

RIBA Chartered Practice Primer

Guide to the quality assurance
requirements of the RIBA
Chartered Practice Scheme



This guide explains the key requirements that the RIBA sets as standards for Chartered Practices to help practices considering Chartered Practice status to work towards and achieve compliance.

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Introduction

This guide explains the key requirements that the RIBA sets as standards for Chartered Practices to help practices considering Chartered Practice status to work towards and achieve compliance.

The primer includes guidance on how practices can develop and implement the policies and processes required by the RIBA listed below including why they are important, what they are for, how to comply with minimum standards, and best practice that you may wish to consider:

- Staff composition and business structure
- Employment
- Equality, diversity and inclusion
- Quality management
- Environmental management
- Health and safety
- Dispute resolution
- Insurance
- CPD

Template policies and systems for each of these issues can be found in the RIBA [Chartered Practice Toolbox](#), available to all RIBA Chartered Practices, and those joining the scheme, through the [RIBA Membership Team](#).

The guide is informed by three books published recently by the RIBA, all of which make excellent reading for a new practice who want to start off on the right track and set up best practice project and business management systems and processes:

- [Small Practice and the Sole Practitioner](#) by Marianne Davys
- [Small Projects Handbook](#) by Nigel Ostime
- [Starting a Practice: A Plan of Work \(2nd ed\)](#) by Simon Foxell

Each of these publications contain sections on practice or project finances. A fourth publication [Financial Management](#) by Brian Pinder-Ayres provides more detail on this subject



Best Practice

Financial management basics: The RIBA recommends taking the following actions regarding financial management as soon as possible:

- Do a cashflow of at least 6 months ahead, this should show all likely receipts and expenditure together with a running total;
- Ensure you know what it costs you to perform work and produce sensible fee bids using costed resource schedules; and
- Record what you do and know what the final outturn cost will be on all your projects.

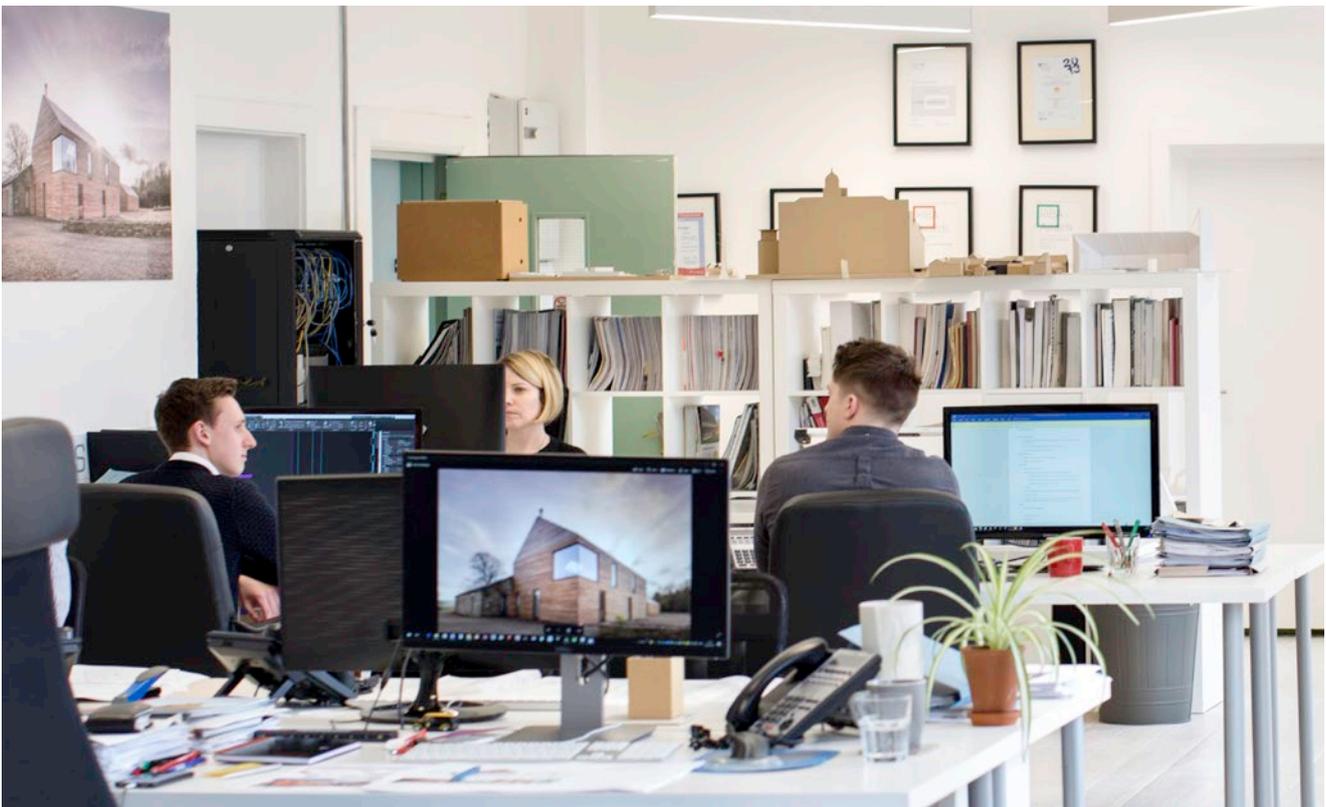
Why do we set standards?

