

RSA Fellowship

Fellowship Council
1st Meeting Summary
Wednesday 7 October 2009
RSA
8 John Adam Street London WC2N 6EZ
13.00-16.30

Present:

Gerry Acher
David Archer
Avril Baigent
John Bale
Mark Ball
David Biggs
Tessy Britton
Kevin Cahill
Irene Campbell
Andrew Chidgey
David Clarke
Stephen Coleman
Sybil Crouch
Gerard Darby
David Dickinson
Jackie Elliman
John Elliott
Stephen Elliott-Hunter
Rosie Ferguson
Frances Gallagher
Jemima Gibbons
Andy Gibson
Emma Harrison
Susan Jones
Zena Martin
John McMullan
Charles Millar
Katie Moore
Ann Packard
Lopa Patel
Alpesh Patel
Bob Porrer
Graham Sprigg
Helen Westropp

Apologies:

Paul Buchannan
Emma Jones
Steve Jones
Charmian Love
David Turner
David Young

RSA Staff:

Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive
Belinda Lester, Director of Fellowship
Nina Bolognesi, Director of External Affairs
Stephen Barton, Head of Fellowship Services
Michael Devlin, Head of Fellowship Networks
Laura Billings, Fellowship Research and Strategy
Manager
Vivs Long-Ferguson, Senior Networks Manager

RSA Trustee:

Philip Goldenberg

Welcome and Introductions

Belinda Lester, Director of Fellowship, and Gerry Acher, member of Fellowship Council and outgoing Deputy Chair of the RSA welcomed and thanked all members of Fellowship Council for their commitment so far. GA stressed the need to celebrate the launch of the new Council and challenged Council members to unlock the potential activities and initiatives of the Fellowship. BL provided an overview and outlined the objectives for the inaugural RSA Fellowship Council session. Council Members were invited to introduce themselves.

Overview

The new Fellowship Council demonstrates the potential of the RSA as a powerhouse of innovative thinking. The Council needs to be representative of the Fellowship, as a dynamic network for social change through action and activity on a local, national and international level. The RSA must be open to Fellows taking the lead on innovation and the use of technology to drive us forward. Transformation is not easy and does not come without debate, difference and discussion.

The work of Council marks a profound change in the Society's engagement with its Fellows. It provides a conduit of communication and representation between Fellowship and the RSA (RSA Trustees, the Executive Team and all staff). This meeting then divided into two sessions:

1. Transformation and strategy; an update on the transformation of the RSA, and the role of Council in transforming the Fellowship
2. Fellowship Charter and the opportunities for Council to support cultural change through practical action.

1. Transforming the RSA, and the role of Council in transforming the Fellowship

Matthew Taylor, Chief Executive of the RSA, opened the discussion and outlined the strategic vision and priorities for the RSA, that:

- the RSA House becomes a beacon for the RSA's identity
- External Affairs exemplifies the RSA's commitment to innovation, excellence, citizen-centric change and social responsibility as a platform for the best enlightenment thinking in the world; via our annual events programme, website, RSA Vision, RSA Journal and partnerships.
- RSA Projects play a critical role in developing the RSA's mission; what role citizens need to play in closing the social aspiration gap: that between the world we aspire to if we are to deliver the common good, and the one we are creating with current behaviours, models, and understanding. Projects should engage Fellows, and be action and outcome focused, linking theory and practice.
- Through combining excellent customer services and network development and management, we will unlock the potential of the RSA Fellowship to be a powerful network of people working together to achieve real impact in the world

Council members are tasked to find practical ways of embedding a culture of collaboration, creativity and social ambition in the Fellowship. The RSA recognises that social activities are an important part of Fellowship and, in the right format, can provide the networked foundation from which great ideas can emerge. However, substantive Fellowship initiatives still feel like isolated examples rather than the new goals and ways of working that the Council should champion.

The fundamental next step is a substantial culture shift which enables and encourages the Fellowship to be a creative and powerful space; one in which ideas naturally emerge and develop rather than one where innovators feel they are having to challenge the prevailing bureaucracies. In support of this process the RSA had made substantial investment in the Fellowship team, in particular Fellowship Networks, to support, recruit and retain Fellows across the UK and internationally. A key initiative for 2010 will be the launch of a seed fund, for investment in Fellows' projects.

