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CVS

What do you look for when reviewing a CV?
We like to see evidence of a candidate's work history, (including jobs not related to architecture), as well as an understanding of what you might be doing when working as a year-out student.

We receive lots of CVs telling us about brilliant design, but the reality is that there's a lot of learning to do on a year-out placement. Commonly, you need to learn about preparing schedules, working as part of a team and dealing efficiently and conscientiously with tasks – no matter how menial. These would be good points to try and get across at interview!

What are the most common mistakes that you see on CVs?
Communication is a significant part of our job. Any CVs with poor grammar or spelling tend to indicate a lack of attention to detail, or a lack of interest in completing tasks properly.

I'm personally not much concerned with people's hobbies – but positions of responsibility (union officer, charity working etc) are useful indicators of a grounded team worker.
Photographs can also sometimes be a negative, especially if the pose is ill considered – they're not really necessary on a CV.

PORTFOLIOS

What would you expect to see on a portfolio?
If a student has any previous work experience, it's good to see evidence of this. Lots of portfolios that we see are fantastic graphic pieces of work, but don't seem to be underpinned by the substance of the actual design.

If we see a portfolio which indicates that somebody can draw, we will set it aside to look at later. The problem with computer renderings is that everybody is using the same software and it's easy to view lots of portfolios in the same way – because they all have the same high quality graphic style.

Do you prefer digital or hard copy format?
PDF is probably best, but unless it's under 1MB, it's deleted! Hard copy is good too as you have something to put to one side to review later. Oddly shaped or over designed portfolios are interesting and make candidates stand out – but they still have to contain the essential information.
Websites can be frustrating if they are fiddly and complicated to use.

What should candidates avoid when creating and submitting their portfolios?
Excessive graphics with little evidence of buildings.

APPLICATIONS

Where do you advertise positions in your company, and do you accept speculative applications?
We always look at speculative applications we receive and we advertise on the university's architecture notice boards.

INTERVIEWS

What sort of questions do you ask at an interview?
We ask if a candidate has worked in an architect's office before and what they want to get out of a placement. We also look through their portfolio and make sure they are showing us *their* work and not group projects executed by others.

What can make a candidate stand out at interview, and what can put you off hiring them?
People stand out if they've made an effort to find out something about our practice. Having worked anywhere at all (coffee shops etc.) is a big draw for us, since it means that the individual wants to work and has started to develop an attitude to work.

People who speak in a derogatory way about previous employers have put us off – if they talk like that about people they've worked for in the past, how will they talk about us in the future? Excessive confidence in your own ability is also a worrying sign. It's a long road from part-one student to qualified architect and we like to see confidence, but with a healthy degree of caution.

Personal hygiene is important – having a crafty cigarette just before an interview is not a good idea!
Above all, we like to see a personable attitude and a willingness to learn.

AND FINALLY…
What are your top tips for students applying for professional experience?
Be concise and make it clear that you are flexible and hard working. Understand that it's unlikely you will be designing fantastic buildings in your year out. It's more of an apprenticeship and candidates need to demonstrate to an employer that they're keen to work in that sort of role and are up to the challenge.