

Area and Branch Secretary's Guide

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Registered Charity Number 266982



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Introduction

Thank you for undertaking the role of Secretary for your Area and/or Branch. This document will hopefully provide you with some help and guidance in the role. There is lots of support for the Branch Secretary through Areas and for the Overseas Branches, through the Area 7 Team.

Area Secretaries provide vital support to Branch Secretaries. Their advice and guidance, based on shared experience and best practice, accumulated over the years and developed within the rules and regulations of the Association is invaluable.

As Branch Secretaries, you are encouraged to meet your Area Secretary. They are your first port of call if you need advice on running your Branch whether day to day or more obscure. Matters for the National Council should also be forwarded to your Area Secretary, this includes proposed awards for Life Membership and Certificates of Appreciation.

A Secretary's three primary tasks are to:

1. Ensure accurate records of membership are maintained, utilising the Central Office Database.
2. Record and retain accurate minutes of committee meetings, Branch meetings and Branch AGMs, ensuring decisions made and actions required are recorded and acted upon.
3. Act as the focus for communications with your Members, your Area and Central Office.

As the Branch Secretary, you are the link between the individual Member and the management structure of the Association as defined in the Royal Charter, which can be found on the RNA website. Your tasks include assisting with the efficient running of both your own Branch and the whole Association. [Royal Charter](#)

Every decision you make in committee should be tested against and comply with the Objects of the RNA as set out in the Royal Charter. As well as meet the Ethos of the Association being neutral in terms of politics and religion as well as diverse and inclusive. Together they are the touchstone against which decisions and choices made by your Branch members should be measured.

They are summed up in our **Core Values**:

Unity: Shared backgrounds and equality in rank. We share the same bonds, the same mindset, and even the same language (Jackspeak!). We are all equal. We are the heart and soul of the RNA.

Loyalty: To each other and our dependants. We will always support and look out for each other. Our loyalty is to all our shipmates, our local communities, the personnel and dependants of the Naval Service, along with other charities or organisations with naval connections.

Patriotism: We are proud to serve and proud to represent our country and the Naval Service. Our pride in serving our country never leaves us. Nor do we forget those who have fallen for our country or who fight now. We are deeply honoured to represent them on both a national and international level.

Comradeship: Friends in fun, fellowship and need. Your shipmates will always be here for you, whether it's about a job, ideas for a fun day out or just an arm around the shoulder. We will never leave you or your dependants in despair.

The RNA Structure

<p>The National Council The National Council is the Governing Body of the Association and it meets 4 times a year.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Council consists of elected representatives, one from each of the Areas of the UK. • It is supported by the Central Office staff under the General Secretary and specialist advisers. • The elected representatives are also Trustees of the Association. • Each year they report to Conference and thus you and your Branch members.
<p>National Council Committees: At each September meeting of the National Council the Officers and Members required for these Committees are appointed or re-appointed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The National Council is supported by two committees. • The Terms of Reference for Officers and Committees are approved by the National Council. • The names of Officers and Members of the Committees are shown in the Annual Trustee Report which can be found on the RNA website.
<p>Association Management Committee (AMC): The Committee considers the general administrative requirements of the Association including oversight of RNA Clubs, Welfare, Ceremonial, Events coordinator. Chair - National Chairman.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consists of the National Chairman and five members of National Council elected to the Committee. • The Deputy Chief of Staff is Secretary to the Committee.
<p>Finance and Administration Committee (FAC): The Committee considers financial, budgetary and linked management matters, keeping the Association's financial position, accounts and how the Association is adhering to the Budget. Costs and examines financial side of AMC initiatives and ideas. Chair - National Vice Chairman</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consists of the National Vice Chairman, Hon National Treasurer (attending in an advisory capacity) and five members of National Council elected to the Committee. • The Membership Secretary is Secretary to the Committee. • The FAC reports its conclusions and recommendations to the National Council as required.
<p>Standing Orders Committee (SOC): Organise Conference Proceedings Chair – Head of Governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises on Branch motions to ensure that they are correctly ready for Conference. • Advises and drafts amendments to Conference Standing Orders.

RNA Central Office is based in Portsmouth Dockyard and is standing by to help Area and Branch Secretaries.

