

**Regionalisation – Change in the Amateur Swimming
Association**

**Institute of Sport & Leisure Policy
Loughborough University**

Dr Leigh Robinson

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Executive Summary

1. At the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) Annual Council in 2002, a paper was presented which dealt with the government's commitment to the regionalisation of government in England. This paper set out an intention to decentralise Sport England. The most significant impact of this to swimming was that most funding would subsequently be devolved to, and allocated by, the Sport England regions. ASA Council recognised that the ASA districts were not aligned to Sport England regions and in order to maximise direct and indirect benefits of funding, it was felt necessary to review the Boundaries of the then existing districts. Thus began the process of regionalisation that is set out and evaluated in this report.
2. Regionalisation went 'live' on October 1st 2005. At this point the eight regions, some substantially different to the old districts, began to administer and organise the sport. At this point of the change process it seemed appropriate to evaluate the process followed and to identify the initial impacts of regionalisation.
3. As a result, the Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy at Loughborough University carried out research within the ASA in order to investigate the impact and effects of regionalisation on the organisation. Data was collected through a series of semi structured interviews, informal discussions and content analysis of key documents.
4. There are a number of factors that are important in the introduction of large scale change, such as the project embarked upon by the ASA in 2002. These factors are presented below and were used as a framework to evaluate the regionalisation process. These factors are:
 - *Change as a good idea*: Change must be perceived as being a good idea; otherwise it is unlikely that it will be accepted.
 - *Factors that will promote and prevent change*: It is necessary to identify what will work for and against the proposed change, such as people, resources, time, external factors and culture.
 - *Effective change team*: If a large change is being implemented a team of people who are responsible for promoting the change will be needed.
 - *Sufficient resources*: The introduction of change requires money, staff training and time.
 - *Implementation strategy*: The final feature that leads to the successful introduction of change is a well-developed implementation strategy. This is particularly important when introducing large-scale change, such as regionalisation.
5. Please note the following terms: *regional staff* has been used to incorporate both *paid staff* and *volunteers* who work in the regions. In other instances, where necessary, the terms *volunteer* and *paid staff* have been used. *ASA Central* has been used to describe the operating core based primarily in Loughborough.
6. The research established that regionalisation is perceived to have been successfully introduced into the organisation. Interviewees were positive about the process that was followed and felt that it reflected 'best practice'. The general perception was that there was little that could have been done differently.

7. There was very clear agreement that the process of creating the Boundary Commission (BC) and the subsequent Regional Project Board (RPB) was pivotal in successfully introducing regionalisation. The members of this group and their ways of working and communication were considered to be primarily responsible for the acceptance of regionalisation by Council.
8. There was agreement that the process of 'shadowing' and the creation of Shadow Boards was also important to the success of the process. There was less agreement on the value of the piloting process. It was also agreed that the timescale for implementation of regionalisation was appropriate.
9. The main advantage of regionalisation is considered to be an increase in money available to the regions. The main problem that arose from regionalisation was the loss of the District Secretary position, which initially posed problems for members and the Regional Directors. It was, however, recognised that steps have been taken to address the loss of this key post.
10. At this early stage of the regionalisation process, the main impact of the change is thought to be a change in culture. It was considered that the people, structures and processes of the old districts have become much more business orientated since the introduction of regionalisation.
11. A number of issues have emerged since the regions began operating. These are:
 - There was concern over the necessity to become self funding. This has been recognised by senior paid staff that are developing strategies to deal with this.
 - A growing concern about the role of the regions in relation to ASA Central is emerging. Regional staff involved in the research felt that the roles of these two parts of the ASA are not necessarily clearly defined.
 - Associated with this, regional staff commented on a phenomenon that can be described as 'strategy by initiative'. Many interviewees felt that they are required to respond to directives from ASA Central, primarily in relation to seeking funding, whether or not this is in line with the region's business plan.
12. Overall, this research indicated that the process of change followed by the ASA when introducing regionalisation was exemplary. The process of developing and implementing the change followed the steps characteristic of a well planned and successful change programme, evidenced by the lack of significant resistance to the proposals. There are clearly some unintended consequences of the regionalisation process, however, the research also indicated that these have been, or are in the process of being addressed. Although it will be many years before the full impact of regionalisation can be evaluated, this research shows that the Amateur Swimming Association has, at this time, successfully implemented the process of regionalisation in an effective manner and brought about organisational change.

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Regionalisation – Change in the Amateur Swimming Association

1. Introduction

At the ASA Annual Council in 2002, a paper was presented which dealt with the government's commitment to the regionalisation of government in England. This paper set out an intention to decentralise Sport England. The most significant impact of this to swimming was that most funding would subsequently be devolved to, and allocated by, the Sport England regions. ASA Council recognised that the ASA districts were not aligned to Sport England regions and in order to maximise direct and indirect benefits of funding, it was felt necessary to review the Boundaries of the then existing districts.