Strong leadership is paramount in any organisation. The RIBA requires our practices to be led by RIBA Chartered Members whose professional competence, integrity and relationships has been assured and demonstrated through their professional education, development and standards.

Members must reach a high standard of professional conduct and performance. To facilitate this, Chartered Practices must abide by [The RIBA Code of Practice for Chartered Practices](#), which is based on the three principles of our Code of Conduct for individuals of honesty and integrity, competence, and relationships. Following the guidelines will enable members to provide a service that meets the exacting standards of the Code.

Guidance included with the Code of Practice provides a framework for the resolution of any misunderstandings or disputes that may arise between Chartered Practices and their clients, co-professionals and others they encounter through their professional obligations.

As explained above, this guide covers the additional requirements that make up the professional aspects of the criteria for Chartered Practices. The processes explained below provide clear and accessible advice on adopting a best practice approach which will be widely applicable to a range of scenarios. For each of them a template policy can be found in the [Chartered Practice Toolbox](#).



Staff composition and Business structure

Chartered Practice Criteria

The office is a full-time architects' office, or, a definable architectural practice business unit within a multi-functional organisation, with responsibility to ensure all practice information submitted to the RIBA is up to date and accurate.

At least one of the full-time principals (Director or Partner) in the architects' office must be a Chartered Member of the RIBA.

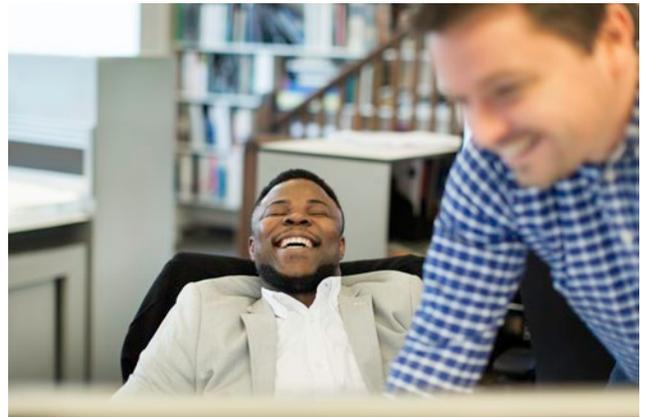
All architectural work must be under the personal supervision of an RIBA Chartered Architect and arrangements in place to ensure work is covered in the event of their absence.

RIBA Chartered Practices must meet a quality assurance standard of staff bound by a relevant code of conduct. This is based on: a minimum of 1:10 staff being Chartered Members of the RIBA; and a minimum 1:8 staff being either Registered Architects, Associate Members of the RIBA, or Affiliate Members of the RIBA.

For the broad protection of society and clients in the UK, the Architects Act (1997) requires all Architects' practices to operate under the control and management of an ARB registered architect, who does not act at the same time in a similar capacity for any other organisation. The Act also requires that all work relating to architecture is carried out by or under the supervision of an ARB registered architect.

