aspiration magazine

Issue 21
Winter 2025

CIAT aspiration
Nurture. Network. Develop.

A word from the Editor

Welcome to Issue 21 of **aspiration Magazine**, a winter edition that brings together an inspiring mix of student achievement, emerging talent, research innovation and professional insight.

From the AT Award-winning Student Project and Report of the Year to in-depth explorations of low-carbon housing and the current job landscape for Architectural Technologists, the work showcased here highlights the growing breadth, relevance and ambition of our profession.

A recurring theme throughout this issue is connection: between education and industry, technology and design, and people at every stage of their career. Features on aspiration activity across the UK, the recent aspiration Weekend in Bristol, and the increasing influence of early-career voices demonstrate the strength of an engaged and supportive professional community.

Whether you are a student navigating your next steps, a graduate building confidence, or an established professional reflecting on the direction of the industry, I hope this issue offers insight, encouragement and practical inspiration.

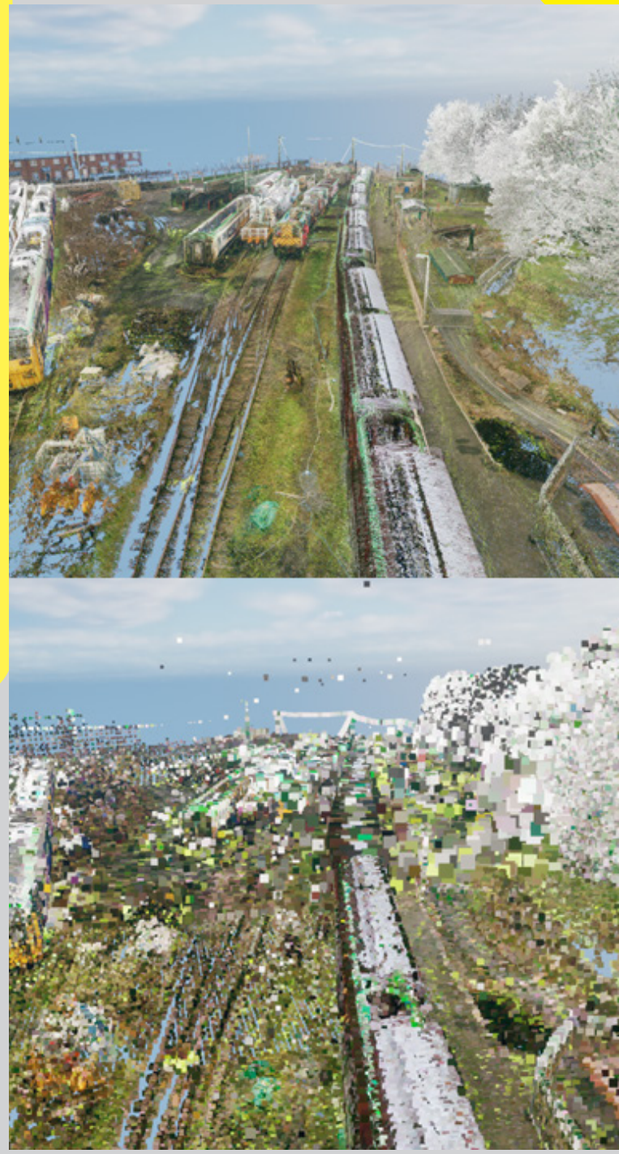
As always, we welcome your feedback, ideas and contributions as we continue to develop aspiration Magazine as a platform for emerging voices and forward-thinking practice.

April McKay
Editor

Get in touch if you have any feedback, ideas or content for the next issue.

Email a.mckay@ciat.global

In this issue...



CIAT aspiration

Nurture. Network. Develop.

You might be able to picture what your career as an Architectural Technology professional or Chartered Architectural Technologist will look like, but find it harder to picture how it will start.

It is never too early to start networking and being affiliated and engaged with organisations; it can help you start building a strong contacts list or even find you your next role. This is why CIAT is committed to helping your career in AT get started through our aspiration community.

What is aspiration?
aspiration is an inclusive global community of members and affiliates, made up of students, graduates, Associates, affiliates and recently qualified Chartered Architectural Technologists. aspiration supports aspiring professionals and helps to shape the future of the profession.

When you join CIAT, you are automatically a member of aspiration. You can become more involved at a Regional/Centre level with the local aspiration Chair who heads the local aspiration Group.

aspiration is led by Sam Lambert MCIAT, a Chartered Architectural Technologist based in the Yorkshire Region, supported by Will Watts MCIAT, also a Chartered Architectural Technologist based in the Western Region.

What does it do?
One of aspiration's main aims is to assist students, graduates and newly qualified members into the profession. They host events such as site visits, practice interviews, networking events and social gatherings. aspiration offers so much more than just events however – aspiration Groups engage regularly with schools and universities through presentations and careers fairs, helping to encourage the young professionals of tomorrow into the sector.

aspiration collaborates with other groups within the built environment, including Novus (CIOB), Matrics (RICS), YEN (CIBSE) and FAN (RIBA). The aspiration Chairs also work with their local CIAT Approved/Accredited programmes as well as Regional/Centre Committees.

Why get involved?
With the aspiration network located all over the country, the opportunities are vast; choose to attend an event, deliver a presentation or sit on an aspiration Group. Your level of involvement is up to you. There is something for everyone in aspiration. You may simply want to come along and meet some of your fellow Architectural Technology colleagues, maybe attend one or two CPD seminars, network at an event or seek some support through your local Chair.

How do I get involved?
It is very easy to get involved and there are many ways of doing so. If you know a Regional/Centre Committee member, Programme Leader or aspiration member, find out about when the next event, CPD or meeting is taking place, and introduce yourself.

Email **aspiration@ciat.global** to be introduced to your local aspiration Group.

Get in touch and become involved with aspiration and CIAT!

/CIAT aspiration

/ciat.aspiration

Winner 2025

STUDENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR

The Drop, Stratford
Kristin Gray, Middlesex University

AT AWARDS

Words by Kristin Gray

The Drop, Stratford is a 100-metre mixed-use tower set within Stratford's rapidly evolving post-Olympic context, the proposal responds to the interconnected challenges of density, sustainability, and inclusivity through a technology-led design approach.

The tower is defined by its external diagrid structure, which reduces steel usage by approximately 20% while enabling column-free, flexible interiors that can adapt to future needs. Environmental performance is underpinned by a holistic strategy of passive and active systems, achieving operational energy demands below 55 kWh/m^2/yr and a 22% reduction in embodied carbon compared to industry benchmarks.

Its tapered, aerodynamic form, combined with a double-skin façade, bio-solar roof and vertical green infrastructure, optimises microclimate conditions while delivering over a 10% biodiversity net gain. The project embeds accessibility, wellbeing and circular economy principles throughout, demonstrating how Architectural Technology can act as a central driver in shaping resilient, low-carbon and socially inclusive high-rise development.

