

18 Month Review of the New Management Structures

a paper by the Royal College of Science Motor Club, the Royal School of Mines Motor Club and the Veteran Vehicles Motor Club

Following a number of big changes to the way the Motor Clubs were organised in June 2011, it was established that a review of the changes would be held in December 2012. This report will outline the Royal College of Science, the Royal School of Mines Motor Club and the Veteran Vehicles Motor Club's attitude to the new system of management and our recommended changes.

Management Structure

The changes made 18 months ago to the management structure were implemented on the basis that it was felt by some members of the CSB that an excessive amount of money was being spent on a 'small group of students'. This misapprehension is easy to understand as the Motor Clubs were the last of the non-membership clubs and as such their system of operation was unfamiliar. The CSB also expressed concerns that the clubs had become too inward facing. The CSB decided to implement a membership target to encourage the clubs to promote themselves to the student body and allow a better understanding of the level of interest that exists in looking after the vehicles.

In order to appreciate the challenges facing managing the Motor Clubs, an understanding of how we operate and what the aims/purposes of the clubs are is necessary. An explanation of the nature and purpose of the clubs is included to enable the members of CSB to be better informed in considering our proposals.

Nature and Purpose of the Motor Clubs

Between 1934 and 1960, Imperial College's constituent colleges (C&G, RCS and RSM) purchased motorised mascots to represent their students and act as transport for their respective presidents. The Motor Clubs were subsequently set up to act as custodians of the vehicles, charged with the maintenance, repair and conservation of the vehicles and enable their use by the student body.

This is one of the first points of difference between the Motor Clubs and most other clubs: the clubs were created to look after the vehicles (rather than clubs which exist and then get equipment), and for as long as the vehicles exist the Motor Clubs (regardless of the number of members in the club at any specific point in time) are necessary to care for the vehicles. In most clubs if interest wanes the equipment can be sold off and repurchased if interest redevelops at a later point: disposing of the Motor Clubs' equipment would mean getting rid of the Mascots - denying current and future students the use of the historic fleet of vehicles forever (not to mention all the other benefits the vehicles provide, in addition to large amounts of specialist and custom stock collected for the purposes of maintaining the vehicles).

The Motor Clubs act as repositories of knowledge that allow the vehicles to be maintained and repaired, in accordance with original techniques where possible. The vehicles cannot be replaced for a wide variety of reasons and this must always be considered when making important decisions relating to the clubs.

Club activities come under three categories:

1. Maintenance and legal operation of the vehicles - funded by the union

grant with time, and expertise (and even equipment) donated by members and alumni of the club.

2. Operation of the vehicles for students, college events, and external events - funded by the event organisers, the union grant or club members taking part in the trip.
3. Club trips around/to events in London, historic vehicles shows around the UK (and abroad) - funded by the members.

The first category (maintenance and legal operation) is similar to the work that Membership Services does in keeping the minibus fleet in operation - namely the necessary maintenance and meeting the legal requirements of keeping the vehicles on the road. However, unlike the minibus fleet the vehicles cannot be taken to a local repair shop so the work either has to be contracted out to a specialist or (as is generally the case) the work is done by the club. The maintenance is very time consuming and we often have to make custom parts ourselves: luckily for the Union members of the clubs and generous Alumni are happy to give their time free of charge to carry out the maintenance - man-hours being the thing that would cause the greatest expense if the work was outsourced. For example: a recent repair job on Jezebel's clutch cost the club nothing as it was done in-house by a team of 6 people working for a day and a half. Had this been outsourced it would have been a considerable expense and would have meant that the vehicle was not available to students for a long period - there are at most a handful of people capable of carrying out this specific example of repair work (or repairs in general) so the upkeep of the vehicles must be done in-house by people who are familiar with how to carry out the repairs and maintenance.

Activities under category 2 are, principally, those which the vehicles were bought for, namely Union events. In addition, the vehicles now attend events of importance to the college - e.g. royal visits, Commemoration Day, Imperial Festival. Due to licensing and insurance laws the clubs cannot charge for any vehicle's attendance but donations are encouraged (fuel and expenses of a vehicle's attendance are fine, so in a worst case scenario the vehicle's attendance results in free publicity for the University/Union).

As well as internal events, the vehicles also take part in external events within the requirements set out by Union and legal regulations; these are typically charitable events like supporting the London Fire Brigade to raise money for a charity or visiting local school/parish fairs. The clubs also have a tradition of providing transport at the weddings of club alumni (RCS Motor has been asked to attend the wedding of a sub-warden of halls of residence in the spring term). These events help to provide a level of financial support to the club which allows us to operate.

Under the third category are all the events the club does internally: these include regular trips around London, attending historic vehicle shows and attending other events across the country, as well as taking part in the London to Brighton Run. The costs of these events are covered by the clubs' members and self-generated income.

The Union grant ensures that the vehicles can be kept operational and are made available to all students. The majority of the costs (predominantly fuel, entry fees at some events and certain items of equipment) are picked up by members or

donations from alumni, the College and external sources.

The clubs attend numerous events over the course of each academic year, with hundreds of students getting to participate in club activities: all at no cost to the students thanks to the union grant and donations to the club. This is why the clubs exist.