To provide a high level of quality assurance, the architects controlling/managing an RIBA Chartered Practice and undertaking/overseeing the architectural work must be Chartered Members of the RIBA. The RIBA sets the minimum number of Chartered Members required per Chartered Practice relative to the total number of staff to achieve the minimum professional management and supervision requirements to deliver a high standard of service.

When first setting up in practice, you will need to decide on your company structure. Very small practices will normally be Sole Traders or Limited Liability Companies, Partnerships and Limited Liability Partnerships are also used. The RIBA advises taking professional legal and financial advice before deciding on a company structure. Guidance can also be found at [Companies House](#).



Best Practice

Innovation under supervision: Consider how your processes of project supervision and design review will allow junior staff to learn and innovate within a safety net that assures the quality of your practice's outputs.

Employment

Chartered Practice Criteria

The practice must operate an Employment Policy which addresses the requirements of the RIBA Chartered Practice Employment Policy Guide

This can be found in the [Chartered Practice Toolbox](#).

As soon as you make the decision to expand your practice beyond yourself - as a sole practitioner or the original partners - to take on a member of staff, you will need to follow employment legislation. The RIBA Chartered Practice Employment Policy Guide sets out the key requirements in a simple checklist based on the principles of UK legislation; UK Government has clear guidance and tools for [employing people](#). International practices must also follow the RIBA Checklist but will also need to be aware of any requirements which conflict with or go beyond their national legislation.

To ensure that all staff working for an RIBA Chartered Practice earn a wage that meets the costs of living, the RIBA requires that all staff, including freelance staff and students are paid at least the Real Living Wage, as set by the [Living Wage Foundation](#).

In order to maintain competitive levels of pay across all levels in the profession, the [RIBA Business Benchmarking Survey](#) for Chartered Practices provides data on the average salaries of all staff levels.



Best Practice

Enhanced employee benefits: The RIBA Chartered Practice Employment Policy Guide provides advice on additional benefits that practices may wish to consider to help improve employee satisfaction, teamwork and productivity. For more detail on the average earnings, fringe benefits and total remuneration packages being received by architects throughout the industry the RIBA and the [Fees Bureau](#) publish an annual [Architects Earnings report](#), check the [RIBA Journal](#) for the latest articles on the results of this survey.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Chartered Practice Criteria

The practice must ensure that an appropriate Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy is in place and operational.

Guidance and templates can be found in the [Chartered Practice Toolbox](#).

Inclusive workplaces make architecture a fairer place for all employees, widen the pool of talent, and strengthen the profession's effectiveness and performance.

The most successful practices demonstrate that a diverse workforce and inclusive working procedures can play an important part in improving productivity and make good business sense. Benefits of this can include:

- improved talent attraction and retention – people who feel respected and valued are more likely to join, stay with and perform better at an inclusive organisation;
- enhanced reputation – a competitive point of difference in the market attracts clients;
- diversity of thought and background – greater creativity, innovation and even constructive disagreements lead to better architecture;
- greater insight into client and user needs – design is informed by and directly relevant to the people inhabiting the spaces;
- better service delivery – inclusive working arrangements support better employee performance; and
- compliance – an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy helps employers and service providers to meet their legal responsibilities, in the UK these can be found in [The Equality Act 2010](#).

Chartered Practices must have and maintain an appropriate Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy, which is regularly monitored. An action plan will help you achieve your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion goals in practice.

The RIBA recognises that a significant proportion of Chartered Practices do not have any employees, although they may, on occasion, employ people on a temporary or ad-hoc basis. We recommended that your policy is fit for purpose and has the flexibility to adapt to changes in circumstances.

Best Practice

Social purpose and leadership: Discover the [RIBA Practice Role Models](#), case studies about organisations that exercise a positive impact – on their people, their clients, the profession and wider society. None claim to be perfect, but there are things to be learnt from each. They are intended to provoke a profession-wide debate about what it means to be a successful RIBA Chartered Practice. The RIBA has defined the [nine characteristics of a practice role model](#).

Quality Management

Chartered Practice Criteria

The practice must operate a Quality Management System, relevant to the size of practice.

- Small practices (up to 10 staff) are required to prepare a Project Quality Plan (PQP) for each project.
- Medium practices (11 to 50 staff) are required to operate a Quality Management System that covers all project and practice procedures.
- Large practices (51+ staff) are required to adopt an externally certified ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System or be working towards having one.