The Stratford site presents several challenges, including high levels of airborne noise from surrounding railway lines and busy roads, overshadowing from nearby high-rise developments, limited baseline biodiversity and uneven ground levels. A detailed environmental analysis highlighted the need for a responsive design strategy to address these constraints.

To mitigate noise and enhance biodiversity, the landscape proposal introduces tree planting along the site's perimeter, creating both a buffer and ecological improvement. The uneven levels were repurposed as a natural drainage strategy, diverting water away from the building, while a mix of stairs and ramps ensures accessibility and ease of movement across the site.

Ecological resilience is reinforced through the integration of green roofs across both The Drop and the surrounding site buildings, planted terraces with native vegetation and new green spaces that collectively deliver a Biodiversity Net Gain of over 10%.

Environmental simulations guided the design process, including daylight analysis, computational fluid dynamics for wind modelling and dynamic thermal assessment. These studies shaped the building's massing into a distinctive 'tear drop' form: the narrow tip diverts prevailing winds, while the curved profile optimises natural sunlight penetration. Solar analysis confirmed this geometry as the most effective for achieving consistently high daylight levels.

Spatial planning was developed through bubble diagrams, structured around a central circular core designed in alignment with UK Building Regulations and British Council for Offices (BCO) guidelines. This process culminated in a vertically stratified programme: public and wellness amenities at ground level, flexible office floors through the mid-rise and a hospitality venue at the crown.

Spatial diversity is embedded within the scheme, offering wellness hubs, quiet library zones and adaptable office spaces to support a range of working styles and needs. The hospitality suite at the top of the building contributes to commercial viability while also providing a civic destination with panoramic views.

The structural solution employs an external diagrid core via radial outriggers. This approach was adopted after a conventional structural grid proved incompatible with the building's geometry. Buildability is further supported through a modular construction strategy: diagrid modules are assembled on-site, composite steel decking standardises floor construction and a panelised façade system ensures precise and efficient installation.

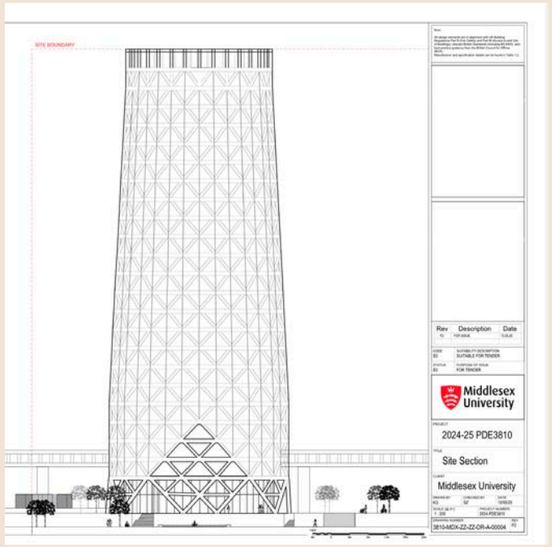
Construction sequencing has been carefully considered to address crane positioning, delivery logistics and the constraints of Stratford's dense urban context. This strategy not only shortens programme length but also reduces waste and ensures the project's design aspirations remain achievable within real-world conditions.

The building envelope is designed as a double-skin façade comprising fully recyclable cladding, modular aluminium panels made from recycled materials and high-performance low-carbon glazing. Given the material intensity of a high-rise - particularly in glass - the use of locally sourced and sustainable materials was prioritised to minimise embodied carbon.

The external skin integrates both fixed and operable blinds to regulate solar gain and enable natural ventilation. Planted terraces, filled with UK-native species, further contribute by filtering air, moderating the microclimate, and enhancing occupant wellbeing - offering restorative greenery that benefits mental health as well as the overall visual quality of the building.

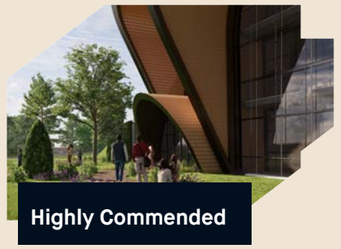
The Drop illustrates how Architectural Technology can serve as the central determinant of high-rise design. By integrating structural efficiency, sustainable façade innovation, biodiversity, and inclusive design into a coherent and buildable scheme, the project delivers a technically rigorous response to Stratford's post-Olympic urban condition.

Judges comments
The Judges praised the scheme as being rooted in a strong and imaginative concept, with building layouts that are both highly functional and deeply inclusive. The project demonstrates a clear commitment to designing for all users, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity are at the heart of the approach. The thoughtful attention to user experience and spatial planning set the work apart as an exemplar of people-centered design. From concept through to design detail, The Drop captures an energy and vision that speaks to Kristen's talent and potential. Above all, the project reflects a designer with a strong vision, creative flair, and a commitment to designing spaces that are both sustainable and inclusive. This project stands out for its clarity, depth and thoughtful execution, making it a deserving winner.



Winners & Finalists

STUDENT PROJECT OF THE YEAR



Highly Commended

Harbour Heights, Cardiff Bay

Lucy Warry ACIAT,
Cardiff Metropolitan University

Harbour Heights reimagines reclaimed industrial land in Cardiff Bay as a mixed-use, low-carbon community. Centred on an 11-storey building, it blends heritage-inspired design with sustainable features including PV panels, heat pumps, SuDS, and kinetic paving. Homes, commercial space, and active frontages create an inclusive, adaptable neighbourhood.

Commended

New Parish Center Glostrup

Rugile Matijosiute & Tanya Pedersen,
VIA University College - Aarhus C

The New Parish Center in Glostrup replaces outdated facilities with a low-carbon, timber-built design that reuses reclaimed bricks to honour its heritage setting. Meeting strict Danish standards, it combines sustainability, durability, and advanced digital tools to create a contextually sensitive, energy-efficient community building.

Commended

The Abberton Arc

Ryan Williams,
Anglia Ruskin University

The Abberton Arc is a dual-use environmental facility for S.E.N.D learning and ecological research at Abberton Reservoir. Designed for full accessibility and low-carbon performance, it uses a minimal-impact, bioclimatic façade with passive heating/cooling. A prefabricated, timber-first structure follows the landscape, with adaptable, sensory-supportive teaching and research spaces.

Finalist

The Exeter Opus

Harry Humphries,
University of Derby

The Exeter Opus is a proposed civic landmark on Derby's riverside, offering inclusive adult education, vocational training, and support for diverse learners. Rooted in social inclusion, it incorporates resilient flood-adaptive landscaping, a "Book of Learning" design identity, sustainable materials, natural ventilation, and prefabricated glulam structures to create adaptable, accessible learning environments.

