Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

Q1 What do you consider to be the greatest challenge facing the profession and architects in practice during and in the wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic and what will you do about that challenge?

Christina Gaiger

The greatest challenge will be different for everyone nationwide, from a sole practitioner in Shetland to a Director in Dundee. It would be overconfident to assume that I understand all challenges at present and ahead. Consequently, I reached out to peers across a range of practices to gain insight into their thoughts.

Feedback included:
- Cashflow
- Workload
- Job security
- Home / life management
- Practice closures
- Future workplace distancing
- Mental health and well-being
- The future of social spaces
- Loss of focus on the climate emergency

To assist, the RIAS can:
- Reinforce the value of good design and substantiate the pivotal contribution architects make.
- Provide a member’s forum and space where architects can share their experiences, seek confidential advice and gain support.
- Lobby the government for positive change to the procurement process, placing an emphasis on quality and openness to collaborative working; alongside a focus on our existing building stock and a uniform VAT rate.
- Act as a conduit for the architectural community, collaborating with other construction industry organisations, to share resources and become more dynamic.

The pandemic has demonstrated that we can be more flexible. Although there are many negatives, we have learnt a great deal and can come out stronger.
Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

Q1 What do you consider to be the greatest challenge facing the profession and architects in practice during and in the wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic and what will you do about that challenge?

**Gordon G Smith**

It is vital the RIAS understand the key problems being faced and how best to represent and support its members. The RIAS having already initiated advice on COVID-19, members are advised to check as the situation develops.

Consideration two distinct time frames:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Short Term</th>
<th>Medium term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issues arising from existing projects</td>
<td>Productivity drop off + decreased workload</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having launched a survey to establish and assess members circumstances, the feedback will provide evidence to share with members and policy makers (I urge all members to respond).

Initiatives to support:

- Develop a Resource Hub to tap into for specialist knowledge
- Membership Forum of shared experiences and practical insight.
- Deliver a national program
- Working remotely and the use of ‘Zoom’ meetings being the norm for much of the RIAS functions in the future allows us to look at the redirection of fee income to support activities including:
  - Membership offer and fees
  - Limited access to Chartered Practice Services to all architects
  - Awareness of existing charitable funds and financial endowments that can be accessed by members.
- Cross industry collaboration
- Alignment with a green recovery.

The only thing we can be certain of in the future is change.

Focus on the way ahead.
Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

**Q1** What do you consider to be the greatest challenge facing the profession and architects in practice during and in the wake of the Coronavirus Pandemic and what will you do about that challenge?

Karen Pickering

Whilst the full effect of the pandemic is impossible to gauge, the greatest challenge we will face is recession. My focus must be on how to navigate our profession through what will be a difficult time.

I would do this by ensuring the RIAS supports our architects in every way it can, and which could include the following measures:

- Be in dialogue with the Scottish Government for support on issues such as fee levels and procurement.
- Assist our architects to embrace digital transformation, whether this is through training or advising on access to grants to purchase new technology.
- Support our architects’ mental health, providing access to support networks.
- Provide business training and mentoring programmes.
- Provide advice on financial support and grant funding.
- Encourage greater collaboration between the RIAS and the RIBA, as they need to unite to help our architects through this.

As the country begins to emerge from this epoch-making pandemic it seems that much will change, both in our profession and the wider construction industry.

However, with challenge also come opportunities, and with the greater recognition of the need to address the climate emergency, COVID-19 can become the catalyst to make things happen.
Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>What makes our professional organisation unique? What do you consider RIAS biggest achievement and how do you intend to protect and preserve its legacy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christina Gaiger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The initial roots of the RIAS date back to 1840 when its aim was for “cordial co-operation and frequent correspondence”. Since then it has gone through a series of iterations and at each stage gathered highly skilled and talented individuals together for the transfer of knowledge and advancement of the profession.

The RIAS’s greatest achievement, what makes it unique and what forms its legacy is the historic and current collection of talent, passion, spirit and expertise – it’s membership. I am proud to be a member amongst some of the nation's best practitioners, past and present.

In order to preserve and build on its legacy we need to promote the existing membership, celebrate their work and provide a better platform for their knowledge to be shared. We also need to expand and attract new and existing talent. Across Scotland there is an incredible wealth and depth of knowledge, architects are doing fantastic things in their respective fields from environmental design to community outreach and education.

If I am given the opportunity to be President, I wish to preside over a professional body that every Architect in Scotland and beyond can see the value in joining.
## Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>What makes our professional organisation unique? What do you consider RIAS biggest achievement and how do you intend to protect and preserve its legacy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Gordon G Smith**

The RIAS, an organisation where the value of its history and traditions should not be overlooked, having recently celebrated our Centenary with a year long Festival of Architecture in 2016.

The RIAS objectives set out in its Charter broadly two main functions:
- Provide support to architects
- Be the voice of architects in Scotland.

A Federal structure of six Chapters brought together in common goal, is its greatest achievement collaborating to create a stronger voice for the values of the profession going forward!

