

CAREERS IN ARCHITECTURE: FINDING AND APPLYING FOR A POST-PART 1 PLACEMENT



[2010/11]

Careers Service
where opportunities begin

www.ncl.ac.uk/careers

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Employer case studies

- Faulkener Browns Architects
- Mosedale Gillatt Architects
- Space Group
- xsite Architecture

Graduate case study

- Jennifer Webb BA (Hons)



Finding a placement

Finding a post-Part 1 year out placement is an important stage in progressing your career as an architect. RIBA's Professional Education and Development Resource (PEDR) have produced a [Guide to Professional Experience](#) which answers frequently asked questions about professional experience.

Where are placements advertised?

Placements are advertised on the following websites:

- [RIBA: job opportunities](#)
- [The Architects' Journal: Jobs Board](#)
- [Building Design jobs](#)
- [Building4Jobs.com](#)
- [Careers in construction](#)
- [Architecture Jobs](#)
- [Vacancies Online](#)

Many practices advertise their architectural assistant posts through recruitment agencies. You can search the Recruitment & Employment Confederation (REC) [Directory of Members](#) for recruitment agencies by sector and location. Below is a selection of agencies specialising in architectural positions across the UK:

- [Hunter Dunning](#)
- [Fusion People](#)
- [Mustard Jobs](#)
- [Centurion-Recruitment](#)
- [Technical Moves](#)
- [Prolink Europe](#)

Architectural vacancies are also advertised in local press and technical journals. Newspapers which North East practices use to advertise vacancies include The Journal, Evening Chronicle, Evening Gazette, and the Northern Echo.

Overseas placements

Getting a 3-12 month placement overseas can count towards your post-Part 1 professional experience, on the condition that you are supervised by a registered architect. RIBA's PEDR website has more information about regulations for overseas experience under [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

If you want to look for placements outside of Europe, you will have to consider the visa regulations for the country you would like to work in. Some employers or work placement providers may arrange, or help you to arrange, your visa. If you are responsible for arranging your own visa, start by checking out the information on [Prospects country profiles](#), but for the most up to date information visit the embassy or consulate website for the country in question.

Finding international practices:

- [RIBA Directory of International Practices](#)
- [ARB register](#)
- [The International Union of Architects: member sections](#)
- [The American Institute of Architects: Architect Finder](#)
- [Arcasia: Member organisation](#) – Architects regional council Asia

International placement providers:

- [IAESTE](#) – international work experience for architectural students
- [GoAbroad.com: Architecture internships](#)
- [UK China Graduate](#) – placements in China supported by the British Government
- [Finding work experience](#) – links to additional international work experience providers

How can I find a placement that isn't advertised?

Recruitment can be a costly process and so quite often practices will not advertise their positions. Instead they may look through speculative applications they have received from candidates who have researched their company.

Making a speculative application – in 5 steps:

1. Search the [Architects Registration Board](#) directory of members for registered architects in the area you would like to work in.
2. If no web address is given, search for the company online and check the website for a careers or a contact section.
3. If there is no 'jobs' or 'vacancies' section, contact the practice to see if they accept speculative applications. Find out if they want a hard copy or a digital copy of your portfolio. If they request a hard copy make sure you know what the return policy is!
4. Write a covering letter and CV, making sure that you demonstrate why you are writing to them, why you would like to work for that particular practice and why they should hire you. Send them your CV, cover letter, and portfolio.

5. Give the practice a couple of weeks to respond to your application. If you do not hear from them, contact them, preferably by telephone, to find out if they've had the opportunity to consider your application. It could be that they haven't got round to looking at it, or that they are waiting for a position to arise. Keeping in touch will show that you are interested and can help build a positive impression – this can put you at an advantage when candidates are being considered for future jobs.

Further resources

For more information and resources about placements and careers in Architecture, visit the [Housing, property and construction](#) page on the Careers Service website.

Presenting applications

CVs

Creating a CV for an architectural position can be different to a traditional CV in format and layout. Employers will be looking to see how you reflect your creativity and design skills in your application. Getting the balance right to create a CV which is both eye-catching and easy to read and follow is very important.

