

IWF UK Pulse survey analysis

In May 2023, IWF UK sent out a Pulse survey to members asking three key questions:

- i) Why did you join?
- ii) How well are we meeting your expectations; and
- iii) If not, what should we do differently?

Seventy members responded, about 33% of the total. A number were willing to provide further thoughts in a follow-up telephone conversation. This report summarises our findings from both the survey and calls. It also includes recommendations for our response.

Question 1: Why did you join?

Item	Count
Expand my network/meet interesting people	56 or 78%
Effect change	15 or 21%
Accept invitation to apply	14 or 19%
Other	11 or 16%

*The total exceeds 100% as several respondents cited more than one reason.

Most respondents cited expanding their networks, meet other like-minded women and making friends. One respondent said:

“(I joined) to meet like-minded women and to share experiences of being a senior woman in business.”

Many also cited advancing IWF’s mission, particularly advancing the cause of women in the workplace. A respondent said:

“(I joined) to meet other influential women who are trying to improve the workplace for this day and age.”

An almost equal number joined because they had been invited to do so by someone they liked and respected. One respondent expressed this as follows:

“(I joined) because I was invited to join by a woman I think very highly of, and she said it would be exactly what I needed.”

Of those who cited other reasons, a number had joined IWF UK because they had been IWF members elsewhere; others cited the opportunity to learn from others and keep up to date. The seniority of the membership appears to be an underlying motivation for many.

Question 2: How well are we meeting your expectations?

Item	Count
Very well	31 or 42%
Well	10 or 14%
Okay	18 or 25%
Not well	10 or 14%

*The total does not equal 100% as a few respondents cited reasons unrelated to IWF UK for their lack of involvement.

The good news is that more than half of respondents were “very happy” or “happy” with the way in which IWF UK was meeting their needs. One enthusiast said,

“Above and beyond! The depth and quality of the members and the events is second to none.!”

Another said,

“Very well. I have met some amazing people through the numerous interesting events that have been organised, as well as through less formal events.”

One said simply: “Fabulously!” Many of those who were happy said they were new joiners and so thought it was too early to tell for sure but “so far, so good”.

However, on the flip side, almost half of respondents were somewhat unhappy or even very unhappy. Some found IWF UK “overwhelming” and said they needed “help to network”. Of those who said their experience was merely okay, some cited the fact that they were not in London or the southeast more generally. Some found the organisation “cliquey” and hard to break into. A couple cited the lack of events for members from the arts rather than business; some wanted more virtual events, others more in-person events.

A number felt the organisation was not doing enough to advance the cause of women – particularly the next generation (although several cited the excellent work done by the Racial Equity Special Interest Group). Some felt it was changing for the worse; others felt it was changing – albeit slowly – for the better.

Of those that said it was not meeting their expectations well or at all, a number cited their own lack of time or change in personal circumstances. A few were disappointed by what they perceive to be a lack of delivery on the agenda for the next generation. One new member felt lost:

“New members are sort of left to their own devices (sic) to work out how to get involved.”

A particularly salient concern was the organisation’s mission. Although a minority of respondents had joined because of a desire to improve the lot of women in the workplace, those who had were sometimes disappointed. One particularly thoughtful respondent cited the evolving purpose of the organisation as a factor in her disappointment:

“The morphing of the organisation from its original purpose of providing a “safe haven” club, mostly a social entity for kindred top women, to an organisation that recognises the tremendous value and wisdom it can bring to bear on society's big problems... (is an issue as) it has yet to find the best way to balance these objectives and organise to deliver them well.”

The Racial Equity SIG stands out here as a successful effort, in the view of several respondents.

Question 3: If not, what should we do differently?

Item	Suggestions	Committee
Events	More subgroups; more on the arts (with the possible revival of the Cultural SIG); more use of external speakers and speakers from other chapters; more and more regular dine-arounds; more to address the varied interests of members e.g., sports; more for those transitioning out of full-time work; more for women interested in joining boards as Chairs; more for the next generation; more and more varied on-line events with an in-person option (rather than in-person with an on-line option); more international events, such as Zoom calls with other chapters; more video links (an iPhone or tablet might do) for in-person events to enable absent members to follow	Events
Timing	More breakfast meetings; more meetings in the afternoons	Events
Content	More for those in the arts; more for executives; more for board members, including prospective board members; more focus on themes such that e.g. events address issues of interest to SIGs; more international content; more and more creative effort to “mine our own content”, that is, make use of what we know about leadership collectively	Events
Communications	More streamlined newsletter; better website; reminders of upcoming events; shorter, more frequent email updates; emailing on Fridays rather than earlier in the week	Communications
Connection	Better integration of new members, with a “new joiners guide” (already done); more mentoring; better understanding of member profiles for use in targeting events	Engagement
Leadership	More focus on the next generation; development of a plan to address the question of how we define and then fulfil our mission; more public statements on issues affecting women, after agreement at Board level; development of more and better relationships with the political establishment, particularly members of the House of Lords; training of Board members in communications to raise external profile	Board

Summary:

The two biggest issues are these: defining who we are and then aligning our activities accordingly, and ensuring members can find the connection they seek.

Many if not all the suggestions made by respondents can be addressed while tackling these two issues. With respect to the former, an intriguing approach is to define what one respondent has called “The IWF Way.” We might do this by distilling our personal stories into a path to leadership.

An idea that we have come up with - and that seems to have traction - might help us address both issues at once: that of supporting members as they take their “Next step”, regardless of whether the members in question are just starting their careers, moving up the career ladder, transitioning from one career to another or leaving full-time paid employment. Focusing on the “next step” is effectively mentoring but without the (potentially condescending) baggage associated with mentoring. It recognises that all of us are always in transition and that we can help each other through. Such an approach could enable IWF UK to differentiate itself from other similar organisations; integrate members with varied interests and at varied life stages; and help to foster connection. Food for thought.

We may be able to address the many concrete suggestions relatively easily: balance on-line and off-line events to ensure those members living outside London feel included; stagger the timing of events, invite external speakers, stage events on a wider range of topics, alert members to events they are likely to be interested in based on their stated preferences.

Revisit communications more broadly, as several shortcomings identified by respondents have already been addressed – a fact of which many seem unaware. For example, a new member’s guide exists. (Sylvana has reminded members of some of the tools at their disposal in the newsletter.) The website has a heatmap to help members find each other. We have several intimate events, ranging from drop ins to “In conversation with...” to dine arounds. We also have Leadership Stories, Thought Leadership pieces and the IWF Bookshelf. A key issue appears to be making our members aware of the resources available to them. We might ask them in our next Pulse survey. Modelling a next-gen special interest group on the Racial Equity SIG might also be an idea. We may also want to try to breathe some life into the Connector programme.

Members of Communication and Engagement Committee (CEC):

Kathryn Kerle, Jenny Winch, Edna Kissmann, Miranda Sharp, Donna Frosco, Liz Marsh and Sylvana Caloni, Chair of the CEC.

Kathryn, Edna and Miranda analysed the responses to the May 2023 Pulse Survey in detail. Additional observations and comments were made by Jenny, Donna, Liz and Sylvana. Kathryn, Jenny, Edna and Sylvana conducted follow-up calls with the majority of those who requested them. Members of the CEC will continue to contact the remaining respondents, who we have not yet been able to reach.