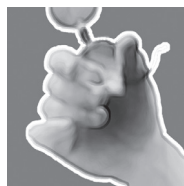




UNISON 2014



CODE OF GOOD
BRANCH PRACTICE

CODE OF GOOD BRANCH PRACTICE

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The Code of Good Branch practice is a core UNISON document that has the backing of UNISON rule. Its purpose is to guide branches and branch officers on how they should meet the requirements placed upon them by UNISON's rules, and to give guidance and advice on the many practical, constitutional, organisational and procedural issues that confront branches.

Following the code means that not only will UNISON branches operate consistently and effectively, but that members will know what to expect from their UNISON branch. Branch officers are therefore encouraged to make themselves familiar with this revised code, taking up opportunities for training where offered.

Members may have concerns about the functioning of their branch. UNISON is a democratic structure and members are urged to raise their views or concerns within the democratic structures of their branch. Only if they feel obstructed from accessing those structures should members raise their concerns by contacting their UNISON regional office.

The environment in which UNISON branches operate is a changing one. New policies and initiatives agreed through UNISON structures seek to address the developing expectations of our members, or respond to political, legislative, or economic influences that affect their lives. The infrastructure of public service provision has changed since UNISON was created, and continues to change. Branches need to be able to respond to these changes, adapting their approach, their internal processes, and even their structures and boundaries to ensure that the role of the branch as a key unit in the organisation of members and democratic decision making by members, remains relevant and effective.

Throughout this code, occasional reference is made to other, separate guidance documents agreed by UNISON's National Executive. These give greater detail than is possible in the code and are kept up-to-date. Most of these are available on UNISON's website at unison.org.uk/core-branch-resources or you can order some of them from the online catalogue at unison.org.uk/catalogue.



Dave Prentis

1.1 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

UNISON sets out its core aims and objectives in its rule book. They apply to our work in the workplace and in the community, and reflect our core values – respect, equality, democracy, supporting our members and promoting public services.

UNISON is committed to achieving equality: in our workplaces, in our union branches; in society and throughout UNISON's structures and activities. People have the right to be treated with dignity and respect at work, to do their job to the best of their ability, free from discrimination and harassment. Equality is also a high priority in our negotiating and campaigning work. UNISON is committed to ensuring that all our members are able to be involved in the union and have their voices heard.

UNISON, as a trade union, is an employer, a member organisation and a provider of services. It has a duty not to discriminate in any of these roles. It must not refuse to provide services, or offer services on different terms, to people on the grounds of their disability, race, gender, gender identity, religion or belief, sexual orientation or age, and must make reasonable adjustments to allow disabled members to make use of their services and facilities, which may mean making changes to practices, policies and procedures as well as making physical changes.

UNISON branches are central to achieving our aims and objectives. The way branches operate is key to our success – their structures and arrangements, the way they are administered, the work of our lay officers. This code is designed to help and inform branch officers and members about how UNISON branches should operate, having regard to developments in UNISON's organisation and the environment in which we work. It has been endorsed by the National Executive Committee and by rule G branches are required to adhere to the code. By following the guidance of the code, members, lay officers and staff will be able to ensure that the branch operates in accordance with UNISON's rule book and in furtherance of our aims and objectives.

1.2 PRIORITIES

Each year the National Executive, in consultation with regional and national lay committees, reviews and determines UNISON's priorities for the year ahead – priorities that address the work we do as a union (representing members, campaigning, bargaining, etc) or the development we need within. Meeting UNISON's priorities requires the attention of all parts of the union – by staff and our lay officers, not least our branch officers.

Branch officers should equally plan ahead. The time offered to the union by our lay officers is precious, as are the financial resources of branches. If we are to build our organisation, and win our campaigns we need to prepare. Branch officers are therefore expected to produce a branch development and organising plan to use as the basis for branch development and recruitment activity, and to review it annually. An annual assessment, carried out by the branch secretary and regional organiser at the start of each year, will inform that process.

