



# Synopsis of comments and feedback to Discussion Document from Area Meetings & Surveys

As part of the consultation phase of MCI Strategic Development Plan 2009 - 2013





## ACCESS & ENVIRONMENT

### Strengths

It was widely felt that the appointment of an Access & Environment Officer demonstrated the MCI's commitment to this issue. Subsequent publications on access and Leave No Trace have led to increased public awareness. The development of a database of areas of access issues, improving working relationships with farming landowning bodies, and good lines of communication with local volunteers were also commended as was the successful maintenance of access to hill/mountain ways and ongoing conservation projects.

### Weaknesses

The MCI was targeted for its perceived lack of political weight, its confusing, intermittently updated, and unobtainable Access Policy, and for failing to implement an effective nationwide strategy or communication network. This often led to an over-reliance on individuals'/group leaders' interest in access/conservation to implement MCI policies. The MCI was also criticised for its tardy response to access issues, for having an 'unrepresentative' attitude toward walking clubs, and for over-emphasising the potential dangers of hill-walking.

It was also felt that there was insufficient official reporting procedure and that resolution of issues with farmers/landowners was often left to individual clubs. Farmers/landowners, in many cases, were perceived as holding too much power over access and being ill-informed about access policies. It was imperative that formal channels of communication be kept open, objective, and impartial.

In many cases, paths to established climbing areas are unmarked/eroded and parking facilities substandard. There is also a lack of information about rock-climbing areas and areas that are access-sensitive. Often, too, MCI Providers are not up to date on MCI conservation policies, or are not Leave No Trace trainers.

### Opportunities

There should be an increased lobbying of ministers and high civil servants and a closer working relationship with local tourism/community groups. The MCI Officer should act as a channel of communication between individuals, clubs, the MCI, and governmental policy. Pilot schemes (Comhairle le Tuaithe) may open more opportunities for access.

Widespread increased communication was supported: awareness of issues relating to A&E, insurance, and liability could be achieved through leaflets, articles in farming magazines, newsletters, and greater involvement in community projects between farmers and walkers. MCI members' active involvement with the conservation effort was discussed and the potential for a 'commitment to effort' from each club/member was proposed, as were 'put something back' days.

### Threats

Landowners'/farmers' perceived lack of knowledge about legislation is a considerable threat to continued access. Confusion over public liability and concerns about increased litigation and vandalism were also regarded as endangering access. The issue of quad bikes and scramblers was also raised in conjunction with the feeling that often it was the actions of minority groups/individuals that were causing access problems for the majority. It was suggested that the MCI was being marginalized by more vocal/militant organizations and that to be effective it needed to have a more prominent media presence.



### **What other activities do you feel the MCI could be doing to ensure adequate access for MCI members?**

Communication is the key to ensuring the continued development of access and environmental issues. This included: publications, media awareness, attendance at local events (e.g. Ploughing Championships), distribution of key policy documents (e.g. IFA "1995 Occupiers Liability Act"), the promotion and continuance of dialogue between farmers/landowners/clubs/individuals/local communities/ministers. The creation of a transparent policy regarding the handling of problems/complaints was identified as a key issue, as was the development of an access policy based on legislation.

### **What conservation concerns do you have that are not being addressed by the MCI?**

Leave No Trace is the benchmark in promoting a responsible attitude toward the environment, however more information about way-marked trails as well as the continued promotion of environmental issues also needs to take place. The completion of a Leave No Trace course being a mandatory requirement of all MS/ML/WGL awards was mooted.

It was felt that the MCI's bolting policy needed renewing and endorsing by the current climbing community. Likewise, a greater degree of action should be taken to repair and maintain eroded areas or undertake conservation projects such as the promotion of car pooling or tackling of quad bikes.

### **List some opportunities you feel that would benefit inclusion of an MCI Access and Conservation representative.**

It was felt that if the MCI's policy was well researched it would help to break down barriers. This could be achieved by greater communication with local clubs/committees/national organisations (e.g. IFA/Keep Ireland Open). An evident and accountable plan would reassure people that action was being taken.

