

Working Life: The Future

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Introduction

With responsibility for *Working Life*, I have taken a lead in consulting the membership on the role that *Working Life* has within Conservative Future. I was aware that the organisation has suffered significant failings in the past and appeared very London focussed. As a recent graduate, with experience of student branches and local association, but not directly with *Working Life*, I wanted to consult members before making decisions on how to move *Working Life* forward.

Below I have set out the results of the survey and consultation conducted during September. I then go on to conclude how I believe *Working Life* can be an effective and efficient extension of Conservative Future.

Survey Results

Nearly 200 people have taken part in the *Working Life* survey conducted online. Members were invited to take part in the survey via e-mailed, which was sent to the CF mailing list, and Facebook group members as well as posted on the executive blog and conservativefuture.com. The participants came from a broad cross-section of CF, with a good age mix; both full and part-time workers, and an even split between active and inactive members and indeed from across the country.

The Party

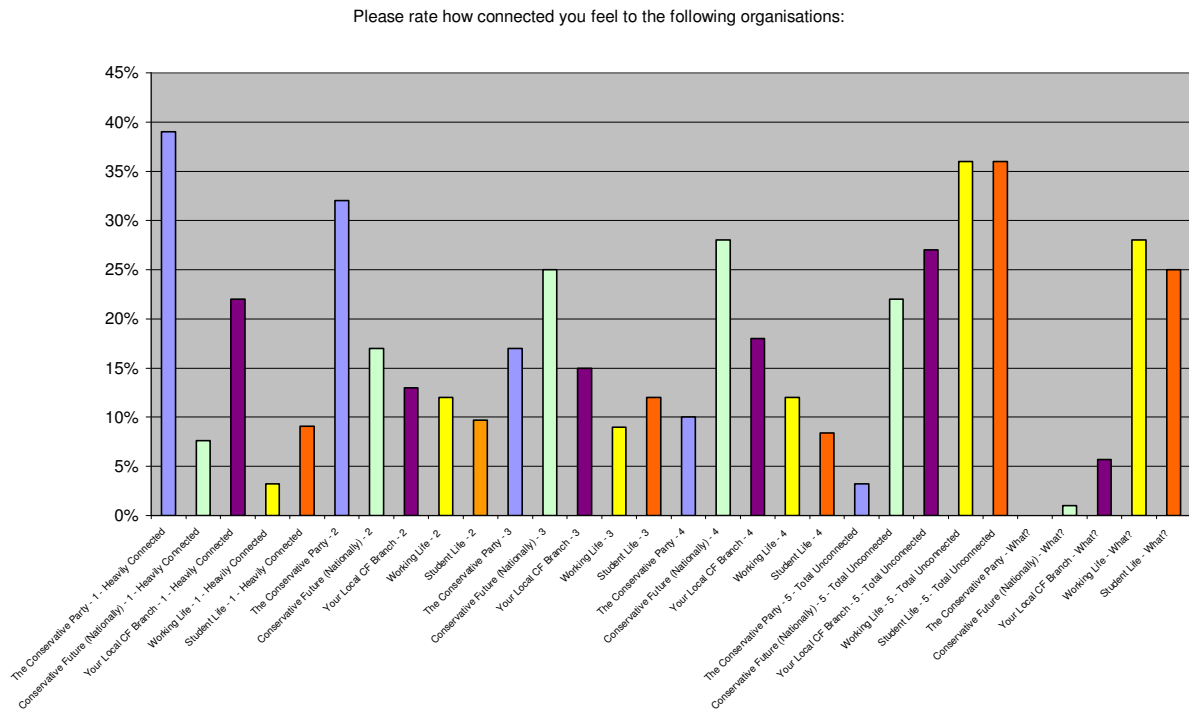
Participants were asked to rate “*how connected they feel*” to The Conservative Party; Conservative Future; Local CF Branch; *Working Life* and *Student Life* on a scale of 1 to 5 or “*what?*” (being the answer given by those who did not know what the organisation was).

40% of respondents felt highly connected to The Conservative Party, but less than 10% had that connection with Conservative Future. Worryingly, only 3% felt connected to *Working Life* in the same way. 36% felt totally unconnected, while a further 28% (totalling a clear majority) answered this question with the answer “*what?*”. The survey results clearly demonstrate that *Working Life* has failed to engage the very people it seeks to serve. The figures are equally dire for people who consider themselves ‘active members’ recording 34% and 27% connectivity respectively.