The review process led to a proposal of 8 new regions. These were:

South East	South West	East	London
East Midlands	West Midlands	North East	North West

It was proposed that each of the new regions would be coterminous with a Sport England region with the exception of the North East Region which would reflect two. A 12 month 'shadowing period' was proposed and regionalisation became operation on October 1st 2005.

This report sets out the process followed and evaluates this process and the initial impacts of regionalisation from a variety of stakeholder viewpoints. It is recognised that regionalisation is in its infancy and the intention is not to determine whether regionalisation has been successful, rather to provide an evaluation of the process followed.

2. The introduction of change in National Governing Bodies (NGBs)

One of the few constant factors in the management of NGBs is the need to continually respond to changes that occur inside and outside of the organisation. To be effective, paid staff and volunteers need to recognise when change is desirable or inevitable and respond accordingly.

For example, in the past 10 years, the ASA is likely to have

- responded to at least 10 new directives from stakeholder organisations such as UK Sport, Sport England or FINA,
- continually introduced new working practices or refined existing practices to take account of innovations in sport science,
- continually updated procedures in response to WADA,
- developed objective criteria for selecting athletes and recruiting volunteers,
- developed strategies for athlete retirement,
- had at least one change of major funding provider,
- handled the fallout from an athlete scandal, and
- seen the sport move away from amateurism.

Some of these changes may have been introduced willingly, whilst others may have been forced on the organisation, and in many instances there was likely no choice about whether to change the way the organisation operated. For example, the ASA will have **had** to deal with athlete scandals, changing requirements of WADA and changes of major funders. If such changes are ignored, the organisation may face criticism and censure.

The main point is that the organisation could not continue to operate as it always had without becoming much less effective in its work and such changes usually have to be introduced alongside the day-to-day running of the sport. Therefore in order to be effective, the need for change should be identified, planned and managed in addition to carrying out other duties.

As stated earlier, the working environment of NGBs changes constantly and therefore these organisations need an organisational culture that facilitates change. This can be developed in a number of ways. Those involved with the organisation must feel that they are fully involved in or fully informed of the decision-making process so that the introduction of change does not come as a surprise.

There will also be factors about the organisation that can and cannot be changed without great resistance. For example, the colour and style of team uniforms may have historical or local significance and attempts to change these will meet with strong resistance. Conversely, aspects that can be changed can be used to begin to introduce change to other aspects of the service. For example, if objective selection criteria for national teams are valued by those within the organisation, this desire for objectivity to introduce objective-led systems of performance measurement.

Most change will lead to resistance amongst some or all of those who work with the organisation. The need to change suggests that the current way of working is no longer adequate, and often those carrying out the work will take this personally. It is also possible to argue that resistance to change is a logical reaction because people and organisations function best in circumstances of stability. Nonetheless, resistance to change needs to be identified and overcome if change is to be fully integrated into the organisation.

Resistance to change is inevitable and therefore a strategy for dealing with it is needed. It is vital to communicate the reasons for change in the organisation. This may allow those affected to become convinced of the need for change before resistance is established. Information about why change is necessary, the process to be followed and the consequences of both changing and not changing allows volunteers and paid staff to see the logic of what is being proposed. This is a useful strategy for overcoming concerns about competence and differences in the working environment.

The most effective strategy in overcoming all types of resistance, however, is to encourage those affected to participate in designing the required change. Involving volunteers in designing and introducing the new regional structure will build commitment to restructuring because it is difficult for people to resist changes that they have helped develop. Involvement can occur at any stage, but the more people are involved at the initial stages, the more committed they will be. This involvement must, however, be meaningful; otherwise resistance will become even greater when those affected become aware that they have been given a token role in determining their future.

Not all resistance is bad. Opposition to change may bring forward issues that had not been considered and that would have eventually had a negative impact on the proposed change. For example, raising the qualification standard for a national event may result in no event being held if the standard is set too high. In most cases, resistance should be viewed as a means of identifying problems, which then need to be resolved. If resistance can be dealt with effectively, commitment to change is likely to be stronger than if resistance did not occur.

Features of a good change programme

A number of features increase the likelihood of change being implemented successfully. Although many of these seem obvious, once a potential solution has been identified it is easy to become overly concerned with what is to change, rather than how to go about making the change. The following features do not guarantee the successful implementation of change, but they do make it more likely.

- *Change As a Good Idea:* Although it seems obvious, change must be perceived as being a good idea; otherwise it is unlikely that it will be accepted. Not all potential changes will be appropriate, even if they appear to be a suitable response to changes in the operating context. For example, although the certification of volunteers may be a sensible way to address increases in litigation, it may be unacceptable to the volunteers, leading many to stop volunteering. A number of stakeholders should be involved in deciding what changes should be introduced, and feedback should be sought on any proposed change. This will allow issues to be raised that had not been considered.
- *Factors That Will Promote and Prevent Change:* It is necessary to identify what will work for and against the proposed change, such as people, resources, time, external factors and culture. This will allow the identification of factors that can be used to promote the change, such as the support of the president, or factors that will prevent the change, such as lack of funding. It is important to generate a list of these factors through discussion with people who have a vested interest in the change. If this process is done by one individual, they are likely to miss concerns that may not be of importance to them but are of key importance to others.
- *Effective Change Team:* Having a team of people responsible for implementing a change can be important. If a large change is being implemented, such as organisational restructuring, or a series of smaller changes that need coordination, such as the introduction of new technology, a team of people who are responsible for promoting the change will be needed.

