

# FIS

FINISHES & INTERIORS SECTOR

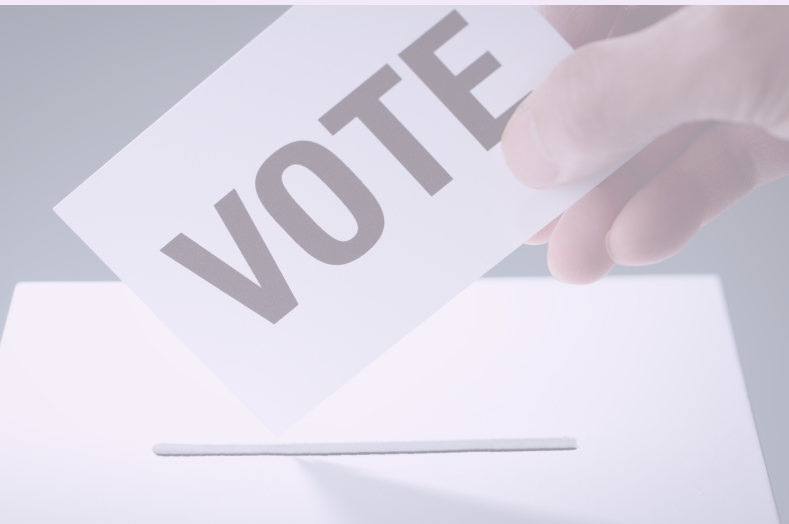
# AGM REPORT

7 November 2023, London



# FIS is in good health

At the FIS AGM this week, Philip Brown (FIS President) assured members that their trade association “is in good health, is well managed, in good financial shape, well respected and continues to grow in every meaningful way”. This is in no small part due to the leadership provided by the elected Directors (all volunteers from the membership).



## Board Elections

In the Board elections the three contractor candidates elected confirmed on a two-year term are:

- Jim Brennan, Nova Plasterboard Systems
- Richard Grimes, Grimes Finishings
- Justin Devaney, Platt and Reilly

And two suppliers were also confirmed:

- Stuart Roberts, CCF
- Elizabeth McDermott, Quick Fix Profiles

It was also confirmed that Ian Strangward of Architectural Wallsz has been elected by the Board to take the role of Vice President with the expectation that he will be the next President of FIS when Philip Brown completes his two-year term in November 2024.

Philip formally thanked Will Hart of Taylor Hart and Phil Thomas of Smiths Building Systems who have formally stood down from the board for the support they have given FIS in this capacity.

# Organisational Activity

FIS CEO Iain McIlwee gave an overview of FIS activity, zoning in on the themes of competence, compliance, raising standards and supporting businesses.

Iain spoke of the “I”, “we” and “they” approach that FIS adopts to support change. “I” being helping individual members with guidance and tools, “we” being collaboration, collective action, research, common understanding and setting standards and “they” being about leveraging collective knowledge and data to influence others – to lead change.

## Modern Methods of Procurement

Iain reflected on the gravitas added to the FIS voice through the academic research that the organisation has done in 2023 and how that has supported successful lobbying on reform to retention reporting and tracking late and disputed invoices. He showed by way of example a recent letter sent to the Housing Minister pointing out that adversarial procurement and squeezing suppliers, may deliver short term benefits to the shareholders, but at the expense of the eco system that is the supply chain.

He spoke of the organisational focus on “the responsible no” and promoting the tangible benefits of “early supply chain involvement”.

## Business and Contractual Support

The difficult trading conditions and high levels of insolvency, often bringing out the worst of behaviours. The FIS Contractual Helpline was extended this year with the addition of QS support and it is a concern how busy this service has become. Risk dumping remains a concern and hence FIS has launched a new Standard Terms and Conditions and a Contract Review Service, to help businesses identify and understand risks that they are signing up to and to provide early sight to the organisation of the clauses that are creeping in so that we can address concerns on behalf of the whole community. Iain spoke of the opportunity that being on the RICS Conflict Avoidance Coalition steering group would provide to champion this work.

Details of above (including helpline numbers, copies of the Standard Form Contracts and details of the FIS Contract Review Service are available in the [FIS Contractual and Legal Toolkit here](#).

# The Building Safety Act

The importance of the Building Safety Act was recognised in the presentation, not just on higher risk buildings, but the CDM responsibilities covering all projects and pushing for cultural change. Iain referenced the potential to drive that Early Supply Chain Involvement and give weight to the “Responsible No”. The three new guides FIS has produced were promoted (and through the panel discussion highly commended).

- FIS Guide - An Introduction to the Building Safety Act
- FIS Guide - Competency Management Plans
- Introduction to the Golden Thread and Digital Information Plans

All available to download from the [FIS website here](#).

Iain spoke about the deep knowledge FIS has developed on the Act and how the team have done more than 20 internal and external presentations to specifiers and contractors, all promoting the community, the importance of organisational capability and linking that back to FIS membership and promoting the importance of Early Supply Chain Involvement and the “Responsible No”.

Iain noted that whilst much was positive, the organisation remained concerned about legacy disputes.

## FIS Technical Work

This work is complementing a wider technical programme that has seen us publish a raft of detailed technical guides through our dynamic working groups designed to support compliance helping ensure our members are working efficiently and avoiding costly repetition of mistakes. To underpin this work FIS is conducting an ongoing and extensive Technical Research Programme linked to issues identified through our working groups and coming in via our technical advisory service.

In the past year the organisation has published research with Southampton University on movement in tall buildings and the impact on interior systems. Also in the field of movement in buildings last week we were with Imperial College and the Steel Construction Institute testing the impact of building movement on SFS fixings. Working with the University of Salford Cundall and Sandy Brown acousticians we have developed a classification process for new larger meeting pods to ensure a level playing field for acoustic claims.

