

# COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY SUMMARY

Institution of  
**MECHANICAL  
ENGINEERS**

Young Members Board



Improving the world through engineering

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Young Members Board of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers have conducted a data collection survey using SurveyMonkey (an online tool) on the topic of Institution Communications following ideas generated at their annual Strategy Weekend in February 2018.

The data has generated five recommendations to take forwards, from four key findings. The four key findings in this report are:

- 1. Email is the preferred medium for members to receive information. Additionally, whilst Social Media has its place in the modern world, members would generally prefer email communication at a set frequency;**
- 2. Members would like the ability to feedback to the Institution using dedicated facilities, with quick turnaround commitments for responses, from Institution managed email, telephone and social media services;**
- 3. The website is not being utilised to its full potential as there are a number of areas about which members reported a preference to receive information, that is already available through the website on dedicated pages;**
- 4. Institution communications are generally of sufficient quality and are meeting members' expectations.**

The five recommendations can be seen in the following section.

The survey generated 1199 responses from across the Young Members network, from every membership grade. An assumption was made that due to the way this survey was distributed, all respondents were members of the Institution.

The respondents were based around the globe, in almost every UK & Ireland region, and 8 international regions, with 14.8% of respondents based internationally.

Members' wishes for communication can be split into three themes. They would like to receive communication about:

1. Personal / professional benefits of membership – which include Events (Conferences / Seminars / Lectures), Training Opportunities and Membership Benefits;
2. Specific opportunities – which include Job Vacancies, Prizes and Awards and Tour Visits; and,
3. Policy and governance – which include Useful information, Engineering policies, News and Politics relevant to the Institution and Internal Governance.

The most popular medium of communication is email, with the most popular frequency of receiving communication being every 4 weeks / monthly, though this differs by the topic being communicated.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendations in this report are as follows:

1. Develop a standardised series of email formats and create a structured distribution frequency to be used across the Institution by volunteers and staff alike.
2. Undertake a review of the type of marketing emails sent out about events, and, following the review, emails relating to events should be revised in line with the results shown for both content and frequency.
3. Allow users to set communication preferences by both frequency and type of communication (such as events / awards / training etc.) – expanding on the current mailing preference options available.
4. Consideration should be given to how the Institution can improve the turnaround for responses with perhaps the use of dedicated facilities (e.g. managed mailbox, telephone and social media services etc.).
5. Ensure the website is easy to navigate and that information is clearly signposted to allow users to readily access the information and resources they require, in the most efficient manner.

## INTRODUCTION

The Young Members Board (YMB) of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE) is an integral part of the learned society. Made up of over 40 volunteer young members from across the Institution, the YMB work to engage and involve young people, school age students, college and university level students, apprentices, graduates and early career professionals, in the activities of the IMechE.

The YMB meet four times per year, and at least one of those meetings is dedicated to strategic objectives. In 2018, during their annual Strategy Weekend, the YMB highlighted communication as a major road-block to volunteers and members of the Institution in working effectively for the good of the profession. It was felt that if a cohesive communications strategy could be formulated, this would increase engagement and understanding amongst members and the volunteer base. Especially in the case of volunteers, this would enable a better working relationship with the salaried staff of the Institution, and provide a better service for all.

A short survey was proposed as an opinion gathering exercise to understand the current issues posed from as wide a range of the population of the membership as possible. This survey ran electronically over the summer of 2018. It was open to members and non-members of the IMechE alike – as it was felt that those who would respond were either going to be members of a Professional Body such as a Professional Engineering Institution (PEI), or non-members who hold an interest in either engineering, STEM subjects or a similar field, and would therefore be interested in receiving communication.

The purpose of this report is to provide an outline of the composition of the survey as it was published, the results of the survey, and the conclusions drawn from the data gathered, with a view to inform the creation of a clear, concise and fit-for-purpose communications strategy to be used by the IMechE. It is presented as objectively as possible based on the data collated.

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Following the work conducted at the 2018 Strategy Weekend of the Young Members Board, the YMB committed to a breakout session to be held during the May 2018 YMB meeting to determine the methodology and timescales for the Communications theme work.

