

Labour's National Policy-Making Process

The *Partnership in Power* process, including the national policy forum (NPF), was formally established in the rulebook at the 1997 conference. The structures are illustrated in the diagram at the end.

Role and functions

There were two main objectives for the system. First, to review all policy areas between general elections, with the outcomes underpinning the next manifesto. However in 2010 Labour lost control of the electoral cycle, and the snap elections in 2017 and 2019 disrupted collective development of a policy platform. Instead the manifestos were drawn up centrally and signed off by the Clause V committee which includes the NEC, shadow ministers, MPs and other stakeholders. The full NPF met usually twice a year through to 2014, but only twice since then, with the last meeting in February 2018.

Second, to maintain continuous dialogue between members and the frontbench. In opposition this is even more important than in government, because the party must respond rapidly to whatever the government is doing, in addition to national and international events.

Composition

The NPF has around 200 members. After changes agreed by the 2021 conference these will comprise 55 representatives directly elected within nations and regions including 11 youth representatives; 55 from trade unions; four each from Scotland and Wales; ten councillors; six from socialist societies; two each from BAME Labour, LGBT Labour, the national BAME, women's and disabled members' committees, the Cooperative Party and the Lords; one each from Labour International, Northern Ireland and Labour Students; nine MPs; six cabinet/shadow cabinet members; and the 39 members of the national executive committee (NEC). New constituency representatives are being elected in summer 2022.

Policy commissions and the joint policy committee

Between NPF meetings all work is carried out by **policy commissions**. These are subsets of the NPF, including members of the NPF, the NEC and the frontbench. They discuss selected topics, draft papers for consultation and produce reports for conference, including policy documents and summaries of issues raised. Members can contribute through discussions in local meetings, or through their unions or other affiliates. In addition individuals and groups can feed in views through the policy forum website at policyforum.labour.org.uk/. All submissions are notified to members of the relevant commission.

An NEC member acts as co-convenor for each commission and these co-convenors represent the NEC on the **joint policy committee**, which also includes NPF and frontbench members. The JPC decides how the Forum operates, agrees policy recommendations, and signs off final documents.

What is discussed where?

Until 2022 the policy commissions shadowed groups of government departments. They have now been reorganised to reflect the themes of the *Stronger Together* shadow cabinet policy review, and the website will be amended accordingly. Below is a list of commissions with the topics covered by each:

A green and digital future

Climate and net zero; energy; the environment, food and rural affairs; science, digital and technology policy; transport (issues related to decarbonisation)

Better jobs and better work

Employment rights; the future of work; business; skills and vocational education; industrial strategy; procurement, insourcing and reshoring; other economic issues (including tax)

Safe and secure communities

Police and crime; criminal justice, prisons, courts and probation; online safety and fraud; local government; retail and high streets; constitution; civil rights; transport (issues related to connectivity and local transport)

Public services that work from the start

Public health; NHS; mental health; social care; education (schools, colleges and universities); youth services

A future where families come first

Social security; pensions; childcare; early years; housing and homelessness; women and equalities; culture

Britain in the world

Defence; foreign affairs; international development; trade (including post Brexit); illicit finance

Annual conference

National policy forum reports, including reports from each policy commission and papers following consultation, are presented to conference which votes on whether to accept or reject them. Recently conference has been able to refer back specific sections for further discussion.

Local parties and affiliates can also send resolutions to conference. From 1998 these were severely restricted in number and scope, and in 2007 votes on motions were all but eliminated. Voting returned some years later, and from 2018 artificial limitations on subject matter were dropped. As from 2021 up to 12 topics can be prioritised for debate. *Partnership in Power* was designed to minimise inconsistency between NPF documents and conference motions, but this has now become more likely.

Where are we now?

Covid and changes at the top of the party have delayed the start of a fresh cycle of consultation, but this is now under way. Below are key dates:

April / May 2022 – policy commissions to start drafting consultation documents with the following titles:

A green and digital future – Creating green jobs

Better jobs and better work – Guaranteeing good work in the modern workplace

Safe and secure communities – Guaranteeing safe and secure communities

Public services that work from the start – Securing first class public services for all

A future where families come first – Delivering financial, social and housing security

Britain in the world – Protecting our national interests and promoting Labour values abroad

27 May to 8 July 2022 – consultation with local parties, affiliates etc

Summer 2022 – policy commissions prepare annual reports for conference

September 2022 – conference votes on annual reports and consultation documents

The timings are very tight, but all local parties are urged to organise discussions in June around as many of the documents as possible, and / or encourage individual members and branches to contribute. The next general election is closer than the last one, and there may not be many more opportunities to have a say.

In addition

17 June 2022 is the deadline for nominating five CLP representatives, including one youth, to the national policy forum from each region and nation. Candidates need nominations from three CLPs within their region / nation. One-member-one-vote ballots will be held in summer, alongside elections for the NEC CLP places and other NEC and Young Labour positions. Your CLP secretary has details, and there is a full list of positions at

<https://labour.org.uk/activist-hub/governance-and-legal-hub/ballots-and-nominations/internal-ballots-2022/>

The current representatives will continue until conference, after which the new NPF will meet online in October 2022, elect a chair and vice-chairs, and take the work forward to the general election.

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