In terms of content, an architectural CV should be no different from a traditional CV:

- Make sure that the knowledge, experience and skills you include are relevant;
- Put the most relevant information first and give it the most space;
- Double check your spelling and grammar; ask a friend to read over it for you if you are unsure;
- Include examples of the project work that you have been involved with as well as skills you've gained from education, part time jobs and voluntary positions;
- If you are printing and posting your CV, use good quality paper.

Online examples:

- [RIBA example architecture CV](#) (PDF: 260.65KB)
- [University of the Creative Arts](#) – winning Architecture CV example
- [Graduate Architect CV from Dayjob.com](#) (PDF: 47.2KB)

Covering Letters

Your CV must be accompanied by a covering letter, unless you have been asked not to send one. As with all covering letters, a letter to an architectural firm must demonstrate your suitability for the position, highlighting the most important points on your CV, as well as outlining your interest in the firm. Whenever possible, address your letter to the relevant person in the company, rather than using "Sir/Madam".

Visit [Covering letters](#) for examples and more information about how to write your letter.

Creating a professional portfolio

Academic v Professional

Don't just use your academic portfolio, no matter how proud you are of it! Instead, use it as a prototype and adapt it for employers' needs.

When creating your professional portfolio, bear in mind the following ways it will differ from your academic portfolio:

- A good professional portfolio should be easy to take in and digest in 5 minutes.
- Your professional portfolio isn't a record of everything you've ever done at university. You have the opportunity to showcase your most impressive work – choose a selection of work which best shows your ideas, ability and experiences.
- Unlike your academic portfolio, you don't need to submit models or sketchbooks. Use photographs or scans if you wish to include them.

Size and format

- Ideally, paper-based portfolios should be no bigger than A3 and no longer than 16 pages - make sure yours can be picked up, read and understood in around five minutes.
- Keep digital portfolios below 1MB if sending by e-mail – overly large files are often automatically deleted or unable to be received. It may be necessary to reduce the size of image files to reduce the overall size of your portfolio.
- Send your portfolio in an accessible file format, such as PDF, to ensure it can be viewed easily and as you intended.

Theme

Think about your audience:

- What type of practice is it?
- What work do they do?
- Who are their clients?
- Do they have a particular design style?

Try to think about the effect your portfolio might have on the person viewing it. This should help you to select your most relevant work and choose an appropriate overall design.

Layout

- Put the work you consider to be your best towards the front of the portfolio to help make a strong first impression, rather than simply featuring projects in chronological order.
- Avoid overblown presentation which detracts from your work or makes it difficult for an employer to absorb. Your portfolio should be clear and easy to follow while still demonstrating your creativity.
- Don't overload the pages of your portfolio. Well spaced images and a carefully considered layout are key to a clear and easily accessible portfolio.

Content

- Aim to demonstrate a variety of skills within your portfolio. Include sketches, CAD drawings, elevations, photographs of models etc.
- Avoid including lengthy passages of written material, which employers are not likely to read in full. Keep text brief, concise and to the point.
- Try to demonstrate your thought processes and show how your ideas and projects progressed from concepts/ sketches through to final designs.

Practical considerations

- First impressions count! Don't neglect the front cover of your portfolio. It should have title and your name. Use good quality paper and appropriate binding.
- If you want your portfolio returned to you, check in advance before sending it off! Not all practices will return your portfolio – they may have a policy of keeping them on file or, even worse, putting them in the bin! Make sure that you keep backup copies of your portfolio in case you don't get it back or it gets damaged.
- If you choose to create a portfolio website, you should ensure it is well structured and easy to navigate. Avoid overly complex designs and layouts. Instead, use clear menus that show what employers what they can find on your site at a glance. Try watching a friend browsing your site to see how easy it is to navigate and understand. Make sure images are appropriately sized for online viewing, to avoid slow loading web pages.

Additional resources

Two copies of each of the following titles, which include useful examples of portfolios, are held in the Robinson Library:

- Andreas Luescher (2010) The architect's portfolio: planning, design, production [720.28LUE]
- Katerina Ruedi Ray, Lesley Naa Norle Lokko & Igor Marjanovic (2003) The Portfolio : an architectural student's handbook [720.23 MAR]

Approaching the interview process

There's no shortage of information available out there on how to succeed at interview, but how do architecture placement interviews differ? Here are some hints and tips to help you make the most of your face-to-face time with an employer...

