



RIAS

The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland

Aonachadh Rìoghail nan Ailtire ann an Alba

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

Review of the EU-UK Trade and Co-operation Agreement Post Brexit Evidence Questions

10 January 2025

- 1. How has the provision of trade in services in the EU changed for UK based businesses and individuals following Brexit (including examples from within your sector)?**

For most Scottish based architects, working in Europe is uncommon and based on specific niche design competencies and partnerships. It does not form a regular pipeline of work but does offer useful experience, learning and diversification. To access these opportunities now requires an EU partner as lead. The added time and cost investment post Brexit is an obvious deterrent in relation to pursuing one off projects.

Conversely EU architects kept recognition of their qualifications to practice under transition arrangements. This means EU based studios can lead projects in Scotland, although usually with local Scottish architecture studio subcontracting, to provide knowledge of consenting regimes and easier access to sites.

This an obvious disadvantage to certain practices, with niche services which are in demand, e.g. Moxon Architects with bridge designing ability^{1,2}. Other Scottish architecture teams forming part of London HQ studios and in global multi-disciplinary built environment consultants, contributing to projects in the EU. However, the RIAS has not found recent examples where branch offices in Scotland have led projects.

- 2. How does the TCA currently work for UK service providers looking to provide services in the EU (including examples of how the arrangements are working in practice within your sector)?**

As already outlined, whilst it is possible to compete for work in the EU the loss of recognition under EU Directive EEC 85/384 makes collaborating with a partner via sub-contracting agreement essential.

¹ <https://www.demagazine.co.uk/2023/06/26/moxon-architects-and-engineers-ib-miebach-complete-a-sustainable-timber-bridge-for-german-town/>

² https://www.urbanrealm.com/news/11029/Moxon_scores_a_hat_trick_with_Norwegian_bridges_win.html



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UK recognition of EU registered architects means countries like Denmark can promote their design sector here. Without reciprocal recognition Scottish studios face added barriers and costs breaking into EU markets.

3. How are the Scottish and UK Governments supporting UK service providers working in the EU in negotiating the new trading environment following Brexit? And is there more support the Scottish and UK Governments can provide to UK service providers working in the EU?

At present the UK and Scottish Government offer no specific support to the architecture sector as a services exporter. The RIAS believes this is misguided as architecture is significant tool for promoting Scottish design and culture industries.

Scotland is also reliant on the Architects Registration Board (ARB), and to a lesser extent the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in managing international relations, handling negotiations with the Architects Council of Europe. The RIAS is ineligible to sit at the top table as a national representative. Arrangements across the UK nations, post devolution remain informal and underdeveloped. Scottish interests' risk being underrepresented – given London is the dominant architectural hub in the UK.

Whilst the current unsatisfactory arrangements persist support is needed to develop new and enhanced partnerships with EU practices. The Scottish Government and Scotland Office need to coordinate more promotional support, focused on developing these connections and the visibility of Scottish Practices abroad. Change requires the Scottish Government and its agencies to provide modest levels of seed corn grants e.g. help with travel costs to conferences and trade events. The recent work by the Danish Embassy in Scotland offers a useful example of how this is done, see [The Liveable City Conference, Scotland](#).

A starting point is fostering stronger relationships between Scotland and the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) and Royal Institute of Architects Ireland (RIAI) – given their enhanced access to EU markets. Other windows to explore include alliances with prominent regions in Europe who have sub-national architectural associations. For example, exploring a Celtic collaboration to exhibit at events. The Scottish Government needs to explore collaborative options given it has frozen future funding for profile-raising exercises such a Scottish presence at the Venice Biennale. Absence from these events further reduces the opportunities for Scottish studios to display work out with Scotland.

4. In what ways would reaching agreements on the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (MRPQ) support service providers? And what should any MRPQ agreements contain?

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Scottish Architectural practices could lead projects, as opposed to a sub-contracting role. This would allow a more initiative-taking approach to winning new work, such as entering design competitions.

