

# RICS AGM 2023: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

At this year's Annual General Meeting, RICS undertook to answer all questions submitted and publish answers on our website. We have grouped questions where there is a theme for ease of reading. We have included all questions submitted to us in advance, all questions asked during the AGM and all questions submitted to the AGM inbox.

We have not published the names of those who asked questions and removed any identifying details from questions. We have disclosed all questions in full where possible.

**Q:** Within a relatively small industry, suppliers have relatively few customers so new suppliers don't compete for their business and/or they create a product that becomes the industry standard, thus creating effective monopolies. Examples are: valuation packages (Argus have a stronghold), market data collection (CoStar are the leaders), and news, which is more competitive but potentially expensive to run if there are various businesses doing the same job. Moreso with the first two examples, they are able to increase their pricing and businesses have no choice but to accept them to do their job and remain competitive amongst their peers. Is RICS able to campaign on behalf of its members to keep the pricing down and to a fair level for all types of users?

**A:** Following the Bichard Review, we have been doing more to strengthen the voice of RICS on behalf of our members in the markets in which they operate. To support this, we are committed to:

- promoting competition
- ensuring that all market participants adhere to consistent quality and accuracy requirements through our standards setting
- collaborating with different industry stakeholders to encourage a more competitive landscape and minimise the risk of monopolistic control
- actively monitoring the market for valuation software and real estate data to help identify any potential anti-competitive practices or market concentration issues that could negatively impact RICS members.

**Q:** AML and KYC checks are quite rightly required with a lot of the onus placed on agents. Nothing can replace the agent making common sense checks as to whether the transaction feels right, but the agent is not qualified enough to spot major money laundering crimes. The agent is unaware if the buyer is also buying properties in other markets, artwork or other high value goods that would suddenly make them suspicious, if known. The process requires a central system, probably government run, that monitors any person or organisations acquiring or disposing assets that any individual or company would need to be registered to in order to transact. The cost of this registration would fund the operation. Is RICS able to campaign for such a process to reduce the pressures on its members?

**A:** This is a high-profile issue affecting not just surveyors but many professionals working in the real estate sector. We have been working closely with the Land Registry and Companies House to contribute to their work on the Register of Overseas Entities and proposals for verification of company information. This Register of Overseas Entities creates a requirement for overseas companies to join a central register to acquire or dispose of land and property assets. We also work with HMRC and the National Crime Agency to ensure that challenges for our members and firms in Anti-Money Laundering compliance are understood by the regulators.

**Q:** What is our policy and what advice are we giving to government on the following:

- debate about affordable housing generally and particularly in areas where “second homes” are a dominant consideration in the local market?
- debate about housing numbers, the availability of land for development and the (often) inadequate provision of supporting infrastructure?

**A:** In the last 12 months we have been meeting with Ministers, MPs, and members of the House of Lords to discuss the challenges of housing supply, healthy homes and property conversions. We have called on the UK Government to reinstate its house building target which supports land supply identification and given evidence in Parliament on reforms and investment needed to meet such a target.

We understand infrastructure is critical to housing supply — this is why it was covered length in our [Levelling Up and Sustainable Placemaking Report](#) and is shaping our engagement with the government as the Levelling Up Bill progresses.

In addition, we will shortly commence a holistic review of the housing commitments we will expect from the next UK Government. This will form part of our Housing Manifesto which will be formally presented to Ministers, MPs and campaigners at the party conferences later this year.

**Q:** How will RICS be supporting its members of the Building Control profession with regards to the new Building Inspector Competency Framework? Will there be an offering of a route to achieving competence similar to what the LABC and CABE are offering?

**Q:** Will there be support given for the Building Control members of the RICS with regards to the new Building Safety Regulator framework?

**Q:** Does RICS propose to provide an accredited process for RICS members to demonstrate their competency as a Building Control Surveyor sufficient to register as Registered Building Inspector (or Approver) class 1,2,3 and 4 with the Building Safety Regulator when the register opens on 1/10/2023.

**A:** The new Building Safety Regulator (BSR) intends to open a register of building control professionals in England on 1 October 2023. RICS is seeking approval as an independent competence assessment scheme provider to ensure that its members can demonstrate their competence to fulfil the different registration classes as defined in the newly published Building Inspector Competence Framework (BICoF). A survey has been issued to members involved in building control to inform this.

We will look to support members as requirements change and the environment in which they are working develops.

**Q:** Is it still relevant that RICS should continue to occupy their Great George Street offices exclusively or would they not be better to let them to a Serviced Office Provider and rent relevant space back on an as needed basis?

