



Governance Review Consultation Document How we work together – making sure we are fit for the future

Autumn 2024

Our mission to enrich people's lives through horses has never been more relevant. As a pioneer in the use of equine therapy, a leader in disability sport, and the only major charity in the UK dedicated specifically to the therapeutic and health benefits derived from the connection between people and horses, RDA is at the forefront of responding to some of the UK's most pressing and growing societal challenges.

We are a large network of around 400 RDA Groups and more than 60 Accessibility Mark Centres. Our work is only possible thanks to the exceptional skills and dedication of our 13,000 volunteers.

For RDA, like many other charities, the last few years have been very tough at times. However, the RDA movement remains strong and dynamic, with many Groups demonstrating innovation and adaptability in supporting our participants. RDA's current way of working together as a federation is around 25 years old. It is good practice for us to reflect on those things that work well, and what we might need to change, so that we make sure that we are helping each other most effectively.

The Trustees and staff of RDA UK would like to hear from you on how we best work together and make sure we are fit for the future. We invite you to read this document which is shaped by the initial focus groups and interviews with RDA volunteers, and is intended to capture some initial suggestions around how we might enhance the governance and connectivity across RDA UK. We very much hope you will be able to share your thoughts and feedback with us at one of the virtual or physical Roadshows in September and October, and look forward to hearing from you.

With warm regards

Helena Vega Lozano
RDA UK Chair

Michael Bishop
RDA UK CEO

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Introduction

It is good practice that charities should regularly review their governance, particularly in more complex structures like federations, and the charity commission recommends this is undertaken every three years. As such, the RDA UK Board of Trustees has engaged external experts in charity governance, Bayes Centre for Charity Effectiveness (CCE), to undertake a governance review for RDA so that we can decide on how to best optimise our federated structure. To get the best out of any organisation, it is helpful to reflect from time to time and consider how things are working and whether changes are needed, and this is the purpose of the RDA Governance review.

As part of the review, CCE has held interviews and focus groups with small numbers of volunteers working at local, regional and national level to discuss how we can work together in RDA. This initial listening exercise has produced some suggestions for change, and this is what this document is about.

We are now moving onto the next stage of the governance review and would like to involve many more of our volunteers, participants and members. We'd love to hear what you think about the issues and suggestions raised in this document which has been written by CCE with input from RDA.

Through the course of this document, we introduce some themes that have come up in our work so far. These topics will be discussed at our Roadshows which take place during September and October. We recognise that there were a range of topics which arose in the listening exercise, such as the supply of suitable horses, and other very real operational challenges. These are not addressed through the governance exercise, however they have been captured and noted, and will play a key part of informing the CEO and wider team's priorities over the coming months.

Some key terms

In terms of practicalities and to make sure we are aligned on the language used, here is what we mean by some of the key terms throughout this consultation document:

RDA – where the term “RDA” is used, we mean all of us within the entire local and national federation – our people and our charities collectively.

RDA UK – where the term “RDA UK” is used, we are referring to the national charity, including the Trustee Board and the national, regional, and county teams.

Governance – by “governance” we mean how our charities are run and the ways in which decisions are made. Governance may relate to RDA UK (only), each individual member RDA group (only), or the governance of the entire federation (how we are governed as a collective group of charities which work together in pursuit of our common cause).

Member groups – here we are referring to local groups which have signed the Member Agreement and pay a membership fee to RDA UK.

Timeline

This consultation runs alongside a series of roadshows which are vital to setting the context to enable you to respond to our consultation questions in an informed way. We are initially publishing this consultation document on a read-only basis, so you have time to consider your views on the questions we are asking. You will be able to respond to the consultation once the roadshows are under way.

Consultation	Key dates	Roadshow event
This document is published	Mid-September	
	25 September	Hamilton Racecourse
	7 October	Stormont
	9 October	Online roadshow
	10 October	Celtic Manor
On-line form for consultation responses is opened	11 October	
	22 October	Aintree Racecourse
	26 October	Online roadshow
	28 October	London
Consultation closes	11 November (9am)	

We want as many people as possible to respond and hope the above timetable will provide options encompassing both roadshows and written feedback, to maximise this opportunity.

