

The following interim report of the Review of political fund effectiveness was accepted by the NEC for inclusion in UNISON's Annual Report 2009/9 (Appendix 2).

Review of political fund effectiveness

Interim report

Last year UNISON's conference called on the national executive council to 'carry out a full review of the political fund arrangements involving the affiliated political fund, general political fund, service groups, self organised groups, regions and branches, to scrutinise and reform operations and functional process to ensure the highest levels of transparency, participation and activity, and to report to conference on this' (national delegate conference 2008, motion 63).

In October the NEC agreed a timetable for the review and appointed a steering group to govern it. The review is being conducted over a two-year period, which will allow the union to take full account of the changing statutory and political context. The work is being overseen by a steering group comprising the presidential team; chairs and nominees of the general political fund, Labour Link and policy development and campaign committees; and four regional convenors.

The NEC agreed that the political context of the review be UK parliamentary politics, devolved administrations and local government. The objective is to ensure that UNISON political fund arrangements are reviewed, scrutinised and enhanced to reflect developments in UK politics.

In its first year the review has been gathering information to inform an assessment of the effectiveness of existing arrangements –including activity levels, communications, fund operational rules, participation and political lobbying. It has also reviewed fund developments, expenditure and fund membership trends since the last review in 2003.

In addition the steering group has gathered information about how other unions and campaigning organisations work, both in the UK and abroad, to see what can be learned from comparisons and examples of good practice.

The review has been monitoring the progress of the political parties and elections bill that followed the Hayden Phillips review of party funding. It is also considering the implications of a possible change of government at the next general election.

Early actions arising from the review's work have included agreeing measures to allow and encourage Northern Ireland members to pay into the general political fund, and improving procedures to ensure that members who do not elect to join either section of the political fund, or who elect to opt out of the political fund, are fully informed of their rights and their choices.

A high priority emerging from initial discussions is extending and deepening engagement with the union's political campaigning – ensuring members are aware of and are able to scrutinise the uses to which the political fund is put, and to access the union's resources to support their own lobbying and campaigning. We recognise that effective political organisation and influence at regional and local levels will be critical for advancing UNISON objectives over the years ahead.

As a first step towards better engaging members in the union's political work, information about the review itself has been published on the UNISON website and in its printed publications, and a questionnaire designed to help the review assess branch needs and experiences.

In its second year the review will conduct a wide-ranging consultation with all parts of the union and particularly regions. This consultation will inform a final report and recommendations which will be presented to the NEC in February 2010 and national delegate conference in June 2010.