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PARTICIPATION PROJECT REPORT TO THE WORKING GROUP

At the last meeting, the Working Group reviewed all the data collected from the surveys, focus groups and various meetings with branches, service groups and self-organised groups.

Some key themes emerged from all of those sources and the clearest one was that our members and activists are under incredible pressures at work and at home, and their time is precious. A lack of time and the dominance of the 'same people' at meetings came out as the top barriers to participation. A key theme for desired changes was an induction process for activists as they start their activism at a regional level.

It was also apparent that the way we currently operate does not attract the broad range of members we represent. Many members seem to have a positive experience of the union. They are open to getting more involved but attending lots of long, 'boring' meetings, especially if it involves travel, does not appeal to them. They find our language and processes a bit alien, and we need to find better ways to communicate with them.

The new virtual meetings are much more popular as well as the shorter time-limited meetings we have been holding during the pandemic. Everyone, whether new to the union or long time activists, universally agree that this new way of working should be maintained even once physical meetings are allowed again.

Feedback from the survey of Regional Council AGM 2021 attendees also confirms this, with;
- 83% of respondents stating that a virtual AGM was easier to participate in than a physical AGM.
- 96% of respondents stating that the agenda was easy to follow.
- 92% stating that having a fixed start and end time made it easier to participate.
- 96% responding that having regular breaks made it easier to participate.
- 92 % also stated that they wanted to keep electronic voting in the future.

We received many ideas about how we could do things differently, especially around meetings and decision making. We heard how important the equality networks were to many of our members and activists and the informal ways they work they feel are easier to access than our core Regional structures. Most don't know or care what all the committees do. Many of the members working in non 'core' employers (i.e. local authorities, NHS Trusts) feel on the outside; this includes members in the local government and health branches but is also felt strongly by members in the smaller service groups.

Based upon these clear outcomes, as we discussed at our last working group meeting, there are several areas for consideration and further development on how we could review what we currently do to enable and encourage greater and increased participation.

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<u>Meeting Arrangements & Structure</u>

1. There seems to be a consensus around the need to maintain a high level of virtual meetings after restrictions are lifted.
   - 1.1 Do we want to amend our regional constitution so that a minimum of half of the meetings are virtual and the remaining meetings are physical?
   - 1.2 Alternatively, could we propose that alternative meetings are virtual?

2. Timing of meetings is harder to reach a consensus. This is due to the diversity of our membership and the variety of FT arrangements or lack of them. We need to consider those working in schools, where they can't use FT during the school day, those working shifts that can make it hard to attend meetings or take FT because of the impact on other colleagues.
   - 2.1 we could trial different times for meetings? With more in the evenings and weekends?
   - 2.2 How do we do this without conceding the importance of maintaining facility time?
   - 2.3 Given the limited availability of activists, how do we ensure we make the most of their time and that all activities are targeted towards the purpose of the committees?

3. As part of the move to virtual meetings during the pandemic, the region introduced access standards that included time-limited meetings with regular breaks, which has been very well received.
   - 3.1 Given their widespread adoption, should we incorporate them within our constitution for all meetings?
   - 3.2 Shorter, more focussed meetings were put forward as a suggestion by many. This has been popular and received support from the majority of those involved in the consultation. How do we continue this whilst balancing the need to conduct business and attract new activists?

4. Looking at the format of the meetings, shorter, timed agendas were popular.
   - 4.1 Should we ensure that this is incorporated into all our structures as far as possible?
   - 4.2 How do we ensure a balance between formal business, speakers, and learning sessions to make the meeting more appealing to members that don't currently attend (and those that do)?
   - 4.3 Should we adopt a default position of a third of each meeting is split between these areas? Learning, in particular, came out as a subject matter that would attract more young members to participate.
   - 4.4 How do we ensure all business is conducted in an accessible and consistent manner?

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5. Chairing is key in ensuring that those that attend meetings are made to feel welcome and that their views are welcome and valued as part of the discussion. There was significant concern about how the same people dominate meetings.

   5.1 To ensure consistency we should consider a standing orders/guidelines to ensure limited speaking times and the number of times any one person can come in on a debate?

   5.2 Should we consider a proportionality guide to allow more women and other under represented groups to be prioritised in debates?

6. Suggestions were made in relation to the topics for discussion at meetings, and it was generally felt that they should be subjects that cut across service groups to ensure all those attending can identify with the issues and feel they are relevant to them, i.e general pay and pensions issues as well as H&S (including matters such as the menopause) were suggested. It was also suggested that each meeting focus on one of the equality strands on a rotational basis as this has attracted many members to becoming more involved. It would also reach out to those members that are currently under represented.

