

Vision & Constitution Working Group

The vision group is now up and running having had two meetings since the last AGM, both via electronic medium, and is making good headway.

I have given a talk / interactive workshop at the 2018 Hidden Earth where we let people write on the walls around the venue (I did cover them with paper!) as well as presenting a survey the group had produced, we had over 300 responses to this and a copy of the survey summary is attached in the appendix of this report. It should be noted that this is just what we received from the channels we used which would very likely not have reached all BCA members. This first stage of the vision project has been all about opening up to both ideas and a dialogue with our membership as in order for BCA to create a new vision and move forward we need it to represent cavers, the vision group recognise that we need to talk to and listen to them.

The most significant thing to mention is that cavers really don't know how much about what the BCA does, and in that we are selling ourselves short on all the amazing work that goes on already.

We had some key points come out, and from this we plan to draft documents and create Vision Statements to go for more consultations during the year, with an expectation to present at the 2020 AGM. We hope to have a one sentence 'mission statement' to summarise the BCA aim, then more detail on key areas identified from our initial consultation

- Vision for 'access'
- Vision for 'promotion, publicity and increasing participation'
- Vision for 'operational working of BCA groups and bodies'
- Vision for 'membership structure'.
- Vision for 'BCA website / web systems'
- Vision for 'support for clubs'
- Vision for cave and mine conservation

The first year has gone ok and we hope that we are now moving firmly in the right direction to making BCA a body that cavers will want to be part of and to helping the sport develop further.

Hellie Adams

Appendix

Preliminary Report of the British Caving Association Vision Questionnaire

Compiled by Rostam Namaghi

Aims & Introduction

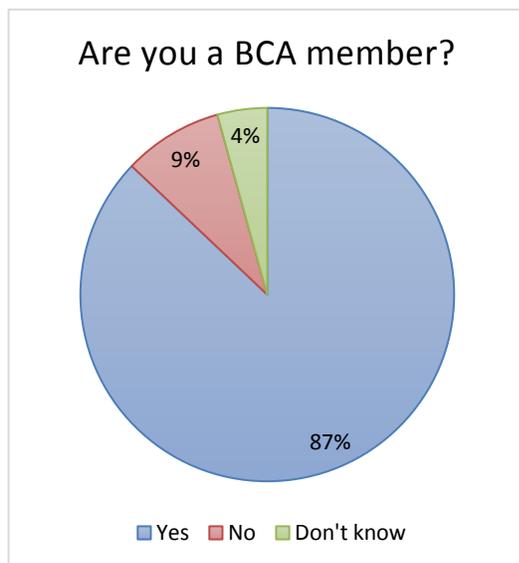
A questionnaire was created by Helen Adams on behalf of the BCA Vision and Constitutional Reform Group. Its purpose was to inform the working group on what the membership thought about the BCA and whether any improvements could be made.

Method

The survey was initially distributed as a request to email, advertised in both the BCA newsletter and on UK Caving. Owing to the cumbersome nature of returning the survey in this format, a Google form was created and widely distributed. A post was put up on UK Caving, Facebook (and was subsequently shared to many groups) and Aditnow. Data collection was open from the 02/02/19 to the 01/03/19 and 314 responses were obtained, only 10 of which were inappropriate and removed from the data analysis. Data was automatically collected and stored in a .csv file and initial analysis was done with Microsoft Excel.

Results

Please note that where specific numbers have been omitted this is due to the relatively small dataset and the ease with which respondents could be identified if the numbers were included.