- Be prepared to talk about what you want to achieve from your placement in terms of both your personal and professional development. Practices want to know that you are focussed, committed and worth investing in; they also want to know that you have realistic expectations and understand that you won't be leading on their newly-acquired multi-million pound project!
- It is not uncommon for placement interviews to have a more informal or conversational feel; the people interviewing you want to put you ease and get to know you. Do try and relax during interview, but take care to remain professional. Remember, it's not a chat with a mate!
- It may not always feel like it when you're being grilled, but an interview is a two-way process. It's just as important to find out whether the placement is a good fit for your own skills, interests and ambitions as it is for the practice to decide if you're the right person to fill it.

The best way to find out whether you are a good fit for each other is to ask questions! You will almost certainly get the chance to do this as part of the interview process, usually towards the end. What does the person interviewing find the most rewarding aspect of working in that practice? How would they describe the work culture here? What have previous placement students worked on or gone on to do? Make the most of the opportunity!

- Take a copy of your portfolio. This one might sound obvious, but if you're taking a digital portfolio, for example, make sure facilities will be available to view it. If you're taking a physical portfolio, make sure it's a manageable and appropriate size, both in terms of dimensions (no A1-sized pages!) and length (your interview will be of a finite duration!).
- Employers are always keen to hear why an applicant has chosen them, yet many fail to take the time to research the practice they are applying to.

Company websites are a good, but obvious, starting point. Practices will almost certainly have a portfolio of recent projects available online. Try to get a feel for their work and form an opinion on it. Also try looking at sector-specific publications, such as [The Architects' Journal](#).

Being able to demonstrate some knowledge of the practice you're applying to is often considered an indicator of motivation and enthusiasm.

The Careers Service website offers more information on [researching employers](#).

- Come prepared to talk about your experiences to date. Be familiar with everything you have included in your CV/ application form/ portfolio and be ready to discuss it in more detail. This is the only information your interviewer has about you, so they are likely to use it as a starting point for at least some of their questions!
- Take advantage of what your Careers Service has to offer! We run regular [term-time workshops](#) on 'How to succeed at interview' and offer a practice interview service for those who have an interview arranged in the near future.

Visit the Careers Service website for more practical information and advice on succeeding at [interviews](#), or drop in and speak to us – no appointment needed!

After the interview

We hope you will be successful, but it's not uncommon to attend more than one interview before securing a placement.

If you haven't been successful, use your experience as an opportunity to learn and improve. Take some time to reflect on your interview performance. What do you feel went well? What do you think you could have done better? It's a good idea to make a note of the questions you were asked, especially any that you found particularly difficult to answer.

Ask for feedback. Most practices will be happy to chat with you about your performance at interview. Feedback, along with self-reflection, can be a great way of building on and improving your approach and technique for future interviews.

Got the job?

Visit the Careers Service website for more information on [handling job offers](#), including accepting or declining an offer.

What if I can't get a post-Part 1 placement?

If for some reason you choose not to, or are unable to, secure a post-Part 1 placement, there are alternative options.

Responding to the 2009 recession, ARCHAO S and RIBA published documents outlining some of these alternatives. Although the recovering UK job market is not as grim as when these were published, the options that they mention could be worth considering, including working in construction, taking on voluntary work, or using your time to improve on important skills such as CAD.

- [ARCHAO S – The Year Out: Dealing with a Recession](#)
- [RIBA – Recession proofing for students \(PDF: 68KB\)](#)
- [ArchiGRAD](#) - project supporting unemployed and underemployed North East-based architecture graduates by offering opportunities to develop professional skills and experience on a voluntary basis.

Funding Part 2 study

For UK/EU students

Currently, graduates enrolling on RIBA accredited Part 2 courses are usually classed as 'continuing students' and remain eligible for student finance, including grants and loans, to support their studies.

The support you receive could be affected if you choose to take a break longer than 12 months from your studies between completion of your BA (Hons) and commencement of your Part 2 studies.

Your fee-paying status may also be affected by whether the course is classed as an undergraduate or postgraduate programme.

We strongly recommend contacting all of the following to check what support is available to you before applying for a Part 2 programme:

- Your local education authority;
- Student Finance for your area of the UK;
- The institution you are applying to (each university operates differently - try contacting admissions, student finance or the relevant school office for advice);
- [Student Finance Services European Team](#) (EU students only).