An effective change team has a variety of members: It is necessary that the organisation's leaders either are part of the change team or support the team. For example, it will be impossible to introduce changes that are not supported by the Executive Board. The Board, aided by the directors must be part of the team since they control resources. Without the commitment of those who control money, facility or staff, changes will be hard to bring about. It may be necessary to include people who represent the organisation's main stakeholder groups, such as funding bodies, sponsors and members. The team should include a spokesperson from the parts of the organisation that will primarily be affected by the proposed change. This may include volunteers, paid staff or athletes.

- *Sufficient Resources:* The introduction of change requires money, training and time. Although money is important, allowing adequate time to develop and implement the change is even more so. One of the major factors that leads to the failure of change is competition from alternative activities. As suggested above, it is usually necessary to continue with day-to-day duties in addition to the activities that are required for the proposed change. In most situations, daily tasks will be given priority as paid staff and volunteers know how to do these and the work has to be done so that the organisation can continue to function. This often leads to a low prioritisation of the activities associated with change.

- *Implementation Strategy*: The final feature that leads to the successful introduction of change is a well-developed implementation strategy. This is particularly important when introducing large-scale change, such as regionalisation. All of the activities required to bring about the change need to be identified and put into an appropriate order. Necessary tasks must be allocated to individuals who will be responsible for these, and the whole process needs to be communicated to everyone who will be affected by the change. The implementation strategy should also include a period of evaluation in order to ensure that the change has been implemented successfully and is achieving its intended outcome.

Underpinning all of these factors and the successful management of change is *preparation*. If paid staff and volunteers are aware of what is happening in the operating context, they will be proactive in anticipating how and when practices will have to change. An understanding of people is also important as this will allow resistance and the reasons for it to be anticipated. Most importantly, knowledge of the people involved in the change will highlight who has to be involved in the process, what can be changed in the organisation and the most successful way to go about it.

3. Method

The research discussed below is part of an ongoing programme of research investigating the nature of the management of National Governing Bodies. Analysis of change, such as been carried out in the ASA, has also been conducted in organisations in North America, Western and Eastern Europe and will continue in the United Kingdom. The aim of this type of research is two fold. First, it attempts to understand how NGBs are organised and managed, and second, it allows examples of 'best practice' to be identified and disseminated.

In order to gain a comprehensive picture of the introduction of regionalisation into the organisation it was considered necessary to adopt a multi-method approach to the research. This comprised semi structured interviews, content analysis of documents and presentations, and informal discussions with a number of key stakeholders in the organisation.

Those interviewed were:

Anne Adams-King (AAK)	Mike Beard (MB)
John Carrie (JCa)	Anne Clark (AC)
Jean Cook (JCo)	David Fletcher (DF)
Ray Gordon (RG)	Josie Grange (JG)
Di Horsley (DH)	Lara Lill (LL)
Jane Nickerson (JN)	

The questions they were asked can be found in Appendix one. Discussions were also held with the Chief Executive, Board members, other regional directors and staff.

The interviewees are not representative of all regions and were not intended to be so. It was decided that detailed investigation of a smaller number of differing viewpoints would be more valuable than a less detailed analysis of all regions. However, the thematic analysis of the interviews identified a number of common themes that emerged across regional staff and were also reflected by ASA Central staff. Thus, at face value it would appear that indicative conclusions about the organisation as a whole can be drawn from the opinions of the sample.

The documents that were analysed were:

- Presentations made to Council by RPB
- Presentations made to Council by the Chief Executive
- Notes of the joint regions away day (October 2006)
- Review of District Boundaries reports: provisional and final
- Review of District Boundaries: Advice and Guidance to clubs.

4. The process of change

The process of regionalisation began in 2001 with a discussion paper that was presented to ASA Committee by the Chief Executive. This discussion paper set out the need to consider the existing structure of the ASA in terms of government thinking on regionalisation. This paper was subsequently followed by a presentation to the 2002 Annual Council.

The need to consider the structure of the ASA was felt to be primarily driven by external forces, in particular the government's regionalisation agenda which was supported by Sport England who *altered their regions slightly to mirror the Regional Government Office, reducing from 10 to 9, making it easier to access government resources in terms of money and staff....the most obvious thing to do was to restructure swimming on the same basis....so could then access support* (DH). The existing districts were *completely out of synch with the Sport England regions and how we should operate* (MB).

There was an internal driver for restructuring and many interviewees noted that one of the aims of regionalisation was to rationalise the size of the districts. A member of the BC noted that *certainly I think some of the smaller districts occasionally looked at them and thought um, you're too big and too powerful and disproportionately large.... I think there was, had been a long standing recognition within the sport and within the structure that the districts were too big* (DF).

