



RIAS

The Royal Incorporation
of Architects in Scotland

Accreditation in Conservation Architecture

Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked Questions about Conservation Accreditation

What is the purpose of accreditation?

The aim of the RIAS accreditation scheme is to promote conservation skills among architects so that they will be better equipped to take the lead in conserving Scotland's built heritage. Accreditation relates to the demonstration of a high level of conservation skills and a sympathetic design approach to monuments, buildings or structures which are listed. The scheme recognises that historic building owners, central government and local authorities, funders etc need reassurance about the skills of conservation architects, and this is first of all what the scheme aims to provide; it is not intended to be a barrier to work if you are not a conservation accredited architect. Accreditation at entry level is intended to be possible for any architect who can demonstrate the skills and experience reasonably required to deliver conservation projects competently on behalf of clients and the scheme is intended to support and encourage each architect's further education and development of experience in architectural conservation. Clients require reassurance that the accredited architect has the appropriate skill set and is passionate about working with historic buildings. Funding agencies, in particular, require reassurance that applicants for their repair grants employ a lead professional with the relevant specialist conservation knowledge, ability and experience.

Conservation architecture entails work to existing buildings or new work which has a significant impact on an existing building or its setting. There is a presumption that architectural conservation is primarily, but not exclusively, concerned with listed buildings. The objectives of architectural conservation could be economic or environmental as well as being purely cultural and the work may include designated or undesignated buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, conservation areas and buildings in gardens and designed landscapes.

Who can apply for accreditation?

RIAS accreditation in architectural conservation is available to any practising architects who, through the provision of project case studies, can demonstrate that they meet the necessary standards required in their personal experience, knowledge, commitment and understanding of conservation philosophies. Accreditation will recognise skills attained and applied to building conservation projects and the ongoing personal and professional commitment of the individual architect to the advancement of conservation architecture.

The skills and the professional judgement required to repair, restore, adapt and extend old buildings well - knowledgeably, creatively, sometimes boldly and sometimes self-effacingly - are fundamentally those of a good architect. However, a conservation architect requires particular knowledge and skills beyond those of the architect engaged only with new work. Some of these skills may be learned through education and formal training. Architectural conservation also requires the sort of understanding gained from experience in practice, usually through informal apprenticeship and working in proximity to more experienced practitioners. The first prerequisite is a real interest in architectural history, traditional building techniques and conservation theory. Conservation architects are passionate about historic buildings and places; and with making old buildings useful, sustainable and financially viable, as well as with the retention of their historical qualities for the benefit of future generations.

When and why was the scheme established?

The RIAS scheme was the first scheme for architects in the UK, launched in 1995. The Historic Buildings Council for Scotland encouraged the RIAS to establish the scheme and as an added incentive, from 1999, accreditation was made a requirement for architects taking the lead in all government grant aided conservation projects. The value of conservation accreditation is now widely recognised by owners and managers of historic buildings and sites as providing an important assurance of professional competence, and it can also offer architects a measure of market advantage.

Are there different levels of accreditation?

There are two levels of accreditation:

- *Accredited Architect in Conservation Architecture
Standard – Competent in working in the Historic Built Environment*
- *Advanced Accredited Architect in Conservation Architecture
Senior – Recognised Conservation Specialist*

'Accredited' members may apply for an upgrade to 'Advanced' if they meet the eligibility criteria (see application forms and guidance).

Where do I find the application forms?

These and further information are on the RIAS website.

<https://www.rias.org.uk/for-architects/conservation-accreditation>

How much does accreditation cost?

RIAS members pay £180.00 (inc. of VAT) on application. Non-RIAS members pay £270.00 (inc. of VAT). Re-accreditation fees are £120.00 (inc of VAT) for RIAS members and £180.00 (inc. of VAT) for non-members. The fees are non-refundable. Unlike some other conservation accreditation schemes there is no annual fee.

How long does the assessment of an accreditation application take?

In normal circumstances the administrator tries to come back to applicants within 8 weeks. This may not relay the final outcome, but could be in the form of a request for supplementary information to assist with the assessment process.