For international students

The UKCISA website provides comprehensive information on [fees, funding and student support](#) for international students in the UK.

The institution you are applying to should be able to provide you with more information about any support or funding you may be eligible for. The departments most likely to be able to offer advice related to funding are admissions, student finance or the relevant school office.

Alternatives to full-time study

Some graduates opt to resume their studies on a part-time basis, balancing the completion of their Part 2 with part-time work. This can be an effective way to spread the cost of spending more time as a student, although not all courses are offered on a part-time basis.

Employer sponsorship, usually with day-release to attend university, may also be available. This route is usually only offered when the student is already known to the employer through either current or previous employment.

Funding study outside your home country

If you are thinking of studying a [RIBA -accredited](#) (PDF: 145KB) course abroad, you should check directly with the institution, in the first instance, for the most up-to-date fee and finance information and advice.

Further resources

- [Newcastle University Student Finance](#)
- [RIBA prizes, scholarships and bursaries](#)
- [RIBA Education Fund](#) - makes grants to students of architecture in the UK experiencing financial hardship.
- [Careers Service: Funding further study](#)

FAULKNERBROWNS ARCHITECTS

Peter Mouncey

Director

FaulknerBrowns Architects

CVs

What do you look for when reviewing a CV?

CVs for post-Part 1 positions are normally reviewed by several people, both when they are received and immediately prior to organising interviews in Spring. Sorting the suitable from the unsuitable applicants is made easier if the CV is well presented with clear and concise information. This is an opportunity for someone who provides a CV that clearly stands out from the others in some way to make an immediate impression.

We don't expect applicants to be completely formed architects; we are looking for someone with a willingness to learn who can bring something to the practice, such as:

- clear architectural thinking;
- good visual communication skills;
- something that indicates their passion or self-motivation e.g. an unusual hobby or interest.

In many instances, there will also be someone in the practice who has tutored or reviewed the work of the student, providing knowledge about their strengths and character to support the application.

Portfolios

What would you expect to see on a portfolio?

For post-Part 1 positions, we are looking for projects in the portfolio to demonstrate a legible and coherent architectural approach, presented in a

way that shows careful consideration and convincing graphic representations.

A selection of well presented course work should form the core of the portfolio, but it's also good to see that the applicant has allied interests (sketching, photography, building studies etc.) beyond what they are required to produce for University. The portfolio is often a starting point for the discussion at interview, so the applicant should be prepared to talk about what they have included and why.

Do you prefer digital or hard copy format?

Both digital and hard copy formats are useful for the CV and accompanying images. The former can be filed easily, whilst the latter is good for quick reference when it first arrives.

What should candidates avoid when creating and submitting their portfolios?

Applicants should avoid sending huge image files that take a long time to download or open. Obscure file formats should also be avoided – the more accessible the information, the more time can be spent reviewing the content.

Applications

Where do you advertise positions in your company, and do you accept speculative applications?

We don't normally advertise post-Part 1 positions. Some students will be invited to send in a CV because their work has been seen at reviews; other applications we receive are speculative. There are usually more great candidates than we are able to take without advertising!

Interviews

What sort of questions do you ask at an interview?

The interview provides an opportunity for both us and the applicant to explore whether we measure up to our initial impressions of each other and if there is a good ‘fit’ of expectations. This is explored through a relatively informal discussion which includes talking about the projects we and they have worked on, why they have selected the ones in their portfolio and their design rationale.

We are looking for people who have some knowledge about the types of projects that we work on and therefore have some understanding about the sort of work they would be doing if their application was successful. We are looking for people who can make a contribution to the office through their knowledge, skills or enthusiasm for a particular aspect of what we do. We want to understand their short and long-term ambitions, and how we could contribute or share in those ambitions.

What can make a candidate stand out at interview, and what can put you off hiring them?

Ideal candidates demonstrate enthusiasm for what they have done thus far and what they could be doing in the future. We want people who are knowledgeable and skilled, but they also need a willingness to learn.

We recognize that different people have different strengths and that some people may find the interview process difficult, but we want people who demonstrate a mature approach and an aptitude for working within a team.

We would be uneasy if it appeared that the work in a candidate’s portfolio was not their own or if they had deliberately tried to mislead us in their CV.

And finally...

What are your top tips for students applying for professional experience?

