

Briefing on Motions D05 Changes to GPEX and D13 Pathfinder to Green Party Autumn Conference 2022

Green Party Trade Union Group, 11 August 2020

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Summary of key points

The Green Party Trade Union Group is calling for Green Party members to:

- Rank motions D05 Changes to GPEX and D13 Pathfinder below other organisational motions on the prioritisation ballot
- Oppose D05 Changes to GPEX if heard at Autumn Conference 2022
- Support GPTU amendments to these motions
- Support a GPTU late motion to launch a review of the representation of the trade union movement in party structures

The Trade Union Group says of the proposed changes:

- This change would cause trade union liaison work to be neglected
- This change does not meet a pressing need, or address a serious fault in the party structures
- This change would put responsibility for supervising trade union relationships in the hands of members with little interest or expertise in doing it
- This change would remove the only clear and identifiable post with responsibility for trade union relationships, replacing it with nothing
- This change would accordingly result in less detailed and accountable trade union liaison work
- This change would jeopardise continuity in trade union liaison work, by making it subject to the whims of a given Executive
- This change would make us less responsive to and accountable to the trade union movement
- This change comes at a time when we need more emphasis on trade union relationships, not less, and could see us go years without an adequate replacement

Introduction

This is a briefing on Motions D05 Changes to GPEX and D13 Pathfinder, for Green Party Autumn Conference 2022, produced by the Green Party Trade Union Group Committee for GPTU members.

It sets out our stance on these two motions and the changes they propose to the Green Party's constitution.

This stance has been developed following discussions with GPTU members in public fora and among committee members. It also follows discussions between GPTU Committee members and members of the Party Structure Working Group, which has developed the proposals.

What do the motions do?

Motion D13 Pathfinder sets out a broad scheme for future changes to the Green Party's constitution, aiming to agree general principles on which precise and detailed changes can be finalised at Spring Conference 2023.

Motion D05 Changes to GPEX proposes changes to the composition of GPEX which, in the view of the proposers, can be made as 'early changes' to the constitution in advance of more substantial changes in due course.

The principal effects of D05 Changes to GPEX are as follows. This is a broad and non-exhaustive list, and we encourage members to read the motion text in full on the agenda site here.

- **To reduce the number of members of the Green Party Executive to 11, removing the Trade Union Liaison Officer.**
- It would comprise the following positions:
 - Leader/Co-Leaders;
 - Deputy Leader(s);
 - Wales Green Party Leader
 - Co-chairs of the Young Greens as a job share;
 - Chair;
 - Treasurer;
 - Seven ordinary members.
- To vest responsibilities currently sitting with named officer/coordinator roles on the Executive, in the Executive as a whole, so that the Executive is collectively responsible for ensuring functions are carried out
- To assign responsibility for convening named sub-committees to individual members of the Executive:
 - Campaigns Committee
 - International Committee
 - Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI) Committee
- To require the Executive to produce plans for intended activities, and reports on past activities, in line with these responsibilities

It is intended that the Executive may create and remove further sub-committees, as they see fit and according to the party's needs from time to time.

What are the Green Party Trade Union Group's concerns around motion D05 Changes to GPEX?

The GPTU Committee has identified a number of causes for concern in this motion. We have set these out to the best of our ability below. If GPTU members or other members of the party have further questions, [we invite members to get in touch with us through our website.](#)

This change would cause trade union liaison work to be neglected

Making trade union liaison work a 'collective responsibility' of the Executive would cause it to be neglected.

The Green Party's relationships with trade unions are fast developing, but need constant attention as a strategic necessity for the party. Previously, these relationships have been taken more or less seriously from time to time. The attention and resources given to such work have often varied, and have too often relied on the efforts of individual 'cheerleaders' in party structures.

This is insufficient for a party that takes trade union relationships seriously. Instead, we need trade union liaison work to be a permanent concern of the party, that is built into our structures accordingly to ensure it takes place.

We have no confidence that without a named officer with specific responsibilities, who is accountable to party members for that work specifically, trade union liaison work would happen in a systematic way.

From past experience, we perceive a serious risk that trade union work will instead become an 'episodic' concern that would feature from time to time, but never as a matter of strategic importance.

The urgent carbon transition that the Green Party is campaigning for will impact workers immensely, particularly those in high emission sectors such as the oil industry and aviation. By embedding trade union links into our structure we can ensure that our policies represent the needs of those who both could be most harmed in the short term as their sectors contract, but who also could benefit from the creation of well paid and skilled new green jobs.

This change does not meet a pressing need, or address a serious fault in the party structures

There are serious issues in party structures which must be addressed. The presence of a Trade Union Liaison Officer is not one of them. There has been no discernible push from across the membership to remove this position.