The RSA will be an international leading example of the kind of organisation that the world needs in the 21st century; to be a Fellow will not only be an important individual commitment and opportunity but will connote that an FRSA is part of a amazing organisation making a positive difference in a variety of ways. Examples of best practice RSA and Fellows projects including; Connected Communities, RSA Academy, and the Chelmsford city planning project led by Malcolm Noble were explored.¹

There was an open discussion with Council, where three challenges were explored: a shift in culture and purpose; unlocking the capacity of the Fellowship; and development of ideas.

Responses and comments from Council Members included:

Communication

The RSA is one of the most dynamic organisations today; we encourage people to get involved but we need to improve our engagement.

Remember this is a global network and we must utilise our online tools for engagement.

The RSA is fundamentally about enhancing human capability: more engaged, more self-reliant and more altruistic.

The need to continue to improve communications and share best practice has to be a priority.

We need to think very imaginatively about how to communicate as a network. Are there innovative ways in which we can communicate with one another, across the RSA network? How can we communicate with individuals, communities and groups beyond our own networks? How do we ensure that virtual communication allows us to facilitate creative thinking, deliberative decisions and real-world outcomes?

Can the RSA become a force for better public communication in the UK (and internationally)?

Risk

The RSA was right to sponsor one Academy rather than several. This type of exemplar inspires.

Others felt that failure should be embraced and encourage bold endeavour. The RSA's history is littered with examples of failed projects that led to great success, the first three attempts to organise the Great Exhibition foundered, the fourth succeeded.

¹ Connected Communities is a project seeking to understand what kind of citizens and communities we need if we are to rise to the challenges we face.

The RSA Academy in Tipton opened to students for the first time in September 2008. It is the first school to be designed entirely around the principles of Opening Minds.

Chelmsford Forum provides a platform for engaging communities in debate over the future of town centres: representing business, local organisations and individuals and working with the local borough and county councils shaping the character and culture of Chelmsford's town centre.

Vision

Where should the RSA be in five years' time? We need to be really clear about the offer for Fellows.

There has been discussion around groups of Fellows coming together but how do we inspire others outside the Fellowship?

The Fellowship is beginning to become engaged and there is potential to exercise social change from the ground up but more practical action needs to be done. Council can lead on this.

How can Council help further, through recruitment?

The Council is here to build bridges.

Resources

Discussion focused on the need to achieve a balance on resources, both understanding the needs of our Fellowship and its activities.

Council members emphasised that resources should be available to link Fellows, Projects, Journal and Events in order to allow Fellows to be active and productive within their Community.

There should be a collaborative process for determining how resources should be allocated to a Fellow's project.

'Council is going to be an intellectually demanding process'.

2. Introducing the Fellowship Charter

BL introduced the developing Exhibition: a graphic illustration of the past and present achievements of the RSA and its Fellows, centred on the draft Fellowship Charter. This is a work in progress and all Fellows are invited to contribute to the development of the image – to the future representation of RSA and Fellowship activities - and the text of the Charter. Council will take the lead on coordinating this feedback. One of the first objectives of this Council is to refine this Fellowship Charter and to be clear about how the principles of the Charter can best be implemented – how can Council members embed and embody the Charter?

Laura Billings, Head of Fellowship Research explained that the Charter has been developed over the past year; the idea was developed by Fellows and has been taken forward by staff and Fellows. There are 3 main elements to the Charter: to inspire, to support and to enable. Fellows are asked to make a personal pledge or commitment; how will they inspire, support or enable their communities and fellow citizens? What does the future of the Fellowship look like? Does the proposed text for the Charter support our ambition? What practical ways can we take this forward? [Fellowship Exhibition online link](#)

Responses and comments from Council Members included:

Wording

This needs to be 'real' and relevant.

The two areas of work (image and wording) could and should be amalgamated.

There was debate about the difference between 'support' and 'enable'; inspire and enable are really strong; would connect or empower be better?