Research the practice that you are applying to – understand the type of work they do and ensure that it reflects your own ambitions or interests. Think about what you want to get out of your year out and the types of projects that will help you achieve this. For example, some people prefer to work on smaller projects where they might have an opportunity to experience both the design and construction phases; others prefer to work on

larger projects where there may be fewer opportunities to have a direct influence on the outcome but it may be a more significant or high profile project.

Think carefully about what you might bring to a practice and how you are able to communicate this. Check that any digital files you provide use standard file formats and can be opened!

CVs

What do you look for when reviewing a CV?

We like to see evidence of a candidate's work history, (including jobs not related to architecture), as well as an understanding of what you might be doing when working as a year-out student.

We receive lots of CVs telling us about brilliant design, but the reality is that there's a lot of learning to do on a year-out placement. Commonly, you need to learn about preparing schedules, working as part of a team and dealing efficiently and conscientiously with tasks - no matter how menial. These would be good points to try and get across at interview!

What are the most common mistakes that you see on CVs?

Communication is a significant part of our job. Any CVs with poor grammar or spelling tend to indicate a lack of attention to detail, or a lack of interest in completing tasks properly.

I'm personally not much concerned with people's hobbies – but positions of responsibility (union officer, charity working etc) are useful indicators of a grounded team worker.

Photographs can also sometimes be a negative, especially if the pose is ill considered - they're not really necessary on a CV.

Portfolios

What would you expect to see on a portfolio?

If a student has any previous work experience, it's good to see evidence of this. Lots of portfolios that we see are fantastic graphic pieces of work, but don't seem to be underpinned by the substance of the actual design.

If we see a portfolio which indicates that somebody can draw, we will set it aside to look at later. The problem with computer renderings is that everybody is using the same software and it's easy to view lots of portfolios in the same way – because they all have the same high quality graphic style.

Do you prefer digital or hard copy format?

PDF is probably best, but unless it's under 1MB, it's deleted! Hard copy is good too as you have something to put to one side to review later. Oddly shaped or over designed portfolios are interesting and make candidates stand out – but they still have to contain the essential information.

Websites can be frustrating if they are fiddly and complicated to use.

What should candidates avoid when creating and submitting their portfolios?

Excessive graphics with little evidence of buildings.

Applications

Where do you advertise positions in your company, and do you accept speculative applications?

We always look at speculative applications we receive and we advertise on the university's architecture notice boards.

Interviews

What sort of questions do you ask at an interview?

We ask if a candidate has worked in an architect's office before and what they want to get out of a placement. We also look through their portfolio and make sure they are showing us *their* work and not group projects executed by others.

What can make a candidate stand out at interview, and what can put you off hiring them?

People stand out if they've made an effort to find out something about our practice. Having worked anywhere at all (coffee shops etc.) is a big draw for us, since it means that the individual wants to work and has started to develop an attitude to work.

People who speak in a derogatory way about previous employers have put us off – if they talk like that about people they've worked for in the past, how will they talk about us in the future? Excessive confidence in your own ability is also a worrying sign. It's a long road from part-one student to qualified architect and we like to see confidence, but with a healthy degree of caution.

Personal hygiene is important - having a crafty cigarette just before an interview is not a good idea!

Above all, we like to see a personable attitude and a willingness to learn.

And finally...

What are your top tips for students applying for professional experience?

Be concise and make it clear that you are flexible and hard working. Understand that it's unlikely you will be designing fantastic buildings in your year out. It's more of an apprenticeship and candidates need to demonstrate to an employer that they're keen to work in that sort of role and are up to the challenge.

CVs

What do you look for when reviewing a CV?

A good CV should be well-presented and accurately designed. The content should provide good examples of projects the candidate has been involved with.

What are the most common mistakes that you see on CVs?

A failure to attach a covering letter, spelling errors and inconsistent use of fonts. CVs printed on tatty or poor quality paper also indicate a lack of care and attention.

Portfolios

What would you expect to see on a portfolio?

Varied examples of projects showing the concept from start to finish.

Do you prefer digital or hard copy format?

Our preference is for portfolios in A4-sized hard copy format.

What should candidates avoid when creating and submitting their portfolios?

Rough or inaccurate drawings. Applicants should ensure drawings are to scale and highlight both accuracy and ability – this is what we look for.

Applications

Where do you advertise positions in your company, and do you accept speculative applications?

