

**nipsa**

*The Leading Public Service Union*

**2009 NIPSA GENERAL CONFERENCE**

**CONFERENCE PAPER No 2**

**ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION  
IN NIPSA BUSINESS**

**MAY 2009**

# **ACTIVISM AND PARTICIPATION IN NIPSA**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 At the 2008 NIPSA Annual Conference the following resolution was adopted:-

### ***Composite Motion No 34***

***Conference notes that despite the continuing growth of the union's membership there has not been a proportional growth in levels of activism or participation. Conference is alarmed that rather than a proportional growth, activism and participation in clearly in decline. This has been evidenced in several ways,***

- ***A year on year decline in participation in General Council ballot elections culminating in a level of less than 12.5% participation in 2008, representing the lowest return yet***
- ***A continuing absence of willing candidates to stand for the General Council or Executive Committees from significant organisational areas of the union, leaving those areas without a voice at the highest level***
- ***A reduction in attendance at the annual conferences when this is considered proportionally to the membership increases***
- ***An especially concerning diminution in the number of branches submitting motions to the annual delegate conference as the primary method for influencing union policy. This meant that in 2007, only 14 branches, from over 200, had motions on the primary agenda of the General Conference***

***This situation constitutes a crisis in activity and participation within NIPSA and conference instructs the General Council to conduct a comprehensive consultation and evaluation of participation in the foregoing activities by actively meeting with, and engaging branches, departmental/section committees, and panels as well as Executive Committees to form a strategy to correct the crisis. The strategy should be reported back to the 2009 General Delegate Conference and contain a motion to enable corrective measures.***

1.2 In considering the general objectives of the resolution to improve the participation of members in NIPSA business, the General Council also had regard to the following motion which was remitted by the 2008 Annual Conference.

### ***Comprehensive Motion No 35***

***Conference calls on the incoming General Council to review the infrastructure needed to promote recruitment to NIPSA as the public service union of choice. Conference calls on the incoming council to support the work of both executive committees in putting in place strategies to deal with perceived blockages to the recruitment of workers, such as indemnity insurance.***

***In addition it calls on the General Council to prepare a report on ways to encourage greater trade union membership in particular of individuals under 26 years of age. This could cover a range of options such as:-***

- ***discounted membership rate to those earning less than £15,000;***
- ***free fixed term membership; and***
- ***nominal fees and corporate gifts bearing the NIPSA logo.***

***It should also include recommendations for any constitutional amendments.***

- 1.3 As requested by resolution No 34, to assist the General Council in considering a possible draft strategy, comments were sought from Branches, Committees and Panels. Specifically the Council sought the views on any particular measures or actions that NIPSA might take that would assist Branches in achieving greater participation in:-

**NIPSA General Council Elections**

- (a) *The number of members completing and returning the General Council election ballot paper which is currently taking place.*
- (b) *The number of candidates coming forward for election to the General Council so that there is representation on the General Council from all sectors of the Union.*

**NIPSA Annual Delegate Conferences**

- (c) *Ensuring that all Branches nominate delegates to attend the Annual Conference.*
- (d) *Encouraging more Branches to submit motions for consideration at Annual Conferences.*

**2. CURRENT PARTICIPATION LEVELS**

- 2.1 **General Council Elections:-** The data on participation in General Council elections from 2002 to date is as follows:-

<b>Year</b>	<b>Candidates Nominated</b>	<b>Ballots Issued</b>	<b>Ballots Returned</b>	<b>% Turnout</b>
2002	45	38,602	6,466	16.75
2003	48	39,924	6,506	16.29
2004	44	41,906	6,844	16.33
2005	50	41,767	6,024	14.42
2006	54	43,175	5,849	13.54
2007	48	43,364	5,622	12.96
2008	47	44,117	5,532	12.53
2009	54	45,365	5,855	12.9

## 2.2 Branch Attendance at Group and Annual Conferences:

	No of Branches	No Represented at Conference	Total Potential Delegates	No Attending
<b>2005</b>				
<b>Civil Service</b>	147	68 (46.3%)	299	179 (59.9%)
<b>Public Officers</b>	69	29 (42%)	220	97 (44.1%)
<b>NIPSA</b>	216	97 (44.9%)	519	276 (53.2%)
<b>2006</b>				
<b>Civil Service</b>	148	76 (51.4%)	291	172 (59.1%)
<b>Public Officers</b>	68	34 (50%)	231	101 (43.7%)
<b>NIPSA</b>	216	110 (50.9%)	522	273 (52.3%)
<b>2007</b>				
<b>Civil Service</b>	142	89 (62.7%)	284	171 (60.2%)
<b>Public Officers</b>	74	33 (44.6%)	242	100 (41.3%)
<b>NIPSA</b>	216	122 (56.5%)	526	271 (51.5%)
<b>2008</b>				
<b>Civil Service</b>	141	87 (61.7%)	271	179 (66.1%)
<b>Public Officers</b>	63	37 (58.7%)	266	140 (52.6%)
<b>NIPSA</b>	204	124 (60.8%)	537	319 (59.4%)

2.3 The General Council noted that the number of members participating in the election decreased in the period 2002-09. With NIPSA's membership increasing the overall % level of participation declined from 16.75% to 12.9%.

