

The Fellowship Council - Progress Report

The Fellowship Council is in its third year of existence. It was created in 2009 as a replacement for the former Advisory Council as a representative forum for Fellows of the RSA, with the core aim of promoting more effective working relationships between all aspects of the RSA, and specifically ensuring that the Fellowship's voice is heard by the Trustee Board and by RSA staff. Initially it comprised 20 Fellows elected within the regions/nations of the RSA and 20 Fellows appointed by the Nominations Committee to ensure diversity and representation of the wide range of activities and interests across the RSA.

It takes time for any new body to settle down, but looking back over the first couple of years we can note a number of areas where the Council has already had a significant impact through the work of its members and working groups. These include:

- Improving relations between regional/national Committees and Panels and RSA headquarters at John Adam Street, with regular meetings of Regional/National Chairs to discuss current issues and the working relationship with John Adam Street, to exchange ideas on increasing the engagement of Fellows; and at the same time to inform the Fellowship Council of the views expressed.
- Input on the Trustee Board through two Fellowship Council members elected to these positions who also report back to the Council on matters discussed at the Trustee Board.
- The development of the Fellows' Charter.
- The Fellowship Council's review of regional/national structures which provided significant input into the recent governance review and approval at the October 2011 AGM of recommendations for a new approach to enhancing Fellows' activities and engagement outside John Adam Street.
- Active involvement in the Governance Advisory Group which was established by the December 2010 AGM, with its recommendations being approved by a substantial majority of Fellows at the October 2011 AGM. These included a recommendation for the Fellowship Council to be composed of 35 elected Fellows (including 14 elected Regional/National Chairs), with 5 appointed to reflect diversity and representation of the wide range of Fellows' activities.
- Input and continuing support for the very successful Catalyst Fund and the associated Skills Bank, which has provided financial (so far over £108,000) and other support for a wide range of Fellows' projects.
- An active working group on Digital Engagement, which has already produced some useful guidelines and is supporting the development of a new Fellowship Platform which includes a new database of the Fellowship as a basis for improving opportunities for Fellows to contact those with similar interests.
- An active working group looking at ways to enhance engagement of Fellows across the RSA.
- FC members have been instrumental in creating some thematic groups - for example, on Education and on Youth.
- A number of practical improvements in communications and support from John Adam Street, with a close working relationship between the Council and its Officers and the Fellowship Department.

In 2010 I was elected Chair of the Fellowship Council, with Irene Campbell as Deputy Chair. Irene and I see the role of the Fellowship Council as facilitating a more constructive dialogue between Fellows and John Adam Street, working with Council, staff, Trustees and Fellows in an even-handed way to achieve this and resolve conflicting visions. Our aim is to enable Fellows, through the Council, to have a genuine influence on RSA strategy and operations.

Most importantly, we all need to learn the lessons of the past but have an open and constructive discussion about the way forward as we seek to increase the activity and engagement of Fellows.

Over the next few months Irene and I hope to visit regional/national meetings countrywide, establish links with a number of Thematic Networks and also to engage with Fellows internationally. Our aim is to update Fellows, listen to them and respond to questions as well as ensure that the Fellowship Council keeps in touch with the experience and views of Fellows wherever they are based.

Bob Porrer, Chair, Fellowship Council

December 2011