

Fisher joins RIBA race for president

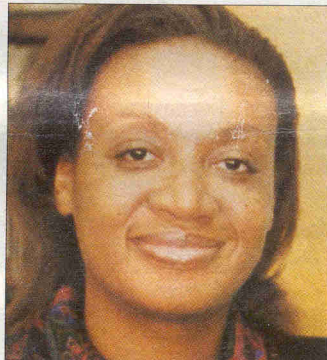
Charlie Gates

Annette Fisher is set to kick-start the RIBA presidential election today with the announcement of her bid to become the profession's first ever black female leader.

Fisher, 42, has already won the support of the pressure group Women in Architecture and the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust, which campaigns for greater opportunities for black architects. She will join the race against Bristol architect George Ferguson and Birmingham's David Thorp, and senior RIBA members are already saying she has a strong chance of winning a major share of the April vote.

She said: "One of the positive things if I run is that I am not only a woman, but a black woman. To stay relevant the RIBA must become diverse. It cannot be a male, white institution." As a black woman she said she could "get away with being a lot braver" and could implement more radical changes. These would include a major initiative to "monitor the number of ethnic minorities in the profession", since she claims indecision has left the RIBA ignorant of race issues in architecture.

She called for the RIBA to become more aware of where



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"bright, young" black architects are going and why so few graduate from university. Some estimates of the number of black architects in the UK are as low as 40.

The London-based architect has joined the race late, and many leading figures within the institute have already committed their support to Ferguson. However, in a surprising move, Ferguson has written to councillors saying they can transfer support to Annette Fisher if they wish. He said he made the move because Fisher "has been on the council longer than I have, and there could be people who want to back her, but have backed me already, and will feel awkward".

Ferguson said her entry made the campaign "worthwhile" and

would turn it into a "spirited contest". But he hinted that Fisher's candidacy could be marred by being based in the capital. The Bristol-based architect said "it is important sometimes that the RIBA should have a president that is not based in London".

Fisher is currently consulting fellow RIBA members to see what level of support she can guarantee, but she told *BD*: "I think I can get the signatures I need," adding that she was confident of having strong "support within the [RIBA] council".

Angela Brady of Women in Architecture said: "I still think there is a problem with inclusion of women, if there was a female president that would change."

Arthur Timothy, a black architect and member of the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust, said: "A black architect, and moreover a woman, heading the institute can only be a good thing." He added that she had a "strong chance to break through", and said her appointment "would send out a strong message [to architects]."

Fisher said she would make sure the RIBA "gets its act together to become the first point of contact for architecture by becoming more visible and becomes a lean, mean organisation".

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