It was felt that change was not only necessary to reflect the Sport England regions, but also that *swimming needed to reduce the size of the districts to a more manageable level if a professional staffing structure was to be put in place and be able to make a difference* (DH). There was to be a fundamental change in the way the sport operated which was not perceived to be possible in the huge districts.

At the Annual Council held in February 2002, 5 individuals were nominated to form the Boundary Commission and were charged with boundary review. The BC was made up of Jean Cook, David Fletcher, Andy Morton, Roger Penfold and Arthur Wilson. All worked for central or local government in one form or other. Their experience has been recognised as a strength of the process.

Their remit was *to examine the structure and ...that each of the new regions had to be coterminous with one or more of the Sport Council regions....we could have had no regions to 9 regions* (DF).

In April 2002, the BC met to agree procedures and following this an invitation to comment was sent to all stakeholders. The BC received 41 submissions from the initial consultation and in June of the same year the commission agreed preliminary recommendations, which were then sent to all clubs and respondents.

The process followed to arrive at the preliminary recommendations was based on thorough research. The BC *had a very open mind on whether it should be 3 or whether it should be 5 or whether it should be 9....we went beyond the Sports*

Council regions....We also has some research done on the size of the regions and the size of the regions and general population as well as size of the regions in terms of the number of swimming clubs and number of members (DF).

Determining regions was not a straightforward task and as noted by the Chair of the BC *the biggest problem was London – we had to incorporate little bits and pieces – had to divide 3 counties which caused a lot of pain (JCo).* Furthermore, *we made sure there was no change for change sake but it was a hard business reason and that we saw values to the sport for making that change and occasionally we stamped on stuff and said no, that's the wrong way (DF).*

In October 2002 the BC met to consider the 39 submissions that had been received in response to the preliminary report and to prepare a final report, which was distributed to all stakeholders. The BC then presented their findings to the Annual Conference of 2003, which accepted the proposals.

Communication underpinned the process and the BC produced a number of reports and booklets. The value of these books was great and *there must have been five printed versions of the first little booklet which went out with different options and things and with all the responses to the consultation (JN).* The purpose of these was to ensure communication and involvement in determining the new regions.

The members of the Boundary Commission were then charged with managing the process of introducing regionalisation and were re-named the Regionalisation Project Group (RPG). Their remit was *to oversee the process. We were given a heavy steer that we were expected to set up project groups for particular aspects....One was dealing with constitution, one was dealing with the administrative management structures that they would need. Another group were dealing with what..... we termed finance and armorial, how to divide up the spoils if you like (DF).*

Intrinsic to the Regionalisation process was the appointment of paid staff, in particular a paid Regional Director. ASA Central committed to funding this post and other aspects of the regions on a reducing basis until 2009. At this point, the intention was that regions should be self-financing.

Shadowing

The RPB recommended a shadowing process that allowed the new regions to put in place their management structures. The process was considered to be *absolutely vital because during that shadowing process the regions were able to set up their structures....it gave them all the time to look at what their structures were, to find out what volunteers they had there and then go off recruiting and finding the people where the gaps were (DF).*

Shadowing was also felt to be important by others affected by the regionalisation process. *Oh, I think that was good, I really do, because people felt that they were involved in the processI think it was essential and I think it worked (AC).* From a paid staff point of view it was noted that *shadowing worked okay, that gave them a period of time I think to find volunteers, to find people to slot in. It gave people who didn't want to continue the opportunity to say I will do it for that period of time, find somebody else, and then I've got my escape route. So I think that worked (JN).*

From a regional perspective it was helpful because *we used the interim period, the pilot period as a time to get our infrastructure right and clarify roles and responsibilities and look at what we needed. So we spent a lot of time analysing*

where we were and that was a really useful period of time (LL). Overall, shadowing obviously worked well as the regions were all ready by October 1st (JCo).

Pilots

There were however mixed opinions about the piloting process. On the one hand, I'm not sure they were ever effective. For a whole variety of reasons in a way...I think it was partly the timescale and partly, in hindsight which is always wonderful isn't it, I'm not sure picking projects to pilot was the right thing. Whether we would have been better saying South West you are an old district with very little change, North East you're a bit of a hybrid and East Midlands you're totally new. Go away and practice being that, set up the structures, just practice being that and see what effect it has. Maybe trying to force them down a road for a specific project tied them into something they couldn't deliver (JN).

Alternatively, AAK felt that it has made us address issues and has been great in I suppose raising problems but as she says, if you expect me to do appraisals give me appraisal information.....Just things like that, very practical issues started coming through with the pilots.

Other interviewees had little to say about the pilots.

Resistance to change

As outlined above, resistance to change is inevitable and as JCo noted no one wanted it (regionalisation) they were happy to stay as they were, however, the districts were no longer sensible districts...the older element that had been in post 30-35 years didn't want to see change – the younger element could see the reasons behind it. In addition, many people resisted change because it was simply that we've always done it this way. It's worked this way all the time why are we changing? (DF).

