

The Radio Communications Foundation

Strategy

1. Introduction

The Radio Communication Foundation [RCF] is a small registered UK charity launched in 2003 by interested parties in the Radio Society of Great Britain [RSGB], industry and others with the mission “to advance the education of the public in the science and practice of radio communicationsand to promote the wider benefits to the public resulting from such education and training”.

The charity is run by a group of Trustees.

During its first decade the RCF has successfully acquired funds from donations and legacies and used these to support students, local amateur radio groups and specific projects, which are set out in the RCF website. Between 2007 and 2015 the RCF also managed UK amateur radio examinations under the terms of a MoU with Ofcom.

The Trustees have reviewed the RCF strategy to rebalance its activity to better reflect the changing demands and requirements of the sector, specifically the need to promote education and careers.

A clearly articulated strategy will not only provide a practical guide to investment decisions, but will support and enhance the success of calls for additional donations.

A summary of RCF activity to date and considerations for future activity are given in the Appendix.

2. Mission

The RCF mission is to increase the engagement of people, especially young people, in radio communications technology. The RCF therefore encourages and assists students to pursue relevant higher education courses, leading to them being employed in the radio communications sector, and also works to raise public interest and involvement in radio communications, including amateur radio.

3. Near and medium term objectives

The objectives are to advance the RCF mission by engaging with four key groups:

- Those at school in order to develop an interest in radio communications
- Those planning or undertaking a university or higher education course to encourage the study of radio communications options
- Those planning or considering employment in radio communications
- The public more generally, including those with an interest in amateur radio

4. Strategy

Schools

The RCF aims to stimulate interest in radio communications among schoolchildren. The RCF has already established a useful relationship with the Arkwright Scholarship Trust and has funded bursaries to a number of individual A-level students who have an intention to pursue radio communications at university. RCF is now seeking to promote its ideas to a wider group of youngsters and will investigate opportunities to fund or sponsor in part student exhibitions and events, for example at the National Space Centre or the National Radio Centre. A summary of RCF work to date is set out in the Appendix.

Universities

RCF seeks to encourage more students to take up science and engineering courses with radio communications so that there is a larger pool of qualified graduates to support the radiocommunications industry.

RCF will also investigate the viability of providing a level of support to university undergraduates working on radiocommunications projects in their final year.

Employers

RCF aims to provide a hub to bring employers and universities together to offer bursaries and employment opportunities such as internships and work experience placements.

RCF has initiated contact with employers' trade associations to help RCF tailor a scheme that meets the needs of employers with the aim of setting up a working group that considers how employers can offer placements or work experience or bursaries. The strategy is to evolve the scheme to other industry associations and trade bodies.

General public

The RCF will seek ways in which the significance of radio communications technology to the 21st century world can be brought to the public, and how the public can engage with the technology as a means of personal development or as a meaningful and rewarding pastime.

5. Implementation plan

RCF operates solely through the good offices of volunteers who have an enthusiasm for its mission and objectives and through limited use of the administrative resources of the RSGB.

The Trustees, who each have a three year term of office, reflect the disparate interests within the radiocommunications technology sector. The Trustees form the RCF board with responsibility for financial probity, for setting the strategy and overseeing its implementation.

RCF seeks to implement this strategic plan by recruiting an advisory group led by an enthusiastic player in this sector, which will have the Terms of Reference to:

- Develop and gain approval for the detailed implementation plans for each of the four strategic areas and report on achievement
- Set a budget for each activity.

