

# 11. Registration:



: women,  
equity,  
architecture.

Only 21% of registered architects are women. This is despite women having comprised approximately 40% of architecture graduates in Australia for three decades.

Encouraging, supporting and mentoring those women who choose to register is a symbolic and practical contribution to gender equity in the profession.

This guide outlines the obstacles that women may face, and strategies to manage them, and provides advice about supporting women who wish to register as architects.



**PARLOUR GUIDES  
TO EQUITABLE  
PRACTICE**

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## Why get registered?

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The term ‘architect’ is legally protected in Australia – only those who have registered are eligible to call themselves architects. Registration is partly a matter of consumer protection, ensuring that people calling themselves architects have the requisite skill and experience. But it is also one of the principal ways in which the profession defines itself, and one of the main measures of professional participation.

The advantages of registration are both symbolic and practical, and include the following:

- Registration provides formal recognition of skills, training and experience in the eyes of the public and the profession.
- The registration process offers learning and networking opportunities, and is an important early- to mid-career milestone.
- Registration enables an architect to set up her own practice.
- Being a registered architect gives access to many of the systems used to obtain and reward architectural work.
- Many leadership roles in the profession are only accessible to registered architects.
- Our research indicates that registered architects earn higher salaries.
- Last but not least, after years of study and work you can officially/legally call yourself an architect.

## Obstacles to registration

Many people trained in architecture make a deliberate choice not to become registered, finding that it is not required in the kind of work they wish to do. But others experience particular obstacles.

The following impediments have been raised by participants in our research. Some of these affect women more than men, while others are experienced by both genders to some degree. It is important to be aware of these possible barriers, in order to be less restricted by them.

- The registration process can be difficult to manage alongside other commitments. This becomes more complex as candidates get older and accumulate more responsibilities.
- Taking time out of the workplace on parental leave and/or working part-time can make it harder to log the required hours.
- The cost of registering and maintaining registration (through continuing professional development and insurance costs) is cited as one of the more significant barriers to registration. These are particular factors for those on career breaks or parental leave.
- There is a perception that the longer you leave registration the harder it gets, and that nuanced experience can be an impediment rather than an asset.
- It can be difficult to obtain the required mix of experience, especially in practices that follow less traditional models, work in specialist areas or use non-standard contracts.
- Some people with international qualifications find the process for assessing and approving these qualifications to be particularly onerous.
- Worryingly, a number of respondents to the Parlour surveys had poor experiences of the registration process, particularly the interview, and some women cited examples of explicit gender-based discrimination.



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## Why does it matter?

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Although there are mixed opinions about whether registration matters or not, it is an important indicator of professional participation and representation. Registered architects have better access to leadership positions in practice and the profession, and thereby to the places where reputations are made and influence achieved. The ability to use the title ‘architect’ is an important symbol of expertise and legitimacy. The fact that women are underrepresented in the ranks of registered architects mean they collectively carry less of the authority that this title confers.

Even as women are underrepresented among registered architects, registration figures also do not provide an accurate account of participation in the profession. For example, only half of the women who responded to the Parlour survey were registered, as compared to 70% of the men. Comparing census and registration figures generates almost identical figures, and reveals that almost a third of the architectural workforce is unregistered. This and other research suggests that many women and some men undertake the work of an architect to all intents and purposes, but are not legally entitled to call themselves architects. This also suggests that registration can be a ‘pinch point’ in women’s careers.

### Practices

Good businesses need good staff and recognise the benefits of supporting and encouraging professional growth and experience. They are proactive and plan for the future, and expect their employees to do the same. Supporting employees to become registered architects is part of this. A practice that supports its employees’ career aspirations, whether for registration or something else, will enjoy a more satisfied, loyal and productive workforce.

### Employees

Registration is seen as an important step in establishing your professional identity as an architect. Being a registered architect is likely to open up professional opportunities and also has a financial impact – the Architects Award identifies registration as a milestone to be recognised through an increase in salary.

Not registering restricts women’s ability to become principals and partners of practices and to access traditional positions of influence.

### The profession

Increasing the numbers of registered women also increases the number of women available to engage in decision-making and in the more high-profile aspects of the profession. Many of the profession’s public and representational activities are restricted to registered architects – for example, eligibility for awards, participation in juries, committees and office-bearing roles in professional organisations. Such roles can only truly represent the diversity of the profession when the pool of potential candidates is also representative – and that means more registered women architects.



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## What can we do?

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The steps required to encourage and support women who choose to register are relatively clear and are similar for women and men. However, the conjunction of career and life cycles can mean that some women find it harder to attain registration. This needs to be planned for and strategised by both practices and employees.

Registration boards must be aware of and address the experiences of women who have been subject to overt and covert discrimination during the registration process and interview.

## Practices

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Our research identifies wildly divergent responses to registration on the part of architectural practices in Australia. Some actively support and encourage graduates to become registered architects, some appear to be obstructive, while the others have difficulty giving employees the requisite mix of experience, even when they are supportive in principle. This last factor is partly because models of practice are changing in ways that are not always commensurate with the current registration system.

We advise all practices to support graduates who wish to become registered.

### **Be clear that your practice values registered architects.**

Send clear messages that the practice supports and recognises the importance of registration.

- Celebrate those who achieve registration
- Encourage graduates to register, and show how the practice can support them.

### **Identify practical ways to support aspiring architects**

All practices can support graduates through the registration process in some way. Resources available will depend on the size of the practice and its economic wellbeing, but all practices can offer some kind of support. Ensure employees are aware of the support available.

