RIAS Pandemic Impacts- Looking Ahead

Thank you to all of you who responded to the surveys to determine the impacts of Covid 19 and Lockdown on our Members and Practices. This document shows a summary of the findings.

The results reflect the picture experienced by many in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK and give valuable insights into the personal, physical and organisational impacts of remote working experienced by our members, as well as critical employment and workload impacts.

We were particularly encouraged by the number of Members who wish to support others and through the Chapters we hope to take forward some of the suggested initiatives to bring Members and Practice together in mentoring and knowledge sharing.

The employment and workload picture present greater challenges and have already been shared with Scottish Government via the **CICV Forum** (a joint working approach we have with other industry bodies). The RIAS are also in discussion with the Chief Architect regarding the findings of both surveys and are engaged across the construction industry in joint actions as a result.

Your comments and suggestions for countering key impacts build on the messages which shaped our **RIAS Inspiring** 5-year Strategy and will inform the RIAS strategic planning for our external voice and internal support into 2021. Specifically:

- Building a strong RIAS **position and voice** on key issues in construction and the environment in the Post-Covid world and working together with other stakeholders to effect change and develop design solutions for a sustainable future.
- Supporting Members with advice on the developing **business landscape and changing legislation** and promoting more **resilient procurement** and ways of **innovative working**.

It has been a fast-moving situation since the surveys closed and there is uncertainty about what will follow. It is essential that we use our networks to develop smarter ways of quickly identifying emerging threats and trends affecting the membership. We have therefore asked the Chapters to assist in developing a network of representative practices willing to help us be aware of workplace and workload challenges as they emerge. This will enable us to respond swiftly and also support Members by sharing relevant advice. **Please contact your chapter if you would like to support this network.**

It is vital that we continue to focus on increasing our collective profile and impact in public life. We are developing an initiative, born of the pandemic, around 'Design Led Futures' as a platform to join with creative industries message 'Making Life Better by Design', and are working with Members to take its messages forward.

Karen Stevenson Acting Secretary

Christina Gaiger RIAS President

RIAS Members and Practice Surveys 2020

Summary Findings

Who responded?

The membership survey issued through the Chapters was completed by 260 practitioners and students.

The Registered Practices and Sole Practitioners survey from RIAS National survey was completed by 140 participants (out of a possible 822), in a period of just over two weeks at the end of May until June 2020. Both response rates are low at 6.5% and 17% respectively but with many staff on furlough this was perhaps to be anticipated.

A separate survey was circulated to our retired members, of whom 156 (29%) responded.

Impacts of Lockdown and Remote Working

Overall;

55% participants indicated that they could work from home with adequate equipment (sometimes taken from the office before lockdown) ,

45% are working the same hours,

27% indicated increased care responsibilities,

22% confirmed that their income has been reduced.

The situation has produced several situations;

- **Reduced hours and income with doubts for returning to normality,**
- **Flexible working to accommodate care responsibilities which are enjoyed but result in longer days,**

- **Increased workload for partners/directors due to furloughed staff,**

- **47% of respondents indicated their personal income has been reduced, with 44% confirming the combined household income is reduced. Despite the financial concerns, 42% agreed they enjoyed working from home. For some, the flexible working has benefited the family,**

- **For 36%, their mental health has been negatively impacted. Words that are used repeatedly include stress, anxiety, draining, lack of motivation, frustrating, missing contact, challenging, isolated and lacking support. 19% felt isolated and the need to physically meet is clearly essential for the wellbeing and efficiency of people working in this industry.**

Employment and Workload

At the time of the survey;

59% of responding Practices were experiencing less inquiries,

52% had a reduced workload and 49% had furloughed staff,

3% of practices had to make staff redundant with a further 5% of Members indicating they expected to be made redundant.

Prior to the lockdown on 23 March the workload picture looked like this;

Around 30 – 50% of workloads were RIBA 1-2 or 3 –4 however when asked what percentage of their workload will be at the various RIBA stages when lockdown ceases, there are more projects in stage 3 – 4 or 5 indicating that some practices were able to continue to progress projects.

Practices relying on private sector funding were clearly being hit with cancelled or postponed projects.

83% of public funded contracts are continuing while only 46% private project are continuing.

However, a greater number of projects valued above £5 million have been cancelled or postponed in the public sector (31%) in contrast to the private sector (27%).

These figures are still quite close so losing larger value contracts from each sector suggests significant uncertainly.

Post Lockdown Prospects

The expectations for post lockdown are mixed for a variety of reasons, including whether the participants are freelance or employed, and on the client bases of practices.

