

The report summarises the discussion held by Groups following the 2010 Annual Delegates Meeting on the long term future for the Association

Compiled by Terry Giles, Chairman No 1 Group.

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Summary

There was clearly a need for change and for the National Committee to plan and direct the long term future of the Association.

1. The National Committee or an Executive Sub Committee must produce a plan for the future. This plan should be in place by 2015 at the latest.
2. Consideration should be given to setting the number of members per Area Representative as this would have the effect of reducing the size of the National Committee as numbers fall.
3. The National Committee should draw up a list of names of prospective volunteers to lead on specific tasks. Final selection should be done by the Chairman in conjunction with the three Vice Presidents.
4. The Officers for the coming year must be announced at the Annual Delegates Meeting.
5. The election of the Officers by the Groups should be included within the five year plan.
6. One Area Representative only to be appointed who should have a deputy. The Deputy would only attend National Committee meetings in the absence of the Area Representative.

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7. There are tasks listed in the new Handbook as expectations of commitment by the Area Representatives that should be fulfilled
8. At the Annual Delegates Meeting it is predominantly Group Chairmen who express views. Is there a Chairman to Chairman communication channel that should be utilised?
9. Annual Delegates Meeting Resolutions should be put forward by the National Committee and Area Representatives as well as from Groups.
10. Planning for the future will require a number of resolutions and a “postal vote” may be necessary to move things forward between the successive physical meetings.
11. A plan for what replaces the National Reunion needs to be formed.
12. Some leadership from the National Committee is expected on the activity for Area Representatives listed as “to help preserve the heritage and ethos of the ROC”.
13. A national record of the location and content of all ROC Heritage sites should be kept.
14. The National Committee does have a responsibility for Association heritage and legacy matters such as the ROC Grove and the laying up of the National Standard. This will require extensive planning, collaboration with others and finance including the possibility of a legacy fund. The dialogue needs to start now with an outline plan in place by 2015.
15. Long term potential costs need to be provided for now whilst income is adequate with details in the plan for the future

Acknowledgements

Those who elected to be part of the discussion

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No 1 Group Maidstone	No 12 Group Bristol	No 24 Group Edinburgh
No 2 Group Horsham	No 14 Group Winchester	No 25 Group Ayr
No 6 Group Norwich	No 15 Group Lincoln	No 28 Group Dundee
No 7 Group Bedford	No 16 Group Shrewsbury	No 29 Group Aberdeen
No 8 Group Coventry	No 21 Group Preston	No 31 Group Belfast
No 9 Group Yeovil	No 22 Group Carlisle	
No 10 Group Exeter	No 23 Group Durham	
John Sharpe	National Chairman	
Jenny Morris	National Secretary	
Norman Greig	Vice President	

Note:

It is understood that No 30 Group Inverness were briefed by No 29 Group Aberdeen

Background

Where did it all start? Probably with the protracted discussions in respect of raising level the capitation. This eventually necessitated Groups rather than the National Committee having to propose the increase. For many Groups this uplift necessitated an increase in subscriptions. For No 1 Group this occurred at the 2009 AGM a time when income was falling, there were redundancies, and short time working for our members. The papers were full of stories of MP's expenses. The increase in capitation meant that one third of each member's subscription was going to the National Committee. These overheads were considered to be too high and the National Committee was not "value for money". From the floor came the question/proposal, "Was now the time, owing to the contraction of the Association, for Area Representatives to be reduced to one from two for each Area? It was suggested that No. 1 Group could raise this at the next Annual Delegates Meeting".

The No 1 Group Committee struggled with the question and after much discussion agreed that the matter should not be ignored but that an Annual Delegates Meeting resolution was unlikely to be successful; therefore a debate or discussion should take place. The No 1 Group Chairman raised the matter informally with the National Chairman at the 2009 Reunion. This was followed up with a [one page letter sent to the National Chairmen](#) in October 2009. The letter highlighted that the ROC Association has evolved since it was formed and particularly since the main body of the Royal Observer Corps stood down in 1991, as have the needs of the membership. The role of the Area Representative as a communications channel has changed completely since the Association was formed. No 1 Group believe now is the time to review the composition of the National Committee and make changes to meet the future needs of the membership.

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The one page letter led to [a three page reply](#) in February 2010. The letter corrected comments made by No 1 Group but was essentially defensive of the status quo and didn't appear to address the long term future. However, the concluding paragraphs gave the opening to raise the matter at the 2010 Annual Delegates Meeting

"The National Committee found that such major changes require the members to have the opportunity to discuss and give their views. If No1 Group so wished time can be allocated at the Annual Delegates Meeting in April for discussion and soundings to be made. If No1 Group wanted to prepare a paper to generate discussion this could be circulated on their behalf prior to the Annual Delegates Meeting."

