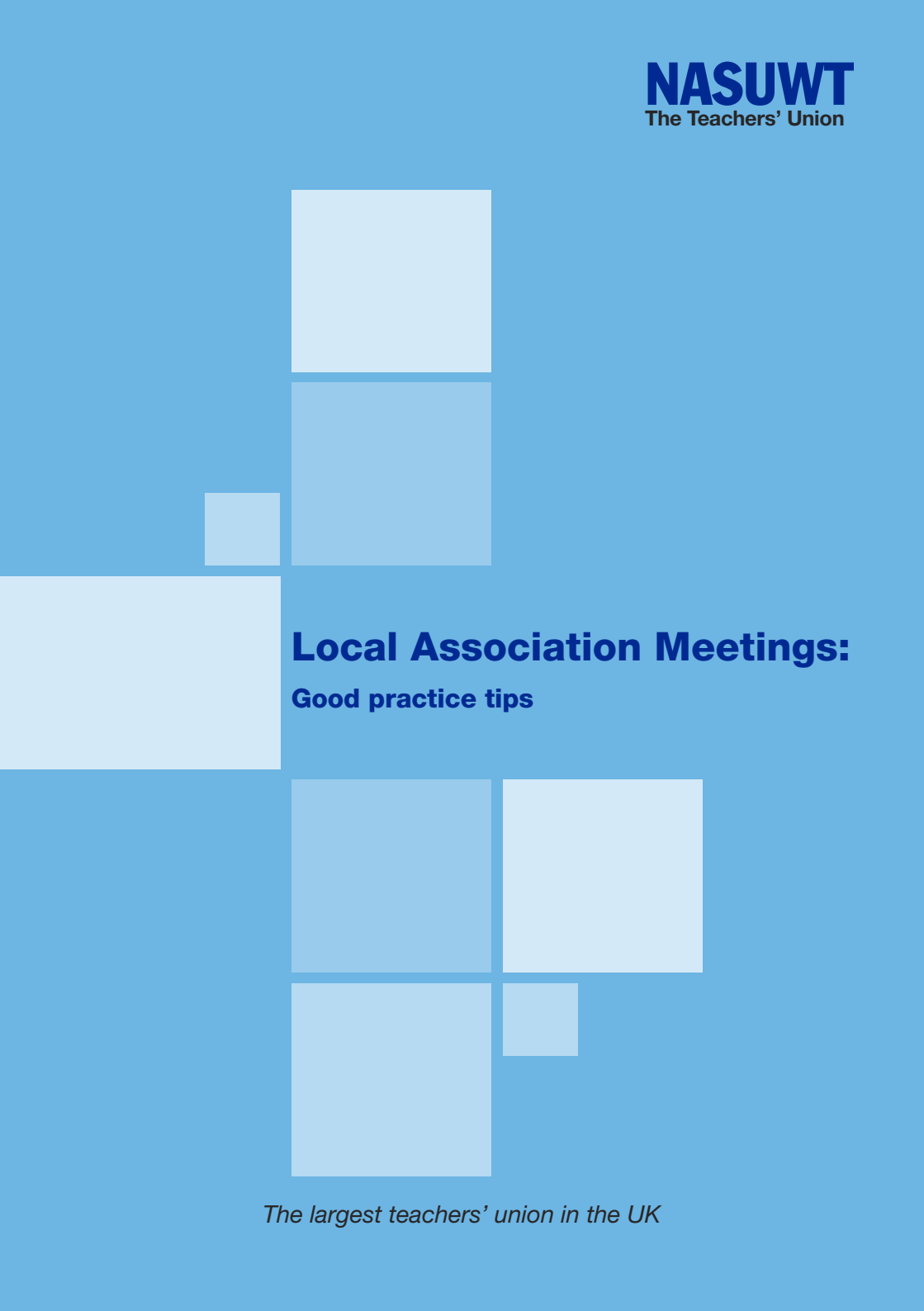




Local Association Meetings:

Good practice tips

At Annual Conference 2012, a resolution was carried asking the National Executive to consider the issue of quorums for Local Association meetings and to find workable solutions to enable Local Associations to meet the quorum figures.

The National Executive set up a Task and Finish Group to consider the issue. As part of the Group's considerations, lay activists, members and Local Associations were canvassed for examples of good practice they had used to secure good attendance at meetings. The feedback demonstrated that there is no single solution that will work for all Local Associations. However, a range of strategies were identified by Local Associations and members on what they felt encouraged attendance at meetings. This leaflet highlights the good practice identified.

Planning Local Association meetings

- Plan well in advance the dates of at least three general meetings to take place during the academic year, including the date of their Annual General Meeting (AGM).

The *Key Dates* document sent by the National Union details deadlines in accordance with the National Rules and Standing Orders of Conference and is a valuable tool for planning the schedule of meetings for the year. It is available at **www.nasuwt.org.uk/Constitutions**.

- Within four weeks of the start of the academic year, send a letter/newsletter to all full members of the Local Association at their home address, including the dates of the meetings and draft agendas of what will be dealt with at each meeting. Some items of formal business can be put on every agenda to safeguard against the possibility of a meeting being inquorate.
- Calling notices and agendas for General Meetings must be sent at least 14 days prior to the meeting and a calling notice and agenda must be sent at least 35 days in advance of the AGM. Consider sending a reminder just before the AGM.