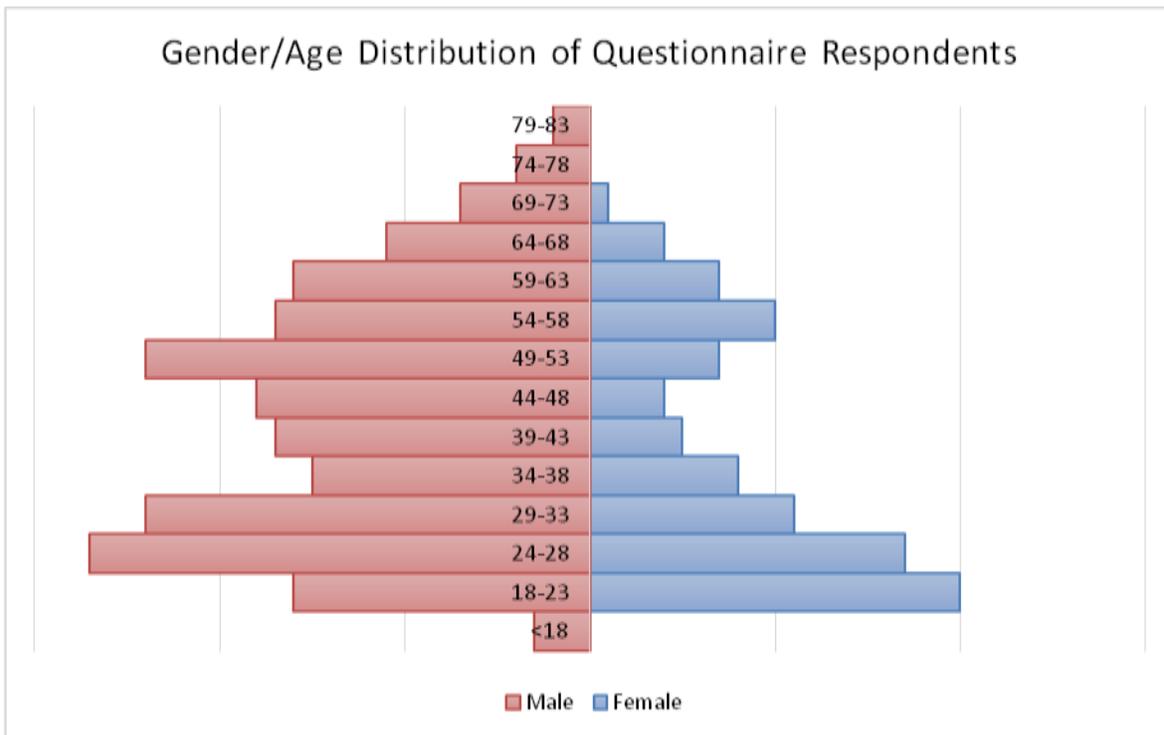
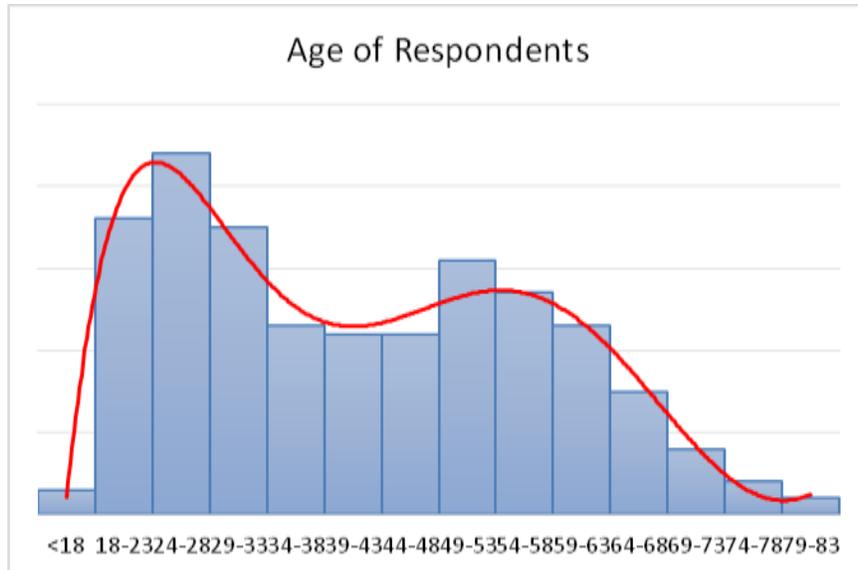
Demographics

303 Respondents answered whether they are a BCA member with the vast majority (263) replying yes (see figure 1.1). If an estimate of the total population being around 6000 cavers is used, this would equate to 5% of the total.

