

SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS

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The RSCM has recently concluded agreements with each of the five key RSCM partner organizations around the world: America, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. These important agreements – the first of their kind for the RSCM – govern the relationship between each territory and the RSCM in the UK, including the responsibilities of each party.

With an ever-increasing emphasis on governance, especially in the aftermath of notable charity scandals – Oxfam in Haiti, and Kids Company in the UK being two of the highest profile examples – the emphasis on good governance wherever the RSCM ‘brand’ exists is of paramount importance. In this age of instant communication, and the ability with social media to comment widely (and not always accurately), any issues relating to safeguarding, fraud, or other misdemeanours can quickly take on a life of their own and cause untold damage to a charity’s reputation.

The desire to reach agreements with the overseas RSCM partners stretches back to John Harper’s leadership back in 2007 and the Memorandum of Understanding. Discussions continued until the York 2013 International Summer School when the outline of a ‘franchise’ model was discussed, under which each National Board would be independent and responsible (in governance terms) for the activities in each country, including their local subsidiary branches, and for administering local membership.

The RSCM Council adopted this model as part of the 2014 strategic plan and drafted an agreement for discussion. Unfortunately, various delays prevented the widespread circulation of a ‘final’ agreement until 2018. The intention at this stage was to have just one agreement that would be ‘acceptable to all of the partner organizations’. However, when the final draft was circulated, it was discovered that the operating mode for each country was significantly different. For example, in America there are no ‘branches’ and everybody pays membership fees to RSCM America (which then pass on a ‘capitation’ fee to the RSCM in the UK). But in Australia, fees are paid to the UK by the branch in each of the federal states. Similar variations occur with the other RSCM partners.

With the realization that aspects of the draft agreement would have to be customized, a lengthy round of negotiations started. Although sometimes it seemed we were not all on the same page as our International Partners (for example, which jurisdiction should apply to the agreement, and how disputes would be settled), I am pleased to say that for the most part the discussions were cordial and always conducted with a view to reaching an agreement that would work for each party.

At face value, each agreement appears to be almost identical, but in fact each includes the key elements of customization that make them work for each territory as well as for the RSCM in the UK.

I should like to pay tribute to the Boards of each territory for understanding the rationale for having the agreements, and their cooperation in drafting and concluding the discussions.

As the RSCM looks to the future, and in particular its centenary in 2027, we should be proud of the international reach of the RSCM brand, and look forward with confidence to increased cooperation and activity in each territory.