

Keynote session Membership motivation and retention

Diana King introduced the keynote session by reminding delegates of the continued concern over declining membership levels in many clubs and of the need to understand and address the problems in order to reverse the decline. She pointed out that standard marketing methods suggest looking after existing customers before looking for new ones. The theme of the session was therefore deliberately designed to consider how to motivate and thereby retain existing members, as a higher priority than looking for methods of improving initial recruitment levels.

She introduced the outline of the 'Midshires Gliding Club', an imaginary club based on an amalgamation of many clubs throughout the country, with typical problems and situations that many delegates would recognise. A selection of questions had been devised for the syndicates to discuss.

Midshires Gliding Club

Midshires Gliding Club is based 'somewhere' in England, within 30 miles of a medium sized city and with a number of other sizeable towns within a 30 – 40 mile radius.

The club rents part of a disused WW2 airfield, and has the use of two hard runways, with grass strips alongside the runways, plus 10 acres of landable grass between the runways. The remainder of the airfield was ploughed up in the 1960s and is farmed by the landowner. The club pays rent of £10,000 p.a. and the lease has six years to run. The landowner is well disposed towards the club and has indicated that he will probably be happy to extend the lease when it runs out. As he is reaching retirement age, he might possibly be able to offer the club use of a larger area, reducing the area that he farms and taking rent from the club to supplement his pension income.

The club has a hangar which houses the gliders and tug as well as the winch and other vehicles and equipment. There is an MT workshop and an aircraft workshop, which is used to maintain the club aircraft and also by private owners. There is one T hangar erected and owned by one of the more wealthy members, for which he pays the club a small fee for the use of the land.

The clubhouse was built by the members themselves, with the help of a Lottery grant, and consists of a main members' room, kitchen, bar, small office/briefing room. There is no overnight accommodation. There is a caravan site with a small children's play area (but no play equipment).

Experience: The 100 members are made up as follows:

| | | | |
|------------|----|-------------|------------|
| Pre-solo | 25 | Gold + | 4 |
| Pre-Bronze | 30 | Instructors | 12 + 3 BIs |
| Pre-Silver | 20 | Women | 7 |
| Silver + | 21 | Disabled | 1 |

Age profile: The age profile is approximately

| | | | |
|----------|-----|---------|-----|
| Under 30 | 10% | 51 – 60 | 25% |
| 31 – 40 | 15% | 61 – 70 | 15% |
| 41 – 50 | 30% | Over 70 | 5% |

Length of membership time: The approximate length of time people have been members of the club is:

| | | | |
|--------------------|-----|--------------|-----|
| More than 10 years | 42% | 2 – 3 years | 6% |
| 5 – 10 years | 19% | 1 – 2 years | 8% |
| 3 – 5 years | 7% | Under 1 year | 18% |

Number of launches

No of launches each year approx 3500
 No of T/L each year approx 650

The club operates weekends and Wednesdays all the year round and seven days a week during August. The club pays one of the instructors' expenses to run the weekday operations.

Fleet and equipment

The club owns a K13, Puchacz, K7, K8 and Astir CS.

There is a reasonably good, homebuilt twin drum winch, which is used on the runways and is therefore fitted with piano wire.

The club owns a Pawnee and has the use of a privately owned Falke.

Background issues

The club has a generally good safety record, but had a serious accident last year in which a K13 was written off and the instructor and pupil were seriously injured. The accident had a bad effect on morale. Some members did not renew their membership and others are flying much less than they used to do. Due to a shortfall on the insurance of the K13 and the urgency to get a replacement glider quickly, the K13 was replaced with a K7, which is currently out of service due to the Tech Note relating to Schleicher gliders.

The club's finances are adequate, with the bank balance now at around £30,000.

Trial Lesson Flying

Being near centres of population, the club is successful in attracting numerous visitors and sells around 750 trial lessons each year. These are done by a combination of trial lesson evenings and ad hoc flying at weekends, when a basic instructor takes over one of the 2 seaters and flies trial lessons as a priority. The majority of these lessons are a standard 10 – 15 minute flight and very few trial lesson pupils ever visit the club again. The pressure to achieve the trial lesson turnaround at weekends frequently causes friction with full members, who are sometimes unable to get the flying on the two seaters that they want. This problem has been aggravated by the loss of one 2 seater. However, the income of around £23,000 p.a. in the total income of £100,000 is a vital part of the club's finances.

