



Leading by example

Why three new members of the Fellowship Council believe that the RSA is the sum of the Fellows

The Fellowship Council is an exciting opportunity for Fellows to become even more engaged in the life and work of the RSA. The 40 members of the Council – 20 elected directly on a regional basis and 20 nominated by Trustees – will be endorsed at the RSA's Annual General Meeting on 7 October. Here, three new members of the Council discuss their agenda for the coming year.

Gerard Darby: The RSA has tremendous potential to become a catalyst for change. For me, being a Council member is both a privilege and a responsibility, as well as an opportunity to interact with some of the talented people that the RSA attracts.

Zena Martin: Together the Fellows have the power to do something amazing, but we need to tap into that potential. There should be more of an outreach from the RSA to Fellows, rather than expecting them to go in search of information.

Lopa Patel: That's already beginning to happen – it's a huge change for the RSA to create the Council. As members, we will become a mouthpiece for the RSA; our role will be to initiate dialogue between Fellows and to listen to what they have to say. Above all, we will be there if a Fellow wants to talk to somebody.

ZM: We'll also be trying to get more Fellows involved in the life of the RSA. It's often the same people who attend events – it would be great to see a more diverse group.

LP: Part of that involves making people understand that the RSA really is the sum of the Fellows.

GD: Exactly. People are nominated to become Fellows because of their work and achievements, so many of them are already doing exciting things – just not under the RSA banner. My role is to show them that what they're doing is relevant to the RSA.



“It’s about capitalising on the partnerships that are in place, and building new ones as well”

ZM: People aren’t always aware of the scope of the RSA’s work. The RSA is known within a specific, intellectual community, but if we could get its message into the media, it could effect even greater social change. People would be bound to help.

LP: The Council needs to develop a framework that will enable Fellows to take ideas forward themselves. Perhaps we should model ourselves on alumni groups, which are incredibly successful at fostering collaboration between people who are geographically apart.

GD: Fellows should be able to do things for themselves, without always having to involve the centre. The way a lot of networks are going these days is that members are getting more power and taking more initiative. Having more Fellow-led activities might seem like a risk for the RSA but I believe it would work. In the end it’s all about pushing the boundaries, even if we only start on a small scale.

LP: I agree. This is an opportunity for the RSA to throw open the doors, both through the Council and through the Fellows.

ZM: We can start by encouraging Fellows to talk about their projects so that we can help them get their ideas off the ground. We all want people to succeed.

GD: What we need to do is to take the energy that Fellows have when they join the RSA and help them maintain or even increase it over the years. That way, both the RSA and the Fellowship can benefit from their ingenuity, ideas and contacts.

LP: Collaboration is a word that comes up time and time again. It’s about capitalising on the partnerships that are in place, and building new ones as well.

GD: It’s a two-way thing: the RSA can help Fellows develop and magnify their ideas by getting them publicity and giving them advice; at the same time, the RSA will benefit from getting practical insight from people on the ground. What gives the RSA strength is also what benefits the Fellows.

Get involved

To give your views on how the Council can help Fellows to realise the RSA’s goals, visit www.RSAfellowshipcouncil.ning.com or contact the Fellowship team on fellowship@rsa.org.uk

Lopa Patel founded Asian lifestyle site Redhotcurry.com and is a non-executive director of government agency Becta

Gerard Darby works for innovation agency NESTA and has run projects such as the RSA’s Coffeehouse Challenge, aimed at cultivating social enterprise

Zena Martin is the founder and managing director of diversity communications consultancy Acknowledge Communications

ZM: We need to change mindsets so that Fellows want to make their projects more effective by linking them with the RSA.

GD: It might be that the RSA can give them a network to help them make their project more effective, or it might be that they feel supported by a community where people are coming across similar problems. Doing something innovative requires courage, and there’s something reassuring about being in an environment where people are taking risks within different sectors.

LP: And that’s where we can help by being an approachable face. If I can succeed, then so can anyone. I want to show people that the RSA is open to ideas from all communities and sectors.

GD: The RSA’s broad remit is its strength and its uniqueness. Fellows can always come to the RSA for advice, because there’s bound to be someone with experience in the right sector.