The [paper was duly prepared](#) and the [discussion at the Annual Delegates Meeting in April](#) was positive with the involvement of ten Delegates. Following the discussion it had been anticipated that the National Committee would assume the lead with one or more Committee Members directing the follow up. However, this role was passed back to the No 1 Group Chairman and the subsequent discussion forms the basis of this report that has been compiled from Members comments received within the three month time slot allocated.

Following the report in Snippets on the discussion at the Annual Delegates Meeting and that it would be followed up, the next step was to form a forum. To meet the time scale and avoid costs the discussion would be carried out virtually using email. Twenty one of the twenty three Groups had an email contact (No 13 and No 30 were the exceptions) and the following email was sent on the 15 May 2010.

Dear All

At the Annual Delegates Meeting held on the 17 April 2010 I was asked to present the discussion paper developed within No 1 Group regarding the National Committee structure. The involvement of at least 10 Groups in that discussion was rewarding. The National Chairman has asked me to continue the discussion. I would like to do this via a virtual group using email. Please could you let me know if you or someone else with your Group would wish to participate in these email exchanges?

I have received a written response from No 8 Group and a paper from No 28 Group is now on the website. Have you discussed the No 1 Group paper? Would you be willing to share any written record either with the Association or in confidence with me? The subtle nuances and variations in the discussion were not easily recorded at the Annual Delegates Meeting

Two main threads became apparent from that initial discussion at the Union Jack Club:

- *Election and roles of the National Committee Members*
- *Preserving the heritage of the ROC for future generations*

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The proposed virtual discussion group may also answer another question raised at the Annual Delegates Meeting regarding the formation of an “e” Group.

My immediate objectives are:

- 1. To have a virtual discussion group in place with a firm list of contacts by the next National Committee Meeting in July*
- 2. Clarify and prioritise some of the issues by the Reunion in October.*

These targets are challenging as the No 1 Group discussion paper started from a question at our AGM in June 2009, following exchanges with the National Committee it appeared at the Annual Delegates Meeting, some ten months in gestation!

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future as to whether you or a nominee from your Group wishes to be a corresponding member of the discussion group

*Terry Giles
Hon Chairman
No 1 Group
ROC Association*

Within 48 hours of sending the email eleven Groups had indicated their point of contact and expressed a wish to participate. This slowly increased to nineteen Groups and responses have ranged from simple acceptance to participate through to lengthy multi-page responses covering a range of topics. The scope of comments extended the discussion at the Annual Delegates Meeting. The key to success was not to attribute comments unless a Group specifically wants these circulated in order to convey to the National Committee as broad a view as possible of the members perceived needs for the future of the Association.

Follow up emails were sent, including a questionnaire, to try and focus on issues raised by the majority of the correspondents. The questionnaire returns gave in the main majority but not unanimous views on the way forward. However, there was clearly a need for change and for the National Committee to plan and direct the long term future of the Association.

Preparing for the Future

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There is unanimous agreement that the Association in its current form has limited life span. The only requirement in place for the long term future is that as Groups dissolve their financial assets should be transferred to the ROC Benevolent Fund. This is a requirement and not a plan.

The vast majority of ordinary members know little of the national aspects of the Association and many members feel that it is remote and of little consequence to them since the Branch, or the Group, is their whole ROC Association world. Apart from the receipt of a local hard copy Newsletter they have no need for further participation. However, the fact that nineteen Groups wanted to be part of the consultation and discussion indicates there is a wish to have an effective national organisation.

The National Committee or an Executive Sub Committee must produce a plan for the future. This plan should be in place by 2015 at the latest. Without such a plan the Association will fragment and slowly fade away. Any fragmentation will mean reducing income and therefore financial planning has to be part of the overall plan.

The change to the structure must be transparent and management responsibility taken up by the National Committee/ National Executive Committee

The Structure

Areas are not an entity within the Association except for the Area Representative structure that forms the National Committee. Already two Areas consist of four and not five Groups. No 30 Group is very small and is often linked to No 29 Group for purposes such as collection and payment of capitation. Whilst these two Groups are within Scottish Area any other merging of Groups could be across "Area" boundaries.

There is also a significant difference in the number of members within each Area. Consideration should be given to setting the number of members per Area Representative. This would have the effect of reducing the size of the National Committee as numbers fall.

The concept of specialist co-options already exists: Web Master, Archivist and Arboretum Co-ordinator. This structure should continue and expand without the need for the specialist to attend National Committee meetings on a regular basis.

Consideration must be given to what happens when Groups decide to stand down. Many will not merge and the concept of an "e" Group was raised at the Annual Delegates Meeting. Whether this is electronic or postal will evolve as communications improve. The structure for including members who are no longer in a Group but want to remain Association Members will require planning, consultation and careful timing. Too soon and it could take members away from Groups that are currently viable.

