

IN THE HOT SEAT

Meet the NAJ'S chairman elect SIMON JOHNSON, owner and founder of MARMALADE JEWELLERY, London

Why have you felt it important to get closely involved with the Association?

The N.A.G. was instrumental in helping us find our feet when we started out, giving us the confidence, contacts, knowledge and training needed to start our new adventure. As we grew we've stayed allied with the Association, sent all our staff on most of the training courses and got to know the head office team very well. Thanks to my brilliant and supportive current team, I'm fortunate now to have time during the working week to help move the

Association forward. I feel that given the recent unification we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to affect some real and great changes to the way the Association and its members benefit each other.

What aspects of the NAJ do you feel need the most urgent attention?

Several areas require constant and immediate effort. Our external Public Policy position must be codified and published as soon as possible. As a new Association our stance on issues such as fair trade and investment diamonds really does need to be in the public domain.

Our position as an education provider and portal for information about all sources of industry training is vital to our success in the coming years. It's essential for our members to understand that we don't just sell (world class!) education, and they should be able to come to us for anything they need to help them make informed decisions about their own training programmes.

Our membership compliance and standards must also be first class. We are re-writing our Code of Conduct and once complete our members will be asked to commit to it so other members, and the public, can start to rely on and prefer an NAJ member over one who is not. There must be sanctions if a member falls below our minimum agreed standards. The EDF group's membership needs to grow and expand to include groups for designer makers and trade suppliers.

The Institute of Registered Valuers must improve its reach across the trades, to encourage new blood into the profession and demonstrate that there really

is a career as a jewellery valuer.

Plus, we've got to develop a new stand for IJL, improve our trade partner benefits and move into new premises this year – so there's plenty to do. Fortunately we've been recruiting volunteers for our steering groups to assist the Board and the head office teams – some amazing people willing to give up their time to help us achieve our goals. We're always looking for as much help as possible however, so if there's anybody out there who can and wants to help please don't hesitate to get in touch.

What are your immediate plans as chairman? What does this role mean to you personally?

It's pretty daunting but also incredibly exciting. I'm fortunate to have lots of friends across all branches of the trade, who are willing to help or offer advice – so that makes it easier. My first priority is to get the steering groups up and running so the target areas can start to be addressed and the NAJ can move forward. I feel incredibly privileged to be invited into this role and my mission is to ensure that the Association is in a better position membership-, education- and finance-wise, after two years of my stewardship.

How is the unification process progressing?

It's gone very smoothly, considering the two organisations had such long unique histories. This smooth transition is testament to the consummate skills and determination of the head office team and the two current chairmen – Andrew Hinds and Gary Wroe.

There are some geographical obstacles – we now have an office in both London and Birmingham. But given that these locations are the two beating hearts of the British jewellery industry, that's a positive!

