



Organisation Development Group  
Workstream 7 - Clubs Working Group

# Proposed Strategy for Clubs 2020 - 2024

Draft Final Paper  
28<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
v1.2

## Version History

Version	Date	Author(s)	Reasons for change	Sections changed
1.0	05/02/2020	Mike Spooner	Initial draft for ODG comment	
1.1	20/02/2020	Mike Spooner	Draft for Clubs Committee comment	
1.2	28/02/2020	Mike Spooner	Incorporating Clubs Comm, ODG group and Board comments	Introduction, supporting our strategy and executive summary added Minor revisions to most strategies

## Distribution

Organisational Review Group  
BMC Affiliated Clubs  
BMC Local Areas  
BMC National Council

## Background

The aim of this document is to complete the Terms of Reference for the WS7 Clubs sub-group, and provide a strategy to address the issues we identified with the BMC's products and services for clubs, and provision for clubs and groups currently outside of the BMC's umbrella.

The strategy takes the form of a work plan for future BMC volunteers to take forward. In our [report of June 2019](#), endorsed by the Board, we proposed an updated structure for the volunteer resource that supports BMC clubs. This plan will provide these new groups with a clear direction as they bed in, and will ensure visibility of their effectiveness, as clubs see positive changes being driven by the new structure.

This plan has been developed considering the issues uncovered in the research phase of our group's work. The themes of our findings have been turned into four strategic goals for the future BMC Club Development Group to pursue. A series of projects has been suggested to fulfill each of these goals over the course of the strategic cycle. This has drawn on the range of activities we carried out over the course of 2019 including consultation with clubs, interviews with BMC staff, analysis of clubs data, review of BMC products and services, and engagement with some external groups. Many of the ideas have been further developed through conversations with BMC volunteers and workshopping with the Clubs' Committee.

Once finalised, this strategy will be published and circulated to clubs. It will provide a succinct guide for what clubs can expect of future BMC volunteers working on their behalf. The document will be handed over to the Club Development Group who will be able to prioritise and develop these projects into their work plans.

For clarity, the background and research that underpins this approach has been largely omitted in this draft, as the vast majority was contained within the [report of June 2019](#). This document should be read and understood in the context of that report. A concise consultation report summarising those findings will be produced for publishing alongside the final strategy.

It is important that clubs have a meaningful input into the work done on their behalf. We encourage clubs to provide their comments on this draft at their local area meeting, through their local BMC clubs rep or via the [ODG website](#) by the 22nd March 2020. A final version will be presented to the Board at their April 2020 meeting.

## Feedback Sought

Clubs are asked to review the draft strategy, and consider the following questions:

1. Do you agree with the direction of the strategy, the aim and the four objectives?
2. Do you agree with the proposed projects? Can you see any practical issues?
3. Are there other areas of work we could do that would help us reach our objectives?
4. Is there anything you think that would be relevant to your club that has been omitted / missed from the projects and objectives?

## Executive Summary

This document sets out our vision for evolving the relationship between the BMC and its affiliated clubs over the coming years. We've set four objectives to reach our goal before 2024, laid out the work needed to achieve them and defined key measures of our success.



## Introduction

This strategy forms the final output of the clubs workstream of the BMC's Organisational Development Group. This group has been working since December 2018 to review all aspects of the BMC's relationship with and support for its affiliated clubs.

In its [report of June 2019](#), the group presented the findings of its consultation and research exercise, which identified a number of areas where improvements could be made. The report, accepted by the BMC Board, recommended a number of changes to structures through which clubs are represented within the BMC, and the development of a partnership relationship between the BMC and its affiliated clubs.

This strategy follows up on a number of issues identified in the original report and follows up on reviews of the BMC's products and services for clubs and the prevalence of volunteer groups currently outside of the BMC's umbrella. The aim is to provide a practical outline of work to be carried out to reach the partnership relationship outlined in the June 2019 report. This will give a clear structure for the future work of BMC clubs reps, as well as provide clubs with a clear guide to the work that will be carried out on their behalf.

## The Value of Clubs

The BMC has set out in its organisational values as part of its strategic plan for 2020-24. Climbing, walking and mountaineering clubs embody these values in many ways, and this strategy has been developed with them in mind, to ensure the BMC continues to support the work clubs do to uphold these values.

