained during their break from architecture to the benefit of their careers. These might include design advisory services, VCO sector work, client advisory, in-house design officer, work for local authorities, property development, practice management or administration, in addition to practising as a registered architect or as an architectural assistant.

After registration and prior to attending the course, we will also send participants a short reading list of books and journals to encourage them to start thinking about issues in contemporary architectural design and practice.

## 4.2 Syllabus

### 4.21 **Day 1: Confidence building and setting the context.**

10.00-11.00am:

An introduction to the course by Anne Markey, principal architect at ASD Projects.

11.30am-1.00pm:

A wide-ranging keynote talk by Professor Robert Mull, Head of Department of Architecture and Spatial Design at London Metropolitan University setting out the 'state of the profession'.

The aim is to set the scene for returning to architectural practice, with particular reference to the changing nature of the profession, the variety of opportunities that exist and the wider changing context of the construction industry.

Setting the ground for a discussion about the changing roles of architects and the opportunities these offer for returners. How 'soft skills' and other transferable skills that returners may have picked up while in career breaks or engaged in other activities may be relevant and marketable to the profession.

1.00pm-2.00pm Lunch – opportunity for further discussion between course participants enabling them to understand their backgrounds, what their personal goals are, when they last practiced, what their interests are, etc.

2.30pm-3.30pm:

The University Liaison Officer at the Architects Registration Board to give a presentation on registration/re-registration as an architect and the role of ARB.

4.00pm-6.00pm:

Skills workshop

This will be lead by a professional trainer from London Metropolitan University's Student Services Team and will focus on presentation skills, portfolio and CV preparation interview skills, confidence building and communication skills.

6.30pm-9.00pm:

Reception with short talks about personal experiences of returning to architecture by architects.

The reception will also offer the opportunity to network with ASD staff, graduates, alumni, fellow returners and associated practices etc.

**4.22 Day 2: Day 2: Design and Procurement**

9.30am-11.00am: Current trends in risk management for architects

11.00am-11.30am: Break and coffee

11.30am-1.00pm: Seminar on project management and procurement.

1.00pm-2.00pm: Lunch

2.00pm-5.00pm: Practice visit to the practice responsible to the case study project.

Introduction to the office

- How the office is structured and managed
- How they get work in
- What technical/CAD systems they run.
- What in-house CPD training is offered to staff
- Opportunity to look around and see how the working environment feels.
- How they are different/similar to other practices and their competitors.
- How they see the profession developing
- Employment of returners and what the practice would look for in a returner

Introduction to the case study project for the next two days.

- Talk by the project architect/director about the project's inception and design.
- How the client found the architect and the appointment of the architect
- The process of refining the brief, early ambitions and concepts for the building and how these were realised/compromised.
- The planning context, negotiation with the planners, regeneration issues in relation to the London Plan/local UDPs/AAPs etc
- How public engagement and consultation were facilitated during the briefing and design process.
- How the internal team and wider design team was constituted, how the design team was managed and co-ordinated.
- The nature of the contract and subcontracts
- Issues that arose, problems as well as successes.

Discussion about these stages of the project, question and answer session.

This session to be illustrated with the project documentation – drawings, reports etc – and also to include examples of client presentations (powerpoints), public consultation/engagement materials, planning application and building control submissions etc.

### **Day 3: Planning and Construction**

9.30am-11.00am: Planning Update

11.00am-11.30am: Break and coffee

11.30am-1.00pm: Seminar on recent updates to construction legislation

1.00-2.00pm: Lunch

2.00pm-5.00pm: Site visit to the case study building,

- Site tour with architect and contractor
- See how the detailed design is carried out in practice, sequencing of trades, what issues have arisen.
- How issues covered in the morning seminars have been addressed in practice
- Discuss areas of cost/time overrun, why, nature of contractual relationship, project management.
- Further on-site briefings on CDM, health and safety etc

### **Day 4: Specialisms and Design**

9.30am-1.00pm: Elective choice of seminars:

- CAD and ICT skills including presentation methods;
- Housing design;
- Participatory design;
- Design as research;
- Sustainable design;
- Urban design;
- Prefabrication and new methods of construction

The choice of seminars available would be based on information obtained on the registration of the participants, about their particular areas of interest or lack of skills.

**Or** a half day design workshop led by ASD tutors. The type and size of the project will suit a half-day session and will be sited nearby to enable a short morning site visit.

The aim is not to judge the design quality of participants' work but to enable them to gain confidence in their design skills in a supportive environment.

2.00pm-5.00pm: Small practice visit

- Introduction to the office, how the office is structured and managed
- How they set up and established themselves in the marketplace, marketing, how they get work
- What technical/CAD systems they run.
- How they are different/similar to other practices and their competitors.
- How they see the profession developing
- How they use returners, what they would be looking for.
- Fee scales and financial considerations of small practices, work-life balance etc.
- Talk through one or two projects in terms of the challenges throughout the process.

6.00pm: Course Dinner

## 5.00 Ongoing Support and Mentoring

A dedicated website will be accessible for participants after the course with a forum/message boards, RSS feeds etc to enable ongoing support for queries. The forum will be accessible by password only to prevent abuse and moderated weekly to ensure that queries receive a prompt response. It will also enable peer support among the group.

## **6.00 Costs**

The fee per participant will include a preliminary consultation; attendance at the course with accommodation as an optional extra; daytime meals and refreshments, a reception on the first evening and course dinner towards the end of the week, course handouts, drawing and modelmaking materials and 12 months online support.

The fee per participant is **£750.00**.

*Please note that this fee is based on 15 participants attending the course and would be increased to £950.00 if this number were to be reduced to 12.*