However, those who were resistant were either in the minority, or were not overly vocal because I don't think there was (resistance). I don't remember it ever being a real battle to get regionalisation through...I don't remember meetings with people going "this will never happen, over my dead body" and all the rest of it (JN). In addition, I can't recall of anything. I think this was due to the fact that the constitutional group had done such a good job and kept everybody informed (AC).

Overall process

The overwhelmingly positive view of the process is summed up by the following quote.

I think first of all, particularly given that they were all volunteers, Jean Cook's group, the Regionalisation Steering Group, were absolutely superb. I mean you could not have got, you could have spent thousands with external consultants and not got a better job done. I think that the way they were able to identify all the issues and sort of set them out and set out the sensible sort of timetable and so on and so forth was very, very skilled and I think the membership was superb. Every date on every timetable was met without any sort of hassle or whatever. I really think the whole process.....was absolutely superb. I really do and I really take my hat off to the ASA membership. It was an absolute model. It was just incredible really to get from where we were to where we are (MB).

Strengths of the process

There were a number of aspects of the process that were perceived to be strengths. First, as noted above, the process was characterised by good communication. *We consulted everybody. We gave everybody the chance, who we'd consulted and particularly those who had replied, the chance to see the draft report before we finalised it (DF).* This was reinforced by AC who commented that she thought *the work they (BC) did was tremendous, the background work, the proposals that there should be a shadow Board in each of the regions.*

Second, the role of the BC and RPB was pivotal. Many of those interviewed attributed the success of the change to the work of these individuals. The role of the BC and RPB was felt to have been facilitated by their independence from the ASA Committee. *The ASA Committee's only role was only to actually appoint individual members but after that they had to stay out. They were just a consultee like anybody else. I think that independence, that was a good thing, that independence that's been seen to be independent, separate from political interference and we were making judgements based on our experience and on the available evidence (DF).*

Finally, the size of the change was managed well. One of the perceived reasons for the success of the process was that it was done *in bite-size chunks and sort of led them through it and agreed the boundaries and then agreed the framework, the constitution. It almost became agreeing the boundaries rather than agreeing regionalisation I think. I think it was subtle. Now people might argue against that but to me it wasn't do you want regionalisation but it's do you want these boundaries (JN).*

Challenges

Although overwhelmingly perceived to have been successful a number of challenges are perceived to have emerged from the regionalisation process.

First, *all the work that the District Secretary did vanished in some areas.... there was absolutely no thought about everything that the District Secretary did. It just totally bypassed us. Here's a new structure. You have a Regional Director, you have one of these, you have this, this and this, administrator here and none of us thought hang on a minute, when a club wants to affiliate or just these silly little things who is going to check the constitutions, none of us thought of it (JN).* The regions are now being asked to find a volunteer to do the old District Secretary work.

In line with this, DF noted that *the knowledge transfer doesn't seem to have happened.....I think some regions are better than others and it's clearly a problem in the new regions because they don't necessarily have transferred that knowledge into their regions, as it's gone off to another region. So there are some training issues I think in a way and some knowledge issues and some experience issues but that happens in...any restructuring, you get periods where you lose a whole load of people and the knowledge is lost. It happens at club level, county level, it happens at regional level, it will happen again.*

Second, *I think the other issue was to do with people..... very many of the people, certainly at East Midlands, have not had experience of district work and it's not just in terms of the Board, but it's also in terms of the sub-committees and the sub-committee structure. You know we were looking at putting together a whole sub-committee structure and finding three lots of it and people are very involved in their*

counties and to then sort of try to find enough people that were actually going to be able to work (JG).

From the same region, AC also noted that *from the East Midlands and the West Midlands all of the experienced people and the East region and London, all the experienced were absolutely split up so you were having to build up a new force of people who had had no experience of the old Districts and that's been hard. That has been very hard.*

This may be a region specific problem as JCo commented that *there was a huge concern that volunteers would go, but we haven't lost them – and have been able to encourage younger people to take on responsibilities.* This would suggest that the splitting of the old Midlands District into 3 regions has caused a specific problem in the East Midlands.

An alternative problem has been identified in the North East. This region went through little physical change and this appears to have led to a different challenge than that faced by the new regions. As outlined by RG *the big downside was, which very quickly came to notice was, because we didn't change that much, people thought there was no change. There was no change because it was basically the same people, we've got a few more clubs but it just continued on the way that it did. Sorry, that is not the case.*

Third, there has been a perceived loss of the social aspects of being involved with the ASA. This was noted by JCa who commented *that the systems, and I use the word in its nicest possible way, the camaraderie that there was between the members of Southern Counties has gone away. ...there has been a breakdown of...the camaraderie and the establishment of the tradition.* Other interviewees also commented on this.

