

The Prospect Retired Members' Group – An Unofficial History

Compiled by

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PREFACE

This is my personal attempt to compile a history of the Prospect Retired Members' Group (RMG). I hope it will be useful to incoming RMG activists and to Prospect staff who are assigned responsibilities for the Group. It is not intended to replace the Retired Members Guide.

My involvement with the RMG only began in 2005 after I took early retirement from the Civil Service. I am therefore grateful to Arthur Bavister, Ann Hedgecock, Stan Kordys and Mike Moriarty for providing their recollections of the pre-2005 RMG.

The status of this history is "unofficial", although I have endeavoured to be objective and factual. Whether a future edition becomes official is, of course, a matter for Prospect. - A.R.

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FORMATION: THE AMG YEARS

On 01 November 2001, Prospect was formed by a merger of the Institution of Professionals Managers and Specialists (IPMS) and the Engineers and Managers Association (EMA). As a result, their retired membership also combined. The two unions had different traditions for involving members who were retired or unemployed. The arrangement for the new Associate Members' Group (AMG) was an amalgamation of those traditions. The AMG could send 12 delegates to the Prospect National Conference where they could participate fully, card votes excepted. The AMG could also send two non-voting delegates to meetings of Prospect's National Executive Committee (NEC) in an advisory role.

The AMG was divided into 20 Areas[†]. The demarcation of the Areas was a compromise between aiming for a similar number of members in each Area and avoiding an excessive geographic spread where membership was sparse. Thus, Scotland was divided into Scotland North and Scotland South, even though Scotland's combined membership was below that of East Anglia.

([†]This excludes the small groupings "Overseas" and "Guernsey" who do not send representatives or delegates to Group meetings. Later, the Isle of Man became another such grouping after breaking away from a mainland Area.)

Each Area sent two representatives to AMG meetings. There was an initial aim that one should be from the IPMS side of the organisation and the other from EMA, but this may not have happened in every Area. The AMG held roughly-quarterly meetings.

THE RMG TAKES SHAPE

In 2004, the AMG was detached from unemployed members and renamed the Retired Members' Group (RMG). At the same time, its organisation changed to make it operate more like Prospect as a whole. A National Committee (NC) superseded the body of Representatives, and was now limited to one Representative per Area. The NC would meet quarterly. Areas now sent two delegates to an Annual Delegate Conference (ADC), normally held in January or February. To ensure delegates were separate from NC members, the latter were barred from being delegates. The NC now had responsibility for implementing instructions given to it by the ADC. The RMG's President & Vice-President would come from the Area Representatives but would be elected by delegates to the ADC.

Membership of the RMG has varied between 20000 and 23000. New members can only come from recently-retired Working Members of Prospect. Retired Members pay lower subscriptions, reflecting the fact they don't receive help on employment-related issues.

The incorporation of BECTU into Prospect has yet to make a significant impact on RMG membership, since BECTU did not have provision for retired membership.

The objectives of the RMG are those laid down in the Rules of Prospect so far as they are appropriate to the Group. In addition, the RMG

- provides a forum whereby Retired Members of Prospect can maintain contact with other Prospect members;
- acts as a focal point for Retired Members to gain help, support and advice from Prospect on issues of concern to them;

- campaigns for improvements in the benefits available to Prospect Retired Members.

CONTRIBUTION TO UNION DECISION-MAKING

RMG delegates at the Prospect National Conference have been free to take part in all debates and all show-of-hands votes. However, there has been debate within the RMG as to whether it should consider proposing motions on issues that didn't directly impact Retired Members. In 2011, with the blessing of the National Executive Committee (NEC), the RMG adopted the rule "Motions may address issues relating to Prospect's wider membership where the action specified can have an application to a Prospect forum such as the National Conference."

The RMG has proposed motions at the Prospect National Conference when instructed to do so by the ADC. Other motions from the ADC have been taken up with the NEC where there was no conflict with policies decided by the Prospect National Conference.

Retired Members have traditionally been left off Prospect NEC committees, with the exception of the Pensions Advisory Sub-Committee. In 2023, the Group asked the NEC to permit RMG nominations to the committees. The NEC agreed to consider co-option in exceptional cases where relevant knowledge & expertise could not be met from the working membership.

