



**SOCIETY OF RESEARCH
SOFTWARE ENGINEERING**

TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT

14th March 2019 - 30th June 2020

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The objective of the Society of Research Software Engineering is to advance the practice of research software engineering for the public benefit in such ways as the charity trustees consider appropriate.

The Society organises an annual conference and other events such as training, meetings, workshops or seminars. The Society may undertake or sponsor research related to Research Software Engineering and provide information, advocacy and advice in relation to Research Software and RSEs. It may also provide grants or other finance for activities that will help meet the Society's aims.

All trustees have regard to the commission's public benefit guidance when exercising any powers or duties to which the guidance is relevant. Specifically, Trustees are made aware of the guidance as part of their induction and each trustee has been registered with the charity commission. The guidance is considered for any decisions made by the charity and there have been no deviations from the guidance to report.

The Society accepts contributions from volunteers, specifically, RSECon19 was led by the Society but relied heavily on volunteers for both the organising committee and the venue volunteers during the conference. SORSE - the series replacing this year's conference is fully staffed by volunteers from many countries, usually through their national RSE chapter.



ACHIEVEMENTS



IN NUMBERS

292

Paid members in the society as of June 2020.

360

Attendees at our conference in 2019, with 123 speakers, 12 volunteers, 16 committee members and two co-chairs.

2112

Members on our community slack channel. An increase of 851.





FORMALISING OUR STRUCTURE

The Society became a charitable incorporated organisation on the 14th March 2019. This represented a major achievement and a provision of a governance structure which has allowed the society to take control of its own finance and future. The founding trustees set up initial systems, infrastructure and policies for running the charity in accordance with the constitution and applicable law during an intense period of work in spring and summer 2019. This included setting up bank accounts and basic financial recording systems, administrative systems, defining membership terms and conditions and agreeing key operational policies including a data handling policy, a code of conduct and the practical procedure for running trustee elections.

In accordance with our constitution, this reporting period has seen an election held in September 2019 in which six of the founding trustees were re-elected and six new trustees joined them. Over the reporting period, the new trustee board has put in place a structure for trustee roles as well as a number of key operational policies and procedures. The trustees have voted to appoint a president, vice president, treasurer and vice treasurer and established a system of shadowing for key roles in which newly elected trustees work with experienced trustees to ensure that there is always a smooth transition of roles following elections. We have set up an online system for managing tasks using Github issue boards and a template for trustee meeting agendas and minutes.

We have started to define a system of trustee working groups to promote more efficient collaboration on the highest priority objectives between small groups of board members between meetings, though the full implementation of this was delayed due to the Covid-19 lockdown during the last quarter of the reporting period. We have refined and formalised the governance arrangements for our annual conference including how the programme chair and volunteer committee are appointed and their terms of reference for delegated responsibility and decision making in delivering the conference and interacting with the trustees. We hope to introduce further working groups and/or subcommittees in the future, providing a wider range of opportunities for members to make a concrete contribution and influence our activities in a structured way.

RSE CONFERENCE 2019



The Annual RSE Conference was held at the University of Birmingham, Tuesday 17th to Thursday 19th September 2019. It attracted 360 attendees, 123 speakers, and had the assistance of 12 volunteers, 16 committee members and two co-chairs. The conference had keynote talks from Andy Stanford-Clark, Chief Technology Officer for IBM in UK and Ireland and Dr Ben Goldacre, best-selling author, broadcaster, campaigner, medical doctor and academic. We attracted 16 sponsors and held a pre-conference sponsored social event as well as a Gala dinner. We received 174 feedback responses giving a very positive overall review, with 94% describing the event as excellent or almost excellent and 98% saying they would attend again.

Due to the impact of Covid-19 we made the difficult decision to cancel the 2020 conference by a unanimous vote by the Trustees. This was done prior to securing a venue so no funds were lost and it was clearly a wise decision because lockdown for large events is unlikely to be lifted by September 2020. We know that this conference is a fantastic social, networking and skills training event for the RSE community worldwide so we'd like to reassure everyone that early planning has already begun for the RSE Conference in 2021. Lots of the early preparation work that was undertaken for the 2020 conference will be applicable to the next conference (including having an organising committee identified and substantial research on some excellent possible venues).



MEMBERSHIP

The Society officially launched paid membership in September 2019. Becoming a member of the Society offers an opportunity to support our work gaining recognition for research software engineering and helping advance research with software. In order to support our paid membership scheme we have selected a sales portal which can also manage our communication with members. This allows payment by direct debit, credit card or debit card for the annual membership fee (£20). As of the 30th of June 2020 our membership stands at 292.