Operational factors

Although the club has the alternative of winch or aerotow, it is not possible to operate the two systems concurrently, due to the layout of the available space. Aerotows can only take place when both cables are fully wound in to the winch and the cable retrieve system is quite slow. Launch rate is typically at best 8 launches an hour and is sometimes only 4 launches an hour.

Training

The system of pre-solo training is fairly typical of a medium sized volunteer club. Pupils fly with whichever instructor happens to be duty and in a recent survey of members who had not renewed their membership, a common complaint was the lack of continuity in the training. The difficulty of getting time on a club 2 seater was also cited as a frustration for many, with a typical comment being 'if you're not on the flying list by 8.30 in the morning, the chances are that you won't fly until late afternoon and sometimes you don't get to fly at all. I can't afford that sort of time commitment.'

Nevertheless the standard and quality of instruction is considered by the Regional Examiner to be up to expectations in terms of safety.

Post-solo training is virtually non-existent, except for the 2 seater flying required to achieve a Bronze badge or cross country endorsement.

Membership morale and 'churn rate'

Over the last 5 years, the club has lost an average of 20 members each year and has recruited an average of 17. There is therefore a gradual decline in the total membership. Members leaving are biased towards the lower end of experience. An issue of particular concern to the CFI is the poor morale among instructors, with a number of current instructors considering giving up their ratings. Another source of disappointment for the club is that some of the most able pilots, who have made good progress as far as Silver, leave the club to join another club about 20 miles away, where there is a stronger emphasis on cross country flying.

There is a limited amount of cross country flying from Midshires, with half a dozen of the experienced pilots flying cross country fairly regularly, but there is no particularly strong cross country or soaring culture. On the whole, members progress fairly slowly through their Bronze badges and cross country endorsements, after which they start to focus on qualifying as a basic instructor. For this purpose, they fly their Silver badge and then in many cases do not bother to fly cross country again. Cross country flying in club gliders is not strongly encouraged after the Silver distance, as it takes aircraft away from the site for a whole day and reduces availability for other members. There are 15 private aircraft on site, predominantly wood and early generation glass gliders.

Syndicate Issues

Syndicate 1 - Trial lesson flying

Do you think that the number of trial lessons, out of the total number of launches, is a reasonable proportion?

If it is, how would you suggest managing the flow of trial lessons pupils to have less impact on the full members?

If you think it is excessive, how would you suggest the club might fill the funding gap which would be created by reducing the number of T/Ls?

Notes for group leader

What is the purpose of trial lesson flying?

- e.g. Using spare capacity on facilities
- Raising funds
- General marketing, public awareness and PR
- Recruiting members (but this is seldom effective unless very special efforts are made)

If one of these reasons is not satisfied, the number of TLs may be excessive, given that the members are complaining about lack of access to aircraft.

Managing the flow of TLs

Bookable TLs, with a maximum number on any one day
Keeping some days or specified hours in the day free of TLs
Running all TLs during special events, such as TL evenings

Filling the funding gap

Consider the level of charge you can make for a TL – surprisingly high! But what are the implications of this, in terms of the impression the TL pupil takes away about gliding?

Will the full members fill the gap, with more flying, special evening courses, etc.? Will their fees meet the gap if you give them the chance? Does the opportunity for members to fly more at *their* club result in better retention of members = less effort required in recruitment to replace = less cost on recruitment = more funds available for other things and/or reduced need to bring in extra TL revenue?

Answers from Group 1

Group 1 identified a number of questions that the club should be trying to answer.

How many TLs?

What does club want from them?

- Revenue source
- Potential new members – courses/TLs

T/Ls – selling gliding as a sport or selling the ‘experience’

Need to improve efficiency

Launching/aircraft utilisation

Managing flow

- Evening groups - dedicated to TLs
- Midweek flying – more flexibility for members, more capacity for TLs
- Booking system – everyone knows what to expect
- Time slots – specific launch method
TL flying between set times

Earning £23K income from TLs – another glider?