Finally, it is apparent that the regionalisation process is not perceived to have filtered down to club level. A number of interviewees commented on this:

They haven't got a clue. In 99.9% of it they haven't got a clue, it hasn't touched them, it doesn't matter to them at all. The ones it has touched are the ones that are suddenly going to pay County fee where they hadn't paid the County fee in the past or are going to pay a higher fee than they did in the past. They're the ones saying I'd didn't want this, why am I having to pay this fee? What am I getting out of it? And they're the only one that even noticed it's happened (JN).

As regard to most of the membership...I think we are going to take several steps because I think the vast majority of the memberships doesn't even know that the West Midlands exist, even the more enlightened ones and of course we've muddied the waters there by still having the Midlands championships (MB).

To the vast majority of the membership, (regionalisation means) nothing. Inside, we are very bad at disseminating information. We are actually very bad, we disseminate, but we don't appear to be able to get the message across (RG).

I mean in terms of the actual sport itself and it happening I don't think it has affected clubs greatly at all. I don't think they could care less (JG).

This is an issue that will need addressing in order to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of how the ASA operates. More importantly, those regions that need to raise

the cost of membership in order to generate revenue will have to have a justification for this, and in some areas regionalisation provides this justification.

Benefits of regionalisation

A clear benefit of the regionalisation process has been the employment of paid staff and *getting in the money – the structure and paid staff has led to this. Sport is too complex for the volunteers to have accessed current funds (JCo) and I think it's opening up channels of money in different places but it's hard to find and I do think that's why we really do need to have the regions (JN).*

The role of paid staff was highlighted by MB who noted that *the key issue for my point of view is funding the Regional Director. If he or she can be satisfactorily funded, if the staffing that's required to properly regionalise, to be properly set up to respond to Sport England regions, if that staffing can be funded in a way that doesn't hurt anybody then it (regionalisation) can't fail, it can't fail.*

From a regional perspective *there is more funding there so we are very much encouraging clubs to become little businesses and looking at the sustainability and really assessing the financial situation (LL).* It was also noted that *I'm building up large amounts of ring fenced cash because Lesley is going out tapping into these various jam jars, getting money in... (MB).*

However not all interviewees were convinced of the benefits of increased income. *I believe funding is coming from the Sports Council or whatever it is, Sport England, funding is coming to the regions. What is it going to be used for? It's going to be used to pay people to do the job that I and my colleagues have done for donkey's years on a voluntary basis. You can say that shouldn't have happened and we should get paid for it. Why? (JCa).*

Increased revenue has also brought other worries. *We've brought in close to a million pounds since October 1st, in 8 months it was, so that in itself proves that something must be going right really. I suppose my concern is that we've gone like quite big so we now have to be careful on the financial forecasting so we are in the process of now starting a business plan to make sure that we can sustain it because I would hate to just suddenly come to the end of the three year funding of all these posts and all of a sudden they're all off again and we still haven't got anybody (LL).*

Changes to the process

Although many interviewees felt that there was nothing that should have been done differently, two related areas of potential difference were highlighted. The first area is related to sub-regional bodies. *The major mistake we made and again it was outside of our control as a commission, as a project board, we weren't allowed to look at the counties. When we did that first regional structure we should have had it (sub-regional bodies) in our remit and been allowed to.... we should have looked at the sub-regional structure then and the role of the counties then (DF).* Although the make up of sub-regional bodies is an issue for each region, it is an issue that continues to generate discussion.

Related to this is an issue to do with the actual boundaries. There were concerns expressed about the boundaries of the South East and London regions. The Midland District was split into 3 and interviewees from the East and West Midlands feel that their regions are too small. This makes it difficult to generate income through membership fees. *If we had to suddenly pay for Lesley...given that our membership*

base is only 16000...if we had no other source of income our membership fee would have to go up from about £1 to about £6 (MB).

Therefore, I would really look at the boundaries. Now this is probably heresy.....but I still have a concern about the difference in size and it's not equitable. I know you can't but it does make a big difference. If you are charging £3 a member in one area and £1 a member in another that does cause problems. The dearest place to belong to is actually Herefordshire because you have a large county fee and a large regional fee and the ASA fee on top of that. People are actually ringing up and saying can I move the boundary over. Can I move to a different county? It's that serious. (JN).

In addition, if I was able to stand up and put a motion into ASA Council I would propose that the regionalisation in the south of the country, the south east, should be reversed or that the regions should be much better balanced in terms of county membership. In other words you have Middlesex, Kent, Surrey and Essex as a region because they are all allied to each other in their make-up (JCa).

The impact of regionalisation

Some of those involved in the research felt that it is too soon to tell what the full impact of regionalisation will be. I don't know (about the impact) and I think to me the jury is still out on regionalisation and will be to be honest for a while...I think it's probably going to be 4 or 5 years time before we can properly assess the before and after (MB). This sentiment was echoed by AAK who felt that it will probably take 10 years I think. It's not something that's going to be done overnight and again each region is so different, it will be different for each one, that's really hard to say. I think they will get there but some of them will do it in two or three years and some will take maybe ten or twelve.