Admittedly of recent, an unpleasant distracting episode in RIAS history, 2019 a year of transition; we can look forward and demonstrate maturity and willingness to create an environment where diverse, conflicting views are respected, welcomed, and decisions reached collectively.

Our decisions are collective ones, we need to work together with unity, compromise, openness, and integrity, providing a balanced perspective without agenda, promoting Architecture, and supporting Architects in Scotland…. Our core business.

We cannot stand still. We must continue to innovate, adapt, and lead the response to change underpinned by clear, focused actions:
- Strong profession
- Strong voice
- Strong organisation

The RIAS needs to look cynicism directly in the eye and have faith that the best is yet to come.
Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

Q2 What makes our professional organisation unique? What do you consider RIAS biggest achievement and how do you intend to protect and preserve its legacy?

Karen Pickering

The RIAS is unique because it is a strong Scottish institution. It is the bedrock of our profession and it specifically supports architects in Scotland. We have some of the most beautiful buildings in the world and the RIAS has always promoted the quality of the work our architects have produced.

I have been a proud member for 29 years and in times of uncertainty, such as current times, the RIAS gives us reassurance. But I do think it can do more and I would want to work on the mechanisms to give our architects more support.

The RIAS biggest achievement has been bringing all the chapters together and representing all architects across Scotland. I would further reinforce this and ensure the northern chapters are embraced more by the RIAS.

I will protect and preserve its legacy by being true to the RIAS charter but also to be guided by the RIAS Council, who have been doing excellent work on bringing about reform in the last two years. The RIAS needs to shed its image of being a ‘gentlemen’s’ club and become more inclusive and relevant to the needs of architects today.
**Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Single practitioners working from home might be the new reality. How do you intend to support, protect, and help them to further develop their careers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Christina Gaiger**

It is clear across many industries and business typologies that working from home has become more viable than expected and it may actually be the new reality or part time reality for office-based workers including Architects. Single practitioners may wish to reduce overheads and work from home as opposed to hot desk, rent or share an office space.

Regardless of workplace location or practice type, every RIAS member should feel supported and have access to CPD and career progression opportunities.

One of my key aims is to create a supportive architectural network and community; a ‘hub’ both digitally and physically for architects and the promotion of architecture. This would offer accessible support for all members, a forum to raise questions, share knowledge and reach out to peers. The ‘hub’ and connectivity could open doors for collaborative opportunity and new ways of working together. This network would also allow for the six chapters and other local organisations for example The Edinburgh Chartered Architects Network (ECAN), to connect, extending the opportunities and support available.

The lockdown period has demonstrated that we do not need to be in the same location to be connected, removing regional, location and workplace barriers.
Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

Q3 Single practitioners working from home might be the new reality. How do you intend to support, protect, and help them to further develop their careers?

Gordon G Smith

Expressed by many individual Members is a perception of being marginalized. Current RIAS membership 69% of practices <5 architects and 43% are sole practitioners.

Architects are uniquely able to help develop and support high quality and innovative solutions as the new norm:

- Guidance on practice resilience
- Champion skills, and knowledge
- Promote a creative, inclusive approach to developing new working
- Promote opportunities for new and emerging practitioners to demonstrate their skills through competitions
- Develop Regional Hubs as foci for promoting architecture
- RIAS to advocate for the protection of the function of an architect
- Establish a Mentoring scheme
- Support the use of new/local practices in remote communities
- Facilitate partnering between architectural practices

Creating joined up thinking across the Chapters and encouraging local architectural communities and Small Practice Network Groups can become a knowledge community dedicated to the exchange of information on Architecture and general practice topics with special emphasis on the application of issues affecting sole and small architectural practices, through the interchange of ideas and by the debate of practice matters.

Collaboration and co-operation lie at the centre of all successful outcomes.

Working together we can contribute to develop new ideas for inclusivity:

- BE SUPPORTED
- BE INFORMED
- BE REPRESENTED
- BE INSPIRED
### Questions to RIAS Presidential Candidates 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Single practitioners working from home might be the new reality. How do you intend to support, protect, and help them to further develop their careers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Karen Pickering**

I work in a practice of 36 people, yet currently working from home, away from my colleagues, I feel like a single practitioner. This experience has given me an insight into what I could do to support single practitioners.

We all need to feel part of something and feel connected. I would ensure the RIAS was the conduit for those connections, embracing technology to do this.

During lockdown I have benefited from accessing digital CPD courses. I would seek to set up a full programme of on-line CPD and webinars, so architects can be fully up to date with the latest thinking in architecture.

I would set up online forums so architects can learn from each other and offer peer support.

I would set up a mentoring system, so architects can be linked to other architects, who could give them career guidance as well as offering emotional support.

I believe the social aspects of being an architect are also important. With more people working remotely, virtual networking events can ensure architects feel connected socially, and crucially be accessible to all RIAS members irrespective of geography.