Funding gap?

- Right pricing – perceived value £30 per TL – too cheap?
- Enthusiasm in club
 - Cross country training course for instructors
 - Motivation and enthusiasm filters down, draws others in.

Syndicate 2 - Converting temporary members to full members

How could the trial lessons be made a more effective recruiting tool?

Does the Midshires GC approach to trial lessons give temporary members a good, and also realistic impression of gliding?

What would you recommend the club to do in order to integrate new members into the club more effectively?

Notes for group leader

How could the trial lessons be made a more effective recruiting tool?

Consider Who are you trying to attract? What sort of person is likely to come for a TL ***and then join the club?***
Should you be targeting appropriate individuals or groups?
What type of TL is the club offering?
Offering more than one flight, possibly a short course, e.g. full day with several flights, a course over several weeks, or other structure
Better involvement of TL visitors with the club operation

Does the Midshires GC approach to trial lessons give temporary members a good and also realistic impression of gliding?

Waiting times – is the delay for TLs very different from the full member? What effect does this have?

Lack of involvement in club operations

Is there a good 'meeter and greeter'?

What is the impression given by the equipment, clubhouse etc?

What would you recommend the club to do in order to integrate new members into the club more effectively?

Possible activities:

- New members' meetings

- New members' 'buddy' system

- New members welcome pack

- Monitoring of early members' regularity of attendance and progress

Answers from Group 2

A more effective recruiting tool

TL – must be value for money

Steer keen ones to half day course

Give pack to completed TLs, log book, progress card – filled in

Small clubs at disadvantage logistically

Improve the efficiency of the operations, including rearranging the way the airfield is used.

TLs to be briefed on membership advantages

Most TLs are joy riders

Do not worry about standing about time
Target the keen one as above
Look to air minded groups e.g. Power pilots – modellers, microlights, parascenders, parachuters
Make the TL the start of being a pilot
Generate enthusiasm through giving people an opportunity to learn at all stages.
This club is not giving good value
Safety brief without frightening by good meet and greeter
Image of gliders and equipment important
Keep good contact with members through various mechanisms
Send them away with a pilot's pack and the knowledge of how to come back.
Try to get a strategic vision, don't just tinker at the edges (but this is difficult to deliver).
Consider the professional/volunteer balance.

Syndicate 3 - Pre-solo training

The system of pre-solo training is typical of that run at many medium sized volunteer clubs. Do you think it is satisfactory and, if not, what improvements would you suggest, in particular in the following respects?

- Availability of aircraft
- Flying list system
- Continuity of training
- Use of the aircraft available – structure of the pre-solo training system
- Launching arrangements
- Any others?

Notes for group leader

Consider:

Use Falke for upper air flying exercises, including circuits?

Consider fixed periods for trial lesson flying?

Limit pre-solo pilot numbers per glider per day?

Review suitability of mixed two-seat fleet?

Start flying earlier?

Booking flying?

Flying Lists – is the philosophy of arrive early, leave early or arrive late, leave late accepted?

Do the instructors understand and therefore meet student needs?

Is the instruction of high-quality? Do the instructors know how to teach?

Can you use suitably experienced non-instructor coaches for some training?

Making progress – are there clearly understood (by instructors/coaches) performance standards for each step to solo?

Daily syndicates with pre-identified instructor?

Mini courses?

What benefits are there in using winch or aerotow launching for pre-solo training?

Could the disadvantages of the mixed launching systems be reduced?

COMMUNICATION with your pilots – find out what they want, how they feel about their progress, what their questions are. Before they simply drift away!

