

President's Blog (33) – SPECIAL AGM EDITION

The President's Blog was established with the aim of keeping members fully updated about the work of the National Executive Committee (NEC) and developments which affect the Union and the wider movement. As a new initiative I have extended the Blog to include details of the recently held Annual General Meeting to update members who were unable to attend.

This year the 115th AGM was held at the Holiday Inn, Runcorn on Saturday 15th and Sunday 16th July.

Welcome

The President welcomed delegates to Conference and invited Rowena Hardwick, President of the Merseyside & North Wales District Council, to give the welcome; Minister Myrrha Hibbert from the East Midlands District Council gave the opening prayer.

John Blackwood OSNU was invited again to take the Chair.

Credential Report

Membership Class	Session 1	Session 2
Individual Members	126	126
Church Representatives	40	41
DC Representatives	13	14
Individual Member proxies	5	5
Church Proxy	2	1
SLU Representative	1	1
SNUi Representative	1	1
Voting strength per session	416	421
Visitors	10	10

President's Address

What follows is an outline of the President's Address; a full report will be circulated shortly.

Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Spiritualists' National Union can I welcome friends both old and new to Runcorn for our 115th Annual General Meeting.

Since we met twelve months ago in Bolton near Manchester we have experienced what can only be described as a turbulent year.

In the last few months we have seen

- the Manchester Arena bombing
- the London Bridge attack
- the Finsbury Park Mosque attack
- the Grenfell Tower fire disaster

All of these events serve to remind us how our lives can be changed forever almost in the blinking of an eye; when these changes are built upon hatred, violence, intolerance and a general failure to care about each other it is clear humanity needs to pause and re-evaluate the true purpose of life.

As Spiritualists we have the benefit of a wider vision; we don't see death as an impenetrable barrier built to divide us from those we love. The fundamental message of spirit is so much more powerful; that message transcends death and serves to teach us a greater understanding of life's pathway and the potential in each and every one of us.

After the shock of the events I have mentioned subsides, we need to ask, what can we learn? How can we grow spiritually as a community and as such reduce or remove the intolerance in our world?

- Connecting and linking with each other.
- Engaging the other faith communities.
- Realising the breadth within our society to move forward slowly together with consensus.
- As a religion I do not believe we can ever be insular; we should rather look out into the world and challenge each and every one to make things better for all.
- Working with the RE Council we are championing the need for religious literacy, which is key in our schools. If we fail to teach our children that humanity is diverse and the value of understanding others' point of view is crucial to create an inclusive world I suggest we fail them bitterly in truly preparing them for life.
- Terrorism will thrive and flourish in divided communities where we fail to communicate and build barriers rather than understanding.
- The constraints of the real world all too often shape our religions and faith bodies, allowing us to encounter difference and respond positively with empathy to the views of others.
- I am sure we all share different views on social media; some will claim it is the scourge of the modern age, others will claim it is a powerful channel for expression, for linking our society together. Before we dismiss this tool to communicate may I share some facts with you? In the next 60 seconds:
 - 3.3 million Facebook posts will be made;
 - 500 hours of video will be uploaded to the web;
 - 29 million WhatsApp messages will be sent;
 - 448,800 tweets will be sent;
 - 65,972 Instagram posts will be made.

2.7 billion people across the world are using social media. Why would we not want to be part of this? Through social media ideas are formed, opinions are shared, and if we still claim to be the thinking person's religion is it not time for us to share our thinking on a larger platform?

