

# King's Student Perspectives Architecture

*Ines, 1st year*

## What attracted you to Cambridge / King's for Architecture?

*Applying to study Architecture at Cambridge has been one of the best decisions I have ever made. Schools of Architecture around the UK tend to have strong identities and vary in their approach towards teaching the subject. I was drawn to the fact*

*that Cambridge University, though unashamedly academic, still fostered enormous creativity within its students. It was this balance that originally attracted me to the course, and I have found throughout my first year that although often very challenging, my studies have also been extremely rewarding.*

## What kind of subject background do you need for the course?

*The study of architecture is unusual because it combines both arts (essay subjects) and sciences. People often worry about which particular A-Level or equivalent subjects are most suited to the course, but in reality at King's the fellows (what we call academics) are not looking for specific subjects, nor is there a perfect combination of A-*

*Levels that you could take. However, choosing a wide range of subjects may be useful to prepare you for using many different skills on the course. Before coming to Cambridge, I studied Art as one of my A-Levels, and then did a Foundation Diploma, which I have found tremendously valuable in understanding how to approach studio work. Maths and Physics, are useful for certain aspects of the course, but are not a requirement to apply to King's.*

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## What made you choose King's?

*When visiting Cambridge for the first time, I was struck by both the friendly atmosphere at King's and the beauty of the college. The Chapel is a spectacular example of Gothic architecture, and as a student you are free to use it as often as you like – it is an extremely restful place to visit during exam term! The location of the college in the centre of town is also useful for buying art materials and model supplies, and it is only a short ten-minute walk to the Department of*



Ines

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*Architecture. King's also benefits from an Art Centre, which puts on exhibitions and classes with the resident artist. I have found it really helpful to work in the Art Centre messy room when I have needed to work on a large scale and did not have the space in my room.*

## *How did you find the application process?*

*Applying to Cambridge can be daunting as it is difficult to know what to expect, and the interview process can be quite nerve-racking! Typically at King's you can expect two interviews for Architecture, and you must bring a portfolio of work with you to both. My first interview was with my Director of Studies, who looked through my work but also asked me questions largely about topics and themes I had discussed in my personal statement. The atmosphere was extremely friendly and relaxed throughout, and I soon felt much less nervous. In the second interview I discussed my portfolio in more detail with the first year studio master, explaining how different ideas had progressed and developed, and I was asked a few tricky questions. You should not feel under pressure to give the correct answer as often*

*You should not feel under pressure to give the correct answer as often there is no right or wrong answer.*

*there is no right or wrong. Interviews are more about being engaged and interested in the conversation, being able to justify your point of view, and having a passion for the subject.*

*In preparation for the interview I had done some general reading on architectural history, but a much larger proportion of my time was spent working on my portfolio. Be warned that this process is extremely time consuming! I included projects I had done as part of my A-Levels, but*

*also work from different courses I had participated in outside college, plus a few examples of life drawing. If you enjoy sculpture or any form of three-dimensional work, it is worth taking some good photos of your favourite pieces, as it is often impractical to bring them to the interviews. Be selective about what to include in your portfolio, edit your work and organise it well into a story that clearly shows the development of your ideas. When you hand in your first year portfolio you will not be there to talk the examiners through it, so it is well worth remembering that a portfolio should speak for itself!*

## *Was it easy to settle in at King's?*

*I found settling in to life at King's extremely easy. Everyone is incredibly friendly here, and there are lots of events that happen in Freshers' Week to allow you to meet lots of people within the college. Your college family also really help you to find your feet: each student at King's is assigned a college mum and dad who write you a letter welcoming you to Cambridge before you arrive, and then have dinner with you during the first week of term. This is a really worthwhile system, as you will inevitably have questions about life at King's, or even about your particular course if one of your college parents does the same subject as you, which they often do.*

*Each student is assigned a college mum and dad.*

## *What is the workload like?*

*In first year, the course is divided up into two parts: studio work (which carries 60% of the marks) and exams and coursework covering topics discussed in lectures (carrying 40%). It is important to understand from the word go that over the year you will be required to spend much more time on studio work than on any other aspect of the course. The work is incredibly time consuming and likely to require more hours per week than any other course at the university! You may or may not know that throughout the UK, Architecture is known affectionately by its students as 'architorture' – but please don't let this put you off! The fast pace ensures that work is always exciting and*



*Working in the Studio (at the Architecture Department)*

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*varied, although it does mean that it can be difficult to find the time to participate regularly in sports clubs and other societies.*

*We are lucky in the Architecture Department in Cambridge because each year group is very small. This allows us to have our own desk spaces in the studio building, a modern addition to the department which also houses a well-equipped workshop for making models. In first year, you are expected to be in the studio for two days a week for tutorials on the progress of your work. These sessions are usually either individual or in pairs, and their*

*frequency is extremely useful when working on a project, and also allows you to get to know your studio masters well. At the end of each project there is a critique of all the work, and it is common for guests (often architects in practice) to be invited along to give comments. This is quite an intimidating experience at first, but it is useful to remember that the critics are trying to help you improve your work and be constructive!*

*There are six hours worth of lectures spread over the other three days of your working week, all of which you must attend. Realistically, you will spend the rest of these days in the studio continuing with your project work. However, it is worth knowing that there is always a great atmosphere in the studio. A fantastic advantage of the course is that you get to know everyone in your year quickly. This is different to other courses at Cambridge, where students generally know far fewer people on their course, and so their closest friends are generally more limited to those in their College.*