## **YOUTH**

### **Strengths**

The successful NI youth initiatives were praised, achieved in no small degree by the appointment of an MCI Officer at Tollymore Mountain Centre. Training/coaching standards in NI were regarded as exemplary and perceptible through good attendance at climbing walls and at the crag. Student symposiums and the MCI's good relationship with youth organisations (e.g. Scouts/Gaisce/Duke of Edinburgh) were also regarded as successful as were organised trips within Ireland and abroad (e.g. Alpine Meet). It was suggested that a climbing festival (rather than Meet) and more MCI youth-specific meets may be more apposite.

### **Weaknesses**

The successful initiatives in NI highlighted the relative lack of youth coaching and participation systems available in the ROI (particularly outside Dublin). It was further felt that the MCI had few links with the Scouts/Guides and that club activities were not properly promoted to young people. In short, the MCI needs greater experience of working with, and a higher profile among, young people if they are to have any direct influence in attracting and maintaining their interest.

Further drawbacks to participation included insufficient funding/transport, as well as the difficulty of engaging with some age groups (18-30) in participatory/coaching roles. Young climbers are insufficiently supported by outdoor companies/organisations and that they often felt alienated in their clubs. There was a call for the MCI to be seen actively to support all aspects of mountaineering and a fear that the MCI was in danger of spreading itself too thin and perhaps leaving ROI youth projects to other organizations such as Scouting Ireland, Guides etc.



### Opportunities

An ROI Youth Officer should be appointed and a wholesale promotion of outdoor activities to young people needs to take place. Initiatives such as family mountaineering days and club/school schemes should be encouraged and there also needs to be greater opportunities and access available for young people. Young talent could be encouraged through a range of initiatives such as NICAS, sponsorship, and national team selection. Existing support systems (e.g. university clubs/parental support) must be utilized. Local/regional competition climbing needs to be arranged and encouraged, as does the development of specific regional youth mountaineering clubs and networks to instil ethics and enthusiasm at an early age.

The MCI should support the training and assessment of climbing coaches who could run youth schemes at climbing walls. A syllabus is desirable for training coaches and a structured, high quality coach mentoring programme put in place. There also needs to be more information on how to deal with young people in clubs and a greater degree of structured progression for youth training to promote skills development. It was also suggested that beginner training for the over 18s should be encouraged.

### Threats

Two fundamental hurdles to youth involvement are funding and the legal implications of working with young people (vetting/accreditation/liability/insurance). A poor government attitude, a lack of facilities and access to facilities were also seen as threats. Clubs are hugely dependent on mentor/volunteer members and often do not have a youth officer: volunteer fatigue is therefore a risk. Across the board the MCI needs to develop existing young climbers' skills and enthusiasm and adopt a creative and bold approach toward promoting the full range of mountaineering activities available.

### How should the MCI promote greater participation by young people in all aspects of mountaineering?

MCI activities should be promoted through schools, colleges, the Department of Education and Presidents Award schemes. MCI clubs/members should be encouraged to take part in youth participation and 'have a go' sessions. Downloads/publications/information needs to be accessible and available.

The MCI must also be given funding for a ROI Youth Officer and the creation of a school liaison and development programme to encourage and promote mountaineering. Initiatives such as youth clubs, a national youth team, national events and an outdoor activity curriculum could also be investigated.

### How should the programme focus be weighted – towards performance or participation?

Performance: This would probably bring more visible results and be the best use of the MCI's limited resources. Higher competence leads to greater enjoyment; however emphasis should be placed on performance to achieve potential, not necessarily on competition.

Participation: This would involve more people (leading to a demand for better facilities) and would inculcate a subsequent 'performance' attitude.

The consensus, however, was that the MCI should support both those who wish to perform to a high level and those that just wish to participate for fun and love of the sport.

### What methods should MCI use to encourage youth participation at all levels of mountaineering?

School and clubs should be actively encouraged and supported to promote youth participation (possibility of spending part of Transition Year in an OEC/training P.E. teachers to WGL standard). For children under 16, participation at club/competition level and parental involvement was particularly important, but the MCI should ensure sufficient 'follow through' activities for 16+. Increased public awareness via publicity/fundraising initiatives could also be organised, as could 'have a go' sessions/sponsored courses.