A position as close to the pre-Brexit arrangements as is possible, which offers parity in contracting arrangements – especially where the Scottish partner has the technical experience to lead the project.

5. How do the mobility arrangements under the TCA work for UK service providers? It would be helpful if you were able to include examples of professions where the arrangements are working well and where they are more challenging.

It is still possible to recruit EU architects under current post Brexit transition arrangements, as their qualifications are still recognised. But in practice VISA thresholds do not reflect the collapse in fees and salaries in the architecture sector. To an extent, Scotland is disadvantaged because salaries are significantly higher in London and more likely to meet the threshold.

This is a particular problem for architecture graduates working towards part 3 exams and chartered status. Whilst lower salary thresholds apply for younger people and students, they face uncertainty about the longer-term prospects upon qualification two or three years hence. RIAS is aware of practices reporting challenges in keeping valued team members, or expenses in doing so associated with securing visas. These are added costs post Brexit which must be absorbed by architecture studios who all fall within the SME sector³.

Scottish Architecture schools (who bring in significant overseas tuition fee income) face long-term uncertainties and challenges around recruitment. For students and graduates, gaining experience via post study employment is critical to achieving chartered status, therefore both graduates and studios need long-term certainty.

6. How might the mobility arrangements between the EU and the UK sit alongside any possible MRPQ agreements? For example, would mobility requirements mean that service providers would be unable to take full advantage of any MRPQ agreements?

Costs and complexity in terms of residency are added barriers, as architects like other professionals must apply to 'short stay' visas that only allow them to stay in EU

³ The standard fee ranges from £719 to £1,639 depending on circumstances. There is also a healthcare surcharge - this is usually £1,035 per year. Plus, legal or agency fees for advice.



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countries for a maximum of 90 days. If they wish to stay longer, they will have to apply for the long-term visa.

Post Brexit challenges included recruiting and keeping talented students (part 2 qualified) architects from EU countries – who may not be able to stay / pursue a career in the UK as result of VISA rules. The UK government does not recognize architecture on its skills shortage list, but average salaries (outside of London) ⁴ are well below skilled visa qualifying levels of £45,900 for new applicants.

Practices and staff face expensive and uncertain processes around sponsorship, which can allow studios to employ and keep talented EU designers post study. This affects EU graduates from Scottish Architecture schools and may create downstream recruitment issues for these schools. Graduate salaries whilst working towards chartered status are much lower than those offered to fully qualified architects e.g. £25k to £34k⁵ based on recent RIBA surveys – although some allowances in visa thresholds apply post study.

The barriers to recruiting and keeping EU nationals with native language ability and cultural and local knowledge function as further barriers to accessing new markets. Nor can Scottish native graduates easily pursue experience in continental Europe either in terms of work or study.

Conclusions

The RIAS reiterates that the challenge of pursuing architectural work overseas (or associated design and technical work in the construction sector) needs a strong home market, via the adoption of progressive and value driven public procurement processes. Public projects create Scotland's shop window to the world – but the shelves will remain bare whilst public bodies undervalue design or quality in construction sacrificed to meet short-term and often self-defeating value engineering parameters, Brexit compounds the fact that other countries (e.g. Scandic Nations) already do more to develop and promote architecture solutions to problems such as climate change – for example the [State of Green](#) collaboration in Denmark.

In this regard, 21 years on from the Scottish Parliament building competition (Catalan Design and Scottish Technical Collaboration), would a leading Scottish Architectural Studio win a similar competition outright, or leading a collaboration with a European partner? Or is the national aspiration to be subcontractors to better supported continental contemporaries with unfettered access to EU markets and the recruitment of young architectural talent?

⁴ [RIBA Salary Survey 2024](#) (limited data sample) shows a median salary for an ARB Register Architects in Scotland with 5 years post qualification experience of £41K compared with London £48,5K

⁵ [RIBA Salary Survey 2024](#) UK figures



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