**A:** Great George Street is a fantastic asset for the Institution given the history of the building and its location. We aim to ensure it is a vibrant and welcoming place to be for staff and members, and that we are taking advantage of its great history and location to help us support the profession and further our public advantage objectives.

Work is currently underway to revitalise the building, potentially reopening the Hub and improving events management, improving member spaces and maximising utilisation of the asset.

**Q:** Could an update be given on the status of the RICS fee review?

**Q:** RICS subscription fee in the US is \$1,000 a year. An equivalent professional organisations, the ULI, charges \$250 a year and produces a lot of usable CPD and networking events. RICS fees are too high. We were told 3 years, and \$3,000 ago, that fee structures would be urgently reviewed but we are still waiting and effectively being held hostage. The RICS must reform.

**A:** At this year's AGM members were asked to vote on a new subscriptions framework, setting out the high-level process for approving subscriptions and the key information that the RICS Board will need to consider before recommending the subscriptions to Governing Council each year for approval.

Ensuring subscription fees are simpler, clearer and fairer for members at all stages of their career has been a major focus of the Member Services Steering Group. Part of this work also explores ways to provide more insight into how member fees are spent and how we deliver better value for the membership. We will be communicating more on this in the next 4-8 weeks, ahead of the new 2024 subscriptions cycle.

**Q:** Where a member has retired from professional practice and has been a member for 50 years or more, consideration should be given to waiving any requirement for a subscription. Other professional bodies have adopted similar attitudes towards their members e.g. Chartered Institute of Bankers.

**A:** An initial review of all member subscriptions has been undertaken which includes reviewing both the fees and value proposition for retired members. Initial feedback has been provided by Governing Council and further work is being undertaken following their steer. Once proposals are updated and approved, these will be communicated to members in the next 4-8 weeks.

**Q:** What is RICS doing to immediately address apathy? I believe only 7% of members responded to the survey titled "the future of the profession". That is telling and urgent action is required.

**Q:** In light of the unprecedented apparent lack of interest in securing nominations for the recent elections to Governing Council for the Building Surveying and Building Control, Commercial Property and Construction professional group positions, as well as the geographical seat for the UK & Ireland, can you outline what measures are either being taken or will be taken by Governing Council to ensure that these vacant positions

are filled democratically? Also has Governing Council commenced an inquiry to report to the membership the reasons why there were a lack of applications and how the current election processes across the Institution can be improved to ensure that the membership is fully engaged?

**A:** We recognise that the low number of candidates for this year's GC election, particularly in the UK and Ireland, was disappointing. We received a good number of applications for seats in other markets, as well as the Young Member seat which attracted many candidates.

This year's election took onboard feedback from members provided as part of the Bichard RICS Review last year and delivered a simplified, faster application process. However, we are aware that some candidates did not find the improvements sufficient. We are fully committed to ongoing improvements to this process and we have listened carefully and liaised directly with members who have taken the time to feedback during the election period.

Governing Council has already begun discussions on next steps. A thorough review is currently being conducted to gain further insight and we will be interviewing candidates, both successful and unsuccessful, and looking at solutions for the uncontested seats, with recommendations for any changes being made to Governing Council in October ahead of next year's elections.

We recognise that there is work to be done to improve member engagement and the disconnect some members feel from their professional body. One example is the upcoming work from UK&I World Regional Board which will focus on creating more grass roots engagement in local towns and cities.

**Q:** The profession is struggling to attract young people, what will RICS do to ensure the future of the profession with future generations?

**A:** One of our core objectives is to continue to develop and attract a diverse next generation of professionals — this is why we have made it one of our four core goals in the new three-year strategy. Moving forward, we will share more detail on how we plan to achieve this important strategic goal.

The RICS dedicated Early Engagement Team is closely aligned with the in-market teams and work to support their needs. Our Early Engagement Team does great work to engage future potential professionals, including going into schools to talk with students about the opportunities in our profession.

Partnerships with external youth organisations are important in raising the profile of RICS and have gone from strength to strength in the last year — there are frequent drop-in sessions for students, course leaders and academics. Opportunities for work experience placements are increasing and a Campus Ambassador initiative is currently being piloted in nine universities. Our social media presence is also expanding.

In universities, there are calendared programmes of themed interactions to maintain engagement, including alignment with firms, and promotion of thought leadership and standards. Other recent activity includes school and college interactions, student visits to RICS HQ in London, attendance at career and influencer events, and a lead role in the global COP28 competition.

The early engagement programme is gaining momentum and is supported by over 500 Brand Ambassadors globally who give up their time and energy to inspire the next generation.

