

# **A Living, Breathing Party**

**Policy Making and Implementation,  
Party Renewal and Campaigning to Win**

Submission to the Review of Party Structure by the  
Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, March 2011

# A LIVING BREATHING PARTY

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## Introduction

In the Leadership election last summer, all five candidates recognised that party members were not adequately involved in policy making. After more than a decade in which New Labour's high command believed that campaigns were primarily about media management and could be run from the centre, the need for activists, engaged in their communities, knocking on doors, was finally rediscovered. If Labour Party and trade union members had been listened to more, on council housing and on Iraq, on privatisation and on ID cards, Labour would not have lost five million votes between 1997 and 2010.

Now Ed Miliband is committed to change, and to creating a “**living breathing party**”. The review of Partnership into Power has now been widened to cover all aspects of the party's structure – selections, conference, the role of the unions, internal elections – and this document therefore covers the whole potential scope of the enquiry. This is the party's opportunity to re-engage with its members, to share ownership of its policy-making, to renew the party at every level, and to create the campaigning party we need to win.



## The local party

The core of party renewal is the resurrection of local parties – to win we need enthusiastic activists, campaigning all year round, identifying with the issues that matter to their communities, welcoming new members. The key requirements are:

- It is **attitudes, imagination, openness and year-round activity** that matters more than structure.
- The party's **federalism** is important at all levels: the traditional branch and GC structure can work well, enabling trade unions to be drawn into local activity and policy making, and we support retaining it – it helps to provide accountability and transparency. However, there should be flexibility for constituency GCs in drawing branch boundaries, holding all-member meetings, even joining with another constituency where local geography means this makes sense.
- **Members and activists** are important; there is no single model of “activism” – most members want to help the party so enable them to do so in ways that suit them!
- **Primaries** – which reward inactivity and non-membership at the expense of members – are therefore **not the way forward** but local supporters networks may be desirable for regular communication, consultation and building the potential for recruitment provided that they do not undermine the benefits of membership.
- Members must know they have a **real voice** in the party – that won't happen overnight, it has to be seen to be believed.
- **Pluralism** is important – diversity of opinion should be valued in a healthy democratic party. Votes must be respected but those who lose the vote must still feel valued.
- **Communication** at a local level, between members not top down, is a pre-requisite for active campaigning – *membersnet* must facilitate this rather than restrict it in the interests of central control. More information should also be available to members about NEC and NPF meetings, and what happens at conference.
- **Membership fees** are too high (currently £41 minimum, half price for unemployed and retired people and union levy-payers) except for a low rate for young people (which we should retain).

## Party Conference

Labour is a federal party comprising individual members, trade unions and other affiliated organisations. That remains a great strength of the party, and keeps it in touch with a key group of core supporters – it must stay that way and be reflected in the structure of party conference. A “living breathing party” with a real functioning democracy requires that party conference has real debates and votes on the key issues, with decisions taken by the delegates representing the membership (individual and affiliated). The fact that one-third of constituencies did not even bother to send a delegate in 2010 – the worst attendance since World War II – reflects the fact that party conference has simply become an irrelevance.

- A good indicator of a “living breathing” conference is how much time is devoted to **delegates’ contributions** – at present this is almost none. The Conference Arrangements Committee should ensure that **at least half of conference’s time is devoted to delegates contributions in debates** on which votes are taken. This is entirely compatible with providing a platform for the party’s front bench to speak to the electorate, but the balance must change.

