

**ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION SUMMARY REPORT  
FROM RSA SCOTLAND “CHALLENGING SCOTLAND”  
CONFERENCE HELD 17<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2007**



**INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

The aim of this paper is:

- To provide a report of the discussions held in relation to the RSA in Scotland by Fellows at the conference – identifying and grouping key themes.

**DISCUSSION MATRIX**

The table below quotes all the comments made, drawn from the written reports provided after the event by the Rapporteurs. The left hand column is an attempt to categorise the comments by key theme.<sup>1</sup>

COMMENT CATEGORY	“DETAILED COMMENTS”
<b>PURPOSE/ROLE OF RSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Role of RSA as an interface agency</li> <li>○ RSE engagement in policy making – advising government</li> <li>○ Cross-party groups - “Know your fellowship so that you can produce a response”</li> <li>○ Specialist spokesmen in their subject to speak authoritatively on behalf of RSA - Who in our group of fellows could speak on behalf of RSA?</li> <li>○ RSA should be cross sector operator - Voluntary – Public – Private</li> <li>○ RSA Policy should aim to have influence at all differing levels</li> <li>○ Complexity and width of RSA can also be its weakness</li> <li>○ What does the RSA do? Why I am here? No immediate answers apparent!</li> <li>○ The RSA becoming the amplifier in the virtuous circle</li> <li>○ Research role of RSA – resources to take things forward – principal asset – knowledge</li> <li>○ RSA strategy is towards convergence rather than divergence</li> <li>○ How are we going to make choices - for us? For others?</li> </ul>
<b>FELLOWSHIP &amp; FELLOWS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ RSA devalued by concept of “bought” fellowship. Compare RSE which has rigorous selection programme.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Please feel free to suggest if you think a particular comment should be positioned in a different category or if you think the comment requires qualification or context.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identity</li> <li>○ Play to the strengths of membership</li> <li>○ What knowledge do RSA Fellows hold that can be brought together to influence and using the 5 themes to move forward.</li> <li>○ Within Scotland the Edinburgh/Glasgow axis is remote from more 'outlying' areas so working together has to overcome this. How do members link up with each other to achieve 'civic innovation'?</li> <li>○ Some Fellows felt they had skills to work within a specific area e.g. education and training, environmental issues, supporting those who are excluded for different reasons. Skills should be identified and business plans drawn up.</li> <li>○ Personal contact and Fellows meeting face to face are vital from time to time. This is how they will bond, although work can be done remotely in between times.</li> <li>○ The current RSA system for reaching other Fellows is inadequate. Fellows do not have a way to assess the availability of other accessible Fellows' skills and experience. This is what would make the Scottish Fellows network much more effective and influential.</li> <li>○ Better networking - Fellows prepared to share and the RSA allowing/facilitating sharing</li> <li>○ Being a Fellow of the RSA should include an expectation of Response when asked/asking for help by other Fellow(s)</li> <li>○ RSA doing things with us – not to us (ownership).</li> </ul>
<p><b>RESOURCING FOR SCOTLAND</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ RSA perceived as Anglo-centric – Need for RSA Scottish</li> <li>○ Issue of employees as opposed to volunteers</li> <li>○ RSA Scotland requires practical help from London to assist working groups and to give publicity for their work.</li> <li>○ Would RSA help with financial and HR support?</li> <li>○ The RSA Journal is rather English in outlook. Is Scotland a satellite? We should not, however, be afraid of looking outside for examples of excellence.</li> <li>○ Staffing: RSA Scotland needs a permanent infrastructure. We could build our own, or use partners to provide the service.</li> <li>○ The Group was uncertain how an individual Fellow can take a clear, well analysed idea forward and from where to get support.</li> <li>○ The existing RSA website has improved but still makes searching the Fellows database for common location/interests/access to resource very</li> </ul>

