

# RSCDS Aberdeen Strategic Plan 2011-2013

RSCDS Aberdeen exists to promote the learning and appreciation of Scottish country dancing in and around Aberdeen by :

- providing a high standard of teaching in welcoming classes
- hosting a variety of social events which enable people to enjoy dancing to the best of their ability
- publicising Scottish country dancing and our activities to as wide an audience as possible
- using good, live music, whenever possible.

## The Need for a Strategic Plan

While RSCDS Aberdeen can justifiably be proud of providing Scottish country dance classes and running social events for dancers in the northeast of Scotland over the past 86 years, we are **now** facing unprecedented challenges. A decline in membership, particularly over the last six years (292 in 2005/6, 218 in 2010/11), and competition for the leisure time of all age groups, suggest that we need to adapt to changing circumstances. This does not mean abandoning the core values and priorities at the heart of our activities, but redefining them and ensuring that they are presented in fresh ways more likely to attract and retain dancers within our membership, classes and social events, thereby preserving Scottish country dancing for future generations.

Our Strategic Plan arises from several discussions in the Branch Committee and its Strategic Planning group, along with input from other sub-committees, as well as direct feedback and ideas from our teachers and individual members, whose experience and insights are invaluable.

## The Strategic Objectives

- To raise the profile of RSCDS Aberdeen and increase the recruitment of new and returner dancers by all appropriate measures.
- To encourage people new to Scottish country dancing to want to continue to attend classes and social events and maintain their RSCDS membership.
- To ensure that our children's classes are taught to a high standard as appropriate to their age and stage, with the emphasis on enjoying dancing, and to encourage them to participate in social events and, in due course, become involved in the adult activities of RSCDS Aberdeen.
- To deliver a high standard of teaching in graded adult classes, with live music whenever possible, and an emphasis on becoming a "good dancer to dance with".
- To increase our membership through several approaches designed to appeal to existing members and attract new or lapsed members, central to which will be the organisation of a varied programme of enjoyable social occasions.
- To ensure that RSCDS Aberdeen complies with the legal and administrative requirements of a well-managed, properly constituted, registered charity.

## **Main Action Areas arising from the Objectives**

### **Outreach and Recruitment**

Every effort should be made to ensure that we engage with the local community and demonstrate how enjoyable Scottish country dancing is. We intend to heighten our profile through press releases and publicity, harnessing the potential of newer media such as social networking sites (Facebook) and a redesigned website. Personal recommendation, however, remains a particularly effective recruitment method!

### **The Beginners' Experience**

Having recruited people new to Scottish country dancing, we need to make sure that they have such a good experience that we do not lose them within a short timescale. If they do not find it to be a hobby which engages them and becomes a vital part of their social and recreational lives, they may well move on to another type of dance, or a different activity.

### **Our Activities for Children**

This crucial area must be seen as a priority, for now and the future, and the teachers who give their time and energy to take classes and participate in all the associated activities need appropriate support through our Branch Youth Committee.

### **Our Adult Classes**

We will consider how our classes can best deliver a high standard of teaching in an enjoyable way, so that members are enabled to dance to the best of their ability. We also need to increase attendance at our classes, thereby ensuring that they remain viable at a time of escalating overheads. In this context, we will explore ways in which the social aspect of our Scottish country dancing classes can be encouraged and enjoyed.

### **The Benefits of Membership**

In addition to members accessing tangible benefits from remaining in the Branch, we aim to foster an appreciation of the role of current members in preserving Scottish country dancing for future generations. In our dancing community, we hope to promote a sense of belonging in which "fun, fitness and friendship" all arise from membership of the Branch. The quality and range of our Branch social events will, of course, be important in achieving this goal.

### **Governance Issues**

All of the above activities must be underpinned by a well-run organisation which, as far as possible, adheres to guidelines for best practice in all aspects of our administration.

## **Timescale, Monitoring and Review**

Although this Strategic Plan covers the next two years, regular monitoring will lead to continuing amendment of our Action Plan. This is the first specific planning process undertaken by the Branch, at least in recent years, and it will therefore be a learning experience. Ideally, the Strategic Plan should be seen as a dynamic document, modified in the light of this experience and as successive generations of Committee members and Office-bearers bring new insights and ideas

## **Action Plan 2011-2013 - Summary**

### **Introduction**

The Action Plan runs to 11 pages of small print tables, detailing the individual actions designed to address each aim, who is responsible, the time-frame and monitoring process for each task. This brief summary may be more helpful for some members who might prefer not to digest the Action Plan as a whole, but the full document is available on request from Lynn Wood, Hon. Secretary, or can be downloaded from the Branch website ([www.aberdeenscds.co.uk](http://www.aberdeenscds.co.uk)).

