

# 'TIS THE SEASON – TO VOTE!

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The BDJ Upfront section includes editorials, letters, news, book reviews and interviews.

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Comes round quickly doesn't it? You think I mean Christmas don't you? Alas not, but even though we are not quite there I do have a gift for you all. It is not a gift from me, but rather one from the whole of the British Dental Association (BDA). But it comes with a proviso; it is really important that you actually use it.

So if I don't mean Christmas, what do I mean? I am talking about democracy. That vital connection that the BDA maintains between grass roots members, policy and the activities of the Association. Whilst the words 'council', 'committee', 'democracy', and 'elections' may not inspire excitement in everyone, they are nonetheless the pivotal background to an organisation that is solely committed to representing the interests of its members. So don't be too quick to turn the page – you never know, you could be the one who makes the critical difference in ensuring that UK dentists are properly heard.

I hope that by now you have already cast your vote(s) in this year's Principal Executive Committee (PEC) elections and popular as they were, they are merely the start of the process. We are now looking to elect to 255 seats distributed across 14 committees and four councils. But why you may ask, after having such a well-contested PEC election are these so important? And anyway, as the PEC are the legal directors of the Association can't we just let them get on with governing? The answer is that the layers of representation which we are now seeking to refresh are essential to our understanding of

**'I wish for a BDA that is suffused with member engagement...'**

what makes the profession tick, and how its different component parts inter-relate.

You will, like I, have read with some degree of alarm the issues and threats facing each dental craft highlighted in *bdanews* and through the pages of our Latest News online (<https://www.bda.org>). Such are the specific challenges in so many different areas. It is vital that the groups untangling them do so from a position of absolute immersion and understanding. The PEC's role is to make sure all the pieces fit together and to make sure that the organisation is run in a way to maximise impact and effectiveness. So there is a vital interaction between the members of the elected representative councils and committees and the PEC. One group identifying the depth and complexity of specific areas, the other co-ordinating how things are organised and delivered.

Be clear, there is not a single dentist currently practising who will not find their world challenged in the next three years. Austerity, commissioning, pensions, regulation, salary. Each element in their turn will come under scrutiny both from within the profession and without. It is in fact likely that recent articles only begin to hint at the issues that will no doubt become mainstream over the next three years. We need you to tell us what is happening to you, why it is happening and what you want to be done. In short, you need to get involved with the BDA. You need to stand for election and you need to then vote in the subsequent elections. When populated, the committees and councils will be in place to provide the PEC with as many options on as many of the

issues as they can consider. Only when in possession of that depth of understanding can we make the BDA as good as it can be.

However much good cheer I may feel at the moment I am not sufficiently joyful to sit here and tell you that the BDA will be able to resolve all of your issues in the way that you see fit.

But what I can tell you is that there is room in the BDA for all opinions and the opportunity for them to be tested and adopted as the case may be. There is no hidden agenda, no unseen hand is guiding the BDA. We are a democratic association. Elected members negotiate contracts and devise policy. Elected directors then debate these and execute them as best they can for the best outcome for the whole profession. The agenda for the PEC is that set by those on the ground. If you have a problem with what the BDA is doing or not doing, then in part, you need to become an elected member and make the change you desire.

So, what is my wish for Christmas? Well I wish for a BDA that is suffused with member engagement; a BDA that can see all the challenges of the profession; a BDA that can take action on behalf of the profession. Because, when it comes down to it, only the BDA can do that. No matter what any other body or organisation tells you, only the BDA is structured to represent the whole profession. Only the BDA is structured to receive and promulgate the views of the whole profession. *You* are the profession, and it truly is *your* Association.

All it takes is for you to reach out, take the gift and then *use it!*

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