AC noted that It's still early days. I think there has been a lot achieved and I think there are a lot of people who were very anti and have now come into it and a lot of people who thought that they didn't want anything to do with it have stayed. There are obviously some who have said well I have reached this age, this is the right time for me to disappear but you always get that.

However, others were convinced that regionalisation was having an impact. It's working, it's working, it's got to work. It's struggling, it's in its infancy, it's only 8 months old but it is working as far as I can see (JCa). In addition, the new regions have taken off the best because the HAD to make a go of it (JCo). Interestingly, given the reasons for regionalisation JN felt that regionalisation hasn't done what I expected it to do and it hasn't equalised places and I think that's quite interesting.

Cultural change

Regionalisation is thought to have brought a clear change of culture in the ASA, which is indicated by the following quotes.

it's something I keep saying to the West Midlands Regional Board that the West Midlands region is a totally different animal to the old Midland District (MB).

The major problems are trying to get the people who sit on committees because we are membership democratic organisation recognising that the ball game has changed. It's not moving the goal posts, changing the pitch, we are in a new ball game and that is a problem (RG).

I don't phone up and say I am the Hon. Treasurer, I am the Finance Manager, it is the perception that goes with it. So what we have is, we have a now a good professional staff who are able to negotiate with the local authorities, with Sport England (RG).

In summary, it isn't just a change in boundaries. It's a whole change in emphasis of how we do business and I think that some regions totally missed what that was going to mean to them. I think they thought it would carry on with the old volunteer set up, doing the old volunteer things and suddenly you've got this professional staff element put in over the top. A whole different remit, go and out find money, go out and deliver these KPI's and it has turned some people's world upside down (JN).

Aquatic disciplines

The overall perception was that regionalisation itself had no significant impact on the aquatic disciplines. In the case of Water polo and Diving it was recognised that *it has an impact so far as numbers and clubs in the Regions, however, because so much ...at the elite end is now carried out at the various Centre's of Excellence it will not have affected them (JCo)*. Synchro was in a different situation as the sport went through a series of changes at the time of regionalisation. *Last year we went into regions but on top of that FINA changed all their rules....LTAD came on board...LTAD brought in the fact that there should be multi-regions, you know, training together in squads. There's been so much... but I am not blaming regionalisation – it's other pressures (AC).*

Emerging concerns

The process of introducing regionalisation has been perceived positively and a number of interviewees considered that regionalisation is having a positive impact on the ASA. However, now the change has occurred a number of unanticipated issues are beginning to emerge.

Of key importance is the issue to do with the requirement for the regions to become self-financing. JG commented that *we were told that ultimately we have got to be financially self supporting, i.e. we've got to have enough money to pay for the Regional Director, and I'll be quite honest that is not going to happen. It is not sustainable. There is not the money out there attached to these various projects for us to take enough of a service charge off of them to pay the right level of money that you need for the right person*

This is an area of real concern for the regions, as noted by AAK who said *it really worries them this. It is really worrying. In retrospect I think we did have to tell them that they have to become self-sustaining. You couldn't have dropped it on them later but it has really worried them. I don't know whether they think that next year if they can't do it we are going to pull the plug on the whole thing.* Options to deal with this concern are now being developed.

Second, interviewees felt that much greater clarification of the role and relationship between the regions and ASA Central is required. Part of the argument for regionalisation presented by the BC was that the role of ASA Central would be reduced. *We sold them a structurewhere they all have more control as regions, more of the work would be done in the regions. The ASA would be a strategic authority, the regions would be the delivery. There would have to be some elements of delivery at national level and the regions would themselves be responsible for regional strategy within that but there would be a lot more autonomy and they would be going out and running their own affairs. What we are sometimes seeing is an*

element of the ASA controlling the Regional Directors as it used to be, the ASA appear to be controlling the Regional Directors, controlling the RDO's still (DF).

From a regional perspective it was noted that I think part of the problem as well is actually trying to work out what the relationship is with the ASA because although it was sort of sold as being that you were independent and you could do as you liked, we're not, we're an integral part (JG).

DH discussed this issue in detail commenting that I think one of the big issues at the moment that you've got is this difference of opinion about what are the regions about and that seems to be coming across very strong...is that regions should be self sustaining, they should be totally autonomous and they should be virtually a totally different body to ASA. Now I think this image of it is wrong because I think what it should be is the delivery arm of the ASA but it has to be an integral part of it to meet their needs because all you will do is, if you autonomise and take them out as separate units, is you will lose the cohesiveness of little Johnny or little Mary coming in at the bottom end and being able to go to whatever level they want to go to and achieving their best potential within the sport at the top because that player pathway, that swimmer pathway.....ASA (Central) is actually giving them the strategic approach and can control that to a certain degree by actually helping people along the way, by providing some of the funding, not all of it admittedly, but some of the funding to help put that in place, I think then you are going to get a much stronger organisation.

This tension between the regions and ASA Central was noted by AAK who felt strongly that the organisation should be acting as a whole. She commented that I do ram down their (members) throats because they keep saying "the ASA" and I say you are the ASA. You know it really annoys me that they actually see themselves as outside the ASA.... they are the ASA, they are the members.

