

Review of the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association

My invitation from the S.A.S.A. was to review its present structure, determine its present effectiveness and to make suggestions on ways in which the association could be made more effective. I invited Mr. D. McGowan a well respected member of the association to assist me in this review.

The review was carried out by interviewing 15 members of the association. These members reflected all levels of participation in the association and included the professional staff employed by the association.

In addition all the reports produced by elected members of the association, individual papers kindly presented by some of the interviewees have been read as has the report by the Director of Swimming.

The collective responses to our interviews and the thoughts contained within the reports and papers have been taken into account in our deliberations.

It would be normal practice to present a summation of the evidence collated from the reports and interviews and then proceed onto our main findings from that evidence and finally to present our recommendations.

It would seem that the association has been through the process of self analysis frequently, and recently. It was felt that the re-iteration of the points raised and fully discussed by the association in the various reports would serve no purpose.

It is our intention to simply summarise the main issues which highlighted from our discussions and reading of the excellent papers and present our recommendations. The main issues which were highlighted presented are noted below:-

- ☐ The lack of a clearly defined organisational and management structure.
- ☐ Office holders with heavy workloads and insufficient administrative support.
- ☐ Evidence that many committee members were not clear of the parameters of their authority and responsibility .
- ☐ Evidence that members of the association do not have a collective concept of the purpose of the association.
ie... what is its function and its objectives.
- ☐ Lack of financial acumen amongst ordinary members and some post holders. This included knowing from where funds were generated, costing of their activities and budgetary control.
- ☐ Lack of evidence of a development plan / strategy for the association to which the constituent disciplines and committees relate and contribute.
- ☐ A high level of dissatisfaction with the present professional technical input to all disciplines.
- ☐ Evidence of an uneasy relationship between the executive and the Director of Swimming

The final point I would wish to make though not an issue in the sense of the previous points has to be noted at this juncture. It is to do with the review committee report. This report was a very comprehensive document which made a major effort to ensure that the opinions of the groups and individuals members was heard and absorbed within their deliberations. Their conclusions and recommendations for change were reasonable and largely acceptable.

Their failure to gain approval at the AGM can be put down to 2 factors:-

1. The amount of change was too much for members to absorb and accept all at once.
2. The report and recommendations did not take sufficient account of the variety of interests and conflicting needs of all the various participants within the association. There are cultural differences and conflicting goals amongst the various disciplines and groups within the disciplines.

It is worthwhile attempting to identify the various conflicting pressures and demands which affect the association. These are not "opposition forces" but rather individuals or sections of the association viewing the recommendations from a different standpoint: not seeing the recommendations as a functional approach to a change in managing the association but more as an "issues" approach which can lead to "personality" issues or "parish politicking". It means that the individual or groups frames of reference tends to make them selective in their interpretation of facts and therefore consciously or unconsciously vote on issues on a group or personality basis - even when the issues are not going to effect their function or role within the association.

The following would seem to be the major areas where frames of reference are different:-

- a) The 4 clearly separate distinct disciplines.
- b) Amateurs as opposed to those who see themselves as professionals.
- c) Competitors V coaches V elected officer members V officials.
- d) Clubs V district V national administration structures.
- e) Competitive structures at Scottish, Scottish national, G. B. national and international levels.

All of these groups have between them and within them - conflicting goals. Whether they have identified them is doubtful, but their function and objectives are different and their reaction to decisions about the generic structure of the association will reflect their functional frame of reference.

There is not a definitive answer to the improvement of the effectiveness of such a complex organisation as the Scottish Amateur Swimming Association.

What is clear from all the discussions and excellent papers is the need to get a simple clearly visible and understood organisational and management structure.

Simple in that everyone within the association is aware of the purpose of the association and their personal function and role in achieving that purpose.

Clearly understood in that the pathways of communication between the various levels of the association are visible and identifiable; so who to communicate with, when and how are apparent.

