

# Chair's Paper: Methods of Work

## 1. Introduction

The PAB performance review was agreed at the May meeting. In the discussion, the PAB members agreed that the working environment had improved considerably and provided a better forum for dialogue, but recognised that consensus building and constructive engagement need a sustained and continued effort. We highlighted methods of working and identified a number of approaches that could be developed to help the PAB's work.

This paper looks at some of these ideas, as well as at some recent examples of what has worked well, and suggests ways in which we could build on success.

## 2. What needs changing?

In the discussion at the May meeting, we identified that we could continue to develop our ways of working to provide:

- A better framework for developing consensus;
- Improved visibility of the PAB and of what we are doing;
- Better communications at all levels to all stakeholders and with Nominet;
- Openness to input from the wider Nominet membership; and
- More efficient working.

There are separate discussions at this meeting looking at the nom-steer forum and at how we might improve cooperative working. This paper focuses on how to identify and prioritise work items and how we schedule the discussion as we prepare our advice to the Board: our ways of working.

## 3. Identification of Issues

It is important to set aside some time at each meeting to plan ahead and incorporate and prioritise issues on the Work Programme. I **recommend** that we have a standing agenda item to decide on the main issues for the next two meetings and to look forward for the next eight months. (This implies a "two meetings fixed, four meetings tentative" schedule, although I recognise that – as with phishing – we may want to give specific issues immediate priority.)

The work programme provides an opportunity for the PAB to identify issues and to establish its priorities. We need to recognise the importance of setting aside sufficient time to understand issues and develop consensus. We also need to factor in discussions with key stakeholders: we did this in the 2007 discussion on phishing to good effect.

Issues can be proposed by the Board, the Executive, or by PAB members, or by other Nominet members from discussions on nom-steer. I **suggest** that we ask the Executive to consider if an additional (neutral) mechanism for Nominet members and other stakeholders to propose issues for the agenda could be made available.

The PAB needs to be able to see issues in a wider context and therefore needs to look beyond the immediate framework of policy associated with the .uk name space. I believe that we already do this successfully – the recent discussions on trust in the Internet, the Byron review and the CBI survey are good examples of this and I **recommend** that we continue this practice of looking at wider issues. Such work will not necessarily result in advice to the Board, but it may allow us to flag key issues for the wider Nominet membership.

As part of the process of identifying topics, I **suggest** that we provide an opportunity for PAB members to briefly introduce topics where they would like to see discussion, or where they think there is an interest from the Nominet membership or from the wider stakeholder community. This could be through a short paper submitted by a member, identifying why a more detailed study in the PAB might be useful. The member could introduce the paper (a "five-minute rule": this could be scheduled as part of our regular agenda) to stimulate a short discussion as part of the prioritisation process. Such an approach could help us improve our awareness of up-coming issues.

## 4. Development of the Discussion

Currently, we do not schedule discussion to help develop thinking about issues. However, experience shows that working through sub-groups and developing thinking over a number of meetings are effective approaches.

**I suggest** that the usual approach to any new topic will look like:

- a. Identification of the issue: what are the policy implications? This could be a paper from the Executive or from a PAB member (either as part of the scheduled work programme or introduced under the “five-minute rule” suggested above).
- b. Initial discussion to identify key issues and points of view: in some cases, this will be done in the initial discussion under the “five-minute rule”. For complex issues, breaking into teams to develop and brainstorm the issues has been shown to be particularly useful, and I will use this technique wherever this is appropriate.
- c. Agreement on handling: this could include identifying an individual who will lead the work or the creation of a sub-committee. It should be their responsibility to prepare proposals and make recommendations for the subsequent discussion. I recognise that PAB members have full schedules, and that programming additional meetings is difficult: I believe that inter-sessional work can effectively be done on line, without the need for face-to-face meetings.
- d. We should encourage input from Nominet members and the wider community. Inviting external experts to attend meetings to improve understanding – as we did with the discussion on phishing – is a useful way of widening perspectives.
- e. The final discussion should be based on proposals from PAB members. While we should aim for consensus, we also need to recognise divergent views: any advice should clearly identify who opposes and on what grounds: this will help the Board to understand the context of the PAB’s advice.
- f. We should schedule our discussion over at least two meetings (points a, b and e above). These might be supplemented by some work done on line or in sub-committees as appropriate. The work programme needs to recognise that few discussions will lead to advice at a single discussion.

As will be clear from the above, **I see it as important** that PAB members take increased responsibility for the work programme and for developing the discussion on specific issues. The role of the Executive is to support members in their work. But the leadership needs to come from members.

## 5. Conflict of interest

The PAB rules require members to provide a declaration of interests: this is less of concern to appointed members, who represent their organisations, than to elected members. We agreed in May that there should be a standing agenda item to allow members to declare conflicts of interests for the meeting. However, there is also a need to have a clear record available for audit of members’ interests.

Transparency is important, both for the integrity of the PAB and to protect the reputation of individual PAB members. However, few members have completed the declaration of interest form. A conflict of interest would not normally bar a member from participating in the discussion, and indeed specialist knowledge can provide a better understanding of the issues.

Nevertheless, the PAB must seek to ensure that its advice is well founded and recognises viewpoints from different communities and stakeholders: **I believe** that we need full compliance on declaration of interests.

## 6. Engagement with other stakeholders

Appointed members bring a perspective on issues affecting the wider community. I recognise that we cannot hope to be comprehensive and, drawing on experience in the discussion on phishing, we should always be open to inviting external experts to help us understand issues and possible approaches.

**Although I do not recommend** that we increase the numbers of the current appointed members, we should seek wherever appropriate to work with other stakeholders.