

NEC Rep Report

The NEC had three meetings during 2019. Jane and I have been the SW NEC Representatives for many years and as age takes its toll it won't be long before the Region has to find different volunteers or risk not being represented in national discussions at all.

- Again, the NEC Agenda has been full to overflowing - with one of the main topics being the policies and procedures we should follow to ensure the Safeguarding of young people and vulnerable adults at our events. The Regional view, submitted before each meeting, is that we must be careful not to place too much unnecessary pressure on people who are organising events. All SW events are organised by volunteers and if the administrative tasks surrounding them become too onerous then they will simply not occur. The training, documentation and appointment of Safeguarding leads at every event are, we believe, a step too far and we would prefer to apply a dose of common sense. On the showing so far, we are unlikely to win this battle and expect to see a tightening of controls applied to the Region
- Other topics of concern stem from the report of the sub-committee looking to the future of HRGB. Some of the ideas being discussed include changing the name of HRGB to something more meaningful; finding a well-known Patron for the society and having a 'professional' HRGB team. They advocate creation of a National Educational Officer with a brief to:
 - Step up development work with schools
 - Grow links with higher education
 - Work more closely with U3A
 - Develop mentors
 - Create a modular course for ringer development
 - Introduce formal qualifications in ringing
 - Create a Handbell Academy

The Regional view is that while all these things sound excellent in isolation, the investment in time and money make most of them impracticable. They are a world away from what we believe the majority of SW ringers require and we fear that laying too much emphasis on these aspects will alienate many of our members - at a time when we are struggling to maintain numbers.

- We have first-hand experience of the difficulties of getting handbell ringing into Devon schools. While the powers that be are generally keen and supportive the fact is that local head teachers and music teachers are not really interested. We believe we need to 'sell' ringing at that level so that the schools themselves can actively seek support from HRGB. Amanda Jones has put in an enormous amount of work in progressing this.
- The new website went live and now offers a 'Members only' area where topics can be explored in more depth and connecting to the HRGB shop through this area gives a member discount on items purchased. The public see a more simplified version of the site - although they can now sign up for membership online.
- Last year we reported the Singleton Bells were available for teams to use; despite advertising this in the Newsletter, we had no requests to borrow them and, rather than let them lie idle, we returned them to NEC where they were immediately reallocated to Scotland.
- The NEC agendas are now so long and detailed that a dozen or so discussion papers are routinely circulated before each meeting - requiring a good deal of preparation work. Despite, or perhaps because of that, items are regularly deferred to subsequent meetings or not considered in depth at all. An earlier start with a longer day, or weekend meetings are now being considered.

John Willis