   6.1 How do we ensure topics at all region-wide meetings are relevant to all members whilst also being focussed on the purpose of the meeting?

   6.2 How do we ensure equalities are at the heart of all our meetings and committee agendas?

Committee Governance, Purpose & Structures

7. Our structures and governance processes can be confusing and overlapping. We had feedback that it's unclear what each committee does or why members should become involved, including how policy is created within the union. Many members that are active locally or within the self-organised groups, do not understand what all of our regional committees do.

   7.1 How can we review our committee structures and remits to ensure they are 'fit for purpose'? Do we need all the committees that we currently have or can some functions be merged?

   7.2 Should we need to try to simplify our structures and processes?

   7.3 For instance do we want to restructure the number and review the remit of committees we have a regional level to prevent overlap?

   7.4 Can we more closely mirror what happens nationally in terms of the names and remits of committees to make our structures more coherent and understandable?

   7.5 Are our committees focussed on the areas that interest members and how could we better achieve this?

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7.6 For instance, does the ETD committee that is in theory focussed on activist education actually spend the majority of time discussing activists education? Does the Publicity & Campaigning committee focus on publicity and campaigning activities or does it spend the majority of its time dealing with funding bids that could be done by the finance committee? What ideas for possible other changes do we have?

8. Each of the various groups within the region in terms of service group and self-organised groups have operated quite independently. Their ways of working and constitutions have become quite diverse. This will sometimes be necessary to accommodate the specific needs of a particular group.

8.1 However, wherever possible, how could we bring in greater harmonisation and consistency between groups to simplify things for new activists learning our processes?

8.2 The motion that initiated the participation project instructed the region to review our current structures and constitutions. How do we review the language, format, operation and fundamental elements of all the regional constitutions to introduce greater consistency to enable easier participation and understanding across and between groups?

8.3 Should we try to refine each constitution to introduce consistent language, format and core processes wherever possible?

9. Not all areas of our membership are equally able to participate, particularly growing areas like schools, probation, community and private sector workplace.

9.1 What changes might we be able to introduce to make our structures and activities more accessible?

9.2 Do we want to trial new structures to ensure that some of the smaller groups of members in a service group, especially ones without facility time, can participate?

9.3 Are there changes to branch structures needed to support this and create equal opportunities for all members to participate regardless of the employer?

Communication

10. Many of our members and activists do not understand our structures, processes and language.

10.1 Should we review all of our current documentation, including our constitution and standard committee reports and paperwork, to make them more readable, accessible and understandable?

10.2 How do we ensure consistency in our language and communications, including emails and meeting paperwork, across our committees?

10.3 Should we develop some short video explainers of some of our processes, particularly what our committees do and their purpose,

how you can become a member of a committee, what regional committees do, and how you can attend regional meetings?

10.4 Should we develop a short video and leaflet/poster that explains our structures?

11. Our language can seem alien to those not currently involved.

11.1 Should we try to reduce jargon and acronyms in our meetings, and how could we do so?

11.2 Could we produce and circulate an easy to understand glossary with each meetings paperwork and improve consistency across committees and across the region in the use of language?

12. Feedback has included members not being aware of or understanding what opportunities for getting involved in our committee structures exist or how to access them, with some concern that sometimes information may not be passed on to those who need it clearly.

12.1 How do we better communicate with all members?

12.2 How do we ensure all branches open opportunities for all members whilst also conducting fair democratic processes within branches and remaining manageable for branch officers?

12.3 How do we better use digital resources to increase participation in democratic decision making.

Education & Activist Development

13. We know that activists are under incredible pressure, and taking on additional responsibilities can seem daunting for new activists.

13.1 How do we provide more support and mentoring for new members getting involved in the region for the first time?

13.2 Can we establish a system of automatically/routinely finding a lay or Organiser mentor for each new activist that gets involved in the region?

14. It was put forward that networking opportunities, especially in the absence of physical meetings, should be explored to allow members to come together in an informal way to share experiences and get to know each other and support each other.

14.1 For example, how could we utilise opportunities such as the Big Weekend more effectively to do so?

14.2 What other opportunities are there that could be utilised to create effective informal networking sessions without our existing structures whilst also ensuring that we utilise the limited time available to our activists?

15. What new materials could we develop for new activists?

15.1 Previously we have discussed an activists handbook – what might we want to include in that and in what format should that be?

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15.2 Short videos seem a popular way of communicating to our time-poor members, especially younger members of the union. Do we need to develop some short videos by current activists and staff explaining the different roles in the union and what support and training is available?