The membership support team can be contacted via admin@rnassoc.org or **02392 723747**

Membership - Who can join the RNA - Any member of the public may theoretically join the RNA, as long as they meet the criteria set out in our Rules and Regulations which define the membership types:

<p>Full: All past and present members of the Naval Forces, and any person who served in the Naval Forces of a nation which was formerly a member of the British Commonwealth during the time when that nation was a member of the British Commonwealth shall be eligible for Full Membership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Member may be a member in more than one Branch (Primary and Secondary Branch). • Although RNA subscriptions are currently set to zero, members could be asked to pay a local levy to their Branch. They could be asked to pay this local levy to both branches if they have a Primary and a Secondary Branch. • A member may only hold elected Office or vote in their Primary Branch. • A Member may transfer to another Branch, or to or from the HQ Roll.
<p>Life: A Full member who has given long and honourable service to the Association may be awarded the honour of Life Membership by the Council on conditions provided in the Bye-Laws. An application form is at Appendix One, at the foot of this Guide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate Members cannot become Life Members* but may be awarded a Certificate of Appreciation. • An application form is at Appendix Two, at the foot of this Guide.
<p>Associate: The Council or any Branch may confer Associate Membership on persons who express sympathy with the objects of the Association.</p> <p>There is no National Association rule about how many Associate Members can be accepted by Branches and it is left to the judgement of each Branch to decide this, bearing in mind the overall objects of the Association.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The energy and dedication which Associate members give to the Association cannot be understated. In fact, many Branches are kept going by the efforts of their Associate membership. They are highly valued members of the Association and should generally be accorded every consideration in all activities. • Associate Members may be elected as members of Branch Main Committees with voting rights within their Branch equivalent to those of a Full or Life Member. • They may be elected to office as Honorary Secretary or Honorary Treasurer (but not as Chairman or Vice-Chairman), and are eligible to act as a Branch Delegate at Area meetings and Conferences if they have completed at least three year's membership of the Association. Certificate of Appreciation Associates have full voting rights.

<p>Serving: Serving members of the Naval Service are eligible for Serving Membership of the Association.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraged to join a Branch where they may be asked to pay a local levy and would then have the right to vote on Branch matters or De facto Serving members will be placed on the HQ Roll.
<p>Honorary: The Council, or any Branch, may confer honorary membership on persons who place their services at the disposal of the Association in an honorary capacity, but who are not eligible for Full Membership.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honorary Membership may only be given to those who are not eligible to be Full Members.

*Motion was passed at Conference 2024 to allow Life Membership to Associate Members. This requires a change to the Royal Charter which is in progress.

Membership Anomalies

The Naval Service includes RN, RM, RNR, RMR, WRNS, RNXS, QARNNS and the RFA and Merchant Marine.

RNXS: It can be very difficult to prove Service in the RNXS as the records were destroyed in the 1990s. You should apply common sense and accept photographic, other documentary evidence or a declaration by another member as to their service.

SCC/ CCF Officers: Another common query concerns Sea Cadet Corps Officers who wear RNR uniforms. They are not, however, members of the RNR with a call up liability so their appointments do not qualify them for Full Membership; they may have other Naval service which provides the qualification. They should in any case be given a special welcome as Associate Members since close liaison with the SCC is important.

BRANCH MATTERS

Running Branch Meetings

The Main Committee shall call such Meetings of the Branch as the Branch Members consider necessary (usually monthly), which can include the Annual General Meeting (AGM). Minutes must be kept for all meetings and separate ones for the AGM. It is possible to conduct both a meeting and an AGM on the same day, however, to ensure you stay within the Rules, one meeting must be stopped and the other started. At least 31 days' notice shall be given to members of the calling of the AGM. The AGM is the time to elect branch officials – which can only be done at the meeting. The Chair and Vice Chair must be Life or Full members, all other positions are open to all members, (provided they have the service requirement of at least 3 years).

The National Council encourages relaxed rig at meetings and therefore RNA branded clothing, perhaps polo shirts, shirts etc should be acceptable alternatives to a blazer and tie.