Answers from Group 3

1. 25% pre solo, 18% in first year
2. ...
 - K13 – ab initio exclusively
 - K7 – back on line (replace K13?)
 - Puch – trial lesson/post solo/advanced
3. ...
 - Half day split
 - Early start & evenings groups
 - Duty pilot system (manage flying list)
4. ..
 - ab initio groups split over 3 op days
 - pupils linked to instructors
5.
 - motor glider upper air exercises and circuits (if qualified instructor available)
 - early training using aerotow
6.
 - Need to be able to aerotow and winch launch ‘together’, speed up winch
 - Better management of TLs
 - Themed days (aerotow, cable breaks)
7.
 - Instructors to consider how to improve launch rate
 - Some Silver + pilots to move to BI, BI to move to Ass Cat
 - Published training schedule
 - Improve winch retrieve (£30,000 in bank)
 - Ab initio feed back

Syndicate 4 - Post-solo progression, including instructors

Can you suggest additional activities to address the problems of:

- Slow post-solo progress
- Loss of members to other nearby club
- Poor motivation of instructors

Notes for group leader

Consider:

Solo pilot awareness of 'next steps'?

Solo pilot awareness of what is possible and how to get there?

Post solo coaching structure and leadership?

Ground school/lectures/tutorials for Bronze, cross country, advanced soaring?

Role models?

Using experienced soaring pilots as coaches, even if they are not instructors?

Ability/experience of instructors – are they capable of teaching soaring?

Instructor awareness of what is required?

Instructors able to develop own soaring or cross-country flying? Do they want to?

Instructors given responsibility and authority to coach individuals – seeing the job through and gaining the satisfaction of helping individuals to progress?

Technical issues:

Suitability/serviceability of glider instrumentation?

Prioritising some two seat soaring training on good days?

Training weeks – e.g. working towards Bronze; improving soaring; cross country?

Task Weeks with or without coaching?

Use the Falke?

Encourage use of single seaters for soaring and cross country?

Club Ladder for cross country and for badge flying?

Expeditions to broaden horizons and to strengthen club spirit?

Aerobatic training?

COMMUNICATION with your pilots – find out what they want, how they feel about their progress, what their questions are. Before they simply drift away!

Answers from Group 4

1. Too often, solo pilots are ignored – until they do something wrong!
2. 2 seater flying lacks 'street cred'
3. Set 'mini tasks' as often as possible

4. Encourage experienced pilots to take early solo pilots XC – or other tasks
5. Encourage early solo pilots to get out of ‘circuit bashing’ – stretch yourself
6. Add loggers into club gliders - & analyse results
7. Instigate regular post/presolo lectures at the club
8. Start a ‘badge ladder’
9. Strive to have a ‘structured glider fleet’ – especially for early solo pilots

Syndicate 5 - Utilisation of resources

What options does the club have in maximising the utilisation of its resources? What pros and cons are there in different options, and what questions should the club be trying to answer?

What changes would you suggest might be considered in an attempt to improve the operations and thereby the members’ satisfaction levels?

Can you suggest any other changes or developments that the club might try, in order to improve morale and retention rate of members?

Notes for group leader

Consider:

Airfield, aircraft, infrastructure, members’ skills, cash at bank, hangar space, hard runways, unutilised space (dependent on the days operation), potentially available land, family and social facilities.

The club has some money in the bank. What is it there for? How much should the club keep in the bank as a ‘reserve’ against some crisis? Would those funds be better employed in improving the club fleet/paying for more land/enlarging the hangar/workshop space? Or would this be risky in case of some unforeseen crisis? What trade-offs should the club consider?

Launch rates. How can they be improved? Efficient use of the systems available. A culture of improving launch rates and an understanding of the benefits of doing so. Is all the launching equipment in the best possible technical state, given the resources available to the club? Does the tug justify its existence, or does it simply create delay and detract from the winching operation?

The land available is limited. Is it being used in the most advantageous way?

Should the club consider whether the facilities are family friendly? Could improved facilities for non-flying partners and for children encourage members

with families to keep coming? Would a simple bunkhouse or club caravans be worthwhile? How much is it worth trying to smarten up the clubhouse etc?

Answers from Group 5

Improve morale:

Priorities:

1. flying
2. social

Flying

1. Increase launch rate 10 per hr
2. Review duty team and duty pilot
3. Review launch methods:
 - move winching to grass (so that stranded cable can be used)
 - speed up the retrieve method
 - go to aerotow only?
4. Look for other types of flying, e.g.:
 - NPPL
 - Aerobatics
 - X-country

Social

Improve family friendly atmosphere

- caravans
- play area
- BBQ etc

Cadet scheme

Membership package

Winter lectures

Restaurant?