CF members feel a connection and affinity to the Conservative Party and the Conservative brand, but not to *Working Life*. With more than a quarter of people answering “*what?*”, *Working Life* has

failed to promote itself as a brand, and failed to connect with Conservative future members. As a result it is failing to deliver for the membership.

The Graph below shows the responses received to the question of connectivity:



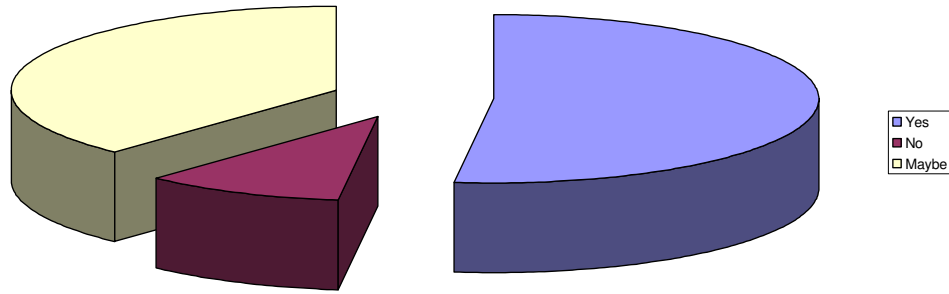
Key:

- Blue – The Conservative Party
- Green – Conservative Future
- Purple – Local CF Branch
- Yellow – Working Life
- Orange – Student Life

The Future

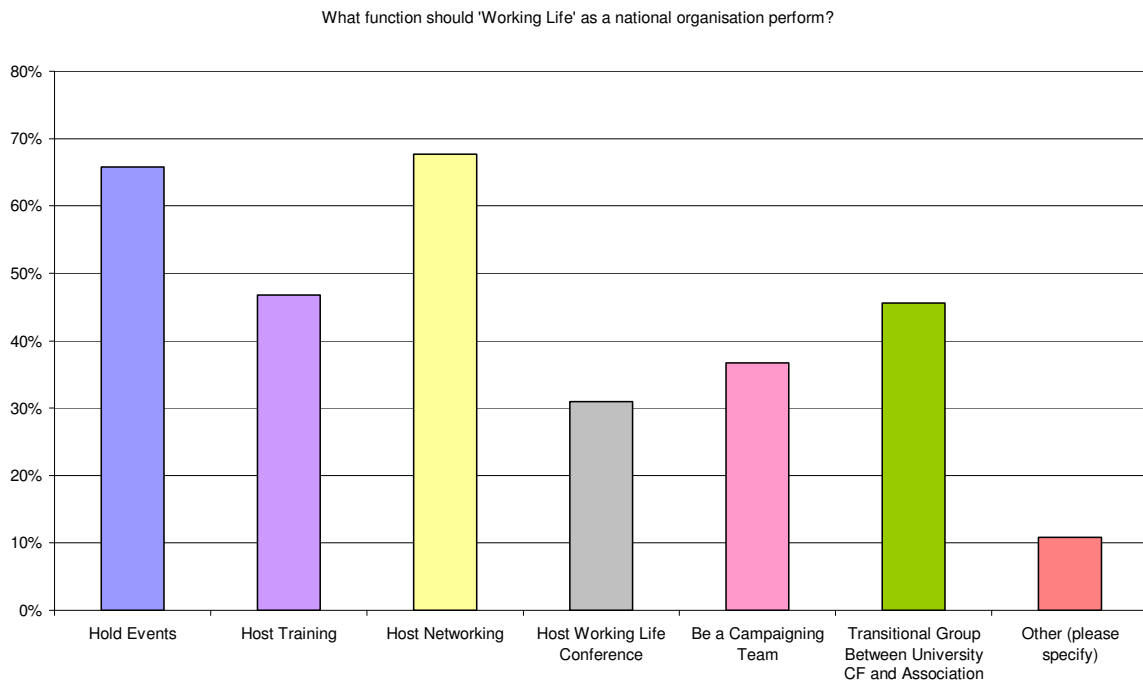
The survey was about planning a future direction for *Working Life*. The majority of people (52%) who took part in the survey believe there is a future role for *Working Life*, with only 10% believing there is no role for a national *Working Life* organisation.

