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A rock and a hard place: what next for CIMSPA?

The announcement of plans for a closer working relationship between CIMSPA and SkillsActive marked another chapter in the story of the professional body established to represent the sport and physical activity sector. As *The Leisure Review* discovered, this new chapter came as something of a surprise to a number of its members and questions remain regarding the institute's future.

On 11 December 2012 the SkillsActive website carried a statement announcing a new working arrangement between SkillsActive and CIMSPA, the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity. Simultaneously present on the CIMSPA website, the statement was brief and offered in fewer than 100 words details of "an outline structure of how the two organisations could work together to achieve their joint and individual objectives". Included in a post script below the signatures of the chairs of both organisations were six areas of work that would see "the joining up of the two organisations' offers".

Despite the statement's brevity and definitive tone, the content of the message seems to have taken a number of CIMSPA's members by surprise, raising as many questions as it sought to answer. Rumours of CIMSPA's organisational and financial travails have been common currency in sport, leisure and culture circles for some time and it is one of the sector's less brilliantly kept secrets that senior representatives of the institute had been in discussions with a range of agencies and organisations in an attempt to secure CIMSPA's viability but, with these discussions taking place behind closed doors, the statement outlining progress towards a joint working agreement was one of the first formal indications to CIMSPA members that discussions with SkillsActive had reached such an advanced stage.

Among CIMSPA members and non-members to whom *The Leisure Review* has spoken the statement has prompted a range of assumptions, conclusions and questions regarding the future of the organisation. For some the statement represents an imminent takeover of the institute by SkillsActive and the end of CIMSPA as an independent body able to speak on behalf of its members and the sector it serves. Others have interpreted the announcement as confirmation of CIMSPA's financial predicament and wondered whether the institute's year-old chartered status will be at risk. Some have lamented a lack of communication with the membership and suggested that the positions of its chair and chief executive would become untenable if the institute were to lose its independence.

The Leisure Review put these points to CIMSPA via the institute's Birmingham-based media relations company and CIMSPA rebutted the concerns expressed. "CIMSPA remains an independent body," the institute told *The Leisure Review*. "CIMSPA is not being taken over by SkillsActive. It cannot legally be taken over by SkillsActive or any other third party and will continue to remain as an independent body." We were reminded that CIMSPA and SkillsActive had signed a memorandum of understanding relating to "a joint commitment... to deliver inspiring professional development programmes for the workforce" back in May 2011. It was acknowledged that "like most businesses in the UK, the institute has suffered financially because of the economic recession" but in this context CIMSPA continues to be secure and financially viable. The institute stated that its members have been kept informed of the CIMSPA's "operations" via personal emails, regular ezines and the institute's magazine, "all of which detail the review of the partnership between CIMSPA and SkillsActive". It denied that chartered status was at risk and "vehemently denied" any suggestion that the process of negotiation with SkillsActive and others had made the positions of the chief executive and chairman untenable, stating that "the chairman and chief executive are working tirelessly to ensure the long-term future of the institute".

How far CIMSPA members are persuaded by these expressions of confidence

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SKILLSACTIVE AND CIMSPA JOINT ANNOUNCEMENT

CIMSPA and SkillsActive have today agreed an outline structure of how the two organisations could work together to achieve their joint and individual objectives and work collaboratively for the benefit of employers, members, and the long term professionalisation of those working in the sport and physical activity industry.

This initiative carries the full support of Sport England and ukactive who can both see the considerable benefits the partnership will offer the sport and physical activity sector as a whole.

We plan to conclude these discussions early in the New Year, including full consultation with employers and members.

Miles Templeman – Chair
CIMSPA
Peter Rowley – Chair
SkillsActive
December 2012

The closer collaboration will be subject to due diligence, and involve the joining up of the two organisations' offers in relation to:

- Registered professionals
- Management professionals
- The single qualification framework (sqf)
- Endorsed training provision
- The skills passport - activepassport
- Skills funding bids and a new 'industrial partnership' between CIMSPA/SkillsActive and the sector's leading employers.

and independence remains to be seen but those invited to attend a meeting at CIMSPA's Loughborough headquarters on 11 January – currently a list that includes regional chairs and what have been termed “key individuals” – will have an opportunity to question the institute's senior representatives. A further meeting open to all of the institute's members is being planned for late February or early March.

As *The Leisure Review* January update went to press no details of these events were listed among the CIMSPA events or news items on the CIMSPA website but some members remain keen to take the opportunity to explore the implications of the joint statement issued by CIMSPA and SkillsActive. Brief though it is, the statement of how the two organisations might work together raises a number of questions that require convincing answers if the reputation of CIMSPA as a representative body for a significant part of the sport, leisure and culture sector is not to be further damaged.

These questions include: why the “full consultation with employers and members” has been truncated to conclude “early in the new year”; the extent to which CIMSPA's executive are able or willing to halt the integration process should the consultation of members result in a negative reaction; why the endorsement or involvement of Sport England and, more pertinently, the recently rebranded Fitness Industry Association is relevant to the process; why, if CIMSPA is to remain wholly independent, a due diligence process is required for the agreement between CIMSPA and SkillsActive; what the new arrangement between the two organisations achieves that the previous memorandum of understanding did not; and how CIMSPA is to retain its function as a genuinely independent body when the list of areas of operation that “involve the joining up of the two organisations' offers” could be construed to encompass most if not all of CIMSPA's activities as a professional body?

In such uncertain times for leisure, local government and the wider economy it is unsurprising that a fledgling representative body such as CIMSPA should be experiencing difficulties in establishing itself as a sector-leading organisation. In such a context it was perhaps brave of the CIMSPA chief executive to issue a press release after the Leveson inquiry, stating: “As one of the most recent bodies to be granted chartership by the Royal Privy Council, CIMSPA has seen first-hand the benefits of becoming a chartered body.” Further down the page the text reveals that the statement has been issued “on behalf of CIMSPA?? [sic]”. The institute's members will be hoping that the double punctuation marks are not an indication of prescience.

***The Leisure Review* hosted a round table discussion on the subject of professional representative bodies and their future in the sport, leisure and culture sector in 2010 in which the future of what was then ISPAL and ISRM was explored: Professional Bodies: *The Leisure Review* Round Table, October 2010**

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