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Area Representatives

The role and need for Area Representatives was the most contentious topic of all. Some Groups could see no point in having Area Representatives in their current role and that the post in its current form should be scrapped. With modern methods of communication almost all felt that that Area Representatives had no role in direct communications between National and Groups. However, others felt that one Area Representative was needed to give some link between Groups and National Committee as well as a balanced representation at national level.

If only one Area Representative was to be appointed then that Area Representative should have a deputy who would only attend National Committee meetings in the absence of the Area Representative. The Area Representative and Deputy Area Representative would never attend the same meeting.

Getting the right person with the necessary skills onto the National Committee was more important than geographical positioning of the “Area” Representative. Area Representatives should be willing to take on a portfolio of duties when elected. This again points to the need to identify the “volunteer” and encourage them to stand for election with the need for specialists also identified and appointed. Area Representatives should be a link between the specialists and National Committee to ensure that regular communication with the entire Committee is continuous.

Beyond the Officers the remainder of the National Committee are relatively unknown, referred to at one point as the “Silent Seven”. In some cases it has been suggested that the National Committee have failed to promote what the Area Representatives on the National Committee do on behalf of the members

Area Representatives should be contacting Groups to discuss National Committee agenda items in order to get collective views and also checking whether issues are being raised in Groups that need National Committee attention. There are tasks listed in the new Handbook as expectations of commitment by the Area Representatives. Whilst this may be occurring in some Areas it is not universal.

Area Representatives could have a role in trying to find a consensus for resolutions and assisting in rewording to help Group resolutions succeed rather than continue to fail. Failure of resolutions, whether right or wrong, sends out the message that bottom up change cannot be effected.

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Area Representatives should come from different Groups rather than two from the same Group. Where this cannot be achieved then the vacancy should be used by the National Committee, in the first instance to embed the Treasurer as a full member and not as currently as a co-opted member. Subsequent vacancies used to reshape the National Committee

Attendance at Group AGM’s should be by invitation only and where an invitation has been extended then the possibility of a contribution to travel expenses should be considered.

The dialogue that has been started by No 1 Group should have been an ongoing part of the Area Representatives duties, However, with little such communication taking place this exercise has demonstrated that communication can be achieved and a lot done in a short time scale and at no cost to the Association and members.

National Executive Committee

To hold together a dwindling and aging membership the National Committee has to take the lead and form itself into an Executive Committee. The recent expectation of the National Committee for Groups to propose an increase in capitation was unsettling and should never be repeated. The need for such changes should be formulated, articulated and proposed by the National Committee. This change in approach and the necessary restructuring to becoming a National Executive Committee must be proposed by the National Committee following consultation with the Groups. This consultation process could be the stimulus for Area Representatives to engage in meaningful dialogue with their Groups.

The initial formulation of the change in policy could be delegated to Task Groups under the chairmanship of a National Committee member. In the longer term this concept leads to the need for the National Committee to reshape itself away from being Area focussed to task based members.

With less than 2000 members in 23 different sized Groups the potential pool of members for the new roles is probably less than a hundred. The possible number of members willing to make a national contribution, albeit not as an Area Representative in the current form, will not exceed fifty. The current National Committee could probably draw up this list of names. The final selection of who to approach should be done by the Chairman in conjunction with the three Vice Presidents

Proactively asking people to volunteer for specific tasks would result in greater engagement with the membership than the current method of recruitment.

Election of Officers

The Groups attending the Annual Delegates Meeting come away without knowing the Officers for the coming year. As with most Group AGM's the Officers are likely to remain in post. However, the concept of the election of Officers behind closed doors lacks the necessary transparency and is a major complaint from the grassroots.

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As a minimum the announcement of the Officers for the coming year must be made at the Annual Delegates Meeting. Consideration of election of the Officers by the Groups should be included within the five year plan.

Communication

“ Snippets” is the de facto route for communicating from the National Committee to Groups and then via Group Newsletters to every individual member. The National Secretary was praised for this work that also gave her a high profile with all the Groups. She was a “visible” member of the National Committee.

All information is passed from the National Secretary to Group Secretaries, Secretary to Secretary being the correct approach. When if ever has there been a Chairman to Chairman communication? At the Annual Delegates Meeting it is predominantly Group Chairmen who

express views. Is there a communication channel that will become of increasing important in times of change that is not being utilised?

With modern methods of communication almost all felt that that Area Representatives had no role in communications between National and Group. It was too slow and too variable.

The National Secretary is to be congratulated for her work in arranging and co-ordinating external events for Association members. Most of this work was direct Secretary to Secretary to ensure timely dissemination and responses.

