

FUTURE OF FOSSUK: THE WAY FORWARD

Background

At the FOSSUK AGM in 2024, FOSSUK members agreed that the current constitution and structure of FOSSUK no longer meet the needs of the Swiss clubs or the broader Swiss community in the UK, especially with the context of a dwindling number and membership of Swiss clubs in the UK. A taskforce was set up to develop a proposal for consideration by members at the FOSSUK AGM in 2025. This taskforce is made up of a mix of representatives from Swiss clubs and other interested Swiss citizens in the UK.

An organisation to support the Swiss community in the UK

Society has changed significantly since FOSSUK was set up, including around the nature and purpose of social clubs and membership organisations. There have also been changes around how people communicate with one another and with clubs.

The taskforce concluded that there still remains a need for an umbrella organisation supporting the Swiss community overall in the UK. The Swiss Embassy and Consulate are the formal representation of the Swiss government in the UK and provide official advice and services to Swiss citizens. The Organisation of the Swiss Abroad (OSA) requires an organisation for communication with Swiss citizens in the UK as well as a body with responsibility for the elections of the delegates to the Council of the Swiss Abroad.

The Swiss Embassy and Consulate do not have the mandate to take on these roles. They are also not set up for more informal communications or to promote connections and networking between people. The established Swiss clubs provide diverse opportunities for their members and followers, but they usually have a geographic and/or thematic focus and are not able to represent the Swiss community in the UK at large. More informal groups (such as online networks, Swiss societies at Universities, event committees or campaign groups) can be transient and may not have the required structures to formally connect to and communicate with the Embassy and the Organisation of Swiss Abroad.

There is therefore still a need for an umbrella organisation whose main focus is to consider the interests of ALL Swiss citizens in the UK, and which has the legitimacy to be a credible interlocutor for official Swiss entities, in particular the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Embassy and Consulate in the UK.

TASKFORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. New name

In line with rebranding efforts by the Organisation of Swiss Abroad (OSA), we recommend that FOSSUK should be renamed to include “SwissCommunity UK”. This new name represents a shift in focus from an organisation that mainly serves the needs of Swiss societies to one whose main focus is on the needs of the broader Swiss community, whether or not they are part of formal clubs and groups. However, it is also important to signal that the new organisation is an official structure. A suggestion in this regard is “SwissCommunity UK: the organisation for the Swiss in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland”.

2. Core purpose

The main purpose of SwissCommunity UK is to serve as an umbrella organisation for all Swiss citizens in the UK and to be recognised as a partner organisation by Swiss governmental and non-governmental organisations.

3. Proposed functions

a) A virtual hub for Swiss citizens in the UK

SwissCommunity UK will complement the work of existing Swiss clubs and informal groups by sharing verifiable and credible information that is of importance to the Swiss community in the UK and supporting Swiss citizens to connect with one another.

b) Main point of contact for the Organisation of Swiss Abroad and organiser of election of delegates from the UK

SwissCommunity UK will act as a single point of contact for OSA and be responsible for organising the elections of the UK delegates to the Council of the Swiss Abroad (CSA) every four years.

SwissCommunity UK will be a vehicle through which CSA delegates solicit input from the Swiss community in the UK and share feedback on the work of the OSA via regular newsletters, webpage and social media channels.

c) Main point of contact for the Swiss Embassy and other Swiss governmental institutions for the broader Swiss community in the UK

While Swiss clubs and Swiss citizens will have individual relationships with the Embassy for various opportunities, SwissCommunity UK will act as a conduit for information flows

between Swiss citizens in the UK and the Embassy, the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and other official bodies or umbrella organisations.

d) Main point of contact for the Swiss Review, relating to UK-specific content

SwissCommunity UK will work closely with the UK Editor of the Swiss Review and facilitate the identification of UK-specific content for publication in the local pages of the Swiss Review. When required, SwissCommunity UK will also be responsible for identifying suitable candidates for the position of Editor of the UK regional pages.

e) A champion for the interests of Swiss citizens in the UK in relevant discussions in Switzerland

SwissCommunity UK will work with OSA to identify opportunities – for example in the Swiss media – for Swiss citizens in the UK to speak about their perspectives and needs.

f) A supporter and promoter of Swiss clubs in the UK

Despite the number of Swiss clubs in the UK dwindling, there is still a role for SwissCommunity UK in supporting Swiss Clubs (and other established institutions, such as the Swiss Church and Swiss Benevolent Society). These clubs play an important role in maintaining and promoting Swiss culture in the UK and building a sense of community for people. The support could take different form, depending on capacity and needs: from helping to find sponsorship opportunities to publicising their activities and requests, to helping the clubs connect with one another.

