

Kristina Allison – Presidential Address

20 May 2025, The Barbican, London



Good evening and welcome, Past Presidents, Members, Honoured guests and Friends. It is both an honour and a privilege to represent the Society as your President for the coming year.

There are so many people who I would like to thank who have supported me get to this point, I'm not sure where to start. Many thanks go to Brendan Keely, the Secretary of the SLL and Fiona Fanning our SLL Membership Executive for all your support thus far! And thank you to Dan Lister and Helen Loomes for handing over the Society in such amazing shape.

I want to give a special mention to all our SLL members for volunteering your time in pursuit of sharing knowledge and truly making us the 'learned body' that we are. The Society owes a lot to the dedication of its members who give up a lot their own time to move the industry forward, through events or writing lighting guides, to give a few examples. There are a few members who I would like to give a mention to specifically.

- Bob Bohannon and the amazing TM66 team – 'LOOK WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED, SO FAR!' and during the coming year I will continue to support and promote this work as it moves through from the BETA version into first release version 1.
- John Aston, my co-chair of the Education & Membership committee. During our time in this position together we challenged the previous MSLL application process so that it would be more straight forward for our members seeking to apply for chartership by starting to align the process with CIBSE. And thank you to Tim Bowes for continuing to champion this.
- Irene Mazzei at Stoane Lighting, for working with me on CIBSE TM65.2: Embodied Carbon in Lighting and being flexible for our Teams meeting times around baby Cecilia's nap times!

So, I've been wondering how to begin this address for months and after much thought I feel it feels right to start here...

I, like many, began my career in lighting not long after I finished my master's degree, not in lighting! I was studying in a different area of design and like 74% of us (yes, I did a poll!) - I 'fell into lighting'. But once I began learning about lamps and energy saving technologies, I was hooked! This was during what I'd later describe an old-fashioned apprenticeship in *Energy-Effective* lighting design working with David Matyus-Flynn, a highly knowledgeable consultant and lecturer in the subject of sustainable lighting. Looking back, I realise how lucky I was to have a mentor guide me both in lighting and business, unfortunately David was unable to travel here to join us tonight, although a very special thanks to David for your time, guidance, patience, and sharing your knowledge. These are the traits I do my best to embody now as a lighting professional.

One evening David and I travelled into London to an SLL event hosted by iGuzzini at Southwark Cathedral. The event was a blend of CPD and a mini Ready Steady Light. It was at this event that I met SLL past president Stephen Lisk, and he encouraged me to sign up as an SLL member and to join the communications committee. So, you see from pretty much day-one I was already getting very involved! It was around this same time I also met SLL past president, John Aston. John and David had played rugby together in their youth, and it was John who introduced me to an emerging technology called 'L.E.D.', and this, just as I'd memorised all the lengths, wattages and Lumen outputs for fluorescent tubes!

As the months and years that would follow, I became more and more involved with the Society, through attending events and delivering the occasional CPD, and even writing the odd TM – and well, 14 years later here I am now!

It was during a communications committee meeting that we came up with the idea of promoting the society via the new online platform – previously known as Twitter – to make a promotional video. [SLL Promo 640x360 - YouTube](#).

It is clear from the interviewees in the video that lighting *is* the wonderful industry that people fall into.

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As part of my preparation for writing this presidential address I've done some research and read back on past SLL presidential addresses. This is important for a few reasons, firstly to make sure I wasn't going to propose the exact same thing as a president did before me and secondly to provide continuity in this position. What I learnt from reading the past presidential addresses was the strong theme for education in lighting and school engagement through STEM. STEM standing for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths.

I remember listening to SLL past president Jeff Shaw's presidential address reflecting on the late Liz Peck's achievements with Night of Heritage Light and STEM through Pockets of Light. At the time I was a member of the Education committee and was inspired to give a lesson in lighting design myself. So, I approached the secondary school I went to and was lucky to be invited to give a class on lighting as part of Design and Technology lesson back in 2018.

It was well received by the pupils and their teacher, and I had been invited to go back again the following year – but then covid happened and we also lost Liz. But her legacy lives on, and through events like pockets of light we share her and our, love and enthusiasm for light and lighting.

