

# Nominet PAB Working Group Discussion Notes

There has been much discussion within Nominet and the PAB about the need for technical working groups. This is a short aid memoir by the PAB Chair to advance the discussion.

Nominet is embarking on a series of projects, mainly technical, which will require more input from stakeholders (particularly members and tag holders) than previous technical work has done so. Examples include Internationalised Domain Names (IDN), Synchronous Registry Services over EPP, DNS SEC (secure domain names), IPv6, ENUM, etc.

Internally, Nominet may wish to hold Executive lead working groups with a focus on operational issues. However, many of the topics also give rise to the development of new policy – which falls within the purview of the PAB.

## Levels of Member Interaction

A key issue is trying to determine what level members will be sufficiently motivated to interact at. Informal feedback has identified that most members are “busy people” and that increasingly their business are driven by non-technical demands, i.e. the bottom line, sales figures, etc, as well as being driven by increasingly less technical management.

1. Firstly, it is felt that members will be more interested in providing a number of short, focused contributions, as opposed to a long-standing commitment.
2. Secondly, it should be recognised that many members are not up to speed on the technical issues of the day and that the level of education and initial awareness is low. However, when “sold”, members being to appreciate the relevance of these new developments.

## Paper by Ben Laurie – IETF style working groups

The IETF (Internet Engineering Task Force) is a well-established technical body that does a lot of internet standards development. They have well-formed and agreed methods of working and reaching an open consensus, although they do appear lengthy!

Ben’s document is an instantiation of the IETF WG process with changes only as required to fit into the Nominet/PAB structure. It would probably be a good idea to adopt such a framework, as it does lay down excellent guidelines for working, on the basis that if we find problems with it we’ll revisit it in future PAB meetings.

## What are the next steps?

1. Members need to be involved, educated & brought up to speed.
2. Policy areas & Issues need to be identified and distilled.

*The PAB Chair would suggest that not all the policy issues have been defined yet, nor the areas identified. The executive have suggested that EPP and IDN are the two “burning issues”, and thus it might seem sensible to begin with Nominet hosting an afternoon tutorial and open discussion, so that members can get up to speed and we can begin to see what the issues are.*

*From this, he believes that we will be able to formulate some working groups and being “discussing”.*

## **How do IETF working groups work?**

For information, the individual elements that make these working groups a success are

### Higher Body

None of these working groups stands alone. They are all part of a structure that includes a higher body that is responsible for agreeing the formation of a group and then approving the outputs. It is also this body that decides when a group should be closed.

### Single Launch Point

Each working group has one single web page that contains all of the details about that group and is publicly accessible.

### Chair

The chair runs the group and is expected to put in a significant time contribution to do so. Whilst other tasks can be delegated, such as producing documents, it is the chair that takes responsibility for keeping the group on-topic, getting the plans produced and the work done.

### Charter

This is the mission statement for the group. This has to be approved by a higher body for the group to be set up and is then made fully public.

### Area

The IETF, which has many more groups to manage than RIPE, sets up 'content areas' and groups are chartered within a specific area. This allows for more structured management and also indicates to the potential participant which groups they might be interested in.

### Work Plan

Each group has a work plan and the production of this the first major step the group takes. The work plan is submitted to a higher body for approval before the working group can progress. With the open publication of the plan and how well the milestones have been met this is critical to the functioning of the group. At RIPE some groups have more of a rolling work plan as they encounter new issues to be tackled.

### Membership

Membership of working groups is completely open to anyone that wishes to participate. This allows people who would not normally participate but have a particularly narrow interest to take an active part. Crazyies or time-wasters are generally censured by other members of the group and in the most extreme cases are removed from the mailing list by the chair.

### Mailing List

Most of the work of a group is done in mailing lists. This allows interaction between people often distant geographically and with different working patterns. Some of these mailing lists are moderated by the chair so that only approved messages are sent to all members. All messages to the mailing list are archived and searchable.

### Outputs

The outputs are generally documents that express the agreed view of the group (as managed by the chair) and are then passed on to the higher body for approval. These outputs are available throughout the life of the group as publicly accessible drafts. They might also include minutes of meetings, presentations or other documents of use to members and visitors to the group.

### In-Person Meetings

Working groups need to meet every now and again for a number of purposes. They allow non-members to see how the group operates and what it is up to. They also allow the group members to meet each other and strengthen their interaction. The meetings should not be decision making but informational.

## **What work this way?**

There are a number of unique benefits that come with the use of working groups. Because the main interaction is via mail and no physical travel is required for proper participation many more people can be involved than otherwise. The breakdown of groups into very specific areas also ensures a more dedicated membership, more willing to work together and producing a higher output than a general group.

The structure of the groups is actually quite rigid with the chair, charter and work plan. However all of this is implemented in a very transparent fashion and with open membership there is the freedom needed to ensure ownership and creative input.

This is the complete antithesis to a group like nom-steer that has an incredibly wide ranging brief, closed user group and no common purpose with consequently no usable output.

### **How would Nominet groups work?**

The proposal is that we implement working groups with the following implementation of the critical elements.

#### Higher Body

This is the natural role for the PAB as most of the work of the groups are a subset of its sphere of influence. This would significantly improve the performance of the PAB if it just dealt with the issues at the key points of setting up a group and approving the outputs. Much of the work that the PAB tries to do in session and between meetings via sub-committees can transfer to appropriate working groups.

#### Single Launch Point

This is obviously the Nominet web site with an area for the list of groups and a page for each group.

#### Chair

Contrary to the way RIPE and IETF groups work we propose that in the first instance we should look to elected PAB members to chair these groups. That gives better definition to their role and helps to answer the question that many of them have as to whether they are there to represent themselves or those who elected them. By the time of the next PAB election this responsibility can have been built into the role so that it is clear that being elected means spending time chairing a group. It also brings a proper process for the way a chair is chosen.

#### Charter

There needs to be a mechanism for requests for new groups to be considered by the PAB, such as writing to the chair who then raises it at the next meeting. When a group is agreed the charter is drawn up by the PAB and the chair selected. It would also be possible for the CoM to instruct the PAB to set up a group to tackle a particular issue.

#### Area

Whilst the number of groups is likely to be quite small, similar to that of RIPE there is distinct value in having areas, not least to tell people what areas the groups do not cover.

#### Membership

The proposal is for the working groups to be fully open even though this may upset some members. The value of such openness is that it allows many more people to participate and add value without the need to pay the membership fee.

#### Mailing Lists

The mailing lists will be hosted and operated by Nominet. They will not be moderated and full searchable archives will be implemented right from the start.

#### Outputs

As the higher body will be the PAB the outputs of working groups are sent to the PAB for approval and then on the CoM, even if they are for information only, to ensure that they are part of a coherent policy framework.

#### In-Person Meetings

It is proposed that these are not attempted until the groups have had several months to bed down and produce some output that can be presented. A target of the 2004 AGM would seem appropriate with an extra day or two being added onto the agenda for the group meetings. These might then replace the current PAB meetings as all of the details of PAB work will have transferred into groups.