*There is always a great atmosphere in the studio.*



*All students also have weekly supervisions with their Director of Studies (the person who oversees your education). At King's, the Director of Studies, Felipe Hernández, also lectures first years in History and Theory Post-1800, and so often we discuss topics related to the week's lecture. There may also be reading or an essay to do for the supervision, but there is always at least a week to get this done. Occasionally we also have individual studio supervisions, particularly if there is a crit approaching.*

## *What do you do outside of your work?*

*It is no secret that due to the time required to complete project work, sometimes it can be difficult to find time for yourself outside the studio. With this in mind, it is important to be really organised in order to allow time for breaks to do other activities and meet up with friends.*



Preparation for the ArcSoc exhibition



Preparation for the ArcSoc exhibition

*A unique advantage of studying Architecture is that it brings together students on the same course, who all have a general interest and sensitivity for design. All Architecture students can join the Architecture Society (ArcSoc), which organises the end-of-year exhibition in London.*



The ArcSoc exhibition



The ArcSoc exhibition

*The ArcSoc exhibition is entirely student-run, and funding is provided by sponsors, the University, and also events put on by ArcSoc itself throughout the year. These events are very popular with students throughout the University. Usually there are a few nights organised in clubs around Cambridge each term, and the biggest event, ArcSoc's annual Cabaret, was held at the Cambridge Union Debating Society venue this year.*

*As a member of ArcSoc, you're encouraged to help out in any way you can. This could be anything from making posters to offering to DJ on the night. The ArcSoc Cabaret at the Union took a lot more preparation than regular club nights. Lots of us got involved with making props to transform the space*

*into a dramatic venue. The tickets*

*were keys laser-cut from MDF. Once you gave yours in at the entrance, you were ushered into a hallway in which hundreds more keys were suspended from string. Swathes of fabric covered the ceiling of the main debating chamber. With the benches removed, it was transformed into a dance floor, with glittering cut-outs of acrobats swirling about mid-air. The party continued upstairs with various student acts and bands playing in different rooms, some entirely covered with ivy, others hosting life class work on tables in the*

*middle. A couple of friends and I made two large tiger heads out of scrap card, painted them and put LED lights in their eyes. One was hung above the entrance, and the other inside, above the doorway to the main dance floor. It was really enjoyable helping with the preparation, and of course being able to attend the event early afterwards!*

*ArcSoc also organises free film screenings throughout the year, generally once a week at the Department. They are a great way to unwind after a long day in the studio, and you're free to invite friends from other subjects too. There are also frequent Life drawing classes, and last year there was a small bonfire in Michaelmas term.*

*ArcSoc organises free film screenings throughout the year.*

*There are also other activities and societies in the University which you can join. They do not have to relate to architecture in any way if you feel you need to escape! During Easter term, I started doing some*



The ArcSoc Cabaret



Keys at the ArcSoc Cabaret



Getting ready for the Cabaret



yoga in King's. As my accommodation is on the main site, the classes are very convenient for me, and I found the exercise an excellent way to relax and forget about work for an hour.

## Do you need to work during the vacations?

With such short, eight-week terms in Cambridge, work is intense, and it's important to remember that the Christmas and Easter vacations are not long holidays! You will be at a disadvantage if you do no work during these periods, but despite this it is very important to take some time off for yourself as well.

## What is Easter term like?

Four to five weeks into Easter term (the third term of the year), you must hand in your portfolio, which contains work from over the course of the year. Time management is quite difficult during this period, as you want to devote all your time to your studio work, but must remember that after hand in, there are only four days to revise for exam week! During exam week first years have one exam per day, for five days. This is an extremely tiring time, but afterwards you are rewarded by finishing before most other subjects and having a long summer ahead of you to enjoy however you like! The prospect of the May Week end-of-year celebrations and punting (a punt is a kind of boat) on the river Cam will also help to pull you through the term's work.

The hardest thing about studying architecture at Cambridge is undoubtedly the long hours. However, there is a strong community in architecture and everyone helps each other through.

At King's this year I am one of three students studying Architecture – this is a good number, as at many colleges you find only one or two students per year.

I have really enjoyed my first year in Cambridge and am excited to see what the next two will bring!

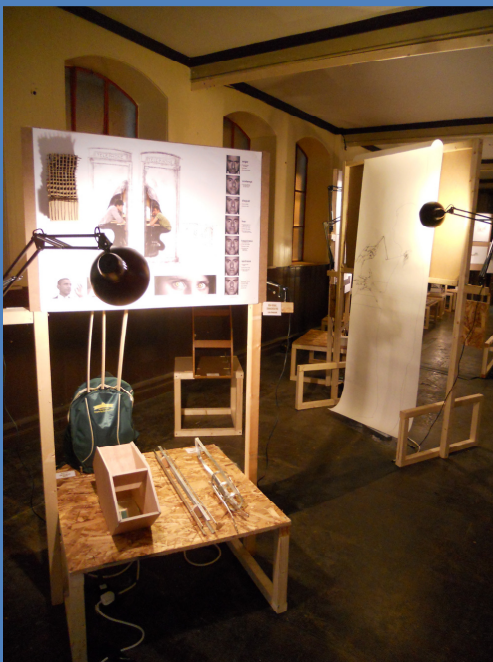
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### A note to current King's Architecture students

If you would like to write about your experiences of studying Architecture at King's for our prospective students to read, please email Kristy in the Admissions Office for further details: [undergraduate.admissions@kings.cam.ac.uk](mailto:undergraduate.admissions@kings.cam.ac.uk)

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The ArcSoc exhibition