

Council Member

John Gibbons



Please give details of all diving industry related interests, whether remunerated or not, and any other potential conflicts of interest

none

What do you think are the key challenges facing BSAC, and what should we be doing to address them?

The challenge for BSAC in the coming years is how to maintain the strengths of the club system and the commitment of our volunteers while at the same time adapting our training and commercial model to compete with other dive training agencies and other outdoor activities (just look at the massive increase in paddle-boarding and activities like coastaleering).

The membership of BSAC has declined from approx. 31 thousand in 2011 to 27 thousand in 2019 (from wikipedia BSAC had a peak membership of approximately 50 thousand in the 90s). The impact of the pandemic has caused a further decrease to 23k in 2020 and the 2021 figures are expected to be similar. In addition to the drop in membership, from my own anecdotal observations we have an aging demographic in our membership and the Universities which were the source of many new members annually are struggling to maintain viability, with my own University club ULSAC going under in 2019. The investment in time required to learn to dive via a BSAC club can be significant and requires commitment. Many people are time poor and want to learn to dive according to their schedule. With most dive centres in popular tourist destinations aligned to PADI the choice provided to learn via the BSAC system abroad is limited.

A quick google search returned approximately 440 PADI dive centres in the UK, although I do not have the data as to how many of these are going concerns, providing easy access to training for those wanting to learn. In comparison BSAC has approximately 41 commercial centres and I think about 450 clubs in the UK. While the strength of the BSAC has been in our club system other training agencies are impacting our ability to attract new members but providing classes and lessons to fit potential divers busy lives. BSAC is now strengthening collaboration between BSAC Schools and Clubs and hopefully this will address some of the challenges we are faced with.

The reduction in our membership will have a consequential impact on our finances and puts at risk the long-term viability of BSAC. The challenge is to manage costs/overheads and expenses, while maintaining the investment to continue evolving the high quality and standards which are the foundation of BSACs reputation.

Please describe how you would contribute to any / all of these areas

In my professional life I am a Management Consultant working across Europe delivering a range of consulting services. My current focus is on IT Security and Data Privacy and helping customers comply with the range of legislation as well as deal with the increasing pace and sophistication of cyber-attacks. During my career I have worked on the design and delivery of multi-million-pound IT systems across a range of industries managing teams of developers, engineers and consultants.

As part of my life as a Consultant I have needed many of the skills and experience the council is looking for (less so in HR/Policy Development and finance). I negotiated several significant contracts both from procurement and as a supplier, developed new services and offerings while leading UK public sector technology strategy for my company. I am a part qualified CIMA accountant, a certified systems engineer and am a frustrated data scientist always looking for new ways to use data and visualisations to develop greater understanding and insight.

I hope the experience I have gained working in business change programmes as a Consultant can help BSAC work in a more agile way to adapt to the challenges it faces in the coming years.

Personal statement

For as long as I can remember I wanted to learn to dive. I finally learned while at university in London, joining ULSAC in 1987. From the first lecture and pool lesson my life was changed. It provided me with the opportunity to discover the UK in ways most people do not have the chance to experience apart from a nature documentary on the BBC. The friendships I made have endured to this day, as well as introducing me to my future wife.

After University I worked in investment banking, fundamentally to fund my diving. It was obvious to my boss at the time that I was treating it such, and he was less than surprised when after passing my BSAC AI exam I quit to take on a full-time teaching opportunity at a dive school in West London.

During the 90s I taught with several schools including two years at Fort Bovisand where I also got to play with the BAD Lads (British Air Divers) on their HSE commercial diver training. Although the joy of a hot-water suit and a KM17 on my head had its attractions I did not see myself as a commercial diver. Instead, I went back to university to study for a PhD in Neuroscience and eventually into a career as a Management Consultant. The time demands of work and family meant that diving took a back seat for the start of the new Millenia and I became a warm water diver on holidays. The kids are now all grown, and I have spent the last few years rebuilding my skills and getting back into teaching again. Diving has changed so much since my wetsuited/ABLJ/single 7l dive in Bovisand harbour as part of my Sports Diver training on a cold April morning in 1988. Having done a trial dive on one of the early CIS-Lunar CCR units in 1996 (or thereabouts) I managed to finally buy a rebreather in 2020 and completed my MOD-1 conversion in October 2021. The changes in the diving industry are as different as my first dive on a single 7 litre in Bovi to the rebreather I now dive on and I look forward to the opportunity to support the BSAC as it adapts to the changes in the diving world.