

**Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee
2nd Report, 2019 (Session 5)**

The Glasgow School of Art Response to Committee Recommendations

Fire Safety and the Mackintosh Building prior to the 2014 fire

- 1) The Committee notes that having clearly identified the risks posed by fire, via a number of reports directly commissioned by the GSA Board, in the period up to 2014, the GSA appears not to have addressed specifically the heightened risk of fire to the Mackintosh building. The Committee notes that the GSA Board consider that the fire safety measures that were taken went above and beyond the standards required. The Committee has been unable to obtain any evidence, beyond the decision to eventually install a water mist system in 2008, to support this position.

As was submitted in our evidence to the Committee, the GSA was operating in full compliance with the fire precaution regulatory framework in 2008-2014. The “above and beyond” was the proposal to install the mist suppression system, which was pioneering at the time, with the intention of setting a new standard for the added protection of historic buildings.

- 2) Committee was not convinced that an adequate risk management approach had been taken by the GSA with specific regard to the Mackintosh building. The Committee would welcome clarification from the GSA as to the measures taken following the publication of the Buro Happold reports aside from the decision to eventually install a mist suppression system, which is considered later in this report.

It should be noted that the fire protection system was compliant and these proposals were an enhancement on the regulatory requirements. This was explained in detail in both the [Page \Park and GSA submissions](#). In summary, additional measures were:

- **Provision of automatic fire detection throughout the Building;**
- **Provision of CCTV in key areas;**
- **Alarm call points and sounders throughout the Building;**

- **Positioning of full fire extinguisher provision throughout the Building;**
 - **Provision of security staff throughout the Building on a 24/7 basis.**
- 3) It is not the role of the Committee to judge whether the Mackintosh building was compliant with the relevant fire safety standards and we expect the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service report to clarify this. However, from the reports commissioned by the GSA, it is evident that there were serious fire risks associated with the building.

The SFRS report (published November 2014) into the 2014 fire has already clarified this position. We acknowledge that the BuroHappold report highlighted that there was a fire risk. The Board's response was to accept the recommendation of the report and to commission the mist suppression system.

- 4) The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, SFRS and Historic Environment Scotland undertake a review of Category A-Listed buildings with unique cultural or historic significance to ascertain if any additional interventions might be introduced to mitigate the risk of fire.

We welcome this recommendation.

Timescale for implementation of a mist suppression system prior to the 2014 fire

- 5) The Committee would welcome clarification on what level of non-core funding has been received by the GSA from the Scottish Funding Council and the heritage purposes in relation to the Mackintosh building these funds were used for.

We welcome the opportunity to work with colleagues in the SFC to provide this information to the Committee.

- 6) The Committee is concerned about the length of time taken for the mist suppression system to be installed in the Mackintosh building and questions whether more steps could have been taken in the interim period to protect the building.

The timeline for taking forward the mist suppression system including funding,

[procurement and its installation was fully explained in the GSA's submission to the Committee \(page 8/9\).](#)

- 7) The Committee notes that the approach taken by the GSA to fundraise in order to install a mist suppression system in the Mackintosh building was considered by some to be unusual. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government undertakes an assessment of whether the current funding models available to HEIs to protect historic assets, such as the Mackintosh building, are adequate.

[We welcome the Committee's recommendation on the challenges of funding enhancements to historic buildings, and we would be pleased to contribute to the assessment on the adequacy of current funding models.](#)

- 8) We recommend that the Scottish Government, through its agencies, review the adequacy of powers to compel owners to put in place enhanced fire safety measures; the public funding available; and the flexibility attached to that funding, to protect buildings of national significance.

[We welcome consideration of this recommendation.](#)

Compartmentation

- 9) The Committee would welcome clarification from the GSA regarding the degree of compartmentation that was undertaken prior to the 2014 fire. The Committee notes that the difficulties associated with undertaking compartmentation resulted in the GSA being reliant upon the installation of a mist suppression system as the main response to the fire risk that had been identified in reports commissioned, in 2006 and 2008 respectively, by the GSA. Unfortunately, the mist suppression system had not been installed at the time of the 2014 fire for the reasons discussed earlier.

[We will work with our architects and revisit the improvements and enhancements made to the Building since the early 1990s and provide this information to the Committee.](#)

- 10) The Committee recognises the challenges associated with compartmentation in historic buildings but questions whether more could have been done during the construction phase

following the 2014 fire. The Committee recommends that Historic Environment Scotland update guidance to reflect the need for improved compartmentation during construction.

We welcome the recognition of the challenges associated with compartmentation, which were set out in our original written submission to Committee (page 9) and we would be pleased to contribute to the debate on guidance relating to compartmentation during construction.