Last year I arranged a Pockets of Light event in my local village, and following the same theme of going into schools, giving a hands-on lesson with lighting samples and props I worked with three local schools. This was a community event, sponsored by Warner Brother's film studios in Abbots Langley. STEM education for schools is well received, and again I was invited to return to the schools for future lessons in lighting. But I started to think – did I consider myself a STEM candidate when I was at school? Probably not, I, like many perhaps in this room consider themselves primarily creative, leaning more into the artistic side of lighting design. This is STEAM, not just STEM. ('A' in STEAM standing for the Art's). And I have seen through going into schools to deliver activities like Pockets of Light that and working collaboratively - we get stuff done!

This made me think back to TM66 and TM65.2 and how having gained all this insight about these subjects and how we, collectively, are approaching the climate emergency through sharing knowledge. At the time I felt overwhelmed with responsibility to make meaningful change – and I did what seemed to be a completely normal thing to do, and I wrote a letter to Sir David Attenborough. I poured my heart out in my letter about the work we have been doing within the Society on circular economy and embodied carbon! Enclosed with a stamped, self-addressed envelope I hoped to he might be able to help me rationalise my complex problem. That same week I received a reply – I was delighted!

I opened the envelop, and in it was a short handwritten note – *'Dear Kristina, thank you for your letter. You work in a specialist field of which I have no knowledge. So, I regret to say I cannot give you any advice. Yours sincerely, David Attenborough'*. I felt a bit disappointed with this response, but I didn't want to leave it there, so I continued with our correspondence – I wrote to him again – this time with less waffle and straight to the point. *'Dear Sir David, (I wrote) how do you keep a clam outlook when you have witnessed so much change and devastation in the natural environment throughout your career? Kind regards, Kristina'*. Not feeling so confident he would write to me again, but I enclosed a second stamped, self-addressed envelope just in case anyway. Can you imagine my delight when on the same week I received a second letter.

Again, his letter was brief, but it was all I needed to hear – *'Dear Kristina Allison, I cannot rationally assess our chances of dealing with climate change successfully. I only know we must do our utmost to do so. Your sincerely, David Attenborough'*. It is the second part that got me – he was right, and the answer doesn't just sit in books, lighting guides or technical memorandums or even digital tools, it requires action and education.

I believe that our utmost means education at a young age with the support of industry, when we are at our most creative and can embed best practice principles right at the beginning of the journey into lighting. We need to inspire the next generation of lighters to actively want to join this community, more than just falling into it. Lighting has the potential to solve and resolve so many things not just in terms of the climate emergency, but including health and wellbeing, medical applications, food production – plus many more global problems we may face in the

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future too. Imagine we use our position, time and knowledge as lighters to give the opportunity for the work force of the future to resolve the challenges in their future world. Vice-president David Mooney once called me evangelical – but I think I just *really* believe in lighting!

Therefore, during my presidential year I aim to take forward the great work of past presidents Liz Peck, Jeff Shaw, Iain Carlile, Richard Capel and Dan Lister. I want to give school age pupils the opportunity to come into our industry through work experience placements. To achieve this, I will work closely with our SLL regional lighting representatives across the UK to spread news about this important strategy and go into schools as STEM or STEAM ambassadors and working collaboratively with our industry partners, and friends at the ILP too.

I want lighting to become an industry that young people choose to follow not just fall in to. Let's inspire children to want to learn about our magical subject, to 'be curious' about how light works for all its facets, from physics to art to technology. Let's change the status quo of we 'fell into lighting' to 'lighting found me'.

I will end this presidential address with a well-known quote. It was Sir Issac Newton who once said we are 'Standing on the shoulders of giants' so let's lift up the next generation of lighters because the future belongs to the curious.

But this is only the beginning.

On there screen here, and in your AGM pack, I have included a sheet with QR code. If you are interested and would like to help me in this quest by getting involved in '[The STEAM 'Get Curious' Lighting Programme](#),' please complete this [form](#).

Thank you so much.