Guidance and templates can be found in the [Chartered Practice Toolbox](#)

Any project is a journey and becomes easier to envisage, plan and execute with a good map. What is true for a project is also true for your practice; having a management system for various functions means that the wheel need not be constantly reinvented and that consistent ways of working can be understood and adopted by everyone. When things don't go quite according to plan on a journey, a map can become a life-saver as it allows you to find a way out of trouble – you can find where you are and then plot a route around the problem.

The RIBA believes that quality management is core to the success of a business in providing quality assurance which accords with the RIBA Chartered Practice scheme. All RIBA Chartered Practices are required to have an appropriate Quality Management System (QMS). This system provides a map specifically designed for the business of architecture and will enable your practice to establish a formal QMS.

Leadership is essential to running an effective QMS. Directors/Partners (and senior managers) establish unity of purpose and direction of the practice. They should create and maintain the collaborative environment that enables staff to become fully involved in achieving the practice's objectives.



Best Practice

Quality assurance accreditation: Developing a full QMS that is externally accredited to [BS EN ISO 9001:2015](#) will help demonstrate to clients that you manage the quality of your work and processes to an internationally recognised standard and improve your success at pre-qualification stage in public sector work. To achieve accreditation, it is likely that you will need help from a quality assurance professional, RIBA members can speak to an RIBA Specialist Practice Consultant for more information: 020 7307 3600

Environmental Management

Chartered Practice Criteria

The practice must ensure that an appropriate Environmental Management Policy is in place and operational.

Guidance and a template can be found in the [Chartered Practice Toolbox](#).

Clearly, the output of a practice will have a great impact on the environment, when considering the life of the buildings designed by the practice. RIBA Chartered Practices are required to have an Environmental Management Policy to establish a common approach to minimising environmental impact on projects and in the practice. This approach will bring many benefits, including:

- internal buy in – formalising an approach to reducing the environmental impact of architecture in a policy helps to provide a framework for internal communication; a written policy ensures that design discussions are underpinned by a common understanding of environmental aspirations, obligations and targets;
- clarifying processes – all good designers will naturally have a positive attitude to environmental issues built into their thinking. Writing these values? down helps to share your goals, allows others to input into processes and, with constructive criticism, can identify how environmental objectives can be better integrated into your work;
- communicating to clients – success rates in public procurement, bids and informal conversations with clients, consultants, local authorities and others can be improved by communicating robust environmental policies. Ensuring that your environmental agenda is clear, transparent and legible can instil confidence in how you talk about, deliver, and how others perceive, your approach; and
- driving improvements – an environmental policy is not a fixed position. It is a working frame of reference. Periodically reviewing and developing the policy to reflect legislative changes, developments in your own thinking and that of wider industry will enable constant improvements to design work and operational procedures.

Best Practice

Whole life thinking: Consider how your practice will encompass environmental, social and economic sustainability throughout the organisation, your architecture and research so that your work is energy and resource efficient, enduring and meets a real need. Challenge yourself and others to innovate, and question current working practices and whole life thinking – including your clients, contractors and the supply chain.

Health and Safety

Chartered Practice Criteria

The practice must ensure that an appropriate Health & Safety Policy is in place and operational.

Guidance and a template can be found in the [Chartered Practice Toolbox](#).

Health and Safety is a fundamental consideration for all architects and designers. It should be part of everyday working - activity inside the office and on every project. There is both a legal and professional responsibility to understand and apply health and safety principles at all times.

Architects have further responsibilities, both legal and moral, to help reduce the devastating impact of construction activity on the workforce of the industry. 50 construction workers per year are killed at work and 100 times that later in life from chronic health conditions resulting from their work on site.

A Health and Safety policy should set out the standards and principles for your practice so that these can be communicated to clients and staff. To be effective, the Health and Safety policy of any Chartered Practice must address the specific needs and requirements of that practice, its staff and its work.

It is important that all staff are familiar with the contents of the policy and refer to it when appropriate. If staff members are in any doubt about the application or requirements at any time they must raise these concerns with their manager.