**Q:** Has the "threat" of government intervention in the running of RICS that came about after the situation leading to the review been dealt with? One of the issues leading to the review was the then leadership treating the RICS as a private fiefdom. What are the measures in place to stop this happening again?

**A:** The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill has continued its passage through the parliamentary process and was debated in the UK House of Lords. We have engaged closely with members and stakeholders to input expert advice on many aspects of the Bill.

Clause 213 of the Bill specifically relates to RICS and seeks explicit powers for the Secretary of State to review the work and performance of the organisation. The clause's purpose is unclear, as are the circumstances in which it would be proposed to be used. In this light, it has potential to undermine confidence in the independence of the Institution's work for the benefit of the market, the public, businesses and members.

In the May debate, members of the House of Lords spoke in support of RICS' remit and its work. Concerns, shared by peers and many other stakeholders centre on the absence of any evidenced rationale for the proposed legislation. We have remained in close discussion with the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities on the potential consequences of this clause.

Lord Bichard has stated he is content with the approach RICS is taking and the progress made to implement the recommendations. He recommended that RICS commissions a review every five years. However, to build confidence that we are delivering the benefits intended as soon as possible, we recognise that five years may be too long a period to wait for the first review so have instead committed to this after three years, to be held in 2025.

As a non-statutory, member funded professional body with a critical public interest role, RICS must be demonstrably independent from commercial or political interests in its work. These matters are of concern not just to RICS but all similar chartered bodies.

RICS has demonstrated its robust governance by its commissioning, publication and immediate implementations of the Levitt review and subsequent commissioning of Lord Bichard's independent review of future strategy. RICS Council endorsed Lord Bichard's review and is well advanced in implementing all of his recommendations.

**Q:** It has been flagged to me that individual RICS members are charging APC candidates for mentoring through the APC process and assessment. Should RICS offer more support to candidates so that young people are not paying out for support?

**A:** We are aware that there are several training providers that support candidates with their APC, supplementing the training and support provided by RICS. We would always encourage candidates to consider their training needs carefully, in discussion with their counsellor. This should cover not only the professional and technical training and support needs, but also any sources of support with the assessment process.

RICS has resource in the form of Candidate Support Teams, spread geographically across the globe. They offer a suite of free resources, designed to help and support candidates on their journey to qualification. In addition to responding to inbound requests via email and phone, there is a wealth of resources available including a series of webinars, drop-in sessions, individual support, podcasts and LinkedIn Challenges. There is also a dedicated [Candidate Support Hub](#) available.

**Q:** How many members have resigned / not renewed their membership this current year? This is a key measure of member engagement and confidence and trust and may be useful as a base to measure the member's sentiment improvement.

**A:** This year we are at a 92% renewal rate. Membership retention levels are a key indicator of member satisfaction and as such, it is one of the metrics we pay close attention to.

**Q:** What has happened to the alleged irregularities surfaced in 2018/2019 concerning foreign funds and spendings of RICS? Has the section of the Levitt Report covering the findings been published so far?

**A:** This refers to the root cause of the issues which led to the Levitt Review. It is important to point out that there was no suggestion of missing funds or evidence of abuse; an internal audit report identified failings in systems of control in respect of a particular financial management process. The issue examined by the Levitt review was how the governance arrangements of the Institution had handled that report.

We published the Levitt Review, accepted and implemented all of its recommendations. Since then, we have done a lot of work to continue to improve and strengthen our internal systems of financial control. We have an effective Audit Risk Assurance and a Finance committee chaired by Mike Driver, and we have been able to report on a clean external audit of last year's financial statements.

**Q:** Are there any plans to improve the frequency of senior professional learning opportunities and knowledge sharing?

**A:** We are putting in place the governance structure and the committees necessary to improve learning opportunities and knowledge sharing; this should pay dividends in terms of a greater amount and relevance of information and support for members in their professional specialism.

Once populated, the Knowledge & Practice Committee and Professional Group panels will explore an ongoing strategy for knowledge sharing and learning provision. We have reintroduced the knowledge and information service to support members in their work. We are aiming to combine the best of our traditional library service at Great George Street with an enquiry and resource service open to all members, wherever they work. If you or a member you know has specific knowledge questions, please reach out to [product@rics.org](mailto:product@rics.org) and we will be happy to discuss further.

**Q:** In regard to the changing relationship with Amity University can it be confirmed that RICS has no further financial liability to the University and has the original RICS investment been repaid?

**A:** We do not have any ongoing financial liability to Amity University, which, at the time of our partnership, was the body for built environment qualifications. We took responsibility for employing the academic staff, developing and delivering the courses.