The management structure itself has to be one which reduces the elected members workload without losing its effectiveness. This requires each management function to be clearly defined within certain parameters and that the points of interface between jobs is clear: this will be particularly true between elected members and professional employees. The individual's role whether elected or paid employee will have to be clearly defined and stated.

Reflecting back on the issues raised from our reading and questioning it would be reasonable to assume that the association has lost its clarity of purpose.

Although the individual parts of the association may be functioning efficiently they do so without a clear understanding of their purpose: without that clarity of purpose their efficiency cannot be translated into effectiveness.

This means that the first question that has to be answered before any of the problems of the association can be addressed is what is the purpose of the association ?-Why does it exist?

Although the association may have a historical purpose for being created that may be insufficient reasoning for today's association: the growth in the width and depth of the associations responsibilities and the expectations of modern society may require a re-focussing of the associations purpose.

For example the associations aims noted in the handbook do not refer to the development of the 4 disciplines as sports, does not mention the development of a competitive structure or improving the quality of teaching, officiating, coaching or the quality of performance by competitors etc. It simply talks about "promoting and encouraging the knowledge of.." The association requires clearer objectives of its "raison d'etre" and the functions it pursues should relate to achieving these objectives.

Before considering whether the association should re-define its purpose it may be of value to review and make comment on the conflicting pressures that affect its efficiency and effectiveness. This might achieve further clarification of the purpose of the association.

The 4 separate disciplines

There is a strong argument for building into the constitution a great deal of independence if not total autonomy for the 4 disciplines. It would make for a clearer statement of objectives and a more direct management structure if they were treated as independent.

The only common element that the disciplines share is the medium of water. Thereafter they use it in entirely different ways, so much so that the officials in one discipline are of no value in another. In addition their competitions take place independently of each other and the few occasions they do appear together is in an end on situation and not as part of a continuous event.

If this argument has to be expanded further you only have to compare competitive swimming which takes place in water and is judged against the time taken to cover a determined distance in a prescribed stroke against diving where the important aspects of the dive take place prior to entering the water: the water only providing the safety cushion to prevent injury.

If the disciplines were independent with their own constitution, cost centre and management structure it would remove the present conflict of interests between the disciplines and would give the discipline and the individuals within it a more direct say in the development of their sport.

The smaller disciplines obviously feel that they are constantly short-changed, that they don't get sufficient benefits from the association in terms of administrative and technical back-up. The inference being that their disciplines tended to be ignored.

The separation of the disciplines would give them more control of their sport, imbue financial reality into their planning and perhaps encourage them to be more adventurous in recruiting members and developing their sport.

There would have to be financial and administrative support over a 2/3 year period for the smaller disciplines to establish their own systems. The end result should be a more positive vigorous development programme in each individual discipline.

A loose federation would allow a smooth transition of responsibility and authority to each discipline and provide time for areas of common interest to be agreed.

Even if the path of independence is not followed it will be important that each discipline is made more financially responsible for the development of its sport. This could be achieved by ensuring that future funding is provided to each discipline on a per capita basis. This means members being registered in the particular discipline in which they are active. Thereafter the responsibility and accountability for using that money falls on its committee members.

In other words each discipline becomes a cost centre responsible for the raising and disbursement of its fund and any discrepancies in budgeting fall on the committee and members of that discipline and not generally against the association. This should reduce the casual nature of the existing budget control systems presently practised by some, and in particular begin to reflect the true balance between expenditure and income in individual disciplines.

Amateur / Professional divide.

We have to ask a multiple question of whether the association is organised by amateur members of the association for individual members of the association or is it organised on behalf of clubs or is it organised by "professionals" as a business?

This may seem a pointless question but it does require clarification. For example if it is for the individual members then the rules governing ease of transfer etc. would reflect that freedom of movement and choice of the individual.

If on the other hand it is organised for the benefit of clubs then there will be restrictions on the movement of individuals because of the effect they could have on a clubs finances, status or competitive performance etc.

Similarly is the association really a business run by "professionals" on behalf of its shareholders ? (individuals / clubs). Here the professionals make the rules and govern and direct the association's activities and are voted in or out by the shareholders based on their performance.