56% expect practices will work smarter and more effectively and use more innovative ways for holding meetings,

40% expect to work from home at least one day a week and some viewed homeworking will continue and require to be supported by Government incentives. Safe working and social distancing were also a concern,

38% expect to be fully employed as before. However, 51% feel their jobs will be less secure as a result of an economic downturn, 30% expect to have to adapt to a new way of working or need to gain new skills, and 20% expect to take a wage cut. Some respondents predict an increase in self-employed architects,

59% of participants indicated they didn't anticipate any changes in their practice /workload spite of the cancelled or postponed work, the remainder do foresee redundancies.

Most responses anticipate a change in the kind of work that might become available after Covid-19

Many Practices registered concerns that on return to post lockdown working there may be restrictions on travel, delays in the supply chain, delays in planning and building warrants.

Looking ahead there is concern regarding delays in awarding contracts and a lack of new commissions due to the financial insecurity of clients and the housing markets. Members are looking for clear narrative on contractual implications of Coronavirus as clients need guidance on what if any increased costs can be levied on projects.

Countering Covid Impacts

Those that participated in the survey have strong ideas how the Government can support Architectural Practices and the Construction Industry including changes to financial packages, regulations and guidance.

Across the board, Practices prioritise increased investment from public funding to support all sectors, as well as funding from banks for housing or investment through commercial projects. Another key priority was the suggestion to review VAT arrangements. It was noted that VAT had a greater impact on sole-practitioners and there were calls for VAT and Tax incentives including raising the VAT threshold or reducing or eliminating VAT Charges on: professional services, architectural fees, alteration works, listed buildings work, remedial use of brownfield sites, refurbishment work and introducing VAT reclaim on non-new build projects.

There were requests for 'smoother' processes in planning and building standards and one for a simplification and relaxation of planning policy and processes at this time.

Some asked for public procurement and fee levels to be reviewed to help smaller practices compete more equally and for an opening up of the tendering process.

Individual Members echo these suggestions and in addition ask for focus on measures to bring forward carbon reduction and climate-related changes to design and construction.

There are a lot of specific positive suggestions and views including:

- **Investment in public infrastructure, support in the community, mental health and climate related issues are the most important,**
- **We need to exploit the awareness of what reduced personal mobility has on CO2 levels and substitute VAT with something like a Climate Contribution paid by anyone producing/specifying something that impacts on the climate/limited resources giving credit where embodied energy is retained (such as existing buildings) and the product has a long guaranteed life,**
- **Invest in town centres with local people, local architects, local clubs and businesses with an aim to create spaces and places which bring people together post COVID19,**
- **Consideration should be given to rural issues as well as urban with thought being given to the sole practitioners and small practices and also individual tradesmen and small building firms in rural areas training, skills and student, apprentice schemes should be retained / developed,**
- **Establish a role for architects and designers in all strategic Post Pandemic Recovery discussions. Allowing architects to work with those most affected to find creative solutions to problems that will impact on the economy, health & wellbeing, and future generations.**

The Student Perspective

The impact of COVID on the sector for students as well as qualified architects is very similar, with both fearing for future work, future earnings and careers.

Supporting Each Other and Knowledge Sharing

The Members Survey asked if individuals were willing to consider giving support to others and to other joint working initiatives and the results reveal that there are some real opportunities for the Chapters to connect people and develop knowledge sharing.

	% Willing Participants
Joint Working Initiatives (between practices and across disciplines)	**55%**

Willing to offer/deliver support	**45%**
Providing Mentoring	**45%**
Providing your expertise to assist the RIAS in its work- education, contracts, practice, planning, conservation, governance, sustainability, competitions/ RIAS Consultancy	**43%**
Networking/Social Events	**41%**
Sharing your Skills (webinars, workshops)	**39%**
Discussions/Debates (taking part or organising)	**37%**
Generating CPD Sessions	**20%**
Do you want to be mentored?	**15%**

The Bigger Picture and RIAS Strategic Plan

What Covid and the post-Covid economy might mean for our existing and future buildings, and public spaces, remains to be seen. However, there is a great deal of willingness to work on what this might look like, through a collaborative approach. Predicting how our future society will live and work focused on the futility of creating buildings that would become obsolete. Building suitability and adaptability, especially in the housing sector, came through as a key message. There should not be 'a race to the bottom' in the construction sector and the Governments' response to restart the economy should not be 'at any cost'.

Practices still see their role in addressing the Climate Emergency through resilient and sustainable design as very important (77%) and addressing the Climate Emergency through whole life energy measures (64%). There were challenges for us a as a profession to set our sights on the United Nations 2030 goals and pointer towards sustainable design and construction solutions such as Passivhaus, Off Site Manufacture and use of home-grown timber.

Supply chain and buying 'local' was a feature in the responses, as was collaborative working, however there was limited reference to the importance of the Circular Economy and only 24% thought promoting Regional collaboration and supply chains in procurement was very important, with 20% thinking it wasn't important at all.

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