"Membership
launched in
September 2019"

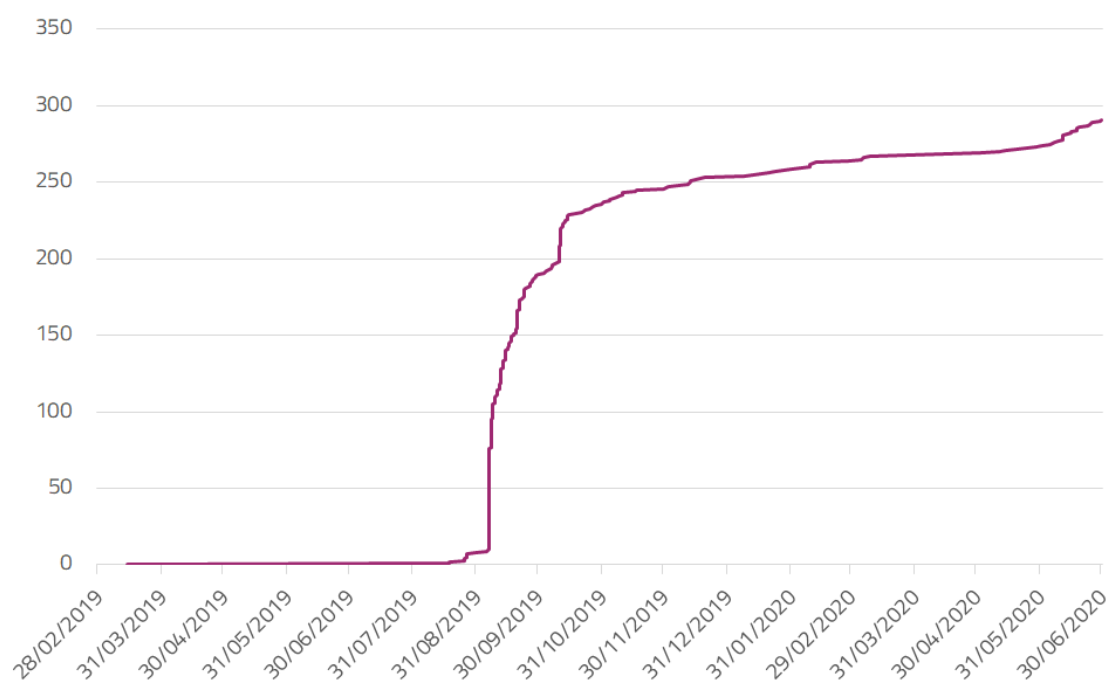




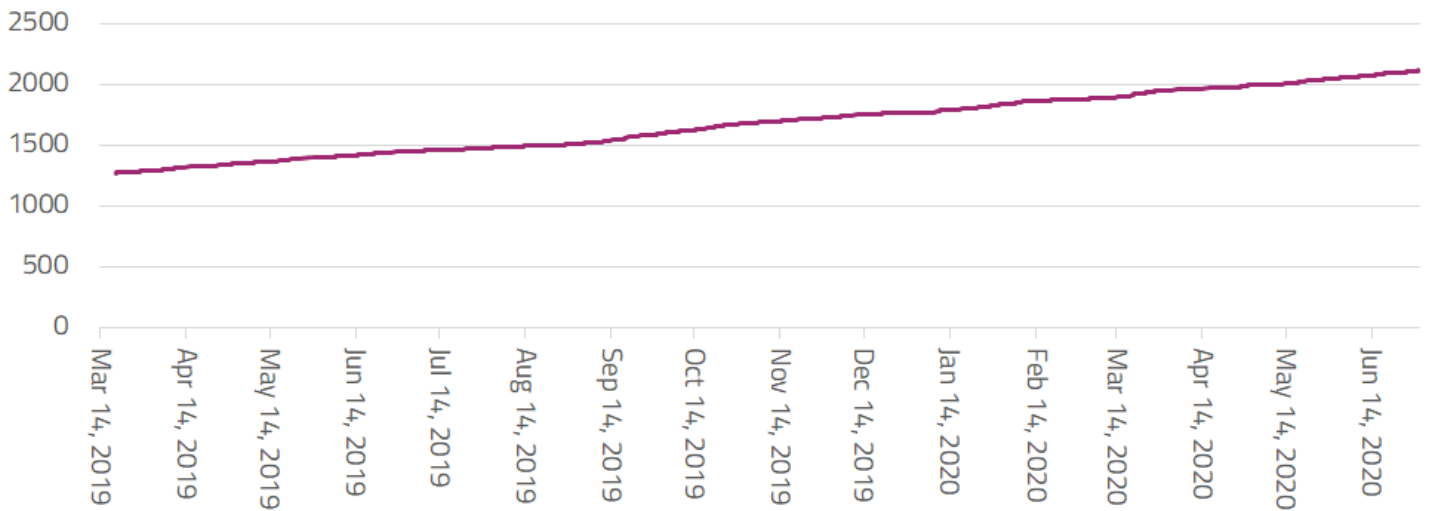
COMMUNITY

The Society officially launched a new website on 19 June 2019 using a new web portal and incorporating the membership platform. In addition to paid membership people can subscribe for free to our mailing list. Our mailing-list membership (including paying members) was 700 members on 30th June 2020. Our website provides some important new areas of information for the RSE community, including events, policies and governance for the society, news, maps of national (UK) RSE groups, an international page for information on other RSE associations and a much improved vacancies page for RSE career opportunities (in August 2019).

Paid Membership to Soc RSE



Slack Membership



Newsletter

We launched a monthly Society Newsletter in February 2020 and have provided a mechanism for members to include information which relates to our charitable objectives. We continue to provide an online community for RSEs via our Slack workspace which has 140k messages posted to date. Within the reporting period our Slack membership increased by 851 members to a total of 2112. The number of new slack channels increased by 28 to a total of 108. The new channels attracted 1108 new channel memberships.



Community Engagement

Our Trustee members have engaged with other national and international community initiatives. E.g. The RSE podcast series, a series to highlight the RSE experience. Society trustees are working with the RSE podcast series to introduce members of the community for future episodes.



ACTIVITIES AND POLICY

The Society has supported a number of key events beyond our flagship conference. We ran a two day event for 28 aspiring RSE leaders in May 2019 supported by 12 existing RSE leaders including Society trustees. The event provided information, mentoring and support for those likely to forge new RSE groups and support the careers of RSEs. We supported the RSE Leaders meetings which took place in March 2019, December 2019 and June 2020. Members of the community have reported these meetings as being an excellent network for exchange of ideas. We support the monthly series of online HPC RSE meetings that allow RSEs with an interest in high performance computing to come together and share experience and knowledge.