Finalist

Blackwall Yard

Braydon O'Donnell,
Nottingham Trent University

This project introduces a Vertical Farming Research and Education Centre to address urban food insecurity and engage local communities. Reinforcing heritage by reopening the Grade II listed Lower Graving Dock and riverside links, it integrates PVs, passive ventilation, blue roofs, ashcrete framing, hemp insulation, and prefabricated solar-shading "flags" inspired by the site's maritime past.

Winner
2025

STUDENT REPORT
OF THE YEAR

Analysing the Application of Extremely Large Point Clouds (ELPC's) in Real Time Environments Using Game Engines

Joel Woodward,
University
of Wolverhampton

Words by Joel Woodward

As reality capture becomes more widely accessible, the use of point clouds for visualisation applications has become an increasingly important tool within the built environment sector, allowing for highly detailed digital models of the existing buildings to be generated. With integration of immersive technologies, such as Virtual and Augmented Reality (VR/AR), the demand for using Extremely Large Point Clouds (ELPCs) in real-time applications is growing rapidly. These expansive datasets make it possible to capture and represent reality with increased detail and precision, allowing designers and clients to visualise buildings and spaces in a more immersive and intuitive way.

However, as point clouds increase in size and complexity, significant challenges emerge in terms of computational performance, file management and hardware requirements. For immersive visualisation applications, maintaining real-time rendering is critical, with a minimum performance threshold of 60 frames per second (fps) required to ensure usability and avoid issues such as motion sickness. The aim of this research was to test the feasibility of ELPCs for real-time visualisation in game engines, specifically Unreal Engine 5. The study benchmarks performance across different point cloud sizes, file formats and hardware configurations to provide a practical insight into current strengths and limitations of the technology.

Point clouds are typically generated using LiDAR scanning or photogrammetry, producing millions of 3D coordinates that capture the geometry and surface detail of the built environment. Due to the non-intrusive nature of reality capture, point clouds are widely used in architecture for heritage recording, surveying, and as-built modelling, and increasingly for immersive visualisation through integration with VR platforms. The 3D spatial data captured provides a range of benefits, as point clouds allow for extreme detail, accuracy and precision. When rendered in immersive environments, they allow users to interact with true-to-life digital representation of the buildings or landscapes. This capability supports greater design decision making, and non-intrusive analysis of historic buildings for future record.

Despite the advantages of point cloud applications, they also present notable challenges. ELPC's are resource intensive which leads to computational constraints for real time applications due to the size of individual datasets. Rendering such volumes of data in real time is demanding even for high-end machines. Previous research has attempted to address this through semantic segmentation and deep learning neural networks which divides classifies each point of the point cloud into their respective categories, making the datasets more manageable. While valuable, these approaches often fail to address practical implementation in real-time environments, with limited focus on point clouds at architectural scales. This study focuses on experimentally testing ELPCs directly in a real-time environment, to analyse the feasibility of point clouds for rendering applications on an architectural scale. Employing an experimental methodology with Unreal Engine 5.4.4, the research directly tested ELPCs in a real-time context by importing a series of datasets ranging from 3 to 31GB in both .las and .e57 formats to evaluate the impact of file type. Point budgets were systematically adjusted from 100,000 to 100 million points to identify the performance thresholds, providing practical benchmarks for real time rendering applications.

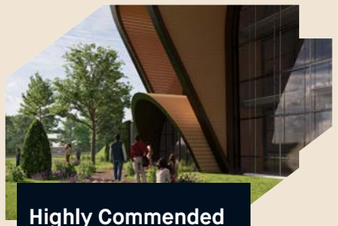
To address the challenges of rendering ELPCs in real time, future research should focus on methods for splitting ELPCs into separate chunks. By separating ELPCs into smaller chunks, this may allow for larger point clouds to be imported without needing a smaller point budget. For example, sample 3 is a point cloud with 543,341,928 points; however, when rendering only 18% of the scene at a point budget of 100,000,000, 15fps is the highest framerate achieved. Whilst this may be applicable for smaller point clouds, it is important to note that larger point clouds may not be suited. If the point cloud is being rendered at a 10,000,000 point-budget to achieve the minimum performance requirement, approximately 54 separate chunks would be required which is not feasible. When considering separating point clouds into more manageable chunks, the .e57 may still be the preferred file format compared to alternatives as they are compressed without sacrificing performance. However, utilising deep learning for point cloud optimisation remains the key focus for future research.

Judges' comments

The Judges commended Joel's report for tackling a highly relevant and contemporary topic, setting out clear aims, objectives and methodology from the outset. His engagement with recent and relevant literature, including academic publications, demonstrated strong research skills and an impressive awareness of developments in the field. Judges were very complimentary about the approach to the work and would like to compliment him on being very clear in his writing style, inciteful and to the point. Overall, the Judges were unanimous in agreeing that this was an engaging, forward-looking piece of research that demonstrated both rigor and creativity. ■

Winners & Finalists

STUDENT REPORT OF THE YEAR



Highly Commended

Tackling Embodied Carbon Within the Retrofit of Historic Structures

Jessica Hakes,
Nottingham Trent University

This research explores low-carbon retrofit strategies for an 18th-century building using literature review, Revit modelling, and LCA. Three alternatives – glulam, cob, and Guadua bamboo – were assessed. A hybrid cob wall with timber framing showed the lowest embodied carbon, demonstrating how natural material combinations can support practical, heritage-sensitive retrofits aligned with UK net-zero goals.

Commended

Harnessing SuDS for Surface Water Management

Braydon O'Donnell,
Nottingham Trent University

This research examines Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) in Tower Hamlets to reduce flood risk and pollution. Using SWMM simulations, permeable paving, bioretention, swales, and blue roofs were assessed, achieving over 61% runoff reduction when combined. The study highlights additional ecological and social benefits, demonstrating SuDS' effectiveness as nature-based urban water management.

Finalist

Pulley to Power: Fantail Driven Renewable Energy

Anastasia Fedorova,
University of Westminster

This report explores adapting historic windmill fantails for renewable energy generation using a Grade II listed mill in Kent. A redesigned fantail and step-up pulley system overcome low RPM while preserving heritage character. The proposal demonstrates how renewable technology can be sensitively integrated into historic assets to deliver sustainable, site-responsive energy solutions.

Finalist

AI Driven Automation in Architectural Design

Kieran Patel,
Nottingham Trent University

This report examines how AI can streamline architectural compliance tasks. Using surveys and testing of ChatGPT-4o, Grok, and DeepSeek on MSP drawings, the study found AI reduced time spent on repetitive checks and improved early-stage validation. While limitations remain, AI shows strong potential to enhance efficiency and design quality with professional oversight.