- Understand your obligations under the Architects Award. This includes provision for study leave for registration.
- Consider committing to pay for registration courses and examination fees if the employee is successful, plus ongoing yearly costs.
- Explore other types of support that are not financially onerous, but could make a difference. This could include allowing employees to use meeting rooms for study groups or pairing up an employee with a mentor who can give advice on how to reach the registration goal.
- Remember, simple things like giving employees an hour of work time at the end of each week to complete log sheets can be a real boost.
- Manage employees' roles and tasks to help them acquire the right mix of skills and experience.



## Employees

Becoming a registered architect involves planning and work. Fortunately there is a clearly established process and a range of support programs available.

### **Think about timing**

There can be a perception that those who don't register quickly, don't register at all. This need not be the case, but it is important to be aware that the registration process takes time and money, which can both be in short supply at different times in an architectural career.

- If possible, aim to get registered sooner rather than later, before the demands of registration have to compete with other non-architectural responsibilities and commitments (for example, the care of children or ageing parents), or the demands of a senior project role at work.
- Don't be put off by the comment, 'The longer you leave it, the harder it gets.' It's not impossible or even particularly uncommon to register many years after graduation. Remember, the registration process is intended to test competence, which tends to increase with experience.
- Remember that, depending on your jurisdiction, it is often possible to register and then transfer into a 'non-practising' category. This theoretically enables those who leave the workforce temporarily (such as for parental leave or long-term travel) to maintain and later 're-activate' their professional status at lower cost. The actual process can be complicated, so check out the situation in your state or territory.
- Remember, it's often easier to transfer a completed registration between states, rather than transferring partway through the process.

### **Get started**

Knowing what you need to do and the steps to achieve it is an important start.

- Familiarise yourself with the formal steps involved in registration (logged hours, examination and interview) and find out more about supplemental activities such as undertaking Practice of Architecture Learning Series (PALS) modules and attending tutorials.
- Download the National Competency Standards in Architecture (NCSA) logbook information and log sheets. It costs nothing and it can be helpful to see exactly what's involved. It's also a good way to check the diversity of the work experience you already have and identify where you may need to beef up your hours.
- Check what resources are available in your area, or look for online resources that can be accessed at a time convenient for you.

### **Discuss your interest and the support you need with your employer**

Highlighting your interest in registration with your employer is an important way to test the waters and support levels.

- Raise registration as something you plan to do and initiate a conversation about how the office can help you.
- Find out how your practice supports registration. Does it offer financial support, study support or mentoring?
- Be aware that the Architects Award includes provisions for time off to study for registration and attend the exam.



## Strategise to gain the right mix of experience

Ensure you have the appropriate range of experience – remember that it can be difficult to log the requisite hours in certain categories, particularly in contract administration. Be inventive about how this could be achieved.

- Discuss the kind of experience you need with the practice director or principal responsible for employee management, and explore how you can best achieve this.
- If you are finding it difficult to get the right mix of experience, find colleagues who have navigated the challenges of registering within your workplace, and ask them for tips – they can often identify some of the obstacles for you and they may have negotiated solutions that you can use.
- If your practice is unable to provide an adequate mix of experience, discuss this with the directors. Is there a way they can help? For example, could they facilitate you gaining experience in another practice in their network?
- Consider working in a range of types and scales of practices early in your career to gain the mix of experience.

## Don't be intimidated

Experienced practitioners who have delayed registration can find the process daunting for specific reasons. They may be undertaking courses with people many years their junior, including employees and former students. In these cases, the risk of losing face by failing the registration process is significantly higher. There's no way around it – it can be difficult and intimidating to return to a situation where you are subject to the professional power and judgment of others. Some strategies include making extensive use of online resources or finding a colleague in a similar career or life stage to attend with you.

## Buddy up: form a study group

It's worth tapping into additional support by forming a study group with people attempting registration. Study groups may be formal (such as those organised in a large practice, or by professional bodies) or rely on informal networks. Both offer a way to extend your knowledge and confidence, plus practical assistance in testing one another. Having access to those who have recently registered can also be a boost.

## Approach the interview with confidence

The interview (APE Part 3) is the final step in registration, and it's not just a formality. During the interview, two experienced practitioners will discuss projects recorded in the log book, statement material and hypothetical scenarios with the candidate. While diversity is improving, it's still not uncommon for both interviewers to be men.

- Ask if senior members of your office, or someone from your wider network, could conduct a dummy run for you.
- You should expect the interview to be run in a professional and respectful manner. If you have any reservations about your interview on these grounds, you should contact the relevant Architects Registration Board immediately and outline your concerns.

## The profession

The fact that some women report facing overt discrimination in the interview process is a cause for serious concern. It is critical that this is acknowledged and addressed by the registration boards. Boards should also consider the other obstacles to registration and explore ways to address these.



### Credits

The Parlour Guides to Equitable Practice are an outcome of the research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership' (2011–2014), led by Naomi Stead of the University of Queensland.

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## Further resources

### Architects Award Fair Work Commission

<http://aca.org.au/docs/modern-architects-award-text-valid-1-july-2013.pdf>

### Registration Report Available by contacting Parlour.

## Rights and responsibilities

The Architects Award includes provision for study leave for registration. This is a maximum of four days leave of absence with pay to attend courses, study for and attend the Architectural Practice Examination (APE).

**Note: This is offered as an overview only. Readers are reminded that legislation may change and they are advised to check current legislation at the time of reading.**

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