Fire Safety during the Mackintosh Building Restoration Project

- 11) The Committee agrees that the preservation of life must be the ultimate priority during a fire incident. However, the Committee notes that there is a considerable risk of fire to historic buildings during restoration. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government reviews, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, the legislation concerning safety in historic buildings during the construction phase of a project in order to identify any additional legislative measures that could be put in place to protect historic buildings as an asset.

The GSA agrees that preservation of life must be the ultimate priority, welcomes the proposed review and hopes to be fully engaged in the process.

- 12) The Committee notes the on-going dialogue between architect and Director of Professional Studies at the GSA, Gordon Gibb, and the Glasgow School of Art regarding the extent to which a mist suppression system was in place prior to the 2014 fire which could have been used during the construction period. This issue was raised toward the end of the Committee's inquiry and accordingly raised issues which it has not been possible to fully scrutinise. The Committee expects the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's inquiry to clarify this matter.

We stand by our supplementary submission on this matter and agree with the Committee on the need to await the report from the SFRS. Regarding the ongoing dialogue between Mr Gibb and the GSA, Mr Gibb has not raised any issue directly with the Board or Senior Management.

Mackintosh Building Restoration Project: Procurement Process

13) The Committee notes the GSA's approach to procurement and accepts that the school had oversight of the project. Notwithstanding these oversight arrangements, there was a second fire.

We welcome the Committee's understanding that we had oversight of the project. Of course, Keir Construction Scotland Ltd (Keir) had day-to-day control of the site when the second fire occurred. In our written submission we explained our procurement approach which was "above and beyond" standard practice.

Site visits to the Mackintosh restoration project

14) The Committee considers that the GSA appear to have acted in accordance with common practice governing sites of this type but notes the commentary, following the 2018 fire, regarding site visits. The Committee considers that a greater degree of transparency and communication regarding how the site was being used during the restoration period would have lessened commentary of this kind. The issue of transparency and communication is considered later in this report.

Our contract with Keir made express provision for community access. There was a positive commitment to appropriate and approved site access, but, as emphasised in our evidence to the Committee, Keir retained full control of the site and access to it at all times. This approach was in line with Scottish Government policy on community benefits in public procurement.

Fire alarm on the night of the 2018 fire

15) The Committee notes the concerns raised regarding the fire alarm system at the Mackintosh site and reports which questioned whether it was operational on the night of the 2018 fire. The Committee is not in a position to determine whether the fire alarm system was switched on and fully operational on the night of the 2018 fire. The Committee understands that this issue will be considered as part of the ongoing SFRS investigation and the Committee awaits its findings.

We agree with the Committee on the need to await the outcome of the SFRS investigation into whether or not the fire alarm system was operational. As the site and the safety and security systems were under the control of Kier, their input will be a material factor in this matter.

Cladding used in the Mackintosh Building

- 16) The Committee notes the ongoing debate regarding the use of certain insulation materials. Given the concerns raised regarding the use of PIR insulation the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government, HES and SFRS take cognisance of the on-going debate on this issue and consider whether PIR insulation poses an unacceptable fire risk.

We would like to clarify the use of the terminology in the heading used in that there has never been any cladding on the Mackintosh Building. As noted in the recommendation, PIR was used. We will be happy to contribute to any Scottish Government review of this wider topic.

Governance: Glasgow Art School Board

- 17) The Committee is not convinced that the GSA gave sufficient priority to the safeguarding of the Mackintosh building. The Committee considers it would have been desirable for there to have been more specific expertise at Board level which reflected the importance of the Mackintosh building within the GSA estate.

We note the Committee's opinion. We are unaware of any evidential basis for this current view and details of current Board members can be found on our website and past Board members, active at the time of the project can be found within the annual accounts.

- 18) The Committee is concerned that the listing system employed by HES covers a very large number of properties and contains no formal mechanism for recognising that there is a smaller sub-set of Category A Listed properties that are of significant cultural and historic importance to Scotland. The Committee recommends that HES and the Scottish Government consider a more tailored form of categorisation that would provide specific protection to

buildings of unique cultural and historic significance.

We note this recommendation.

The Dual Purpose of the Mackintosh Building

19) Despite the reassurances provided by the Glasgow School of Art with regards to the reviews put in place during the Mackintosh restoration project, the Committee is concerned by the lack of transparency regarding what specific measures were taken as a result of the reviews implemented following the 2014 fire. Additionally, the Committee considers that the GSA has been unable to articulate, in the public domain, what lessons were learned from the 2014 fire.

We addressed this matter fully on page 17 of our submission. To summarise, lessons learned were applied to the rest of the GSA Estate and would have applied to the Mackintosh Building following the handover of the site from Keir. It should also be noted that these lessons were applied in the contract with Keir.

20) The Committee considers that the dual purpose of the Mackintosh building places a significant burden upon the building which increases the risk of fire occurring. However, the Committee notes that the Glasgow School of Art remains committed to the dual purpose of the building as both an education building and a museum.