## TRAINING

### Strengths

It was widely recognised that the well established formal and informal mountaineering training schemes, the Winter/Summer MCI Meets and MCI workshops were a success. Irish OECs offer a good range of courses and BOS Providers were regarded as an enthusiastic and professional body of instructors. The appointment of an experienced, respected Training Officer is a positive step, as is the redesigned website.

### Weaknesses

Clubs do not receive enough information about MCI training and that there is an absence of structured training to improve members' personal skills. However, clubs themselves often fail to promote training and there is a lack of willing volunteers to run club walks. Experienced volunteers often felt under-appreciated.

The MCI was targeted for its perceived bias toward certain mountaineering disciplines and for its failure to follow up successful initiatives. The loss of Tiglin and the resultant BOS Provider scheme has caused confusion over who exactly 'runs' formal training: training was also often perceived to be run at the discretion of Providers' commercial interests. Training schemes were criticised for often being confusing, expensive, and irrelevant for certain age/interest groups: an inconsistency in the standards of instructors was also highlighted. The step from MS to ML was considered demanding and many commented that it was often difficult to know if particular training was suitable for their needs.

### Opportunities

It was widely agreed that club members need to be trained in the hill skills necessary to make them self-sufficient, not just mountaineering leaders: formal training would often follow from this kind of informal tuition. Clubs themselves need to come together with the MCI to discuss training.

The formation of training centres was suggested, as was the creation of a register of qualified trainers with periodic, mandatory retraining courses for Providers. 'Specific training for specific needs' was widely endorsed. A mentoring scheme was suggested, as was an 'official support' policy by the MCI for NCTC Coaching Award schemes/other NGBs. It was felt that programmes designed in conjunction with university clubs would also be of great benefit and that perhaps the MCI should 'officially' support talented climbers/mountaineers.

### Threats

Keeping a balance between climbing/hillwalking training is vital as is the separation of leader/instructor/coaching roles in training. In many cases, the expense/availability of formal training courses, as well as the 'immaturity' of certain MCI Providers led people to seek instruction outside the MCI. In turn, a number of Providers felt that increasing pressure by BOS regarding qualifications/renewal/paperwork was likely to drive many Providers away from the MCI. There is continued difficulty in getting people to lead club walks and, in many cases, hillwalkers were overconfident in their hills skills and did not see the need to attend training, leading to unsafe groups on the mountains.

### **An options appraisal is to be carried out in joining together Ireland's two Training Boards (BOS & MLTNI). What do you feel would be the advantages/disadvantages of an All-Ireland Training Board?**

Advantages: Resource pooling would encourage MCI members to visit new areas and would promote an "Irish Mountaineering Community" with MCI as sole governing body. It would (hopefully) lead to a more efficient administrative system/greater resources.



Disadvantages: Instructors in NI/ROI operate in different legal environments – this may cause a problem if the two Boards are merged and might lead to UK laws/regulations being made defacto laws in ROI. Policy clashes/job losses may also result. Any merger may also cause potential administrative delays.

**The current MCI strategic plan for training acts on two fronts: the formal NGB award scheme and informal training particularly suited for the needs of MCI clubs. What are the key aspects and actions the MCI should promote in informal bespoke training for its members?**

Informal training is extremely useful and important and this could be carried out either by documents (books/CDs) available to clubs, by Providers visiting clubs, or via the website; application for training could also usefully be web-based. It is also important that informal training is ongoing and that clubs are notified well in advance about dates/costs etc. Clubs' training needs analyses are necessary and the MCI should be more hands-on in both its delivery and ensuring that appropriate safety procedures and hill skills are in use.

Respondents undertaking formal awards felt that bespoke training should be a bridge between awards. Non-club members felt that the MCI should take an interest in their individual development. It was suggested that formal awards should be made more user-friendly and incorporate a mentoring system. It was also suggested that an awards scheme designed toward personal skills (rather than leadership) be set up: the SPA, for example, was felt to be of little value to those who want to advance personal skills.

