

## Future of SOSA Survey – Findings

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### Introduction

Thank you to everyone who replied to the survey, I think I've replied to everyone.

In all I received about 50 replies which is about 10% of the emails that I sent out which isn't bad for this type of exercise.

There are some common themes and several suggestions. I have attempted to summarise what I've learned, both good and bad. My apologies to anyone who might believe that I've missed out their views, but I've tried to pick the main topics where several people have commented.

### Summary

There is a strong feeling that some form of overhaul of SOSA is needed.

There has been quite strong criticism of the June Reunion.

There is general support that any spare SOSA funds should be spent on the five SOSA Aims but not a lot of support for helping old scholars down on their luck.

There is strong support for regional and year group reunions.

There are a wide variety of views concerning web sites and social media.

There is a general view that an old scholar should edit the Rocket but no suggestions as to how we could encourage anyone to take on board the task.

There is a general view that the existing web site should be maintained but there are some criticisms over its content.

There is a reasonable belief that social media is not being utilised to as good an extent as it should be.

Merging the Reunion Secretary with the Membership Secretary finds favour as does the creation of the School Liaison Secretary.

### Future of SOSA

People's views on SOSA vary from keeping everything the same to a small but significant view that it should be disbanded.

My concern with keeping everything the same is that we struggle to get volunteers for the Committee and that the number of active members has diminished for many years.

My concern over SOSA being disbanded is that there are many who still have an interest in Sibford.

There is a strong belief that SOSA does not appeal to the younger generation for a variety of reasons:

- Recent leavers are more interested in spreading their wings rather than reverting to schooldays.
- Somewhat older leavers have commitments to new families and work.
- There is a strong belief amongst older old scholars that they have a greater affinity with their schooldays as they were boarders.

The Committee are attempting to address the perennial problem of interesting younger members by the creation of the School Liaison Secretary, but other suggestions have been received, some of which, are detailed below.

### Annual Reunion

Sadly, this is one of the areas with the most damning replies. Common complaints are:

- The Programme is boring, it's even been likened to a seminar day.
- People are tired of the marquee, too many reunions spent shivering in the cold.
- A very strong feeling that old scholars are a bit of a chore for the School except when it comes to the catering staff.
- A belief that since Sibford General Meeting was moved to the same weekend resources have been channelled towards that rather than old scholars. e.g. cancellation of Tea on Holly House Lawn, apparent unavailability of facilities such as the swimming pool, pottery etc.
- Although several people applaud the subsidy of U21's meals there is also a view that over 65's should receive the same consideration.
- Inaccessibility of Sibford via public transport.
- Inconvenient time of the year.

On the positive side, people like to see the School in action and people also like the location of Sibford for the AGM especially as we introduced voting via email for registered members.

I strongly believe that, in consultation with the School, an alternative date for the Annual Reunion needs to be found. Additionally, future Presidents need to bear in mind the above comments when proposing their Programme for the day or even weekend.

### Use of SOSA Funds

Although there is some support for the idea helping old scholars who are down on their luck there is a greater unease with this suggestion.

The general feeling is that surplus funds should be donated to supporting all five of SOSA's Aims.

There is a strong feeling that SOSA has historically supported the School over the needs of the association.

There is a reasonable feeling that money given to the School has been wasted on items such as: reflooring the Main Hall, the old tennis courts.

I would therefore propose that an equal amount be allocated each year to each of the 5 Aims in the Annual budget. This amount would however vary depending on any specific general needs of SOSA.

In particular, the Committee needs to consider expenditure on events that would appeal to younger old scholars.

#### Regional and Year Group Reunions

There is a strong feeling that these types of events should be encouraged by SOSA and, to an extent, financially supported.

These events take place already, but they need to be more widely published. Additionally, SOSA needs to be an organisation for younger old scholars as well as older ones, but older ones want their gatherings too.

#### Web Sites and Social Media

There is a strong belief that the existing web site should continue and that it should be under the control of an old scholar in order to maintain independence.

However, there are some criticisms of the site:

- Greater ease of access.
  - I can address this in the near future
- More up to date content.
  - I believe that a twofold approach is need:
    - The existing site should mainly concentrate on archival material and membership details.
    - SOSA should support the School's plans to include an old scholars' section within their own web site to promote forthcoming events.

As concerns social media, there is already a successful Facebook Group and it is my belief that SOSA should not attempt to compete with this by creating another one. However, younger old scholars need to be made aware of this group's existence.

No views have been received concerning Twitter, Instagram etc. but this is perhaps more a reflection of having very few replies from younger old scholars.

#### The Rocket

Many people have commented that this publication is much anticipated each year.

There is still a strong desire from many people to receive paper copies of the magazine including from members living abroad. Although members registered on the web site have the option to request paper copies these have not always been received even when addresses are correct. The Committee need to address why mailings are going astray.

There is a reasonable feeling that the magazine should be edited by an old scholar. However, I believe that we need to be pragmatic over how practical this might be, we have

struggled in the past to find someone who has the time and skills to undertake the job. I believe that the only alternative is:

- for the School to collate the magazine, as at present.
- for SOSA to pay for the printing, postage etc, as at present
- for the new School Liaison Secretary to review the Rocket prior to the print run.

Many old scholars read the Rocket in conjunction with the School's own magazine and comments have been made that:

- the Rocket should concentrate more on old scholar stories and reminiscences from a wider range of ages. (However, to achieve this people need to provide copy!)
- some people would like a change in style as the current style has been used for many years.

### Communication

Various criticisms have been made:

- SOSA and SOSC have not made members aware of what their purposes are.
- As mentioned above, post has not been delivered.
- The Committee need to go back to sending out the occasional e-Newsletter.
- The date of the Annual Reunion needs to be printed in the Rocket as promised at the 2018 AGM.

### Conclusions

The fact that there has been a reasonable level of replies shows that there is still interest in SOSA but clearly there are criticisms and we need to change.

Interest is primarily from the older generation and, even though there may be valid reasons for a lower level of interest from younger old scholars, we are missing enthusiasm from those aged in their 40's and 50's.

From a personal point of view, I believe that:

- The younger generation can only be effectively reached via the School's higher visibility.
- SOSA itself will only exist in a few years' time, in its current form, if some younger and middle-aged old scholars come forward to participate on the Committee.

There are things that we, as an association, can do now to address some of the areas where we are failing but this needs the active involvement of the membership, the School and the SOSA Committee.