A more explicit representation of the need for action would help. Enable highlights the practical side of action, support links to community.

Image

Feedback on the exhibition image was varied. Overall the image received a positive response as it was seen to be different and simple with a strong message that reflects the broad range of backgrounds of the Fellowship but demonstrates a commitment to the three central RSA goals (support, enable and inspire).

The comment was made that the creativity balanced against the text demonstrates movement but an introduction of a stronger global/international dimension was required.

The image needed to reflect the society we are trying to change more clearly through visually representing what is happening underneath the street view. It was pointed out that the image could be interpreted as London-centric, should show an "open door" policy to the organisation rather than closed and that the RSA needed to balance expectations.

Round Table Sessions

Practical Action and Preparation for next meeting – Belinda Lester

In groups, Council members were asked to explore:

- How can we best unlock the capacity of the Fellowship?
- What are the practical actions that Council Members can take?
- How can Council members help Fellows talk to each other?
- How can Council evolve, embed, and embody the Fellows Charter?

Responses and comments from Groups included:

Cultural Change

Culture-change challenge facing the RSA. Why not make that an object of learning rather than frustration? Balance the tensions between 'the way we've always done things' and regard them as an inherent feature of organisational psychology. We should urge others to adopt a reflexive stance towards their own capacities, practices and aspirations.

How should we engage with obstructive Fellows?

RSA has subventions distributed to Regional Committees; is this the best use of these regional funds? Is this the best practice for regional representation?

Projects

How can we shift grassroots projects from ground level within local communities, and how can we organise quickly and strategically enough in order to make a difference in the short and long term?

How can we best identify great projects, and apply simple structure and application processes?

Council should assist in the development of models to share skills and knowledge with Fellows and communities.

Fellowship

Could the Council have a role in encouraging more diversity in the Fellowship: a younger, more gender and culturally balanced Fellowship?

How can we bring as many Fellows into this conversation as possible? Focus on one campaign, find a theme that connects all Fellows?

Communication

Council members need to get to know their areas and Fellows within their community and networks.

Council members should take the time to talk to Fellows and get to know them, and understand what Fellows want from the Fellowship Council.

How can the Fellowship use the Fellowship Networks team, and how can they use the Council, to achieve our collective aims?

Role

Council needs its own voice and focus. How do we effectively serve the interests of Fellows and the wider strategic aims of the RSA?

What sort of support can the Fellows offer the RSA project teams? How could the Council knit this goodwill together?

What can the Council add that isn't already being done? Be outward looking, supporting not just the Fellowship, but social initiatives more widely.

Actions for all Council Members:

Council members were tasked with:

- identifying practical ways of embedding a culture of collaboration, creativity and social ambition in the Fellowship
- encouraging Fellows to [pledge](#) outlined as part of the Fellowship Exhibition (and to provide feedback themselves)
- supporting the refinement of the Fellowship Charter and being clear about how the principles of the Charter can best be implemented – how can Council members embed and embody the Charter?
- talking to Fellows, local networks and communities. Working with and providing feedback to the Fellowship [Networks team](#)
- understanding RSA [Projects](#) and activities

Appointment of Chair and Deputy Chair

Following the adoption of the revised bye-laws the process for selection of Chair and Deputy Chair of the Fellowship Council, and the members of the new Nominations Panel, will be discussed by Trustees on 21 October. This will be discussed and confirmed at the 15 December Council meeting.

The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Fellowship Council act on behalf, and in the best interests, of RSA Fellows and the wider Fellowship. Both positions are accountable to the RSA Trustee Board, and will work in partnership with the Director of Fellowship.

Council Members debated the need for a Chair or Deputy Chair – this could be an opportunity for Council members to be innovative with their own governance and develop a non-hierarchical structure for the Council with representation on Trustee Board. BL agreed to discuss this with the Trustee Board.

Final Remarks from Gerry Acher and Matthew Taylor *'This is an enormous organisational change for us'*.

Close of Meeting

Future Council meetings:

All meetings from 13.00-16.30

Tuesday 15 December 2009

Tuesday 27 April 2010

Tuesday 5 October 2010 (date of 2010 AGM)

VLF October 2009