

UEMS Policy: broadening the scope for member input

Current practice

The UEMS Statutes and Rules of Procedure do not include a formal process for UEMS Council to seek the views of members when making UEMS policy or responding to consultations by the European Commission. In practice, the UEMS usually takes one of the following approaches:

- In many cases, particularly in regard to the recent revisions to the Directive on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications, the UEMS bases responses to consultations as far as possible on existing policy; these are then presented to the UEMS Council for endorsement.
- When the Commission consults the UEMS on an issue where it has no existing policy, national member associations are invited to contribute views on a voluntary basis, provided that the response deadline set by the Commission allows for this.
- Where the deadline is too close, it may be necessary for a draft UEMS position on a specific issue to be presented to the UEMS Council for discussion and vote, without prior inclusion on the agenda.

Limitations

All of the above approaches share the same limitation: they offer restricted scope for capturing the full range of individual members' views and/or concerns on issues where the UEMS is required to adopt a policy position. In any membership-fee based organisation it is crucially important that the views expressed by the organisation accurately and robustly reflect the views of the subscription-paying members on policy issues which may have an impact in the working lives of specialists in those members' countries.

Whilst existing policy statements may provide an adequate basis for the UEMS to provide input on more general issues, the limitations of this approach have been demonstrated on more specific questions such as patient safety and continuing professional development. The drawback of relying on prior policy in this way is that it does not take account of recent progress, and is therefore less useful for responses to new policy initiatives, such as the European Professional Card.

For the UEMS position on such issues to be truly representative of its members, consideration needs to be given to creating opportunities and platforms for them to make individual submissions in a timely manner which can then be incorporated into the final response. Where response deadlines are too close to allow collection of members' submissions, such platforms could also be used by the UEMS Secretariat to circulate, for example, draft position statements on specific issues so that members of the UEMS can consult with their own national constituencies on how to vote.

Solutions and proposal

Given the time-sensitive nature of, for example, the revision of EU directives, broadening the scope for input of UEMS members requires a process which is quick and easy at all stages – from initial responses to final submission. We request that consideration be given to the following:

Consulting online

The recent development of simple online survey applications – most of which are free and very simple to use – has seen a broad range of membership organisations adopt this approach when they wish to gather viewpoints quickly on key issues. It has the potential for the entire consultation process to occur in one place – respondents are directed to the recommendations, they can be asked specific questions, they can enter responses, and then click on ‘Submit’ without opening attachments.

Examples of such applications include Survey Monkey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/> which allows users to custom design a survey or questionnaire, or choose from a range of templates. Respondents click on a link to the survey which can be circulated by bulk email or embedded on a secure webpage. They enter their response(s) and click to submit. All responses are collected in the user’s Survey Monkey account. For the UEMS, this could be a very fast and efficient method, for example, when collecting member input on specific recommendations put forward by the Commission.

Whilst one of the most popular and widely-used applications, Survey Monkey is by no means the only option available and there are many other applications which could be tailored even more specifically to UEMS purposes.

Finalising online

Once responses have been received and incorporated into a draft submission, online applications also have the potential to streamline the process of finalising the text. Google Docs is a popular choice for sharing documents which are ‘works in progress’. Users click on a link to view the text and can make any amendments or comments in the margin (similar to ‘track changes’ feature found in Microsoft Word). The BMA has used Google Docs when developing resources which require peer review and found it to be both simple and effective. More information:

<https://support.google.com/drive/answer/49008?hl=en>

Advantages

The above applications offer UEMS members the opportunity to express views on a proposal in a simple and concise manner. For the UEMS Secretariat, it takes consultation responses out of their email inboxes and allows them to be monitored and collated separately. The final draft of a document and suggested amendments can be displayed on the same page. Above all, the UEMS has the opportunity to provide input to European Commission initiatives which accurately represent the diverse concerns of specialists at Member State level, ensuring a richer, nuanced contribution to policy development. In addition, by adopting these suggestions UEMS will clearly demonstrate that it is an organisation that values and works with its members in true partnership to deliver timely results most likely to have the best positive impact.

The above proposals are fully supported by the UK representatives to UEMS Specialist Sections and Boards.

UK Delegation to UEMS

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