The ROC is probably being promoted more now more than it was when operational. This should continue both at local and national level. The National Committee has a role to play in national press and media statements to ensure accuracy. Also to link local members to any interested parties making enquiries.

Annual Delegates Meeting Resolutions

It is usual for Committees that run organisations to be able to put forward resolutions for voting on by the members. As such resolutions should be put forward by the National Committee and Area Representatives as well as from Groups. The National Committee is the only forum to get a full national perspective due to the fact that at the Annual Delegates Meeting and Reunion many Groups are not in attendance. Area Representatives should be able to seek regional views that may be at variance with the national consensus.

Resolutions should continue to be circulated well ahead of the Annual Delegates Meeting to enable Group discussion. With the resolution should be some explanation (not exceeding one page) to amplify the reasons and thinking behind the Resolution. Area Representatives should be gathering opinion and advising if minor changes should be incorporated in order to get a majority consensus.

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Planning for the future will require a number of resolutions and a “postal vote system” may be necessary to move things forward between the successive Annual Delegates Meeting’s.

Finance

Two aspects are of concern. The long voiced views regarding National Committee expenses. The views expressed by the Chairman at the Annual Delegates Meeting on low mileage rates are understandable. Equally the National Committee should listen to grass root members. Some 47% of national expenditure is on travel, this goes up to 61% if postage, stationery and other costs are added in. Consideration should also be given to only one Area Representative attending National Committee meetings where expenses are claimed as a way of reducing the travel costs. All National Committee members should be encouraged to use email as a way of reducing the postal charges bill.

The second concern relates to financial planning. The Treasurer was praised for the recent forecast of expenditure that has been a feature of the Annual Delegates Meeting presentation. No mention has been made of setting money aside in designated funds for potential high cost items such as the replacement of seats at the National Memorial Arboretum and the Battle of

Britain Memorial site. Thought also needs to be given to replacement and laying up of the National Standard.

These long term potential costs need to be provided for now whilst income is adequate. By the time expenditure is required the head count and resulting capitation income could be considerably lower

National Reunion

The National Reunion provides a communications channel from national level to Groups and between Groups then onwards to the wider membership. The informal fringe discussions provide ideas and concepts for the development of Groups. It was noted that “Areas” do not form part of the National Reunion concept.

Area Reunions are gradually opening their doors to members from “outside” Groups. The Caledonian Reunion has always included No 31 Group members

As with all aspects of the Association attendance at the National Reunion is likely to fall as age, health and willingness to travel takes its toll. A plan for what replaces the National Reunion needs to be formed. Several ideas have come forward including merging the Reunion with the Annual Delegates Meeting. The combined event would include an AGM where more input from a wider audience would be welcomed but voting should remain as one vote per Group.

The combined Reunion/AGM should continue to include the successful aspects of the current event such as the gala dinner, sale of memorabilia and could include an external visit on the Saturday afternoon.

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Heritage & Legacy

This was the area where almost universally everyone wanted something done but there was little clarity on what exactly was required.

Much ROC heritage work had already been done with preserved posts, ROC displays and museums. But almost all this work has been done by individuals or small enthusiastic volunteer groups. However, ROC heritage coordination and general policy is required at a national level.

Because of the widespread and private nature of many ROC Heritage collections it is too late to have a ‘National Collection’. However, a national record of the location and content of all ROC Heritage sites should be kept. Many believe that this is being done but cannot state where or who is responsible, but not thought to be in the hands of the National Committee. This again highlights the communication gaps that exist.

One activity for Area Representatives is listed as “to help preserve the heritage and ethos of the ROC”. Could specific examples of work done by each Area Representative to date be publicised to enable the duty to be expanded? Some leadership from the National Committee is expected on this matter.

The National Committee does have a responsibility for Association heritage and legacy matters. These include the:

1. ROC Grove and seat at the National Memorial Arboretum
This requires early discussion with The Royal British Legion on options. The options could include discussion with RAFA whose site is adjacent to the ROC Grove
2. The seat at the Battle of Britain Memorial site at Capel le Ferne
This requires discussion with the Battle of Britain Memorial Trust
3. Laying up of the National Standard.
This requires an early decision on where the National Standard should reside. Once that has been done discussion with ceremonial officers from other Associations would provide the knowledge of process and protocol.

All the above are long term but will require extensive planning, collaboration with others and finance including the possibility of a legacy fund. The dialogue needs to start now if an outline plan is to be in place by 2015. Execution of the heritage and legacy plan could be 25 years away. However, at that point age and ability within the membership will be waning and the plan has to be on the shelf ready for the event when it occurs

At some point HM the Queen, our Patron, will need to be informed of our pending winding up. Again the protocol and format need to be quietly investigated and recorded.

Greater co-ordination, record keeping and dissemination of information is required of the National Committee as this is a topic of real interest to many members.