

Role Based Convention 2nd November 2017

Notes from the Chair's Workgroup

Introduction

This workgroup was attended by approximately 25 delegates, all of whom were Branch or Specialist Group chairs or their representatives. The workgroup had 2 broad objectives:

1. Brief the chairs on current issues and activities of the Community Board Best Practice Committee (CBBPC) and invite feedback.
2. Discuss other issues and topics of relevance and interest to the chairs to share information/experiences and raise points of concern to the CBBPC

The workgroup's discussions focused on several topics and a summary of main points arising from these discussions are documented in the following sections.

1. Chair's Annual Report

A standard structure for the annual report produced by Branch and SG chairs has been developed by the MBPPC and trialled in a small number of branches prior to its full roll out. The workgroup was invited to discuss and comment on the report and the following points emerged from this discussion.

- In general, there was a positive response to the structure of and need for this document, however there were several suggestions for ways of both improving the content and reducing the amount of effort required to produce it.
- One chair did comment that he had "lost the will to live" while writing the report while several others remarked that chairs are volunteers and HQ needs to remember this.
- Whilst the factual content of the report was OK, the more abstract elements caused some difficulty as the chairs were not sure exactly what was required. A further point made was that the quantitative data was already being reported so did not this report unnecessarily duplicate this.
- It was suggested by a few chairs that an example of a completed report should be distributed to provide guidance.
- One chair commented that the structure was oriented towards information silos which caused repetition and that a more tabular format could avoid this.
- The structure did not allow for the operational differences between Branches and SGs and so possibly a different version for each type of groups should be considered.
- The question was raised as to whether the reports would be loaded on the BCS website.

2. Branch Membership and Outreach

The workgroup was asked to roughly calculate the % of branch members that attended each meeting over the course of a year. The result, not entirely unexpected, was that most branches had less than 5% attendance but the SGs were significantly higher. The discussion that followed explored whether this was an acceptable attendance rate and if not, what could be done to improve it.

- Most Branches and SGs had a hard core of members who attended most meetings whilst remainder were members who were specifically interested in the subject of the meeting. This was felt to be a de facto situation that had always existed and efforts to reach out to a wider audience tended to be nugatory.
- It was pointed out that BCS members represented a very small proportion of the IT population anyway and so perhaps the solution lay first with increasing the profile of the society to attract more members.
- Another suggestion was that more effort should be made to advertise and promote meetings through use of social media and especially when a subject was aligned with a university course module.
- Some chairs did report success in increasing attendance, the specific things they identified being:
 - Holding breakfast meetings. The rationale being that members (especially younger members with family commitments) found it easier to take time out at the beginning of the working day to attend.
 - Working with corporate members who would then encourage their staff to attend
 - Make the meeting webinars so members could virtually attend and/or watch the meeting at a more convenient time.
 - Holding meetings at weekends.
 - Running a “open mike” meeting has been particularly successful for one branch in attracting attendance from younger members. (see next section for a full description).
- On the subject of running meetings as webinars, it was pointed out that many speakers would prefer to talk in front of an audience, even a very small one, than just speak to a camera. It was suggested that this was because an audience gave feedback and interaction which speakers needed.

3. Engaging with Universities

One chair raised the issue of how branches could engage with the universities in their area. There were 3 in his area and whilst he had been able to develop good collaborative arrangements with 2 of them the third has resisted all attempts. The chairs were invited to make comments and suggestions from their own experiences which are summarised below:

- If not already done, encourage the university to get its courses accredited by the BCS.
- Offer student prizes.
- Target the university’s staff to be speakers at branch meetings.
- Offer free/discounted membership to students/staff.

- If the university has a professional advisory board volunteer a committee member to serve on it.
- Explore setting up a student chapter in the university.
- Align the speakers at the branch meeting to the content of the university's course modules.
- Organise an "open mike" branch meeting and ask the students to volunteer to give 10-minute informal talks on their projects. This approach had been tried by one branch and proved to be very successful.
- As an initial step at least one branch noted that they had developed personal contacts with the academic staff, encouraged them to join the branch committee which then provided the platform for building the relationship.

4. Other Topics Briefly Discussed

- 4.1. A newly appointed chair enquired whether there were any mentoring/induction/training programmes specifically for chairs. The response was that whilst there was a recently introduced induction pack for all new committee members there was nothing specific for chairs, however it was noted that the MBPPC would be looking to fill this gap at this very shortly.
- 4.2. The apparent focus of the BCS academy on school age young people rather than university students and academics was raised as an issue.
- 4.3. The question "why do people join the BCS?" was asked. The discussion that followed suggested 3 major reasons
- 4.4. CV enhancement
- 4.5. Networking
- 4.6. Learning and skills development
- 4.7. However, the main conclusion was that HQ did not seem to know and so it should find out in order to make the BCS and its activities more relevant to its target membership.
- 4.8. Unconscious bias, inclusivity and diversity were raised as topics that should be discussed to make sure that the chairs were aware of their importance and familiar with BCS policy and activities. However, when these topics were raised the session had run out of time and so no discussion was possible.