

19 November 2012

University and College Union

**To**                    **National/Regional committees and Employment special interest groups**

**From**                **Commission on union democracy**

**For**                    **Discussion**

**Subject**            **Further Consultation: Views from National/Regional committees/Advisory groups/Conferences**

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 Our recent request to members asking for their views on the functioning, size and composition of the NEC generated a number of responses reflecting UCU's diverse membership and views on how they could/should be represented. We have identified four themes for further consultation:
  - Representativeness
  - Connecting with and involving the membership
  - Sub-groups and modes of organisation
  - Size of the NEC
- 1.2 Further work will also be undertaken on a fifth aspect, the election processes, and will also investigate any legal constraints which may apply to our internal organisation.
- 1.3 We have asked your committee to consider the four themes and send feedback to Alan Scobbie ([ascobbie@ucu.org.uk](mailto:ascobbie@ucu.org.uk)) by Monday 10<sup>th</sup> December.
- 1.4 We would be pleased to receive any other comments you choose to make.
- 1.5 We intend to use these responses to develop a series of alternative proposals which branches/LAs will be asked to consider during the first quarter of 2013. Our final report will be made to UCU Congress 2013.

## **2 Theme one – Representativeness**

- 2.1 NEC representation comprises members elected from the following areas:
  - Employment status - part time hourly paid, zero hours contracts, fixed term; there is currently an Anti-Casualisation Committee and there are 2 (1 FE & 1 HE) NEC seats for causally employed members

- Equality strands - currently there are a total of 11 reserved seats on the NEC for Women; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT); Disabled; Black members. There are also national standing committees and annual conference for each of the four strands
- Geographical representation - each region or nation currently has specific representatives for HE and FE, based on membership numbers (currently a total of 30 seats)
- National representation - there are currently 14 HE and 10 FE nationally elected reps which will include seats for specific employment groups (e.g. academic related, post-1992 HE, adult & community education)
- The five National Officers are also members of the NEC, giving a current total of 72 NEC members.

2.2 Please see UCU Rule 18 for full details which are more complex than the descriptions above. [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/h/ucurules\\_2011-12.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/d/h/ucurules_2011-12.pdf)

2.3 The initial consultation responses included:

2.3.1 *"It should have reps from each country and each sector and should try to be representative of the membership in terms of gender and ethnicity. Trying to go further than this is a recipe for creating a group which is too large for its primary function. By all means let's have specialist advisory groups to inform and lobby the NEC about issues that it should be cognisant of but also, let's get real."*

2.3.2 *"The fewest possible people required should be elected to get the work done. All these sub-groups should be removed."*

2.3.3 *"I think we need to ensure that the union NEC is as representative as possible, and therefore no reduction in the number or proportion of geographical, employment group, or equalities strands NEC members which would lead to a loss of representation."*

2.4 What view does your Committee have on the range of seats and how they represent UCU's diverse membership?

### **3 Theme two – Connecting the Membership**

3.1 What are the views of your Committee on the following?

3.1.1 How can members be encouraged to become more active / involved in UCU?

- Departmental Meetings/Branch Meetings/Regional Meetings
- Branch and NEC Representatives
- Motions to Congress and sector conferences
- Surveys and e-ballots (design/length/whether after debate)

- Social networking sites e.g. Facebook, Twitter
- Web forums on single issues
- Local and regional networks e.g. women workers/part time/hourly paid
- Campaigning for wider participation – e.g. more black professors and lecturers
- National meetings for specific groups
- Publicity reaching all members

### 3.1.2 How can branch officers be supported and encouraged?

- Links with specific NEC members
- Workload agreements
- Facilities agreements
- Involvement in Regional Committees/ Networks

### 3.2 How should NEC members seek members' views and/or disseminate information?

- NEC members, regional and UK-elected, should liaise with several allocated branches and speak at meetings
- NEC members, regional and UK-elected, should attend and speak at regional meetings
- NEC members should be encouraged to use blogs and conduct webinars
- The e-mail addresses of NEC members should be freely available
- NEC members networking with the groups they represent