- I am pleased to announce that finally we are moving towards a new website for the SNU, which I know from the comments I receive from many members is long overdue. We hope to launch the new site in the autumn and I hope you will be impressed and find the new site easier to navigate. The old site had over 800 pages, much of which were outdated; the new site will have a dedicated members' area, on-line shop and a simplified home page, which we hope the general public enquiring about Spiritualism will find useful. We also plan the launch of a new website for SNUi, and the Barbanell Centre has also launched two new websites, one for its Spiritualist work and a separate site for the conference and business side of the business. The Arthur Findlay College is also planning a new site, which, overall, will mean we have five important new windows on the world, and it is hoped that adopting Twitter and enhancing our Facebook presence will also help to strengthen our message to the world.
- It was pleasing last year for the Spiritualists' National Union to be accepted as a full member of the Interfaith Network and even more gratifying when Minister David Hopkins was voted on to the Board of Trustees, thus creating another national forum where the voice of Spiritualism is to be heard. Last year Interfaith Week saw 579 different activities arranged during the eight days, with a further 70 held by Interfaith Scotland. Interfaith Week 2017 will take place between 12th and 19th November and I urge our Churches to get involved.
- We have also experienced considerable change at Head Office, with many new staff joining the Union. I would like to pay tribute to Rachael Loukes, our new General Manager, who despite only joining us last October has worked incredibly hard to move Head Office forward in many positive ways which will ultimately serve the membership better.
- The new Oomi database is installed and working well.
- I acknowledge that many of our dedicated healing team have had issues with their healing renewals but Rachael is confident the team have learnt from this year's experience and we will be much better placed for April next year.
- At the College we are coming towards the end of a full refurbishment of all the student accommodation and planning applications have been lodged to fully refurbish the tutor accommodation. We are also working towards creating a newly built Museum and an additional teaching room and archive store. The Museum at Stansted Hall under the direction of Paul Gaunt is fast becoming a world-leading location for research into Spiritualism and I hope the new Museum will serve to provide an appropriate user-friendly modern facility best able to promote our religion to the world. If we fail to acknowledge our history, how will we ever develop a strong future?
- I would also like to acknowledge the recent decision by the Spiritualists' Lyceum Union to move their museum and archive to Stansted Hall, thus drawing more important and valuable archives into one place for the greater benefit of the movement as a whole.
- World Congress 2018 is to be held at the Arthur Findlay College on 4th to 6th July 2018; the launch of the marketing is to be 11th August 2017.

- We are currently working with the following Universities: the Open University, Durham University, Northampton University and Southampton University, to promote the scientific side of our religion.
- As I travel around the country I always value the time I spend working for or visiting our Churches. I have stated on many occasions that they are the backbone of the modern Spiritualist movement. Many issues abound through our Churches today, falling congregations, old and outdated buildings, the standards of mediumship, fewer people ready to volunteer, increasing red tape in our modern society. So is it time we all give in and call it a day?
- Has Spiritualism lost its edge?
- Is the message of Spiritualism no longer needed in our modern world?
- If you have doubts, then can I urge you to think again.
- I began by reflecting on our world; let us not then let our vision become tainted or dulled by the acts of others.
- Let our connection with the spirit truly inspire us and renew our efforts to be a positive force for good in our world.
- Through our Ministry so much good work is done, with our work within prisons, our work within the hospitals and the positive pastoral work both in our communities and within our Churches.
- We should not be afraid of change; we should, I believe, embrace it. Spiritualism has never in its history failed to take up the cause and failed to serve when the call comes; this is fundamental to what we believe and it is through this knowledge that we serve God.

Declarations of Elections

VICE-PRESIDENT

Minister Alan Rawnsley declared elected unopposed.

VICE-PRESIDENT

Minister June English declared elected unopposed.

ELECTIVE AUDITOR

Minister Brian Gledhill declared elected unopposed.

COUNCIL MEMBER TO NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

<u>NAME</u>	<u>NO OF NOMINATIONS</u>
BRADLEY, MRS L.	8
GILBERT, MRS L.	2
SMART, MRS J.	2
BAKER, MINISTER A.	1
BISHOP, MINISTER M.	1
HIBBERT, MINISTER M.	1
TAYLOR, MRS H.	1
TODD, MRS L.	1

Minister Lynda Bradley is elected as the Council Member to the National Executive Committee for the following year.

Declarations of Elections and Appointments

CHAIRMAN OF ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

Nominations

NAME	TOTAL
ENGLISH, MINISTER J.	313
WRIGHT, J.	5
COLCLOUGH, MINISTER M.	10
ELLIS, MINISTER C.	4

Minister Carol Ellis is appointed as the Chairman of the Accreditation Committee for the following year.

CHAIRMAN OF COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Nominations

NAME	TOTAL
HIRST, A.	324
MANSHIP, A.	4

Alv Hirst is appointed as the Chairman of the Communications Committee for the following year.

The following are duly elected or appointed Councillors for the coming electoral year:-

East London DC	Vacant
West London DC	Lorraine Gilbert OSNU
East Midlands DC	Minister Myrrha Hibbert
West Midlands DC	Lorraine Todd
Northern DC	Minister Lynda Bradley
North Lancs & Cumbria DC	Helen Taylor OSNU
Manchester DC	Vacant
Merseyside & North Wales DC	Jacky Ellis
Scottish & Irish DC	George Falconer DSNU
Southern DC	Robert Pallett
South Western DC	Minister Marian Bishop
South Wales DC	Minister Carol Ellis
North Yorkshire DC	Kathryn Crossley OSNU
South Yorkshire DC	Jean Smart CSNU
Lyceum Union	Minister Dinah Annable
SNU International	Minister Alan Baker
Individual Members Representative	Karen Line-Jones OSNU

PRIZES 2017

EDUCATION

John Mcindoe Prize

This is for the highest combined marks in a completed range of Diploma subjects. The courses do not have to be completed in the same year.