Finalist

An Assessment of the Feasibility of Energy Piles for Widespread Use Across UK

David Smith,
Liverpool John Moores University

This research evaluates energy pile foundations for low-carbon heating and cooling in the UK. Using literature and industry insights, it identifies barriers including technical complexity, limited standards, and low awareness. Case studies show strong potential where early collaboration occurs, highlighting the need for education and standardisation to reduce operational carbon.

Winner 2025

THE ASPIRATON AWARD FOR EMERGING TALENT IN AT

AWARDS

Ryan Davies MCIAT

Words by Richard Roberts, Director, Rio Architects

Ryan joined Rio Architects four years ago after graduating with a First-Class Honours degree in Architectural Technology from Cardiff Metropolitan University, where during his studies he demonstrated a high level of passion and technical ability, rightfully being awarded the CIAT Wales Outstanding Graduating Student Award. This early recognition set the tone for Ryan's professional journey, where he continues to demonstrate the same drive, commitment and technical excellence in practice.

One of Ryan's standout qualities is his ability to seamlessly switch between multiple projects at short notice, maintaining a high standard of work while always meeting deadlines. His flexibility plays a crucial role in maintaining project momentum and supporting the successful delivery of complex, fast-paced schemes, upholding the practice's reputation for technical excellence and quick delivery. His consistent dedication and willingness to support others have earned him the respect of colleagues and senior leadership.

Showing a sharp understanding of the growing responsibilities of Architectural Technologists with the introduction of the Building Safety Act, he is actively pushing to build his knowledge, lead coordination on complex projects, and champion the clear, accountable technical information the profession now demands.

While specialising in RIBA Stages 3–5, Ryan has a wide-ranging skill set that extends well beyond technical delivery. He is highly proficient in producing striking visuals through real-time rendering software. He has used this software to walk clients and planners through our schemes earlier in the process. This ability to communicate design intent in this way has proven invaluable in securing client buy-in and approvals. Helping them fully understand and connect with the vision behind each project.

He has been a key contributor to a wide range of our projects, including a large college in Bridgend featuring a unitised façade system, a high-rise student accommodation tower in Leeds, fire remediation works to hospitals and many others. Whether working collaboratively or leading a project, he consistently takes on greater responsibility and delivers strong results, no matter the challenge.

One of the current schemes he has been leading is a refurbishment of a Grade II* listed Victorian arcade in Cardiff, transforming an abandoned space hidden behind the units into a vibrant, modern food hall. His leadership and vision from developing the spatial arrangement to the Stage 4 tender package demonstrated his ability to navigate the complexities of working within a sensitive historic environment. Being heavily constrained, he expertly balanced the preservation of the arcade's unique heritage with the demands of a contemporary commercial use.

His consistent presence on site has fostered a strong partnership with the contractor. This allowed him to respond quickly and effectively to any unexpected issues, particularly during the soft strip phase, where hidden conditions demanded immediate and flexible solutions. His adaptability ensured that challenges were resolved thoughtfully and efficiently, minimising delays and preserving the integrity of the design. With completion expected towards the end of the year, Ryan has led the design team through this complex project, demonstrating dedication to achieving the highest quality outcome.

Not only contributing to the company through project work, Ryan is also a strong power user of Revit within the practice. He is the youngest member of our BIM team, specialising in our visualisation software plug-ins.

Ryan also prepared and delivered an internal workshop open to all our technologists, most of them being his seniors, where he walked them through the full CIAT chartership application process. He created an open forum where colleagues could share experiences, discuss the evidence they had, and explore how best to use it for their submissions. Even for those not yet applying, the session proved to be invaluable, providing clarity, encouraging early evidence gathering, and helping them take meaningful first steps.

Outside of work hours, Ryan is highly active within the industry. Regularly attending networking events, where he has built a strong professional network, connecting with industry leaders across the city. Ryan is an excellent young ambassador for our company, consistently representing the practice with professionalism, enthusiasm, and a genuine passion for promoting Rio Architects and Architectural Technology within the wider built environment.

His role at CIAT has allowed him to make a meaningful contribution to the profession. While he has only been the aspiration Chair for the Wales Region for 8 months at the time of writing, what he has accomplished in this time sets him apart alone. He is extremely passionate about bridging the gap between industry and education, creating opportunities that give students experience-led insights beyond the classroom, exposing them to industry expertise. Ryan has led the development of many new initiatives aimed at strengthening this connection, his vision ensuring the next generation enters the profession better prepared and technically confident.

The best example was the Technical Showcase event he organised for Cardiff Metropolitan University, designed to boost students' technical understanding through live construction demonstrations. The real-time installation of a section of a rainscreen façade and roofing systems, while having the contractor and manufacturers talk through design considerations alongside, allowed students to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This was also supported by CPDs on the products that were installed and industry-led talks, helping the students gain a clearer understanding of construction sequencing, technical detailing, and the practical considerations that informs their detail drawings.

The university's feedback was outstanding, praising both the relevance of the topic and the manufacturer's willingness to engage with students. The completed display is still in their studio today, where current and future students will have access to it, and is set to be the subject of future early detailing exercises.

From the event's success, it was featured in aspiration Magazine and will be recreated again this academic year. Ryan has also been working with other aspiration chairs about the possibility to bring this event model to other Regions in the future.

Ryan also organised a technical support session for final-year students at Cardiff Metropolitan University, bringing in some of Cardiff's leading architectural technologists to offer expert advice; aimed at strengthening the students' technical submissions and boosting their confidence ahead of deadlines. He also gave up his own time during lunch breaks to host one to one Teams calls for those unable to attend in person and for those at universities further afield, going above and beyond to make sure no one was left without support.

Additionally, Ryan sparked the idea for a second-year student technical competition, which has now been developed with the Aspiration team and is being implemented this academic year. Designed to strengthen students' technical skills and their ability to clearly present and communicate design decisions without an over-reliance on presentation boards and visuals, the competition is already being recognised for its potential to raise the profile of emerging student talent, improve technical confidence, and better prepare students for placement opportunities and professional expectations. They expect it to significantly boost student engagement with CIAT and student membership numbers, and provide universities with a valuable opportunity to showcase their students' technical capabilities on a larger platform.

Ryan has shown outstanding commitment and ambition in Architectural Technology. He has developed the skills and mindset to handle projects of all sizes and complexity, contributing to some of the practice's most technically demanding work. His forward-thinking approach and dedication to excellence mark him as a future industry leader.

With a strong drive to grow, he actively embraces digital tools, pursues professional certifications, attends industry events, and engages with professional bodies, all whilst serving as group chair for CIAT aspiration Wales, where he is redefining industry engagement with universities.