Bar

Syndicate 6 – Information & Communication

What information should the club try to collect?

How can we find out what motivates members?

How can the less progressive members be drawn along with new ideas and helped to feel that their views are still considered?

Notes for group leader

Consider:

What information? – aim to focus on the information relevant to the membership motivation and retention topic.

Internally - Individual aspirations and concerns
Equipment failings
Instructor failings (as if!)

Externally - Land owner's intentions
Potential membership base
Local air minded youth groups
Planning Officers – to ensure that club aspirations will be possible
The BGA – to keep up to date with current trends, ideas and issues

How to find out what motivates members

Communicate – ask them!

Success or otherwise of initiatives

Questionnaires and surveys, both formal and informal

Newsletters

Club meetings

Open discussion culture

Instructor meetings

Keeping everyone 'on side'

Try to avoid elitism with a gap across the club experience gradient (them and us!)

Encourage everyone to expand their own horizons, but without pressure on people who don't want to do more than they now do. Let people fly for their own reasons and let those reasons be respected.

Involve the experienced members in areas where they can contribute

Member to member e-news groups

Answers from Group 6

Externally

Landlord's intentions?

(Does he have a family whose views will be important?)

Can we purchase?

Local planning authority – know what the local plans are and the planners' attitude to developments

Airspace

Sources of new members

Internally - How

Talk

Members meetings – 2 each year

Contact individually

- Telephone
- Email maybe

Newsletter, hard copy not email

Provide website

Syndicate 7 – Future Development - What sort of club should Midlands GC be trying to be?

How can the club and particularly the committee move from the day-to-day issues and give some time and energy to a longer-term vision?

Should the club continue to rely on volunteers' contributions, or is there an argument for moving towards a more professional approach?

How could some bigger ambitions be achieved without losing the existing members and in particular the less well off ones?

Notes for group leader

Consider

Time and energy to develop a longer-term vision

Are there experienced ex-committee members and/or others who could be recruited as a long-term planning group?

Structure of the committee – is it one big group, or are there sub-committees or working groups to manage separate areas? Committee core acting as a ‘board’ to drive the plan?

Consultation with the members –use a club meeting to brainstorm ideas? Use questionnaires?

Develop aims and long term plans?

Volunteer or professional

Retired membership ‘ownership’ of site management – semi professional?

Developing 7-day operation/promoting midweek launch availability to other clubs?

Developing the vision without losing valuable members

Keep communicating all the time, make sure the messages are not all one way!

Involve the experienced members in areas where they can contribute

Think ‘outside the box’ – other activities on site?

Member buy-in by results?

Member loans to buy equipment?

Be imaginative about fund-raising – grants, loans, sponsorship, legacies, gift-aid, CASC registration to take advantage of tax breaks for Sports Clubs

Answers from Group 7

Vision – couldn’t agree

Establish Sub-committees to look into issues such as:

- Site security
- Open discussions with the nearby XC club
- Explore balance T/flights v. members
- Options of all winch or all aerotow operation

Examples of Good Practice

Three Club Chairmen presented briefly on projects and methods which their clubs had adopted which had been found helpful in recruiting and retaining members.

Dave Martin of Derby and Lancs GC presented the club's scheme introduced to tackle a downturn when the club was losing members and failing to compete with the offer from other clubs. The scheme has been in place for four years and DLGC believe it is working.

DLGC uses a colourful, simple brochure which costs £1,200 to print 40,000 (3p each) and £350 pa to distribute). It is designed to be eye-catching and is distributed through pubs, clubs, B&Bs and Tourist Information Centres. The brochures bring in five trial lessons a week, who are recruited primarily on to the club's Flying Start scheme. On this, the new member pays £160 and receives:

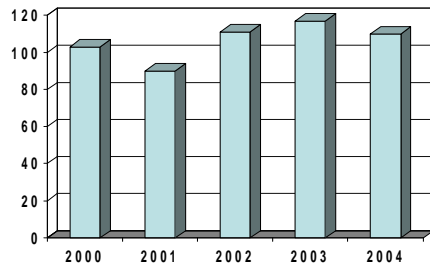
- ❑ an immediate £80 credit in their flying account
- ❑ a club logbook
- ❑ an information CD (club operations, etc)
- ❑ a book about gliding
- ❑ one year's free membership