Joe Cilia and his team have established a new working group to look at interfaces, penetrations, and complex details within the interior supersystem and will be publishing the Walls as a System document once peer review is completed in the New Year.

With this approach our knowledge and influence grow and it should be no surprise that FIS was invited to co-chair the new Passive Fire Knowledge Forum, a group of main contractors and trade bodies looking to interrogate emerging safety risks and ensure they are dealt with consistently and pragmatically.

# Skills and competency

Supporting the FIS Guide to Competency Management that we published, we have been active through working group two developing Baseline Competency standards. Dry Lining was used as a pilot and through this work we developed a clear competency framework for the sector. The focus was baseline competence we have two routes to baseline competence, the Apprenticeship and the VQ (in England and Scotland).

This work is ongoing and we are now using this simple framework to build on competency frameworks for all core trades in the sector and look at career progression in terms of advanced trades and supervisory work.

Iain noted that beyond fit for purpose qualifications and frameworks, the organisation continues to have grave concerns about the quality of assessment for vocational qualifications and standards of provision of apprenticeships.

To start to address this we have worked alongside E Aptitude to develop an E learning training package which supports the delivery of both the dry lining pathway for the interior systems installer VQ and Apprenticeship. This is now available to employers and providers and it is hoped that we can roll similar out for all trades in the sector in the future.

[This training module is available here.](#)

Iain highlighted that a focus on eLearning is a priority for FIS in 2024 when we will be focussing on developing our guides into training. Knowledge is central to training and again we see the overlaps between our technical work – it is key that the knowledge we have developed in our guidance is better delivered through them through training.

These records of competence can be captured on the [FIS Competency Passport](#) that we have developed with MPP to support a consistent approach to managing competency records in a fluid workforce.

# Recruiting the workforce of the future

Iain reported that FIS are under no illusion that this is the biggest systemic challenge we face – qualifications and records of competence rely on us actually having people to train and assess!

Our workforce was more reliant on Eastern Europeans than most and whilst we haven't seen a mass exodus, Brexit and an aging workforce has doubled what we need to do to recruit – we now need around 9,000 indigenous new starters each year to maintain the trade workforce. Which means we need to recruit around 12,000 (this is a conservative estimate) – double what was required prior to Brexit when we could rely on immigration to support.

At the same time an educational system that is not fit for purpose and shorttermism in procurement is making it harder for companies to rally the resources they need to invest.

FIS we are doing what we can to promote careers in the sector and support members in recruitment. This work is led by our Skills Board and has seen us run recruitment workshops across the UK, tapping employers into local support networks. The Department of Work and Pensions were a key part of this and we continue to work closely with them promoting skills bootcamps and ensure job centres across the UK have the best possible information on key opportunities in the sector.

We refer internally to our funnel and to support this we have established a Construction Interiors Ambassador Network (linked to the national STEM programme), we are working with Government Bootcamps to provide work experience opportunities, the Department of Work and Pensions, working with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, a charity helping ex-offenders back into the workplace and ex-military initiatives.

Our new partnership with the Worshipful Company of Plasterers has seen us develop a much more focussed approach to awareness/outreach with schools, college. There is a huge body of work going on here.

Iain noted that the importance of linking this back to procurement is key – companies that do should be rewarded for having effective training programs.

[More information available here](#)

# Sustainability Leadership Group

With the addition to Flavie to the FIS team, work in this area has stepped up exponentially. FIS has partnered with the Supply Chain Sustainability School to develop training, is starting to monitor waste, and is working with manufacturers to develop a verified 'Precycle' scheme that cuts through greenwashing and ensures manufacturers offer effective take back and reuse schemes.

This is one of a number of exciting initiatives and our group has been working with NBS to look at the strip-out process and how this can be better positioned to support fit-out contractors taking ownership of the strip-out audit and redesign the programme to support more effective resource efficiency. We have been working with the University of Hertfordshire on how AI can streamline this process with the support of some Innovate UK Funding and zoning in on re-use

We are also taking an active role in the relaunch of the Ska Rating scheme which is now being spun out of RICS to allow a more agile approach to environmentally measuring projects. Ska aligns well to our values as at the core is a free tool that all can use to be better.

A driver for this renewed focus on Net Zero is legislation, but interestingly last year we were asked to take a lead role in the City of London's Supply Chain Sustainability School. The reason for establishing this network is that if the City wants to attract world leading companies they need to do this with world class sustainable buildings.

It is perhaps no surprise given our work on the steering group, the interim report published by the Corporation has zoned in on the importance of effective procurement. This is another area where FIS activity is helping to drive that focus on Early Supply Chain Involvement.

## FIS Events

FIS is a community and other highlights of the year include our new collaborations with the workspace design show, that saw the FIS conference run in London co-located with the exhibition, which gave us a platform to launch our inaugural FIS Innovation Awards, this was so successful with standing room only at virtually all sessions.

Our Regional Programme too saw numbers building and our Contractors Awards also attracted a record crowd. Dedicated supply chain days on Housing and Commercial Fit-out also proved popular.

Our trade magazine SpecFinish has also grown in stature and again our Marketing Committee have a number of exciting initiatives to better project FIS and our community in 2024.

# A growing community

At the end of the day FIS doesn't exist to exist, but to help.

Iain reported that off the back of the efforts outlined, we continue to grow as a community and are on course to reach 600 members by the end of the year.

Members mean influence and with the ear of industry and a general election coming we will be doing what we can to leverage this in support of our community.

## Keynote Presentations

Tim Balcon, CEO CITB

David Rintoul, Partner, Hill Dickinson

Peter Apps, Author Show me the Bodies

Panel Debate Competence, Compliance and Transformation