Community	Clubs are at the heart of local and national mountaineering communities, facilitating lifelong friendships and providing dedicated volunteers.
Adventure	Clubs introduce their members to adventurous experiences they may not find elsewhere and advocate personal responsibility in the mountains.
Sustainability	Clubs volunteers care for their local crags and mountains and instill respect for the natural environment and mountaineering ethics in their members.
Aspiration	Clubs are valuable environments which facilitate personal development and peer-learning of skills that help members achieve personal ambitions.
Respect	Clubs safeguard the traditions of British climbing, hill walking and mountaineering and promote inclusive an atmosphere for participants.

## **Our Goal**

*The BMC and Clubs work in partnership to promote our shared mission & values and support a thriving club community.*

The BMC recognises the huge role clubs play at a grassroots level within our sport. They provide thousands of people with their first experiences of climbing and hillwalking, cultivate lifelong friendships, and embody and encourage the ethos and ethics of mountaineering in the UK.

Clubs themselves express a desire to be more involved in BMC activities. They value the work of the BMC in areas such as Access and Conservation and recognise the potential impact of a healthy national representative body. Often, however, they feel like they have little influence within the organisation and do not experience the benefits of being part of a larger whole.

The relationship between the representative body and its affiliated clubs should be a mutually beneficial one. The BMC should be able to harness the potential of a nationwide community of volunteers to increase the impact of its work at a grassroots level. Clubs should not just experience the direct benefits of their affiliation fee, but should derive value from being part of an extended network of clubs with shared goals and have the ability to influence and contribute to policy work carried out on their behalf.

As participation in climbing and hillwalking activities grows, nurturing a healthy and collegial club community will ensure that the BMC can extend its reach to all areas of the mountaineering community and safeguard its position as the representative body for all climbers and walkers across England and Wales.

## Four Strategic Objectives

To drive change and realise the benefits of partnership relationship with affiliated clubs, the BMC needs to focus its clubs-related work in a number of areas. The following four objectives set out what the BMC needs to achieve if we are to reach our ambitious goal. Each project recommended in this strategy should clearly contribute to achieving one of these objectives. Taken together, they describe the behaviours that the BMC should show if we have been successful by the end of this strategic cycle.

The following pages outline each of our four objectives, why they are necessary, what steps we will take to achieve them and how we will measure their success.



## **Objective 1**

The BMC actively seeks the views of Clubs and promotes opportunities to contribute to national and local initiatives.

### **Why are we doing this?**

Clubs need to have clear pathways to influence the work done on their behalf and are a vital source of volunteers who want to play their part in the BMC's work. If the BMC and its affiliated clubs are to truly work in partnership, the BMC needs to be proactive in engaging and involving clubs in policy-making and in its outreach, access and conservation work.

### **How are we going to achieve this?**

#### **1.1 Formally link clubs into policy making**

Clubs' Committee currently receives feedback on Council meetings after they have occurred, and frequently only learns of certain developments after they have already been discussed at a national level. Clubs may only find out about policy circulated for member feedback if they attend Area Meetings in person, which may also be the first occasion BMC club volunteers are made aware of discussions.

Clubs must be linked formally into policy making processes if they are to be effectively engaged for their views. Area Club Coordinators and the Club Development Group should therefore be included in the same distribution list as Areas for Council and Board papers on the same policy making cycle. This will allow club volunteers to engage with clubs at an earlier stage and provide input.

To facilitate discussion of feedback received, Club Development Group meetings should be scheduled after each round of Area Meetings and before the following Council meeting. This is essential to help inform the new voting councillors for clubs. The building of club networks (see 2.1 below) will allow effective and timely engagement of club committees in policy matters.

#### **1.2 Club collaborations built into early project planning**

Many BMC clubs express a desire to give more back to the mountaineering community and use their resources to contribute to the BMC's work at a local, national and international level. In the past, calls for participation in initiatives have come very close to public launch dates. However, due to their meeting cycles and a tendency to plan their programs of activities well in advance, clubs often struggle to answer these calls at short notice. Club volunteer time is a precious commodity, thus opportunities for club involvement need to be as accessible and streamlined as possible.

The BMC should not miss opportunities to harness the power of its grassroots network of affiliated clubs to increase the impact of its initiatives and programs. Consideration of whether clubs could significantly increase the impact of a project should happen at a formative stage, and the BMC should ensure that this is built into its project planning process.