We sponsored the RSE South East meeting as a pilot for a wider program of sponsoring member-organised events that align with our aims. Trustees have agreed a transparent mechanism for inviting, reviewing and deciding upon requests for sponsorship but the launch of this has been delayed due to the impact of Covid-19. We are monitoring the wider situation to determine an appropriate time to go ahead with this launch. To ensure that events are supported which meet our charitable aims in the current working environment, the Society has endorsed and contributed to organising the Series of Online Research Software Events (SORSE) program. This program is led by an international committee consisting of volunteers from other national RSE chapters. The program replaces a number of cancelled international RSE conferences and has allowed the Society to further enhance our links with the international community. Broadly, the program aims to provide an opportunity for RSEs to develop and grow their skills, build new collaborations and engage with RSEs worldwide.

The Society plays an important role in influencing policy. Our Trustees sit on strategic committees such as the UKRI e-infrastructure expert group and the EPSRC e-Infrastructure SAT to ensure that the needs of RSEs are reflected by research funders. Such input helps to support programs such as the RSE Fellowship Schemes and longer term changes to funding policy to support the inclusion of RSEs on research grants. The Society has partnered with the UKRI director of e-Infrastructure to gather and report on RSE effort relating to COVID-19 work. Trustees have also contributed to published policy. E.g. UKRI's e-Infrastructure report on "The UK's research and innovation infrastructure: opportunities to grow our capability" and an OECD Science, Technology and Industry Policy Paper on "Building digital workforce capacity and skills for data-intensive science".