You will find templates of meeting Agenda and Minutes About / Documents area of the website and at this link:

[Meeting Agenda Template](#)

[Meeting Minutes Template](#)

The normal routine of a meeting is:

- Produce first draft of the Agenda – noting things that need to be done for the time of year (accounts, conference motions, Biennial, Cenotaph, AFD, Trafalgar dinner etc).
- Check that the Branch Chairman is content and make adjustments if needed.
- Send Agenda out to all branch members along with necessary paperwork (such as accounts), at least 7 days before the meeting – 14 days for the AGM.
- Ensure accurate minutes are taken and check that those voting are entitled to do so.
- Complete the minutes within 48 hours of the meeting (while it is fresh in your mind) and send to the Branch Chair for approval. Keep a track of agreed actions and once approved send to all Branch members.

RECORD KEEPING AND DATA PROTECTION

Membership Database

Branch Secretaries are responsible for keeping their membership details updated on the RNA Database.

Support is available from Central Office, and you can request updated Branch Reports in PDF or Excel, and links to their Branch Portal on the RNA database as often as required by emailing admin@rnassoc.org

Secretaries can also contact the RNA Database Portal directly. The Portal is managed by the RNA IT Contactor who can support via email portal@royalnavalassoc.com

Through the RNA Portal, Branch Secretaries are able to:

- Add new members to their branch
- Update members details
- Remove a member
- Update the Branch Officers List
- Request an updated report

For all other functions, such as moving a member between Branches or the HQ Roll, please contact Central Office – admin@rnassoc.org Branch Secretary training is available from Central Office – email admin@rnassoc.org

When a new member joins your Branch and is added to the database, the Secretary will automatically receive a welcome pack from Central Office for them, this pack includes the new Shipmates' membership card and a welcome letter from the General Secretary.

The Secretary should make contact with the new Branch member, welcoming them and giving them details of the next Branch Meeting when they can be welcomed by all Shipmates in the Branch, and they can be presented with their welcome pack.

Branch reports contain a great deal of personal information and are all password protected. On receipt of an updated Branch Report, Secretaries are reminded that the email must never be forwarded on to a third party and the password must never be shared.

All data must be controlled in accordance with Data Protection guidance and must only be used for official branch purposes. Data must only be held for a limited period whilst it is relevant and current and must be destroyed as soon as it is not longer required.

Branch Officials (RNA Form 1), a copy of the Annual Accounts (RNA Form 2) and the Branch Activity Report (RNA Form 5), must be forwarded to Central Office and a copy must be sent to Area Secretaries after the Branch AGM, and no later than 30 April each year. It is essential that Annual Returns are forwarded by the due date, failure to do so will result in escalation to the Governance Team and could result in Branch closure.

The forms can be found on the RNA Website at the link below:

[Branch Officials RNA Form 1](#)

[Branch Year End Returns RNA Form 2](#)

[Area Officials RNA Form 3](#)

[Area Year End Returns RNA Form 4](#)

[Branch Activity Report RNA Form 5](#)

Data Protection – GDPR

As the Branch Secretary, you have access to a great deal of personal data and protected information. You must control this data in accordance with Data Protection guidance and never share a Shipmate's personal information with others.

Central Office is the data controller for the Association. If there is a suspected data breach in your Branch, you must contact Central Office who will offer guidance and support. The RNA Data Protection Policy can be found at the link below:

[RNA Data Protection Policy](#)

The RNA subscribes to the Information Commissioner's Office, and you will find lots of useful information on their website at the link below:

[Information Commissioner's Office \(ICO\)](#)

Retaining Data. Minutes must be kept indefinitely. Finance records and Annual Returns must be kept for 7 years. Personal information should be destroyed as soon as it is no longer required.

Central Office is the data controller for the Association, any data sent to Central Office will **never** be shared unless the purpose for which it was collected has been made explicit to those involved.



Top Tip:

Ask each member's permission before sharing any personal information, including images.

Who can Vote at meetings

- There are times when only Full members or those Associates holding a Certificate of Appreciation are entitled to vote as committee members.
- Full and Life Members may vote on all matters.

If in doubt, refer to the Royal Charter [Royal Charter](#)

Distributing Information to Members

As the Hon Secretary of the Branch you are at the hub of the network by which information flows between members, to and from your Area, NCM and Central Office. New members especially need to be brought into the information flow to make them feel welcome.