Early engagement with the BMC Club Officer and volunteer reps at an early stage of project planning is key to identifying opportunities for clubs to contribute and they can provide advice on the support and resources clubs may need. They can also facilitate early approaches to clubs, allowing them the time to include activities in their programs.

### **1.3 BMC volunteer reps refocus on club engagement**

BMC clubs are supported by a group of dedicated volunteers with a deep understanding of how clubs operate. Volunteer time is a precious resource and needs to be spent in a way that is manageable for those giving up their time and maximises their impact on clubs.

Currently, the most significant proportion of volunteer rep time is taken up attending the four clubs committee meetings a year. This involves significant amounts of travel, as reps are based in all areas of England and Wales, and, especially for the two weekend meetings which often require overnight stays, requires significant commitments from volunteers to plan to attend. A clubs committee volunteer, travelling from 90 minutes away, would spend in excess of 28 hours per year just attending four meetings.

With the change in structures of club-focused committees (see 'Supporting our Strategy' below) and the removal of the requirement to attend quarterly meetings, Area Club Coordinators (ACCs) will be able to focus more time on engaging with clubs they represent. The time now spent attending and travelling to meetings can be spent building relationships and engagement with club committees. Crucially, this time can be much more spread out over the course of the year, and allows volunteers to give their time flexibly whenever they are able.

For clubs, this personal contact is something that is greatly valued, and better engagement with their representatives should foster a greater sense of belonging as an affiliate to the BMC. This engagement can be built and sustained through the other work contained in this strategy, which should allow clubs much greater visibility of the work done on their behalf and a clear line to give feedback to the BMC. Clubs have reported a lack of knowledge of the BMC's services for clubs, and building relationships with ACCs will go some way to plugging this communication gap.

### **1.4 Campaign to promote club membership**

Club members make up approx. 30 % of the BMC membership, however the BMC does little to promote the idea of clubs and the benefits they give their members. The BMC can demonstrate that it values the work of its affiliated clubs, and provide an immediate opportunity for clubs to contribute to its work, through a campaign encouraging club membership.

The campaign should provide clubs that wish to recruit new members the opportunity to organise recruitment events in their local area, in a format that suits their individual needs. The BMC can coordinate the project nationally, promoting activities through its communication channels and hosting details of where local events are happening. ACCs will be able to use this as an early opportunity to engage clubs, encourage them to get involved and help this new way of working bed in.

This initiative would be an important testing ground for coordinating activity between the BMC and affiliated clubs, and would immediately demonstrate the value of a partnership

approach. The period following the Olympics in 2020 would be an ideal time to run this campaign; the expected wave of new interest presents an opportunity to mutually benefit clubs that wish to recruit new members and the BMC by bringing newcomers to the sport under its umbrella.

### **1.5 Recognise and draw on club expertise**

Volunteer club leaders are vastly knowledgeable, both generally on running of clubs but many different specialisms within mountaineering. This might be within certain subsets of mountain sports, engaging with certain demographics or knowledge of the history and ethics of climbing in a certain area. The BMC should recognise this expertise and draw on this resource to support its work in relevant areas.

This form of partnership has already been demonstrated successfully, for example with the BMC/Alpine Club Young Alpinists Meets. Deeper engagement between clubs and their BMC representatives will allow a deeper understanding of the strengths of different clubs and their different expertise. This knowledge should allow the identification of more opportunities for these partnerships and the BMC should actively make use of the network of club representatives to reach out to clubs form them.

### **What does success look like?**

The BMC has carried out several national initiatives where clubs have had a role in the design or delivery of local events.

Growth in the number of club members of the BMC.

Increase in club engagement with their volunteer reps.

(Measures to be further refined and targets developed)

## **Objective 2**

The BMC facilitates inter-club networks, encourages sharing of good practice and promotes collaboration between clubs.

### **Why are we doing this?**

Club committees have a vast range of experience and knowledge, and there are few problems that clubs will experience that other clubs will not have had to deal with before. There is huge potential for clubs to support each other and work together to define and share best practice. The BMC should facilitate this, and the ability to network with similar clubs nationwide should be a key benefit of affiliating to the national representative body.

