


**Governance Review Update, January 2025**

The Governance Review consultation closed in November 2024, following a series of Roadshow events held across the UK and online. Thank you to everyone who contributed to those events and the consultation, the responses were enormously helpful in shaping the governance of RDA UK.

The RDA UK Board met in December 2024 to consider the initial feedback from the consultation, and more detailed discussions are now underway to consider how recommendations that were supported by RDA Groups can be implemented. Some of the recommendations of the original consultation report will be amended to respond to the feedback.

**Can I still access the consultation document?**

The consultation document can still be found on [My RDA,](https://myrda.org.uk/assets/RDA-Consultation-document-200924-final.pdf) and we have recently shared a set of Questions and Answers arising from the Roadshow events. These Q&As were not limited to governance, covering several key themes raised during the events. They can be found on [My RDA,](https://myrda.org.uk/assets/Governance-Review-Roadshows-Questions-and-Answers-v4-3.pdf) and include information about simplifying the RDA Memorandum and Articles of Association.

**What was the consultation feedback?**

The following pages are a report produced by CCE, who have been conducting the Governance Review on behalf of RDA UK, summarising the feedback highlighted by both the roadshow events and online consultation. As you’ll see in this report, it’s a summary of feedback from RDA Groups, and is not intended as a response to that feedback.

**What happens next?**

 We will communicate the final organisational changes to be implemented as a result of the consultation in the Spring. These will include the establishment of the two Advisory Boards, and a response to the valuable wider feedback received.

**Key themes and observations from the Roadshows and survey (compiled and authored by CCE).**

* 1. **The relationship between the national charity and local RDA Member Groups**

The Trustees, Member Groups and staff across RDA UK are committed to having a really good relationship. The speakers at the Roadshows spoke about the need for the national charity to listen and to have a good understanding of what things look like at the grassroots. The Trustees and staff of RDA UK have heard the message that Members sometimes think that RDA UK does not sufficiently appreciate or respect their experience and expertise, and are determined to demonstrate their intention that RDA UK’s actions and decisions will be informed by understanding of Members’ views.

The Trustees and CEO have committed to continuing the dialogue established by the Roadshows and this in itself will help continue to build confidence.

* 1. **Building better understanding of the resources that the national charity has available**

At the moment comments made by Members suggest that some think that the national charity is very well-funded and should be able to offer a much higher level of support and assistance to Members. There is a high level of demand from Members and at the moment the national charity is not in a position to meet all of the demands.

The Trustees and senior staff of RDA UK want to be very open with Members about the limits to what can be done given the current level of financial resources which is very challenging. They are committed to transparency about the national charity’s resources and recognise that good communication on this subject will lead to better mutual understanding and dialogue about priorities.

The foundation for this is to provide open information about the national charity’s finances via the Regional Chairs Committee and support Regional Chairs in sharing this across the network with Regional Committees and the Members in their Regions. The focus of the national charity can then be prioritised according to what matters to the Members most.

* 1. **Communications**

The Roadshows provided further evidence that communications could be strengthened and showed that there is a great hunger for more in person networking events as well as information on the charity operations.

There are significant bottlenecks with some people gate-keeping at a local level. Some attendees of the Roadshows recalled that some years ago there had been an agreement to limit the number of people who get sent communications. However, the general consensus and the view of senior RDA UK staff was that this is no longer appropriate, that there are many people across the network who would like more information who don’t get it at the moment, and this needs to be addressed

People want MyRDA to more user-friendly and with better content.  There is emerging recognition that the national charity is trying to address the situation and the commitments made at the Roadshows were well-received but it is recognised that Members will want to see tangible improvements.

However, as discussed at the Roadshows, it is clear that RDA UK is behind other comparable charities with large networks of local Member Groups in its ability to spend on both staff and systems to improve communications, in large part due to funding current constraints.

* 1. **Regions and the Regional Chairs Committee**

People were happy to support the idea of empowering the Regional Chairs to govern more of the grass-roots activities.  However, the Roadshows demonstrated that Members do not all know about or feel supported by their Regional Chair and Committee.  The Roadshows have helped reveal significant variability in how regions are working and the skills and experience that Regional Chairs and their Committee members are bringing to their roles.

Local Members were not all clear in how they are involved in appointing the Regional Chair and many wanted to know more about what their Region can do for them.

Members understand that a key purpose of the Regional Chairs Committee is to speak for them, but not everyone agrees that the Regional Chairs know the Members well enough to do so.

Hearing from Members from across the country on this subject was really valuable. The Chair of the Regional Chairs Committee together with other Regional Chairs past and present attended many of the meetings and so got to hear about the perspectives of people in other regions.

In the New Year, the Regional Chairs Committee will consider what has been learned from the Roadshows and how to tackle the level of variability in experience.

* 1. **Advisory Boards**

The proposal to form two Advisory Boards got useful questions and challenges but was well-supported at the Roadshows and in the response to the survey.

