transitions: Architects-in-Practice working with Architects-in-Education is an academic research project that investigates the relationship between the worlds of architectural practice and architectural education to address the core theme of employability and the underlying educational principle of student engagement.

Contemporary undergraduates present challenges that are not fully addressed by the contemporary university learning environment. Of particular relevance to this project is the transition issues that students commit to many first year undergraduates, progressing from the shadow of learning environment of secondary level education to the deeper learning environment of university education.

Failure to establish meaningful and effective transition for undergraduates can lead to academic underachievement. The importance of aiding students’ transition into higher education is reinforced by appreciating that undergraduate are likely to arrive with learning strategies suitable to school and college life, which are less effective in university environment...


This project seeks to foster a considered, active engagement of the student cohort with research that informs their learning environment and enhances their learning experience, allowing the students to become co-creators of their curriculum.

Aims:
- Facilitate student engagement as co-creators in research and learning;
- Actively engage students with learning that addresses the transition issues that are common to first year undergraduates;
- Develop a peer-reviewed curriculum development process that will involve both Architectural education and Architectural practice;
- Enhance (employability skills and prospects) through embedding of considered employability skills in the first year Architectural curriculum.

Method - planning:
Group made up of both student & architects recruited from the worlds of architectural practice; identify, analyse and develop an architectural proposal for a real client - PLACE, The Architecture and Built Environment Centre for Northern Ireland.

Through considered stages of collaboration, active research and reflection, these groups critique their existing architectural curriculum and in doing so, become co-creators in the process.

Method - implementation:
Through active research, the students critique their architectural curriculum and become co-creators of their own research and learning. A number of corresponding collaborative workshops provide the opportunity for reflection on, and evaluation of, the research in progress.

The project builds on the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (2007). Enhancement Themes: Employability, Effective Learning and Assessment. This study looked at ways of linking learning effectively to employability skills. The suggestions and advice offered to students by the sample of graduate recruiters, is regarded by the teacher as essential for development, can be grouped under three broad headings:

- exploration - analysis, reflection and development - investigation, preparation and presentation

The project develops this overview to address the subject-specific, fundamental architectural employability skills of communication, representation and professional presentation. Year 1 architectural students and professional architectural practitioners, contributing as equal participants, actively research the practical, key valued architectural curriculum through a project-based learning exercise typical to both the worlds of education and practice that addresses these key identified areas:

- exploration is made possible through direct engagement with recruiters
- analysis, reflection and development are made possible through the implementation of collaborative workshops & a reflective blog
- investigation, preparation and presentation are made possible through a project based-learning exercise focusing on communication, representation & professional presentation

A selection of quotes from the Reflective Blog [highlights the student’s experience and key learning]:

I feel that we need more projects such as this one, where we can take a step away from a ‘normal’ brief and learn in an alternative way… I look forward to being able to take part in such a project in second year.

I have learnt a lot about myself and how I feel about the course and improving my employability skills to help build my career in architecture… I have learnt a lot about myself and how I feel about the course and improving my employability skills to help build my career in architecture.

I think some teachers… are so focused on getting stuff done that they don’t pay attention to their students, which I think are the most valuable resources for the future. (Mihans, Long & Felten, 2008)

Asking students to talk about their education is so simple that – whether we are teachers, parents, researchers, or policymakers – we inevitably forget to do it. (White, 2010)

Reflective Blog Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. (2008). Quality Enhancement - Enhancing employability skills in Year 1 architecture curriculum

themes: The First Year Experience. Curriculum design for the first year:

- enhancing employability skills and prospects through embedding of considered employability skills in the first year Architectural curriculum.
- facilitating student engagement as co-creators in research and learning;
- developing a peer-reviewed curriculum development process that will involve both Architectural education and Architectural practice;
- enhancing (employability skills and prospects) through embedding of considered employability skills in the first year Architectural curriculum.

Method - implementation:

Through structural collaboration with professional architects the project bridges the gap between architectural education and the world of architectural practice.