Over the period of this arrangement, it did not deliver a net financial gain for RICS and resulted in no return on investment. Following the change in 2022, Amity University now takes responsibility for the delivery of the courses. There is a very small RICS team working alongside Amity, focusing on engagement with members and employers in India — this is a much more effective model.

Although the arrangement was not a conventional success in financial terms, there were many positive aspects of the work that was done, including building relationships in India. The operation trained and provided qualifications to many built environment specialists in India, a number of whom have become members of the profession.



**Q:** In Egypt, the currency has devalued to nearly 50% of its previous value, which nearly doubled the RICS renewal fees, and of course the membership fees for anyone new. This is in fact affecting the number of candidates applying for RICS memberships. Are there any plans for considering this increase in fees for Egypt?

**A:** At this year's AGM members were asked to vote on a new subscriptions framework, setting out the high-level process for approving subscriptions and the key information that the RICS Board will need to consider before recommending the subscriptions to Governing Council each year for approval. Ensuring subscription fees are simpler, clearer and fairer for members at all stages of their career has been a major focus of the Member Services Steering Group, and guided by the framework, we will be communicating more on this in the next 4-8 weeks, ahead of the new 2024 subscriptions cycle.

**Q:** What is the plan with modernising and making the RICS IT Systems more logical and streamlined? There are currently various websites which are confusing and overlap, such as two online academy websites, as well as isurv. It would be logical to combine all the learning websites, for example, and make the RICS IT systems more user friendly.

**A:** We recognise that there is work to do on improving our IT systems to provide a more seamless experience. Several improvements have been made recently in IT systems over the last year, following challenges with previous implementation. There is a programme of planned improvements in place, and we are working towards a simple, reliable, intuitive single interface for members through which they can undertake all their business.

**Q:** Why is RICS focused so much on the global context at the expense of turning against its core membership throughout Great Britain? Is it the case that dropping RICS overseas could save substantial costs and enable RICS London to finally appreciate its membership across the country which it has absolutely lost? The membership fee could then more easily be halved. RICS today is nothing like the organisation I was encouraged to join and actively participate within. The status of being a member of RICS has rapidly diminished.

**A:** Every member of the Institution, wherever they practice their professional career, is of equal importance to the Institution and will receive our full support. We recognise that the UK market is important and contains the majority of our membership, and that the RICS plays a particular role in the economic, business, political and social life of the UK. We have recently appointed Emma Causer as the UK & Ireland Director (Interim), as well as created a separate role for the International Membership Market. Emma and her team now support the UK & Ireland World Regional Boards who set the focus and direction for the UK membership — it is the members who are very firmly creating the direction of travel for her team to follow.

**Q:** What is your plan to expand in emerging markets in other countries?

**A:** We are keen to work with members and firms to expand the reach of RICS standards and approaches to work. It continues to part of the Institution's mission to seek to promote professionalism and RICS standards across the globe. We welcome contact from any member or firm about what we can do to support colleagues in any part of the world — please get in touch via [contactrics@rics.org](mailto:contactrics@rics.org)

**Q:** I did make a suggestion a few times for RICS to help develop the profession in Indonesia. Indonesia is a very vibrant country which by 2030 might be the third largest economy in the world. But there is no recognized provider of courses in quantity surveying (QS). I hope that the new Council will take note of the vast opportunities in many emerging economies for the development of the valuation profession and the QS profession.

**A:** RICS and its members play a role in helping the development of economies. We have seen a significant growth in membership and activity over the last 18 months in the Middle East and the Gulf countries. We are aware of the potential to not only grow membership but also for the members to give back and help emerging economies meet significant skill shortages in key areas. We have relayed this to the team which covers Asia-Pacific.

**Q:** Are there any plans to allow access to the online learning hub (isurv)?

**A:** Michael Bichard recommended a review of our commercial strategy, which RICS Board will be exploring over the next six months. Some elements of isurv are included within the base membership package, and part of the Board's work will be to decide on the value isurv offers to members.

**Q:** The fees are too high. Over my career I've paid about £30,000 in fees to RICS. RICS spends £7 million a month on a staff of 900. The costs, the staffing and subs have got to go down, because other bodies that we can all join are all charging less than RICS.

**A:** We have made significant cost reductions in the last few years — RICS staff count currently stands at 684 after a substantial restructure a few years ago. However, we recognise that we have to continue to demonstrate the relevance and value of the Institution and the designation to our members. Subscription rates have been held flat for the past four years; had they been increased in line with inflation they would be approximately 18% per annum higher than they are at present. Those inflationary pressures have been absorbed by RICS.

