

Report

How can SDUK create a sustainable membership organisation?

Robyn Winfield-Smith, 17 February 2015

Report from 'How can SDUK create a sustainable membership organisation?'

Session called by Robyn Winfield-Smith

Participants present:

- Tamara Harvey
- Jane Moriarty
- Jonathan Butterell
- Ivor Benjamin
- Russ Hope
- Caroline Hunt
- Liz Holmes
- Plus around 2 or 3 others who joined part-way through

It was unanimously felt that continued transparency was paramount in order to maintain the enthusiasm, momentum and trust currently held by SDUK.

We should continue to be transparent about:

- What we are trying to achieve

- What we have to offer directors at the point of joining
- What we will have to offer directors in the future
- Why we charge what we will be charging for subscriptions
- Who is on our membership
- What our membership has to offer (in terms of mentoring etc)

Other things that members want from SDUK include:

- Events such as this Open Space where they can meet and talk to other directors.
- Solidarity (i.e. collective voice and empowerment)
- Buddy-ing, mentoring, training, networking, observation opportunities
- Transparency about each other's earnings, hours etc. so that producers/employers can't keep us in the dark about what is acceptable.
- Online forum where people might be able to advertise jobs/opportunities.
- Opportunities to create partnerships with people at a similar stage of career who could help other money-earning jobs when creative opportunities come up (e.g. covering 6 weeks of youth theatre sessions whilst someone goes off to rehearse a show; deputising for someone for a week whilst they take up another opportunity).

Initial discussion looked at what people might be willing to pay to subscribe, before swiftly moving to what people might want (whether now or in ten years' time) in order to make a membership package compelling. Jonathan Butterell introduced the brilliant and accurate phrase of 'there is no you and us with SDUK: we're all on the same side'.

Tamara Harvey suggested that by joining the organisation you could be declaring your willingness to participate in training/mentoring etc opportunities (Liz Holmes and RWS also discussed possibility of directors being able to opt in or out of being contacted by

other directors through SDUK if necessary).

Tamara also mentioned the value of the long-term benefits/investment of joining SDUK, citing that she would be happy to wait for some of the more sizeable benefits (e.g. changes in attitudes towards director royalties etc). This is a brilliant admission, as it invites the possibility of SDUK really laying out a timeline for the coming years, and justifying people's continued membership on the basis of investment not just in their own professional future, but in the whole concept of increased fairness, access and consistency within this profession/industry...

It was pointed out that a 5-year timeline of what we want to achieve and/or transparency of our accounts (i.e. how much it costs us to run, in order to show how reasonable our subscriptions are) might be attractive to members, and further emphasise our commitment to fairness and transparency.

Russ Hope lightly referenced the fact that the Young Vic Genesis Network, amongst other organisations, already offer solidarity, networking opportunities, a forum for advertising jobs etc. Several people indicated that the opportunity to be connected with directors across the whole spectrum of experience is a really valuable thing – for directors at every level.

Russ suggested that a new membership organisation should be clear about 3 things that its members would get right there and then if they joined: if someone joins SDUK now, what would they get now that they did not have before. RWS wondered whether this offer could include a PRESENT offer (e.g. empowerment to speak up as a member of SDUK when offered unacceptably low fees), an ONGOING offer (e.g. access to other members and to password-protected online resources; constant

updates on how much time people are putting towards productions and how much they are being paid for this time,) and a FUTURE offer (e.g. legal advice, insurance, higher fees and proper discussion of issues such as royalties).

Several people agreed that 'buddy-ing' (opportunity to speak to other directors about things that perhaps might not otherwise be talked about), mentoring and other such informal opportunities would be very useful.

Caroline Hunt and Ivor Benjamin raised issues relating to the relationship between SDUK and Equity. Ivor felt passionately that Insurance and Legal Representation are the key 'offer' from Equity, and that SDUK should seek to provide these in order to bolster its sustainability.

It was pointed out that different levels of membership (as per the ALD model) might be beneficial, in order to begin to differentiate between the different levels of experience within the membership (e.g. professional members must demonstrate that they have recent professional credits; affiliate members will have some training but be recent graduates or emerging directors; student members will be student members; associate members will have a commitment to/interest in directing but their day job is not currently directing). Rates for each tier of membership will, naturally, vary.

Liz Holmes and RWS confirmed that the SDUK subscription will be a tiered annual fee, which can be paid monthly, quarterly or annually by direct debit. The rate will be based on the member's self-declared earnings from the previous financial year, and will vary from a reasonable minimum (of less than Equity's current subs rate) to a reasonable capped maximum.

In summary, we agreed that SDUK should look to provide practical benefits such as insurance and legal representation, as well as softer (albeit equally if not more valuable) benefits such as networking, buddying/mentoring, training, collated job advertisements, possibly even lobbying for increased public funds, etc.

Many other pockets of conversation were of course had, many of which touched on other interesting areas, but the above represent the main headlines from this session!

RWS

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