Our post-Part 1 positions are not advertised as we expect the graduates to be well prepared in their research. We receive a huge amount of speculative applications for these posts, making advertising unnecessary.

Interviews

What sort of questions do you ask at an interview?

We encourage the applicant to talk about themselves and their portfolio. We don't have set questions to ask; we find we gain more knowledge about the candidate by adopting a more informal approach to the interview process.

What can make a candidate stand out at interview, and what can put you off hiring them?

Punctuality is important, as is appearance. Interviewees should be on time, smartly dressed and well-groomed - remember to shine your shoes!

We are put off by casual dress, such as jeans or trainers, or excessive amounts of tattoos/piercings - we have to know that you would be able to represent _space in a professional manner.

Take the time to make yourself knowledgeable about the company you are applying to. It's a huge turn-off for us when people say they don't know anything about _space and haven't bothered to look at our website.

And finally...

What are your top tips for students applying for professional experience?

Don't wait until after you get your grades to make applications. At _space, we like to receive CVs around Feb/March as we hold interviews and make job offers in April.

Try to be yourself and relax at interview. Remember, the person interviewing you is often also quite nervous!

xsite

Tim Bailey
Founding Partner, Architect
xsite Architecture

CVs

What do you look for when reviewing a CV?

Presentation ability, work experience and evidence of personality

What are the most common mistakes you see on CVs?

Applications addressed to 'Dear Sir/Madam' or 'To whom it may concern'.
Take the time to find out the name of the person you are writing to.

Other common mistakes are putting too much emphasis on pre-University education and using badly-sized or irrelevant images.

Portfolios

What would you expect to see on a portfolio?

Evidence of thinking, drawing and design ability as well as an indication that the process was enjoyed not endured.

How do prefer to receive digital or hard copy portfolios?

We prefer e-mailed PDFs or weblinks. Hard copy portfolios should be A3 and of sufficient length to make the point, not longer!

What should candidates avoid when creating and submitting their portfolios?

Making it difficult to digest in under five minutes and assuming that everyone will interpret it in the same way that they do. Digital portfolios

should be under 3MB.

Applications

Where do you advertise positions in your company, and do you accept speculative applications?

We don't advertise, but we do accept speculative applications. Timing is key though - too early and the CVs get forgotten. For us, the ideal period to applications is between June and August each year for September recruitment.

Interviews

What sort of questions do you ask at an interview?

Can you explain to us where the architecture 'bug' comes from?

Explain the process behind your most successful project.

What differs on your least successful project?

What can make a candidate stand out at interview, and what can put you off hiring them?

Standing out is a personality thing. Confidence, talent and clear enthusiasm help a candidate to impress.

We're put off by applicants who display cockiness, dullness or a lack of enthusiasm.

And finally...

What are your top tips for students applying for professional experience?

Be knowledgeable about the firm you are being interviewed by, be able to explain what you hope to achieve from a placement and show you have thought about a career path (not aspirational, just some goals). Don't forget to smile!



Jennifer Webb
BA Hons Architecture
Newcastle University

When considering your experience of applying for post-Part 1 placement...

How did you apply for your placement?

Speculative CVs

What are the main differences, in content and presentation, between an academic and a professional portfolio?

With a professional portfolio you tend to show more technical capability – such as detailing.

What advice would give someone preparing a professional portfolio?

Show all different kinds of media and types of drawing to show your competence across a broad spectrum. Keep it well organised and with an underlying grid/style.

What were the most difficult questions you were asked at interview?

“What would you like to get out of working here?”

“What do you expect to get paid?”

“Where would you like to be in 5 years time?”

Why do you think you were successful in getting your placement?

Rapport with those who were interviewing me, and also having previous long term work experience in practice (I worked during my gap year and

during the summer holidays of my Part 1).

How did you fund your Part 2 qualification?

My husband provides for us both, we got married during my year out. As his earnings are not that high – I get support from the government towards fees.

And finally...

What are your top tips for students applying for professional experience?

Be yourself, be confident in the abilities you already have, and show enthusiasm for architecture and your own hobbies/interests.

Organise your portfolio so that you have your best/most recent projects at the front and then work your way backwards.

Dress smart/casual and take a small-ish portfolio (no bigger than A2 as that becomes too bulky)

And finally, smile!