THE MARLOW PLAN 1970

1. An Extraordinary Meeting of Council held at Marlow, Buckinghamshire, on 23 and 24 March 1970 determined to examine the Society’s responsibilities afresh. We now place our conclusions and consequential plan before the membership.

2. Operational research is a professional activity, acknowledging high standards of scientific work and professional integrity. These standards must at all costs be maintained. Operational research is also an essentially collaborative venture with management. Means are required to foster this collaboration.

3. The powerful growth of our own formal technique over 30 years is gratifying indeed. Yet we may have allowed our concern for this to overwhelm the attention paid to the managerial interest and contribution. The conduct of the Society’s affairs—in national meetings, in publications and in educational effort—too often expresses an ambivalent attitude. There is doubt as to whether particular undertakings are directed towards professionals or managers: then, in attempting to emphasize managerial aspects of the matter, professional aspects may be lost to view or become distorted.

4. Here is a dilemma which every operational research man faces in his own job, and must resolve. The national Society too must make a conscious resolution, and select the best of both worlds. Otherwise it will drift into a slough where it has the worst of each.

5. We begin with the question of national meetings, held in London, which well exemplify the problem and are not well attended. They are mostly interesting: but the programme as a whole is inevitably designed to be all things to all men. This is not a criticism of the programme but an acceptance of the inappropriateness in the ’seventies of traditions inherited from and suitable for the ’forties. The national Society will not continue to hold these meetings after the current session. Instead it will convene a few national meetings, each designed with a specific and attainable purpose, and armed with a proper organization to assure its success. A working group has been established to recommend the basis on which this should be done.

6. This decision leaves a lacuna in London and the South-East of England. A forum will be needed for the operational research professionals who live and work in this region, a forum organized by themselves to suit their own needs. We note the healthy and successful growth of regional Societies in all other parts of Great Britain, and consider that this natural development has
not happened in the South-East simply because frequent “national” meetings were held in London. Accordingly, we intend to foster the creation of a regional society, and to make facilities available to its organizers. The Operational Research Society will then become a federation of regional societies. Another working group is now looking into the consequences of this decision, since all members ought in future to have the opportunity to belong to a regional society, and will pay special attention to the financial links.

7. It follows from this conclusion, we consider, that each region should have a seat on the Society’s Council. Thus a number of “constituency members” should be appointed to Council, in addition to those directly elected by the national membership. A further working party will be making recommendations about this part of the plan, which has legal implications.

8. We note also the very effective growth of Study Groups and will continue to support these as needed. It is not proposed to attempt a systematic classification, since the success of Study Groups appears to us to rely on the spontaneity with which they spring into being as a new focus of attention makes itself manifest. Nor should there be any barrier to the closure of a Study Group that finds there is no more useful work to do in its area for the time being. We applaud the heavy managerial involvement in industry-based Groups and the professional zeal of the technique-based Groups alike. The Study Groups have indeed proven to be a home-grown system for solving the dilemma with which this report began. However, it is certainly necessary to change the system whereby a single member of Council concerns himself with (currently) seventeen Groups, and we are providing for a broader Council interest.

9. The plan as so far envisaged radically changes the organization of the Society, the regular conduct of which will become heavily decentralized by regions. We answer the question as to what “the centre” will any longer do by outlining the new Council structure on which we are agreed, and explaining its major responsibilities. But the short answer to the question is that Council will organize an Executive capable of administering both to the needs of Regional and Study Groups and also to itself. For Council will be freed from most of the detailed administrative work which has consumed its time in the past. Its immediate aim now will be to devise the measures needed to underwrite the professional status of the Society’s members, while at the same time securing a greater managerial involvement. If these two objectives have appeared antithetic in the past, we now see the first as helping to foster the second. This immediate aim subserves the long-term aim, which is that Council should at all times be planning the Society’s future—its adaptation to the changing environment.

10 Here then is the new structure of the Society’s general management. Hitherto, every committee of the Society has reported directly to Council. Standing and ad hoc committees have often been numbered in double figures