

Central Council Representative's Report for 2020.

The Central Council meeting scheduled to take place at Nottingham was instead held remotely over the web using Zoom. I was pleased to find that the technical side seemed to run very smoothly, including both the login using details sent out via email, and the way that the meeting was presented on the screen as it took place. I imagine a lot of effort was needed to prepare for a large meeting to take place in this way, and those involved should be congratulated. The downside was obviously the lack of opportunity for informal contact with other ringers in person, but my perception was that the use of a Zoom meeting was not unduly detrimental to the purpose of conducting the businesses of the meeting.

The first part of the agenda followed the usual pattern and dealt with the more routine matters of business. It is perhaps worth noting that the concerns raised last year over the number of vacancies in the list of representatives for the affiliated societies were still there, and it appeared that the situation was actually worse this year. The reports from the Executive and the Workgroups followed on, and one item of particular interest was the presentation from the "Young Ringers – Universities and Colleges" Workgroup. This was one of three new workgroups which resulted from the May Executive meeting, and the terms of reference are "to establish new long-term sustainable sources of recruits from schools and youth groups, focusing on their transition through higher education and beyond". The Workgroup leader, Ian Roulstone, mentioned that the group had only been active since around August, but apart from looking into ways of reducing the number of ringers lost at the point when they move to university, were also considering how to support ringing at university level. One thought was that smaller university societies that perhaps lacked critical mass might benefit from closer links with the Northern or Southern Universities Association. It was pleasing to hear DUSCR being mentioned as one of the larger successful societies within those affiliated to Central Council, and that was no doubt helped by level of interest from the alumni. I'll keep an eye out for anything that might be of particular relevance to DUSCR coming out from this workgroup.

The main item of note from the Executive report was mention of consultation sessions to be held over the next few months on the next steps towards some outstanding proposals from CRAG (Council Review Action Group) including direct membership and reducing the total number of council members. There was also mention that there may be some restructuring of the workgroups in the near future, and that some, for example the one concerned with universities and colleges, may only be expected to be in existence for a couple of years while addressing the specific issues of concern.

The meeting then went on to consider the motion to permit small societies (i.e. those who have membership numbers below the level allowing them to apply for affiliation) to register with the Council. The aim is to make Council more inclusive, but while the registered societies would be able to nominate a representative who would be able to speak at Council meetings, they would not have voting rights. There had been a consultation phase prior to the meeting, and this led to a set of admission criteria that would be included in the Standing Orders. The new rules would allow the Council and the Executive to have the ultimate power to remove and societies that no longer were suitable for registration. The rules would also provide a pathway to apply for affiliation on reaching a membership level of over 75, and likewise there would also be an option for affiliated societies whose membership levels were likely to fall below 50 to apply for registered small society status instead. The final version of the motion consisted of the changes to the rules but was also dependant on the changes to Standing Orders that had already been decided by the Executive. When the motion was presented at the meeting, there was a further amendment to the Standing Orders presented relating to the requirements for the societies to have a safeguarding policy. The revised version required safeguarding arrangements that reflected local best practice, rather than the earlier specification that the safeguarding policy met the Council's requirements. The motion provoked much debate, so much so that the meeting had to be adjourned so that the Ringing World AGM could take place.

The Council meeting resumed at 15:45, and then following further discussion a vote was taken, and the motion passed. The voting figures were 100 votes for, 28 votes against, and 4 abstentions.

The last part of the meeting discussed plans for the meeting next year, and the intention is to hold the meeting in Nottingham as was originally intended this year. However, there are no plans to hold a roadshow type of event on the same weekend as happened with the 2019 meeting. The meeting closed at around 16:30.

P. A. Hughes,
7th September 2020.