	<p>difficult.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Expectations had to be matched with reality, otherwise demoralisation would set in and Fellows would become disengaged. Objectives of change need to be very clear and sharply focussed. In addition there needs to be the energy and resource to sustain effort over a longer period of 3 to 5 years to make change permanent.</li> <li>○ Pitfalls - lack of commitment / lack of funding / short-termism</li> </ul>
<p><b>THE RSA'S PLACE IN TODAY'S SCOTLAND</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ RSA Challenging Scotland should address concrete things with an outcome</li> <li>○ RSA needs a visible and nationally significant project in Scotland with relevance for UK as a whole (i.e. test bed)</li> <li>○ Susan Deacon's words resonated: Scotland has shared values, a strong networking culture and a size that makes communication easy.</li> <li>○ The purpose of projects should be direct improvement; RSA Scotland shouldn't be a political lobby.</li> <li>○ The scale of action - this could be at Scottish level, local council area or community.</li> <li>○ Scale - go where impact is greatest</li> <li>○ The Group felt strongly that all their efforts would be to no avail if there were not clear paths to the 'right levers' of power to make a difference.</li> <li>○ Starting point was the need to 'build capacity', remove tendency of government to micromanage policies and development and thereby empower people. Public rhetoric is of joined up thinking, but micromanagement constricts it. Strength of, and opportunity for, RSA to bring agencies together – linking partnerships, although opinion to support relationships not partnerships (latter is clichéd without commitment). Public agencies usually good at meeting statutory obligations, but neglect the person.</li> <li>○ RSA contribution - opinion forming / influences opinion / knowledge transfer</li> </ul>
<p><b>KEY ISSUES OF CONCERN TO RSA FELLOWS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Sustainable development – though no clear vision as to what this means.</li> <li>○ Cultural misunderstanding</li> <li>○ Do we sort out the economic base first before dealing with cultural issues?</li> <li>○ Corporate social responsibility and small-medium sized enterprises in Scotland (58% of employment is in SMEs)</li> <li>○ Social Enterprise in Scotland - not for profit organisations - need and opportunity</li> <li>○ There is a high plateau of education in Scotland, but within this many are not succeeding. 25% of the Scottish population cannot read or write.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CPD/education is important</li> <li>○ For the RSA to assist/intervene in delivering social change we need to know where we are operating. Is it all about education or something else – perhaps lifelong learning? It is essential that this includes the acquisition of ‘life’ skills [5 core skills under SQA]. It is certainly about Developing a Capable population. Education, in this regard, should be inclusive and not divisive. There should be plenty of space for the informal as well as informal learning. It was generally agreed that Primary education delivers a sound start, however it is in Secondary S1 to S3 where many pupils that eventually lose interest in school start to become disengaged. Aspirations have to be lifted, realistically, in a whole range of contexts. Appropriate challenges should be made to each individual. Demoralisation starts with ‘over control’. Our networks need to be opened up to be able to use all the educational talent that is available for best serving pupils.</li> <li>○ Need to find new ways of developing skills. Varied points raised about leadership – need people to take responsibility – take risks. Need identified to model leadership, as considered some communities don’t have skills. Conflict between support and resilience vs. precarious leadership.</li> <li>○ Discussion on how to sustain people’s activism. For young people, activism is issue based. Need to give validation to young people.</li> <li>○ Disagreement as to whether there should be less government – less public sector – in Scotland. Also query over whether Scots do lack confidence vs entrepreneurial spirit.</li> <li>○ Leadership capacity &amp; creativity / entrepreneurial imagination and risk taking / relationships</li> <li>○ Innumeracy / illiteracy / poor completion rates in education - key in knowledge economy renaissance in arts – importance to economy</li> </ul>
<p><b>IDENTIFIED AREAS FOR ACTION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Themes - post independence analysis / invisible exports (finance, education, tourism) / export of Scottish culture / demographic change (age distribution – migration)</li> </ul>
<p><b>SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Fellows network project - doing a project and getting recognition for it. Action – identify working groups - e.g. Literacy project - should this be RSA-centric or non-RSA-centric?</li> <li>○ Relevant projects should combine economic, social, environmental and cultural objectives</li> <li>○ The RSA was known as an organisation that originally gave qualifications and certificates in secretarial skills. Now this has gone there should be some type of certificate or award that raises the esteem of individuals through recognising skills.</li> <li>○ The challenge could be for students/pupils to come up with their own ideas/experiences either through projects in schools and universities and the RSA could provide recognition for this through a prize or award. Discussion took place on the different levels of recognition not just a</li> </ul>