(This compares to the usual membership cost of £220 plus £50 entrance fee.) There is a 30-day cooling-off period in which if the member comes back to the club and asks they get the remainder of their flying fees refunded. Of 170 flying members, 31 have been recruited as Flying Starts over the last year from about 500 trial lessons. The next issue is to convert them to longer-term members, and what the club is doing to address that is offering specialized courses: solo, Bronze, Silver and cross-country development.

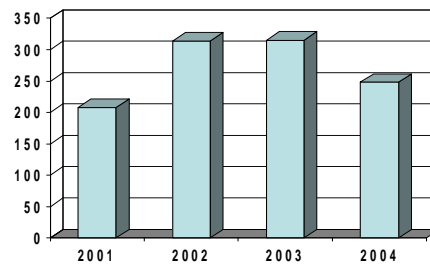
John Dickinson of Stratford on Avon GC presented on the topic of keeping members.

| Keeping Members! | A Few Facts |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• John Dickinson• Stratford on Avon Gliding Club• john@glidex.co.uk | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All Gliding Clubs 'leak' members!• New members tend to be aged 35+• Only source of new members is visitors |

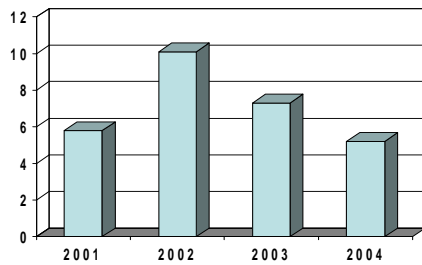
SoAGC Full Flying Members



Visitors to SoAGC



Visitor to Member Conversion Rate (%)



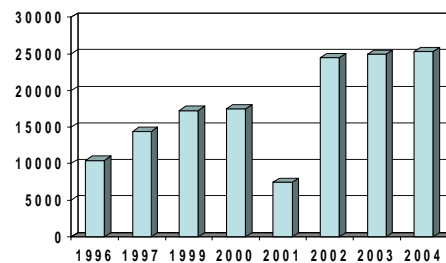
Why Members Lapse

- Young members get married, go to University, get a mortgage, children etc.
- Winter happens
- Get bored
- Been there, tick in the box, now for Scuba Diving!
- Legislation / Insurance issues
- Change to personal circumstances
- Disagreements

What we do....

- 'New Member Pack'
- Keep new members involved!
- New Member Meeting
- 'Badge Ladder' Trophy
- Bronze 'C' Lectures
- Cross Country Flying lectures
- 'Task Weeks'
- Coaching – not just instructing!

Cross Country Km's Flown



When we fail....

- Write to Lapsed Members

What we DON'T do...

- Formal 'Buddy' system

| | |
|---|--|
| Future Threats | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Airspace• EASA• Other legislation | |

John Williams of Scottish Gliding Union presented details of their club's ideas on bookable lessons and two-seater time and also their new hangar which enables every glider to be taken out without moving any others, thus encouraging flying to take place with only minimal numbers of people on site.

Club membership has grown by 15 per cent in five years, because of three simple things:

1. They have changed how they deal with ab initios, who can have difficulty with weekends (domestic pressures). A group of six to ten come along on Wednesday evenings between April and October, to fly with three dedicated instructors, in dedicated aircraft. This creates a small team all learning at the same time with the same instructors. The conversion rate to full useful members is very good. They charge £150 for six months membership; at the end of the six months nearly everyone joins as a full member.
2. Employing a full-time instructor, who works strange hours Saturday to Wednesday, bookable for £10 for a half-day (up to two people).
3. They are just about to start the third thing: they realise that the work-party ethic (getting to the club early to unpack the hangar then waiting all day for a flight) is no longer sustainable. They are building a 22-glider hangar (idea borrowed from Nympsfield) at a cost of £165,000, half of the spaces will be paid for up front at £6,000 each by private owners (12 years' rent) and all the club fleet will be kept there.