

Fellowship Council 28 February 2017

Tavern Room 11am-4pm

Convenor: Rod Hyde (Chair)

In attendance: Vikki Heywood, Oliver Reichardt, Charlotte Eisenhart, Lou Matter, Rachel Barker, Amy Jordan, Laura House, Mark Hall, Chloe Mavrommatis (notes)

Fellowship Councillors in attendance

Alan Bec
Alex Bell
Edward Boott
Hasmita Chavda
Caroline Clark
Peter Clitheroe
Ian Coleman
Bhavani Esapathi (until 3pm)
Lucy Griffiths
Clem Henricson
Tanya Hine
Rod Hyde
Sharon Jandu
Chris Luffingham
Pauline Moger
Margaret Morgan
Lorna Prescott (until lunch)
Amy Pryor
Judy Rees
Leonie Ramondt
Steve Trevillion
Eric Woodcock

Apologies:

Racheal Brown
Maurizio Fantato
Suzanne Lyle
Keiran McGeowan
Michelle Preston
Amy Pryor

1. Welcome and apologies: Rod Hyde

This meeting included trialling a few new ways of working, including new table layout, and utilising volunteer sign up sheets. Everyone was very positive about the squared conference style table and agreed that it made it feel more like a group meeting than an audience, so we will be using that layout going forward.

Rod put a call out for any other business, and pointed out that individual tech problems will not form part of this meeting, they will be dealt with one to one by whoever is most appropriate to provide support.

2. Introduction: Vikki Heywood

Whilst in the past Vikki has attended several Fellowship Council meetings, she would like to attend each going forward whenever possible, in order to maximise the way in which the Fellowship Council and Trustee Board can work together. She would like to update each time on the news from the Trustee Board, and where their current thinking and priorities lie.

Currently the Board are focusing on two main issues.

Firstly, they are engaged in decided how much money could or should be put aside to reform the John Adam Street House. It is a difficult historical building to grapple with and is currently not fit for its modern purpose, so we want to maximise and increase the public spaces available to us. Rod is part of the working group for this, and they are currently discussing finance options.

The second major issue of focus is how to better articulate the RSA's unique model of change for ourselves and also for others. The RSA wants to convene all the people who want to contribute to our work, and this will involve this Council continuing the work of previous Councils in growing and engaging our Fellowship. As we cannot offer tangible benefits we must offer emotional engagement and we need to think carefully about how we can quantify and spread this throughout the Fellowship. It's vital that both Fellows and staff are emotionally engaged with our work in order to remain energetic and motivated.

We don't have the staff to service all the work we want to do, so we need to engage Fellows to run this themselves but also remain within the comfort zone of how the RSA want their work to be presented. A well-articulated brief on the work of the RSA will be vital for this.

Matthew Taylor and the exec team have been working with Robert Bean on a coherent explanation of "What is the RSA" that doesn't destroy the creativity and potential for change. We need to be constantly thinking about how we are retelling the story of the RSA to a modern audience in order for us to remain relevant. We need a narrative that marks out what makes us distinctive and this can inform new straplines for our work.

Vikki and the Trustee Board are also keen for the RSA to shift its thinking about what it means to be a global organisation. People all over the world view our work online, how can we be more connected to them. Our local work is vital, but we don't want to be too bogged down by single areas or nations, we want to start tying our thinking about these local centres together in to a bigger interconnected global model.

3. Fellowship Council Strategy: Chris Luffingham

Chris had been tasked with looking in to the role of the Fellowship Council following the survey in December, and Matthew Taylor's challenges for the Council to address from their first meeting. He has met with key stakeholders across the RSA and there is a strong feeling that better communication and links should be established between the FC and the Board. Vikki speaking at each Council meeting will form part of this. There will also be a task and finish group established to look at Fellowship Council ways of working and establishing better links with Trustees and RSA Exec. Whilst the Council has undergone several iterations with different focuses of work, the overall mandates have remained the same.

Firstly it will act as an advisory body to changes in Fellowship, amendments and bylaws and the like. There has in the past been limited work in this area with a general lack of communication, with the major exception of the task and finish group on regional governance which was noted as a general success. Chris believes that the Fellowship Council could offer advice in this area under its own initiative. The Fellowship Survey is a major piece of work that the Council could put in the centre of its plans in order to address enthusiasm or dissatisfaction in the Fellowship.