The questions for the survey were formulated and agreed upon, as was the use of SurveyMonkey to distribute the questions and collate the responses.

SurveyMonkey is a tool that allows any kind of online survey project to be launched, be it for the purpose of market research, a quick poll, competitive analysis or customer or employee feedback<sup>1</sup>. As the YMB have some prior success using SurveyMonkey from when they conducted work on the Value Proposition of Membership in 2016, it was agreed that this was the most suitable way of achieving as high a return rate as possible. This, in part is due to the confidence supplied by the product, which can be used (with a question limit) at no cost, allowing SurveyMonkey to become an accepted way of conducting polls worldwide and as such a trusted means of collecting data online. A question limit of 10 questions for a short survey (without paying for a membership plan) is sufficient for the needs of the survey conducted into communications and therefore the tool is fit for purpose in this regard.

In the survey, none of the questions were mandatory. This decision was taken so that if at any point respondents were unable to complete the survey, or were unwilling to provide certain information for whatever reason known only unto themselves, they were still able to submit the data they had supplied to that point, giving the Institution the maximum amount of data with which to analyse for this workstream.

The ten questions decided upon for use in the survey can be seen, along with their options, in Appendix A of this report.

The survey was distributed using the Young Members network, initially through the networks of the members of the YMB, but then also through a mailshot sent out by the IMechE to all members classed as Young Members of the Institution. The survey was not restricted to Young Members, and as can be seen from the data of membership status of the respondents, a great range of membership grades are represented in the results.

It was felt by the YMB that the timescale for data collection should be reasonably long enough to gain a high return, without being excessive, and allowing for the YMB to formulate the output within the Institution's year between AGMs. The survey was published on 16 July 2018 and closed on 07 September 2018, with 1199 responses generated. The key findings, analysis and conclusions can be seen in subsequent sections of this report.

Feedback received on this survey has indicated that issues were experienced with Young Members not necessarily receiving the survey, which may explain the perceived low response rate relative to the number of Members, and especially of those Young Members in the Institution.

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1 <https://reviews.financesonline.com/p/surveymonkey>

## KEY FINDINGS

Through analysis of the data returned from the 1199 respondents to this survey, the key findings are:

1. **Email is the preferred medium for members to receive information. Additionally, whilst Social Media has its place in the modern world, members would generally prefer email communication at a set frequency;**

The respondents of the survey prefer email as a medium for communication over all others, with a smaller proportion preferring Social Media.

Some may find this result surprising as, anecdotally, email is often criticised as a communication method. This is largely due to comments around its frequency of receipt, currently too high, and the format and readability of the communications.

There were two comments which stood out, and further the case for email being a primary method of communication. The following are taken from the open responses to question 10 dealing with personal experiences of effective communication:

- "Ultimately I believe that the IMechE should have one main communication method, but still maintain a presence through the other communications styles to reach out to members";
- "Please don't go down the road of thinking that a stronger social media presence on Facebook / Twitter is needed to be "relevant". Institutions are professional bodies and should behave as such. They should engage with their members in a substantive way. Social media should be reserved for how we broaden the knowledge and spark curiosity of those outside the profession, as it is a highly accessible medium".

The data backs up these sentiments, with email being selected by 96.8% of respondents as a preferred medium, whereas Social Media only received 35.8% in a "select all that apply" question, enabling a return of over 100%.

2. **Members would like the ability to feedback to the Institution using dedicated facilities, with quick turnaround commitments for responses, from Institution managed email, telephone and social media services;**

Feedback from members is something every professional body should value, especially one with a commitment to improve the world through engineering. A feedback loop is an important part of any improvement cycle, and having a suitable vehicle for that will drive the Institution forwards.

When asked how respondents would like to feedback, using an open text field, the majority requested some method of feeding back by email. This aligns with the first key finding of this work, however, also comes with some logistical issues. Some of the comments raised were:

- "Quicker turnaround of email responses";
- "It needs to be clearer who the points of contact are within different levels of the institution for issues or suggestions to be raised";
- "Communication is a two-way thing. If a member comments, the exec needs to respond";
- "Clearly identified contact address that is monitored frequently. Clear direction and communication between institutional departments. I have been led in circles numerous times, even when asking a simple question".