Or is it an amateur sport run and organised by amateurs ,(rather like politicians), who are voted into office. They then may use the services of professionals but the authority to hire and fire lies with them and their judgment of the professionals performance in achieving the associations objectives.

Similarly you have to ask the question of how are the targets and objectives for the association in terms of its maintenance and growth set ? Should you buy a package? The individual and his policies for the association with the right if approved to pick his / her own team or does the association discuss and set the targets and policies and then select individuals for specific functions on the basis of their considered talents ? Or does the present system continue where the individual is elected independently of policies ? Policies which at the same AGM are being approved or voted out without knowledge of the individuals beliefs about the policies or the ability to carry them out.

When the association was a small group of individuals with very limited funding then the present system would seem to have been sufficient.

The size and complexity of the association today requires to have a more professional approach to its management. It requires to have clear objectives for the long term and the medium term. It requires to have targets set for the various committees to achieve in the short term. It requires to have a certain amount of stability in its policies so that from year to year there is the facility to measure the progress towards its medium and long term objectives. It has to have the security of tenure for the best people within the system to gain experience and knowledge of the association and its needs and to demonstrate their ability to achieve these. It has to have a facility for identifying people of **professional value** within the association who are in sympathy with the associations objectives and who can communicate their plans and targets in achieving these objectives.

This requires a different system of election to major posts within the association than exists at present. It also need a separation of the political and functional dimensions of the association.

For example there perhaps should be 2 forms of AGM. A major one matched to the Commonwealth or Olympic Games, where the medium term objectives of the association for the following 4 years are agreed and approved by the members and minor ones in the interim years which simply report progress and the following years projected development.

At the major Olympic year AGM the plan, strategies and targets for the various areas of the association would be presented by a development committee based on analysis of the previous 4 years of the association and from taking soundings from the various levels from within the association.

Once approval for the 4 year plan has been given then advertising & interviews for the "amateur" functionary posts within the association would follow. These posts would be vetted by a representative group from districts supported by professional employees as appropriate.

The AGM would separately pick their political heads whose function and role would be to front the association and to monitor that the functionary post members and professional employees are carrying out the agreed development programme. They could if it was felt necessary also have an ombudsmen function. They would meet once a year prior to the intervening years' AGMs.

The intervening AGM's would be to receive a report from the various committees including comment from the political head and interim statements from the development group on whether action committees were on target to achieve their objectives. The development would also start the process of gathering information for planning the next 4 year programme.

Competitors v coaches v officials v elected members.

This has always been an area of controversy because each area is uncertain of the bounds of its authority and responsibility.

Competitors who are probably the real reason for the existence of the association are probably the least considered. They tend to get things done to them rather than allowed to contribute to the dialogue of the association.

There is no real attempt to educate them into the values of being in the association, to rationalise their expectations against reality, to find out their desires for and from the sport or, in many instances, to make the competitive event an enjoyable pleasant experience - which for the majority will be at a low level of performance.

The other group coaches, officials etc. are more difficult to define. They tend to come from a variety of backgrounds, some with no real knowledge of the technical side of the sport or the purpose of the association, some with a high technical knowledge and some with a professional/ career commitment others simply as a hobby and others for personal aggrandisement. It is not unusual to get a mix of all these reasons within one individual.

A majority have become involved with the association through an introduction to the sport by their offsprings. A lesser number through a natural extension from their competitive days. It is an area which abounds with discontent and misunderstanding.

A major part of the problem stems again from a lack of clarity of the purpose of the association, a lack of education of the individuals in the roles they have opted to play, its purpose and relationship to the other activities of the association. Experience tends to be gained through the grouping to which you belong so that in-built attitudes and prejudices tend to be passed on and areas of conflict rather than co-operation are highlighted.

The answer would be some form of induction course customised for each group but reflecting the overall philosophy and objectives of the association. This should be the responsibility of an independent committee - a sort of "Keepers of the SASA Grail" Their function would be to ensure all newly elected members went through an appropriate induction course enshrining the objectives and the spirit of the associations articles. Their function could be extended to providing a service for new members, clubs, officials etc.

