

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 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 occasionally since then, with the last in-person meeting in February 2018. Systematic work has now resumed and in July 2023 the NPF will finalise policies for the next manifesto unless interrupted again.

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. These 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).

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 were reorganised to reflect the themes of the *Stronger Together* shadow cabinet policy review, and 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. In the final year of the NPF cycle conference will vote on the manifesto programme for the next election.

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. From 2022 onwards up to twelve 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 with the increased number of motions.

Where are we now and what happens next?

Below are key dates through to summer 2023:

January – March 2023

Draft consultation papers are published on 30 January 2023 based around themes decided by the six policy commissions, with a closing date of 17 March 2023. Submissions are accepted from CLPs, branches, affiliates and external organisations such as charities but not, at this stage, from individuals. Local parties should set aside time in February to discuss and respond to these documents.

March 2023

Commissions draw up policy documents based on this input and all work done since the 2019 election, including the *Stronger Together* review, Gordon Brown's constitutional work, David Blunkett's learning and skills report, and the start-up review launched by Rachel Reeves.

May – June 2023

Draft documents covering the entire policy agenda were published on 9 May 2023, and are available at <https://labour.org.uk/document/npf-final-year-docs/>. To access them you will need to enter your Labour Hub login details – any difficulties with this, mail policydevelopment@labour.org.uk. NPF representatives can submit five amendments each by 5 June 2023 (five in total, not five per document). The joint policy committee then makes recommendations as to which amendments should be accepted and which require further consideration, and produces a draft policy platform.

The party is sending all submissions from the last three years to CLP representatives within each region and nation, but this is not a method which favours detailed textual amendments. CLPs may send further thoughts, with a maximum of 600 words for each of the six chapters, to policydevelopment@labour.org.uk by noon on 29 May 2023, and these will also be passed on to CLP NPF representatives.

(By comparison in 2014 CLPs had three months to discuss the final stage documents, each CLP could submit up to ten amendments, and their regional NPF representatives then chose which ones to take forward.) Nevertheless this is the most important phase of the entire process, and members and CLPs should take every opportunity to engage.

21 – 23 July 2023

The policy platform goes to a meeting of the 200-strong NPF, which discusses the papers and amendments and aims to reach consensus wherever possible, with votes on any remaining differences. Any amendment which receives more than 50% of the votes is carried. Any amendment which receives between 35% and 50% of the vote goes forward to conference for a final decision. In practice this rarely happens.

October 2023

Annual conference votes on the policy platform put forward by the NPF. If carried by a two-thirds majority it goes forward to the Clause V meeting which signs off the manifesto after the general election is called.

What if there is a general election before July 2023?

The joint policy committee will consult as extensively as possible, including conversations with all stakeholders, within whatever time is available.

Ann Black, 9 March 2023

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