There needs to be some way of addressing these concerns, whilst providing a suitable vehicle for feeding back from the members. Many different options were raised in this open question, including a webchat service, a web form and using social media like many other modern professional companies. A dedicated mailbox and dedicated telephone enquiry services are familiar to many in the world of business, irrespective of age, however, are very time and resource heavy to implement, and even more so to implement effectively to a high standard.

Without committing the Institution to something it cannot necessarily deliver upon, this report advises that the Executive of the Institution (the CEO and their staff) could look at the options available for a feedback model from the membership, and understand any issues with implementing something such as a dedicated mailbox, with a strict response rate – such as getting back to all queries within a number of working days. Rather than being prescriptive, this report will leave it to the Executive to determine the best course of action in this piece of further work.

**3. The website is not being utilised to its full potential as there are a number of areas about which members reported a preference to receive information, that is already available through the website on dedicated pages;**

A number of comments were raised, in conjunction with the data gained on where the respondents would like to receive information from, which indicate that the website is not being utilised to the best of its capabilities.

Members would like to receive communication on: Membership benefits; Volunteering opportunities; and Prizes, Awards and Competitions – all of which have sections dedicated to them on the IMechE website.

One thing that may be contributing to this is the way in which the current website is structured. There may also be other reasons, however at this stage there is insufficient data available to determine this. Two comments which stand out with regards to the website are:

- “Needs to be easier to search for local events (evening lectures), across all divisions of IMechE, e.g. I’m not an aero engineer, but I’m interested in such lectures”;

- “In the case of the IMechE a world class website is still needed. Parts of the site work and parts don’t for the size of the Institution is extremely poor. The whole thing needs a total rethink/rebuild in the modern age a world class website with integrated app and support functions is the difference between an average organisation and a great one”.

Currently, the Institution is in the middle of a significant Digital Transformation programme, which is looking to address the digital offering and how the digital resources can be improved to provide a world class service for a modern-day membership organisation. One other comment which needs to be kept in mind within this work is:

- “Understand the concept of minimising clicks to get the information you want or need”.

This can keep people engaged and allows the Institution to give them what they need electronically in the most efficient way possible.

**4. Institution communications are generally of sufficient quality and are meeting members’ expectations;**

Data collected within this survey indicates that whilst some members feel the quality of what they receive is lacking, an almost equal proportion feel that it exceeds their expectations. Combined with a large return stating that the quality meets expectations, the Institution can treat these results as a confirmation of their current output being of sufficient quality for the membership base.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this report was to gain an understanding of how the membership communicate with the Institution of Mechanical Engineers (IMechE), and how they wish to be communicated with by the Institution. By a thorough analysis of the data collected through an online survey distributed amongst the Young Members Network and their contacts, the Young Members Board (YMB) have identified a number of key findings and recommendations.

The survey results have to be taken as a small representation of the feelings of the membership due to the networked approach of distribution of the survey link. An issue is the response rate. Whilst 1199 responses for a survey of this type is a good level to draw data from, if it is assumed that all 1199 respondents are members of the IMechE, then the response rate is a small fraction of the Institution's membership – circa 1%.

The key findings highlight that the current quality of content output is sufficient and what the members expect. The format and frequency of distribution of emails is something which requires work, particularly with respect to Events emails from both Birdcage Walk and the local volunteer base, and further work needs to be done to create set formats and a structured distribution frequency to be used across the Institution by staff and volunteers alike (Recommendations 1 and 2).

Since the implementation of policies to ensure compliance with the GDPR which came into force in May 2018, the Institution has focussed heavily on the basis of consent with its communications. A way to ensure the Institution remains compliant is to improve the way in which communications preferences can be outlined within each members' account, to take into account the type of communication, and the frequency with which they receive them (Recommendation 3).

Members wish to have a simple way of feeding back to the Institution, with the most popular method to do so being Email, followed by Phone and Social Media. The Institution

currently does not have dedicated resources to provide this service at the time of compilation of this report, and the YMB recommend that the Executive look into how this can be addressed (Recommendation 4).