4. Membership

A general principle of the new structure is that membership will be open to individuals. This is a significant change from the current model where the members are Swiss societies registered with OSA. The Transition Committee will develop a proposal to define the details of membership after examining pros and cons of different approaches (e.g. is this all Swiss citizens, only above 18, registered at the Embassy, etc).

5. Partners and affiliates

Swiss clubs and other organisations in the UK, which are recognised by OSA, will be official partners of SwissCommunity UK. Other groups with strong Swiss connections will be listed as affiliate organisations. These could include informal online networks, with enough flexibility built in to accept time-limited groups, if needed. Companies and other groups with an interest in Switzerland will be encouraged to connect with SwissCommunity UK in different ways (including sponsorship).

6. Governance

Details of an appropriate governance structure will need to be determined by the Transition Committee.

7. Committee

The Committee of SwissCommunity UK will be charged by the membership to take on the day-to-day running of the organisation. All UK CSA delegates will automatically become members of the Committee, as will the UK Editor of the Swiss Review.

Any member can express a wish to join the Committee and nominations will need to be voted on by the membership. A proposal around the size, structure and roles in the Committee will need to be developed by the Transition Committee.

8. Funding model

SwissCommunity UK will need to develop a new funding model to cover its core costs and to support any events/activities. Core costs include: maintenance of a website, bank charges, costs associated with committee meetings, software charges etc. Event/activity costs include: booking event spaces, security, insurance, renting AV equipment etc.

A proposal around the funding model will need to be developed by the Transition Committee. One suggestion is to charge a nominal membership fee to individuals, with Swiss clubs paying an additional small 'sponsorship' fee. SwissCommunity UK will need to find additional sponsorship and sell tickets for any specific events/activities. There are, however, pros and cons of different approaches and these will need to be discussed in more detail.

While FOSSUK's constitution states that the organisation will cover CSA delegates' travel costs, the financial situation has meant that this has not been possible. If the financial situation improves substantially in the future, SwissCommunity UK may want to revisit this idea to ensure a more diverse set of CSA delegates. Similarly, travel expenses for Committee members could be reimbursed. Membership of the Committee and acting as a CSA delegate are voluntary and unremunerated positions.

PROPOSED TIMELINE – FOR DISCUSSION AND REFINEMENT

June 2025:

- Recommendations presented at the FOSSUK AGM for discussion and a motion to proceed voted on by current FOSSUK corporate members.
- New UK CSA delegates are ratified.
- The Transition Committee is elected, including new CSA delegates. This Transition Committee replaces the FOSSUK Committee for the transition period.
- Plans are discussed with OSA.
- A meeting is confirmed for late June bringing together the Transition Committee and other interested parties (including current Taskforce members) to agree on roles and responsibilities and a timeline for development of the new structure, model and constitution of SwissCommunity UK. An OSA representative could also be invited to participate in these discussions. A Transition Chair will be appointed to take forward the transition.

July – November 2025:

- The Transition Committee (which will include the people mentioned above) refines plans for SwissCommunity UK.
- Plans are discussed with the Embassy staff for their input.
- There is an ongoing dialogue with OSA representatives.
- An Extraordinary General Meeting is organised with the FOSSUK Corporate Members to finalise the change from FOSSUK to SwissCommunity UK and to approve constitutional changes.
- A communications plan is launched to alert Swiss citizens to the change from FOSSUK to SwissCommunity UK and to invite them to the first AGM.
- Efforts are put in place to recruit new Committee members for SwissCommunity UK.

December 2025:

- The transition team sets up SwissCommunity UK's first AGM on 6 December [TBD], open to all Swiss citizens in the UK.
- The new plans are discussed and approved by attendees.
- A new Committee is elected.