

NOC Support Review

Purpose

1. To update Council of the findings of the NOC Support Review and to seek its approval to take forward work streams in the areas described in this paper.

Background

2. Since its establishment in 2005 the NOC structure has proved to be very successful in handling devolved issues on behalf of the joint unions.
3. At its meeting held in October 2006 Council noted that the NOC function had been in operation for 2 years and it therefore concluded that this would be a good opportunity to review what additional support, if any, might be needed.
4. It was subsequently agreed that I, in my Service Development and Support role, would explore closely with each of the NOCs what could be done to help them, and at the same time look at what could be done to strengthen the structure overall.
5. In order to concentrate and focus discussion informal meetings were held with the Chair's and Secretaries from each NOC. This provided a setting which enabled us the chance to look at any problems or issues pertinent to each individual NOC and to discuss and brainstorm them thoroughly. This process proved successful certainly from my part, and seemed to be well received by my NOC colleagues.

Review Findings

6. I would at the onset like to record my appreciation and thanks to the each NOC Chair and Secretary for their co-operation and patience. Their input has played a key part in allowing me to complete the review and to formulate a valuable insight and understanding of the work, problems and frustrations associated with each one.
7. Some NOCs have evolved to become reactive and proactive bodies which are successfully carrying out the major part of their remit; others have struggled primarily due to lack of resources.
8. During our discussions, Chairs and Secretaries from 5 of the NOCs completed a SWOT analysis: the rationale behind this exercise was to get their views and for them to acknowledge their own strengths as well as identifying what they considered to be their NOCs Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. (*A summary of all comments can be found at appendix 1, attached to this report.*)
9. Because of the differences associated with the work and geographical nature of the NOCs it was to be expected that some issues would be NOC specific. Throughout each discussion however it became clear that there were common threads appearing which were having an impact on all concerned.

Resources

10. The most common theme to emerge throughout all of my meetings has been the fact that a few people appear to be doing most of the work. Various reasons are responsible for this, the main being the lack of activism within all of the individual unions in the Commission.

11. Additionally, in many cases reps are finding it increasingly difficult to balance the rise in their union work pressures and roles against their FC core work role. It also seems that managers in some areas have discouraged staff from taking on union duties.

Recommendation 1:

Given that this issue was raised by all of the NOCs and that it has been some time since the Facility Time Agreement has been looked at I believe that this is an opportune time to undertake such an exercise.

Recommendation 2:

Following the completion of Recommendation 1 a campaign is launched to once again raise managers' awareness of its existence and their responsibility in complying with its content.

I have addressed the difficulty of attracting members to sit on NOCs under the section on Communication.

NOC Roles and Remit

12. I found that in general key members understood the role and the remit of the NOC; however it was interesting to note the differing interpretations and understandings of the actual roles of the main NOC posts. Some were surprised to learn that general descriptions for each role were contained in their own NOC constitution. Following discussions with other NOC members I am unconvinced that they have the same level of understanding of either the role or the remit of the NOC.

13. There is no question that the lack of resources means that NOCs are currently only able to focus on high priority issues. Many stated that they would like the opportunity to be even more proactive in identifying areas of potential concern and in encouraging activism so that vacant posts could be filled and workloads shared.

14. The lack of resources combined with the high workloads has restricted NOCs by not allowing them the chance to take a more lateral view by utilising resources through more delegation and forward planning of work.

15. While I do not want to take away the freedom for NOCs to be able to evolve and grow as individual bodies, I believe that there is a requirement for a central overview and support function. The support mechanism would in essence generally manage and co-ordinate the operation whilst working in tandem with the NOCs assisting in areas such as post filling. This would provide NOCs with the capacity to develop and concentrate their resources on taking forward members issues.

Recommendation 3:

There is a definite need to clarify the role and remit of the NOC so that members fully understand their responsibilities. Existing information which is contained in the Constitution should be updated and modified so that it provides comprehensive guidance and information for both new and existing NOC members.

Recommendation 4:

To enable NOCs to have the capacity to develop and concentrate resources on trade union issues the role of co-ordinating and 'managing' the function of NOCs should be carried out by the FCTU office.

Training

16. Although it has been the norm for constituent unions to provide training for its reps, the work of the NOCs is different in that it is a joint union function. Therefore in my view the joint unions has a responsibility to ensure that every NOC member is adequately trained and equipped with the skills and expertise to enable them to carry out their role.

Recommendation 5:

Any training required to carry out existing or new NOC roles should be co-ordinated centrally by the FCTU office.

Communication

17. Even though this has been a high profile topic for sometime at central level unfortunately only the Wales NOC seem to have taken this subject on board in any depth. It is the only NOC that has taken steps to put a system in place which feeds information about Wales specific issues to union members. The rest rely heavily on NOC members cascading information to members at their own workplaces consequently coverage is scant to say the least, or the FCTU office publishing or issuing papers and copies of minutes on its website.

18. None of the NOCs have channels in existence for members to feed information direct to the NOC or for the NOC to receive feedback on Council issues. In fact Wales is the only NOC that knows who and where its members are.