How to respond

This consultation document is being published in September 2024 and we encourage you to come to one of the Roadshows if possible – either physical or virtual - to discuss the topics raised.

If you would like to provide a written response, links to an online form enabling you to complete your consultation responses will be published on Friday 11th October, allowing for some initial Roadshows to have taken place beforehand.

The closing date for responding to the consultation is Monday 11th November at 9.00am.

If you need support in being able to respond using the online form, please call (01926) 492915 or e-mail: Governance@rda.org.uk. Please note that consultation responses will be received and collated by CCE, therefore please use these contact details only for admin purposes in relation to the online form.

Topic: Member involvement in decisions: empowering the Regional Chairs Committee

In any federated charity network, openness and transparency are important to earning trust and alignment of purpose. The Regional Chairs Committee (RCC) plays a vital role in the governance of the federation. It provides the link between the regional, county and local organisations and the national charity.

What we heard

The ability to contribute to the decision-making at RDA is important to RDA groups and volunteers and RDA governance is set up to enable this through the Regional Chairs Committee. It is recognized that Regional Chairs also provide an important communication route between RDA UK and member groups.

Although it is clear about the role of the Regional Chairs Committee in representing the views of members, what is less clear is how and when the Committee is involved in making decisions about changes that will affect members going forwards.

What we would like to discuss with you

We propose that the role of the Regional Chairs Committee is more clearly defined and agreed with the Board of Trustees. We will make sure that the Committee is involved or consulted in the key decisions that affect everyone.

The decisions that the Committee should be involved or consulted in include:

- Rules and requirements that affect Members
- Setting shared goals for the future of RDA
- Major new projects that involve Members
- The development of the brand
- How to improve communications
- New risks and changes to the law that affect everyone

How is this relevant to me?

The RCC is the principal body that represents Members in decisions that affect them. The RCC has a crucial role to play in the good governance of the federation. It is important that Members keep in touch with their Regional Committee and representatives and let them know about your views and experiences so that they can represent you effectively.

Topic: Unifying RDA: how we work together

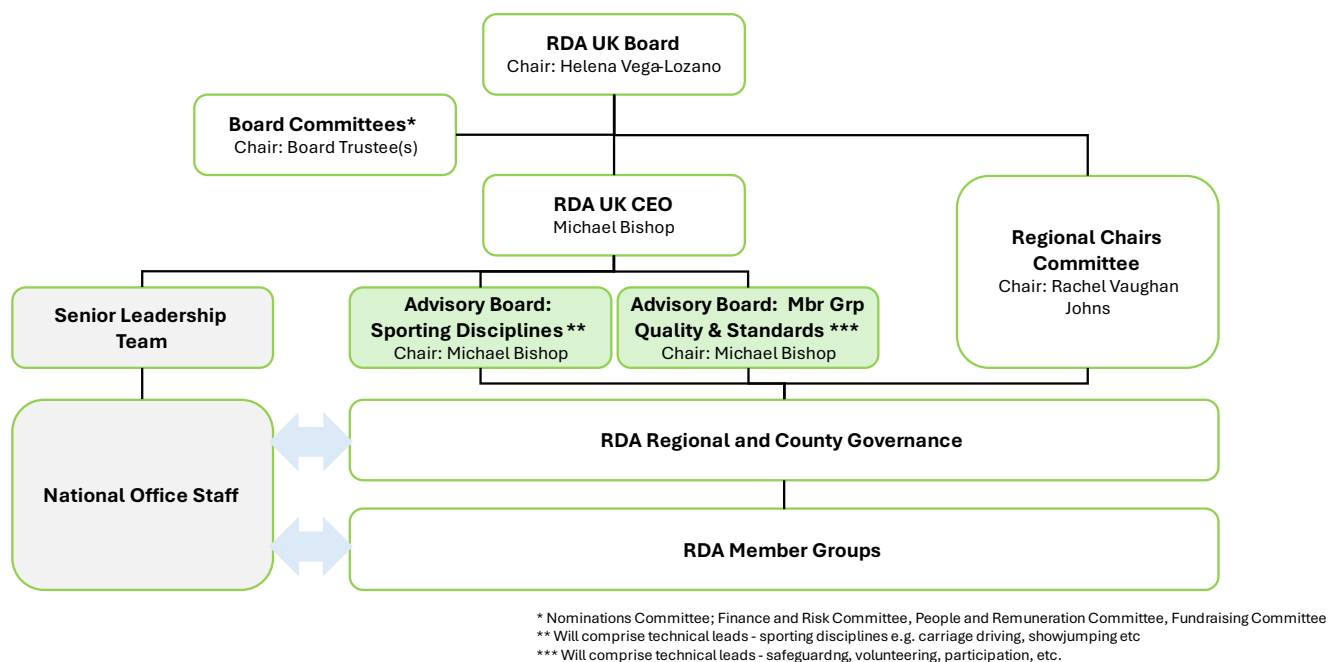
RDA has many strengths as a federation. The nature of our work means that we need expert advice which we have always drawn from volunteers, and we are extremely proud of the resulting high quality of the work we do.

