

# Resourcing the Central Council's work

The Central Council's work on behalf of ringers covers all aspects: training and publications; advice on bell installation, maintenance and restoration; technical aspects of change ringing and performance records; public relations, ringing trends and regulatory aspects. The work is performed by the Council's 15 committees as well as its officers and stewards. It relies entirely on volunteers, since unlike almost all other similar national bodies, the Council has so far managed to operate without any paid staff. However there are costs, including among other things the cost of the annual Council meeting and expenses incurred by committees. Typically Council expends around £10,000 per year (about 25p per ringer).

The Council is a federation of ringing societies, each of which pays an annual affiliation fee. A quarter of a century ago these fees provided around 10% of the Council's income, with the rest coming from interest on capital that had accumulated in earlier years. This was about the same proportion as the cost of the annual meeting, so effectively the affiliation fees paid for just the meeting. Each society's affiliation fee is proportional to the number of representatives it has, ie the number of people who could attend the meeting. It all seemed very neat.

Over the years, the investment income that had paid for all of the Council's other activity (ie doing the real work) progressively fell, and the affiliation fees were raised to balance the books. Before the financial crash investment income was down to about twice the affiliation fee income and since the crash it has been around half affiliation fee income. So the affiliated societies no longer pay just for the meeting to which they send representatives, they pay the majority share of the cost of the Council's work.

It is of course quite reasonable for ringers (through their societies) to pay for the their (inter)national body – it's what happens in most other voluntary activities. But it isn't quite so simple because of the way the affiliation fee is calculated.

The relationship between the number of members and the number of representatives that a society has is very nonlinear. As a result, members of some pay 15 times more than members of others (in 2014 members of the largest society pay 7p per year and members of the smallest pay £1.07p per year). That seems wrong as a way to fund the Council's work.

In 2007, after the affiliation fee had doubled in just four years, there was a proposal to make the affiliation fee proportional to membership. It was narrowly defeated after a heated debate and the status quo remained. Since 2007 the affiliation fee has risen further and it is likely to do so again. The higher the affiliation fee, the more marked is the discrepancy between what members of different societies pay. The Administrative Committee felt that the question should be revisited, but that before considering any change, more work should be done to understand the effects of such a change, and where possible to quantify them. Above all it was felt important to consult affiliated societies before rather than after formulating any specific proposal.

The preparatory work proved valuable because it provided facts rather than speculation. To provide the same revenue as the current £30 per representative, all societies would pay 16p per member. Societies with more than 750 members would pay more than they do now. The largest (~2600 members) would more than double (£180 to £411) with the cost per member increasing from 7p to 16p per year. Between there and the break-even size the increase would be smaller.

Two societies with ~1800 members would go from £150 to £300 (8p to 16p per member) and several societies with ~1400 members would go from £150 to around £220 (11p to 16p per member). 16p per member is a small fraction of a typical annual membership subscription of several pounds, but some societies have reduced subscriptions. A typical society has 10% young, 60% full and 30% retired members, so if seniors paid a half and juniors paid a quarter the average subscription would be three quarters of the full subscription – still likely to be well above 16p. Waiving the subscriptions for all long-serving members would have very little effect because it only affects a few percent.

Societies that don't have an annual subscription already have a special arrangement – the

number of Council representatives is based not on total membership but on one of several criteria (defined in Council rules) related to active members. This same number would be used to calculate the affiliation fee and in all cases it is below 750, so these societies would pay less than they do now. The College Youths and the Cumberlands would pay around 10% less and the biggest university societies less than half what they do now.

A ringer belonging to more than one society would pay a contribution to the affiliation fee of each society, but in almost all such cases the collective contribution will be less than it is now because it is quite hard to be a resident member of two of the 16 societies with more than 750 members (Bath & Wells, Chester, Essex, Gloucester & Bristol, Hereford, Kent, Lancashire, Norwich, Oxford DG, Peterborough, Salisbury, Suffolk, Sussex, Truro, Winchester & Portsmouth, Yorkshire). So the total contribution on behalf almost all ringers with multiple society membership would be less than it is now. For example, a member of Gloucester & Bristol and Four Shires Guild who is a College Youth and went to Cambridge University currently pays £1.01 (11p+31p+21p+38p) which would reduce to 64p (4 x 16p). At the other (rare) extreme, a resident member of both Bath & Wells and Gloucester & Bristol (and nothing else) currently pays 19p (11p + 8p) which would increase to 32p (16p + 16p) – which is less than what the members of 13 societies already pay.

A consultation paper was sent to all affiliated societies at the end of January. It was anticipated that asking questions about funding would inevitably generate responses about related things so the paper included two extra sets of questions. One was about areas of the Council's current or potential work that societies felt important. The other was about how societies select their representatives, who collectively provide the human resources even more critical to getting the work done than the money. A quarter of all societies responded, despite the relatively short time requested before the March meeting. Of the those with more than 750 members nearly half responded, and six of the ten of those with over 1000.

Most of responses supported the idea of linking affiliation fees directly to membership, but a few had reservations, and over half raised a lot of related issues about value for money, other possible sources of funds, transparency, the Council's size and its organisation. It was clear that there would be widespread support for a change, but it was also clear that, even from those societies that would support the change, there are many aspects of the Council's funding and work about which they were less happy, some no doubt down to poor communication but others pointing to the need for serious review.

Following the feedback it was decided not to propose a change to the basis of funding the Council's work at this year's meeting but to address the issues raised by the responses with a view to formulating a proposal for change at a future meeting, which should be capable of receiving widespread support. Meanwhile the related questions and suggestions received will help to inform reviews of other aspects of the Council's organisation and activity. The officers are always willing to receive constructive criticism and suggestions for how the Council can better serve the ringing community.

The consultation paper and the collective feedback to the consultation can be downloaded from the Council website: [cccbr.org.uk/pr/articles](http://cccbr.org.uk/pr/articles)

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