### **How are we going to achieve this?**

#### **2.1 Create networks for club groups**

When clubs affiliate to the BMC they become part of a nationwide group of hundreds of similar clubs. However, there is little opportunity for clubs to interact with each other unless they already have local contact or attend local Area Meetings. This huge pool of experience in running mountaineering clubs is not harnessed effectively. The BMC is well placed to convene clubs with similar interests, and facilitate peer-support amongst clubs.

The BMC should therefore seek a technological solution to form online networks for officers of its affiliated clubs. These should be based around current groupings (National, Student, Areas) with each network overseen by the relevant BMC volunteers (ACCs, National & Student reps). All clubs should be free to add as many committee members as they deem relevant. The networks should function as forums for clubs to seek advice from their peers, volunteer reps and BMC staff, discuss relevant policy issues as a group and share information and resources.

The technological solution will need to be developed in line with the BMC's digital strategy, but it should, as a minimum:

- provide an engaging platform for forum-style online discussions
- allow direct contact to be made between clubs, volunteer reps and staff
- facilitate collaborative working on documents etc.
- allow for storage of resources
- provide the facility for video conferencing

#### **2.2 Create repository of club materials**

Clubs should perceive that affiliation to the BMC that adds value for them and their committees, over and above an insurance policy and the benefits received by their members. A key component of this should be the ability to draw on a base of knowledge and support that would not be available if the club were not affiliated to a larger group.

The BMC should create a repository of resources that clubs can access as a member benefit. The current club guidelines should be expanded to include more advice on day-to-day running of clubs and good practice guides for putting on events, marketing clubs etc. These could take the form of written documents, or videos, webinar recordings even

online training modules. Resources could also include template forms or documents, posters, stock photos etc that clubs could make use of.

All clubs should have access to this repository and it should be a dynamic resource, being constantly updated and added to in line with club need and suggestions.

### **2.3 Use digital methods to deliver club officer training**

The BMC's affiliated clubs are spread throughout England and Wales. Despite efforts to have training venues in a wide number of locations, often these still require several hours of travel time to attend. Travel costs must either be met by attendees, or by clubs with limited resources; this is a particular barrier to attendance for university clubs. There are also the environmental costs incurred with long distance travel. Equally, there may often be only 1 or 2 dates in any particular location each year, meaning sessions last a whole day to cover many topics and volunteers must give up a significant amount of time to attend, assuming that they are available on the dates in question.

The BMC should transfer its club training as far as is practical to digital delivery methods, including using webinar platforms and live streams via social media. This has been piloted with some success with university clubs in 2019, and should be extended across all clubs and as many club committee training topics as possible. As a first step, the topics from the current Club Officer Training Days should be split into individual modules and delivered via a regular webinar format. This should have the dual benefit of far greater club engagement with the training they need most, whilst being less resource-intensive for the BMC. Recordings of past sessions can also help grow the resource repository available for clubs as a membership benefit.

### **2.4 Promote and encourage club collaborations**

In addition to promoting peer-support for dealing with issues, the BMC should also promote joint-working and collaboration between clubs where they have a mutual interest. There are isolated examples of this happening at present, from scales ranging from clubbing together to organise a joint training day, to sharing costs of huts or networks for producing guidebooks.

The new clubs networks should be leveraged to increase these collaborative activities. Case studies should be actively sought out and presented via a series of website articles to provide clubs with a source of advice and lessons learned to help them create their own partnerships. These case studies should be actively promoted, in conjunction with a proactive effort by ACCs to approach clubs and offer to facilitate similar relationships. These could be themed around certain topics, with waves of similar case studies coordinated by active efforts by ACCs to broker similar approaches.

Over time, these activities should become business-as-usual for ACCs and other club reps. Long-term, there is potential for this to link into BMC programs such as subsidised training courses, which could be provided in areas where groups of clubs come together to demonstrate demand.

## **2.5 Engage with clubs to develop good practice advice**

Currently clubs have little engagement with guidance provided by the BMC. Some of the club guidelines on the BMC website are more than 10 years old and there is a great deal of potential for greater information sharing between clubs.

The establishment of the clubs networks should be leveraged to start a program of consulting with clubs to systematically update the BMC's Club Guidelines, drawing on the range of expertise in club committees. Draft documents should be circulated via the networks for comment, and committee members with the relevant expertise and experience invited to contribute to the writing of new documents.

Following the update of the formal club guidelines, this work should be extended to source examples of good practice in new areas and produce guidance and case studies for these. Success stories should be actively promoted, to spread ideas to other clubs and generate ideas for other case studies to share.