The graph below shows the answers given to the question, “Do you think there is a role for a national *Working Life* organisation?”



While there is not an overwhelming majority in favour of *Working Life*, 39% thought there could be a role. This suggests that an effective and efficient *Working Life* organisation could reach out to more than 90% of our membership.

However, the more interesting results come when considering what role that a future *Working Life* organisation should have. Out of 6 functions, only two received the support of more than half the respondents – ‘holding event’, and ‘hosting networking’. Additionally, ‘offering training’ and ‘acting as a transition between university and local association’ received high levels of support (47% and 46% respectively). The chart below gives the full results:



Representation

One of the most concerning results was in response to the question “As a *Working Life* member, do you feel represented on the National Management Executive?”. 77% of respondents said they did not.

While this is obviously a disappointing result, I think it would be wrong to read too much into it. With more than 50% of survey respondents not feeling connected to *Working Life*, it would be unrealistic to expect more than 50% of those people to feel '*represented as a working life member*'. However, the figure for those who feel '*Highly connected*' to *Working Life*' is worse, with 100% feeling unrepresented.

Partly this result may be down to the wording of the question; the question was loaded in a manner that would require respondents to consider themselves a *Working Life* member. Judging by the wider consultation and the comments connected to those respondents who said they did not feel represented, many of them do not. People do not feel that *Working Life* is an organisation to which they can be a member; they see *Working Life* as performing a function and delivering a service, but they consider their membership to be with Conservative Future or The Conservative Party. Additionally, in this survey we engaged a large number of members who are not involved in CF, and who are disconnected from the NME and the central organisation.

However, there is obviously an opportunity as a national team to improve the sense of representation among members.

Conclusion – The Future of Working Life

I have drawn my conclusions based on this consultation, consisting not only of the survey results but also representation made by individuals. Those individuals who have taken a more active role in the consultation consist of active and non-active members, recent graduates, young professionals and CF officers.

My conclusion is simple, *Working Life* as a brand can be successful, but as an organisation is flawed. Subdividing Conservative Future into smaller organisations leaves members feeling disconnected and further from the centre. *Working Life* has existed for many years, but has failed to connect with over half the membership. However, the *Working Life* brand, if marketed correctly has the ability to draw people into Conservative Future who would otherwise feel alienated from what they view as largely a student organisation. It is easily identifiable and self defining; this is why I conclude that the brand can be successful.

In the past it has been proposed that *Working Life* should act as a sub-culture within CF. But this has been the strategy by which *Working Life* has attempted to operate for the last few years, and failed; as a result I have ruled it out for the future. CF does not have the ability or resource to act as a multi-layered organisation, and must continue to exist as a single unit to reach its maximum potential and retain influence.

The way I propose to move forward is with a *Working Life* network. Primarily this will consist of a monthly e-newsletter, which details of policy announcements, news stories and events happening across the country that are relevant and of interest to young professionals. This will serve to deliver the desired role of a National Working Life organisation as presented in the survey results. *Working Life* does not have the ability to compete in a crowded market to organise and host its own events and networking, but by acting as an information porthole for existing events, we can deliver our members the service they desire with minimal investment of resources.

City branches, local Association, Conservative Future branches and partner organisations already deliver the services our members seek from *Working Life*. Rather than becoming a competitor in this 'market', I believe we will serve our members best by providing them relevant information in a simply, regular and easy access format. Other providers deliver high quality events and networking, and by putting our members in touch with those events we will act as a transition authority between University and Association, and be able to provide high quality training through our partners e.g. YBF. This is the only feasible way I see Conservative Future being able to deliver a national *Working Life* structure that meets the needs and requirements of our members as conveyed during the consultation.

By achieving this we will also build our campaign resources. If *Working Life* can serve to connect its members with local campaign activity, people get involved and stay involved. Working locally with their association or campaign team, people find it easy and accessible to campaign – rather than being part of a national campaign network through *Working Life*. There is not a role for a working life as a campaign unit; but there is a role for working life members in campaigning, which can be delivered under this proposal.

In summary, to deliver an efficient and effective '*Working Life*' organisation under the umbrella of Conservative Future I propose a rethink on the aspirations of *Working Life*. We must understand that the best interests of our members will not always be served by our own provision.