



NORTH WALES BRANCH

We interviewed Mike Jones, Chair of IHIE's North Wales Branch.

The Branch offers six meetings every year on topics of professional interest to the 100 members. There is also an annual visit to a site of interest, combined with a social event. Mike puts this vigorous Branch's success down to its "relaxed and friendly atmosphere", and its regularly offering of good quality CPD opportunities, combined with the Committee "constantly looking to get new blood in."

In his view, part of the secret comes from holding the meetings at the same time each year, and in the same place, Abergelly. This continuity and familiarity helps to create and sustain a habit of expectation and support that becomes integrated into the pattern of members' professional lives.

The meetings are also always at 6.00 p.m., making for an easy, pleasant, and productive extension of the working day.

But, how to start? Mike has clear advice for anyone setting out to start up, or re-invigorate, local activities. One: be enthusiastic and do not give up; it is a marathon, not a sprint, to build up a thriving Branch. Two: get some colleagues involved with you, and select a topic that is of immediate interest to many of the members, such as the new Health and Safety standards. Three: involve employers in seeing the value of the meeting and supporting it. Subsequently the growth will be led by the quality and quantity of interesting meetings that will count towards CPD. Mike suggests that once a pattern of useful meetings has been set, then the social side can be quietly encouraged, and also the networking potential of these events will start to kick in quite naturally.

In addition, as engineers often move around the country, Branches can be a very helpful entry point for someone looking to integrate into a new area and place of work.

Thinking of topics, securing speakers, booking rooms, publicising events, holding AGMs, securing funding, liaising with the IHIE in London – all this needs to be going on in the background all the time.

Fortunately, the growth and spread of people attending meetings opens up a new pool of possible candidates for committee membership, or for more informal involvement in the work needed to keep a Branch going.

Another important role of a Branch, in Mike's experience, is to be the link to, as well as the public face of, the IHIE as a national organisation. (By the way, IHIE remains one of the steadily decreasing number of truly UK-wide organisations, with Branches across N Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and England).

The Branch is a key channel from IHIE to local members for information about industry news, qualifications, and Mike sees the Branch supporting and encouraging members throughout their careers to take the steps towards higher qualifications, greater responsibility, and greater job satisfaction. Now that IHIE offers access to CEng, it and the Branch together, can provide the complete sequence of qualifications for a successful career.