Branch Correspondence

Letterhead and templates are available at the documents section of the website:

[RNA Letterhead](#)

These should be used on official correspondence only. As Secretary, you should keep a file of letters received and share the contents with the Chairman before each meeting. Many Meeting Agendas have correspondence as a standing item. Email is the preferred method of contact however, whilst most members have an email address and can therefore receive and send relevant correspondence; please remember to include those who still require information to be sent by post.

In the unfortunate event of a complaint within your Branch, Club or Area, the RNA Complaints Policy must be adhered to:

[RNA Complaints Policy](#)

Please also inform Central Office who can support in these cases.

Your attention is also drawn to the RNA Diversity and Inclusion Policy and if support is required, please don't hesitate to contact Central Office:

[RNA Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)

Branch Accounts

Please see the separate Branch Treasurer's Guide which can be found on the RNA Website at the link below:

[Branch Treasurers Guide](#)

Submitting a Motion to Conference

A Branch may submit a motion if passed by a meeting. Motions should begin with the word "That" and be worded in the affirmative (i.e. propose some finite action or declare or proclaim something). A section of the form is available to show the reasons behind the motion and this will help the Standing Orders Committee (SOC) in exercising its powers to combine, condense and/or re-draft motions. Branches may well find it advantageous to discuss proposed motions with Area officials, their NCM, SOC or Central Office staff: often the object may be achieved without the need for Conference approval.

Timing: Motions for consideration at the next Conference must reach the General Secretary sixteen weeks before Conference; date is promulgated each year (normally mid February). Motions may be submitted earlier, please see guidance on Motions to Conference.

Branches are reminded of this process in the Semaphore Circulars and the details can be found on page 53 of the Royal Charter which is on the RNA Website at the link below:

[Royal Charter](#)

Branch Secretaries are also required to co-ordinate the submission of any nominations from their Branch for the National positions of National Council Member and Deputy National Council Member.

Branch and Club Support Fund (BCSF)

Background

The Fund originated from the Alex Madden Fund having received permission to de-restrict the Fund due to lack of applications and to establish a Support Fund for Branches and Clubs. The Terms of Reference are set out below. In the first instance a Branch or Club interested in applying for either a Grant or Loan should approach their Area Secretary or National Council Member (NCM) who can provide advice. Central Office (formerly HQ's) staff are also available to advise as necessary.

Funding

Funding on an annual basis comes from the Branch Suspense Account, being money transferred from closed Branches after ten years have elapsed, and from Interest on loans made from the Fund. The National Council (NC) may allocate other funds as it deems fit.

Terms of Reference

Purpose: To provide support by way of grants and loans to Branches and Clubs to:

- Improve facilities and/or accessibility for meetings.
- Allow and encourage better participation in Area and National events.
- Other purposes which support Branches in recruiting etc.
- To assist in the setting up of a new Branch
- Loans for the purchase of Standards
- Support their Club.

Further information and the application form can be found on the RNA Website at the link below:

[BCSF Application](#)

1000 Good Deeds Fund

Background

Originally launched in 2019, the National Council approved the 1000 Good Deeds fund, to offer small grants on request to enhance quality of life, remove barriers to enable Shipmates to look after each other, or for one off or extraordinary events.

Examples of uses have been for:

- A Covid-19 related mercy mission.
- Transport costs/admission
- Fees to take an otherwise isolated shipmate out for the day.
- Repair costs as a result of a break-in or deliberate damage to property.
- Contributing to additional or unexpected costs relating to providing new and relevant services or historic events for Veterans.

Further information and the application form can be found on the RNA Website at the link below:

[1000 Good Deeds Fund Application](#)

Registration of the Association and all Branches as a Charity

Usually, the Charity Commission does not register charities with an income of less than £5,000. This is purely to reduce the regulatory burden on smaller charities. Further information and guidance can be found on the Government website at the link below, or contact the Central Office for advice and guidance:

[How to set up a charity \(CC21a\) - GOV.UK](#)

For your information, The Royal Naval Association Registered Charity Number is 266982.

Fundraising

You are encouraged to support your Branch and Central Office by fundraising in your local community and it's a great way to attract new members.

Money collected **MUST** be spent as detailed on the collecting tin and described in the literature which drew the donation from the giver. If you are collecting on behalf of the RNA nationally or your own Branch locally, it should also be made clear that the money is spent to achieve the objects of the Association.

