

The International Exchange Group

Duncan Wood-Allum explains how international leisure knowledge and experience are now just a couple of clicks away.

Following a number of international trips to meet sport, leisure and culture organisations in 2009 and early 2010, I realised that such trips were unlikely to be a regular occurrence. This led me to think about how we could connect like minds across the globe to share ideas, best practice and make new contacts in the sport, leisure and culture sector. It struck me that LinkedIn, the business networking site that I had been using for some time, might offer a cheap, popular and easy-to-use platform. The Chief Culture and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) supported the development of an international panel and, hey presto, we were in business.

Teaming up with Ian Cooper, well known for his work with the World Leisure Congress, Martyn Allison from Local Government Improvement and Development and David Albutt from CLOA (all of whom provided invaluable support and contacts), we started to develop the terms of reference for the International Exchange Group and its specialist sub-groups. These cover sport and leisure, parks and open spaces, tourism, play, the arts, libraries, museums and archives, and heritage.

The aim of the International Exchange Group is quite simple: to improve the experience and opportunities of people working in the sport, recreational, parks and cultural services sectors in order to enhance individuals' skills and knowledge, to support the work and services provided in their respective communities. Its objectives are as follows: to connect sport, recreation, parks and cultural organisations together through a global network; to promote sharing of knowledge, research, best practice and ideas between organisations and individuals in the sport, recreation, parks and cultural sectors; to support the development of international relationships between sport, recreation, parks and cultural professionals to assist their personal and professional development; and to improve the competency and skills of those working in their respective sector. In terms of scope, the International Exchange Group will be for individuals working within public, private and third sector/non-profit organisations that plan, commission, manage, facilitate and/or deliver services in the sport, leisure, parks and open space, recreation, museums and archives, arts, heritage, play and tourism sectors.

Key partners who have been invited to join the IEG include: the Chief Cultural and Leisure Officers Association (CLOA) – England and Wales; Voice of Chief Officers of Cultural and Leisure Services in Scotland (VOCAL) – Scotland; CLOA Northern Ireland; New Zealand Recreation Association; National Recreation and Parks Association; Canadian Parks and Recreation Association; Parks Forum – Australia; Parks and Leisure Australia; World Leisure Congress.

The Sport, Leisure and Culture Consultancy is providing pro bono support for the establishment of the IEP. I am just keen to get this established and let it develop virally. Having learned so much from my travels to New Zealand and New York (which have been featured in The Leisure Review), I am convinced there are some real benefits in different countries sharing information, case studies and ideas.

Two examples of how this works spring to mind. First, a council officer in New Zealand was starting to explore procurement options for outsourcing their leisure facilities and wanted to see what comparisons there were between the UK and New Zealand. I sent her a copy of Fit for the Future, David Manley's report from the Audit Commission. This produced one very happy Kiwi, saving her a huge amount of time and effort.

A second example of the network is a project manager I met in Napier, North

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Island of New Zealand who is developing a velodrome and was looking for contacts within the UK to explore complimentary developments. Jock contacted me through the Group and 5 minutes later he had a number of leads in the UK to follow up, including British Cycling offering support.

Looking ahead, I am keen to continue to promote the IEG through CLOA, The Leisure Review and the new international groups within the global sport, leisure and culture family. We are planning to establish some webinars, international exchange programmes and study tours in 2011 alongside development of debate and discussion on common issues of interest.

Joining the International Exchange Group is easy: just click the link below to join which takes you a few minutes only. If you are already a LinkedIn member this takes 10 seconds. With time and budget pressures we need to explore smarter ways of accessing knowledge and sharing good ideas. The IEG is a start and I hope this triggers a renewed interest in what we can learn from our friends and colleagues abroad. Join today and start sharing!

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Find the International Exchange Group on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com

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