It has to be stressed that they would have nothing to do with the creation of policy only ensuring its interpretation in line with the spirit and objectives of the association to new clubs, members or officials. The aim would be to make each individual and group appreciate the worth and value of the other members of the association.

An extension of this concept would be to provide training on the administrative and management elements of the post to which they have been elected. This would have value for money if the tenure of a post was as suggested previously to be for 4 years.

Clubs v District v National - Administration Structures.

There is a great deal of uncertainty at each level of the association in terms of the parameters of authority, responsibility and the relevant patterns of communication.

It is important to determine how much the association is going to be directed and administered from the centre and how much autonomy is divested to the Districts. It also has to be clear whether the clubs are the direct responsibility of the association or whether their primary allegiance is to the districts.

The question posed about the 4 disciplines in term of authority, responsibility and financial accountability has to be posed about the districts and the Council. For example if there is to be strong leadership from the centre then it would be sensible to have the secretaries and treasurers of the districts directly responsible to the SASA treasurer / secretary. They would from their own sub-committees and reporting back to the council would be by the SASA secretary / treasurer. This would have the benefit of a standardisation of the administration of the association and tighter financial control. If on the other hand there is devolution to the districts then some other system of control would have to be introduced to ensure that the administration and financial controls were in place. This may lead to more effective districts though there is the danger that the larger / richer districts would start to dominate the system and go independent.

The present system of district meetings being the official means of passing information to members and relaying opinions does seem a bit archaic :belonging to an era where communications and travel were more difficult and time consuming. In the present day where travel and communications are so much easier one has to question and review the function of the district meetings to extract what is essential decision making by districts and what could now be transferred to an effective communications system. Again the question is posed as to what is the purpose of the district meetings ? Is their purpose to pass information from the centre to the districts and vice-versa or are they primarily to provide a means for the clubs within the district to be involved in the decision making process of the association?

For example if the concept of objectives, plans and strategies being agreed on a 4 year plan basis was approved then the process of gaining advice and consensus from the association members has been satisfied. This means any district meetings would be about informing on progress and dealing with issues related to the management of the district or the clubs in relation to that development plan. This could easily be satisfied with quarterly meetings in each year. With a properly directed agenda this would likely be more purposeful series of meetings than the present monthly meetings.

To support this structure it should be possible to develop district surgeries where clubs and individuals could seek advice and support from association "advisory staff" on a variety of issues. This marketing approach could be expanded to having association "shops" at designated swim meets where the various services of the association can be displayed. eg.. major events and issues publicised and general advice and information being provided to members and potential members. The meets would not necessarily be selected for their competitive importance but for their potential as contact points for the greatest number of members. This structure would best be serviced from the centre.

The structure and purpose of competition viz clubs v district v national v G. B. / international competition.

This question also takes account of the training and coaching for competition. Again this is an area of conflicting interests in which clarification of the associations purpose will help remove some of the anomalies.

The question boils down to who should the association be really serving?

In sheer growth and financial terms it would be better to cater for the needs of the majority of swimmers. So the objective would be to build up the service at the base and make the sport more attractive to the majority.

If it is accepted that the main objective is to develop swimming as a competitive sport and to provide the opportunity for swimmers to develop their talents to the full then the structure of competitions would reflect that objective. It would mean for example that pre-competitive activities such as teaching swimming would have a two fold objective:-

1. As a money generator for the sport.
2. As preparation for an introduction to the association and its objective of swimming as a competitive sport.

The balance between these 2 objectives in terms of income raising would be reflected in the costing structure. eg.. teaching swimming - high cost and introduction to coaching and competition - low cost. In other words teaching swimming is an indirect objective of the association and should be considered and developed as a money earner. The money gained to be used to develop the sport.

There are other areas within the associations activities which can generate income or at least should be reviewed to ensure that they are self-financing.