At this year's AGM members were asked to vote on a new subscriptions framework, setting out the high-level process for approving subscriptions and the key information that the RICS Board will need to consider before recommending the subscriptions to Governing Council each year for approval.

Ensuring subscription fees are simpler, clearer and fairer for members at all stages of their career has been a major focus of the Member Services Steering Group and guided by the subscriptions framework.

Part of this work also explores ways to provide more insight into how member fees are spent and how we deliver better value for the membership. We will be communicating more on this in the next 4-8 weeks, ahead of the new 2024 subscriptions cycle.

**Q:** Are there any plans to increase the number of CPD courses available to members that are free? Around 30% of courses last year were free. But to get value for money and bearing in mind that CPD is a requirement to maintain your membership year over year, is there any chance of seeing that number increase?

**A:** Our aspiration is to be a life-long learning partner for every professional member, and we are taking steps to maximise membership value. CPD support will be reviewed by the Member Services Steering Group as



they look at the value of RICS membership alongside the development of the Commercial strategy. We will continue to provide free CPD, guidance and professionalism in the members' CPD Support Pack.

**Q:** Can you tell us a bit more about how you propose to increase member engagement? What exactly would you do to increase member engagement, to make members aware of what the Governing Council does and of what people like you are doing for the Institution? Because it seems to me that if you talk to any average surveyor, they probably know very little about the GC.

**A:** We are aware that there is a challenge in recovering a position of trust and engagement with our members. Some of the activity to support this includes reinstating the work of the professional groups and the Professional Group Panels to facilitate member-to-member discussions about the practice of surveying. We are inviting members to work with us on the development of the professional competencies, supported by in-person and digital forums. We are also refreshing our offering in terms of information and technical journals.

Further developments in membership services aim to empower our local boards and committees, as they are best placed to assess the priorities of the local membership and the most effective forms of engagement. We have given this increased authority and autonomy to our regional boards in the UK and overseas and our World Regional Boards and country boards. Earlier this year, GC took the decision to bring World Regional Boards into the governance structure which meant the boards have the resource to engage with local members via events and other means of communication.

**Q:** For the vast majority of members working for large organisations, their fees are paid for their employers. Does that not neglect the sort of engagement they want with RICS, and is there any dialogue that you could have with employers to generate engagement from employees as members of RICS?

**A:** Our Engagement Team's work with the UK and regional leads elsewhere involves engaging with firms to identify how we can work with the firms to engage with their employees who are members of RICS. But it is a different challenge engaging with members who work within very large multi nationals, as compared to the very large number of SMEs that we have, particularly in the UK.

**Q:** Would it be useful to engage Matrics to reach out to organisations and schools to promote the profession and to encourage more people to join in the future?

**(Below answer has been revised from the one given at AGM to ensure accuracy and add further information)**

**A:** We are very proud that Matrics is fully operational again across the UK. In 2022, 28 local committees from across the UK organised over 120 events, engaging with over 6000 members, with the support of the RICS Matrics Engagement Lead and the Matrics UK Board headed up by Theo Till. So far this year, these same committees have already run 74 events including networking, candidate support groups, site visits and wellbeing sessions in collaboration with our charity [Lionheart](#).

As part of their activities, Matrics community members are also encouraged to become Inspire Ambassadors who visit schools and universities promoting surveying as a career. In addition, Samantha Organ and Dean Hockley of the Matrics UK Board, alongside the RICS Early Engagement Team have also been instrumental in setting up Campus Ambassadors at key universities across the UK, to promote surveying and contribute to the Matrics strategy. We are dedicated to supporting the next generation of professionals and we remain focused on this in the year ahead.

**Q:** Why should somebody want to become a member of RICS? You don't have to be a member of the RICS to operate in the real estate business and it seems to me that the main thing that we have to offer isn't doing lots of CPD events and meetings, etc. It is how can we continue to raise the status of the letters that go after our name (MRICS, FRICS) that has a real meaning to the outside world. There should be initiative from the Governing Council to engage with senior figures in the sector and determine why senior partners/directors would want to be members of the Governing Council of RICS.

**A:** The Institution has been well served by the current members of Governing Council who did a huge amount of skilful work in the last year. As a membership organisation representing a range of professions and sizes of firms, we must reflect this in our governing structures.

We are an organisation with a renewed focus on engaging with its members in a meaningful way. We do, however, recognise that there is further work to be done on member engagement to achieve a stage where all members consider themselves to be advocates for the profession.