

Minutes of RAGnet AGM held at Thistle Hotel, Bristol

1 May 2003

Chair: Jacqui Forsyth

Minutes: Nigel Bilsbrough

Present: Alan Cannings, Rizwan Akram, Marcus Lord, Anne Perkins, Saran Simpson, Maureen Morrison, Kerry Wilding, Kate Woodgate, Phil Clare, Yasmin Glover, Peter Townsend, Pauline Muya, Simon Kerridge, Kate Ferguson, Jill Bramston, Eileen Clucas, Jen Shearer, John Hall, Ian Carter, Norma McNaught, Arif Syed, Clive Randall, Isaac John, Steff Hazlehurst, Elaine Ryder, Jan Davies, Michelle Double, Ross Dowsett, Naomi Webber, Kate Nimmo, Janet Hampson, Nigel Bilsbrough, Geraldine O'Leary, Jacqui Forsyth, Deirdre Kelliher

1. Apologies for Absence

The following apologies were received: Helen Fitzgerald and Kathryn Ludlow.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous AGM held at Ramada Jarvis Hotel, Leicester on 2 May 2002 were agreed to be a true and accurate record of the proceedings and were signed as such by the Chair. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

3. Annual Report 2002-2003 by Jacqui Forsyth, RAGnet Chair

A written Annual Report was presented to the meeting brief highlights of which are given below:

- Individual membership now stands at over 450 representing some 150 organisations. Although universities and colleges in the UK and Ireland still form the great majority of these we have members from the research councils, funding charities, NHS bodies and other organisations within the HE sector.
- We have further expanded our international collaboration:
 - A RAGnet team ran a one day seminar for 28 Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) sponsored postdoctoral and postgraduate researchers from 13 different Commonwealth countries.
 - Peter Townsend (Loughborough) represented RAGnet at the inaugural meeting of the International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS) held in Orlando, Florida, in October 2002. In addition to RAGnet the other founder members are: the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), the Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS), the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA), the Society of Research Administrators International (SRA), Southern African Research and Innovation Management Association (SARIMA) and the Swiss Association of Research Managers and Administrators (SARMA).
- Several training events have been held during the year including the Annual Spring Workshop in Leicester attended by more than 90 delegates and the Fifth Induction Workshop which attracted 41 participants. The Expert Seminar programme has continued with joint events being held with the British Academy and the Association of Medical Research Charities. The very popular EPSRC Study Visits have also continued with three separate tours being arranged through the year.
- New election procedures for Committee membership, based on a postal ballot, have been introduced this year. These are designed to further advance the professionalisation of the organisation and to widen the participation of the membership in this important process.
- Finally the Chair thanked all members for their continued support of, and participation in, RAGnet and wished to note particularly the organisation's appreciation to two Committee members who were retiring from their positions. Kate Nimmo has served on the RAGnet Committee for a number of years and for the last five years has held the position of treasurer. Jen Shearer is also leaving the Committee. The contributions of both have been highly valued.

4. Financial Report for 2002/2003 by Kate Nimmo, RAGnet Treasurer

A written finance report was incorporated in the Annual Report showing the position as at the 31 March 2003. The Treasurer reported:

- The association had enjoyed a stable year and continued to maintain healthy reserves.
- We were continuing, with professional assistance, to pursue our application for charitable status.
- The accounts have now been forwarded to our accountants for an independent review.

5. Development of RAGnet Project and Future Plans

The Chair reported on the following:

The RAGnet Committee held an awayday last August to take forward ideas suggested at last year's Advisory Group meeting and AGM. These included increasing the membership base, improving the resources available to maintain the organisation and adding to our portfolio of training courses. However, it was decided that the financial assumptions underpinning these ideas were somewhat vague and had not been tested. It was agreed to commission research, which the EPSRC kindly offered to part finance, to explore the salient issues and to provide robust data on which decisions could be taken.

An Invitation to Tender was issued which received two responses and after careful consideration a contract was issued to Bluebell Research Ltd. The final report has only just been received so it has yet to be fully considered by the Committee but some of the key points are given briefly below:

- The researchers undertook a survey of all RAGnet members to which a third responded. A focus group was also held. This enabled an analysis of the features of the organisation most and least liked by the members.
- The quality of RAGnet's training events was seen as a particular strength. Events on average scored 3.9 on a 1-5 scale, with one particular event scoring 4.7.
- The mailbase list received very mixed responses being seen by some as the most beneficial service provided by the organisation whilst others saw it as the most problematic.
- The most commonly quoted "best bits" of the organisation were the sense of community it provided to members and removing the feeling of isolation.
- On pursuing collaboration with other groups, on a 1-5 scale funding bodies rated 4.5, charities 3.9 and the NHS 3.7

In the short term it appears the only way we can continue to maintain the organisation and hopefully develop and grow it in the future is to improve its infrastructure. This will need to be funded by increasing membership numbers and the range and number of our activities. Targeting increased membership from the funding bodies would seem a sensible starting point.

A summary of the report will be made available to all members after further consideration by the Committee.

The meeting was asked for its views on any of the points raised. It was agreed the provision of appropriate training was a key way to develop the organisation. The question of obtaining formal accreditation, perhaps leading to a certified qualification in research administration, was raised. It was pointed out that the Committee had explored accreditation in the past but as it was perceived to be such a huge undertaking, it had not been pursued. It was also difficult to see how one off events, such as the current Spring Workshop, could be accredited. Although if we were to offer repeated courses say on the core competencies for research administration then it may be less problematic.

The meeting was further informed on the ongoing process of election to Committee membership. This year there had been nine vacancies but only five nominations received, four of which were from existing members. It was also pointed out that with effect from the end of May the organisation would be without a formal Treasurer. If the organisation is to remain dynamic and is to expand to become more representative then it is imperative that the Committee receives new members with fresh ideas. Members were encouraged to offer assistance in any way they felt appropriate, e.g. by organising or hosting an expert seminar, or by writing an article for RAG Times.

6. Any Other Business

There being no other business the Chair thanked members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 17.40.

Nigel Bilsbrough
RAGnet Secretary
30 May 2003