

# 4

## THE PROFESSIONAL CASE STUDY

### 4.1 Purpose of the Professional Case Study

The purpose of the Case Study is to allow you to demonstrate your ability to analyse an architectural topic in depth. In this regard the role of the Case Study in the Part 3 Examination process is different from that of the Practice Paper where the intention is to assess your awareness, knowledge, understanding and judgment of architectural subjects across the whole of the ARB/RIBA Part 3 criteria.

In undertaking your Case Study you will normally have to do the following

- identify a suitable topic for your study
- gather as extensive a range of information on the topic as possible
- undertake critical analysis relating to the topic
- and on the basis of this critical analysis draw up meaningful conclusions and recommendations

In undertaking critical analysis it is important to emphasise that you will have to develop arguments based as far as possible on sound evidence. These arguments, in turn, should allow you to develop meaningful conclusions and recommendations for your Case Study topic. Your examiners will be keen to explore these arguments, conclusions and recommendations with you at oral interview to assess your professional competence to act as a registered architect.

You may not be entirely familiar with what is involved in critical analysis. To help you understand this process more clearly APEAS is preparing a note on critical analysis, a copy of which will appear in the Candidate Section of the APEAS website ([www.apeas.org.uk](http://www.apeas.org.uk)) in due course.

Examiners have frequently stressed the developmental value of the Case Study to candidates. It is hoped that your completed study will not only be of interest and value to you but to others who work in your office and possibly consultants and clients.

### 4.2 Notes of guidance in undertaking a Case Study

The Professional Case Study you are going to undertake must relate to the **practice of architecture**. The nature and scope of the study is left largely for you to decide, limited only by the requirements set out in the following notes.

#### Stage Submissions

You should make contact with the institution with whom you are registered for Part 3 Examination support for advice on staged submissions of the Case Study.

In most cases the process of developing your Case Study will consist of the following three stages:

- Stage 1: Topic – Candidate submits a brief statement to his/her PSA suggesting a topic for his/her Case Study together with a working title for the study.
- Stage 2: Synopsis - Candidate submits a synopsis/outline to his/her PSA indicating the form and scope of the proposed study and confirming its title.
- Stage 3: Completed Case Study submitted to APEAS by date shown in Appendix 2.

Examiners are anxious that candidates are given maximum freedom in the selection of the subject and style of the study, but to ensure acceptable topics (and to benefit from advice) you are strongly advised to adhere to the process shown above.

Approval of the synopsis is not a guarantee that the final study will be satisfactory, **but failure to submit a synopsis for advice has in the past been a common feature amongst candidates who have failed the Case Study.**

APEAS has been advised by PSA's that candidates may submit their Case Study title and synopsis at any time in the year. However, in practice this should happen not less than six months before the submission date for documentary submissions to allow sufficient time for you to develop your Case Study fully.

### **Maintaining contact with PSA**

After submitting their synopsis, some candidates have chosen not to make any further contact with their PSA before submitting their Case Study report. Such candidates have lost the benefit of the information and advice their PSA could have offered them while they were undertaking their Case Study investigation and preparing their report. **You are strongly advised to maintain regular contact with your PSA while preparing your Case Study.** However, once a PSA has seen the **structure** of the Case Study he/she will have no further involvement in the content which is for the examiners to ultimately mark and comment on at interview.'

### **Early identification of the topic**

The subject of your Case Study should emerge from your professional experience. This requires that you have a continuous commitment to actively engaging in, and recording, different forms of professional experience. Early consultation with your Employment Mentor and PSA is important in identifying an appropriate subject for your Case Study.

## **The importance of a title**

Examiners have noted that it is very important that the Case Study should have a title. Not simply “Project at 52 Wakefield Avenue”, but a title that indicates the scope and intentions of the study and the key issues addressed.

Examiners have commented that many Case Study titles bear little or no relation to the content of the Case Study report. By their very nature Case Study investigations can give rise to new and unsuspected information taking the candidate down routes of enquiry not anticipated when the Case Study was originally proposed. If this is the case, you should be willing to change the title of your Case Study report to ensure that it reflects as closely as possible the scope and content of your report.

## **Alternative types of Case Study**

The Case Study will normally depend on which of the following two approaches is adopted: the first is project-based while the second is thematic.

### **Project Based Study**

This type of study involves a building project of a significant size and preferably one which is under construction during part of the study period. The project should be one in which you are personally involved in a professional capacity. The study should investigate and comment on the background and progress of the project from inception to its present stage, identifying and forming conclusions about problems and their solutions and discussing organisational, administrative and operational issues. While reporting the factual basis of the project is important it is not itself sufficient: critical analysis leading to meaningful conclusions and recommendations is essential in allowing examiners to assess your understanding and capabilities.

### **Thematic Study**

A thematic study involves an investigation, in some depth, of an aspect of architectural practice that can be appropriately studied within the organisation in which you are employed. Subjects in the following areas might be included:

- Contract administration, including on-site procedures
- Building appraisal and feedback procedures
- Control of project finance during design and construction
- Design team working
- Project documentation and contractor's requirements
- Information handling within the organisation.

With regard to a thematic type study it is important that the subject you choose is not too narrow since this may limit your opportunities to undertake effective critical analysis on the subject. On the other hand, studies that involve too wide a subject matter should also be avoided

since such studies can become too large and fall outside the scope of a Part 3 candidate Case Study.

One possible form of thematic study may be to look at four or five jobs your practice has been involved in and track a theme through these (e.g. the results of failure to implement the appropriate certification).

### **On-going commitment to the study**

The Case Study investigation should be a continuous activity during which you gather and assess all kinds of information, develop your arguments and form conclusions and recommendations. You should not be concerned if your arguments, conclusions and recommendations change as your Case Study develops. This is a natural part of the critical analysis process: that is, as you gather more reliable evidence your arguments may well change leading, in turn, to changes in your conclusions and recommendations.