	<p>graduate level but at other levels. It was felt that it was difficult to harmonise the value of recognition and award and facilities to get ahead in a changing economy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ There was also a shortage of skilled trades people where in the past there had been apprenticeships. Now there needs to be a culture change whilst pay is the main incentive for qualifications there is a reward and recognition system. This could be for a range of skills and does not necessarily lead to qualifications.</li> <li>○ The RSA could get students to be more active in school/college/university and work as teams to deliver challenges based on the five themes.</li> <li>○ Groups should be set up to focus on themes but shouldn't be geographical in basis. Out of these themes, projects would be identified. Cross fertilisation of ideas is central any projects.</li> <li>○ We need to find ways of finding out who each other is, and what skills, ideas, experience and expertise they could bring to different projects. A database? Online forums? Regular get-togethers?</li> <li>○ The RSA Scottish Committee should be the focus for developing an inventory of other partner organisations to make more effective use of resources, time and energy.</li> <li>○ Clear themes are required from the Scottish Committee for things we are engaged in and over longer periods than a few weeks - to allow Fellows to identify their own ways of contributing.</li> <li>○ Suggestion to promote training for community councils – how to chair meetings etc.. RSA to encourage and train in civic leadership.</li> </ul>
<p><b>GENERAL COMMENTS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The expectation from Fellows was that there should be a response to ideas for change - either from other Fellows, from the RSA Scottish Committee or from RSA John Adam Street. Without this understanding and mutual support our efforts will be much less effective or not take root at all.</li> </ul>

## SUMMARY

There is clearly a wide range of issues highlighted through the notes of the Round Table Discussions, which could be debated in more detail. However, there are some key themes emerging, which could be summarised by the following:

- How Fellows can connect more – more effectively and with more impact – with:
  - Each other...
  - RSA Scotland Committee...
  - RSA generally...
- Resources for Scotland in order to carry out a programme of work
- Improved communications at all levels

- How can Fellows work together to establish specific projects – and how could/should this be “managed”?
- Clearer purpose and role for RSA in Scotland – positioning and identity – and how RSA Scotland can become a key influencer accessing “levers of power”
- Education, skills, sustainability and activism all key areas identified – worth noting that these discussions took place before pre-set afternoon sessions so are “unprompted” topics.

## SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS

At the meeting of the RSA Scotland Committee on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2007, following the Challenging Scotland Conference, the response to the event was discussed in detail, particularly the requirement for a Scotland-specific project for Fellows to connect with. The following action was **agreed**:

1. *Explore potential for work in area of skills and education – in particular with reference to NEET young people.*
2. *Explore potential for work in area of sustainability, linking this to design and possible partnership with Six Cities Design Festival.*

In addition, we have also committed to:

1. *The development of a communications strategy to address communications, identity and positioning issues.*
2. *To discuss with RSA in London how RSA Scotland can support/link with and potentially enhance the following national strategic projects:*
  - a. *CarbonDaq – encouraging RSA Fellows and others in Scotland to sign up.*
  - b. *Prison Governors’ Learning Network – linking in Scottish HMI for Prisons*
  - c. *Opening Minds Curriculum – creating links with A Curriculum for Excellent key personnel in Scotland to share experiences*
3. *Ongoing discussions are also taking place with RSA staff in London in relation to the RSA Design Directions Programme, specifically to look at potential for some kind of profile raising event in Scotland and also at opportunities for widening criteria and scope of the programme.*

In relation to the issues of how can Fellows work together to establish specific projects – and how could/should this be “managed” – this should be addressed within the context of the current ongoing changes taking place as part of the **RSA Networks** initiative, taking place nationally. This offers a new and innovative platform for Fellows to engage and explore project ideas, both virtually and in reality.

Finally, a key issues raised on the day was resources for Scotland in order to deliver this new vision. It was recognised that the voluntary input of many committed Fellows is a key strength of the RSA, but that in order to progress with our aspirations and ambitions, the time is right to consider more strategic and structured resourcing.

Responses to this paper are welcome. Comments should be sent to Deputy Chair Louise Macdonald on: [Louisem@youngscot.org](mailto:Louisem@youngscot.org)