

Review of the Central Council

Part 1: Developing a clear vision

By Phillip Barnes Chairman, CRAG

Background to the Review

At the meeting of the Central Council (CC) in Portsmouth last May, the Council passed a motion which set up an independent working group to undertake a detailed review of its rules and activities, and to make recommendations for modernisation. The motion was proposed against a backdrop of criticism of the CC and the way in which it had handled certain issues and questions being raised about its continuing relevance.

The group was to consist of a mixture of current CC representatives, those former representatives who had left the CC during the recent past and some other members of guilds and associations who had never been on the CC. This diverse team – the Council Review Action Group, or CRAG for short – will report to the 2017 CC meeting with our recommendations for change.

CRAG met as a group in Birmingham on August 13th and it was immediately clear that, while there were many different ideas for change, every member felt that a strong relevant central body within ringing was worthwhile. Most were agreed that a lot needed to be changed within the CC if it were to be that body. Speaking personally, I believe there could be an exciting future for ringing if we had a radically different central body that engaged better with ringers of all types and provided the services they want and need.

What's our approach?

We feel that our remit must be about modernisation, rather than merely the technical efficiency of the CC. The Council has done and continues to do many valuable things but it is not always clear what it is seeking to achieve, or for whom. As a group we felt that the primary role of the CC must be to provide a service to ringers and to ringing – but which services?

We are going to structure our work by asking ourselves a number of questions: What should the Vision of the Central Council be for the future of ringing? That means what is a mental picture of what “good” (or “great”) looks like?

What things need to be done in order for that Vision to actually happen? In other words what should the outline Mission of the Council be?

What specific services will the Council need either to provide itself or to make sure are provided by other organisations, in order for those things to be done? Finally. How will the Council or other central body organise itself to do all of this?

This last question will involve a number of more detailed questions including, but not limited to:

What should its relationship be to individual ringers, to Guilds and Associations and to other organisations active within ringing?

How can it ensure it is effective and inclusive in serving the whole global family of ringers of all levels of skill and experience who have different interests and differing local circumstances?

How big should the central team that runs it be, how should it be structured and run and how should it be accountable to individual ringers and individual societies?

The key part of what we will be doing is to listen to others before we come up with suggested recommendations. We need a lot of input from the whole range of ringers. That means those who are just learning; those who have recently learnt and who are trying to improve their ringing; those who are happy with their ringing activity just as it is; those who have made great strides in ringing and may even be at the cutting edge; even those who are feeling frustrated for some reason and may even be about to or already have given up ringing.

We are also conscious that our timescales for this very important work are very tight, but also that delay would be a bad thing for ringing and for the Council. We will therefore have relatively short periods for you to give feedback at each stage and we will receive, consider and digest all of the feedback we receive. Rather than ourselves engage in any debate that might occur, either in the pages of the Ringing World or elsewhere, we will consider everything that is said there as well so that we can get the roundest view.

The proposed Vision.

The phrase "Vision Statement" usually makes peoples' eyes glaze over or gets them grumbling about management speak. As I said above, all it is meant to do is to give everyone a simple vision of what the ideal future looks like. For ringing, and thus for the CC, we propose that the Vision should be:

“A vibrant community of ringers; with bell- ringing valued as an enjoyable performing art that is open to all, a beneficial mental & physical exercise, and a unique musical and cultural pursuit which provides service to both community and church.”

As Vision statements go, it is at the long end of the range but we think it encompasses what a healthy future state for ringing would look like. It would then follow that the aim of the Central Council should be:

“To foster a vibrant community of ringers; with bell- ringing valued as an enjoyable performing art that is open to all, a beneficial mental & physical exercise, and a unique musical and cultural pursuit which provides service to both community and church.”

Have your say!

We would like your feedback in one, or both, of two ways:

1 Please send all feedback about the proposed Vision statement above preferably by email to vision@crag.cccbr.org.uk. For those unable to use email please send any letters addressed to CRAG Vision, Piltdown House, Maidstone Road, Platt, Sevenoaks TN15 8JE. Please ensure all comments are received by CRAG by 5pm on Friday September 30th.

2 We would also like to invite more general written submissions about the Central Council review. These might be about particular strengths or weaknesses of the CC, ideas for improvement, ideas for services that you feel the CC should provide (or cease providing), views on how the CC can best serve you and with what other organisations the CC should engage. This is not however an exhaustive list. These written submissions should be sent by email to submissions@crag.cccbr.org.uk or else addressed to “CRAG Submissions” at the address above. We should like to receive any of these general submissions as soon as possible but in any case no later than 5pm on Monday October 31st. If your comments include any related to the Vision statement we will need these by September 30th.

In both cases we would ask for your name and where in the country you ring. If you wish you may also outline your experience within ringing or within other areas to provide us with a little context for your comments.

Once we have the initial feedback on the Vision statement we will publish our first thoughts on the Mission statement. This should be in early October but in the meantime the CRAG team are also putting our minds to the various services that might need to be supplied to ringers and how a central body could ensure they are delivered.