### **Practical Bias**

Examiners have frequently expressed disappointment that a study has told them little or nothing about a candidate. It is difficult to generalise all views expressed by examiners but on the basis of past experience you should note the following points:

Avoid becoming too academic or theoretical: the Part 3 Examination is concerned with practice and the examiners will be looking to draw out contractual or professional implications of the subject from you at the oral examination. Make practice based considerations the prime objective of your study. Although the theory may be of interest to you, its practical application is more likely to lead to the sort of problem-based discussion at oral examination that will allow you to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and professional judgment.

Do not lose sight of the assessment purpose of the report: **the examiners expect to discover your approach to the evaluation of problems** and, for this, **conclusions are essential**.

The most common criticism from examiners is that:

"..... the candidate often fails to identify the problems which arose, the methods used to deal with the problems and how they ought to have been handled. The study is really nothing more than a job history or expanded diary." It is important to remember that your examiners do not simply want you to reiterate in the Case Study what you have already recorded in your Record of Experience. **A Case Study involving simply a diary of a job will not be acceptable.** While some description of the project/theme is necessary in a Case Study examiners are mainly looking for a critical analysis of the Case Study topic leading to meaningful conclusions and recommendations.

One simple yet successful method, which has been used by many, is first to 'cull' a history from the job files, in the form of brief notes.

Scanning this outline (and discussing it with your Employment Mentor) often suggests a significant theme (possibly two or three) around which the study may be built, providing direction and ensuring effective editing of unnecessary information.

In a project based Case Study you should identify the economic and other factors influencing the decision to build and the significance of the job to your office.

**In your Case Study it is important that you are analytical and evaluative and, where appropriate, make references to key texts on the subject to support your arguments.** Where possible you should benchmark practice identified in the study against good practice in architecture (e.g. RIBA Plan of Work / RIBA Job Book may be useful sources of information).

### **Permissions and confidentiality**

You should ensure before committing yourself to a study that all necessary information can be obtained and that permission for access, use, reproduction, etc, has been - or will be - granted. It is stressed that the responsibility for obtaining these permissions rests with you.

You are reminded that your employer's **confidentiality** must be respected at all times. However, your Case Study should not be 'sanitised'. You are assured that all documentary submissions submitted to APEAS will be treated with utmost confidence and will only be read by the few that are strictly necessary.

### **Case Study Report**

The Case Study report should be written up on a continuous basis during the life of the Case Study investigation. Depth cannot easily be acquired in composing a last-minute report.

In writing your Case Study report it is important to remember who the audience for your report is. Principally it will be your two examiners followed by your employment mentor, PSA and others in your office. Your two examiners will normally be senior architects, with many years of architectural practice experience, who work in private practice or the public sector. Such architects are unlikely to look favourably on a poorly structured report, with an excess of descriptive commentary and a lack of critical analysis.

One of the most frequent complaints made by examiners is that Case Study reports are too long. The body of the Case Study report, including any quotations, should be **6,000 words**. Only relevant materials should be included in appendices. Some candidates have chosen to ignore this advice producing, for example, reports in excess of 10,000 words. It is highly unlikely that a report that exceeds 6000 words in length will improve your chances of passing the Case Study. In fact, it is more likely to work against you as it indicates poor

judgment and an inability to convey information and analysis in a concise manner.

APEAS does not have any particular rules regarding the structure of Case Study reports. Rather it is left to each candidate to decide on the best structure for their report. In deciding on the structure your aim should be to present information, findings, analysis, conclusions and recommendations in a way that will be clear, concise, logical and easily understood by your examiners. When thinking about the structure of your report you may wish to ask yourself the following questions (the list of questions is not intended to be exhaustive):

- (1) Just how much background information should be included in the report?
- (2) Would an Executive Summary help give the examiners a concise overview of the Case Study?
- (3) What are an appropriate number of drawings, diagrams, graphics, and photographs to support the text in the report?
- (4) Where is the best place in the report to present critical evaluation (e.g. at the end of the report, at the end of each chapter or as it naturally arises? *To differentiate critical evaluation and comment from any job history it may be helpful to show the evaluation and comments in italic script*).
- (5) Are conclusions and recommendations supported by well developed analysis and argument in the body of the report?
- (6) Does the Case Study demonstrate clearly your ability to discuss and make professional judgments about the issues described?
- (7) Does the report provide examiners with insights into the way you have developed in professional practice as a result of undertaking the Case Study?
- (8) Can you demonstrate how the Case Study fits in with the ARB/RIBA Part 3 criteria as you may be asked questions on this at your oral examination interview?
- (9) Additional materials should only be included in any appendices attached to the report (e.g. financial statements, progress charts, minutes of meetings etc.) where relevant to the Study.

### 4.3 Presentation of the Report

It is important that a degree of uniformity be observed in the presentation of reports:

- 1 The Case Study should have stiff card covers, and be spirally bound.
- 2 Your name, and the study title, must be **clearly** visible.
- 3 All reports must be A4 size and the text must be typewritten.

- 4 A minimum font size of 12 should be used.
- 5 An index or 'contents' list is essential and the pages must be numbered.
- 6 A one page executive summary at the beginning of the report outlining key activities and conclusions is very helpful in allowing examiners to focus on the key issues in the Case Study.

#### **4.4 Proof Reading of the Report**

Examiners complain that some Case Study reports contain numerous spelling and grammatical errors. It cannot be over-emphasised that incorrect grammar and misspelling do not reflect well on your ability to compile a professional report. It is important that you arrange for your Case Study report to be carefully proof read prior to submission.