What we heard

Members have told us that they are not always clear how RDA works, where decisions are taken and by whom. Members are sometimes uncertain about how they can make their voices heard. There have been some questions raised about how volunteers are appointed to national roles or working groups.

What we would like to discuss with you

Governance Review Structure Chart, showing two new Committees (August 2024)



We are proposing improvements to the processes by which we work together, to add structure and clarity to the ways in which we make decisions that affect everyone in the federation, and to improve how those decisions are communicated.

How is this relevant to me?

This will increase clarity on how our federated organisation works together, informing and improving decision-making and delivery on issues where they affect us all.

Topic: Achieving quality together: Member quality and standards

We currently have a system of individual “National Lead” volunteers who contribute their expertise to lead on subjects which are relevant to everyone in RDA – such as volunteers, participants, and coaching.

What we heard

The safe delivery of RDA activities is very important throughout the RDA membership. There is widespread acceptance that quality and assurance is needed – especially when it comes to looking after horses and ponies, running good quality sessions, giving participants a great experience, and keeping everything and everyone safe

However, there is currently a large number of different areas in which there are shared rules and requirements that Members are told that they have to comply with, which creates a burden on Members and the national charity’s staff and volunteers alike. The communication of changes is not always smooth.

What we would like to discuss with you

The creation of a new Advisory Board for Member Group Quality and Standards bringing together the expert volunteers who have up to now been the National Leads on areas including safeguarding, volunteering, participation, and coaching. A key task of the new Committee will be to consider quality standards and other rules and requirements on Members in the round, so that we can ensure that the expectations placed on Members, volunteers and staff with relevant roles are relevant, necessary, and proportionate.

How is this relevant to me?

Expertise from the RDA network is used to inform and make decisions on their areas of expertise, coordination of recommendations to RDA groups. The Committee should consider how to streamline the processes by which Members hear about, learn about, implement, and provide assurance on the standards, rules, and processes that they are required to comply with.

Topic: Sporting excellence: using our knowledge and expertise

We currently have a system of individual “National Leads” volunteers who contribute their expertise on individual sporting disciplines.

What we heard

The safe delivery of competition and activities is very important to everyone in the RDA network. There is a need for a coordinated, clear approach to training and information about activities. RDA relies on the expertise of its volunteers and there is room to do more to bring together volunteers with expertise to support the Regional Chairs and national charity staff. There needs to be clarity when rule changes are introduced and transparency in the process of selecting expert volunteers.