The membership also are concerned at how their membership fees are spent as they do not see a tangible benefit that justifies the cost of membership. This can be a reason why it is difficult to convert free Affiliate membership grades to paying Associate grades and beyond, as not every engineer works in a company who will cover their membership costs. The YMB conducted a survey in 2016 regarding the Value Proposition of Membership. This work needs to be revisited and analysed to see if there are any ways of improving the perceived benefits of membership of the Institution.

Members are interested in receiving communications regarding Membership Benefits, Prizes, Awards and Competitions, Events, and Volunteering Opportunities, all of which are currently available on the IMechE website. This indicates that the website is not being utilised to its full potential. The Digital Transformation programme of works need to ensure ease of use of the website, with clear signposting of the information, and efficient navigation, with the minimum number of clicks required to access information (Recommendation 5).

The objective of the report to generate further work with the aim of improving the Institution's communications has been achieved, and through the implementation of the recommendations, the YMB, in conjunction with relevant parts of the IMechE Executive and staff, aims to improve the experience of communications across the Institution, to better serve the members, and non-members and to improve the world through engineering.

# APPENDIX 1

## SURVEY QUESTIONS

The ten questions used in the Young Members Board Summer 2018 Communications Survey are as follows:

### 1. Which of the following categories do you fall into?

Please select all that apply:

- a. Member of any Professional Engineering Institution
- b. Member of another type of Professional Body (e.g. Association for Project Management, Engineering Council etc.)
- c. Non-Member
- d. Student
- e. Affiliate or equivalent membership grade
- f. Associate or equivalent membership grade
- g. Volunteer
- h. Professionally registered as an Engineering Technician (EngTech)
- i. Professionally registered as an Incorporated Engineer (IEng)
- j. Professionally registered as a Chartered Engineer (CEng)
- k. Fellow of a Professional Engineering Institution or other Professional Body

### 2. In which Region are you based – if outside the UK, please specify?

- a. Scotland
- b. North West England
- c. North East England
- d. East Midlands
- e. West Midlands
- f. South East England (not including London)
- g. South West England
- h. London
- i. Northern Ireland
- j. Republic of Ireland
- k. Wales
- l. Other (please specify)

### 3. How would you rate the quality of the information you currently receive from Professional Engineering Institutions?

- a. Unacceptable
- b. Below expectations
- c. Meets expectations
- d. Exceeds expectations
- e. Greatly exceeds expectations

### 4. There are a number of levels and departments associated with a Professional Engineering Institution. From the list below, what would you want to receive information about?

Please select all that apply:

- a. Events (Conferences / Seminars / Lectures)
- b. Volunteering opportunities
- c. Job vacancies
- d. Engineering policies
- e. New and politics relative to the Institution
- f. Useful information
- g. Membership benefits
- h. Internal governance (including representative elections)
- i. Training opportunities / courses
- j. Tour visits
- k. Prizes, Awards and Competitions
- l. Other (please specify)

### 5. How often would you like to hear from each of these?

This question had a scale associated with each of the options from question 4. The scale was graded as:

- a. Daily
- b. 2-3 times per week
- c. Weekly
- d. Every 2 weeks
- e. Every 4 weeks / Monthly
- f. Every 3 months / Quarterly
- g. Every 6 months
- h. Annually

**6. What medium of communication do you personally find the most effective?**

Please select all that apply:

- a. Email
- b. Posters
- c. Social media (LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook etc.)
- d. Post
- e. Phone calls
- f. Word of mouth
- g. Other (please specify)

**7. On which social media platforms would you be comfortable receiving information from a Professional Engineering Institution?**

**8. How much information would you like to be included in each communication (depending upon the delivery method)?**

This question had a scale associated with each of the options from question 6. The scale was graded as:

- a. Just one item
- b. 2-3 items
- c. 4-5 items
- d. As much as possible!

**9. Thinking of feeding back, or communication with an Institution's levels or departments, how would you like to be able to get in touch with your Institution?**

**10. Do you have any further comments or suggestions which may help us gain an understanding in how to better communicate with both our members and non-members?**

## APPENDIX 2 CONTRIBUTORS

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