By following this code and the separate advice and guidance referred to, and by working to

UNISON's priorities and those agreed within the branch, branch officers will be able to ensure that the branch grows in strength, that local issues and the concerns are used to promote the achievement of our central objectives and priorities, and that the requirements of UNISON rule are met.

1.3 ORGANISING – THE NUMBER ONE PRIORITY

There is a direct link between bargaining strength, and membership density (the proportion of employees who are union members) and inclusion. Low density undermines our ability to influence employers or government. Working on issues that do not directly involve and engage members will always be less successful than when members take ownership of an issue. That means organising. This code reflects UNISON's organising approach to building a strong, dynamic, and growing union and to building strong, dynamic and growing branches.

A successful organising approach is one that:

- involves members in identifying issues, finding solutions and dealing with problems
- recruits, trains, and supports more active and confident representatives from among every work group and workplace
- takes a “what can we do about it” approach, rather than “leave it with me to sort out”
- resolves most problems locally and speedily because they are identified sooner
- builds confidence among members about what they can do with our support and guidance
- reaches out to and inspires non-members to join UNISON
- leaves members feeling good about the union and ready to recruit others
- means trades unionism that has a political consciousness and is grounded in collective action, not individual and/or legal action
- ensures a legacy of organised workplaces.

1.4 WORKPLACE ORGANISATION

Strong workplace organisation is the foundation of an organising union. High membership density, local activity and effective workplace representatives are essential to UNISON's strategy for the future.

UNISON's membership is complex and diverse. Consequently the nature of workplace organisation varies considerably, reflecting the nature, size and range of workplaces and occupations, geography, type of service, etc.

However diverse the workplaces, these are where our members are located and where the union needs to be seen at its most active.

For this reason, UNISON has adopted a number of objectives in relation to strong workplace organisation. These are:

- a steward, a health and safety representative, and a UNISON learning representative in every workplace
- in larger workplaces, more representatives to reflect different sections, departments, shifts, etc
- regular meetings with members where members are able to attend fairly easily
- other methods for involving members where it is difficult for them to attend meetings
- consulting members and offering informed choices
- giving leadership and direction.

The key point is that every member should have representatives whom they elect annually and whom they can easily contact; and every representative should know their “constituency” which should be small enough to ensure they are in regular contact with their members, know their views, can keep them informed, can identify and recruit any non-members and not create too great a workload. (See also Workplace Representatives leaflet, stock no 2233).

These objectives will not be achieved easily or quickly. Branches need to have a planned and realistic approach to building organisation over time. This will be achieved through the branch having and working to a branch development and organising plan.

1.5 THE ORGANISING BRANCH – A STANDARD

This code and associated guidance will help branch officers and members to ensure theirs becomes an organising branch. So what would it look like? This standard is aspirational – something to strive for, but which can be achieved little by little if we plan, commit our resources, work in a partnership involving branch officers, staff and members, monitor and review our progress, celebrate our successes and learn from our failures.

A standard for branch organisation

Membership

- UNISON recognition and membership levels of no less than 50% with its primary employers
- An organising plan to expand membership into unorganised employers engaged in delivering relevant public services, and to achieve recognition
- new employees are quickly approached by the UNISON steward.

Organisation

- the majority of workplaces, departments and workgroups have a steward, a health & safety representative, and a learning representative; the numbers are increasing and all are recorded on RMS
- the branch uses RMS to map the membership and plan campaigns. All stewards know who their members are and can identify non-members
- there is a branch support structure for trained and active UNISON learning representatives

- the branch works to a development and organising plan.

Participation

- 100% of members on the branch distribution system
- quarterly informative and relevant mailings/newsletters sent to members
- a branch structure with regular, effective, participative and well-attended meetings, and that takes account of geography and the diversity of employers
- participation by all members regardless of sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age or their working hours and their employer
- a quorate branch AGM or significant participation in branch elections
- regular branch attendance at Regional Council and National Conferences, including self-organised group, young members and retired members conferences
- proportionality and fair representation among branch office holders and delegations (see section 4.4).

