

RSGS AGM 2015 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Welcome

- Warm welcome to members.
- My first full year as chair spent time getting to know the people, members, volunteers and staff, and focussing the board's efforts on our future and hopefully making progress.
- Stimulating meeting some many members in visits to all local groups (still to visit Ayr and Helensburgh next week): the coal face of the society. And giving brief talk at each one as well as lectures at three centres.
- Also visited the 6 main geography academic groups in the universities.
- Met President and half of VPs. Met Director of RGS to rebuild links.
- Also networked with many folk around Scotland to find increasing interest in the Society and the role we can play: MSPs, other bodies such as the RSE, and government agencies.

A year's progress and planning the future: profile and credibility raising, securing the financial future, modernising the governance and operation

1. Raising the profile of the subject and the credibility of the Society

- Geography not well placed in secondary and tertiary education or in public life and society not well known. So continuing major effort to improve the position.
- At schools level our joint RSGS/SAGT Task Force on the Schools Curriculum has gathered evidence from classroom teachers to aid our discussions with the SQA. Thanks to Erica Caldwell. Slow process but absolutely necessary and showing some signs of improvement with promises to review the Higher Syllabus. But the limitation to 6 subjects at the equivalent of standard grade and the way these are timetabled and brigaded is quite unhelpful
- To improve our effectiveness further we have established a Schools Geography Influencing Group to work with Parent Associations and others to lobby Ministers and their officials and politicians for the changes needed.
- Had good links with academic geographers but not as strong as we would like. Therefore promoting a new approach, working title the Academy of geography for Scotland, seeking to connect academic geographers with civil society and with decision makers. Met the leaders in each of the 6 main universities to discuss our proposals and gained sufficient support to put together a funding proposal to the SFC (who have indicated interest in our approach). Also will elicit support of all geographers who are members of the RSE. Work to be taken forward by Task Force on Geography and Public Engagement.
- Geographer Royal. Panel of president, 2 VPS and Chair selected candidate from those proposed by universities and now waiting for agreement from the Royal Household. Very exciting opportunity to promote the subject and the society.
- *The Geographer* goes from strength to strength. Highly praised from all quarters. Well done Mike and Susan. Is widely read beyond the membership and widely sought after: recently Environment Minister's office asked why she had not had her copy!

- SGJ slowly moving up the academic ratings but still too low down. Thanks to Drs Tim Mighall and Lorna Philp, Aberdeen University for their sterling efforts. Welcome now to Drs Charles Warren and Dan Clayton of St Andrews University who take over shortly. They have agreed a written mandate from the Board on our requirements for the Journal in keeping with our profile raising strategy.
- Talks programme vibrant as observed in my visits to the local centres. Working actively with the centre chairs and committees to develop outreach and extend membership as well as flex programmes to suit current and potential member's interests.
- Intend to publicise our fellows and medal winners more effectively this year and to expect all of them from past to contribute something to our future.

2. Securing the future

- Critical to ensure that the Society has the resources not only to continue, but to fulfil its ambitions. Path to break even is on course and remains an immediate goal but recognise that we need to step up our effort so that we achieve our medium term goal of generating a surplus.
- Treasurer will give details of our financial rebalancing between investments, working capital and cash in hand.
- Cutting costs: independent review of all staff posts paid by Business Gateway Tayside resulted in clear job descriptions and market benchmarking of all salaries. Also revised CE's salary to increase its realism.
- Centre piece is the *Work Plan* approved by the Board: thanks to Alister Hendrie, Lorna Ogilvie, John McCrone and Mike. So everyone knows what is expected of them. Highly focussed *Improvement Plan* with critical targets developed and approved by the board focussing on money, profile and credibility; enables the board with the CE to monitor performance and make necessary changes.
- Fund raising plan developed, with helpful input from fund raising experts for free. Soundings undertaken of major trusts, lottery and other relevant sources to help Society to target bids most effectively over the next few months rather than going blind and failing.
- Members asked for donations and legacies by Chair during visits to each local group meeting.
- Developing specific proposals, for example for the education programme and for the academic outreach programme.
- Considering fund raising events, including donor dinner to celebrate 130 years.

3. Modernising the governance and operation

- Board now operating effectively to deal with all of the financial matters with active input from Treasurer and other financially qualified Board member, Malcolm Good and annual meetings with our investment advisers Brewin Dolphin
- In process of reviewing Collections Committee with Margaret Wilkes. Thanks to her and the team for all their work.

- Reconsidering format of the Members Group to encourage greater outreach in to local communities, wider spread of ages and increase membership.
- Set aside the Research Group as not effective and to be replaced by Task Force on Geography and Public Engagement to drive forward the academy proposals. Chaired by the Geographer Royal.
- Accountability of CE clarified through new contract.
- Revised Constitution developed with help of charity law specialist to bring to this AGM to ensure up to date governance and match with charity and company requirements.
- Developing a Geography Day for all of the key groups within the Society and linked to it to share ideas and extend support.

Thanks

Thanks to all members for their continuing financial support, the bedrock of the Society, to all of the volunteer providing equivalent of 4.5 fte (1000-1250 days). Thanks to my fellow board members for clear focus and commitment, real added value. Particularly thanks to Bruce Gittings who is standing down as Vice Chair at the end of his term for his dedication, and all of his assistance on many fronts including the old web site, the redevelopment of Fair Maid's House the link with Edinburgh University for our local centre and for his work on collections. And thanks to the staff for their work. Particularly Mike and Susan Watt who have not only given us continuity through the year of changing staff but have been resilient and focused in ensuring that we continue to deliver.