SGP

Architecture and Mentorship

Five Ways to Support the Next Generation



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Architecture shapes how people live, work and connect. With a lasting impact on our communities, the profession has a responsibility to pass knowledge and experience on to the next generation.

Mentorship plays an important role in this. From helping a new colleague use software to offering advice on a project or demonstrating effective client communication, everyday interactions provide opportunities to support others' development. Mentoring is not limited to formal schemes; it is part of how knowledge is shared across a practice. So, how can we make these opportunities count?

FIVE TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL MENTORING

1. Make it collaborative, not one-sided

The best mentoring relationships are built on shared learning. Experienced professionals can offer valuable knowledge, while mentees bring fresh ideas, different perspectives and new ways of approaching challenges.

Encouraging questions, inviting contributions and remaining open to alternative viewpoints creates an environment where everyone can learn. Even when an idea does not work as expected, there is an opportunity to reflect, adapt and improve.

2. Share your experiences openly

Practical insight can be just as valuable as technical knowledge. Sharing successes and mistakes helps emerging professionals understand that expertise develops over time and that challenges are a normal part of architectural practice.

Design problems and unexpected project issues can be difficult to resolve in isolation. Discussing these challenges with colleagues can introduce alternative approaches and solutions that may not have been considered. Being open about how challenges are overcome helps others avoid similar pitfalls, build confidence and recognise that they are not expected to have all the answers immediately.

3. Create a supportive environment

Mentoring is not limited to formal meetings. Everyday conversations, quick questions and opportunities to reflect on a project can all contribute to professional development.

Creating a supportive environment means ensuring colleagues feel comfortable asking questions and seeking guidance. We all experience busy periods, but taking time to explain a process or respond thoughtfully, rather than dismissing a question, can make a lasting difference to someone's confidence and willingness to learn.

4. Learn from what works in practice

Every project brings valuable lessons, and colleagues at all levels have insights that can benefit the wider team. Sharing these experiences helps build collective knowledge beyond individual mentoring relationships.

At SGP, lessons learnt workshops and the increasing use of design reviews provide opportunities to reflect on completed projects, discuss how challenges were resolved and identify what could be done differently. Learning from both successes and setbacks helps teams apply these insights to future projects, strengthen collaboration and avoid repeating mistakes.

Embedding knowledge-sharing into everyday practice ensures valuable experience can benefit colleagues across teams and inform future project work.

5. Give people responsibility, not just advice

Applying knowledge through practical tasks helps develop skills and build confidence. Under the mentor's guidance and with their approval, mentees can take responsibility for appropriate tasks, contribute to project decisions and work through design or technical challenges.

Discussing the rationale behind design choices and construction details helps connect theory with practice. Providing responsibility at an appropriate level, with suitable oversight, encourages independent thinking and practical development while enabling mentees to make a meaningful contribution to the team.

HOW SGP IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

SGP's Education Social Values Group supports the next generation in exploring architecture and understanding the profession.

Our university RIBA Mentorship Scheme brings students together for three sessions each year. Topics include the roles of different teams, CV and portfolio development, interview preparation, site visits and an insight into a typical day in practice.

SGP also runs Better Buildings workshops in local primary and secondary schools, introducing pupils to architecture and sustainability. In addition, colleagues participate in university guest critiques, providing feedback on students' design projects.

Together, these initiatives help aspiring architects gain a clearer understanding of the profession and prepare for their future careers.

BUILDING A STRONGER PROFESSION TOGETHER

Looking back on my own career, I recognise how valuable mentorship could have been when I was starting out. Having someone to offer guidance, challenge assumptions and help me understand the realities of practice would have made a real difference.

We cannot always anticipate the challenges others will face, but we can share our experiences, encourage questions and create opportunities to learn. By making mentoring collaborative, practical and part of our everyday culture, we can help colleagues grow in confidence while strengthening the future of our profession.

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