If the associations main objective is the achievement of high level performers then the associations energies would be more directed towards the few who may achieve an international standard of performance and the competitive structure would be geared to providing that opportunity.

If the level of performance is to be above Scottish National level then other factors other than internal competition come in to play.

There would be need for a coaching dimension which develops swimmers beyond the club / Scottish level. This requires buying in professional coaching or selecting the best available Scottish coaches to be involved in a coach development programme to improve their knowledge and experience of international coaching and competition.

In parallel with this is the political dimension related to the management structure of a G.B. or international selection process. The association must have access to the decision making process in terms of the timing, placement and selection process for international events.

Clarification of what the associations objectives are would place these alternatives in context. It is not intended to suggest that the direction of development and levels of competition described are mutually exclusive but the balance and purpose of the competitions, coaching and political dimension has to be appreciated and the method of resourcing development identified.

For example:-

is the function of a Director of Swimming to develop a base of Scottish swimming for a greater width and depth of internal national competition ?

is it really to coach / develop the few at international level?

is it his responsibility to be involved in the politicking decision making process at G.B. level ?

is he more concerned about creating a sound competitive structure and developing coaching expertise in Scotland?

The original intention behind the appointment of a Director Of Swimming was to do with the development of Scottish swimming at all levels and in all aspects. This function has through time been diluted down to that of a kind of national coach. - At the same time a majority of the interviewees have indicated the need for a chief executive to manage and develop the affairs of the association and the position of director or coach to be diluted to technical advice or coaching squads. The only conclusion that can be drawn from these statements is that the job remit of the incumbent director is not as originally identified or that the job has not been carried out to specification as described in the job remit. Irrespective of why this has come about there is a clear need for someone irrespective of title to be appointed to manage the affairs of the association and assist the elected members achieve the objectives of the association.

The general consensus is for the appointment of a Chief Executive responsible for managing the development of the association in all its aspects. Management skills were of the prime importance but preferably combined with a knowledge and experience of sport, particularly SASA related.

The one area where there was general agreement was in the level of dissatisfaction with the present professional technical input to all disciplines. This took the form of dissatisfaction by the diving, synchro and water polo with the total lack of technical support by the incumbent Director of Swimming. The competitive swimming discipline was also dissatisfied with its technical support.

There was strong support for the appointment of technical support staff for all 4 disciplines and for an improvement in the quality of central administration

It would be true to say that there was not a great deal of support expressed for the present Director of Swimming. The general feeling given was that there was insufficient evidence of clear leadership.

There was also clear evidence of an uneasy relationship between the Council executive and the Director reflected in accusation and counter accusations on approval for certain activities and in timeous reports on various matters.

There would seem to be a need to review the present structure of paid employees. The association finances would not allow additional appointments, even if this was advisable, to the present workforce. It requires a restructuring and appointment of staff who are sympathetic to achieving the associations development, capable of working with the associations elected members and with the administrative and financial management skills to effectively manage and develop the association.

Recommendations

In summary we would wish to reiterate the point we made with reference to the "review committee report" about the need to phase in change. It is important that that members are educated to the reason and purpose of each individual change and are given time to absorb such change before considering the next stage of development.

Our recommendations are not expected to be accepted in totality or to be absorbed within one AGM. Many of them require time for discussion and clarification, the affect of certain changes will have to be fully discussed before judgments on their value are made. Our recommendations therefore are placed in what we consider would be the sequential order of integration into the associations articles after discussion by council and individual members.

There are some decisions which can be taken within the remit of authority and responsibility already invested in the council.

1. The appointment of a Chief Executive. This would be a full time professional appointment with the specific remit of controlling and managing the development of the association's affairs.

This would include the overall responsibility for all professional staff appointed by the association.

We would suggest that whoever is appointed should have full voting powers within the council / executive or whatever elected structure of management is decided. This has the advantage that the chief executive is part of the decision making process and is not seen to be separate or above the "law."

It is appreciated that the association finances cannot, at this point in time, support the addition of a new senior post within their professional staff appointments.