## **4 Theme three – Sub-groups**

- 4.1 The NEC at present is based on election by the members either as a whole or as a trade (HE/FE) group and/or geographical constituency. Currently the NEC operates with a number of sub-committees; the Strategy and Finance, Equality, Education and Recruitment, Organising and Campaigning Committees, which are elected by and from the NEC. Its members also comprise the HEC and FEC by virtue of their employment sector.
- 4.2 There are currently seven other bodies elected from branches, regions and trade groups which advise, but are not sub-committees of the NEC:
- 4.3 three Special Employment Interest Committees (the Anti-Casualisation Committee, the Academic Related Staff Committee and the Medical Research Council Committee). All the voting members of these committees are elected at annual national meetings for members of the relevant groups;
- 4.4 four Equality Standing Committees, for Black members, Disabled members, LGBT members and Women members. Most of the members of these four

committees are elected at annual national conferences for members of the relevant groups. Members of the NEC elected to represent the equality strands are also full members of these committees.

- 4.5 There are annual national meetings, but no committees, for land-based members; adult education members; prison education members; post-92 university members.
- 4.6 The initial consultation responses included:
  - 4.6.1 *"Just the chairs and vice-chairs of sub-committees along with the five national officers. I think most of the work should be done at sub-committee level with reports into the NEC and back to committees and members. The current committees seem adequate - though it's unclear what the Education Committee is for. Their purposes should be clearly explained and easily accessible from the website."*
  - 4.6.2 *"A smaller number of members elected on a UK wide basis with occasional meeting (annual or less) for particular employment groups."*
  - 4.6.3 *"I suggest having the current HEC and FEC as they are, but with members only sitting on the NEC after they have been in post on the HEC/FEC for one year. This would limit the size of the NEC while, with suitable timings of elections to the various strands on the FEC and HEC, maintain a similar overall representation of the various regional, equality and employment group strands on the NEC. It would also lead to a more dynamic membership of the NEC."*
- 4.7 What are the views of your Committee on the following questions:
  - 4.7.1 Do you think there should be distinct NEC sub-committees for trade groups, e.g. FE, HE, etc?
  - 4.7.2 If yes, which trade groups would you like to see have distinct sub-committees?
  - 4.7.3 Does each sub-committee need to be represented on the full NEC? If so, how should this be done, and how should they interact?
  - 4.7.4 Do all the members of each sub-committee need to be on the NEC or would a smaller number suffice?
  - 4.7.5 Which other areas of the union's work (e.g. Equality, Education) do you think need distinct national representative structures?
  - 4.7.6 If the present NEC were replaced by a smaller core NEC and related sub-committees, which decisions should be taken in the NEC and which in sub-committees?

## **5 Theme four – Size of the NEC**

- 5.1 In the initial consultation exercise carried out by the Commission, roughly 250 replies thought that the NEC should be smaller; roughly 100 thought that the present size was appropriate, while a handful of people thought it should be larger. A substantial minority (about 80) expressed no view on the question.

There was therefore a substantial majority in favour of a smaller NEC but no coherent view as to how this might be achieved.

5.2 The initial consultation responses included:

5.2.1 *"It feels important to have wide-spread representation but looking at the current very wide-spread membership, difficult to see how coherent decision-making can take place."*

5.2.2 *"I think it is vital that the composition of the workforce and issues pertaining to different groups are represented on the NEC. A danger of a significantly slimmed down NEC is that this would be impossible to achieve."*

5.2.3 *"I can see why there is a need for people to be both elected on a geographical basis of some kind and particular groups of staff. I cannot see why it is necessary to have both regional members and members elected on a UK-wide basis"*

5.2.4 *"If it needs to be big to cover all the different categories of members, then it needs to be big. Attention should be given to how meetings are organised so that it can be collectively effective."*

5.2.5 *"We ought to be of equivalent size to the NECs of unions that are of equivalent size to us. With proper subsidiary and devolving of areas of work this should be a practical task to achieve."*

5.3 What view does your committee have on this question?