One issue that particularly aggrieved the NC was the exclusion of the Retired Members' delegates from card votes at the National Conference. Card votes occurred on all rule-change motions and on those motions where a card vote was requested. The exclusion was felt to be unfair, particularly on those issues which affected Retired Members. For its part, the NEC was resistant to a *per capita* card vote for the RMG because of concern that the result would be a block vote that gave pensioners excessive influence on the union's decision making.

At the 2014 Prospect National Conference, the NEC proposed a significant rule change. This was to give RMG delegates a 25% card vote (*ie* representing a quarter of RMG membership) which would be restricted to:

- on-request card-votes on RMG subscriptions, and
- rule-change motions on Rule 5 (the section specifically dealing with the RMG).

The change was overwhelmingly approved and the change took effect for Prospect National Conferences from 2016 onwards. However, as of 2025, there had been no rule-change motions affecting Section 5 and no card votes on RMG subscriptions (which had ceased to be an issue of contention).

In 2023-25, the RMG made representations to improve matters. At the 2026 Prospect National Conference, the NEC successfully proposed a widening of the scope of the RMG card vote. It is now extended to motions (other than rule changes) which have an equivalent impact on Retired Members and Working Members.

FITTING IN WITH PROSPECT

At various times, the RMG has had to decide how far to reflect the way things are done in Prospect as a whole. In practice, where the RMG has a say in the matter, it has used its own judgement.

One example is the RMG Rules. Until 2012, they were numbered sequentially from 1 to 34. This meant that a new Rule 5, for example, would require the renumbering of all the subsequent rules and would prevent any rule-change motion affecting them from being debated that year. In 2012, a new structure was approved with hierarchical numbering, as in the Prospect Rulebook. This made it possible to debate different rule-change motions at the ADC provided they related to different sections.

Another example is the NC practice of keeping its recommendations secret until motions are debated at the ADC. The NEC had a similar practice for motions being debated at the Prospect National Conference. In 2022, the NEC decided to disclose its bare recommendations in advance, partly to avoid too many speeches on non-contentious motions. In the interests of openness, the NC decided to follow suit for ADC motions as from 2023.

In 2018, the NC debated whether the RMG Delegate Conference should be made biennial, like Prospect's National Conference. A consultation of Areas showed more against than in favour, so a two-thirds majority for change was never going to happen. The cost of one-day RMG ADCs was in any case miniscule compared to the cost of National Conferences.

Another issue arose in 2022 over whether the Vice-President should be required to automatically become President if the latter post was unexpectedly vacated or unfilled. At the time, the RMG Rules had no explicit mechanism for filling the post, or indeed the Vice-Presidency if the incumbent chose to resign. In 2024, rule-changes were carried which gave the NC the power to elect a new President and/or Vice-President when unexpected vacancies occurred. Alignment with the Prospect procedure was partial, since the union has a three-person Presidential team elected every two years.

Following the 2024 Prospect National Conference, where there was evidence of misunderstandings about the RMG, the NC recognised the need for greater interaction with Working Members. For the first time, an RMG stall was set up at the 2026 Prospect National Conference. Worthwhile contacts were made, including members of the BECTU Sector eager for allies to combat ageism.

COMMUNICATIONS

Prior to 2014, the Prospect magazine Profile contained a page for Retired Members. From that year, Retired Members received a 4-page leaflet called WiseEye. It was sent out 3 or 4 times a year, sometimes as an insert in Profile, sometimes on its own.

It was produced by Prospect's Communications Department (Comms) but had significant input from an Editorial Advisory Team of five Retired Members elected by the NC. The final hard-copy WiseEye was sent out in February 2020. The only WiseEye since then was a soft-copy embedded in an email sent to online members in October 2021.

In September 2022, the NC began producing a Retired Members Bulletin to be sent to online Retired Members who had email addresses known to Prospect. The Editorial Advisory Team became an Editorial Team, although the bulletin was subject to vetting by HQ staff.

Starting in 2023, in collaboration with Comms, the NC compiled an Autumn RoundUp for postal-dependent Retired Members. This provided details of forthcoming Area AGMs as well as a summary of the news they had missed.