### **Outreach and Recruitment**

We aim to redesign the Branch website, as the first point of contact for many members of the public. We will build on recent progress in raising our press profile as well as developing a coherent advertising approach, and capitalising on the opportunities presented by the Branch Facebook page on the internet. It will enhance our image if we develop quality publicity materials available for distribution in a variety of situations, all with a consistent "brand", and we would like to build up a selection of good photographs for publicity purposes. We hope to hold annual promotional events (Dance Scottish) prior to the start of our classes. Over the next few months, we need to debate issues such as how to make best use of opportunities for public dancing displays. We also hope to address other aspects of the image of the Branch by, for instance, encouraging a tolerant and inclusive attitude, given the wide range of needs and preferences within the membership.

### **The Beginners' Experience**

People attending our Introductory and Improvers' classes should feel welcome and encouraged to enjoy and appreciate Scottish country dancing in a sociable setting. New Members' Packs will be issued to everyone on joining the Branch for the first time. A balance has to be reached between encouraging high standards while increasing confidence and enabling the inexperienced dancer to consider attending social events in due course. A Beginners' party will be organised towards the end of each term, and class members will be encouraged to attend our Dances, albeit with realistic expectations of the extent of participation. We will take steps to become more aware of the reasons for people dropping out of classes or not returning after the summer, and feedback forms will be introduced to these classes each term. Various alternative ways of organising our Introductory classes will be explored by the Strategic Planning sub-committee and the Branch Committee, e.g. joint working with ACC or holding Introductory classes in different neighbourhoods of the City.

### **Our Activities for Children**

Our childrens' class teachers will continue to meet regularly, but we hope to provide specific information and support to this group of dedicated teachers. They have been asked to review current arrangements within the Branch, e.g. classes, medal tests, to ensure best use of resources, and the balance between social dancing and preparation for performances/ tests/competitions will continue to be discussed. The group has creative ideas about opportunities for performing and increasing social events offered to young dancers, and the existing Youth Workshop will be promoted more widely. Young adults will be encouraged to attend RSCDS Spring Fling and progress to the Dancing Proficiency Award when ready. We need to realise the potential for engaging children more via Facebook and the RSCDS Youth E-zine, but we also hope to produce our own Branch magazine for this group. Our Child Protection and Health and Safety policies and procedures will be reviewed regularly.

## **Adult Classes**

Our adult classes are a key priority for the Branch. We will support the maintenance of a high standard of teaching by our committed teachers, and enable progression of our teachers in training. We also aim to enhance the social aspects, both during and after class, e.g. using the coffee lounge facilities at Curl Aberdeen. It is important to consider the balance between teaching technique and enjoying putting it into practice while dancing socially. We need to maximise the average numbers attending all our classes and will continue to be monitor attendance figures regularly, while aiming to set realistic charges. All class attendees will be invited to complete feedback forms at the end of the year to inform future decision making. It is hoped to establish the reasons why members may not currently attend our classes, and, as far as possible, address any recurring themes. There is a need to check whether the organisation of our classes might be adjusted to make better use of resources. In particular, we will revisit the feasibility of a class which could support the needs of the more proficient dancer and provide a core of people from whom dancers could be chosen for performance or competition. Various approaches will be considered to enable teachers with other commitments to contribute on a "less than full-time" basis, and we would like to explore ways of recruiting new musicians to the Branch to support our intention to use live music whenever possible.

## **The Benefits of Membership**

Apart from the provision of classes, the Committee hopes that other aspects of Branch life will be appreciated by members. We intend to increase the range of social events, starting with a trial of Winter Socials on a couple of Sunday afternoons in January and February, and we will explore the feasibility of a more formal occasion in the calendar. We want to build on the successful annual Away Weekend by asking for more detailed feedback from those who attend this event. We are considering establishing a Youth group, for under 35 year olds, with potential social events to include a Hostel Weekend. Our aim is to promote a sense of belonging in which "fun, fitness and friendship" all arise from membership of the Branch. Just as important is the concept of the preservation of Scottish country dancing for future generations, and we will promote this idea through the newsletter and fliers at our classes and events. More tangible benefits may be available if local businesses can be persuaded to recognise our members as a potential market for goods such as dance shoes. We would like to continue to develop the Branch Newsletter, and look to the internet to improve communication with and involvement of members, while ensuring that traditional methods are not neglected.

## **Governance**

The Branch is in the process of establishing a budget plan, and will prepare a financial policy and procedures document. The Child Protection policy and associated documents will be reviewed annually and we will check that all relevant personnel are aware of the appropriate procedures. Our Health and Safety policy and procedures (currently in draft form) and incident forms will be included in our new Teachers' Packs. We are clarifying our position with regard to licensing for the playing of live music (PRS), and we are covered by RSCDS Headquarters arrangements with regard to recorded music (PPL). Crucially, there is a need to review the structure, roles and responsibilities of our Branch Committee and ensure that we have an organisation capable of functioning efficiently and effectively, given that we are all volunteers combining busy lives with Branch responsibilities.