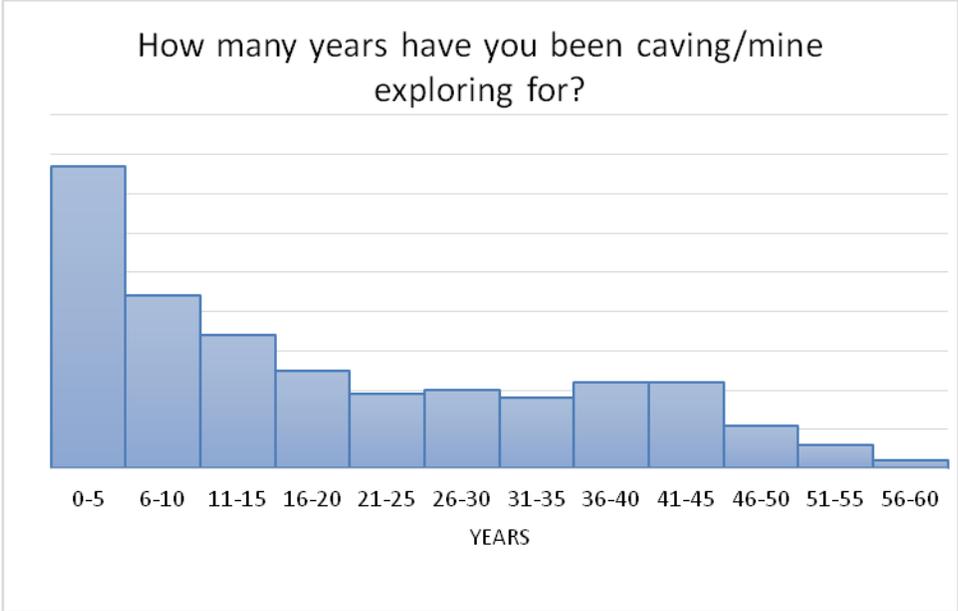
With 302 respondents listing their gender, 67% identified as Male and 32% as Female, with <1% writing in their gender and 2 not wishing to disclose.

299 respondents filled out their age with the mean value being 41.5 years old. Polynomial distribution reveals 2 peaks, one at 24 and another (smaller peak) at 54.

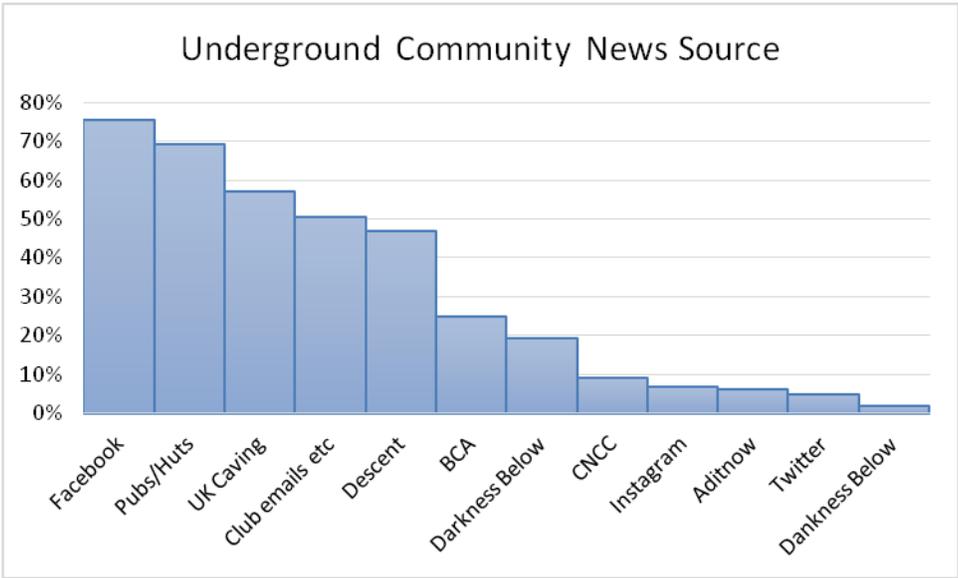
A population pyramid has also been included to illustrate these results.



A further question ‘How many years have you been caving/mine exploring for?’ was also asked. 300 responses were received. 26% have been caving for 5 or fewer years. The mean average was 19.7 years, with the median being 15. See below for further results.



A further question ‘How do you find out what’s going on in the underground community?’ was asked. Options included (in the following order): Descent, UK Caving, Darkness Below, The BCA Newsletter, A club, newsletter/email, Facebook, The BCA Website, Twitter, Instagram, Chatting in pubs/huts, Aditnow. Extra options were added as a write in, and Aditnow was only included as an option after 200 responses had already been received, although there were 11 write ins of the website. 10 responses that were generated in the space of 5 minutes solely referring to Dankness Below as their only news source were deleted. Despite this the spoof site still features in 2% of responses.



Promotion (24 responses)
Younger (26 responses)
Training (20 responses)
Students (19 responses)

Again, example responses selected to give the author's impression of the theme:

'Sort access so that it's only administered by 1 body per area! And much easier!'