REPRESENTING THE SOCIETY

- "Introduction to the Society of RSE" lightning talk at UKRSE Virtual GPU Bootcamp (Anna Brown, June 2020)"
- UK RSE GPU Bootcamp" aimed at RSEs in EMEA in collaboration with OpenACC Organization and NVIDIA (Organized and delivered by Mozhgan Kabiri Chimeh, June 2020)
- "Why Recognising software experts is key to research" (Simon Hettrick, CERSE, online, 13 May 2020)
- "The growth and professionalisation of Research Software Engineers" (Simon Hettrick, Collaborations Workshop, online, 1 April 2020)
- "Software Engineering in Academic and Commercial Research" (Alys Brett, BCS Oxfordshire event, March 2020)
- "Society of Research Software Engineering" (Simon Hettrick, RS London and South East, 6 February 2020)
- Supercomputing Wales Conference, January 2020: Keynote talk (Simon Hettrick, Alys Brett "The Role of the Research Software Engineer"). Claire Wyatt participated.
- "Research Software Engineering Impact Showcase" at Computing Insight UK (Andy Turner, December 2019)
- "UK RSE and Software Sustainability" podcast for FLOSS for Science (Simon Hettrick, December 2019)
- Software in research & Research Software Engineers (Simon Hettrick, Ordnance Survey engineering group, Southampton, 21 November 2019)
- SSI and Digital Skills at OECD workshop (Simon Hettrick, OECD Global Science Forum Expert Group, 28 October 2019, Cologne)
- First NL RSE conference, Amsterdam, November 2019 (Tania Allard and Claire Wyatt participated)
- "Why Recognising Scientific Software Experts is Key to Open Science" (Simon Hettrick, Lisbon Council on behalf of EC, 13 June 2019, webinar)
- First DE-RSE conference in Berlin (4th-6th June 2019). Opening keynote: "RSEs together - building networks, groups, organisations and careers", Alys Brett. Several trustees and members spoke and participated.
- "Research software engineers to the rescue" podcast for Nature careers (Simon Hettrick, April 2019)





FINANCIAL SUMMARY

"Our income is an accumulation of operating profits from the RSE Association with the sole source of this income being from the 2016-2019 RSE conferences"

Income	£105,475
Expenses	£1,030
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Balance	£104,444
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Financial Statement

The majority of income over the accounting period has come from a large donation from the University of Southampton of £100,010. This donation represents the RSE association's account balance which was previously held in a University account. The balance is an accumulation of operating profits from the RSE Association with the sole source of this income being from the 2016-2019 RSE conferences which attracted sponsorship and attendance fees. The latest 2019 conference generated a surplus of £40,255. Our paid membership has raised a total of £5,465.

Outgoings

Our outgoings cover costs associated with the conference (only those that were incurred after the handover of the associated budget from the University of Southampton), infrastructure, sponsorship and logistics. Our outgoings appear very low for this reporting period for two reasons: Firstly, only outgoings incurred after the transfer of funds from the University of Southampton are included, so within the period February 2020 - June 2020. Secondly, our major spending plans for the latter part of the reporting period centred around our conference, sponsoring relevant events and travel, all of which were cancelled or delayed due to the Covid-19 situation. The trustees and members are finding creative ways to pursue our aims by other means but anticipate that spending will remain low whilst in-person events are not possible.

Managing Risks

The trustees have established a policy whereby the unrestricted funds not committed or invested in tangible assets held by the charity should be maintained at a level to provide financial support for one year of operation. This equates to £30,000 to cover our basic running costs and costs associated with the annual conference. The trustees consider that reserves at this level will protect the society in the event of any unexpected problems with conference funding such as a significant loss in sponsorship or in the event of forced cancellation in which we would not be eligible for refund.

The trustees have reviewed the major risks to which the charity is exposed which are broadly categorised as governance and financial. The trustees maintain a risk register to categorise risk treatment criteria. The trustees review these risks on an ongoing basis and satisfy themselves that adequate systems and procedures are in place to mitigate risk.



GOVERNANCE

The Society is a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) governed by our constitution.

Trustees, up to a maximum of 14 and a minimum of 5, are elected according to our constitution which states that at every annual general meeting of the members of the CIO, one half of the charity trustees shall retire from office. Vacancies are filled by the decision of the CIO's membership by means of a vote. The constitution sets out a further provision for trustees to be elected during the term in cases where a trustee retires or is removed during their term.

Current Trustees

Alys Brett (President)
Paul Richmond (Vice President)
Simon Hettrick (Treasurer)
Matt Williams (Vice-Treasurer)
Tania Allard (Diversity and Inclusion Lead)
Anna (Ania) Brown (Web Co-Lead)
Mihaela Duta (Membership Lead)
James Graham (Web Co-Lead)
Claire Wyatt (Conference & Communications Lead)
Andy Turner (Secretary)
Mozhgan Kabiri Chimeh
Joanna Leng

Trustees (Term Ended)

Mark Turner (until Sep '19)
Robert Haines (until Sep '19)
Matthew Johnson (until Sep '19)
Iain Bethune (until Sep '19)
Ilian Todorov (until Sep '19)
Christopher Woods (until May '19)