The second remit is hard to define, and Chris has broadly used the term of “amplification body” and is also very strongly of the opinion that this Council should identify goals with tangible outcomes they can achieve by the end of their term.

The Council was asked to split up and brainstorm notes on what they want to achieve as Councillors. Some initial areas of thought from Chris were: the work of the new thematic Councillors, how we identify projects for the Council to support, how we could amplify the work of the most engaged and active Fellows etc.

We also want to be able to define tangible achievements of the Council so that in future staff will be able to recruit more widely for volunteers for the Fellowship Council.

Outcome of Q&A session:

Chris has had conversations with Oli about identifying the most active and engaged Fellows (“Top 200”) so we can empower them to become even more effective changemakers. The Council will form the core of this group, but we want to surround them with a network of Fellows who can link to even more communities.

Outcome of strategy session: Chris to circulate notes in more detail but in brief

The consistent themes of discussion were around communication – how can we be a showcase for the work of the RSA, how can we tell and amplify stories?

Councillors want to be a lot more active in the sharing of best practises in terms of networks and events and what does and doesn’t work at the local level.

The outcome from this session will be fed in to the task and finish group. This will be formed of 2 Trustees, RSA Exec Staff, and 2 Fellowship Councillors (see volunteer sheet) and Rod.

It was also decided that the exec summary of the Fellowship Survey will be available at Fellowship Councils in future so that it can continue to form the backbone of the Council’s advisory role.

4. Supporting great projects: Lorna Prescott

There is a consensus that the work that Fellows do on the ground is not prominent enough in the work that the RSA does. Lorna proposed and Council agreed that the Council undergo a 6 month project – a campaign to explore and curate the ideas and stories of Fellows who are actively doing work related to the RSA’s mission.

The idea would be initially to create a discussion guide for Councillors to find and interview Fellows, and then invite these Fellows to blog about their experiences. She would also like to collect ideas about how the Council can then distil some ideas and insights from these projects, and how we can use this aggregated learning to inform the ongoing work of the Council.

It was suggested that some link to Catalyst could be possible, but caution should be used as we don’t want to exclude other strands of work.

It was also suggested, and strongly supported, that some sort of creative commission could be formed to deal with the curation of this work, in order to give proper context and connection to the wider work of the RSA.

5. Department Update: Oliver Reichardt (as per powerpoint attached)

Our current broad focus in Fellowship is to gain deeper insights into our Fellowship in order that we can more effectively engage them in our work. The engagement team has moved from change aim experts working in engagement, to experts in engagement who will be working across the change

aims, which we hope will bring us to a point at which we can predict which Fellows will be interested in ARC research before we even begin it. Charlotte Eisenhart, the new Head of Engagement is working on her early plans for this, and will present them to the Council.

Work is also being done segmenting and targeting our mailouts, so that Fellows received the information that is most relevant and most likely to get them to engage.

Fellowship In Action, the series of blogs and newsletter pieces, has struggled to find projects where Fellowship has had a tangible interest to showcase, so the suggested project from Item 4 will be of great interest as part of this engagement strategy.

Fellowship has also been working closely with Pat Dade FRSA (see Cultural Dynamics website and the book: What Makes People Tick?) in order to better understand our Fellowship. Our Fellowship largely falls into a single type, which can be useful for insight, but also perhaps leaves avenues of work open in spreading our message into other segments of society.

Councillors were very interested to hear of this work and requested further information.

6. Fellows Forum Update: Judy Rees

Commonspace.discoursehosting.net (trial forum)

The Fellows Forum is a project that grew very quickly and organically out of social media feedback on the RSA and strategies to address this. Judy was trying to pull out positive actions to take after negative feedback on linkedin, and over conversations with many Fellows, it became clear that Facebook and LinkedIn groups weren't sufficient to Fellows' needs, and a dedicated forum would far more useful. 86 Fellows from all over the world volunteered time and expertise after a call out in the newsletter, and a technical platform (Discourse) has now been identified to trial the project.

