



DISCUSSION PAPER ON BRANCH STRUCTURE – JANUARY 2009

SCOPE

It was agreed at the post-conference BEC (2008) that a discussion paper would be written with a view to examining the current branch structure and roles within the structure, to determine its effectiveness. Any suggested improvements or changes would then be presented to the BEC for discussion and approval or otherwise. Conference would also have to endorse any recommendations.

This paper is by no means exhaustive or written in any great detail but instead will hopefully highlight some points for us to discuss in greater depth as a BEC. The most appropriate areas for discussion appear to be the following:

Sections of the branch

Roles on the branch

BEC member numbers

Frequency of BEC meetings

SECTIONS WITHIN THE BRANCH

Currently we have 4 sections which are split dependant on 2 factors. Geography, in general terms, with regard to the Northern or Southern Section and Ops room discipline/base unit in the case of AC and TC.

Although this has worked without any problems, motions to the recent conference and dialogue at some section meetings suggest that this could be done in a different manner and be more effective. For example, It has been suggested that in light of the move from Manchester that an NPC section should be established. The Northern Section airports have also suggested that they feel they have somewhat different issues generally from that of the centres and have greatly benefited from any recent joint meetings with the Southern Section as it is mainly constructed of other airports. Therefore it seems reasonable to suggest that a break up of this section as it currently stands could be seen as a positive move from most if not all of the constituents of the section.

The situation now that TC and AC are co-located should also be considered. Although the units are far from integrated in NATS terms it is perhaps time to consider one section, or at least a transition towards one section. If that was not felt appropriate then perhaps more regular joint meetings would be a reasonable way forward.

There are still also non-ops units (CTC, Hurn and Heathrow House) which need to be taken into account as well as they have traditionally been placed into a section with regard to geography as opposed to discipline. Flow control (and OS & I in general) has never really been taken into account either and as we have ATCOs working in these areas it is appropriate to change this now to ensure representation covers all of our workforce where possible.

In light of all of the above it would seem that a restructuring would be beneficial, probably leaning towards grouping around units and discipline, if possible, rather than geography. This would ideally be 3 sections, consisting of NPC, Swanwick and finally Airports & Non-Ops. If the Swanwick section was not possible then the current TC/AC sections would still seem appropriate.

ROLES OF THE BRANCH

Any changes to this area would have to be aligned with Prospect National Rules on branch structure (which was unavailable to check at the time of writing!).

At the moment the branch officers are the Chair, Vice Chair, Deputy Vice Chair, Secretary, Assistant secretary and Treasurer. In light of the recent appointment of Chair communications and the changing role of the secretariat it would seem appropriate perhaps to amend this to reflect more how we operate as a branch. This would perhaps include changing the secretary to Chair comms and strategy instead and creating a branch organiser role rather than assistant secretary.

The roles of the Chair, VC and DVC seem to work well although perhaps the DVC should be given a clearer accountability for certain areas of branch business. This can be discussed by the BEC.

With regard to the treasurer and assistant secretary/organiser role it would perhaps be time to remove them as official 'branch officers' as such as these are already not dealt with as a role in their own right and would not necessarily be required at a GPC meeting as the constitution would currently suggest.

The roles of all of the above in terms of the branch handbook are now out of date and would require re-worded and should be prepared as a change motion for the next ADC even if no changes to the structure were to take place.

The issue of Section chairs and whether or not they should be full BEC members or not as a mandatory requirement has recently been discussed. There doesn't appear to be any real need for this to be the case in my view however this should perhaps be given further debate by the BEC.

Co-optees have operated in many different ways over the past few years and it would seem appropriate that we now have a consistent approach. They are seconded to the BEC as they have a particular expertise in a given area which can benefit the branch however by definition are not full members of the BEC and should not be expected to take on the full responsibilities of elected members. This should obviously continue but we should now perhaps formalise more thoroughly when co-optees are expected to attend BECs and the exact remit of their role.

Sub section committees and chairs seem to work well and there doesn't appear to make any changes.

BEC NUMBERS

Any changes in this area would largely depend on sectional changes however if the recommendations above were to be adopted it would seem appropriate that sectional numbers were as follows.

NPC – 3 BEC members

Swanwick – 4 BEC members

Airports and Non Ops – 3 members

FREQUENCY OF BECS

Branch rules state that we should have at least 6 BEC meetings per year. We are currently achieving this and in some years bettering this.

From my perspective as Vice Chair there is still a phenomenal amount of work being thrown at us in both ATCO branch and NTUS terms and I feel that a more frequent opportunity to discuss and update the BEC in some form is still appropriate. The practicalities of having more frequent full BECs has been discussed before and is probably not possible so it would

seem reasonable that the BEC should have another debate around the possibility of holding a GPC (or any other constitution that suits us) in between full BEC meetings. This would allow us to give more regular updates to each other and have further opportunities to discuss important matters rather than relying on email or phones on a regular basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a pointed out at the beginning of this paper these should be seen as discussion points for us at the BEC rather than full proposals however in light of some of the points covered seem a good place to start! Recommendations for consideration:

A move towards 3 branches (if TC/AC were to combine) or 4 if this was not achievable in the short/medium term. The Sections should be renamed as:

NPC – to include any reps and members working at NPC both now and in the future

Swanwick - An amalgamation of the current TC/AC section

Airports and Non-ops – Including all airports within NATS, CTC, Heathrow House, Hurn and Possibly OS&I

If it was decided that TC and AC should remain separate the constitution for those units would remain unchanged. Recommendations:

Branch officers should be changed to Chair, Vice Chair, Deputy Vice Chair, Chair Communications and strategy. (Chair Communications would effectively replace the old secretary role). Treasurers role should remain but be removed from the branch officers list. Assistant secretary should be removed from branch officers list and be re-named Branch organizer. This would pick up any remaining tasks from the secretary role which the Chair comms did not do.

Branch handbook entries of roles of BEC officers should be updated.

Review of co-optees should take place.

Numbers of BEC members should be reviewed in line with any section changes.

GPCs or a smaller meeting consisting of whoever the chair deems appropriate are implemented in between BECs as a matter of course from now on.

Stuart Osman
January 2009