Why the RIAS scheme?

The RIAS scheme is specially adapted to Scotland's unique built heritage, materials and environment, and the RIBA has accepted that it is the most appropriate scheme for architects practising in Scotland.

The scheme has evolved over time and complies with the 'Home Countries Protocol', the criteria against which Accreditation Schemes would be considered by the 4 Home Countries. The RIAS scheme is recognised by Historic Environment Scotland, Historic England, CADW and the Department for Communities Northern Ireland. Both documents can be found using the link:

<https://www.rias.org.uk/for-architects/conservation-accreditation>

What criteria are used in assessing applications / conservation skills?

Assessments under all the architectural accreditation schemes recognised by the Home Countries are based on the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) 1993 Colombo Assembly's Guidelines for education and training in the conservation of monuments, ensembles and sites.

What are the ICOMOS Guidelines?

ICOMOS "Guidelines for Training for the Conservation of Monuments, Ensembles and Sites". Under these guidelines the architect should be able to:

- (a) read monument, ensemble or site and identify its emotional, cultural and use significance;
- (b) understand the history and technology of monuments, ensembles or sites in order to define their identity, plan for their conservation, and interpret the results of this research;
- (c) understand the setting of a monument, ensemble or site, their contents and surroundings, in relation to other buildings, gardens or landscapes;
- (d) find and absorb all available sources of information relevant to the monument, ensemble

- or site being studied;
- (e) understand and analyse the behaviour of monuments, ensembles and sites as complex systems;
 - (f) diagnose intrinsic and extrinsic causes of decay as a basis for appropriate action;
 - (g) inspect and make reports intelligible to non-specialist readers of monuments, ensembles or sites, illustrated by graphic means such as sketches and photographs;
 - (h) know, understand and apply Unesco conventions and recommendations, and ICOMOS and other recognised Charters, Regulations and Guidelines;
 - (i) make balanced judgements based on shared ethical principles, and accept responsibility for the long-term welfare of cultural heritage;
 - (j) recognise when advice must be sought and define the areas of need of study by difference specialists e.g. wall paintings, sculpture and objects of artistic and historical value, and/or studies of materials and systems;
 - (k) give expert advice on maintenance strategies, management policies and the policy framework for environmental protection and preservation of monuments and their contents, and sites;
 - (l) document works executed and make same accessible;
 - (m) work in multi-disciplinary groups using sound methods, be aware of, and apply when appropriate, the contribution of art historians and archaeologists;
 - (n) be able to work with inhabitants, administrators and planners to resolve conflicts and to develop conservation strategies appropriate to local needs, abilities and resources.

The RIAS has distilled these 14 criteria down to 6 main areas which the candidate has to demonstrate in the 5 Case Studies, personal statement and record of CPD.

- **General experience of conservation architecture** - general experience as an architect and relevant general experience in conservation architecture
- **Conservation theory** - understanding of conservation theory as a basis for decision making
- **Materials, construction and repair techniques** - knowledge of materials, construction and repair techniques
- **Design in conservation contexts** - ability to analyse and design appropriate alterations, interventions, etc.
- **Delivery of conservation projects** - experience of preparing reports, conservation plans, detailing, specification writing, work on site and delivering projects.
- **Commitment to conservation** - interest /commitment: books, lectures, conferences and other CPD

When can I apply?

Applicants for RIAS accreditation normally have to have been registered architects for at least four to five years and must demonstrate adequate knowledge and skill to take the lead in building conservation projects, not just a theoretical understanding of building conservation. Currently, five case studies of completed projects must be submitted, at least three of which should date from the past five years.

Can you provide some guidance on writing the case studies?

