

National Union of Journalists

Oxford Branch

Secretary: Anna
Wagstaff
60 Cricket Road
Oxford OX4 3DQ
Tel/Fax 01865 723450
e-mail oxnuj@aol.com

Chair: Peter Cann
111 Cornwallis Road
Oxford OX4 3NH
Tel. 01865 773158

Structuring the future:
Building our democratic strength

Response of the Oxford and District branch to the interim report

27 August 2008

GENERAL POINTS

1. It is a strength of the NUJ that we organise industrially as chapels and group chapels within sectors, and we have a separate democratic structure based on branches, councils and the annual delegate meeting.
2. What individual staffers get from the union comes primarily from their chapel, group chapel and organiser, not from the branch.
3. Branches are where members have the chance to contribute to the activity and policy making of the union. They are the lifeblood of a democratic union and need to attract the more active and committed members.
4. The NUJ has gone through many attempts to revive the branch structure, through a succession of structure working parties – this consultation being the latest. None of these have been great successes.
5. The problem is that the focus has been too narrowly on structures and geographical factors and processes. **We believe the answer lies in the NUJ's new focus on campaigning, particularly around the theme of Stand Up For Journalism.** This has struck a chord with the union's most committed and conscious members, and offers a myriad of possibilities for effective locally based campaigns that go beyond the workplace to relate to local communities.
6. **With a new Deputy General Secretary, elected on a commitment to building from the grassroots upwards, and a strong track record on SUFJ, the NUJ should develop a strategy of rebuilding our activist base using this sort of local campaigning as a focus, and use this to stimulate the revival or reformation of branches. Working with local chapels, particularly around recruitment campaigns, can also be a vital focus for branch activity.**

7. The geographical borders of branches should be governed by what is most likely to work for the people in any particular area, not by some overall grand strategy.
8. Rules on how branches function – number of meetings, notice of meetings, compulsory agenda items, compulsory branch officer positions – should be governed by the minimum requirement to safeguard democracy, ie to ensure all branch members know when and where meetings are taking place and what is on the agenda, policy and financial decisions require a quorum, etc.

SECTION BY SECTION COMMENTS:

Membership

We support the status quo, with a temporary membership option for those earning less than 50% of their income from journalism and the 1% and 0.5% rule for those on low incomes (whether this be because they are working part-time or for any other reason).

Contributions/Subs

The proposed change would be costly and/or impossible to implement. We are opposed to it.

Branches

Regional meetings

We are opposed to regional meetings. It may be that some branches will work best across entire regions, but having two layers of meetings will not help the attendance at either layer.

Frequency of meetings/virtual meetings

There could be an option for branches to meet monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly if that helps attendance. It would be useful in those cases to have virtual meetings in between to take care of organisational matters. However, policy and financial decisions should only be taken at quorate real meetings.

Other matters

We disagree with the proposals on sending meeting proposals and minutes to the NEC – added bureaucratic obstacles are the last thing branches need.

We disagree with the proposed rules for branch committee posts and agenda items – this is far too prescriptive.

Liaison between branches and Headland House should focus on enhancing the branches capacity to make a difference, whether that be ‘public’ campaigns on Stand Up for Journalism, or supporting its chapels through local recruitment campaigns or whatever.

Procedures for closing defunct branches should focus on consulting with all activists in the region to find ways in which they can function collectively, given the potential options of changing geographical boundaries, changing meeting frequency, etc. It is important to take the emphasis away from asking people to support a branch structure, to asking them to work together to achieve something.

Chapels/group chapels

The Oxford and District branch is a very strong supporter of group chapels, and believes it could be right to allow group chapels to table resolutions to ADM, providing this is done according to the rules laid down for branches in terms of

timetable for submission and distribution of motions in advance of the meeting that will take the decision.

We are very opposed to any idea that we should be fostering new chapels “instead of trying to revive defunct branches”. Chapels and branches have very distinct roles, and we should be doing both.

No need to be so prescriptive about the posts in a group chapel or chapel committee.

We shouldn't discourage branches from reading out lists of new members. It is vital that branch members know who is joining in their area, not least because it gives them an idea of where new chapels could be formed.

Regional councils

We are opposed to regional councils. They have little rationale and have never been known to work. If branches in a region want to get together and discuss things, they already have every right to do so.

ADM

Time spent on resolutions at ADM should not be further curtailed. ADM is an important learning experience for many young delegates, and they often learn more and are more stimulated by debates over resolutions that are not controversial than by debates that are hotly contested. There is nothing to be gained by shovelling parts of the agenda off to be dealt with by the NEC.

Industrial Sectors/Councils

The system of industrial sectors we currently have still strongly reflects distinct industrial realities despite the advent of multimedia convergence. We feel these councils have a role to play supervising the union's work in each sector. We cannot see any rationale at all for replacing them with the two councils suggested.

We do feel, however, that it could be helpful to review the working of the industrial councils in light of changes in the industry (eg digital convergence, break-up of national agreements) and in the union (eg the increasing importance of group chapels). Are they effective at overseeing agreements and negotiations and setting strategies and goals for their sectors? Could they be organised to make it easier for key activists in each sector to play a role?