Richard Cuthbert OSNU, Northern DC

Special Endeavour Prize

The Special Endeavour Prize is awarded at the discretion of the Education Committee to students who have made a supreme effort to complete an education course.

Maureen Gibson, South Yorkshire DC

Dorothy Wilson Prize

For the highest marks over a completed range of subjects required for the award of a Diploma as a Speaker, Demonstrator or Administrator.

Tracey Louise Norton, South Yorkshire DC

Tom Hibbs Prize

This is for 'Achiever of the year' not necessarily the most academic, but the most deserving as deemed by the Education Committee.

Melanie Ladwig, Overseas

Ted Annabel Prize

The Ted Annable Prize for excellence in healing education course work.

Terri Takahashi, Overseas

Eileen Ledger Award

The Eileen Ledger Award is for the highest marks in either of the following: SD1 H1 and G1.

Amanda Williams, East Midlands DC

The Education Shield

This is given to the person who, in the opinion of the Education Committee, has contributed greatly to Education over many years.

Minister Dinah Annable

HEALING

Bob Bassett Award

This award was instigated by Minister Jean Bassett in memory of her husband Bob. The award is not an academic award but given in recognition of their dedication to healing within the Church over a number of years and their commitment to the Church in general.

Jean Smart CSNU, South Yorkshire DC
Valerie Daniels, Manchester DC

TRAINING & AWARDS

Gladys Owen Award for Speaking

This is a prize that is agreed by Lionel Owen, Gladys's nephew. It is awarded to the person who the Training & Awards Committee feel has achieved a high standard of public speaking and it is usually granted to a person who has achieved the DSNU (S) in the last twelve months.

Richard Cuthbert, Northern DC

Arthur Conan Doyle Prize for the PAS Scheme

This is awarded to the candidate on the Platform Accreditation Scheme who the Training & Awards Committee felt had achieved a high standard throughout.

Angela Foster, East London DC

Olive Haywood Award for Achievement

This is awarded by Darlington Church, where Olive was a member. It is recognition of achievement over and above what is usually expected of candidates undertaking SNU accreditation or awards.

Ivy Campbell, Scottish & Irish DC

Church of the Year Award

This prize is for a Church or Churches who have fulfilled the following criteria:

1. Induction classes have been held for Associate Members before they become Full Members.
2. Held welcoming services to enrol Associate Members to Full Membership.
3. The Roll Book has been signed by all new Members.
4. Have a Healing Group.
5. Its Members have achieved awards of the SNU, e.g. DSNU, CSNU or PAS.
6. Hold education classes, workshops, etc. on a regular basis.
7. Circles are held whether they are open, closed, trance, etc.

Church of the Year	1st	Hinckley SC, West Midlands DC
Award of Excellence	2nd	Birtley SC, Northern DC
Award of Achievement	3rd	Denton SC, Manchester DC

Community Service Award

To be presented locally to Hinckley Church, West Midlands

Awards of Merit

Minister Robert Clarke, West London DC
Minister June English, South Yorkshire DC
George Falconer DSNU, Scottish & Irish DC
Derek Jones OSNU, West Midlands DC
Jean Smart CSNU, South Yorkshire DC

Spiritualist of the Year

This year a joint award was made to Minister Peter Kent of Reading Church and Linda Smith of Norwich Church.

Lifetime Achievement Award

Minister Judith Seaman.

500 Club Lucky Winners

69 – David Mathers - £1000
36 – Barbara Penketh - £100
07 – Sue Presley - £50
28 – Roy Candy - £50
66 – Brian Robertson - £25
49 – John Goodman - £25
30 – Simone Key - £25

Saturday Retiring Collection for Marie Curie raised £298.98.

Notices of Motions and Results of Voting

1. Special Resolution requiring three-fourths majority

That Article 17, paragraphs (1) and (2) be amended to read as follows:-

- (1) Subject to paragraph (2) below, every person who is for the time being a full member of a Church or Pioneer Centre and is not an Individual Member shall be an Affiliate Member and shall be registered as such with the Union by the Church or Pioneer Centre as the case may be. Registration shall be in such form as may from time to time be prescribed by the National Executive Committee.*
- (2) Paragraph (1) above shall not apply to:-*
 - (a) any person whose Individual Membership has been terminated by the National Executive Committee pursuant to Article 25 other than on the grounds of overdue subscription;*
 - (b) any full member of a Church or Pioneer Centre who declines or resigns from Affiliate Membership in writing to the chief administrative officer.*

National Executive Committee

NOTE OF EXPLANATION: This motion provides for Affiliate Membership of the Union to be open to members of Pioneer Centres.