The assessors will be looking at your case studies to see how they demonstrate the 6 main areas listed above and so you should think in terms of providing an evidence-based analysis (to use the APEAS Part 3 phraseology). It helps the assessors if you provide an overview of each project, as follows:

- 1. The client's brief and your personal role in the project, date and value.*
- 2. The historic and architectural significance of the building and the study and research required.*
- 3. The existing state of repair and your analysis of defects, including evidence of your objectives and knowledge of conservation theory.*
- 4. The specification and execution of the work, noting the range of materials and techniques involved and the engagement of any specialist advisers and contractors.*
- 5. Lessons learned during the construction and the inspection of the work.*
- 6. Any other information you would like to add.*

Other points to note:

- It is important to be concise and to be reflective on outcomes, good and not so good.*
- Case studies can include unlisted buildings if of good quality with architectural and/or historic interest and if a sympathetic and knowledgeable conservation approach can be demonstrated.*
- A long-term project can be used as the basis for more than one case study if it was perhaps a different phase and could demonstrate different skills and knowledge and a different type of work.*
- It is important to demonstrate both understanding of conservation theory and the application of conservation philosophy when writing up the case studies.*
- The assessors often note a reliance on specialists and would like to see more of the applicant's understanding of the science of how materials react by themselves or with other components, how buildings work and of workmanship.*
- It is important that the applicant's personal thinking in terms of analysis in designing appropriate alterations and interventions and their aesthetic sensitivity are demonstrated in the case studies.*
- At the baseline level, in an application for the lower level of accreditation, assessors would not necessarily expect to see the intensive, detailed work more typically found at advanced level.*

Do case study projects need to have been completed on site?

It is generally expected that an architect applying for accreditation in conservation architecture will have been involved in the full range of work on the project, from briefing, carrying out full surveys (measured and condition), getting to know the building, understanding its significance, assessing the work required and materials to be used, whether any specialists need to be involved (e.g. paint analysis, mortar analysis), preparing drawings and /or over-seeing the production of drawings, preparing a specification, briefing other design team members and being involved on site inspecting the work to ensure that the contractor and his labour carry out the work to the required specification, and dealing with any unforeseen items (eg rotten timbers) that arise on site up to and including the issue of the practical completion certificate. If the case study project is not fully complete the applicant will need to decide whether it is sufficiently advanced to include as a case study. The RIAS has developed Pre-application Mentoring Scheme Guidance Notes which can be found using the link: <https://www.rias.org.uk/for-architects/conservation-accreditation>

Is there a deadline for submitting applications?

No – we accept applications throughout the year.

The scheme is administered by Elaine Dobie Elaine.Dobie@rias.org.uk and she will check the application and pass it to two assessors.

Who are the assessors?

The assessors are drawn from a panel which mainly comprises advanced accredited architects. The scheme administrator takes care to ensure that assessors have no conflicts of interest. All applications are treated as strictly confidential and only viewed by the assessors who need to see them. The RIAS has guidance for the assessors which states - 'Confidentiality over the results (until known) and the case studies referred to in the applications is essential. APEAS stresses to [Part 3] examiners that they must not disclose information revealed by students as part of their case studies and practical training records and the same applies with case studies submitted in support of conservation accreditation applications.' (APEAS is the Architects' Professional Examination Authority in Scotland).

Why is re-accreditation required every five years?

Peer assessment together with re-assessment on a regular basis, which has been agreed as every five years, is to ensure that accreditation indicates current competence. It is a condition of recognition of the scheme by the 4 Home Countries.

Can I upgrade from accredited level to advanced accredited level?

If you are proposing to apply for an upgrade to the advanced level when your re-accreditation is due, you should mention that you are applying for an upgrade as part of your re-accreditation in your cover letter to Elaine Dobie who will make the assessors aware of this. This means that if it is felt that advanced accreditation is not quite met, the accredited level can be awarded.

Thinking about upgrading?

Those applying at the advanced level wish to be recognised as senior conservation architects. You are eligible to apply at the advanced level if you have been accredited for more than 5 years. Applicants applying to be upgraded in the RIAS scheme must submit three case studies, one of which must have been from within the past 5 years, and a record of CPD for the past 5 years. The statement of approach requires the applicant to describe why they consider themselves to be suitable for consideration at the advanced level, which should be reflected and evidenced within the case studies. It is something that individuals have to self-assess, considering what you have improved on and learnt since your initial application, and what additional experiences you have had. It would perhaps help you to look at your initial and re-accreditation applications, and evaluate what you know now that you did not know then. At advanced level the assessors expect to see intensive detailed work that goes significantly beyond that presented by applicants for accreditation at accredited level.