Working well beyond his years, he is rapidly becoming a highly respected and influential Chartered Architectural Technologist. Rio is proud to have him as part of the team. ■

aspiration Weekend 2025: Connecting, inspiring, exploring Bristol

Words by Adam Green ACIAT, Chair, aspiration Wessex

CIAT aspiration
Nurture. Network. Develop.

The CIAT aspiration Weekend is the flagship annual event that brings together early career professionals in Architectural Technology from across the UK and Europe. Far more than just a trip, it's an opportunity to explore a vibrant city, gain insight into the profession, and forge lasting connections.

This year marked the second aspiration Weekend trip, following our inaugural visit to Belfast last year, spearheaded by Liam Briggs MCIAT, Chair of aspiration North West.

The initiative was born from a simple yet powerful idea: to build a community that people feel part of and provide students, recent graduates, and early career professionals with a tangible reason to engage with CIAT.

The weekend creates shared experiences that build confidence, spark conversations, and connect attendees to the wider Architectural Technology community, showing them they are never alone in their professional journey.

This year, Bristol and the Wessex Region hosted an unforgettable weekend under three guiding principles: **Connect, Inspire, Explore.**

Day one: Setting the scene
The weekend kicked off at the University of the West of England (UWE), where attendees were welcomed with an itinerary briefing and a relaxed pizza social. CIAT provided on-campus accommodation, creating a central hub for the group to return to throughout the trip. The stage was set for a weekend that blended education, networking, and exploration.

From UWE, the group visited one of Bristol's most ambitious regeneration projects: Brabazon, led by YTL Developments.

This transformation of the former Filton Airfield into a thriving community promises 6,500 homes and commercial spaces capable of creating over 30,000 jobs. Tim Ridges and Gavin Kemmett from YTL shared insights into the master planning process, followed by a technical tour of the show homes designed exclusively for CIAT visitors. For many, it was a rare opportunity to see large-scale development up close and appreciate the complexity behind such projects.

Industry insight at Ridge & Partners
The next stop was Ridge & Partners' Bristol office, where I introduced presentations from Devon, Danny, and Esther of the architectural team. Attendees gained a window into office life, project workflows, and potential career paths. For those still studying, it was an invaluable opportunity to reflect on the environments they aspire to join.

Networking in style
As evening approached, CIAT Wessex welcomed attendees to their summer regional event at Harbour House. With a buffet and welcome drinks, nearly 30 members gathered to share ideas, compare experiences, and forge new connections. The atmosphere was vibrant, with conversations ranging from technical challenges to career ambitions, proof that networking can be both productive and enjoyable.

Day two: Exploring Bristol
Saturday embraced the Explore pillar. After an early coffee, the group visited local museums to uncover Bristol's rich history before embarking on a city-wide treasure hunt. This lighthearted competition encouraged teamwork while showcasing iconic landmarks. The day concluded with a scenic ferry ride around the harbourside, offering the perfect moment to reflect on the weekend's experiences.

The evening wrapped up with a lively group dinner and games, including bowling, pool, ping pong, and darts, ensuring the social side of the weekend was as strong as the educational one.

Voices from the weekend

"I had a brilliant three days and it was fantastic to see Bristol for the first time. I found it beneficial for my personal and professional development and the mix of site visits and networking was great."

Adam Jones, student, University of Lancashire

"The trip was a valuable experience that encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone and engage with others in similar situations. It allowed me to build confidence."

Chloe Baugh, student, Anglia Ruskin University

A growing initiative
The impact of this trip continues to grow. Attendees from last year have become aspiration Chairs and have started groups in their own Regions and Centres. Engagement from new participants has increased noticeably, and feedback consistently highlights the value of meeting new people, visiting live projects, and seeing the profession in a fresh context. CIAT aspiration is proud of this initiative and committed to expanding these opportunities in the future. Keep an eye out for what's planned next year – you won't want to miss it.

Architecture talent in 2026: Navigating change and opportunity

Words by Joe Oxtoby, Senior Manager at Hays, specialising in Architecture

The architecture sector enters 2026 with a mix of optimism and challenge.

Demand for experienced professionals remains strong, and opportunities for junior-level Architectural Technologists remains a bright spot in a jobs market that is challenging for those at the entry level. This is alongside a backdrop of the wider industry grappling with evolving skill requirements, salary expectations, and the growing influence of AI. Insights from the **Hays UK Salary & Recruiting Trends 2026 guide** reveal what employers and candidates need to know to stay competitive.

The market landscape
Economic uncertainty and rising operational costs have led many organisations to tighten entry-level hiring, a trend mirrored across UK industries. At the same time, AI is reshaping workflows and automating tasks once handled by junior staff. Rather than replacing talent, this shift signals the need for AI-literate professionals who can integrate technology into design and delivery.

For mid and senior-level roles, demand remains robust. Employers are seeking candidates with advanced technical expertise, regulatory knowledge, and sector experience. Soft skills like adaptability, stakeholder management, commercial awareness, and critical thinking are increasingly decisive in hiring decisions.

What ATs and Architects are saying
In data from our Salary Guide – looking at the responses from Architectural Technologists and architects – it paints a clear picture of shifting priorities and persistent challenges. Salary dissatisfaction is widespread, with 58% feeling their pay does not reflect responsibilities and 63% reporting overall dissatisfaction.

Transparency is also a major factor in job decisions – most respondents (93%) say they are more likely to apply for roles that publish salary ranges. Beyond pay, positive work atmosphere and a strong benefits package are the top priorities for 45% of respondents, followed by job security (36%), and career development (35%).

Work-life balance remains a concern, with more than 37% rating theirs as poor, often due to unpaid overtime – over 76% of respondents not compensated in any way for working outside of hours. Flexible working continues to influence choices: while 53% work fully on-site, hybrid and remote options are highly valued, with some willing to trade salary for flexibility.

Skills confidence across the profession is generally strong, yet there is a clear appetite for development, particularly in leadership and communication, reflecting the growing importance of soft skills alongside technical expertise. Meanwhile, AI adoption is gaining traction, with 50% using it regularly for productivity and creativity, though formal training opportunities remain limited.

Employer insights
Employers across construction and property, including architecture, report persistent skills shortages, particularly in roles that blend technical delivery with project leadership. These gaps are most evident at mid and senior levels, where practices need professionals who can manage compliance, budgets, and client relationships alongside design and production work.

Many firms expect modest headcount growth and favour hybrid models, typically requiring two to three anchor days in-office or on-site. Flexibility is now a key differentiator, helping attract and retain talent in a competitive market. Retention remains a priority, with employers increasingly willing to hire for potential and invest in upskilling through funded certifications, internal training, and mentoring.

Salary budgets are rising but often fall short of candidate expectations – nearly half (47%) of respondents feel that the inability to match market salary expectations is the biggest challenge to retain employees. Bonus schemes exist but vary in clarity and impact, highlighting the need for transparent reward structures and defined progression pathways. In a market shaped by rising costs and legislative changes, practices that prioritise flexibility, transparency, and skills development will be best placed to secure the talent needed for success in 2026 and beyond.