COVID-19 AND THE AFTERMATH

In 2020, the RMG held its ADC on 30 January. Three resolutions contained motions to be submitted to the 2020 Prospect National Conference. That event never took place. The outbreak of COVID-19 caused a country-wide suspension of in-person gatherings. Prospect offices were largely closed for 18 months, although the majority of staff continued working from home.

After a GPC meeting on 06 February 2020, the NC was only able to conduct its business through email exchanges. The pandemic also had a significant impact on the majority of RMG Area Committees. Most Committee meetings planned for 2020 could not take place and very few Areas were able to hold their AGMs.

The NC had an informal Zoom meeting on 19 December 2020 with half its members present. It was noted that no ADC for 2021 was possible. The first formal NC meeting for 17 months was held on 08 July 2021. It was via Zoom, as were the subsequent three NC meetings held that year.

In-person attendance at NC meetings resumed in 2022, but became hybrid, allowing Area Representatives with far-to-travel the option of participating online. The RMG was able to hold an ADC in 2022, but several Areas were struggling to function. Four failed to nominate a Representative to the NC. Local volunteers managed to reactivate three of those Areas with the help the NC and regional Full-Time Officers. The South-East Midlands Area could not be revived, however. Its members were redistributed into neighbouring Areas.

REPRESENTATION ON PROSPECT BODIES

In addition to two delegates to meetings of the NEC, the RMG has representatives on the following Prospect bodies.

- The Prospect NEC Pensions Advisory Sub-Committee.
- The Prospect Scotland Committee.
- The Prospect Ireland Committee.
- The Prospect AEAT Pension Campaign.

AFFILIATIONS

The RMG has sent representatives to the following bodies.

- The National Pensioners Convention (NPC) and some of its working groups.
- The Public Service Pensioners Council (until it disbanded in 2024).
- The Wales Seniors Forum, and its successor NPC Wales.
- The Scottish Pensioners Forum.
- TUC Pensioners Committees (National and Regional).

ACHIEVEMENTS

These include benefits for Retired Members obtained by Prospect and campaign successes where the RMG has worked with others.

- Transferable personal tax allowances between spouses (benefitting many pensioners)
- Compensation for members diagnosed with Asbestos-related medical condition.
- Help for members in non-employment-related personal cases.
- Continuation of the triple-lock on the basic state pension.
- Improvements to the indexation used by the Pension Protection Fund.
- A fair deal for members of the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme.
- Restoration of the Winter Heating Allowance for the majority of pensioners.

APPENDIX A: RMG OFFICERS

The list of elected officers is as follows:

Year Elected	Group President	Group Vice-President
2002	Ted Edwards	Harry Sharrock
2003	Ted Edwards	Harry Sharrock
2004	Ted Edwards	Harry Sharrock
2005	Ted Edwards	Harry Sharrock
2006	Harry Sharrock	Margaret Wastall
2007	Harry Sharrock	Margaret Wastall
2008	Harry Sharrock	Margaret Wastall
2009	Margaret Wastall	Gerald Perks
2010	Margaret Wastall	Gerald Perks
2011	Margaret Wastall	Gerald Perks
2012	Gerald Perks	Ann Hedgecock
2013	Gerald Perks	Ann Hedgecock
2014	Gerald Perks	Robbie Ridoutt
2015	Gerald Perks	Robbie Ridoutt
2016	Robbie Ridoutt	Peter Gilroy
2017	Robbie Ridoutt	Peter Gilroy
2018	Robbie Ridoutt	Peter Gilroy
2019	David Harding	Ray Arrowsmith
2020	David Harding	Ray Arrowsmith
2022	David Harding	Andrew Ruffhead
2023	David Harding	Andrew Ruffhead
2024	David Harding	Andrew Ruffhead
2025	Andrew Ruffhead	Tom James
2026	Andrew Ruffhead	Tom James

Note: There was no ADC in 2021, so David Harding and Ray Arrowsmith continued in office.

The following have been Group Secretaries: Terry Lane, Mike Clancy, Garry Graham, David Luxton, Andy Bye, Mike Weiler, Garry Graham (again), John Ferrett (in an acting capacity) and Mike Macdonald.