'A better website. The current BCA website is difficult to navigate and poorly developed. Because it is so out of date and the information relevance is poor, it makes it that much more difficult for new people or even people who are already cavers to understand what's going on and just how the national body works.'

'Education and outreach, asking cavers what they need, working to preserve land when threatened and supporting landowner relations more centrally instead of leaving it to clubs and regions.'

'I think a better catalogue of caves, an interactive map with information, pictures and descriptions about caves would be great. Like <https://deandar.com/> but in English and for caves.'

'We need a clear Pro active stance encouraging participation and engagement of people from all ages and backgrounds. Pathways for under 18s to enter the sport need great improvement. Professional caving needs more oversight the lcmla scheme needs to be focused to ensure it is producing cave leaders that are invested in the sport and the number of trainers and assessed especially in the south west needs to be expanded. The BCA should be able to call local councils to account and provide a place of arbitration when a regional council is felt to not be representing its members.'

'Be more in the sense we all like caving and we all support the bca. I feel everyone knows the bca but really we don't know much about our governing body, and there more there mixed views...'

'Make them self more visible. Help/promote uni clubs. Support British expeditions abroad and exploration within the UK. As far as I'm concerned CHECC, ghar parau and ukcaving support cavers more than the BCA! Not to mention they are completely invisible in the North where majority of caves actually exist!'

'Not sure. Maybe support clubs somehow, organise training or legal advice. The clubs are key for getting into caving and social things. Whilst it is nice that all the club's are different, there must be some things that could be standardised or supported in some way.'

'my impression of caving as it was ~20yrs ago is that it was very diverse in terms of people's backgrounds. as it currently stands the 2 main ways to get into caving are to join a university club or to be lucky enough to be the child of a caver. this is problematic because it leaves out the demographic of people who don't go to university which is to the detriment of the sport. reaching out to people in their teens and 20s who don't go to university seems like a pretty good start.'

'Taking a more prominent stance and promoting "good news" stories about caving in the national press.'

What would make it more relevant to you?

‘If it was more involved with actual caving and caving clubs. A social media presence would help.’

‘If there was more communication/ better front end information - e.g. up to date website, newsletter etc. More information for general membership - e.g. what is going on and what is the status of the crow access negotiations.’

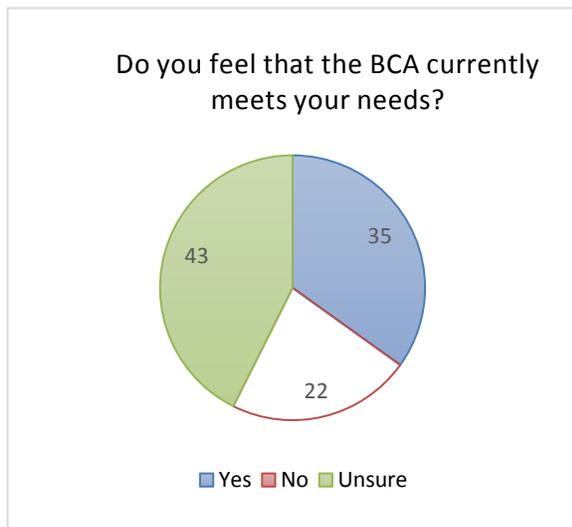
‘Provide information on improving caving skills such as navigation and leading - being new to caving these are areas I would like to work on independently as well as with my fellow cavers. Additionally, information about clubs, caves and club huts around the UK would be extremely useful when planning on visiting new areas.’

‘It doesn't need to be more relevant to me, it needs to appeal to younger people. Cavers my age don't really need anything from BCA.’

‘Literally anything. I stopped paying because as a student I couldn't see what they were doing and how it benefits me. It seems like they do very little to be honest.’

‘If it offered worldwide expedition insurance similar to the French model.’

If they had some way of consulting/talking to the membership. Something along the lines of electronic voting.’



Meeting members needs

299 people responded to this question, with no clear majority in answer between Yes, No and Unsure. No other responses could be written in.

Is there anything else that should be included in BCA's new vision?

The same process for the other 3 word clouds was repeated. There were 170 responses to this question.

Discussion

This survey showed a wide engagement with UK based cavers and mine explorers. There are significant limitations to the survey, primarily its online nature and the selection bias of engagement i.e. people who are either dissatisfied or involved with BCA being over represented. It would be wise to compare the demographics of those who answered the survey with the BCA's membership database to see how representative it is.