Skills in demand
Employers are looking for candidates who can deliver beyond design. Project delivery expertise tops the list, with professionals expected to manage compliance, budgets, and client relationships – skills that directly impact project success. Regulatory knowledge is another critical area, as firms navigate complex building regulations, planning frameworks, and safety standards. Leadership capability is also in high demand, particularly for mid-sized practices, where people management and negotiation skills are essential for guiding teams and maintaining client confidence.

These priorities reflect wider industry trends: over 66% of employers say they are willing to hire candidates who lack some skills but show attitude and willingness to learn (73%) over people who have existing skills, and over 28% cite specialist technical and digital skills as a top hiring focus. This means opportunity for those who combine adaptability with a commitment to learning.

Salary expectations mirror this demand – our survey shows 44% of employed architects earn between £30,000 and £44,999, while senior professionals often command £60,000 or more, reinforcing the value of advanced expertise and leadership capability.

Advice for early-career talent and the road ahead
While junior roles may be fewer, opportunities still exist for those who take a targeted approach. Clear, well-curated portfolios, evidence of project thinking, and adaptability can help candidates stand out – qualities employers consistently value alongside technical skills. As the profession evolves, these attributes will become even more important.

Practices that embrace transparency, flexibility, and continuous learning will not only attract emerging talent but also retain experienced professionals. In a market shaped by technological change and shifting expectations, those who invest in skills development and foster inclusive, future-ready workplaces will be best positioned to thrive in 2026 and beyond.

Shaping the future: MADD's innovative and sustainable approach to AT

Words by Macey's Architectural Design & Development Ltd

Founded in 2024, Macey's Architectural Design & Development Ltd (MADD) has quickly made its mark as a CIAT Chartered Practice with a passion for innovation and sustainability.

From residential and commercial new builds to the careful conservation of listed buildings, MADD's portfolio is as varied as it is ambitious. Following their success at the Southern Enterprise Awards 2025, Director Ben Macey MCIAT explores what makes the practice so distinctive.

At the heart of MADD's ethos is a commitment to excellence, attention to detail, and a client-focused approach. Ben explains:

"We believe that every project is an opportunity to create something extraordinary, and we are passionate about delivering results that exceed expectations. In the world of architecture, the journey from an initial concept to a completed building involves numerous stages, each requiring distinct expertise and attention to detail. MADD is dedicated to guiding you through every step of this intricate process, offering services that span from RIBA Stage 0 to RIBA Stage 7."

He continues:

"By adding services across all RIBA stages, we ensure a holistic and cohesive approach that brings your vision to life with precision and creativity. We aim to deliver exceptional results that stand the test of time. We ensure we always stay on trend and ahead of the curve by staying up to date with the latest technologies and advancements."

These services are, but not limited to:

- design and construction of new residential and commercial builds;
- comprehensive execution of housing developments, from initial consultation and site analysis to master planning, sustainable design, and project management;
- extensions to existing structures to enhance their space and functionality;
- creation of facilities for the healthcare sector to meet the evolving needs of patients and staff;
- empathetic conservation of listed and historic buildings;
- refurbishment of outdated properties to include modern design and innovation solutions; and
- renovation services to update and improve existing buildings.

The combination of technical skill, client-first thinking, integrated services, and innovative, environmentally conscious design allows the team to bring each project to life to the highest standard. Core values such as quality, collaboration, adaptability, continuous learning, and integrity underpin every project.

Ben explains:

"We have a client-centric approach and prioritise the client's vision and requirements, ensuring that every design aligns with their goals and enhances the user experience. We ensure that every aspect of the project is executed to the highest standard and we embrace cutting-edge technology and sustainable practices to deliver innovative and environmentally responsible designs."

So, how does Ben go about leading the team that make it all happen? He highlights the embracing of remote work and driving of electric cars to help minimise their carbon footprint. But he also goes on to say that he is dedicated to ensuring each team member fully understands their roles and that it is okay to ask questions, adding that, "in my opinion, that is one of the best ways to learn!"

He continues:

"I aim to lead by example, communicating openly and fostering collaboration, which I believe is key in this industry. I make sure I delegate work responsibly, encouraging feedback as and when required and aim to resolve any conflicts constructively to maintain team harmony and productivity. As we expand, I look for team members that have our core values at heart and have a passion for the industry and what we do."

When asked about the future, Ben is optimistic:

"The remainder of 2025 and beyond looks bright. We currently have several ongoing projects at various stages of development, and new jobs are coming in at a steady rate.

"On a wider scale. I'm involved with the CIAT Wessex Regional Committee and helped to set up a CIAT Coffee Club in Wiltshire, an event we are sharing with the AECB (Association for Environment Conscious Building). It is a great opportunity to meet like-minded people and businesses to connect and discuss sustainability and technology in architecture.

"I was also voted to represent the Wessex Region as a Voting Delegate at the CIAT AGM 2025 in Dublin, alongside the 60th Celebratory Gala, which was a fantastic experience."

With its dedication to innovative, sustainable design and a team culture built on collaboration and curiosity, MADD is a practice to watch. It's clear that for Ben and his team, the next chapter is only just beginning.

Zero carbon social housing: unlocking brownfield potential

Words by Lalit Chauhan FCIAT, Design Director, ZED PODS

The urgent need for social housing in the UK demands innovative approaches. Unlocking the potential of brownfield sites offers a sustainable pathway, delivering net zero homes while regenerating our urban environments for future generations.

The UK's housing crisis demands innovative and immediate solutions. With thousands of people languishing on council housing waiting lists and growing numbers in temporary accommodation. Despite ambitious government targets of 370,000 new homes annually to build 1.5 million new homes over the next 5 years, delivery has consistently fallen short and the need for sustainable, scalable answers has never been more pressing.

As we seek sustainable solutions, expanding into greenfield land poses significant environmental, social, and logistical challenges. Instead, brownfield sites – already embedded within and closer to urban areas or infrastructure – present an opportunity to meet housing needs in a way that respects both the past and the future.

At ZED PODS, we believe unlocking the potential of these underutilised spaces can deliver the zero-carbon social housing the UK urgently needs. Through innovative design, careful planning, and modern construction methods, these overlooked sites can be transformed into vibrant, net zero communities, creating sustainable communities without compromising future generations. In other words, brownfield sites are not problems to be solved but assets to be unlocked, offering the chance to build homes that are sustainable, beautiful, and deeply connected to place. Below, we explore seven key strategies essential for success.