Best Practice

Health and safety project leadership: The RIBA Health and Safety Policy Guide includes guidance on the Construction (Design and Management) (CDM) Regulations 2015 which introduced the role of Principal Designer. The RIBA supports the Health and Safety Executive's position that the most appropriate organisation to fulfil the duties of the Principal Designer and make the most effective contribution to positive health and safety on the design of a project is the lead designer, which is likely to be the architecture practice, rather than a separate consultant. To improve your knowledge and confidence to undertake this role, you can read the RIBA's detailed guidance on CDM 2015 and consider taking a course.

Dispute Resolution and Professional Indemnity Insurance

Chartered Practice Criteria

As part of the Code of Practice, practices are required to have in place a written complaint handling procedure.

Guidance can be found with the [Code of Practice](#).

The RIBA acknowledges that, on occasion, Chartered Practices may fall short of the exacting standards of the Code. In order to deal with possible breaches of the Code, and other concerns, the RIBA has established a clear and equitable process for dealing with complaints against Chartered Practices.

The Institute also accepts that misunderstandings and disputes can arise between Chartered Practices and their clients, co-professionals and others they encounter through their professional obligations, but that these often do not amount to a breach of the Code. The RIBA has therefore also implemented a [series of dispute resolution processes](#) to assist parties in resolving these matters.



Best Practice

Responsibility and professionalism:

Most disputes are caused by a failure to communicate, complete actions, deliver services or behave in ways that are expected or have been agreed upon. Contractual duties are most clear to understand in standard forms of agreement (like [RIBA contracts and agreements](#)) while your duty of care in Tort will go beyond the terms of a contract. For detailed but concise guidance refer to the RIBA publication [Avoiding and Resolving Disputes: A Short Guide for Architects](#) by Bart Kavanagh.

Insurance

Chartered Practice Criteria

The practice must hold Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) cover appropriate for the work undertaken by the practice, or an equivalent form of insurance if operating outside of the UK.

Guidance on PII and risk management can be found from the [RIBA Insurance Agency](#).

Appropriate Professional Insurance is a requirement for architects in the UK. Starting at £250,000 at the least (as required by the ARB), practices may need more cover dependent on the type of projects they work on. Allegations of professional negligence often involve complex and detailed issues, and litigation may be expensive and traumatic. During your career, should a claim be made against you, your insurer should support you throughout this process. For more information on Professional Indemnity Insurance, visit the [RIBA Insurance Agency](#), the only PII broker recommended by the RIBA.



Best Practice

Additional insurance: The RIBA recommends that practices assess they may face and have appropriate insurance to protect the business and specialist advice is sought. Beyond the requirement for Professional Indemnity Insurance, you may need insurance to cover the following:

- Employers liability (a legal requirement as an employer)
- Premises and contents insurance
- Public liability insurance
- Cyber liability insurance
- Health and accident insurance
- Travel insurance
- Motor insurance
- Insurance for specific items such as ICT and other equipment.

CPD

Chartered Practice Criteria

The practice must operate a management system to ensure that architects in this office adhere to the [RIBA Code of Professional Conduct](#) and comply with Continuing Professional Development obligations.

Guidance can be found on the [RIBA CPD webpages](#).

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Doing CPD helps you to remain competent, professional, capable and resilient as an architect. It enables RIBA members to achieve better outcomes and run better businesses. CPD also helps you to contend with disruption and to face current and future challenges as well as learn new skills and specialisms.

RIBA Chartered Practices must provide the opportunity for all staff members (not just RIBA Chartered Members) to undertake CPD so that your practice can develop its knowledge. Easy compliance with this requirement can be achieved by creating a structured framework for your team's continual learning, with a member of staff being responsible for organising CPD.



Best Practice

Research and career learning: Research can be an essential part of a practice's approach to working and can form an important element of the service offer to clients. Consider whether gaining new knowledge and information might be a significant part of your working method and how you disseminate the results internally, to your clients and to the wider profession or industry. For more information on undertaking research download our guides [Knowledge and Research in Practice](#) and [Housing Research in Practice](#). Design research - carried out as a practice, in collaboration with other architects or through teaching - can often lead to career specialisation, opening avenues of work on new project types. Specialist knowledge can be achieved, maintained and enhanced by courses leading to certificates, diplomas or degrees such as the [RIBA Career Learning Conservation Course](#).

Thinking of joining the RIBA Chartered Practice Scheme?

[Make an enquiry](#)