At the time of Council, top level categories are being discussed, and in the weeks following Council, Adam Timmins will be assisting to identify a few hundred Fellows to invite to test the platform.

Councillors were encouraged to get involved as soon as possible, generating content and conversation that other Fellows would feel comfortable joining.

There has been feedback that this project has been tried before and failed, but Judy is certain that there are valuable lessons to be learned, even if this is the case.

It was noted that it would be valuable to highlight within the forum that this is being run entirely for Fellows by Fellows, and that RSA Staff are not managing the forums in any way.

7. Areas and Nations

Budget Paper: Rod Hyde (attached)

The current budget proposal is a hybrid of previous approaches. Each area is allocated a standard amount, 15% will be held back for Thematic Councillors, and then the rest will be allocated on a per Fellow basis. This proposal was accepted by Council.

There will be a 6 month review on this allocation to manage the budget and reduce the risk of under or over spend and ensure that the money is being used wisely. Previously regions other than London have not spent their allocations. Money will no longer be rolled over, it will now work on a yearly budget cycle like the rest of the RSA budgets.

There was a discussion of allowable expense. The RSA do not pay speakers fees at the House, and this has been used as the standard across the Areas. However feedback has been that this is a barrier to event organisation. This will be assigned to the task and finish group to address. We actively encourage partnerships, and are happy for budgetary funds to be put towards co-hosted events. There are currently no brand guidelines for co-branded events, but they can be produced if needed. There were further questions about the automatic allocation of area funding : Oliver Reichardt will draft a more formal document and circulate it, and then councillors can feedback on this.

The Council then divided for discussion within their Area and Thematic groups with their relevant staff members.

8. Purpose of Fellowship Council quarterly meetings and general housekeeping: Rod Hyde

As these sessions cost in the region of £5000 a time, Rod is keen for them to be as useful as possible so asked for suggestions on this front.

The work of ARC was raised, and Anthony Painter will be at next Council meeting to update on ARC work, with a strictly Fellowship engagement focus.

Sharing of best practise is extremely important to all Councillors. We would need to frame these sessions clearly in order to avoid focus on individual projects, but instead discuss transferable learning from other projects and networks.

The work of the Thematic Councillors is still being defined, and they will present a session in 6 months on how this work in progressing and what it can mean for the wider Council.

The challenge of Global work has never been successfully addressed by the Fellowship Council, it is hoped that the new Global Advisory Board, including Council staff, will be able to address some of this.

Councillors also requested more sessions where they move and break in to smaller groups, and also sessions on how other areas are portioning their budgets, in order to see how money is generally being spent.

There is also work to be done on measuring of impact, Laura House is working with the Areas team on improved feedback, so Councillors were encouraged to contact their area staff members to discuss this further.

9. Barriers to Fellowship Council work between quarterly London meetings: Peter Clitheroe

A number of the Councillors have been having weekly Zoom calls which have proved useful in spreading and supporting each other's work, and they would like to identify barriers to other Councillors so they can think of solutions to this remote working problem.

Councillors were encouraged to watch previous Zoom meetings (there are also crowdsourced agendas and minutes available), and subscribe to the Google calendar for reminders of upcoming ones.

Currently these are usually held on a weekday evening, but this is a barrier for some Councillors, so it proposed that there will be meetings held during the day, and some at weekends in order to allow Councillors to attend at different times.

Some Councillors prefer agenda lead meetings where they can attend if there are items of particular interest to them, and some prefer more open-forum discussions – it was proposed that there is a blend of these meetings held.

Anything that is to do with budget changes and reallocation must only be moved for decision at the quarterly Council meetings.

There will be a trial of making decisions outside of the Council meetings. If anything appropriate for full Council discussion comes up during online sessions, whoever is chairing will take note and email the full Council. There will then be a 2 week period of time for discussion and decision making. It is hoped that this more agile way of working will allow the Council to achieve more tangible results in their 2 year tenure.

It was also suggested that Councillors might be given responsibility for a single session each, in order to set themes of discussions, and also encourage greater participation. It is felt that the support offered by these sessions could be invaluable, and if the Council can make this arrangement work, it could be extremely useful to roll out over networks and other projects.