

AGM – Chair's Report

As Chair of the South West Fed I am delighted to welcome you to our 90th AGM, my third as Chair and a very special birthday year for the Fed.

Last year's AGM was our first ever to take place digitally due to the Covid-19 pandemic and with the support of members, we were able to pass through some transformational changes to the structure and public programming approaches of our organisation. These changes enabled us to ensure the future sustainability of the South West Fed, responding not just to the impact of the pandemic, but to a longer-term financial challenge that we had been facing and that I had raised the year before. I would like to thank those who supported us at that time and am proud to say that the South West Fed is now operating on a financially viable model that will enable us to continue our work for the foreseeable future.

Looking back on 2020, there are some highlights it is important to remember:

- We held our 2020 Conference online that was titled '**Interpreting, Curating and Combatting the Climate Emergency**'. We welcomed over 60 delegates over the two days and the keynotes, speakers and workshop leaders provided inspiring but also challenging content and in particular, highlight the work we have to do in our region, to contribute to this debate and take action to ensure real change. For the South West Fed, this led to a recognition of the need for a new Environmental Policy, that is now live on our website.
- We recognise that we were not able to hold the physical events that are usually part of our programme and there were no forums. I was thrilled that our board member Iona Keen was able to deliver Bristol Mingles online and the success of these events, inspired our new programme approach.
- At our delayed AGM in October last year, we successfully passed through some changes and gained support for a new, free membership model and online programme of activity, agreed to launch in 2021.

This year's AGM is more straightforward than the last couple of year, with no special resolutions proposed. We hope to welcome our new board members subject to member approval and you will see from the Finance Report that we are now in a stable position, with reserves that can cover all our core costs for at least one year. I am very proud and relieved to have enabled the Fed to realise this position of security and would like to thank all those who have helped us during what has been a year of genuine crisis.

We have now launched our new membership model and programme and I look forward to feeding back in full, next year, how this has gone and we are also exploring the potential of some physical events that are also zoom enabled, as we consider our activity in 2022, and how best to meet the changing needs of our sector.

I would like to thank those board members who are standing down at this AGM. Both Helen Daniels and Fiona Pitt have provided very valuable

contributions to the board, supporting our programme and advocating the work of the Fed amongst their networks and in the counties where they are based. We continue our commitment to ensure the board represents the South West Region and I am therefore delighted that we are welcoming a new Student Rep role to the board, to provide a voice for those looking to enter our sector, and who can challenge the South West Fed to produce a relevant and appealing programme. The new board member comes from Exeter University, which is also a positive outcome from our Memorandum of Understanding, that we are able to directly engage with these students and benefit from their views and perspectives whilst also providing opportunities for development and networking. I am also really pleased that we have a new Programme Officer standing, who is based in Wiltshire, a county that has not been represented on the board for nearly 18 months. I hope members will support their nominations at the AGM.

I would also like to say a very special thank you to Matt Ashdown. He has worked as our freelance support in membership and communications for many years. Our Arts Council Grant enabled us to retain Matt during 2020 and the professional support he has provided, whilst we transitioned to a new business model has enabled us to ensure the ongoing success of the South West Fed. We all wish Matt well in his other projects and thank him for all he has done for the organisation, he will be very much missed.

As always, I am hugely thankful for the support of our board, especially during the last year when we have all been managing home working, home schooling, facing the isolation of furlough or dealing with the devastation of job losses. Our organisation's success is a testament to the ongoing commitment, hard work and determination of those on our board.

Looking ahead, I am excited that 2021 will be a year of embedding our new approach, building up our membership base and inspiring those in our sector as we emerge from this pandemic. I especially look forward to celebrating our 90th birthday in September in bath – do look out for the invitation to join us!

Finally, I am sad to confirm this will be my last year chairing the Fed, as I will be standing down in Summer 2022. I have found this role to be challenging, hugely rewarding and a lot of fun. When I step down, I will have served as Chair for four years and am proud to have contributed in a small part, to the long and rich history of this special organisation that holds a unique and important place for museums, galleries and many others working in heritage and culture across our region. I will be supporting the South West Fed with board recruitment this year, to ensure that a strong, energetic and focussed board will continue to take the organisation forward from 2022. If you are interested in getting involved and joining our board, please do get in touch – we would love to hear from you.