Collecting tins, labels and seals are available from Central Office and your local council may require you to wear badges identifying your members as official collectors.

Armed Forces Day events are organised either nationally or by your local Council. Make friends with the local organiser and get your members involved. It is a good social occasion and is a chance to recruit new members. Make sure that your Area fundraiser and PRO are aware of the event. Speak to Central Office if you have any questions regarding gazebos and give aways.

You must obtain a license from your local Council to hold street collections. Further information and guidance can be found on the Government website at the link below:

[Street Collection Licences - England and Wales](#)

It is a generally accepted custom of the Association that Branches holding raffles should restrict the sale of the tickets to their own area. The only exceptions to this are raffles held to help finance national events (e.g. Annual Conference and Re-unions). Further information and guidance can be found on the Gambling Commission website at the link below:

[Gambling Commission](#)

APPENDIX ONE



APPLICATION FOR LIFE MEMBERSHIP OF THE ROYAL NAVAL ASSOCIATION Applications must be accompanied by a remittance of £140		
Branch:		
Full Name of Nominee		
Length of RNA Service		
Branch comment: (Post(s) held)		
Area comment: (Post(s) held)		
Reason for Award:		
Recommended at Branch General Meeting held on:	<i>(Date)</i>	
Result of voting:	Unanimous	Majority
Branch Chairman's Comments:		

Declaration: I certify that the nominee is qualified by service for Full Life Membership i.e. a minimum of ten years i.a.w. Bye-Law 5 (a).

Signed:Branch Chairman.

National Council Member's Comments:

I certify that the nominee is qualified by service for Full Life Membership i.e. a minimum of ten years i.a.w. Bye-Law 5 (a). **APPROVED / NOT SUPPORTED**

NCM No (Area):	<i>(Date)</i>
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APPENDIX TWO



APPLICATION FOR THE AWARD OF A CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION		
Branch/Area:		
Full Name of Nominee:		
Full, Associate or Honorary:		
Period of Membership:		
Describe the exceptional services required to merit this award:		
Signature: (Branch Chairman)		
NCM's Comments:		
Delete as appropriate:	APPROVED	NOT SUPPORTED
Signature:		
NCM No: Area	Date	

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION: FULL, ASSOCIATE AND HONORARY MEMBERS

Guidance Notes and Application Procedure.

Background: At the 2015 Conference a motion was approved that Associate members awarded a Certificate of Appreciation might henceforth exercise voting rights equal to a full member of their own Branch.

To qualify for an award, the recipient should meet the requirements of the following definition:

“A Full, Associate or Honorary Member who has given long and honorable service to the Association. Such service may have been given nationally, to an Area or Branch or RNA Registered Club and should have significantly enhanced the reputation of the Association. The quality of service is more important than its length which should however reflect a sustained effort on behalf of the Association”.

Procedure for Recommendation: An Area or Branch wishing to consider a recommendation should do so formally at a meeting of the Area/Branch Committee and the decision should be recorded in the Minutes (Note: *Unlike the recommendation for Life Membership for a Full Member, it does not require the endorsement of an Area or Branch General Meeting as stated in the Bye Laws*).

Recommendations should be sent to both the General Secretary at Central Office and the National Council member for the Area, stating the following:

- Full name of the member recommended
- Whether an Associate or Honorary member and period(s) of membership
- The exceptional services met as defined above.

The National Council member will inform Central Office if the recommendation is approved.

Subject to this recommendation, the General Secretary will **approve the award** and report it to the next meeting of the Council

If the award is not supported by the National Council member, the recommendation will be considered by the Council at their next meeting.

Applications should be accompanied by a remittance of £25 as a contribution to the cost of the Certificate, the administration actions needed and to purchase the lapel badge.

For Overseas Branches: A copy of the recommendation is to be sent to the National Council Overseas Corresponding Representative who will inform Central office if the recommendation is supported.

Subject to this recommendation, the General Secretary will **approve the award** and report it to the next meeting of the Council.

If the award is not supported by the National Council Overseas Corresponding Representative, the recommendation will be considered by the Council at their next meeting.

Award of the Certificate: The Certificate of Appreciation will be forwarded to the Area/Branch making the recommendation for completion and signature by the appropriate Area/Branch officials. It should be presented in a manner which they consider appropriate.