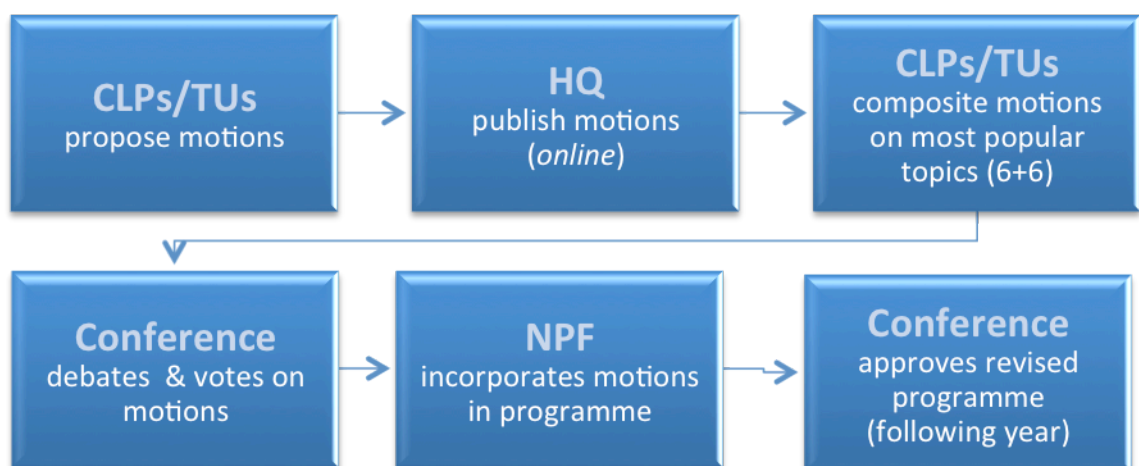


Figure 1 - Annual Conference cycle

- A “**real functioning democracy**” requires that members (individual and affiliated) are able, through their CLPs & Unions, to **submit their policy proposals, have them considered, see the outcome & have them voted on**. The structure illustrated in Fig 1 would enable that to happen. Composites should be produced well in advance of conference on the most popular 6 topics amongst CLPs, based on the number of motions submitted on each topic, and another 6 for the affiliates (to ensure that smaller affiliates are also included). NPF Policy Commissions should also be able to select additional motions for debate at conference. Any motions (including emergency motions) which are not debated at conference or included in a composite should be referred to the relevant policy commission and their CLPs invited to be represented when it is discussed.

- National executive **papers and minutes** should be published on *Membersnet*, except when the national executive believes that it would damage the party's interest for them to be published electronically even to party members, but agendas should be published in full.
- Each CLP and affiliate should also be able to submit a motion on issues of **organisation, finance & campaigning and a rule change** on any topic. Rule changes should be considered in the year they are submitted – there is no genuine reason for delay. It was never proposed, under Partnership in/into Power, to prevent motions on issues other than policy but they have, in practice, been ruled out of order since 1997.
- In addition to the consideration of reports and motions, the primary task of each annual conference should be to consider the National Policy Forum's recommendations in relation to the **party's rolling programme**, and any amendments or alternative options.
- **Policy statements** from the NEC or NPF should, where possible, contain options, and conference should be able to consider minority positions from the NPF (provided they were supported by 25% of the NPF or relevant policy commission) and amendments from CLPs and affiliates (provided that these are supported by organisations representing by, say, 5 or 10% of conference votes), or take them section by section (as was originally agreed in 21997 but not implemented).
- **Affiliated organisations and CLPs** should have equal representation and weight at Conference (and also on the National Executive and National Policy Forum, *see below*)
- All party **conference documents**, including annual reports, policy documents, motions, records of decisions, votes and proceedings, should be published on *Membersnet*.

## The National Executive Committee

Between conferences and meetings of the national policy forum, the national executive is the voice of the party, but its role and status each need to be enhanced. That is more important, and a better model, than the creation of an additional role of directly-elected chair of the party.

- The role of **overseeing policy-making** (in addition to campaigning, organisation and finances) should be restored to the National Executive.
- The national executive is the voice of the party in day-to-day **dealings with the Leader** and parliamentary party, and in the final stages of **drawing up the manifesto**. It should be consulted about key decisions by Labour in parliament and in government. In the event of a **hung parliament**, which would be a more frequent event if AV is introduced, it should receive frequent reports on any negotiations with other parties to form a government, and its approval (as well as that of the parliamentary party) must be given before forming any arrangement with another party.
- As long as members of the **House of Lords** are appointed, the national executive should approve any names put forward.
- The **composition of the NEC** needs to reflect the equality between individual and affiliated members and a proposed structure is set out below. The bar on members of the **General Council of the TUC** being members of the executive should be ended. There is also a strong case for strengthening the **representation of BAME and Young people** on the NEC, and widening participation in their election. The **EPLP, MSPs and AMs** should be represented by their respective leaders. Scotland and Wales should directly elect an NEC member each.

	Current	Proposed
Leader	1	1
Deputy Leader	1	1
Treasurer	1	1
TUs	12	12
CLPs	6	12
Soc Socs	1	1
BAME	1	1
Youth	1	1
Gov	3	3 (non-voting)
PLP	} 4 {	3
EPLP	} {	1
MSPs/AMs	0	2
Local Government	2	2
Gen Sec	1 (non-voting)	1 (non-voting)
Voting members	33	38

- The National Executive should return to the practice of taking questions and comments on all of its **annual report** at conference, and submitting it for the approval of conference, subject to the reference back of any parts with which conference disagrees.
- National executive **papers and minutes** should be published on *Membersnet*, except when the national executive believes that it would damage the party's interest for them to be published electronically even to party members, but agendas should be published in full.

