



## Local IHIE Action

***'What makes a branch tick' that's the question we have asked several of IHIE's active local groups. Here's the response from Tony and Alison of IHIE Southern.***

Southern Branch of IHIE is large and very active. It has 278 members and stretches from London down through Sussex, Surrey and Hampshire. Two stalwarts of the Branch, Alison Coffey, Branch Chairman and Tony Suter, Secretary, see the success of Southern as down to the Committee's hard work, not to any secret ingredient.

The Committee aims to provide six good, interesting and CPD-worthy meetings every year, for the members' benefit. Additionally, they plan to make these meetings have a social side that will facilitate networking and mutual support. A further three events are laid on: the annual Branch Seminar on a key issue, the AGM at an attractive venue, and a fundraiser for charity – the infamous "Wine and Wisdom" Quiz.

Technical meetings are held as far as possible at the same times and as centrally as possible making it accessible to Branch members. Sometimes the venue is provided for free by a company or work-related organisation, which helps the cash flow.

Holding nine annual events is a heavy workload for volunteers in full-time employment, and the committee is constantly looking for new blood to share and then to carry the burden. On the other hand, the number of events and their quality brings a wide circle of people into the Branch's orbit, from which to recruit.

One benefit in kind the Branch enjoys is the provision of its website through The Stilwell Partnership, a traffic and safety consultancy. The involvement of employers and users is seen as central to a Branch's success, and can have similar useful outcomes.

Branch members see the Branch's events and meetings as a concrete benefit of their IHIE national membership. The Branch can say "We are here, use us" in a way the London head office cannot. Often, an individual will make his or her first tentative enquiry about going for Registration, to another Branch member. Contacting Russell Square as a first move can sometimes feel to be rather too "committing" an act. The Branch is an important tool for encouraging people to aim high, and to get the qualifications which will open doors to them later in their careers.

Because of the importance of the Branch as a professional resource, Tony says to anyone trying to get one started, or more active: "Don't get dispirited, it won't all happen at once" and he points out that it will take a lot of good meetings to build up the sort of track record that will sustain interest and draw in a steady active membership able to maintain a high level of activity in the future.

Alison stresses the networking and social value, too, of an active Branch, as something that makes IHIE membership an effective way of helping people to move across the country and quickly pick up the threads of a professional and social life in a new environment.

[www.ihie.org.uk/southern/](http://www.ihie.org.uk/southern/)