

Autumn 2021

Dear SIA Member,



I am writing to all SIA members, about some important proposed changes to the charity's membership and governance structures, and to let you know how much, as the charity's Founder and President, I fully support the plans.

For a little background, it almost goes without saying that the past 18 months have been challenging for everyone, not least for spinal cord injured people and SIA. The charity has been required to act quickly, taking an agile and flexible approach to meeting emerging priorities and urgent needs. The results have been astounding. Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, SIA has continued to reach and support more spinal cord injured people like you and me than ever, by redeploying its team of experts on the frontline, maximising the use of digital technology and launching new programmes such as its in-house professional counselling service. Against the rub, the charity has expanded almost all elements of its work and support for all of us as members.

I tell you this because, in this modern fast-paced world, agility and flexibility are characteristics of the most successful organisations, both charitable and commercial. And the changes being proposed at SIA are to make our association just that - more agile, flexible and able to achieve its mission to drive SIA towards achieving the vision I had back in 1974 when SIA was established; *a fulfilled live for everyone affected by spinal cord injury.*

I know Nik Hartley OBE, our CEO, will continue to keep us in touch with the new network approach, the increased digital access, the expanding nurse programme, the regional expansion and plan for more regular feedback loops from its members, all of which I am watching with excitement from the side lines. But I wanted to bring to your attention the plan for constitutional changes that you will receive from the Board to consider in a matter of days. At its heart is a new set of Articles, simpler, in plainer English and based on best practice for a modern charity. I for one am very pleased to see them at last. But in it are two proposals I want to pick out, to explain them and my support for them:

1. Recruitment of Trustees: Currently, most SIA Trustees are elected through a formal election by its membership. But the reality is, less than 6% (a few hundred) of SIA members have been taking part. One result is many of the same Trustees have been re-elected many times. And to their credit they feel it is time this changed. The proposed changes will give responsibility to the Board to actively find and recruit more diverse members from all parts of the country, from all backgrounds

– to use modern processes that scrutinise and test not just competence but metrics of inclusion and diversity. This will be backed up by clearer terms of service for Trustees, to encourage new ideas and perspectives.

You will be reassured that while there is this proposed move to more emphasis on Board-led multi-staged recruitment, the new articles will continue to commit to election of at least five members of the Board, and the same minimum commitment to 75% held by spinal cord injured people. (I note with pride that all but one of our present Board members are spinal cord injured right now).

2. Membership of SIA: Currently, SIA’s constitutional powers are vested in all of its full members – i.e. as company members as well as members of the charity’s services and campaigns. In theory this gives a governance voice to all of us; in reality a tiny percentage – single figures – contribute to constitutional matters. And with the way the Articles are written, that means constitutional matters must await an AGM or EGM – again which normally includes a handful of members – and takes months to bring together.

The proposed changes are for the Trustees to be entrusted the role of ‘company members’ with the authority to make decisions affecting the governance and articles on our behalf, while we will all remain members of SIA, with the same access to vital information, services and support and, as you will continue to hear from Nik and his teams, increasing opportunities to raise concerns, plan campaigns, have increased local say through a region-by-region expansion of the charity that, as someone from north east England, I feel is vital.

In summary these proposed changes to our Articles are to be considered at an Extraordinary General Meeting on 29 October, along with our Annual Impact Report and Accounts. The articles and explanation from the Board will be in your inboxes soon. I am in no doubt whatsoever that the proposed changes will take SIA, the charity I founded almost 50 years ago, into a new and exciting era; one that will build more platforms for us all to advocate for the changes we want.

I hope you will agree that this is a positive step forward for SIA and that, following these changes, you will continue to be involved in the organisation as members, service users, friends, ambassadors, supporters and fundraisers.

Thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully,

Sue Masham

Baroness Masham of Ilton
Founder and President of SIA