## The National Policy Forum

There is widespread cynicism about the national policy forum and few regard it as having been a “success” thus far – in spite of statements to the contrary in the consultation document *Partnership into Power*. Nevertheless a representative body, smaller than conference, which meets away from the media’s gaze, could play a valuable part provided that it is democratic and inclusive, and considers policy options from all sections of the party and strands of opinion. However, we should not underestimate the task of overcoming party members’ cynicism.

- The primary task of the national policy forum should be to maintain a **rolling policy programme** for agreement by conference based on the deliberations of its own policy commissions and ad-hoc working groups (which should review representations from members, CLPs and affiliates as well as policy experts outside the party’s structure) and on motions agreed by conference. This should be published online as soon as it is available.
- In order to ensure a proper debate at conference, proposals for the programme and subsequent amendments and addendums to it, in the absence of a consensus, should include **options that seek to represent significant strands of opinion in the party**. Any minority position supported by 25% should be included. This will require a significant change in the culture of the NPF – from producing a single option which is allegedly “consensual” to proposing options to facilitate a decision by conference.
- Before decisions are reached on final documents, **procedures** must allow sufficient time for members to properly digest all proposals and consult those they represent – the chaotic procedures of Warwick conferences have not been an improvement on earlier compositing processes. Where appropriate, wider consultations should be undertaken in the party and beyond including through the use of ‘green’ and ‘white’ papers.

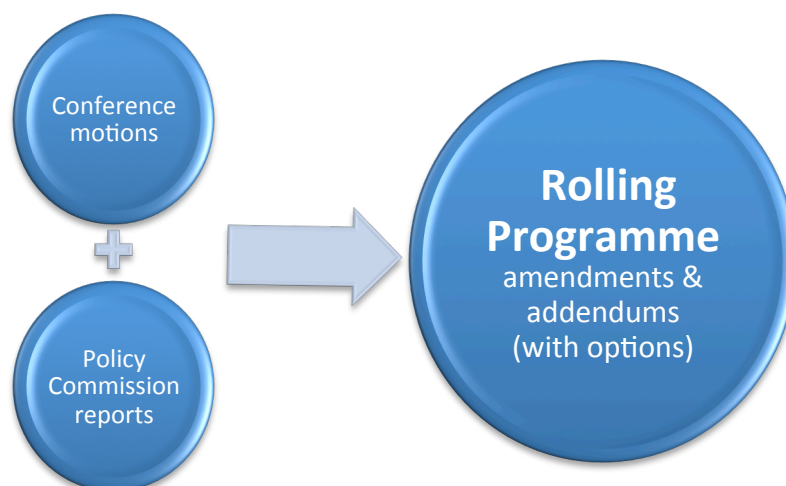


Figure 2 - National Policy Forum

- When setting up policy commissions and working groups, **all strands of opinion should be included** as far as possible – any group of NPF members dissatisfied with the composition of any of these bodies should be entitled to proportionate representation.
- The **planning of the policy forum’s work programme** should be undertaken by the democratically-elected national executive (replacing the role of the Joint Policy Committee),



ensuring that all aspects of the programme are reviewed during the lifetime of a parliament, that issues of concern to party members and the public are considered as necessary, and that the programme responds to unfolding events as soon as possible.

- The internal **workings and procedures of the policy forum** must nevertheless allow the members of the forum to control their own agenda – it should not be for anyone or any other body (save Party Conference) to restrict what the forum may discuss or decide.
- The policy forum should make best possible use of *Membersnet* and **web-based consultation** in order to gather the views and expertise of party members during its deliberations. All documents should be published on the web as soon as possible. *Membersnet* must enable CLPs and affiliated organisations to communicate easily with their own representatives, and to submit motions and submissions to all members of relevant policy panels, and to facilitate communication between members of the NPF as a whole and each policy commission or panel.
- The NPF should meet at least once per year, and it should be possible for **meetings of the Forum** and (including virtual meetings) of commissions or panels to be requisitioned by, say, 20% of their members.
- The policy forum may include non-members of the forum on policy commissions and working groups, in order to involve **policy experts** from independent **voluntary organisations** and **pressure groups**, as well as front or back-bench MPs and other **elected representatives**. Where party conference resolutions are being considered, representatives of the organisations that moved and seconded those motions should be invited.
- The composition of the National Policy Forum should also be amended to give equal representation and weight to **affiliated organisations and CLPs**. Young Labour representatives should continue to be elected by OMOV ballot of all individual members by region as at present, but the Chair of Young Labour should also be included.