What we would like to discuss with you

The creation of a new Advisory Board for Sporting Disciplines, bringing together the expert volunteers who have up to now been National Leads. The Committee will require expertise in all the domains required to meet the needs of the Executive team and Members in general for advice on specific disciplines.

How is this relevant to me?

Decisions about activities and competitions are informed by RDA volunteers with relevant expertise and experience of RDA. There will be clarity about rule changes. The Committee will be formed in a transparent way to make best use of the skills and knowledge available. Establishing the Committee will help ensure that there is a knowledgeable ground jury system for RDA Championships.

Topic: A new model for our federation?

At the moment every Group is required to be an independently registered charity. This creates additional work both for local Groups and in the national charity. We understand that other charity federations in the UK, including Samaritans, YMCA, Age UK, and other household names have changed the way they are organised in recent years and have created alternatives to everyone registering separately. Any change to our model would need a lot more discussion. At this stage, we'd simply like to know whether Members would be interested in change.

What we have heard

In recent years, the charity sector has been required to operate to higher regulatory standards in fields such as safeguarding and health and safety, in an environment in which volunteer recruitment has been challenging. For RDA, it has become more difficult for some member groups to maintain all the governance and administration standards that are necessary to operate as an individual charity in their own right. For some groups, this diverts volunteer capacity away from delivering activities. Occasionally those who would like to start a new RDA group are put off by the requirement to become a registered charity.

What we would like to discuss with you

We believe that all groups which want to continue as independent, registered charities should be supported to do so. We also believe we should explore alternative (optional) lighter-touch governance options to enable new and existing groups to be able to deliver safe and welcoming RDA activities without having to be an individual registered charity, if they prefer.

How is this relevant to me?

RDA groups could choose a governance option which works best for them. Local volunteer time can be focused on providing RDA activities. Reduced charity administration time might mean more successful recruitment of volunteers at local level. People who are interested in starting new Groups might be more likely to go ahead.

Issues for longer-term discussion

Discussing and deciding our future direction together is something that the Trustees and staff of the national charity want to do more of in future.

At the Roadshows, Trustees and the new CEO will share some of their thoughts about what might lie ahead for RDA and look forward to discussing these topics at the roadshows and on an ongoing basis.

RDA Governing Documents and the RDA UK Articles of Association

We understand from RDA's legal advisors, VWV solicitors, that RDA groups calling the Legal Helpline often raise queries about the RDA governing documents. The issues raised include:

- the need to update the model governing documents,
- the possibility of greater flexibility for groups to reflect their local needs, and
- for some, the wish to amend the objects to reflect a wider range of activities.

Under the federated structure as currently organised, the governing documents of RDA groups include objects tied to those in the articles of association of RDA UK. Other changes to the governing documents of RDA groups require changes to the 'approved governing documents' agreed with The Charity Commission for England and Wales and equivalent regulators in other nations.

Changes to the RDA UK articles of association and the model governing documents used by RDA groups would need to be coordinated, so that the resulting changes are consistent, effective, and meet the needs of RDA Members.

Once we have the results of the governance review, we plan to begin with the amendments to RDA UK's articles of association. We anticipate this will involve changes to:

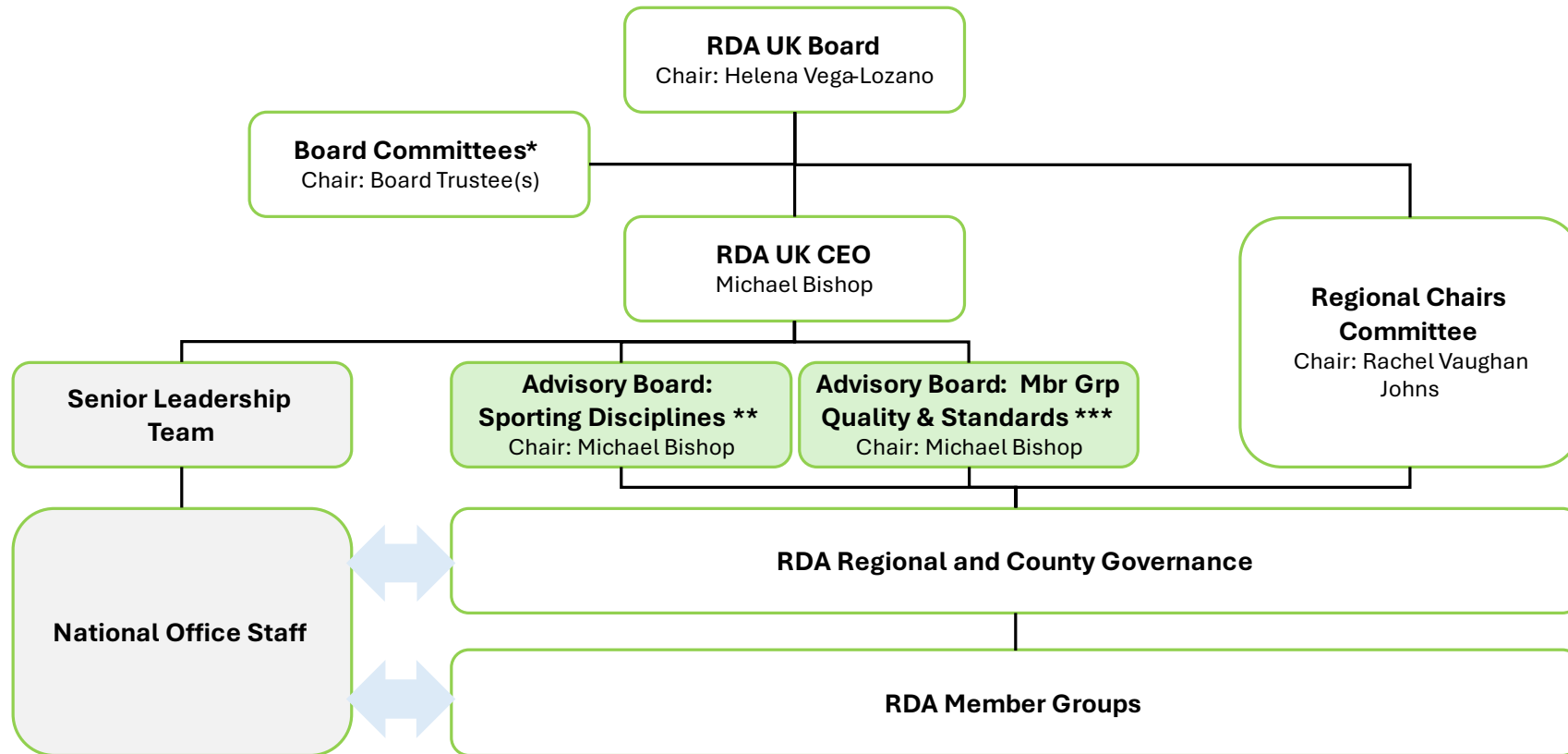
- update the document to reflect legal changes and, for example, enable the trustees to meet electronically to take advantage of the simplicity and cost savings of video conferencing,
- use plain English wherever possible,
- simplify aspects of the document to make it easier to understand and apply.

Our charitable Objects

These changes could also involve amendments to the charitable objects in line with Members' views. We recognise that across the country many groups have evolved to deliver a wider variety of activities, and that some of you have developed exciting new ways of providing brilliant experiences with horses and other equines, some of which don't involve riding or carriage driving.

All of these changes will 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. There will be an opportunity to discuss these broad proposals in the Roadshow events and we will share more details during 2025.

Governance Review Structure Chart, showing two new Committees (August 2024)



* Nominations Committee; Finance and Risk Committee, People and Remuneration Committee, Fundraising Committee

** Will comprise technical leads - sporting disciplines e.g. carriage driving, showjumping etc

*** Will comprise technical leads - safeguardng, volunteering, participation, etc.