Associated with this perception of a lack of role clarity was a concern at the 'initiativitis' that sometimes drew the regions away from non strategic work. This was described by DH as non-strategic work. It's throwing things out at the last minute. It's chasing bits of money and saying go and deliver it. The regions have, as far as I'm aware, put together their regional plans based on the national plan so you've got the same headings and things and it's a regional interpretation. They've identified and had agreed at national level what their priorities are but at national level all of a sudden the commercial people come along and say you are doing Kellogg's Swim Fit, you're doing this, you're doing that and the poor old region is suddenly given totally different priorities so therefore they need to be able to be strategic. They need to be able to work on their priorities and not just be pulled away because there's suddenly a chunk of money here.

In addition, I think that's a big issue that we are still sort of trying to manage, is that something crops at national level and it's just shunted out to the regions now. It's your job, get on with it, you deal with it. they want a reply on this and if you're doing a plan and all of a sudden you get something that sort of comes out of the blue and you've got to reorganise what you're doing (JG).

These issues will need to be addressed in order for regionalisation to have the most positive impact possible on the ASA.

5. Evaluation of regionalisation

As can be seen from the discussion above, the regionalisation process that commenced in the ASA has been received positively. In terms of implementing change, the process outlined here reflects many of the features required for successful change.

Change as a good idea: The proposal to restructure the ASA was a good idea for several reasons. It responded to changes in the external environment and aligned the old districts with the new Sport England regions. This has made it easier for the regions to identify and attract funding for their operations. In addition, it met an internal concern regarding the size of some of the districts, in particular the Midlands and the South. Although some still have concerns about the size of the new regions, the new structure has resulted in regional bodies of a more manageable size. Finally, regionalisation has resulted in an increase in paid staff and an emerging culture of professionalism.

Knowledge of the factors that will promote and prevent change: A desire for increased funding and more equitably sized regions were factors promoting the change. The establishment of the BC and RPB were major drivers for change, as was the shadowing process. Factors with the potential to prevent the change were concerns about loss of status and power, and simple resistance to change. These were overcome by the communication and consultation process that was part of the change.

Effective change team: Arguably this was the most successful feature of the change process. The change team was initially made up of 5 nominated members, who were later supported by a paid member of senior staff. Thus, the main stakeholders were part of the change team, actively promoting the need for change. The features that facilitated their effectiveness were:

- nomination from the membership
- experience of the group with regionalisation and/or government.
- autonomy from ASA Committee
- their approach to communication and consultation
- the support received from ASA Central

The change team can take much credit for the success of the process and without their involvement and the consultative approach they adopted, it is unlikely that the introduction of regionalisation would have proceeded at the pace it did, if indeed at all.

Sufficient resources: The resources required to propose and introduce regionalisation were great. Of significance is the time that the BC gave to developing and communicating their proposals. The paid staff support provided to the RPB by ASA Central facilitated the second phase of regionalisation. In addition, ASA Central committed to underwriting the regions to some extent until 2009. Most importantly, however, the process was given time. Adequate time was given to develop the proposals (2 years) which was followed by a sensible transition phase of 12 months. This increased the chances of regionalisation becoming fully integrated into the ASA.

Implementation strategy: The change had a clear implementation strategy with allocated responsibilities and time frames. A taskforce was formed, charged with the development of proposals for change that were acceptable to the membership. The

proposed restructuring required the approval of key stakeholders, which was given after consultation and discussion. This was followed by a period of transition which allowed the new structures to establish their ways of working. This was a well-planned process that occurred on a realistic time frame.

Overall, this research indicated that the process of change followed by the ASA when introducing regionalisation was exemplary. The process of developing and implementing the change followed the steps characteristic of a well planned and successful change programme, evidenced by the lack of significant resistance to the proposals. The membership were convinced of the need for change, involved in determining what it should be, and were prepared for the introduction of regionalisation in 2005.

Although it will be many years before the full impact of regionalisation can be evaluated, this research shows that the Amateur Swimming Association has, at this time, successfully implemented the process of regionalisation in an effective manner and brought about organisational change.

Appendix One: Questions about Regionalisation

How did the idea of regionalisation come about?

Where there any external factors driving the need for change?

Where there any internal factors driving the need for change?

Why was it considered the way forward?

What was to be achieved with regionalisation?

How was the project put together?

What process was followed?

Who had input into the process?

Who chose the project team?

Would you have anyone different on it if you were to do it again?

What was good about the way the project was developed?

What was bad about the way the project was developed?

What would you do differently next time?

What was the reaction to regionalisation at board level, district level, and member's level?

Who was resistant to the idea and why?

Who supported and promoted the process...and why?

How was it funded?

What was good about the way the project was implemented?

What was bad about the way the project was implemented?

What benefits have arisen as a result?

What problems have arisen as a result?

Has it achieved what it set out to do?

What changes has it brought about in the organisation? (focus on paid staff, volunteers and committees)

Will more change be required in the near future? Why?