Involving clubs with these discussions should lead to identification of new areas where guidance is needed and encourage a culture of peer-support between clubs. This program of work would serve as a significant opportunity to build club engagement in the early stages of the club networks and demonstrate their value.

## **2.6 Improve communications tools for BMC volunteers**

The success of this strategy requires effective engagement with club committees. The projects suggested should provide plenty of initiatives to engage with. However, communications between BMC staff and volunteers, and with club officers is a significant bottleneck. Clubs often report not receiving communications, finding the website difficult to navigate and are often unaware of training opportunities etc that are available for them.

The nomination of a 'communications contact' introduced in 2019 was intended to counter the issue of the wrong members of committees receiving relevant communications, but this has had poor take up among clubs. Contacting student clubs is also particularly problematic when students' union staff are named as the contact.

As a priority, club contacts must be overhauled. Clubs should be able to nominate as many contacts as they wish. Contacts should be assigned an appropriate role with committee positions to allow the right person to be contacted in the correct circumstance (ie. training dates sent to the training officer, invoices to the treasurer). Clubs should be able to assign multiple roles to one person, or have a separate email for each role, as well as have the ability to specify a generic inbox.

BMC volunteers are asked to engage proactively with clubs. They should be assigned an official, position specific BMC inbox so that this can be actively promoted without advertising personal addresses, and clubs will have consistent contacts as volunteer roles change hands. These would need to be monitored by staff, however this would effectively be no change as all emails currently sent by volunteer reps are cc'd to the BMC Clubs Officer. This also allows more effective volunteer job shares, for example where there are two National club reps.

Finally, in the long term a significant overhaul in the BMC website is required to collate clubs information in one place, with its own new feed, events calendar, access to the resource repository and contacts list. This has been trialled with a landing page for student clubs, but would be much more effective with a proper sub-site for all club officers.

### **What does success look like?**

Successful creation of club networks and resource repository.

All current guideline documents updated within strategy period with input from clubs.

Increased (Target number?) number of club officer training sessions delivered digitally.

All clubs submitted at least two email contacts and official addresses for volunteer BMC reps.

(Measures to be further refined and targets developed)

## **Objective 3**

The BMC focuses its resources to provide targeted, relevant support to address key priorities to ensure the health of clubs.

### **Why are we doing this?**

An in-depth review of club membership data revealed several areas where the characteristics of BMC club members are significantly different to BMC individual members and participants in mountaineering activities more generally. Additionally, concerning patterns were identified in the rate of attrition of newly-formed clubs. The BMC needs to ensure that limited BMC staff and volunteer time is deployed in areas that will have the biggest impact on the long-term health of its affiliated clubs.

### **How are we going to achieve this?**

#### **3.1 Focus on student member retention**

The least represented adult age group amongst BMC clubs are 25-30 year olds, representing just 7.3 % of club members (cf. 11.8 % individual members). However, in the Sport England Active Lives Survey (Nov 2018), a greater proportion of 25-35 year olds reported regularly partaking in climbing, hillwalking or mountaineering activities than all older age groups.

Aside from the over 50s, the only other age category where the proportion of club members is greater than for individuals is the 18-25 year-olds, partly due to the number of affiliated student clubs. Clearly, many of these members are lost as they move on from their university clubs, and are not going on to join senior local or national clubs.

Student members are currently very disengaged from the BMC's activities, and may not realise the importance of its work in facilitating their participation in their sport, through for example access work or club committee training. The Student Panel should prioritise building engagement with the BMC amongst students and celebrating the work it does that is relevant to students' activities. This will ensure that greater numbers of those leaving university clubs value the BMC as an organisation, and encourage more to become 'members for life'.

Good practice guidance should be produced from engagement with clubs that have good feeder relationships with student clubs and this should be proactively promoted to clubs looking to recruit younger members, with the support of volunteer BMC reps to make local connections. This should be supported by an annual cycle of communications aimed at students nearing graduation, promoting next steps within senior clubs and potentially with offers on individual BMC membership. The activities under Objective 4 should also aid in capturing members that move on to clubs and groups outside of the BMC umbrella and a streamlined approach to creating more-loosely constituted clubs (objective 4.4) should be directly promoted to student clubs to encourage the growth of new 'graduate' clubs.

