

Selection of a Convenor

Purpose

1. The submission of nominations for the role of Forum Convenor has now been completed and six candidates have been nominated. As indicated in our letter of 27th August, we are now proposing a modified selection process which allows the Forum to meet all of the nominees. A further meeting will be organised in late October/early November for this to take place, and for the Forum to reach a decision on a preferred candidate. This paper briefly updates the Forum on this revised approach.
2. The previous paper setting out a suggested approach for selection of a Convenor did not specify the voting procedure in detail. This paper also, therefore, sets out possible voting methods for consideration in advance of the proposed meeting in late October/early November.

Action

- 3. The Forum is invited to consider these proposals and determine how voting should be conducted in order to select a Convenor.**

The revised approach to selecting a Convenor

4. Under our original proposals, selection of a Convenor would have taken place at the present Forum meeting, based on the submissions received in support of each nomination. In the event of a large number of nominations being received, we had proposed that a representative sub-group of Forum members could hold a pre-meeting in order to reduce the number of nominees to a short list. Based on the nominations which we have received, however, we are now proposing an alternative approach in which the Forum has the opportunity to meet all of the nominees before making a decision. This will take place at a further meeting in late October/early November.
5. We are seeking to pursue this revised approach for a number of reasons:
 - The nominations all involve candidates of high calibre, and the original suggested approach may not allow adequate and fair consideration of all six individuals. A number of member bodies have emphasised that all nominees should be considered by the full Forum as a matter of principle, arguing in particular that the proposed pre-selection stage was inappropriate. This specific concern could have been circumvented by omitting the pre-selection meeting, but this approach would not really address the wider issue

of ensuring that the Forum has sufficient time to do justice to the nominees.

- Although some lobbying is probably inevitable, it would be beneficial to provide all candidates with an equal opportunity to present their case in order to provide a more level playing field.
 - Most of the candidates will not be well known to all of the key sectors represented on the Forum, and it would be helpful to provide members with an opportunity to meet the nominees.
 - The supporting submissions from the nominees are quite variable in their extent and coverage, and it would be helpful to provide members with an opportunity to explore some of the respective merits of the different nominees by discussion with the candidates themselves.
6. The revised approach will therefore involve a dedicated meeting at which the Forum can meet the nominees and select the new Convenor. John Markland has confirmed that he will be able to chair this meeting in his capacity as interim Convenor. We will conduct a preliminary trawl for potential dates at the meeting on 15th September.
7. We should also consider the nature of the presentations we ask the nominees to make at the selection meeting; along with timings and arrangements for handling questions.

Possible voting systems

8. The previous paper setting out a suggested approach for selection of a Convenor did not consider possible voting methods in detail, and it would be helpful to establish a preferred approach in advance of the meeting referred to above.
9. The chosen approach must crucially ensure that the Convenor can be elected on the basis of a clear majority vote among Forum members. A vote could, in theory, be conducted by various approaches including 'first past the post' and 'transferable vote' methods, and ranking the candidates in order of preference (as recently used by the Forum to identify the 'other body' members). None of these methods, however, could guarantee that one nominee would ultimately receive clear and demonstrable majority support when starting from a field of six candidates.
10. The Forum might alternatively seek to reach consensus through discussion rather than by voting. This approach might be less potentially divisive than voting, but could be quite complex to conduct when six nominees are involved.
11. We would therefore strongly recommend the adoption of an approach based on sequential rounds of voting, in which the candidate receiving the fewest votes is eliminated after each round. Successive rounds of voting are held until a single candidate has an absolute majority of the votes cast.

This approach would ensure that a convenor is elected on a majority vote and would allow members to reconsider their preference, if necessary, as the field of candidates diminishes. The voting method for each round would be simple, with each member casting a single vote for their preferred candidate. If there is a tie at any stage for last place, the Interim Convenor would have a casting vote.

12. The Forum is invited to approve the suggested approach, subject to any further comments or suggestions.

Mark Wraitham
National Access Forum Secretariat