Dear Friends and Plus members,

They say that a week is a long time in politics, but this past year has flown by as National Chair.

You may remember by the end of the last NAGM that we did not elect a National Treasurer. We faced the real prospect of closing the federation before I had even started in post. I was still hopeful that one could be found before the May National Executive Committee (NEC) meeting. In the meantime, I consulted with the NEC and suggested that we move the location of the NEC meetings from Coventry. This made practical sense in sharing the travelling between all of us. It also coincided with the request for charging our current meeting room. I found a suitable venue in Oxford which is central and easy to travel by all forms of transport with good wheelchair access. Looking at the structure of the NEC meeting I decided that an overdue review was needed in the way that standing items are handled. This was an opportunity to review the top tier and bring organisation up to date. Keeping meetings concise and meaningful within a reasonable time scale of 5 hours including an hour lunch break.

Just before the August NEC meeting the Hon Gen Sec, Ian Crawshaw contacted me to say he was unable to continue due to mounting work pressures. I would like to thank Ian for his years of service to Plus. I know how difficult he found it when deciding. Ian had made a commitment at the last NAGM and felt had let us down when he was unable to fulfill this commitment. Ian is a true plusser and I wish him well. Reminding him that you must come first no matter what the situation. The last NEC meeting in November was postponed as the number of committee members were unable to attend and making the meeting non quorate. I gave those NEC members available the opportunity to continue to have the meeting if they wished.

For me the starkest thing is how some parts of Plus are very motivated whilst other parts are dormant. Do not get me wrong, we are not the only organisation that is experiencing this same issue. One large National Trust group of 400 members will close this year as they are unable to elect a committee. The current committee have served four years and must stand down as their constitution states. This is a good example of how a constitution cannot work for the benefit of its own organisation.

What I think we need a is frank and honest conversation regarding the future direction of Plus. As I said before some parts are happy as a pair of comfortable shoes to drift along as they are at present. Others drive hard to promote and maintain Plus as it was 30 years ago. It is not for me to say who is right or wrong? I am just stating the obvious, so no one is under any illusion that everything is perfect. The world around has changed in the last 30 to 40 years and maybe we should just accept that?

During the year I have attended several of events across the country. It is great to see that the Kings Lynn camping weekend grows in strength every year. The Weekend in Sunny Hunstanton (WASH) has managed to overcome some of its issues from last year. But just like Plus it must face up to its own challenges. This well loved and iconic event continues as Plus's premier weekend. It must recognise the need in taking careful consideration to ensure its future viability. We must not forget the Spring Break and recognise the hard work put in by Ben Allen and Adrian Barnard. This event too has grown to ensure that Plus has a few key events across the year. Not forgetting my own area who run the Centre Parcs weekend in September. In the past 3 years it now regularly attracts 24 attendees and early booking is essential. Then there is of course the National Annual General Meeting (NAGM). Again, Adrian and Ben bring their organisational skills together to provide a cost-effective event.

One observation I have made is that having NAGM so soon after Christmas and the New Year. Then Spring Break just shortly after wards brings a huge financial pressure to some of our members. I believe that this may have an impact on the numbers attending. The new incoming NEC, Spring Break & NAGM organiser's may wish to consider this point carefully.

If you or your members have not been to any of the above events, then why not make this your New Year's resolution. To book, enjoy and support these events. So, ensuring their future longevity.

Another observation is the amount of social media presence. I am hoping that later today one of our guest speakers will be able to inspire you all to getting more active online in a safe manner. Yes, there is some dangers out there online. But with a few simple tips you can make the most of the internet and social media. I believe that we need to have a second active website to compliment Mark Hewson's one. Not forgetting to thank Mark for giving up his precious free time in updating the web site which we all use regularly. Thank You!

For me a special mention should be given to Ben Allen who has shown great foresight in the past year in taking a greater lead in running this year's NAGAM and Spring Break. Taking the pressure off Adrian to allow him time to recuperate from his recent ill health.

Finally, to all our groups across the country that run their weekly, forth nightly or monthly group nights. This is the bread and butter activity that is the heart of Plus to which many groups will survive or fail.

Overall our organisation needs to take stock for its future wellbeing. If we plan carefully, consider our members and how we can best serve them. Plus, can find a niche in the over loaded social activities arena. To compete with the ever-increasing competition that social media attracts. We do need to be more visible as there are potential members out there, that I believe are looking but cannot find us.

For the future wellbeing of Plus we do need to start taking small steps to improve. I know for some of you out there, like me you been to many meetings and acknowledge this very point.

Today we have an opportunity to take matters in our hands and shape the way forward. I would like to ask all groups that have fewer than 10 members make a commitment this year to recruit one more member. Equally I would like to ask groups that have more than 10 members to give a commitment to support a group with 10 or less members. This could be helping in a recruitment campaign or support an event or activity in raising the groups profile in their local area. Remembering that the fellow group does not have to be in your own area. I believe what we need to do is break down the barriers of groups & areas that currently exist and work together as one big Plus group.

If elected as National Chair for this year then I will be seeking the NEC's approval to a financial plan to support this activity. The details for this plan have not been considered but it needs to be realistic, achievable for it to succeed. I know it will be a long road into the unknown, but we can do it together for the benefit of Plus in the whole.

For now, and the future.

Steve Rolfe

National Chair