### **3.2 Support and encourage new youth clubs**

There are currently less than 250 members of BMC affiliated clubs under the age of 18 in England and Wales. There has been a huge explosion in young people discovering climbing and mountaineering through local walls, many of whom through structured wall-based clubs and youth squads. According to Sport England Data, in 2018/19 more than 550,000 school age children reported having participated in climbing activities in the preceding week, a comparable participation rate to cricket, martial arts and tennis.

The BMC has been right to develop a new category of youth club, to give those wishing to take their first steps outdoors the ability to do this through a specialist youth-focused group. The BMC's clubs volunteers should support the Training, Youth and Walls Committee in promoting this new category of club, through providing expertise and resource to promote the creation of new clubs. ACCs should actively approach youth groups on their patch who may wish to take this offer up and assist them with setting up the club and the process of affiliating to the BMC.

Collaboration with Area Youth Coordinators is required, however local ACCs can bring club expertise that will be invaluable to help these new clubs succeed. Development of guidance for this club category should take into account work to expand flexibility in club operating models and BMC criteria under objective 4, to encourage maximum take up of this option.

### **3.3 Promote and grow family club membership**

Currently, less than 20% of clubs offer a family membership, and a similar proportion offer membership to under-18s. Less than 1 % of club members are under-18 years old, compared to 5.5 % of individual members. Similarly, 31-40 and 41-50 year olds form a significantly smaller proportion of club members compared to individual members. Significant progress could be made in these numbers by supporting clubs to be more family-friendly.

Clubs often cite concerns with safeguarding as a reason they feel unable to encourage membership for under-18s. The BMC provides a great deal of guidance on its website relating to its safeguarding policy, including specific guidelines for clubs. The BMC needs to proactively engage with clubs to determine whether this guidance is effective, and if any further support is needed. Examples of good practice in engaging young people in clubs should be sought and shared to encourage more clubs to open their membership to under-18s.

Club members should also be incentivised to introduce their families to club membership. While recent work to introduce a family membership category for club members is to be welcomed, there is significant scope for the BMC to be more ambitious in this area. The simpler solution of lowering the under-18 club membership price as far as reasonably possible, ideally to a nominal amount, should be considered to incentivise parents to bring their children on club activities.

### **3.4 Directly support small club development**

Small clubs with less than 40 members make up more than 40 % of the number of BMC affiliated clubs. This number has been in decline however, and there are many examples looking at membership data, of new start-ups failing and dropping off our records. Through being affiliated to the BMC, these clubs should be able to tap into the knowledge base of

being part of a larger network, and the BMC should actively nurture these clubs to ensure a thriving grassroots club scene.

BMC club volunteers have an important role to play in this. Area Club Coordinators (ACCs) should start a program of contacting the committees of all the small clubs on their patch directly, to ascertain their development goals and direct them to any support they need. They should also encourage peer-support between clubs, creating links between clubs experiencing issues and those that have faced similar before.

Development goals that are specified by clubs should be recorded, and ACCs be able to after an appropriate period of time to determine whether the club needs further support. By nationally collating the goals of small clubs, BMC reps can better shape club support programs to ensure that club needs are being met by training provision etc. This process should begin as soon as a new club is affiliated, and representatives should proactively contact new affiliates as soon as is practical to ensure engagement right from the start of their relationship with the BMC.

### **3.5 BMC should collect equality, diversity and inclusion data**

As the National Representative Body for mountaineering, the BMC has a responsibility to ensure that its membership is representative of all those who partake in climbing and hillwalking activities and this extends to its affiliated clubs. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is about promoting opportunities for everyone to be involved with a club, and to give clubs the support they need to remove barriers to participation.

As part of our research for this work, we were able to identify differences in the age profiles and gender splits between BMC individual members and the club members from the available data, and this has informed our recommendations for future focus areas. However, no such data existed at the time for other protected characteristics, such as ethnicity, disability or sexuality. This kind of information has previously been collected on an ad-hoc basis, led by the Equity Steering Group. An Equality Survey was carried out during 2019, however data was not available disaggregated by BMC Club membership, and the sample was not suitable to give an accurate picture of the club population, evidenced by the age and gender profiles of respondents.

