Federation of Model Engineering Societies

Attracting and keeping new members

This document was written by Paul Naylor and was originally published by FMES in May 2023. It reports on a workshop carried out at the 2023 AGM event day.

New members workshop, AGM, 25 March 2023

Summary of feedback:

This is a summary of the thoughts expressed by club members sitting around tables at the workshop at the Wakefield AGM in March 2023. The next section describes each question asked of the tables and the results collated into some sort of conclusion, with very limited comments of what this may mean.

Make what you will of the information!

The obvious qualifier is that there were 21 clubs present, 10% of the membership, and this may not have been representative.

The typed-up responses from the workshop are in the appendix at the end for interest.

Question 1a: This was only answered in the way requested by two tables. It was about how ***often*** clubs get new members.

The conclusion was that clubs get new members 'occasionally/frequently' with some suggestions that a few clubs attract members 'all the time'

It appears that the 'average club' attracts between 5 and 10 members per year, but all seem able to get new members to some degree, some very well.

Question 1b: This was about what clubs actually do to get new members to join.

Again, there was a variety in how answered, but there were some common themes:

IT (inc. Facebook, Youtube, website and other local media)	9 mentions
Open days (ie more than 'just' running)	5 mentions
Exhibition attendance (presumably local?)	5 mentions
Word of mouth, personal recommendation and family	5 mentions
Visibility from public running days (ie giving rides etc)	2 mentions

The remainder were all a single mention and included having a portable track to take to events, approaching local engineering employers, public training courses, reducing subs, having attractive facilities, junior membership

It appears that the most important thing to do is to use IT as a regular communication tool, mixing different methods such as website, social media etc. Word of mouth and associated activities are a frequent source of new members, however this is more passive. Proactive activities to reach out to potential interest via open days (as distinct from giving rides) and exhibition attendance are of equal importance (and actually would complement the IT communications).

Question 2a: This was a 'negative' question asking how the clubs put people off joining **_or staying_**.

Everyone understood this one and the answers were scattered, but fell into the following broad categories:

Cliques (or equivalent)	4 mentions
Lack of friendliness, arguments, unsociable, lack of welcome	4 mentions
Lack of mentoring and encouragement, unwanted criticism, all	
Looks too hard	4 mentions
Intolerance of new ideas, entrenched views, 'loco' only	3 mentions
IT communication gap, no general access to [club] website,	
poor communication with members	3 mentions

The remainder were single comments including: limited social occasions, inconsistent procedures and communications, no name badges, ME seen as old fashioned and.....lack of 'fun'.

Note that most comments seemed to be about the 'human side' rather than (e.g.) lack of facilities etc.

Question 2b: This was the inverse of the above: what does your club do (in actuality) to make people want to join and stay?

This was a broad spread of comments. They are grouped under a suggested 'theme':

Informal: Support, buddy system, pass on experience, advice

4 mentions

Support mechanisms: Teaching, workshop classes, induction process

4 mentions

Social: Social events, show and tell sessions, exhibitions, talks

4 mentions

Day to day life: Involve new members, club projects, work teams

3 mentions

Atmosphere: Friendly atmosphere, 'be nice', encouragement

3 mentions

The above includes all comments.

There is nothing particularly surprising here but the fact that all are more or less equal suggests that a club needs all themes to be evident to succeed in having a thriving club!

Question 3: **What do members who join *and stay* at my club get out of it:**

As for Q2b, there are proposed themes to group the comments under:

Social: Kindred spirits, community/well-being, socialising, place to go, life for single person 13 mentions

Hobby support: Workshop access and training, advice and knowledge

10 mentions

Enabling: Boiler tests, insurance, health and safety 5 mentions

Events: Club visits, talks, money raising 5 mentions

Activities: Building and running things 2 mentions

There were a few that did not seem to really fit the above themes: 'regular communications' being the main one.

The surprising outcome of the above is that the main reason people join and stay at a club is social! Yes, the 'hobby side' is a fundamental rationale to be there, but this links to the 'fun' comment earlier.

Other comments:

There was one comment asking FMES to contemplate having 'a list' of potential speakers for clubs to engage for events (Post comment: see website)

Appendix

The following is an assembly of the feedback from the workshop questions. There were no names/clubs stated and the table numbers given are not consistent from question to question.

1. **How does your club attract new members**

a). **Do you get new members?**

Table 1 Occasionally

Frequently

Table 2 Occasionally, <5 per year 20% of respondents

Frequently, 5 – 10 per year 60% or respondents

All the time, >10 per year 20% of respondents

Two table responses answered ' *how* do you get new members, so this added into next question.

b). **Top ways that you attract new members in reality:**

Table 1 Visibility from public activities (eg giving rides)

Exhibitions attendances

Portable track to events

Open days via flyers through local letterboxes

Facebook, especially using search words/branding

Youtube videos

Table 2 Word of mouth (2 votes)

Open days (2 votes)

Website/Internal (3 votes)

Exhibitions (3 votes)

Facebook (2 votes)

Approach to local engineering employers (1 vote)

Training courses (ie open to public: 1 vote)

Reduction of subs (£20: 1 vote)

Table 3 Open days

Personal recommendations

Family memberships

Juniors

Local IT for info/propaganda

Table 4 Facebook

Open days

Public running days

Word of mouth

Attendance at shows (ie exhibitions)

Attractive facilities (eg track etc)

1. **Why would anyone want to join us?**

a). **How do we put people of joining or staying?**

Table 1 Poor communication with membership

Cliques

Lack of welcome

Lack of mentorship

ME seen as old fashioned

Limited engineering eg to locos

All looks too hard/daunting

Table 2 Arguments between members

Intolerance (usually by old members) for new ideas from younger ones

IT communication gap

Cliques

Table 3 Factionalism (cliques?)

Unfriendliness

Insular and unsociable

No name badges

Limited social side

Table 4 Older entrenched views

Unwanted criticisms

Cliques

Lack of 'fun'

Inconsistent procedures and communication

No general access to website info

[lack of ?] encouragement

b). What does your club do to make people want to join and stay?

Table 1 Friendly atmosphere

Interest in facilities and encouragement

Table 2 Be nice

Teaching

Support

Workshop classes

Social side (inc timing of events)

Pass on experience

Table 3 Involve new members

    Induction process

    'Buddy' system

Comment here about not enough, but this is what should be done

Table 4 Monthly talks

    Workshop facilities to use

    Advice on how to do things

    Model exhibitions/show and tell sessions

    Club projects

    Work teams

1. **What do members who join and stay my club get out of it?**

Table 1 Annual boiler test (1 vote)
Social side (5 votes)
Technical help (5 votes)
Kindred spirits (3 votes)
Life for single people (? Votes)
Talks (3 votes)
Regular comms (5 votes)

Table 2 Insurance
Health and safety (?)
Loco/boiler testing
Social
Knowledge exchange/learning from experts
Supervised workshop facilities

Table 3 Building things
Running things
Social
Learning
Get away from home
Money raising
Career opportunity/mentoring

Table 4 Community via friendly company/health and well being

    Interest in type of facility

    Machining facilities

    Source of help/knowledge

    Boiler testing

    Visit other clubs