	Current	Proposed
<b>National Executive</b>	33	33
<b>CLPs</b> (4/5 + youth transferred to YL section)	55	44
<b>Regions</b> (2 from each region)	22	22
<b>Socialist Societies</b> (incl BAME Labour)	10	10
<b>Trade Unions</b>	30	44
<b>EPLP</b>	6	4
<b>PLP/ front-bench</b>	8	8
<b>PLP/ back-bench</b>	9	9
<b>House of Lords</b>	2	2
<b>Local Government</b>	8	8
<b>Wales &amp; Scotland Policy Forums</b>	6	6
<b>Young Labour</b>		12
<b>Total</b>	189	202

- **Ministers or shadow ministers** should actively engage with the policy forum and its relevant commissions or working groups through all stages of the development and implementation of policy. In the past, this has not been a priority for (shadow) Ministers, many of whom were very poor attendees. This was also true of some NPF members. In future attendance records should be published for the Forum and all its subgroups.

- Members of the policy forum have **equal status** and are entitled to full information about all policy commissions and working groups (using web-based information exchange) and are entitled to express their views before final decisions.
- Members of the policy forum are **accountable** to the sections they represent, and the party should enable them to report back to the organisations they represent and the individuals who constitute their electorate.
- Policy forum **papers and minutes** should be published on *Membersnet*, except when the national executive believes that it would damage the party's interest for them to be published electronically even to party members, but agendas should be published in full.
- The party's rolling programme, discussed by the NPF and approved by conference each year, shall be the basis of the party's **election manifesto**. This is not very different from the process adopted by the Scottish and Welsh parties for the elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.
- No policy making apparatus can work, let alone work transparently, without **adequate resources**. In the past, Labour's research department was run down whilst '*Short-money*' enabled the Leader and (Shadow) Cabinet to increase their research staff. With a combination of cooperation between the party and front-bench and a new priority within the party for policy and research, we are confident that adequate resources can be made available.

## The Leadership

There has been discussion about the method of electing the Leader and Deputy. No doubt it is possible to improve the organisation of the ballot, but there is no strong argument, in our view, for any fundamental change to the current method. The idea that party supporters should be somehow included should be rejected for the same reason as primaries should be rejected at a local level – non-membership should not be rewarded at the expense of members, and supporters should be encouraged to join with lower membership fees and the opportunity to participate in a leadership election as they were in 2010. The suggestion that Trade union members or MPs should be excluded from the process should also be rejected. Party members, individual and affiliated, and MPs are all entitled to a view. Some modifications, however, would be desirable:

- It is desirable that all **elections**, where there is a vacancy, are contested – coronations help neither the party nor even the crowned leader as we have discovered to our cost. For that reason, if there is a vacancy, whenever only one candidate receives more nominations than the stated threshold, that threshold should cease to apply so that any other nominees may be considered.
- However, the current **barrier to nomination** where there is a vacancy (12½%) is in any case too high and should be reduced, since it can still exclude candidates who have a significant body of support in the party. This should be done by reducing the proportion of MPs required to support each nomination to 5%, but we also favour applying the threshold to the whole college – so that it can be reached by totalling the proportion from each section.
- In order to discourage repeated ad-hoc **campaigns against the leader** by disgruntled dissenters, as we witnessed in the last parliament, timetables should always be set for nominations and nomination papers circulated to those entitled to nominate. When in government, nominations received for the Prime Minister would provide a barometer of support that would be preferable to unpopular challenges which only serve to damage the party's interests.
- The special status of **MEPs** in the electoral college is an anomaly which should be removed. Nor should any other categories of Labour representatives be included – the unique special case of MPs to be included in the electoral college is because the party leader is also leader of the PLP.