**Coaching and competition are relatively new and emerging elements within the sport of mountaineering. How best can the MCI develop and deliver a successful coaching programme?**

There was wide support for the development of a coaching programme. It was suggested that coaching should start at youth level and that university clubs should also be heavily involved. Regional development offers could be put in place and 'coaching' should be considered as part of the larger 'training' curriculum. The MCI could usefully learn from the BMC/CAF, who currently run coaching delivery programmes.

On the other hand, some felt that this was a niche concept, that the wider mountain community did not require competition coaching and that undue emphasis is being placed on this competitive aspect of mountaineering to the detriment of hillwalkers' needs.

## COMMUNICATIONS AND SERVICES

### Strengths

The website, Log and e-zine were all regarded as successes, as was the increased MCI/club communication.

### Weaknesses

The website/e-zine/Log's successes are wholly dependent on people actually reading it or having internet access: to ensure the former, there should be more member involvement (e.g. letters page/forum/club profile). Forthcoming lectures need greater publicity or synchronisation with climbing/walking events.

The MCI should promote itself more forcefully, possibly with the appointment of a full-time communication and PR member of staff. The organization currently suffers from a perceived lack of identity with hillwalkers believing it favours rock-climbers, and vice versa. It was felt that the MCI should be responsible for examining the way clubs operate, should promote cross-club communication, and also should be more aware of non-club members. There is also an access problem to the MCI library.



### **Opportunities**

The MCI needs to be more member-focused. This could be achieved via promotional road shows, endorsing relevant publications, and promotion through periodicals/newspapers. The website could report club activities, provide a regional round-up of events, and instigate a text-messaging service. Other suggestions included: workshops on photography/flora & fauna; route cards on website; multi-lingual information available; member discounts on electronic maps; regional meetings; a logo change.

### **Threats**

Member apathy, competing publications, and the MCI's lack of progression/visible identity were all recognized, as were preconceived ideas about the MCI as an administrative body. Without a central administrator, any web forum could be open to malicious /slandering postings. It was also conceded that parties currently unrepresented by the MCI could become discouraged and withdraw membership.

### **The Irish Mountain Log is our main communication channel. Does it portray what we do as an organisation? What key additional features should be incorporated?**

In general the Log was seen as a successful means of communication. However, it needs to concentrate on the quality of its articles and photography and include more MCI-specific information. Other additional features suggested were: a club news/outing section; accommodation details; walking/climbing routes; expedition reports; technical skills/'dummies guide' section; youth section.

### **To enable future developments of the sport we could increase our membership of hillwalkers and climbers to produce greater strengths in numbers. Would significant growth pose any threats to our identity as a National Governing Body representative of the sporting and relational activities?**

Significant growth in numbers would enable the MCI to have a more commanding voice when communicating their needs to government and statutory agencies. If this necessitated a large diversion of MCI funds to effect, however, it may jeopardize other aspects of its development plan.

### **The MCI has an international presence, supporting mountaineering best practice in Europe and beyond through international events, UIAA, BMC and the MCofS. What message should we be conveying?**

That Ireland has excellent climbing/walking opportunities and a large body of active and successful climbers/mountaineers. International co-operation is supported and the MCI continues to encourage and develop best mountaineering practice among members on a par with other European countries.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Strengths**

Recent staffing appointments, the board of directors, accounts layouts, and the new website were all regarded as considerable assets, as was the new library (although p&p is not cost-effective). With a more professional statute, the MCI is now well established as an NGB and has numerous contacts nationwide as well as a strong international profile. It has established a network of area meetings, a close relationship with affiliated clubs, and has a good volunteer system. The membership fee remains reasonable and, with minimal financial resources, the MCI has been able to achieve much (e.g. youth initiatives in NI).



### Weaknesses

Financially, it was felt that the MCI was over-reliant on Sport Council funding and failed to sufficiently communicate its resource spending. An increase in membership fees is possibly not the answer to the MCI's financial concerns. There is also a lack of club/member input into the MCI Board and this sector may subsequently feel excluded. The mountaineer/climber/hillwalker factions remain at loggerheads and the relationship between Board/staff itself is also rather vulnerable. Tiglin's closure remains a significant loss.

