

ROYAL SOCIETY PENSIONERS' ASSOCIATION: CONSULTATION ON POSSIBLE EVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT

Note by Keith Root, Chairman, RSPA Future Development Working Group

The Royal Society Pensioners' Association (RSPA) was established at a time when a high proportion of people retiring from the Royal Society (RS) had worked there for much of their career. The majority of members thus know each other well and provide mutual help, as well as enjoying the support provided centrally by the Association

There has, however, been concern for some time over the small number of new members joining the RSPA, despite sterling efforts of the Secretary and Committee. This has resulted in an increase in the average age of the members, falling numbers and fewer younger members available to organise the affairs of the RSPA. If this trend continues, the situation would become unviable and the Association would cease to operate, although there would still be a significant number of members who could benefit from its activities and support.

The problem was raised at the last AGM, and since then some RSPA members elaborated their concern to the Chairman who instigated an investigation into the prospects of recruiting more members, with the aim of safeguarding the current facilities provided by the RSPA to existing members. A small group, consisting of the Chairman and three other members (Peter Cooper, Ann Hicks and Keith Root) looked into these ideas, with the aim of reporting back to the Committee. They also raised the matter informally with Peter Collins at the Society (which currently provides a grant based on matching members' subscriptions and some resources in kind in Carlton House Terrace) to find out how the Society's new strategic plan might view the RSPA and whether changes to membership rules were likely to have the Society's support.

Following a discussion of the initial findings at the meeting of the RSPA Committee meeting on 30 November, it was agreed that a consultation paper would be circulated to all members of RSPA, so that any responses could be taken into account by a newly approved RSPA Future Development Working Group comprising Keith Root (Chair), Ann Hicks and Peter Cooper, and by the whole Committee in advance of a paper to the AGM.

Background

The Royal Society Pensioners' Association was established in 1986, and has the current aims:

- a) to keep colleagues in touch with one another and to lend a helping hand when appropriate.
- b) to administer an annual Welfare Grant from the Royal Society to enable visits to colleagues and to assist them by the provision of transport to attend the Association's Annual General Meeting, the Society's Anniversary celebrations or the Christmas luncheon.
- c) to recommend to the Royal Society any extraordinary capital expenditure for the benefit of individual pensioners from the income of the Society's private Pension Fund.
- d) to meet at least once a year at the Society or elsewhere
- e) to arrange cultural or social occasions from time to time
- f) to monitor the level of pensions, and to make representations to the Trustees when considered necessary
- g) to publish a newsletter *Beyond the Terrace*, normally biannually.

The current rules governing membership, last revised in 2009, are that membership is open to all retired staff of the Society ("retired" meaning those in receipt of an RS pension and also other ex-staff who left the Society at the normal retirement age) and also to other former staff members who at the time of leaving the Society were over 50 years of age, and included part-time staff.

Changes to the nature of employment within the Royal Society and its impact on the RSPA

The main reason for the reduction in the number of eligible new members is that working practices have changed significantly over the past twenty years and it is now usual for people to move more frequently

between organisations during their career than hitherto. For the RS this means that while there may be larger numbers of people leaving the Society each year, the average age is lower on departure, and few people actually retire rather than resign from the Society each year (if indeed the concept of ‘retirement’ has a meaning in the future). The present rules for membership impacts on the RSPA in a number of ways:

- There are fewer potential members eligible to join the Association;
- The attractiveness of the RSPA to those qualified to join is reduced significantly as many of their past colleagues at the RS, some of whom will be younger, are not yet eligible to join, because they left the Society before they were 50 years old. This at least partly explains why a significant number of those eligible to join the Association have not done so, despite research and invitations from the Hon Secretary.

The situation over the past ten years, excluding 1 deferred pensioner re-joiner, is as follows:

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total
Approached	2	6		4	1	3	8	1	1	0	2	28
Retirees	1	2		1			3	1	1			9
Deferred	0	3		1		1	2				1	8
Refused/ no reply	1	1		2	1	2	3				1	11

A possible way forward

A possible way forward would be to return the membership rules of the Association to the situation pre-2009 situation to include more former employees who worked for the Society for a significant number of years (say at least five) but left at a younger age. We know that many of such people do retain an affection for and connection with the Society as they move on to new jobs.

For the Association this change would give the possibility of increasing membership and creating an inflow of membership and creating an inflow of new, younger and potentially active members. If achieved, this could both provide the resources to run the RSPA and also retain the existing strengths of the RSPA as a network for members, an organiser of activities and a support for those members who need it. Although many of those new members will still be in work and less able to, or indeed wish to, spend much effort on helping with the administration of the Association’s affairs and participating in its activities, seeing the enhanced organisation initially as a means of keeping in touch with the RS and ex RS colleagues, they would be more likely to become active members on their eventual retirement or partial retirement.

For the RS the potential benefits are:

- The existence of a more dynamic association of former staff may be a potential recruitment benefit to new staff. Employees are a core (and expensive) resource of any organisation, and retention of staff loyalty and commitment is important. Another potential HR benefit might be the provision of support for those nearing or entering retirement.
- An association for former staff that included people who are now in significant and potentially influential posts elsewhere, and who have a continuing interest in the work being done by the RS, could provide a conduit to supply up-to-date information on the work of the RS. This would provide the Society with access to networks of influential organisations and individuals complementary to that provided by Fellows, and more general potential to promote positive messages about, and awareness of, the RS and its activities.

- In possibly rare, but crucial occasions, such a wider association could provide keys to corporate memory, such as the start up of major schemes or projects, or the background to particular reviews for Government (eg Foot and Mouth).

A significant number of detailed questions would still need to be resolved including the following:

- i. whether there needs to be two different classes of membership, with potentially different levels of subscriptions, indeed the RSPA would have to maintain records of different classes of members, to aid selection of those who should be invited to RS events such as Anniversary Day;
- ii. whether we can expect the new members to assist in the organisation of the greater number (and possibly more diverse) activities that more and younger members may wish to see;
- iii. how we could ensure that the existing personal knowledge and corporate care of current members can be retained within the Association;
- iv. the future name of the Association.
- v. whether any other alternative to these proposals offers any better likelihood of continuing the good work of the Association, given that the *status quo* is not viable in the long term.

Obtaining Members views on any changes

Before negotiating with the Society over any change to the rules for the Association's membership, the Committee would seek approval in principle to an outline set of proposals to be discussed at the 2012 AGM on 21 May. A paper will be circulated to members in advance of the AGM.

The purpose of this early consultation is to seek initial views or comments from members on the following, so that these views can be taken into account in that paper:

1. the current situation over recruitment of new members to the Association;
2. the increasing difficulties of finding members willing to help run the Association;
3. the outline draft proposals for expanding the Association to include other ex-staff of the Society who leave or left before they were 50 as suggested in this document;
4. should any lower age be specified or left undefined?
4. any concerns over safeguarding existing facilities to members;
5. any other comments of relevance to the proposals set out above.

Any comments should be sent by 12 March to me, Keith Root either by email or post at:

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