Motion 1 – Carried unanimously on a show of hands.

2. Special Resolution requiring three-fourths majority

That Article 37(2)(b) be amended to read as follows:-

- (b) *The President and Vice-Presidents shall be elected from among Individual Members who are full members of affiliated bodies. They shall be elected in alternate years, the President and one Vice-President in one year, the other Vice-President in the alternate year, each serving for a term of two years. The election shall be by postal vote of eligible Church Representatives, Individual Members, Kindred Body Representatives and Pioneer Centre Representatives.*

National Executive Committee

NOTE OF EXPLANATION: This motion provides for the Vice-Presidents to be elected in alternate years, the President and one Vice-President in one year and the other Vice-President in the alternate year.

Motion 2 – Carried unanimously on a show of hands.

3. Special Resolution requiring three-fourths majority

That Article 62 be amended to read as follows:-

62. Settlement of Complaints

- (1) *Provision shall be made in the Bye-laws for the settlement of complaints.*
- (2) *Provision shall be made in the Bye-laws for the appointment by the National Executive Committee of a Complaints Committee to deal with complaints in relation to matters for which responsibility is not assigned under the Bye-laws to another body. No member of the National Executive Committee or the Appeals Board shall be a member of the Complaints Committee.*
- (3) *Provision shall be made in the Bye-laws for the hearing of appeals by an Appeals Board appointed by the National Executive Committee. No member of the National Executive Committee or the Complaints Committee shall be a member of the Appeals Board.*

National Executive Committee

NOTE OF EXPLANATION: This motion abolishes the prohibition on members of the Council being members of the Complaints Committee and the Appeals Board.

Motion 3 – Carried unanimously on a show of hands.

4. Motion re Annual Subscription for Individual Members

That the minimum annual subscription of an Individual Member be increased to £26 with effect from 1st October 2017.

North Yorkshire District Council

Motion 4 – In favour: 112, Against: 70. **Motion Carried.**

5. Motion re Review of Annual Subscription for Individual Members

That this Annual General Meeting recommends that:-

- (i) The National Executive Committee review annually the minimum annual subscription for an Individual Member, taking into account any increase in the rate of inflation;*
- (ii) The National Executive Committee submit a motion to the AGM to increase the annual subscription where the increase in the rate of inflation warrants it in its opinion.*

North Yorkshire District Council

NOTE OF EXPLANATION: Currently there is no formal mechanism for an annual review of the Individual Membership subscription; this motion would provide for such review in the future. It does not necessarily mean that an annual increase would be applied, just that an annual review will take place.

Motion 5 – **Withdrawn.**

6. Motion re Guidelines on Disruptive and Violent Behaviour

That the National Executive Committee is requested to issue guidelines on dealing with any acts of violence or disruptive behaviour committed within our Churches/Centres, including a list of appropriate actions that can be taken against those committing or instigating such acts or behaviour.

Billingham Spiritualist Church

Motion 6 – In favour: 327, Against: 167. Motion Carried.

Appointment and Remuneration of Professional Auditors

That Messrs Price Bailey LLP be re-appointed as the Union's auditors for the coming year and that their remuneration be fixed by the National Executive Committee.

Motion carried on a show of cards.

Date and Venue for the 2018 AGM

Presentation by Minister Alan Rawnsley and Minister June English on behalf of the South and North Yorkshire District Councils to make our special anniversary year.

Venue to be Cedar Court Hotel, 21st & 22nd July 2018.

Motion carried.

Date and Venue for the 2019 AGM

Proposal by George Falconer DSNU on behalf of the Scottish & Irish District Council to hold the 2019 AGM in Scotland.

Venue to be arranged.

Motion carried.

AGM Reports

All necessary AGM booklets are available online via the SNU website: www.snu.org.uk

The meeting closed at 4.00 p.m., leaving Sunday clear to conduct a special Spiritualist service of worship and to hold some focus groups to discuss our future.

500 Club

The latest draw has just taken place, with one lucky member scooping a top prize of £500. Any member or Church or non-member wishing to join the scheme with a chance to win some excellent prizes should contact Jane Heatley at the Members Service Centre, Head Office. The odds of winning a prize are 14 to 1, which is better than the National Lottery.

Next NEC Meeting

The next NEC meeting will take place at the Barbanell Centre on 28th, 29th and 30th July. The next National Council meeting will take place at the Barbanell Conference Centre on Saturday 7th October 2017.

Have your say

As part of an ongoing policy of openness the NEC would welcome your views; please feel free to email your comments to me at president@snu.org.uk

Thought for the day

'Keep your face always towards the sunshine – and shadows will fall behind you.'

Walt Whitman

Minister David R Bruton