

Royal Society Former Staff Association

Professional Activities Group – members’ survey

Introduction

The RSFSA Professional Activities Group (PAG) has been active in the last year, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It held two London workshops in 2019, the first in June led by member Jill Nelson called 'Creating Sparks' focusing on lessons from her career experiences at and since leaving the Royal Society. The second workshop was held in November 2019 and led by an external expert, Steve Preston of SMP Solutions, on portfolio careers. Both workshops were well attended by a committed core of RSFSA members and led to wider discussions about career-life issues of interest to those who came, possibly wider.

The PAG wanted to conduct an anonymous survey of members to inform the development of its plans for activities to support RSFSA members who are working. A short survey was devised, tested and created by the group. SurveyMonkey was chosen for administering the survey. The survey link was emailed to all RSFSA members on 2 October 2019, with follow-up publicity in emails to members on 26 October 2019, and in *'Beyond The Terrace'* No. 75, which gave a survey cut-off point of 31 January 2020. It was also promoted in the RSFSA WhatsApp group set up in Autumn 2019.

Responses to the Survey

The PAG received 10 anonymous responses (approx. 10% of the RSFSA membership). This level of response suggests that the results should be considered as providing insight and feedback, rather than statistical validity. One respondent mentioned that they were “Retired but wish the group every success” and then did not answer any further questions.

Benefits from being involved

Respondents were broadly interested in all the options offered for benefits from a professional activities network:

- Opportunity to catch up with a nice group of people (9)
- Hearing interesting stories about other people’s careers (9)
- Sharing tips with other professionals on handling work–life issues (6)
- Engaging with my peers (6)
- Providing me with continuing professional development (5)

Apart from the number of respondents who ticked them, it was not clear if any one of the suggested benefits was more important to RSFSA members. One commented “I would hope to accrue a range of benefits, rather than just one”.

Of reasons why respondents might want to be involved in professional activities with former Royal Society staff in particular, most said because they would like to keep in contact with former colleagues and others who had experienced working at the Royal Society, and that former Royal Society staff have had a good range of experiences since leaving. Less common was because the PAG is a good addition to their own professional networks.

Activity delivery

The majority of respondents were content with occasional early evening events in the London area. There was less enthusiasm for joining events remotely e.g. via Skype or similar live video technologies. All respondents said they were happy to network informally, rather than needing or preferring a more formalised structure. Most respondents were happy to contribute up to £10 towards the cost of physical events.

Types of activity and topics suggested

Types of activity suggested by the respondents:

- Talks by former (and current?) Royal Society staff on their experiences and expertise, as has been trialled by the PAG.
- Practical workshops on e.g. mid- to late-career moves, exploiting pro bono opportunities, CV writing, marketing skills, use of social media, coaching/mentoring skills etc.
- An informal networking event at one of the 'lates' in a gallery or museum.

Topics suggested, in addition to the above:

- Themed talks that share people's perspectives on their work and lives, including for example the pros and cons of remote working.
- 'Generation X', Brexit consequences, new technologies, the Environment.

Discussion

The PAG met on 5 February to consider the survey outcomes and start planning for 2020 activities. A report of the survey was then circulated to the RSFSA's Executive Committee to consider. Below are some general points for wider discussion by all members – any responses should be sent to pag@beyondtheterrace.org.uk:

- The very low level of response to the survey is reflective of the current level of demand for PAG activities from RSFSA membership, most of whom are retired.
- Those who did respond generally endorsed the current direction of travel of the PAG and were happy with paying up to £10 towards the cost of a face-to-face event in London. Remote events weren't as popular.
- The PAG looked at possible types of activity and topics for 2020, informed by the survey suggestions and recommends the following:
 - Two early evening workshops in June and November each year, subject of course to the long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical and even remote meetings (bandwidth issues etc).
 - Topics should allow plenty of time for structured group discussion by all attendees, with a speaker or panel to get the ball rolling
 - Themes should take different sectoral approaches to issues e.g. not-for-profit, government, university, commercial, professional and learned body etc
 - Low cost venues to be found by asking former Royal Society staff who are able to help with this through their organisations – during the COVID-19 pandemic response, the PAG will test out the most effective way to run remote workshops using the available technology – but this will depend on the quality of engagement given respondents' preference for physical meetings.
 - Make more use of the RSFSA's new [LinkedIn group](#) for interested former Royal Society staff, whether current RSFSA members or not. This could act as a gateway to busy professional people who may be interested in PAG-type activities. The LinkedIn group is by invitation currently for those who have LinkedIn accounts. The PAG will look into ways to engage with prospective and current LinkedIn group members and welcomes wider input from all with an interest in this.

Nick von Behr, Professional Activities Secretary
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