

## **Governance Review Roadshows Questions and Answers**

### **Background**

During the recent Governance Review Roadshow events, we kept record of a 'parking lot' of questions and comments made that we were not able to discuss at length. They were noted and we committed to reply with answers following the events, and in this way could be shared for visibility across RDA.

These Q&As do not capture all the feedback that was pertinent to the main themes outlined in the consultation document. Formal written feedback opened and closed in November, and will be shared with the RDA network once it has been analysed.

We have structured arranged these Q&As under the following headings: RDA UK Governance, Member Group Governance, RDA UK Strategy, and Communications.

### **RDA UK Governance**

#### **Who are the Regional Chairs Committee?**

The Regional Chairs Committee membership consists of all the Regional Chairs across the RDA network. Their role is to support RDA activity across their region, and to provide input to RDA UK decision making based on their regional experience. Regions and Counties are a critical structure for local groups and activities, as an important local extension of RDA UK's support to Members, as well as providing a vital route for communication across the RDA federation.

The Chair of the Regional Chairs Committee is appointed to the role of Deputy Chair of the RDA UK Board of Trustees, further cementing the importance of this committee.

#### **What is the appointment process for Regional Chairs?**

Regional Chairs play a pivotal role in RDA's success, especially providing a link between RDA UK and Member Groups and therefore the structure for their appointment is of vital importance.

A Regional Chair vacancy is advertised openly on the RDA website, and shared in the fortnightly e-newsletter, and we encourage individuals with the relevant experience in RDA and local connections to consider this rewarding volunteer role.

Applications are initially reviewed by the Volunteer Appointment Panel to ensure skills align with the role description. The panel consists of RDA UK Trustees and a representative Regional Chair.

Once this panel review has taken place, the potential candidates are then presented to the Member Groups in the region for a vote. This is a critical democratic step as Groups get the final say in the appointment.

In some circumstances the role of Regional Chair is shared, a decision usually taken to ensure the role is manageable for the individuals involved.

#### **What do we mean by 'Sporting Disciplines'?**

The creation of a new Advisory Board for Sporting Disciplines, bringing together the expert volunteers who have up to now been National Leads, was included in the consultation document shared earlier this year. This Advisory Board will help ensure decisions about activities and competitions (such as rule changes) are informed by RDA volunteers with relevant expertise and experience of RDA. Feedback from the roadshow events and the consultation feedback, suggests

that the title 'Sporting Disciplines' is too narrow, as it infers just sporting activities (such as dressage, carriage driving and showjumping).

We agree that we should seek for this Advisory Board to represent the full range of activities that RDA offers to our participants (such as non-ridden equine assisted services), and for this to be clearly represented in the name of the Advisory Board.

As we further develop the scope of the Advisory Boards we will reflect this feedback in the titles of the Advisory Boards, and their respective Terms of Reference.

### **What took place at RDA UK that led to many of the personnel changes at RDA UK?**

In March 2023 a complaint was made to the previous RDA UK Board, questioning whether the charity was being governed effectively. An independent legal firm was asked to investigate the complaint and although the specific charges were not upheld, the investigation did make a number of recommendations in relation to improving the charity's governance which were all accepted and are now largely implemented. One of the recommendations was to review the Governance Model of the federation which is currently underway. The full list of recommendations have been shared previously and can be accessed [here](#).

### Group Governance

### **Can we simplify the RDA Memorandum and Articles of Association, and do they reflect the activities we currently offer?**

We have heard widespread support from the roadshows and group consultation for the proposal to make amendments to RDA UK's Memorandum and Articles of Association. As covered in the consultation document, we anticipate this will involve changes to:

- Bring the document to bring up-to-date with respect to legal terminology and general board practices, for example enabling the board to make decisions via video call if needed (currently all decision making has to be in-person only);
- use plain English wherever possible to make the document easier to understand.

These changes could also involve amendments to the charitable objects, based on the support expressed for doing so in the recent consultation and from feedback from our Legal Helpline. We will explore changes that seek to recognise that across the country many Groups have evolved to deliver a wider variety of activities, including exciting new ways of providing brilliant experiences with horses and other equines, some of which don't involve riding or carriage driving. This will not create any expectation that all Groups deliver all activities, but rather provide a wider choice of activities to Groups and make clear that delivering a wider range of services to disabled people without directly riding or carriage driving is still a highly valued RDA activity.