1. Repurposing existing housing stock
Much of the UK's existing housing stock is outdated, inefficient, and unsuitable for modern living. Rather than extending cities outward, the strategic repurposing or redevelopment of underperforming stock can address housing needs sustainably, offering modern, space compliant and sustainable homes offering an opportunity to meet immediate needs while preserving urban cohesion.

Volumetric modular construction enables old or inefficient sites to be revitalised rapidly, reducing embodied carbon impacts while creating future-proof homes that meet evolving standards and expectations.

2. Building net zero social housing
Social housing must not only respond to today's needs but also anticipate tomorrow's challenges. Building to net zero carbon standards from the outset ensures homes are energy efficient, resilient to future regulations, and cost-effective over the long term.

Modern modular homes incorporate renewable energy systems, superior insulation, high-efficiency services, and passive design features to significantly exceed current regulatory requirements, creating homes that are both sustainable and desirable. Building to net zero standards ensures that future retrofitting is avoided, safeguarding financial and environmental investments over the long term.

This future-ready housing model is not just necessary, it is non-negotiable if we are to meet our net zero commitments by 2050.

3. Maximising brownfield potential within urban limits
Urban brownfield sites – from disused car parks to existing garages to flood plains to redundant industrial plots – offer the unique advantage of location: they are typically close to existing infrastructure, amenities, and public transport. The CPRE's State of Brownfield 2022 report identified over 23,000 brownfield opportunities across England alone, covering some 27,000 hectares.

Prioritising these sites ensures that development is compact, efficient, less car-dependent, bringing residents closer to workplaces, schools, healthcare, and public transport, supporting national efforts towards decarbonisation and urban regeneration and creating vibrant, walkable neighbourhoods.

4. Urban regeneration with double-edge benefits: housing delivery and green transformation
Unlocking brownfield land provides a rare double-edged benefit: meeting urgent social housing needs while regenerating neglected urban spaces into vibrant, biodiverse environments.

By transforming degraded or contaminated sites into thriving residential communities, developments not only address housing shortages but also turn 'waste' land into urban oases that enhance community wellbeing, biodiversity, and environmental resilience.

Incorporating features such as green roofs, rain gardens, naturalised landscapes, and ecological corridors, these projects deliver Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – a statutory requirement under the Environment Act 2021 – while simultaneously mitigating urban heat islands, improving air quality, and strengthening climate adaptation strategies.

Critically, such regeneration reduces site-wide whole life carbon impacts. Reusing existing land and infrastructure minimises embodied emissions; while integrating sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and ecosystem services helps future-proof communities against environmental risks.

Far from being burdens, brownfield sites present an opportunity to create sustainable, resilient, and desirable places – turning liabilities into assets for generations to come.

5. Sensitive design within historic contexts
Brownfield sites are often located within or near conservation areas, historic centres, or sites of ecological interest Development must, therefore, tread carefully, balancing the need for new homes with the imperative to respect local heritage and context.

Successful schemes emerge from early engagement with local stakeholders, thoughtful massing and materiality, and a deep appreciation of place. Our award-winning projects in conservation areas and floodplains have shown that, through sensitive designs, responsive massing, and considered materials, brownfield regeneration can enhance, rather than detract from, historic settings.

Unlocking brownfields is not simply a technical exercise, it is a civic responsibility.

6. Delivering complex brownfield projects
At ZED PODS, we have pioneered the delivery of modular, net zero social housing on some of the UK's most challenging brownfield sites. Our multi award winning schemes in Mid Devon, Bromley, Bristol, Newport, and Ashford exemplify how design, manufacturing know-how, and early stakeholder engagement can overcome issues like flood risks, contamination, made ground, buried services, conservation constraints, ecological sensitivities, and planning constraints must be navigated collaboratively.

Key success factors include integrated design and planning from the earliest stages, adaptability to local environmental and planning requirements, robust construction methodologies that incorporate modular flexibility, and close stakeholder engagement to resolve site-specific constraints These approaches allow developments to proceed efficiently, sustainably, and in ways that traditional methods may not permit.

7. Bridging standardisation and bespoke design
One size does not fit all, especially in the world of brownfield regeneration. Success depends on blending standardisation for manufacturing efficiency with bespoke design solutions tailored to each site's unique character. By embedding flexibility into modular systems – adjusting layouts, elevations, finishes, and material choices – it is possible to respond to local contexts without compromising efficiency or sustainability.

At its best, this hybrid approach allows developments not just to achieve planning approval more smoothly and deliver high-performance and low-carbon housing, but also to reflect local character and identity and create places where residents feel genuinely at home.

At ZED PODS, my 'Bespokularity' philosophy – the art of combining bespoke beauty with modularity – provides a framework for unlocking difficult sites in ways that are cost-effective, scalable, and community-focused.

In conclusion, Brownfield sites hold immense untapped potential to help solve the UK's housing crisis sustainably. Through a design-led, net zero-focused approach, brownfield development can regenerate urban environments, provide high-quality affordable housing, and support broader environmental and social objectives.

ZED PODS' experience proves that the obstacles presented by brownfields are not barriers but opportunities – opportunities to build better, greener, and more inclusively. If we are serious about tackling the housing crisis, we must start where the land already welcomes us: within our towns and cities, on the forgotten plots waiting to be reborn. By unlocking the potential of brownfields, we can deliver not just homes, but hope.

Take the next step on your professional journey!

If you have recently completed your studies, take your involvement and engagement with CIAT to the next level and upgrade to either Associate, ACIAT or 'CIAT affiliate' status with our supportive two-year subscription package.

Upgrading with CIAT will demonstrate to potential/future employers your commitment to your career and professional progression within Architectural Technology, plus enable access to our aspiration community which is a CIAT initiative that exists to help you accelerate your career and grow personally and professionally.

Should you upgrade in the same year as programme completion, we offer a supportive two-year membership package.

The first year subscription (worth £270) will be absolutely free – all you need to do is pay the application fee!

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To take advantage of this offer all you need to upgrade is to issue the following **via email** to membership@ciat.global quoting the promotional code **SA25**:

- Complete Associate membership application form
- Proof of degree/award certificate
- Current CV
- Formal ID (passport, driving licence)
- Pay £70 via BACS (please state your name in full as the reference when paying via BACS)

A suite of films about the qualifying process can be viewed on our YouTube Channel at **youtube.com/CIATechnologist**

For any queries related to upgrading, registration or qualifying, please do not hesitate to contact **membership@ciat.global**

4 reasons to upgrade

Demonstrate your commitment to the highest professional and ethical standards in Architectural Technology.

Attend CPD events through our AT CPD Register and receive specialist support via Mentor Match Me and Technology Network.

Engage with your peers and fellow professionals. Make new contacts, exchange ideas and expand your professional and social networks.

Dedicated support with professional progression and a range of information and resources.