That said, it has achieved a significant sample size and some very robust trends have emerged:

- The BCA should do more on access.
- BCA should be attracting new people to caving.
- Caving needs more young people.
- Caving should be promoted more.
- BCA membership is widely taken up for the primary reason of insurance.
- We do not communicate well with our members.
- Our website is outdated.
- On-line voting would help engagement.
- Clubs would like more support.

The BCA should do more on access. Access featured highly in all free text responses, being the highest referred to topic in two and second highest in the other two. Sentiment analysis is strongly recommended as there appears to be a large appetite for the BCA to intervene on access issues but it remains difficult to quantify in this analysis. Further exploration of this topic would be fruitful so as to determine attitudes towards Access Controlling Bodies and regional agreements. A current core value of the BCA's constitution is that it cannot interfere with local access agreements, evidence would currently suggest that this should change.

Given the opaque nature of the BCA bureaucracy, i.e. the third most common response to what the BCA does was 'don't know/unsure' and the commonest response to 'Do you feel the BCA meets your needs?' was unsure (43%) it would be advisable to obtain people's opinions on the situation once it was explained to them.

BCA should be attracting new people to caving and **Caving needs more young people** are two intimately related topics. Youth was mentioned as the 4th most common topic in what we could be doing and 3rd most in what should be in the new vision. This was the focus of many of the comments regarding helping clubs although further analysis is needed to quantify this.

Caving should be promoted more. There was a large number of responses to all free text questions (approximately 10% in each category) regarding promotion or the manner in which it should be done. This was regarding caving in general and the BCA, the two were not separated out.

BCA membership is widely taken up for the primary reason of insurance. This is supported by the fact that 28.6% mention insurance in response to being asked what the BCA's role is, the highest single response. This is unsurprising given many access agreements rely on BCA insurance. As stated above, many people don't know what the BCA does other than insurance and several comments were made querying what the BCA does with its money. This leads to the next point:

We do not communicate well with our members. The fact that 21 people ended their responses with question marks when asked what BCA's role is, is damning enough in itself. Only 25% of people state that they get their news from the BCA in any form and the 5th most prominent topic for improvement mentioned use of social media. Strongly linked is the BCA's website:

Our website is outdated. This was the 4th most common suggested topic of improvement and was to a relative degree split over several questions due to vague questionnaire design. For example significant mention was made in response to 'What could the BCA be doing to help cavers?' with 11 responses mentioning the website. The quote *'A better website. They current BCA website is difficult to navigate and poorly developed.'* appears to be representative of responses although sentiment analysis would be fruitful in quantifying this.

On-line voting would help engagement. The 5th most common topic for improvement. A specific question to see if this would be popular with the wider membership would be advised given it has been consistently raised by a diverse set of sources (large timestamp intervals, both sexes, variety of ages).

Clubs would like more support. Helping clubs and the caving community feature heavily across all free text questions. More work is needed in analysing the data we have in order to draw out what exactly is being asked. A separate set of questions on this issue may yield more useful and specific suggestions. It is however clear

It should be mentioned that respondents recognize widely that training is delivered by BCA, and is significantly mentioned in something that could be improved. It was not included in the clear themes because a superficial reading of the comments revealed varying opinions, including a significant number from award holders. Given the situation QMC, the Training committee and the BCA have had over the last few years, it is unsurprising that this generated mixed views and high frequency of mention.

The CNCC were frequently touted as being an example to follow although all the reviews mentioning the CNCC came during a narrow period of approximately 48 hours. None appear to be duplicate and there are no other reasons to doubt the validity of the data.

Recommendations

- The themes listed in the discussion should be the initial basis of discussion the Vision and Constitutional Reform group.
- Further analysis of the data set is advised, sentiment analysis should prove useful in quantifying opinion.
- Further questions on specific topics should help clarify things.
- The BCA should implement changes and track its progress in identified areas immediately, many of these issues do not need to wait for constitutional reform. These include:
 - Planning a comprehensive media campaign to improve the image of caving to the general public.
 - Publicise the Youth and Development team's success with Swansea and Lancaster, making people aware what help is available from BCA. Also publicise things like making membership free for under 18s.
 - Put together a pack to help clubs advertise effectively and clarify the legality of taking under 18s underground.

- Explain to covers how the BCA works and what it does.
- Revamp the website and put together a strategy for developing online voting. This would need a serious and genuine commitment.
- Give press releases regarding BCA's involvement with access for the sake of transparency and dispel the myth of inaction and caving politics. An update on CRoW and the issues with Charterhouse Caving Company for example.