If it is to be effective in supporting the health of its affiliated clubs and to ensure that opportunities to join clubs exist for all, the BMC must have a full and deep understanding of its club members. The BMC should therefore routinely collect EDI data about its club membership, either through club membership returns or another mechanism, although it is important that this process is as streamlined as possible, to avoid unnecessary burdens being placed on clubs.

### **What does success look like?**

Demographic differences in BMC club and individual members decrease over time.

Long-term these should approach nationally reported participation in mountaineering activities.

Rate of loss of recently-created or -affiliated clubs decreases.

BMC has sufficient data available to identify under-represented groups within clubs and remove barriers to participation.

(Measures to be further refined and targets developed)

## **Objective 4**

The BMC recognises and engages with the broad range of clubs and volunteer groups that facilitate participation in mountain sports.

### **Why are we doing this?**

A revolution has happened in climbing and walking clubs. Thousands of people are regularly participating in mountain sports, indoors and out, through loosely constituted groups. Some of these are as informal as a social media group for friends who meet regularly at a wall, others, often organised on platforms such as Meetup, run much more formalised sessions and aside from a few key differences, operate much like a 'traditional' club. If the BMC is to remain the representative body for all who participate in climbing and walking in the UK, it needs to recognise and engage with these groups.

### **How are we going to achieve this?**

#### **4.1 Broaden BMC criteria for club affiliation**

The eligibility criteria for a club to affiliate to the BMC contained within its Articles of Association already define a club in broad terms (that its principal object is Mountaineering, it is headquartered in Great Britain, that it is controlled by its members, and that the BMC Board considers affiliated in the best interests of the BMC). However, the criterion that 'it is controlled by its own members' is significantly limiting in the number of club structures that would be admissible, and excludes a large number of modern groups which are director-led.

The articles should allow the BMC the flexibility to engage with all volunteer groups involved in mountaineering, and not preclude any clubs which may be perfectly suitable affiliates. The 'controlled by its own members' should be replaced with a clause that an affiliated club should be 'run for the benefit of its members and on a not-for-personal-profit basis'. This aligns with feedback from clubs and volunteers, that the only true red line in club affiliation are groups which may be seen to profit from the work of other volunteers.

More detailed work would be required on the wording of this clause to minimise unintended consequences, and should be phased in conjunction with work on updated club structures (objective 4.3). Further guidelines may be necessary to preclude clubs that may not, for example, comply with conditions of our insurance policy, but the articles themselves should be flexible enough to allow the Board to make these decisions. The current process of Board and Council review of club applications, with input from clubs and volunteers remains as a mechanism to sift any applications which may not be in the BMC's interest.

#### **4.2 Provide maximum flexibility in club processes**

The processes to gain and maintain affiliation to the BMC, currently require clubs to stick to several rigid requirements. Renewals are processed in one step at a single time of year (January for senior clubs, October for student clubs). Club members joining more than 6 months through the year have a 50 % discount, although student members pay the same

rate year-round, but all must renew at the start of the next membership cycle. All members of the club must be declared and paid for to be included on the insurance policy.

Although this system works for many currently affiliated clubs, this does not align with the model of many groups that are not currently affiliated, where members can join for a period of 12 months at any point of the year. It would be a significant burden for these groups to change membership cycles, and forms a disincentive for groups that constantly recruit new members throughout the year.

The BMC should adapt its processes to allow maximum flexibility for club affiliation. The feasibility of 12 month rolling memberships from date of joining for club members, as exists for individual memberships should be investigated. This could be supported by offering a monthly direct for due affiliation fees from clubs rather than an annual invoice, and through updating MSO to allow individual club members to input and update their own data. At the very least, clubs should be able to specify their own renewal years. None of these steps should preclude existing clubs from maintaining the current arrangement.

#### **4.3 Review, broaden and update club structure guidelines**

Currently, all BMC guidance assumes a very formalised, democratic club structure. This is very far removed from the model of many new groups being set up today. Many are director-led (rather than being democratically-led), others have no clear leadership structures and many members of these groups appreciate the lack of complex layers of formality.

A working group should convene to define other common models of club, both currently affiliated and external to the BMC. This should include more loosely-constituted groups and director-led models, which may require for example, consultation with our insurers over or whether new club membership categories should be created. Where a general model does not exist for a less formally constituted group, an effort should be made to create one that can accept these groups in some way within the organisation.