The Roadshows revealed that Members across the country were very unclear about the current position where a number of Committees that used to exist were wound up and a new system of a single “National Lead” volunteer was created. This happened during COVID and in some ways was a response to the operational pressures of that time. What is clear is that the new system isn’t working well enough to ensure that RDA UK is informed by Members’ expertise or to provide expert support and advice to Members across the country.

The discussion about the proposed Advisory Board for Sporting Disciplines gave rise to discussion about activities that don’t involve riding or driving. Members clearly expressed the view that these activities should be part of what the RDA movement does, even though individual Member Groups should remain free to decide which specific activities they want to offer.

During the conversations at the Roadshows, another important issue was also flagged up, namely the RDA approach to various detailed aspects of equine welfare considerations. It was asked whether the proposals for the Advisory Boards gave sufficient scope to this issue.

* 1. **Rules and standards, responsibility and accountability**

There is significant uncertainty about the status and origin of RDA rules (who influences and who makes decisions, what is the national charity’s authority and why do local Member Boards have to respect it). There is a marked lack of awareness of the Membership Agreement as the mechanism that creates the obligation on Members to obey rules.

At several Roadshows there was challenge about whether specific recent rule changes (about safety belts in carriages) were a) justified and b) appropriately communicated and supported. It was useful to be able to discuss this issue at Roadshows because it provided a great real-life example of the issue of how rules are agreed and applied.

There is wide acceptance that there should be quality standards and rules. This is perhaps due to one of the strongest features of the RDA culture, the shared commitment to “doing things the right way” and taking good care of both people and horses.

While many Members express confidence in the way that they themselves are working, we heard a worry at Roadshows from Members that other Members, including near neighbours, might not be acting in a way that is consistent with what should be expected of an RDA group.  This was one reason Members support the idea of clear and consistent standards.

* 1. **Member Group Governance and Leadership within the federation**

We heard some positive stories about what Members are doing to improve Member Group governance but people also shared many experiences of how hard it is to get their Board functioning appropriately.   There's an appetite for more support and information to help Trustees in their role as Trustees of their local Group.

There is more to do to ensure that RDA UK recognises, encourages and supports people who are interested in becoming Trustees and take on other roles as leaders within the federation, taking on roles in regional and national affairs, helping connect local Members to wider RDA affairs and getting involved in discussions about how the work should develop and where RDA goes in future.

* 1. **Evidencing Impact**

This topic was touched on in the presentations at the Roadshows and clearly struck a chord with participants. It came up regularly in the Q&A sessions and showed that there is a significant audience which is very interested in the topic.

Lots of people, even though not everyone, are interested in demonstrating impact, in working together to get better at this, and they understand that this also provides a clear link to income generation.

* 1. **A different model and/or changes to charitable objects.**

The consultation paper asked a series of open questions, rather than making definite proposals, to help gauge the level of interest in a nuanced structure for the RDA movement which is currently composed of around 400 Member Groups who are all independently registered charities in addition to the national charity RDA UK.  This would still be a federated model, but look to create benefits and ease of operating across the Member Groups.

At the Roadshows, we heard stories of change already happening, especially mergers between groups all using the same site.   There were positive stories of successful change.

The majority thought that a different model might be relevant to others but that they themselves didn't need to change at the moment, although ideas around helping to make Member Group governance more manageable were welcome. Members did not object to the idea that there might be new options which might suit other Members better in the future.

The point that struck the biggest chord was the barriers to forming new Groups – there was support for making it easier to establish a Group and a recognition that requiring a Member to be an independently registered charity from the start might be preventing new Members from forming.

Charitable objects – there is some interest in whether change is needed to the agreed charitable objects for RDA and its Members to recognise the breadth of RDA activities, and a small number of people are asking questions about which activities fall within the scope of the current objects.

We found that not everyone is aware that Member Groups are obliged to have governing documents that comply with the model governing documents approved by RDA UK.

* 1. **Recognising that RDA collectively now provides more than riding and driving**

There is widespread recognition across the country that non-ridden activity is now being offered by many Member groups and this is welcomed and well-regarded.

At the Roadshows we heard a few times that some Members fear that RDA UK wants everyone to do the same thing or to do different things from what they currently do. This seems to stem from events of a couple of years ago rather than any current position: we knew already that people were worried they were going to be asked to grow and that seems to be dissipating, but underneath there is a residual worry about enforced standardisation of the activities offered. RDA UK Trustees and senior staff spoke passionately about a key strength of RDA being the diverse scale of RDA Groups and the activities they offer. and how important choices were at a local level in order to best support this. They were clear that RDA UK is keen to support Groups to deliver activities and participant numbers that are appropriate to their local circumstances, and standardisation is simply not on the agenda.

People raised issues about quality of the wider service offer and about what the “pathway” should be for leaders of sessions that don’t involve riding or driving. These may not be called “coaches” but people pointed out that there should be shared standards, expectations and training as well as a route to help people offer these services and to become leaders.