I have had a parental break/maternity/paternity/carers leave – how does this affect my re-accreditation?

When applicants for re-accreditation have had a period out of practice due to maternity / paternity etc leave we would typically advise the individual to state this within their cover letter to the scheme administrator, and within the application itself, including dates for such periods. The applicant should still submit evidence of their on-going work, whatever that may be. The applicant is required to meet the competencies detailed on the sample feedback form within the application and so we would advise you to provide as much evidence on these areas for the projects that you have worked on. Re-accreditation is 'on-going' project work, and no number of projects is stipulated. It is also important to include the CPD you have carried out since your last application as this will help demonstrate current competency and continued interest. Assessors will take these breaks from employment into consideration when assessing the material provided.

Now I have conservation accreditation my practice would like to describe the practice as a Conservation Accredited Practice – is this OK?

No – it is the individual who can be described as a conservation accredited architect, not the practice.

You may add your conservation accreditation to your email signature eg XXXX, Conservation Accredited Architect, RIAS Conservation Accreditation Scheme.

Where a practice secures a project based on an accredited partner/employee, this individual (or, if necessary, in unforeseen circumstances, their accredited replacement) must be involved in the project at every stage, providing adequate supervision to colleagues working on that project, and must remain responsible throughout the whole process to completion.

How can my practice help me become a conservation accredited architect?

Conservation architecture requires the sort of understanding gained from experience in practice, usually through informal apprenticeship and working in proximity to more experienced practitioners. If you are a sole practitioner or are working in a practice without any conservation projects you are still eligible to apply but may find it difficult to gain that sort of informal support and teaching.

The RIAS is exploring the possibility of ‘buddy’ experiences whereby an architect wishing to become conservation accredited could shadow a more experienced conservation accredited architect, possibly on grant aided projects.

Practical support can be provided in a number of ways:

- Try and attend some courses at the Scottish Lime Centre, the Engine Shed (Historic Environment Scotland (HES), Stirling) and CPD events run by the RIAS and the Chapters, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), the City Heritage Trusts and conservation area regeneration schemes. Visit historic buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, cities, towns and villages, conservation areas and gardens and designed landscapes, and study the fabric and construction details, consider and discuss work carried out or required. Attend lectures and study days on different aspects of architectural history.*
- You should also be familiar with Historic Environment Scotland’s wide range of publications, those relating to planning matters (Historic Environment Policy Scotland (HEPS)), Managing Change guidance, Technical Advice Notes and INFORM guides.*
- Membership of RIAS Practice Services provides access to Section 4, Energy, Sustainability and Conservation, of Practice Information which contains useful and relevant papers, some of which have been part of RIAS CPD events.*
- You could make sure your office can provide a copy of BS 7913 : 2013 ‘Guide to the conservation of historic buildings’.*
- The website <https://www.understandingconservation.org> includes reading lists. Can your office library acquire some relevant books?*
- Invest in a copy of ‘Rolled Lead Sheet : The Complete Manual’ 2016 Edition, published by the Lead Sheet Association. Understand lead detailing and expect, as a conservation accredited architect, to understand, design and draw details correctly.*

How can I persuade my practice with other conservation accredited architects to be more supportive?

The RIAS encourages practices to consider the benefits to the practice, as well as to individuals, of supporting accreditation. These include improving the capability and quality of work of architects and other staff and improving the practice’s competitive edge. Further

support may relate to helping you and your colleagues develop a conservation-related CPD plan and providing on-site mentoring.

If you have the good fortune to be working in a practice with a conservation accredited architect on a conservation project make sure you raise any issues you spot during surveys on site or during construction with your conservation accredited supervisor so that nothing is missed. Learn how to detect possible rot outbreaks. The conservation architect must provide adequate supervision and remain responsible in these situations. His / her 'reward' is in developing the next generation of skilled conservation architects.