Under the present structure the Director of Swimming is not seen as properly servicing 3 of the 4 disciplines.

It is also clear that the existing remit of the Director of Swimming does not match up to the functions he is at present carrying out.

Similarly the present office managers post will also have to be reviewed in relation to the appointment of a Chief Executive.

We would suggest that the present professional staffs' contracts are not renewed or are cancelled with the provision that they can apply and be interviewed for any suitable posts designed under the new structure.

The first function of the Chief Executive would be to assist the council in creating a development plan defining a clear management structure based on a review of the associations objectives.

The structure would have to define the parameters of authority of the various committees, their relationship to the council, executive and professional staff.

2. The need for a re-definition of the association's objectives: clear unambiguous objectives, to which the functions the association carry out are related.

It is important that these objectives form the basis of a development plan for the association in which short term targets to be achieved by individual disciplines and committees can be identified.

3. That consideration be given to establishing the 4 disciplines as independently constituted associations with full control of their own affairs.

These would operate under the aegis of the parent association.

A relationship between the 4 disciplines can be maintained and be developed under a separately constituted federation. This will allow areas where benefits from joint ventures or activities can be planned and discussed.

eg.. it would make economic sense for the 4 disciplines to have access to common administrative facilities.

This would in our opinion have several benefits:-

- a. It would allow each discipline and its members to make decisions about their sport without interference from other disciplines.
- b. Members could be more selective in the appointment of individuals to look after their affairs.
- c. It would shorten the lines of communication and reduce the workload of committees / council.
- d. Make ordinary and elected members within each discipline more sensitive to their own financial matters and means of budgetary control.
- e. Accelerate the preparation of a development plan for each individual discipline.

As previously mentioned support over a 2/3 years would have to be provided during the transition stage to give a "kick-start" to the smaller disciplines which have not had the benefits accrued by the major discipline of swimming.

Even if independently constituted disciplines is not acceptable we would consider it important that as much autonomy as possible be given to each discipline.

The clear objectives being:-

- i) To make each disciplines responsible and accountable for its actions.
- ii) That funding is directly related to the number of identified members within their discipline.
- iii) That that funding is to be used at their discretion to organise, plan and execute the activities agreed within their discipline by their members.
- iv) That as a cost centres they are responsible for ensuring strict budgetary control of all activities.

This would have similar benefits to those previously described.

4. That consideration be given to the establishment of an Induction or Welcome Committee with the function of providing induction courses for new members, clubs and new committee members.

The function is not simply making members aware of the handbook but is the provision of support and help in integrating everyone into the ethos of the association. It may include provision of technical advice for a committee member on their role eg.. managing meetings, it may be producing pamphlets to introduce new members to the association or on aspects of procedure, talking to prospective clubs, providing advice to established clubs on the protocol of some aspect of the club business.

The constant is to get over the associations mission statement by example and deed.

To get members to focus on the associations objectives and become less parochial in their outlook and their actions and to appreciate the function and role of other members of the association.

Professional attitudes have to supersede district loyalties when deliberating national objectives

5. To review the structure of the districts in relation to their line management. As previously mentioned there is value in having direct line management in such areas as district secretary and treasurer.

The review should also consider the pattern of meetings and determine whether the existing frequency can be reduced by providing a different form of service within the districts along the lines described in italics on page 8.

6. Dependent on the funds available after the appointment of the Chief Executive consideration has to be given to the appointment of technical support within the 4 disciplines.
7. The need to review the structure of the council and the roles of the individuals within it. This should be based on the separation of those posts which could be considered as functional posts; related to the management of the association's affairs and policy posts; which have a political overview of the development of the association.

We have decided to conclude our report at this stage, not because it is complete, but because decisions have to be made on what has already been noted within the report.

For example we have not reviewed or made any form of report on the present post and function of the President, Secretary, Treasurer and individual council members. Our feeling is that until the present matters already reviewed are discussed and decisions made that any further recommendations in relation to the above posts and others is pointless.

John G. Queen.

Danny McGowan.

1/12/91