We note this observation.

21) The Committee recommends that HES and the Scottish Government review current guidance. This review should take account of whether historic buildings which have a dual function, such as the Mackintosh building, require additional guidance or support in cognisance of the additional fire risk which their dual purpose presents.

We welcome this recommendation and look forward to being fully engaged in this process.

The role of Historic Environment Scotland

22) The Committee notes the remit of Historic Environment Scotland is to have a leadership role in relation to the conservation and preservation of historic buildings. Despite this, the Committee considers that Historic Environment Scotland adopted an arms-length approach to the Mackintosh building with regards to safeguarding it from fire. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the Scottish Government reviews the remit of Historic Environment Scotland and considers giving it extended statutory powers to intervene in cases where there is a risk to an asset of national significance.

We note this observation.

Trust

23) The Committee notes the suggestion made by former directors Professors Inns and Jones that the Mackintosh building be placed in a Trust, with the Glasgow School of Art and Dawson Stelfox taking a different view. The Committee notes that the Trust model is not a new suggestion and has been the subject of discussion over a number of decades as a means of enabling the GSA to focus on its core educational function whilst providing a means of protecting the Mackintosh building. The Committee considers that the GSA should give serious consideration to placing any future Mackintosh building in a Trust.

The Mackintosh Building is core to the GSA's teaching, learning and research. It is what makes The Glasgow School of Art's educational and student experience unique. As stated by Dr Gray at the Committee hearing, the GSA will consider all options for the management of the Building going forward.

Transparency and Communication

24) The Committee notes the measures taken by the GSA to provide information to the Committee for the purposes of this inquiry. However, much of the information was not readily available on the GSA's website and had to be provided on request. For example, the GSA's website includes clear information about the restoration project itself but not the governance and decision-making processes underpinning much of this work. Furthermore, the Committee notes that the Charles Rennie Mackintosh Society could not readily find information pertaining to the substantial collections lost following the 2014 fire.

We note the Committee's comments. The GSA is committed to being as open and transparent as possible, and taking on board the Committee comments will continue to improve availability and accessibility of information.

- 25) The Committee therefore recommends the GSA review how it presents information on its website to ensure that information is easily accessible. The Committee considers it is essential that a list of each item and its value from the Mackintosh collection lost in the 2014 and 2018 fires is published in a prominent location and in easily accessible formats.

As stated at 24 above, the GSA is committed to transparency and will continue to improve availability and accessibility of information. The losses from the 2014 fire, which were submitted to the committee, were displayed on the GSA Archives and Collections website.

- 26) Despite the reassurances provided by the GSA, the Committee recommends the GSA review how it disseminates information pertaining to the Mackintosh building to provide a clearer picture of its activities. In particular, the GSA Board should be more transparent regarding the processes which would be put in place regarding any future re-build of the Mackintosh building.

We note the Committee's recommendation. We will commit to review how we disseminate and share information going forward.

The Mackintosh building and the Local Community

- 27) The Committee welcomes the GSA's commitment to improving engagement with the local community but considers that more needs to be done to allay the concerns of local residents and rebuild the loss of trust. In particular, the Committee considers that the GSA cannot be truly effective as an institution until relations with the local community have been repaired.
- 28) The Committee recommends that the GSA establish a formal method of engaging with the local community on a permanent basis. At the same time, the GSA should put in place mechanisms to ensure that the local community be fully consulted on any proposals relating to the restoration of the Mackintosh building in the future.

In response to Recommendations 27 and 28. Since the fire the GSA has appointed a dedicated Community Engagement Officer and has worked closely with both local community councils to begin to rebuild trust. This forms part of our wider work continuing to improve transparency and information flow as stated in points 24) and 26).

Rebuilding the Mackintosh building

29) The Committee believes any discussion regarding the future of the Mackintosh building should fully consider the wider cultural and economic impact of the building. The Committee therefore recommends that the GSA undertake a full consultation exercise with regards to the future of the Mackintosh building, so as to fully acknowledge and understand differing viewpoints, before making a formal decision on whether or not to rebuild.

The Board has already taken an in-principle decision to rebuild the Mackintosh Building on its current site and that it should return as a fully functioning art school. As we go forward with the design, procurement and funding processes we will engage with all stakeholders.

Conclusion

30) The Committee considers from the evidence gathered that the Mackintosh fires raise a host of associated issues which go beyond the cause of the fire itself and as such require further examination.

31) The Committee recommends that after the conclusion of the SFRS report, the Scottish Government should establish a public inquiry with judicial powers into the 2014 and 2018 fires at the Glasgow School of Art. The inquiry should also examine the risks posed by fire in historic buildings nationally and the ability of custodians to manage these properties, drawing on the lessons learned from the GSA.

In response to Recommendations 30 and 31, the issue of a public inquiry is a matter for Scottish Ministers.