### Opportunities

The website and Log continue to be well-used resources, although the Log could be made available online and greater publicity for e-zine created. Library resources should be uploaded and more pdf information documents made available. Insurance/discount schemes need reviewing and the MCI should consider providing incentives for volunteers.

Financial issues remain critical. Government funding bodies must be made aware that more resources are required and the MCI itself should work to increase its membership numbers. It remains debatable whether any increase in membership fees should be spent on membership services or funding for staffing positions. Potential sponsorship deals could be lucrative; however the MCI may be regarded as 'selling out'.

There are many clubs, individuals, climbing walls, and mountaineering projects that would benefit from MCI sponsorship/support. It was also felt that the MCI should prioritise increasing access and availability to existing climbing walls and state its strategy for developing new walls (especially in ROI).

### Threats

Financially, governmental funding is likely to decrease with any economic downturn. A loss of members will also lead to reduced government funding. However, any funding avenue the MCI may subsequently pursue could reduce resources available to some of the organizations it supports.

Better lines of communication between clubs/MCI are not being promoted and there has been a downturn in membership numbers whilst an increase in new outdoor groups (e.g. Walkers Association). Non-affiliated rock-climbers/mountaineers are developing the sport and their input/involvement would be invaluable. The MCI itself also needs to decide who it is influenced by (MLTUK/UIAA/ROI).

### Would you like to see additional support for club volunteers in terms of recruitment/training?

Of those who replied 'yes', it was felt that support could take the form of expenses/free training or the creation of regional Liaison Officers. An induction programme/information package would be useful as would widespread club/member training in hill skills & safety.

### Do you see advantages to MCI increasing membership fees in order to provide an increased level of service to its members?

No: Some cannot afford a fee raise, and for university clubs it may result in cutbacks in other areas. There may also be the potential of losing disgruntled members who disagree with resultant spending.

Yes: Only if the reason for the increase was an improved service or clearly stated, achievable initiatives. It was felt that increased membership fees would not be too burdensome although a transparency in spending would be essential.

Some felt that the MCI should support clubs' efforts to tap into local funding sources: endorsing the financial empowerment of clubs would take some pressure off the MCI.



### **Do you see a benefit in MCI being organised at a regional level?**

Yes: The MCI is often regarded as a Dublin organisation. Decentralisation would result in greater regional participation and would ensure that indigenous attitudes/ opportunities/problems could be targeted. Regional Liaison Officers would be an important step, allowing the MCI a better idea of regional issues, and giving members a feeling that their issues are being heard and addressed.

No: This would be costly to implement and would increase bureaucracy and unnecessary structures for an organisation of the MCI's size. Working at a regional level is too narrow and the MCI should be a national organization with local input and involvement.

### **Have you any other comments and suggestions you would like to add?**

- Having regional MCI officers/basing the MCI in a more appropriate environment would remove the 'Ivory Tower' label as there remains considerable doubt over who the MCI are and what they do.
- Considerable confusion still reigns over the MCI insurance and it was also felt that the insurance year should be changed to the calendar year.
- It was asked what the MCI/Failte Ireland/Coilte were doing in securing suitable car parks near access points to the uplands, with agreement with farmers/landowners.
- The MCI should consider employing a climbing co-ordinator so that the several guidebooks in preparation could be helped to completion. Consideration should also be given to renew annual grants scheme for innovative/significant expeditions.
- The IRC believe that the MCI should have a strategy to look after all members equally and not single out Youth for special attention. Following the Swim Ireland model the MCI should have separate strategies for hillwalking, bouldering, rock-climbing and alpinism.
- A number of respondents commented that the survey itself was unwieldy to fill out, tedious, repetitive, ambiguous, and non user-friendly.
- The requirement that people leading club walks are WGL/ML trained was suggested.
- The MCI was widely praised for its work to date but counselled that research and development applies to MCI as any other body be they sport/industrial/educational.

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