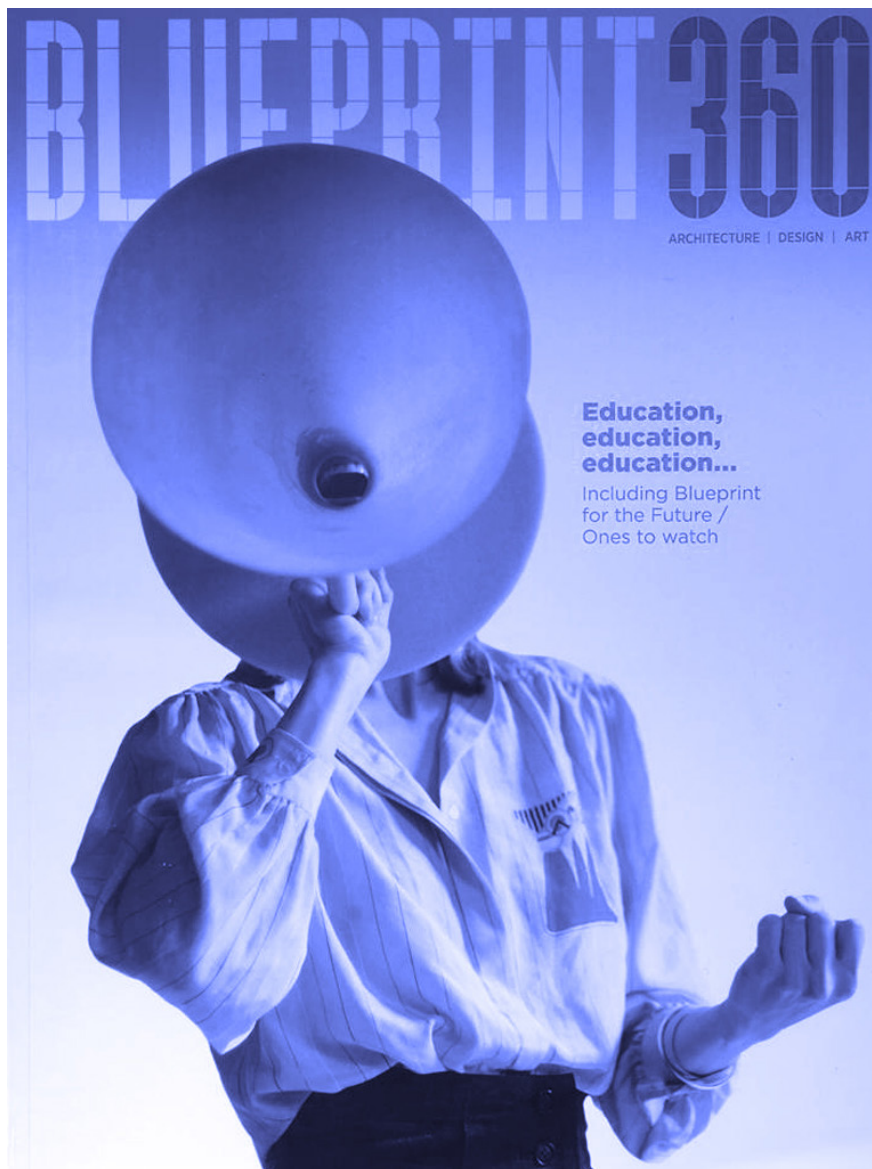




The Diversity Divide in Architectural Education



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The following article was written by Zoë Berman and published in Blueprint Magazine.

There was consternation expressed on social media following The Future of Education seminar organised by Blueprint last month. The event was billed as 'exploring how architectural education needs to evolve to respond to the challenges and changes of today'. If the makeup of that panel – Heads of Schools from nine architecture faculties in London – was a barometer, one would have to assume the future of architectural education will be 90% male and entirely white.

The short film *Architecture for All* recently launched by the Architecture Foundation is a powerful wake-up call to the profession, pointing out the alarming lack of diversity amongst educators and built environment practitioners. A survey carried out by the *Architects' Journal* revealed students from poorer backgrounds are being priced out of architectural education – narrowing the pathway to education such that, as one respondent commented "only a certain class of person can jump on board". Students studying architecture now will become the next generation of lecturers and practitioners, but if they cannot see tutors who look or speak like themselves, a future in academia is unlikely to look promising.

Tahera Rouf, an associate at RCKa, expanding on some of the comments she made in the TRT World TV documentary, *Structural Inequality: Why Does Diversity Matter?* told me 'My own education was highly internationally diverse but really lacked local diversity. And all our tutors were white. Over the years, I've toned down my full East London accent. I don't think it would have been well received! It's a subconscious thing, but you start to realise you are received better... presenting in a way that people recognise in themselves.'

A contributing factor towards the lack of diversity amongst design educators is the fact that underpaid work hits hardest the people who come from poorer backgrounds, members of ethnic minorities, parents and carers, and those with disabilities. No one goes into teaching architecture for money, and many universities are being run on short - term business cases, rather than long- term socially informed economics.

As a practitioner - educator, the best teaching pay I have received is at the Reading School of Architecture, where Head of School Lorraine Farrelly talks openly about the need for staff skill and hard work to be matched with commensurate hourly rates. Last year my team occasionally struggled with childcare cover, but worked collectively to manage the gaps, believing it essential that skilled tutors can continue to teach during all stages of life – and that students see it is possible to have a baby, and a career. But hourly paid fixed - term contracts at universities mean visiting lecturers have limited workers' rights. This impacts all of us, especially women, because fixed contracts do not include maternity pay.

The lack of flexible work patterns in academia is problematic. Advertised university posts offer options for job sharing or part - time working but in reality, academic timetables are anything but flexible. Bureaucratic rigours of university programming give little space for anyone who needs to work non - standard hours. The dominant discussion around alternative models for architectural education – such as The London School of Architecture and the freshly launched Global Free Unit – has focused on improving access to education for students. These models will also enable and support a far broader range of educators. As a female Head of School, Farrelly is in the minority. The most recent RIBA Education statistics show that of full - time equivalent teaching staff, 35% are women. This is not good enough – but data on the ethnic diversity of staff in architectural academia isn't being gathered at all.

Steps are being taken by some to rewrite course syllabi to address the divide. Dr. Harriet Harris of the Royal College of Art has assembled the Women Write Architecture resource to help in compiling gender - balanced reading lists for architecture students, saying "The lack of gender representation in the profession is being sustained and maintained by schools of architecture – if fewer students know about the work of women, ultimately their work is ignored and they're less likely to be considered for senior academic roles." All teachers need to be sharp - eyed about the diversity of the people behind the material – written and built – that we present to students.

We're at risk of becoming an ugly profession if there's a need to tone down your accent, language or cultural nuance to 'fit in'. Teaching institutions need to work much harder to recruit tutors from a range of backgrounds, so more students will see a place for themselves in academia and in practice. The balances in ethnicity, gender and social background must be made equal right to the top of the academic ladder. Staff need to be properly recompensed, and their workers' rights strengthened. Education will be the richer for it – having a range of perspectives amongst teachers brings a broader range of knowledge, insight and ideas. In design terms, the production of spaces that are accessible to all can be much safer and easier to use – and more appealing – for everyone. There's a growing surge of interest in new pedagogical structures. These models offer the potential to be flexible, and supportive of people from all walks of life, to encourage a broad societal cross - section of those who are taught – and those who teach.