Strengthen your LinkedIn profile for more visibility

Words by Aylin Round, Founder, ArchJobs

LinkedIn has become one of the most important tools for architectural professionals, whether you're looking for a new role, hoping to expand your network or building your personal brand. For Architectural Technologists in particular, it's an easy way to showcase technical strengths, connect with the wider industry and be seen by the right people.

LinkedIn now has over 1 billion members and more than 69 million company pages. It's where employers, collaborators and industry peers go to research people and discover new talent. Even if you're not actively job seeking, having a clear and up-to-date profile can help you connect with others, build your credibility and make the most of opportunities in the architectural community.

Below are some simple, practical steps you can take to strengthen your profile and increase your visibility online.

The essential steps

These 5 areas have the biggest impact on how often your profile shows up in searches and how people perceive you.

1. Write a clear headline

Your headline is one of the first things people see and it appears every time you comment, connect or share something. Keep it simple and keyword-focused so others immediately understand your role. For example:

↳ Chartered Architectural Technologist, MCIAT | Revit | [Specific sector]
↳ Senior Architectural Technologist | BIM Coordination
↳ Graduate Architectural Technologist | Revit | Technical Design

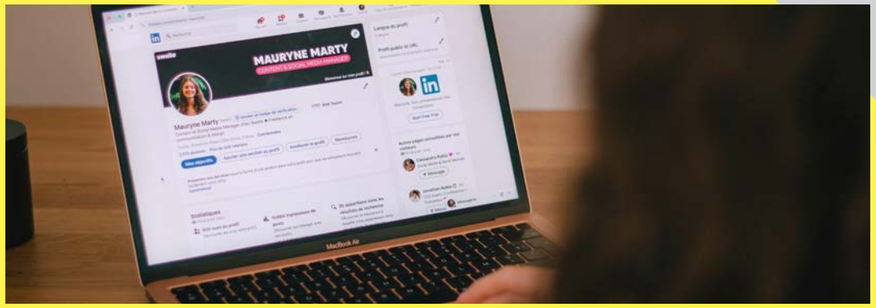
Avoid vague titles or phrases like 'seeking opportunities'. Clear, accurate titles perform far better.

2. Choose a professional profile photo

A friendly, up-to-date headshot makes a strong first impression. Use a clear photo where you are the only person in the frame. Avoid selfies and cropped group photos.

3. Update your location, industry and contact details

These small fields make a big difference. Selecting 'Architecture and Planning' helps you appear in the right searches. Make sure your location and contact details are current, especially if you're open to networking or collaboration.



4. Write a strong About section

This is your chance to tell people more about your experience, software strengths and technical background. Write in first person and include sector-specific keywords such as Revit, BIM, RIBA Stages, Technical Detailing or Tender Packages. Even if you're not job searching, an engaging About section helps people understand your expertise and makes your profile feel complete.

5. Keep your experience section updated

Your Experience section should match your CV in titles, dates and companies. Use bullet points to highlight key responsibilities and technical strengths, such as:

- Producing tender and construction packages in Revit
- Working across RIBA Stages 3–5
- Technical detailing for residential and education projects
- Liaising with contractors and consultants
- Supporting site coordination

Keeping this updated is helpful not only for job applications, but also for networking, collaboration and building your personal brand within the AT community.

Bonus sections to strengthen your profile

While the sections below are optional, they can enhance your visibility and make your profile more engaging.

Background image
A simple architectural sketch, drawing or branded banner can make your profile look more polished and personable.

Education
List your qualifications, grades and institutions. If you're still studying, add your expected completion date.

Skills
Add at least 5 skills, ideally a mix of technical, sector-specific and soft skills. You can add up to 50. These help you appear in more searches and allow others to endorse your expertise.

Featured
This is your 'highlight reel'. Even if you don't post regularly, you can include work samples, portfolio pages, project summaries, awards or a link to your online portfolio. This gives visitors a quick snapshot of your strengths.

Custom URL
A small detail, but it creates a cleaner, more professional profile link. Go to your profile → Edit Public Profile & URL → Customise

Your activity matters

Once your profile is updated, your activity becomes the main driver of visibility. You don't need to post every day... small, consistent interactions can have a big impact.

A few simple examples:

- Comment on posts within the architectural community
- Repost something relevant to your work or interests
- Share a drawing, detail or project highlight
- Join discussions about software, technical delivery or industry trends

The more active you are, the more people will see your name, headline and expertise. This helps you grow your network, increase visibility and stay connected within the AT community. Just remember that LinkedIn is a professional platform, so keep your interactions constructive, respectful and aligned with how you want to be perceived in the industry.

Conclusion

A strong LinkedIn profile is a valuable tool for any Architectural Technologist. It allows you to present your technical strengths clearly, build your professional identity and stay connected with others in the industry. Once everything is updated, spend a little time each week engaging with your network — small actions like commenting, sharing an insight or showing your work can make a noticeable difference.

A polished profile won't magically make people queue up to connect with you, but it will make it far easier for others to find you and understand who you are, what you do and what you care about. And that's the part that leads to opportunities, visibility, clarity and consistency.

Celebrating a year of momentum!

Words by Sam Lambert MCIAT, aspiration Chair

CIAT aspiration
Nurture. Network. Develop.

The aspiration Community was represented by over 20 aspiration Chairs and group members at the Institute's AGM and 60th Anniversary celebrations in November.

Key moments from the weekend included the inauguration of Usman Yaqub PCIAT as President, succeeding Eddie Weir PPCIAT FCIAT after his remarkable four-year presidential term.

Another milestone was the unanimous approval of an amendment to Bye-law 40, adding the aspiration Chair as a Trustee on the Executive Board. This change ensures direct representation of the aspiration community at governance level, enabling meaningful input into discussions and decisions that will shape the future of the Institute, the profession and the discipline.

There was also an update on aspiration activity across the Institute, delivered by Joe Hyett MCIAT and Sam Lambert MCIAT. Outgoing Chair, Joe reflected on a year of strong momentum, highlighting the aspiration Educational Trip in Bristol, the regional aspiration Chairs meeting in Leeds, and the significant presence of aspiration at the AT Awards. Incoming Chair, Sam then shared his vision for the next two years: "Bridging the gap—academia to industry."

The CIAT 60th Anniversary Celebratory Gala concluded the weekend, an exceptional evening of celebration and reflection marking seven decades of the Institute's achievements.

Practice information, education and guidance

Is running your own Practice a career aspiration? Is it your goal to run your own business as a Chartered Architectural Technologist or in partnership or co-directorship with others?

To give you a flavour, we have produced some information on what it requires, what CIAT provides you as a practising Architectural Technology professional, and how you would establish your own CIAT Chartered Practice.

Please visit *architecturaltechnology.com*, log in to the My CIAT area and select Practice information, education and guidance.

CIAT aspiration

Nurture. Network. Develop.

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