If it was practical to make everyone who travelled on the vehicles a member, by the end of welcome week the clubs would have membership figures in excess of 400. However, for most of these events the clubs know that they will be collecting people from certain student groups (e.g. halls in Evelyn Gardens, CivSoc), but not which specific people until they arrive at a pick-up location. Electronic sign-up is not practical by the side of the road and paper membership forms have a tendency to blow away (and are now banned by the Union). Making 10 people fill in forms for each trip would also greatly reduce the number of students carried - the vehicles tend to travel non-stop for several hours during these events - thereby defeating the object of the vehicle's attendance. As such we do not attempt to record numbers in any formal capacity at these events. For this reason the level of membership does not reflect the benefit the club provides to the Union/University and is instead a measure of the level of interest that exists with in the body of students to be involved with looking after the vehicles.

Another point of concern raised during the discussion over the clubs was the fact that the clubs do not charge for membership. The clubs are free as their existence is concerned with the maintenance of the vehicles and, as such, are entirely dependent on students being happy to give their time to the clubs for free. If a membership fee was charged the clubs would be asking a select group of students to pay to keep the university's mascots available which is absurd.

Any club event beyond that of ensuring the vehicles carry out their function as Mascots are charged to the members of the club on a 'pay-per-play' basis. So if a membership fee is charged then it would be the people looking after the vehicles that would have to pay when they are paying for all the club events already.

Alumni contribute an enormous amount to the both the finances of the clubs and in supporting club activities / mechanical work. They pay approximately three or four times the economic cost for each event they attend. Currently there is over £15,000 worth of equipment in the garages donated by alumni and they provide invaluable expertise and training worth thousands of pounds completely free of charge (no motor club budget includes entries for instructors, despite the high level of training required to safely operate the vehicles).

Under the current set-up, members pay for their use of the vehicle (e.g. petrol, part of the wear and tear, entry and travel costs on trips). External users (e.g. College) contribute to running costs for their events - e.g. cost of fuel, money for cleaning materials when used at graduation, etc. The costs required to keep the vehicles insured and mechanically roadworthy are covered by the grant. Without the grant they can't be safely and legally maintained, and no-one would be able to use them.

The amount of money required to keep the vehicles on the road is a fixed figure and is irrespective of the number of people doing the maintenance. Safe

maintenance and operation of the vehicles are complex tasks. New members are trained by current students and Alumni, who already contribute considerable financial, logistical and practical assistance.

Reflection and Recommendations

These reflections are based on the experiences of both current and past members of the clubs' committees, some of whom had experience of running the clubs under the current and previous management systems. Several possible proposals were discussed with the Deputy President for Clubs and Societies, and the Motor Clubs' collective recommendations are set out here.

The possible restriction in the amount of grant provided to the Motor Clubs – when insufficient members join – is a very grave concern to us. We, as Motor Clubs, need a certain level of funding to keep the vehicles running and on the road. This is independent of the level of student interest in being a member. If we do not have sufficient funds to keep the vehicles operational then the vehicles deteriorate and will not be in any state to fulfil their purpose of being student Mascots.

The level of membership is not a clear indication of how many students the clubs reach as very few of the students that benefit from the club ever become members. Additionally, the vehicles do raise the profile of the Union and the College when they participate in events – the benefit from this is not quantifiable and as such it is not possible to measure the benefit that the vehicles (and by extension Motor Clubs) provide to the Union and the student body. Most people that join the clubs are those interested in getting experience of hands-on engineering and looking after the vehicles. The rest of the members of the clubs are those people who are involved with the social side of the clubs, this group will often be reduced in size when the vehicle is off the road – which is precisely the time at which Union funding is most needed. In the last two years the clubs have had to petition students to join so we can reach our target to get our grant and not be closed. Within the last week membership of VVMC has increased by over 200% when people joined the club to ensure that it met its membership target; while these people might not have joined the club under other circumstances they are very supportive of the vehicles and enjoy seeing them at various events.

The membership target was not instigated to restrict the budgets of the Motor Clubs – but rather to prevent the clubs becoming too inward facing and losing sight of their broader role within College life. With this in mind, we propose that the Motor Clubs continue to be “membership clubs” but with a lower membership target of 10 members (as opposed to the current 20). We feel that this figure more closely reflects the number of people who are interested in the mechanical side of the vehicles and is thus more achievable, especially when a club is unable to organise trips due to their respective vehicle being off the road. The clubs would be very active if they had 10 members as it is difficult for more than three people to work on a specific part at one moment in time. However, the target is high enough to prevent the clubs becoming too insular as we would have to continue to recruit new members every year. The clubs would carry on requiring students to become members before taking part in club activities (as previously stated it is not feasible to require membership of people who are in contact with the vehicles at Union, other societies or College events).

The clubs have very much appreciated the support and expertise that the RCC have given to them. The RCC Treasurer has been especially helpful in ensuring that the clubs' finances continue to remain healthy and clarifying any queries that the committees have had.

We would like to continue to be part of the RCC as it allows us to have a clearly defined system for financial authorisation and accountability. Given the unique nature of the clubs we wish to highlight the importance of the clubs being present at the CSB budgeting meeting to ensure that informed decisions can be made about our grant applications to ensure the appropriate level of financial support is provided.

Finally, we would like to suggest that, regardless of what (if any) changes are made to the management structure of the Motor Clubs, the situation is again reviewed in 24 months (i.e. December 2014). Any changes will need to be reviewed in light of any matters arising in the intervening time. In any case, the past 18 months have been somewhat atypical, with all the vehicles being off the road for significant periods of time, thus issues which we have not yet considered may arise and need to be discussed.