19. The England NOC felt strongly that the name 'National Organising Committee' was unhelpful and restrictive in that it did not help members or managers connect the group to the joint unions. They would like to see an alternative adopted relating more to the work of the unions and which would be immediately identifiable to everyone.

20. No steps have been taken by the NOCs to raise the awareness of their existence or to promote or explain its role. The impact of this in my view is far reaching:

- Firstly, union members with issues or questions quite understandably go direct to reps that have the highest profile more often than not this is the NOC chair and secretary. This results in those individuals being overloaded, providing an immediate uneven balance in workloads within the NOC.
- Without question all of the NOCs expressed concern at the current level of apathy among union members. However nothing has been done by NOCs to raise awareness or to demonstrate relevance. Members cannot be criticised for not being interested in things that they are unaware of in the first place. I strongly believe that promoting success stimulates interest, which in turn may generate an increase in members' involvement in their union.

Recommendation 6:

The term NOC has never really fulfilled its purpose in describing this area of the joint union structure. A title is needed that stresses the unity and cohesiveness of the joint unions, a name that will be immediately identifiable and can be linked to FCTU GB Council and the FCTU office. My recommendation therefore is for the NOCs to be renamed to perhaps something along the lines of FCTU-England, FCTU-Research, etc.

Recommendation 7:

Work should be undertaken to develop a communication strategy for each NOC taking all the above points into consideration. This area of work should form part of the FCTU Office support function.

Next Steps

Council members are invited to comment on this report, and to **agree** to the recommendations outlined above.

Sue Gillingwater
8th February 2008

National Organising Committees Analyses of their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

STRENGTHS

	England NOC	Scotland NOC	Wales NOC	Business Unit NOC	Silvan House NOC
Commitment	✓	✓		✓	
Relations with Senior Management	✓	✓	✓		✓
The actions of Key Individuals		✓			
Successful in carrying out the major parts of its remit		✓	✓		✓
Has a proactive approach		✓	✓		
Has a reactive approach		✓	✓		
NOC role understood and recognised by the majority of union members.			✓		
Good Communication within the NOC		✓	✓	✓	
Generated interest in the NOC & recruited new members because of that.			✓		
Good lines of communication with union members			✓		
Good relations between unions within the NOC	✓		✓		
Strength of FCTU Joint Unions				✓	
Union and HR procedural knowledge				✓	
FCTU Secretary and Office support				✓	
Geographical Spread of members		✓			
Concentrated location of union members and Issues		✓			✓
An individual union taking the lead on training and issues.					✓
Good distribution processes and communication with members			✓		
Breadth of Experience within the NOC	✓				

National Organising Committees Analyses of their **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats****WEAKNESSES**

	England NOC	Scotland NOC	Wales NOC	Business Unit NOC	Silvan House NOC
Lack of general/overall activism amongst union members.		✓	✓		✓
Inability to generate enthusiasm in members			✓		✓
Lack of knowledge and guidance on how to take forward and manage some issues.			✓		
Lack of NOC systems to record actions taken and outcomes.			✓		
Willingness to too easily accept decisions that go against what the NOC has been fighting for.			✓		
No training opportunities for NOC members.			✓	✓	
Absence of demonstration of leadership and direction from FCTU key members			✓	✓	
Low Profile FTCU of some Joint union leaders			✓	✓	✓
Lack of commitment from some unions		✓		✓	✓
Reliant on key individuals to drive work forward and deliver outcomes.		✓			✓
Non-recognition of the term NOC (and its work) by management or union members		✓		✓	✓
Poor communication with other NOCs and awareness of their issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Geographical spread of members and locations				✓	
Lack of systems or basic membership information to enable transfer of information to and from members.	✓	✓		✓	✓
Fear of repercussion from managers				✓	
Lack of general/overall activism amongst union members.		✓	✓		✓
Inability to generate enthusiasm in members			✓		✓
Lack of knowledge and guidance on how to take forward and manage some issues.			✓		
Lack of NOC systems to record actions taken and outcomes.			✓		
Lack of female and admin group representation on the NOC	✓				
The Title NOC	✓				

Unable to sustain momentum between meetings	✓				
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National Organising Committees Analyses of their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

OPPORTUNITIES

	England NOC	Scotland NOC	Wales NOC	Business Unit NOC	Silvan House NOC
To have better communication channels with Senior Management		✓	✓		✓
To have better communication channels with Members	✓		✓		✓
To improve contact with other NOCs and the FCTU			✓		
To raise the profile and understanding of the existence and the work of NOCs	✓		✓		
To develop new NOC members roles and involvement			✓		
To raise the profile and awareness of the work of the FCTU GB and its key individuals			✓	✓	
Training for Reps	✓		✓	✓	
To identify and put forward innovative issues to management	✓				

National Organising Committees Analyses of their Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

THREATS

	England NOC	Scotland NOC	Wales NOC	Business Unit NOC	Silvan House NOC
No succession planning in place	✓	✓	✓		✓
Apathy of union members	✓				✓
Cut in resources				✓	
Increase in constraints re finance and time				✓	
Efficiency Programme				✓	
Balancing the increase in union work roles/ pressures against FC core work role	✓		✓	✓	✓
Declining union membership in the FC	✓				
Increase in work pressures	✓				