The group should also consider acceptable sub-structures that would allow a sub-section of a larger group to affiliate to the BMC separately from the wider group. Although this already possible under the current criteria, this is not well known and the scope is quite limited, therefore maximum flexibility for these arrangements should be the aim. There are many casual indoor climbing groups that have large growing memberships, with a proportion keen to move outdoors. This change would allow these groups to form outdoor sections, without the unnecessary expense of fully affiliating the entire group.

Where new models and routes to affiliation are identified, the BMC should update its published guidance to reflect this, and clearly advertise the range of groups that are welcome to affiliate. This work should also consider the structure requirements of clubs that might register in the new youth club category.

#### **4.4 Provide off-the-shelf club models**

The BMC should be proactive in encouraging existing groups of climbers and walkers to set up clubs. These groups should be able to choose from a selection of models whatever is right for them. Currently only one constitution template is available that outlines a

traditional member-led club. Additionally, the New Club Application pack currently assumes that the new club is already set up and ready to affiliate.

The BMC should produce a series of how to start a club guides for club models of different levels of formality. These should streamline the process of starting a club as much as possible, to facilitate any group of people with no prior knowledge of clubs to start one from scratch. They should include off-the-shelf templates for constitutions and other important documents, that can be adapted with minimal effort. Complete checklists for things to think about should be provided

These off-the-shelf club models should be proactively promoted to encourage those thinking of starting a club to do so. BMC staff and volunteers should be made available to discuss ideas with and guide those setting up new clubs. This will also facilitate very informal groups being able to easily form a club under the BMC umbrella.

#### **4.5 Outreach program for casual and social groups**

In many areas of the country, casual groups organised through platforms such as Meetup are carrying out important work giving thousands of people their first taste of walking or climbing. Currently, there is very little engagement between these groups and the BMC.

Area Club Coordinators carry out a program to reach out and form relationships with large groups such as these (local walking groups or groups based at climbing walls), to understand their support needs and development goals. The BMC should consider producing guidance for groups operating solely from a social media platform, that may encourage engagement with the BMC for advice and encourage these groups to develop into fully-fledged clubs.

Many groups in towns and cities based around indoor walls may have ambitions to take their climbing outdoors, but may lack the experience or knowledge to do this. Having built links, BMC volunteers could advise on this, encourage affiliation or facilitate links to established clubs that may be looking to recruit.

#### **What does success look like?**

Growth in the number of affiliated groups.

Growth in applications to affiliate using provided templates.

Growth in the number of feeder relationships formed between casual groups and existing clubs.

(Measures to be further refined and targets developed)

## **Supporting our Strategy**

Our research & consultation identified the need to develop a more collaborative approach to working with clubs whilst strengthening club influence within the organisation. In our [report of June 2019](#), accepted by the Board, we recommended a series of changes to how clubs are represented within the BMC. These changes will facilitate the move to a more mutually beneficial relationship between the BMC and affiliated clubs.

### **What's happening?**

#### **Local Area Club Coordinators**

Local Area Club Reps will be re-focussed on building relationships with, supporting and facilitating links between clubs on their patch. They will convene to coordinate work nationally and to feed club views into decision making bodies.

#### **Club Development Group**

A slimmed-down Clubs Committee will be re-tasked with carrying out work on Clubs behalf, building on knowledge provided from local volunteers on the ground and developing partnership between clubs and the BMC. It will bring together working groups to clubs to deliver work aligned with the BMC's Clubs Strategy.

#### **Formal Council votes**

The Clubs Chair will lead the work of the new Club Development Group. The Clubs Councillor, elected by all club members, will represent the interests of club members at the Clubs Development Group. Both will be voting members of the reconstituted National Council.

### **How will it affect my club?**

#### **Local contact**

You will retain a Rep in your local area, tasked with supporting partnerships between your club and the BMC and gathering club views for national bodies.

#### **Stronger local links**

Your local Rep in your area will be tasked with supporting and engaging with clubs directly, as well as building partnerships between clubs and groups external to the BMC.

#### **Better club support**

By making better use of volunteer time, the new structure should allow us to spend more time engaging with clubs and give them more opportunities to be involved with BMC.

#### **Stronger club voice**

Stronger relationships with clubs will better facilitate gathering of club views and clubs will have a formal say in policy made at the Members' Council.

### **More Information**

Much more detail on the implementation of these changes, and the rationale behind them, can be found in the Clubs Workstream [report of June 2019](#).