Proposals are intended to move the party away from a system of having numerous 'functional' (or 'doing') roles on the Executive, towards a system where the Executive comprises members elected by the membership on a list system (by a ranked choice voting system).

The position of Trade Union Liaison Officer is not a 'functional' role comparable to, e.g., the Publications Coordinator. Instead, its purpose is to provide political oversight and direction in a vitally important but specialised sense that is otherwise missing from party structures.

There are other, pressing concerns to be addressed (such as limited liability and incorporation).

[This change would put responsibility for supervising trade union relationships in the hands of members with little interest or expertise in doing it](#)

There is no guarantee whatsoever that any one of the seven proposed ordinary members of the Executive would have any interest in or experience of trade union liaison work.

It is improbable that anyone would get elected to the Executive with the express purpose of undertaking trade union liaison work.

In such circumstances, which are likely to occur more often than not, the party's structures would lack any central node for trade union liaison work. In these circumstances the work would likely be done, if at all, as a secondary concern and potentially in a perfunctory manner.

This does not serve the purpose of building stronger relationships across the trade union movement. Furthermore, it would risk putting ordinary members of the Executive in an invidious position, since the Party constitution would require them to shoulder responsibility for work in which they have little experience or confidence.

[This change would remove the only clear and identifiable post with responsibility for trade union relationships, replacing it with nothing](#)

This motion would remove the only clearly identifiable post in the party's structures with responsibility for building and maintaining trade union relationships. The motion does not replace it with anything.

[This change would accordingly result in less detailed and accountable trade union liaison work](#)

Without a named officer on the Executive, Conference's ability to compel the Executive to take action on these lines would be very limited. Without any clear, continuing responsibility for the work, the work risks being relegated lower and lower in the Executive's priorities.

Members of the Green Party wishing to query the party's work with trade unions at the highest level would be unable to identify clearly and easily who is responsible for such work, and to use accountability mechanisms (such as Conferences and biennial elections) to hold that person to their promises.

Trade union officials would lack a clearly identifiable contact in the party's structures centrally, to build and maintain lasting relationships.

Any handover of trade union relationships from one Executive to another would also, therefore, be harder to handle and risk getting lost in the mix of different Executive responsibilities.

Each of the above weaknesses make this proposed removal of the Trade Union Liaison Officer, to replace it with nothing in particular, hazardous for a party that wants to build durable trade union relationships.

[This change would jeopardise continuity in trade union liaison work, by making it subject to the whims of a given Executive](#)

While the standing orders for the relevant party body could create 'lead individuals' or 'sub-committees', this could and would vary hugely over time.

In some areas of work, the 'flexibility' this change seeks to enshrine could be advantageous. In respect of trade union liaison work, it would be harmful indeed.

The work of building strong relationships with trade unions requires continuity and a firm footing, so relationships can be managed and handed over.

If we are serious about building such relationships, the 'task force' model of making responsibilities contingent on the whims of the members of the body who happen to be in post for a given term is entirely inadequate for the work of trade union liaison.

The continuity of trade union liaison work would also be subject to the skills, confidence and time availability of an Executive which was not elected with trade union liaison work in mind. This would be unfair to the new ordinary members of the Executive.

[This change would make us less responsive to and accountable to the trade union movement](#)

It is our view that each of these and other concerns raised by our members have not been engaged with or addressed by Motion D05 Changes to GPEX.

The changes proposed in the motion would therefore make us less responsible to and accountable to the trade union movement.

This change comes at a time when we need more emphasis on trade union relationships, not less, and could see us go years without an adequate replacement

This would deal a serious blow to the ongoing work, not only of GPTU but also dozens of elected Greens and hundreds and thousands of Green activists who are working hard to lay the groundwork for a better relationship with the trade union movement.

The reputational effect of removing the only name position with responsibility for trade union liaison work, to replace it with nothing, could be enormous.

But reputation aside, the continuous and vital work of growing closer trade union relationships would be jeopardised by this motion.

For these reasons, unless each concern is fully addressed, we urge Green Party members to reject Motion D05 Changes to GPEX.

What are the Green Party Trade Union Group's concerns around motion D13 Pathfinder?

Motion D13 Pathfinder aims to outline the basis for more substantial changes to the party's constitution.

The motion does not currently explore, or invite the party to explore, ways to ensure trade union liaison work is embedded in future party structures.

The motion does not mention trade union liaison work. We are left to assume that this and similar work is envisaged to take place in the proposed new Council, through a 'task-and-finish' model, although this is speculative.

In any case, we believe that trade union liaison work must be included in any proposal to change the party's constitution.

Additionally, the motion as it stands represents a missed opportunity to explore new and better ways to ensure our relationship with the trade union movement flourishes.

