

► Frequently asked questions

How do I know that the person I am talking to is properly qualified as an architect?

The description 'Architect' is protected by law and can only be used by professionals who have successfully completed a seven year training course. A company should only use the word 'Architect' on their letterhead or website, if they are registered. Although unqualified people are allowed to call themselves 'Architectural Designers', or 'Architectural Consultants', it is against the law for them to use the title 'Architect'. The Architects Registration Board is responsible for registering architects and can confirm whether or not someone is qualified (020 7436 5269 or www.arb.org.uk). This body should be informed if you have been misled by someone into believing that they are qualified when they are not. It regulates architects to ensure that they provide a high standard of service, but does not do this for non-registered designers.

What is the best way to pay an architect?

ASBA Architects will quote either a percentage, hourly rate or fixed fee if clients require it. The main thing clients are buying is the time of an experienced professional. Value for money is only achieved if the architect spends all the time that you pay them for on your project.

Percentage

What makes it easier to estimate the time required for a larger project where the full service is needed, especially if it is for a new building. This allows percentage fees to be quoted reliably because there is a mechanism for increasing the fee if the client decides to increase the project size after the architect has been appointed.

Fixed Fee

A fixed fee is not necessarily always the best solution for small works. This is because at the early stages it can be difficult even for experienced professionals to estimate precisely how much time a project will take. If the fixed fee is too high, the client overpays. Even if a fixed fee is low, a consultant who is not accountable to a client for the time spent on the project might avoid losing by rushing things. Poorly considered design work is likely to cost thousands or even tens of thousands of pounds once the builder starts work. If you agree to a fixed fee, you should ensure that you get the full service promised, including the extra work that may be needed e.g. to get the

best possible design to suit your brief, or to ensure that proper negotiations are carried out with the planners if they are needed. When quoting a fixed fee, a responsible Architect will allow a reasonable contingency for unpredictable elements of the project that may need time to sort out.

Hourly Rate

If you engage an Architect on a hourly rate you should ensure that they state a range of time for each stage, identify the work that they have allowed for, and will inform you if there is a good reason for any possible overrun before it is billed. It is much easier for you to check that your architect is providing good value for money if they have to indicate and record the time they expect to spend on your project and then justify it to you on a regular basis. It is important to be confident that you trust your Architect to provide you with good value for your money, regardless of the payment method that you adopt.

What do architects do?

Architects have the longest training of any construction professional, because to qualify, aside from a high standard of creative design, they also have to be proficient in construction techniques and detailing, structural design, project management, cost control, planning law, contract law and many other practical issues connected with building design and construction. The stages of work provided in their simplest form are: Feasibility and Survey, Sketch Design and Planning Application, Building.

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Regulations Application, Preparation of Tenders and Contract Management. The latter, although always available, is often not required for small scale alterations to a house.

How do I find a good contractor?

There are plenty of good building contractors in the East Midlands area. After 18 years of working with local builders, ASBA Architects maintain a database of firms that is available to their clients once the practice has been appointed. It is recommended that basic credit checks are carried out on builders and that they are asked key questions about the way that they run their business prior to them being appointed.

How do I get the best price from a contractor?

The secret of getting accurate, cost effective prices from builders is to ensure that a thorough set of detailed construction drawings and specifications are prepared and that they are sent out to at least three contractors for tender prices. Time spent ensuring that the tender package has been properly prepared initially costs a few hundred pounds, but because it avoids many of the potential extras on site and ensures that the prices are tendered in competition, it will save thousands of pounds on the building cost.

Will I save money if I use a 'free' design service offered by a contractor?

All design work costs money and you will pay for it one way or another. If the contractor appoints and pays the designer, you are obliged to use them to carry out the building work because they own the copyright for the design. This means that there is no competition from other contractors and therefore no incentive for the price to be keen or for the standard of specification to be high. You will probably end up paying a lot more for the total building project than you would if you paid your own designer to get competitive quotes.

What are the differences between Registered Architects, RIBA members and RIBA Chartered Practices?

All architects have to be registered with the ARB to use the title 'Architect' and some are members of the RIBA. RIBA stands for 'Royal Institute of British Architects'. Although it is not compulsory, RIBA memberships show a commitment to the profession and maintaining its standards. RIBA members can put those letters after their name. Some practices achieve the highest standards imposed by the RIBA and become Chartered Practices. Chartered Practices use this description when advertising their practice.