## The party and members' rights

In recent years, there has been criticism of the way in which the party has been managed, party elections manipulated, favoured outside candidates provided with preferential access to membership databases and parachuted into safe Labour seats, postal votes abused and even selections marred by acts of sabotage or fraud. The operation of the party must be beyond reproach, even-handed and respectful of the rights of members and the party's rules. The party must be restored to that which members are "*proud to call their own*":

- There must be a **clear line of accountability of officials** to NEC through the General Secretary.
- **Selections** are central to members empowerment and voice – members rights to select and reselect their candidates should be paramount and party officials' role should be to protect these rights, rather than to protect existing representatives or advance the careers of favoured sons. Interference should be curtailed, and where intervention is necessary, such as when a vacancy arises shortly before nominations close, it should be exercised in partnership with representatives of the relevant local party.
- There should be a renewed **right of members to select all candidates prior to each election**. This would mean that the selection (and reselection) of parliamentary candidates would be put on the same footing as that of all other candidates for election, except that we would accept that shortlists of one should be permitted for sitting MPs where there was only one nomination (a procedure which should replace the trigger ballot).
- For **local government**, as is already the case for parliament, candidates should no longer be required to have prior approval from the district, borough, city or county party. Sitting councillors should always be permitted to seek reselection except in the case of disciplinary action by the party – it should only be in exceptional cases that elected representatives who continue to have the support of their local parties are prevented from standing.
- A **charter of members' rights** should be introduced, together with a post of ombudsman and code of ethics including a whistle blowing policy. Within this structure, party officials would observe the civil service principles of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.
- A commitment to **equalities** and has rightly been a major strand in the development of the party's structure in recent years. Further steps need to be taken to increase the number of **BAME** MPs (some BAME communities especially Afro-Caribbeans are especially under-represented), and **women-only shortlists** need to remain a feature of parliamentary shortlists. It is important that an objective process (perhaps with an explicitly random element) needs to be established to select those winnable seats where these are applied in order to avoid any suggestion of manipulation, or arguments between the NEC and CLPs.
- **Working class representation** in parliament, including amongst Labour MPs, has also suffered badly in recent years, and this needs to be addressed. It is a good reason to resist any reduction in the role of trade unions in the nominations process, although trade unions do need to ensure that they are encouraging their working class members, shop stewards and lay officials, to stand as well as their political officers, researchers and legal advisers. The **provision of training** is an important aspect of increasing the numbers of working class, women and BAME MPs.
- The **strengthening of the women's and BAME structure** within the party are also important to this objective as well as to the party's policy-making and campaigning. There need to be active and representative women's and BAME organisations at local (CLP), regional and national levels and at the moment there are neither.

## The Party in Government

It must be recognised that “a living breathing party”, one in which policy and strategy are debated, must learn to manage its disagreements – not that disagreements haven’t been there during the years of discipline, command and control, for the divisions within New Labour were as public and as damaging as anything that went before them. It is always worth seeking consensus, and often, in a party which is re-established on shared values, that will be possible. At other times, it will not, and disagreements must be resolved by votes.

There is a particular problem when the party is in government, and disagreements emerge between the party and the Government. Under the last Labour government, this was not allowed to happen, but the Government was worse for it, persisting with unpopular policies and ultimately losing power. In future, Labour governments would be foolish to stifle democracy or dissent, and, instead, there should be joint discussions between the National Executive, NPF representatives and the Government to try to resolve such disagreements.



## Young Labour

The revitalisation of Labour's youth section at a national and local level is a pre-condition for renewal of the party and reinvigorating its campaigning potential. In practice, the party currently has two youth sections – Young Labour and Labour Students. Although the integration of these two has been controversial in the past, it should be re-examined since a single organisation with both student and constituency branches would have a number of advantages, including the better deployment of resources and the possibility of improved electoral organisation amongst students. However, it is important that, as far as political and campaigning activities are concerned, autonomy is important for the activities of both sections. This requires:

- The **establishment of Young Labour branches at CLP level** under the supervision of the CLP, with representation at CLP meetings, and the freedom to campaign on issues it regards as important to young people, and to recruit new members.
- An **annual Young Labour conference** convened by the Young Labour National Committee with representation from CLPs (or Young Labour branches where they exist) as well as Labour student organisations and trade unions.
- A **sabbatical salary for the elected chair of Young Labour**, with office facilities, administrative support and adequate resources to maintain an effective and autonomous organisation.
- **Adequate resources and administrative support** for Young Labour at a national level, and full access to for Young Labour officers to membership lists at the appropriate level.
- Young Labour should be able to **feed into party decision-making** at all levels – constituency, regionally and nationally, into the national policy forum, national executive and party conference.
- The Young Labour National Committee should be ex-officio **delegates to Labour Party conference**, and be entitled to move motions there which have been approved and prioritised by Young Labour conference.

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*This submission was prepared for the **Campaign for Labour Party Democracy** on the basis of consultation with numerous organisations and individuals on the Centre Left of the Labour Party, including members of the National Executive Committee and National Policy Forum.*

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**Democracy Taskforce**  
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