2.4 The data on participation levels by Branches at Annual Conferences indicates some improvement over the period 2005-08. For example at the 2005 General Conference only 97 of the 216 Branches were represented at Conference while in 2008 124 out of 204 Branches were represented. The % of potential delegates attending also increased from 53.2% to 59.4% over the same period.

## **3. RESPONSES FROM BRANCHES**

3.1 Responses were received from only six Branches to the General Council's request for views on measures to improve participation levels. These included a number of proposals and suggestions as follows:-

### **General Council Elections**

- *There should be reserved seats for every section of NIPSA (by Employer) which has at least 5% of the membership at 31 December. For this purpose NICS Departments were counted as separate employers eg DSD, DOE.*
- *Nominations from any Branch should be limited to 3 for any one election.*

- *The number eligible to be elected from any Branch should be limited to 3. If more than 3 elected the 3 highest votes to be deemed elected.*
- *Prior to the General Council election NIPSA News and NIPSA Reports should carry a sequence of articles to inform and encourage participation.*
- *Participation could be encouraged by entry into a free draw.*
- *A donation of 10p per ballot paper returned to the NI Hospice could be made by NIPSA to encourage members to return ballot papers.*
- *Look at the imbalance in grades on the General Council ie perceived lack of representation at lower grades.*

### **NIPSA Conferences**

- *Allocate an Official to follow up Branches who have not submitted Delegates to Conference.*
- *Offer assistance where difficulty with time off is the issue*
- *Have a minimum number of 2 Delegates per Branch*
- *Amend Standing Orders to ensure that motions from Branches which have not submitted motions for at least the previous 2 years are placed at the start of the relevant agenda section.*
- *Write to non-participating Branches asking for the reason behind their non-attendance.*

### **Other General Comments**

- *There is a need for more and better communication at all levels.*
- *There should be monitoring of Branch General meetings and AGMs. A Headquarter observer/speaker should be in attendance.*
- *Branches should advertise their meetings using the NIPSA website.*
- *Branches should be visited at least once a year by a Union Organiser.*
- *Amalgamation of Branches should be considered in certain areas.*

## **4. DEVELOPING A STRATEGY**

- 4.1 The General Council considered the above responses. However it was fully recognised that the limited response of 6 Branches only did not provide a sufficient basis to establish a consensus on options for action. The General Council's initial conclusions were:-

- (a) The Council did not agree with the proposals that limitations should be placed on the number of Branch nominations for the General Council or the number that could be elected from a Branch.
  - (b) Suggestions of encouraging membership participation in elections by offering free draws or charitable donations were not considered appropriate.
  - (c) It was agreed that further efforts should be made to publicise more information about the General Council election, role of the General Council, etc in NIPSA Reports. In addition the Council proposes to initiate a post election sample survey to establish reasons why members may not have participated.
  - (d) It was agreed there should be follow up action with Branches not submitting delegates to Conferences. In this context it was also agreed to reinstate the practice of allocating General Council members to Branches.
  - (e) It was noted that the suggestion of a minimum 2 delegates per Branch to Conference would require a constitutional amendment but there was ongoing action to review the numbers of Branches within different sectors.
  - (f) It was noted that it was a matter for Branches to decide who to invite to Branch AGMs but NIPSA HQ does seek returns annually from each Branch by 31 December in line with the constitution.
  - (g) The facility to enable Branches to publish their AGMs on the website could be available under the new NIPSA website.
- 4.2 The General Council concluded that further detailed work will be necessary to develop strategies and plans to build greater levels of participation across all NIPSA sectors. However the 2008 Annual Conference resolution required the Council to submit a report to the 2009 Conference. The Council wishes to emphasise that this report should be regarded only as an interim paper with a firm commitment to undertake further consultations with Branches.
- 4.3 Having regard to the terms of Motion No 35 on recruitment activities the General Council considered a proposal submitted by the organisation Trademark to undertake a research project aimed at building young people's trade union membership and activity. The General Council has approved the project which will be implemented after 2009 Annual Conference as follows:-

### **Research Objectives**

**This research sets out to determine the barriers to young people (aged 16 to 25) participating in union activities and engaging with union structures in the public sector in Northern Ireland, with particular focus on NIPSA.**

**The research will encompass a quantitative analysis of the age profile of union members to determine patterns of membership and areas where membership is low.**

**This will then be followed by a series of focus groups with young adults from the union to examine their views and experiences with respect to:-**

- 1. Reasons for joining the union**
- 2. Experiences of and relationships with the union**
- 3. Experiences of and relationships with union reps**
- 4. Identification of barriers and enablers.**

**The research will make a series of recommendations to address obstacles and to increase active participation of young adults in the union.**

**May 2009**

© nipsa2009

Published by:

**NORTHERN • IRELAND • PUBLIC • SERVICE • ALLIANCE**

**NIPSA Headquarters:** Harkin House, 54 Wellington Park, Belfast BT9 6DP.

**Telephone:** 028 9066 1831 • **Fax No:** 028 9066 5847 • **Minicom:** 028 9068 7285

**E-Mail:** [info@nipsa.org.uk](mailto:info@nipsa.org.uk) • **Web:** [www.nipsa.org.uk](http://www.nipsa.org.uk)