

Preparing for a Future in the Built Environment: An Interview with Loughborough University Architecture Student Hugh Westcott

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Hugh Westcott stands out as one of the new generation of trainee architects making their mark in the built environment sector.

Now in his final year of studies at Loughborough University, Hugh has spent the past twelve months immersed in industry, gaining invaluable experience with top architecture and consultancy firms. When we speak via teams, he is currently in his final placement with the international Built Environment firm [Buro Happold](#), which is home to a global community of world-leading engineering, advisory and design professionals.

His insights into the sector, his aspirations, and the challenges he faces offer a compelling account of a fledgling professional navigating his way in the industry.

Join me as I hear his thoughts on his career journey so far.

What made you decide on a career in Architecture?

I've always aspired to be in a career that impacts the future. Seeing firsthand the societal impact that architecture can have, has only strengthened my excitement about joining the profession.

I found out about architecture whilst I was still at school. I had several opportunities when I was quite young to experience working in architectural environments—I remember being around 17 going out on site

and collaborating with industry practitioners and being blown away by it all.

How did the opportunity come about?

I was fortunate to be involved with several industry initiatives through EDT (Engineering Development Trust), opening up opportunities to young people to learn about architecture and the built environment. It was a great introduction to working on briefs and presenting them in a real life work environment, to my peers and industry professionals. These experiences gave me my first taste of what I could potentially achieve within this career. I was also given an industry mentor who was especially supportive, and helped me in navigating the educational pathway into the career, which can be very daunting if you are not familiar. I'm currently finishing a placement as part of my undergraduate degree, where I've been working full-time as an Architectural Assistant.

Tell me a little about Buro Happold. What is its core area of activity, and what is it currently focused on delivering?

At its heart, Buro Happold is about creativity and collaboration. It's a multidisciplinary firm encompassing advisory, structural engineering, design, and planning. The firm excels at integrating these technical aspects to create exceptional outcomes for clients. What sets Buro Happold apart is its holistic approach, ensuring that every facet of a project and the work that it is involved in adds value to the client. My role has been quite varied, currently I am focusing on integration; supporting teams from various internal specialisms, and communicating our comprehensive offerings to clients. I've also been involved in some specific design activities, which have been incredibly rewarding.

What other firms have you worked with, and how have they shaped your career journey so far?

This placement with Buro Happold has been quite different from my previous ones, where I was more project-focused. What I've learned is that the career path in architecture is much broader than I initially expected. There are numerous directions I can take, whether specializing in technical aspects of the built environment or pursuing broader opportunities. The industry career path isn't as linear as school and university might suggest; it's about exploring the many possibilities and finding your niche, which has been enlightening.

How have your technical abilities progressed during your placement year?

There's been a noticeable transformation in my skillset and I've gained confidence as my responsibilities have increased. I started in a very junior role, learning the basics of the technical work involved. Over time, my autonomy has increased significantly. I've had the chance to present my ideas formally, such as a recent project using the Rapid Prototyping approach. It's been a great journey, seeing my abilities and understanding develop.

What most excites you about the profession and the future as you see it?

What excites me most is the integration of technology, particularly Artificial Intelligence(AI), into our daily workflows. I'm keen to see how we, as practitioners, can optimize and innovate through technology. I

believe embracing these advancements and being agile in our approach will lead to greater design innovation. I do think that the ability to comfortably work across various platforms and technology interfaces will also be crucial skills for the future.

What are some of the best projects you've been involved in? What learnings have you taken away?

Two standout projects have been Venue Performance Rating (VPR) and Buro Happold Object Modelling (BHoM), both were notable for their computational design applications. VPR allowed us to evaluate multiple design options quickly and efficiently, implementing data driven design in real-time. We could immediately gauge user experience and create a scientific-based profile, making it easier to track and measure the outcomes we were seeing in the model. Comparing our designs against existing models such as the stadiums for the Tottenham Hotspur and Everton football clubs and analyzing the match day experience, is something that we could not have easily done previously. This option has been a game-changer for us in terms of how we now design.



Northumberland Development Project (Tottenham Hotspur)

How do you see the relationship between technical specialisms like architecture and project management?

I've gained a much deeper understanding of how interrelated the various technical specialisms within the built-environment sector are. Being part of a multidisciplinary practice like Buro Happold highlights the benefits of integration and the added value from fields like project management. The synergy between different specialisms really is crucial for successful project delivery.

Are there any areas you think the profession could improve, especially for young professionals?

Entering the profession is undoubtedly challenging. It takes a lot of energy, effort and perseverance. Support from experienced practitioners can be very impactful for an aspiring student, especially for those from non-traditional backgrounds. Mentorship and guidance can make a significant difference in supporting young people wanting to enter the field.

Have you faced any challenges in your role, and how have you overcome them?

It's been tough, especially growing my network and creating opportunities to engage with industry. The advice given in school and university often doesn't align with industry realities. Seeking real-world experience and advice from built environment professionals has been essential. Being proactive and taking control of finding opportunities is key. They are rarely just handed to you.

What advice would you give to young people starting their careers? What have been your three biggest lessons so far?

Firstly, my advice is to be open-minded and look beyond just academics. Building your network is crucial. Speak to current professionals for insights and to help you navigate your career path. Secondly, I would advise that you always follow up on conversations and regularly attend a range of events, as they can lead to opportunities. Lastly, taking short courses alongside your studies broadens your knowledge base. Also, developing peer-to-peer networks are equally important.

What's on the horizon for you professionally? How do you see your career progressing?

I've enjoyed the work that I have been involved in integrating multidisciplinary aspects and creating relationships between teams. It has enhanced both my technical knowledge and non-technical skills, which are core to doing well in firms like Buro Happold. I'll be returning to university in September, however I'm already planning to incorporate some consultancy work while finishing my studies. But my immediate focus is on completing my dissertation and planning the next steps for my Chartership.

What do you see as the biggest opportunities for people wanting to enter the profession?

Without doubt it is an exciting time in this sector, and there are many opportunities. As we confront vital social and environmental challenges, creative solutions are essential. The emphasis on teamwork and the access to advanced technology are huge advantages. The profession is evolving, and there's a lot to look

forward to.

How would suggest other's looking to join the profession, prepare their skillsets to take on the future challenges of the industry?

My final advice for those thinking about joining the profession is to go for it. Consider apprenticeships and hands-on experience as well as just the university routes. Look for paid and unpaid work opportunities through schools, universities, and industry organizations. There are so many competitions and continuous learning opportunities are fully supported and endorsed by RIBA.

How can readers find out more about what you and Buro Happold are doing?

Buro Happold is involved in many exciting projects, especially in sustainability. We're working on developments to improve decarbonisation and introducing design for manufacture workflows, all of which are cutting edge.

As my time with Hugh draws to a close, I am overwhelmed by his maturity and it is difficult to believe that he'll be heading back to university in the fall.

Hugh Westcott's journey is a testament to the exciting and evolving nature of the architecture profession. As well as Hugh's tenacity in finding a way to drive his own opportunities create his success.

Hugh's experiences and insights offer a valuable perspective for anyone considering a career in the built environment. And a reminder that the profession is a hive of opportunity for those willing to take the initiative and have the courage to see where the path takes them.

For more information, keep an eye the [Buro Happold](#) website and career pages [LINK](#)

And if you are interested in finding out about the [Loughborough University](#) Undergraduate Course in Architecture, with a placement year in industry, you can get to their webpage here [LINK](#). And finally you can follow and connect with [Hugh](#) via his LinkedIn profile.