All these changes would require the support of Members and the approval of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. Whilst the roadshow events and consultation demonstrated strong support for these changes, we would develop these changes with input from the Regional Chairs Committee and also ask for further input from Members. It is anticipated that the changes would be socialised through early 2025 allowing for feedback and iteration through the course of the year, and proposed for approval at the 2025 AGM towards the end of the year.

### **Can we look at simplifying the new Group process?**

We recognise that improvements are needed to the process for starting a new Group, as well as the process for supporting volunteers looking to support RDA UK and RDA Groups.

In 2024 we have focussed on making improvements to the process for Groups wishing to dissolve or merge, and in 2025 we are committed to simplifying the onboarding for new Groups and Accessibility Mark Centres.

Also in 2025, we aim to review the onboarding process for volunteers, ensuring this is as straightforward as possible. We hope this will help ensure RDA remains continues to be an attractive and rewarding place to volunteer.

### **Is there help available to support Group trustee understanding of Charity Governance?**

Through January and February, in partnership with The Centre for Charity Effectiveness we will be hosting a series of charity governance workshops. This will be aimed at Group Trustees, with up to two trustees per RDA Group able to join the sessions. The workshops will seek to develop understanding of the role of Group Trustees and their regulatory framework across the home nations to familiarise themselves with charity governance requirements. [check with Lee if link for booking is ready, if not proceed without it and advertise in New Year].

### RDA UK Strategy

#### **Are we still working to the RDA UK 5-year plan previously developed?**

No, the previous RDA UK strategy (due to end in 2025) is no longer in use. RDA UK are currently focussed on three areas: raising the profile of RDA activities across the UK, improving the operations at national office (the support that Groups receive), and developing a long-term plan for RDA. Developing a new long-term plan for RDA can only be done effectively with input from Groups across the UK. RDA UK will seek to engage with member Groups during 2025 to help prioritise the activities of RDA UK to best support member Groups and our participants.

#### **Can you reintroduce the participant tracker, or a way of Groups being able to measure outcomes?**

It is critical that there is a deeper understanding of our collective and individual impact so that we can communicate our impact, the health and wellbeing benefits of bringing people and horses together.

This will aid fundraising efforts both locally and nationally and will help to continue to raise the profile of RDA. It also helps us to periodically review the impact of our programmes so that we can evolve our practices.

RDA UK is therefore keen to develop a new participant tracker that would be available to all Groups to use, but we recognise that this will take time to build, and we will need to secure fundraising income to do so.

### Communications

#### **What are the main ways that we can find out what's happening at RDA UK?**

There is a fortnightly e-newsletter containing general updates, operational information and changes, forthcoming training dates, and much more. This is currently sent to RDA UK Board members, staff and volunteers; as well as member Group Chairs and Primary Contacts to cascade to their trustees and volunteers. If you would like to receive this email, please contact [comms@rda.org.uk](mailto:comms@rda.org.uk) and we will add you to the mailing list.

In early 2025 we will be reviewing the sign-up process to make it easier to subscribe to the fortnightly newsletter so that more people can receive it. We will also be mapping and reviewing the various online RDA forums that exist to improve the flow of information across the network. We are aware that over the years numerous social media groups, and websites, have been set up at a national or regional level, and not all of these are up to date or actively managed. This makes information sharing difficult, and creates a barrier for potential volunteers, participants, or donors attempting to find out about RDA, so it is important we take a consistent and planned approach to these.

There is also a quarterly coaching newsletter sent out to the coaching community. If you would like to receive this, please contact [coaching@rda.org.uk](mailto:coaching@rda.org.uk). Coaching information is also shared on the RDA Coaches Facebook group – a private group for RDA coaches.

Finally information and updates can be found on [My RDA](#) - the online knowledge hub, containing policies, guidance, resources and news. Links to the fortnightly newsletter can be found on the [news section](#) of the site.

### **Is the 'My RDA' website going to be replaced soon?**

We know that the current site is not the easiest to use, so we have been developing a new 'My RDA' site, working with a volunteer user testing panel. The new site will have a powerful search tool, accessibility controls to make it easier for everyone to use, and a handy contacts directory.

The old *My RDA* site had over 3,000 pieces of information stored. We've completed an initial review, and not everything will move to the new site. We have taken the decision to take extra time to carefully check the content so it's accurate, reliable, or clearly marked if it needs further updates. This review will continue through December and January.

At the end of January, we'll share the test site with our user testing group to get feedback. The full launch is planned for late March.

Thank you for your patience as we work to make the new *My RDA* as good as possible!