For this reason, we intend to bring to the Autumn Conference a late motion to instruct party bodies to undertake a review of how the trade union movement could be represented in party structures, the better to support this relationship.

Further serious concerns surrounding consultation processes

In addition to the concerns raised above, we feel bound to raise further problems in the consultation process around this motion.

GPTU was not consulted on the form or content of Motion D05 Changes to GPEX, nor was GPTU notified of the proposal. It was brought to the attention of our Committee by members after the final agenda deadline.

We contest the argument, made by some supporters of Motion D05, that there was insufficient time to consult on its content or to notify GPTU and other party groups with a legitimate interest in scrutinising major constitutional changes. It would be more accurate to say that no time was made by the motion's proposers for engagement with GPTU and others. If time was not made for such consultation, the motion's should be prepared to defend against criticism of that decision.

GPTU has been party to successive rounds of consultation on similar proposals for constitutional change, over a period of several months. At every consultation in which GPTU has been involved, we have set out repeatedly and at length the concerns set out above.

At no point have these concerns been addressed directly. Far from addressing these concerns, there are no clear signs that the proposers have engaged with them in the discussion around Motion D05.

In previous consultations, Party Structure Working Group members have rejected our suggestions for retaining a Trade Union Liaison Officer or a member with specific responsibility to coordinate trade union liaison work, suggesting that this would "open the door" for other groups to try and do the same for tasks, concerns, or issues they care about.

This argument is poor on its own terms: the Trade Union Liaison Officer already exists, and we have not proposed the creation of a new role but the retention of an already existing role. There are strong reasons for why trade union liaison work cannot operate under the model being proposed.

But this response also fails to deal with any of the points GPTU has made. Without a serious effort to address the point above, the working group gives the impression (intentionally or not) that it is broadly uninterested in ensuring that trade union liaison work is done and done well, and is instead primarily interested in preserving the purity of its preferred overall model.

Each of the above points leaves us with deep concerns surrounding the consultation process that has led to Motions D05 and D13. We do not have confidence that it has been thorough, continuous with previous consultations, or at all suitable for a change of such magnitude.

What we *are* arguing, and what we are *not* arguing...

We *do not* believe that the PSWG is hostile to trade union liaison work.

We trust that each member of PSWG is doing their best to support the party through changes they believe are necessary. It should not be concluded from this briefing that members of PSWG are anti-union.

We *do* believe that the proposed changes to the constitution in Motion D05 Changes to GPEx are deeply mistaken.

They could have potentially disastrous consequences, and we believe that a thorough, continuous and good faith consultation process would have revealed this earlier.

We *do not* oppose all constitutional change, nor are we dogmatically committed to the existing party structures.

We are not wedded to existing structures or ways of doing things. This briefing does not take a stance on broader questions around how party structures should change over time.

We *do* believe that by working with GPTU and others ahead of the next Conference, PSWG could create a stronger motion with broad support that meets the needs of the party going forward.

We are keen to work with PSWG to ensure better proposals come to the next Conference. But we believe that these proposals are entirely unsuitable as proposed 'early changes' to the party constitution.

What we want to happen now

GPTU wishes for our concerns to be addressed. For this to happen, Motion D05 Changes to GPEx cannot pass in its current form.

We are in contact with PSWG to try and find ways to amend Motion D05 Changes to GPEx to address the concerns in this briefing. We will also be bringing our own amendments in due course.

However, the best course of action is for this motion to be referred back, so that better alternative proposals can be brought to Spring Conference 2023.

For that reason, we are campaigning to push Motion D05 Changes to GPEx down the prioritisation ballot. We are also campaigning for it to be referred back or defeated at Conference, if it is heard.

We believe that Motion D13 Pathfinder needs to address trade union liaison work, which is currently not mentioned. We will be exploring amendments to this motion, as well as bringing a late motion to the Autumn Conference as explained above.

Will these motions be amended?

GPTU will be monitoring the amendment forum for potential amendments. We encourage members to do the same.

GPTU will also be proposing one or more amendments to attempt to address the concerns raised above.

However, GPTU recognises that we cannot assume the success of any given amendment on the Conference floor. For that reason, we urge all members in any event to rank Motion D05 Changes to GPEX at the bottom of the prioritisation ballot, and to join us in campaigning against it.

How can we help GPTU?

You can help by spreading the word about this motion: online, in your local party, with others in the party that you know.

You can speak positively about the serious need for engagement with trade unions, and how Motion D05 Changes to GPEX (and D13 Pathfinder unless amended or complemented by a suitable late motion) will weaken that work, not strengthen it.

You can write to GPTU through our website to ask how else you can support us, especially but not exclusively if you are planning to attend Autumn Conference 2022.