Remember when sending reminders into workplaces to identify at regular intervals throughout the year new members to the Local Association and ensure that they receive, either via a direct mailing or personal e-mail, the full schedule of meetings. The e-membership system can be used to identify these members.

Visit www.nasuwt.org.uk/Constitutions for more detail on how.

Communicating with members

In addition to the formal notices, it is important to try a variety of ways of communicating with members of the Local Association. Different members will respond to different forms of communication. The most effective form of communication is face-to-face with members.

In addition to the initial mailing to home addresses, consider:

- sending notices into schools;
- sending a poster into schools for the notice board;
- e-mailing members;
- ringing representatives/contacts in key schools;
- using social media such as Facebook and Twitter;
- utilising school visits to promote meetings.

Communication is most effective where it is personalised and this can be done through use of mail-merging letters and e-mails. Local Associations can also add the dates and agendas of their local meetings to the national NASUWT website.

Meeting agendas

The NASUWT survey of members on attitudes to meetings identified two key factors for encouraging attendance at an NASUWT meeting:

- an agenda covering issues relevant to members;
- setting a clear finish time for the meeting.

Other helpful strategies suggested were:

- inviting members to submit items for the agenda;
- having an agenda which covers national issues and school-based issues;
- including the agenda as part of a newsletter for members so that it does not appear too formal;
- limiting the formal business of the meeting to a specified time-slot;
- including items to ensure all groups of members know they will be welcomed and hear about issues relevant to them. For example, items for supply teachers and newly qualified teachers on the agenda;
- combining the formal union business with innovations that may attract the wider membership to the meeting. For example, combine the meeting agenda with a continuing professional development (CPD) session, or invite a guest speaker from within the Union to come to talk to members about a specific issue;
- having a social aspect to the meeting or an informal session afterwards;
- offering the opportunity in the calling notice for members to speak to a caseworker after the meeting.

Timing and venue

It is not possible to identify one particular time and venue that will attract all members. Some members will prefer a venue nearer their work, whilst others will prefer a venue nearer their home. Similarly, some members prefer meetings that take place soon after school, whilst others prefer a meeting later in the evening.

The following are issues to consider when setting meeting times and choosing venues:

- meetings directly after the school day can be good for people in the immediate area, but may disenfranchise members from further away, particularly in Local Associations that cover larger geographical areas;
- the provision of food, particularly for meetings later in the evening;
- the venue must be accessible to anyone with mobility issues. This may not just include wheelchair access, so consider the implications for members with visual impairments, hearing impairments and other disability access issues;
- meeting venues should be chosen with consideration given to the cultural backgrounds of members. For example, some union meetings are held in venues that serve alcohol, which may be fine for some members, but totally inappropriate for others;
- consider whether the venue has the appropriate level of privacy for an open discussion about the issues within the Local Association;
- provide ample information about the venue, such as adequate arrangements for car parking;
- not all members have cars. Consider venues accessible by good public transport links and explore options for arranging travel such as car sharing from schools;
- some members will have concerns about safety, so specific details about walking distances, street lighting and access can allay these fears;
- consider paying travel expenses or expenses for childcare upon production of receipts;
- rotate the meetings in locations across the Local Association;
- vary venues, including types of school if school premises are used;
- vary meeting times and change the day the meetings throughout the year take place, as some members will have regular commitments on the same day each week.

Other tips and considerations

- Many members report feeling daunted about attending a meeting on their own and are more likely to attend if they can come with someone they already know. Try encouraging groups of members who are friends to come to a Local Association meeting together. Ask regular attendees to invite a friend.
- Consider giving members the name of someone from the Local Association to meet at the venue if they are attending for the first time.
- Make a point of meeting and greeting any member who is attending a meeting for the first time. This will help members feel included and more likely to return to the next meeting.
- Try to ensure that attendees at meetings have an opportunity to contribute and help set the agenda and tone of the meeting. Make a point of talking to them after the meeting. Although Local Association meetings are an important way for local Union representatives to relay important information, members are also more likely to attend meetings regularly if they feel they are making a useful contribution, and have issues to discuss relevant to them.
- Many members attend national events such as the seminars for newly qualified teachers and the consultation conferences without being involved locally. Lists of these members are available to each Local Association. Contact these members to invite them to local meetings.
- Consider distributing 'business' cards to all members with contact details of the Local Association and the dates for all meetings throughout the year.

For more information, visit the NASUWT website at www.nasuwt.org.uk. There is an abundance of advice and guidance for Local Associations on constitutional matters including the calendar of key dates, copies of the rules for federations and Local Associations, and the handy date planner for general meetings.

You can access training courses on organising and utilising IT, such as how to mail-merge letters. There are also case studies and good practice examples of what Local Associations have done successfully to encourage attendance at meetings.

www.nasuwt.org.uk/Constitutions

Note: None of the strategies suggested within this guidance document supersede or remove any requirement to comply with the Rules of the NASUWT (i.e. either the National Rules or the constitution in place at a Local Association level).



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