Appendix

Schools

The Foundation has a vision to:

- Influence school children from an early age about the wonders of radio;
- Directly support youngsters who show an aptitude in engineering at A Level age by the provision of scholarships;
- Follow those students through to University and encourage their interest in radio engineering by arranging work placement experience and vocational opportunities

The RCF has previously tried to influence school children through the medium of the GB4FUN mobile amateur radio station. The RCF and RSGB, together with commercial sponsors and volunteers put together a mobile amateur radio station which then followed a programme of secondary school visits. Although this was initially quite successful and welcomed by science teachers in schools, it proved difficult to integrate the visits into the school's work under the National Curriculum and it became increasingly difficult to cover the running costs for the project and find sufficient volunteers (who needed to be CRB checked and trained). The RCF and RSGB agreed in 2012 to discontinue this project and the RSGB has since concentrated its efforts on the National Radio Centre that it set up at Bletchley Park.

The RCF has also worked with the Arkwright Scholarships Trust and funds annual bursaries for one or two highly talented schoolchildren who have achieved outstanding results at GCSE and who are studying appropriate A levels and with a demonstrated interest in a radio communications or electronics. The Foundation has also arranged opportunities for its Arkwright students to go on work experience and vocational studies.

The intention of the Foundation is to follow up with those Arkwright students who go on to university to study an appropriate engineering related degree course and in partnership with industry seek to offer a menu of work placements, job experience or internships. Within the University, the Foundation might also consider the funding of radio related work modules or subject prizes. On the vocational side, if the student joined the University Amateur Radio Club then the Foundation might be interested in funding appropriate kit or otherwise establishing links in recognition of the working relationship with the student

A major advantage for the RCF is that our funds go directly to the person we wish to support and for Arkwright, our involvement increases the availability of bursaries to promote their scheme.

The RCF has influenced school children by financially supporting a mobile amateur radio station and through grants to individual amateur radio clubs. In the future, the Foundation would gladly consider funding requests for projects that had the potential to create a wide educational impact.

Employers and Universities

One of the detailed objectives of the RCF is to encourage students to take up radio communications options in the engineering courses and then to follow those through into employment, so that we see a greater stream of people with some background in radio communication entering the ICT industry in the UK. To a great extent it is in the hands of the Universities to make their radio engineering course interesting to their students, but the RCF has considered whether it can tilt the playing field a little, for example by adding an employment opportunity onto the bursaries described in the previous section. There are very many possible examples, ranging from work experience placements, through vacation or post-graduate intern placements (paid or

unpaid) through to third year industrial placements for students on four year degree courses and post-graduate year fully salaried work placements.

The organisation of any significant level of such placements would be a substantial undertaking and not one that the RCF could do alone, so the RCF has agreed that it will work with one or more organisations in the field. For example relevant trade associations or professional institutions would probably be able to give exposure of such a scheme to a wide range of potential partners and perhaps this could even be seen as a potential service offer to their membership.

The strategy that the RCF has adopted is to identify one such organisation and engage with them to set up a pilot scheme, building on what a small set of interested members feed in on their company's requirements. The first contact has been with Tech UK the trade association for the UK's technology industries and subsequently with the UK Electronics Skills Foundation (UKESF).

There is clearly potential here for the development of an ecosystem which includes Universities with strong radio communications presences and employers with significant need for engineering graduates with radio communications specialisation. The RCF intends to adopt the strategy of acting as an enabler, which should minimise the administration cost to the RCF.

Depending on the success of the exploratory contact with Tech UK and UKESF the RCF will consider developing similar schemes with the Institution of Engineering & Technology (the professional institution for radio communications engineers) and with the Federation of Communications Services (the trade association for businesses providing communications products and services).

General Public

Although the RCF has at the core of its strategy the promotion of radio engineering to young people as they enter university and later as they make their career choices, it recognises that there is significant value in bringing a wider appreciation of radio engineering to people at an earlier and a later stage.

There are already two national resources working in this field, the RSGB's National Radio Centre at Bletchley Park and the UK National Space Centre at Leicester. Both of these resources have as an aim that young people should leave them after a visit enthused by the importance of radio communications and a desire to get involved.

RCF would favour a "flagship" project approach, similar to GB4FUN, with a national rather than a local impact. For example, a viable plan at the National Space Centre for a project related to amateur radio that might represent something of the sort.