Representation and bargaining

- active bargaining machinery with all employers that is used to take forward UNISON members' agenda, not only to respond to employer demands
- all members consulted on all bargaining issues relating to them
- conditions of service, policies and procedures are subject to joint review and are broadly better than other similar employers
- all representatives trained to Stage 1
- disciplinary and grievance cases (other than complex cases) are dealt with by the branch up to and including final employer level
- the branch supports a Labour Link section that is actively engaged in representing UNISON policies in Labour Party organisation
- the branch maintains dialogue and builds relationships with key decision-makers, opinion-formers and potential allies at employer level, relevant political level, and the wider community including user groups and local media; and campaigns for policy and political changes that will benefit members (in accordance with UNISON policy), making use the General Political Fund where appropriate.

Branch administration

- a system of communication with, and support to, its representatives to ensure that all parts of the branch work together towards achieving its objectives
- a system of mapping and monitoring equality in participation and service delivery in accordance with UNISON's equality objectives.

- as outlined in Representation: A UNISON Guide
- efficient processing of membership applications and maintaining accurate membership records
- use of IT for communications, managing RMS and other key functions.

1.6 SO WHAT IS A BRANCH?

The branch is the main unit of local UNISON organisation to encourage, facilitate and support the range of UNISON activities at workplace and employer level, with regard to issues common to all members, and to provide services and individual support to activists and members.

Branches may be established to organise the employees of one principal employer, but should then also seek to organise the employees of any other employers providing parallel services (for example where services are outsourced), or associated services (for example in the community and voluntary sector). Accordingly, branches may be established based on a area covered by the principal employer in one UNISON region, across several regions, or “nationally”.

Branches may equally be established to organise workers in a particular community. Such branches may organise several major employers, together with the range of associated employers providing services in the community. Such branches will fall within a single UNISON region.

Other branches may be established to organise particular occupational groups across many employers. Such branches may be “local”, regional, pan-regional or “national” branches.

Branches may therefore vary in size and nature. These variations will have important implications for how the branch is structured and administered to ensure that all members can participate and receive support from the union on an equal basis, and so that the roles and expectations on branch officers are clearly defined.

Changes in employer structures and public service provision challenge the practical ability of existing branches to organise and meet the demands of members employed by “new” employers. Changes to branch boundaries or to internal structures, or the creation of new branches, need to be considered to ensure the effectiveness of the branch and our ability to organise members. Such changes can be initiated by a branch or the regional committee (see section 11.2.1). Similarly, branches may look to models of organisation that facilitate high levels of joint branch working to ensure they remain relevant for their members and potential members (see section 11.2.3.).

All members belong to a branch (see rule G1.1). The branch is the main gateway through which members influence UNISON policy or access services beyond those that can be provided by their workplace representative. The branch:

- effectively “administers”, facilitates, encourages and supports UNISON’s local organisation at employer level

- provides the means by which members or their workplace representatives can come together
- provides a network of support to representatives, ensuring their training, and devolves resources, especially to aid the activity of those supporting members in “smaller” employers
- provides a means for members to participate in the wider union
- leads national campaigns, supports local campaigning and collective bargaining with the employers, and provides leadership, advice and support to stewards and other branch officers at employer level
- acts as the interface between members and the regional and national organisation
- represents UNISON within the community
- is the route through which national policies are put into practice locally.

Branches, through their key officers, have responsibilities to:

- ensure that members are aware of and know how to access the broad range of support, assistance, advice and opportunities to participate in their union
- recruit, retain and organise members and local representatives
- advise members about how to resolve grievance or disciplinary issues
- represent members in grievance, disciplinary and like matters
- bargain and negotiate with local employers on conditions of service, pay, employment changes, etc
- respond to consultations from employers
- represent members on health and safety matters
- promote UNISON's aims and values
- campaign locally in accordance with UNISON policy
- regularly communicate and consult with members
- provide opportunities for the education of members and development of activists.

2.1 MEMBERS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Our members are what UNISON is about. Without them we have no union. Members pay their contributions and have the right to expect certain standards and services from their union – that means from UNISON officers, whether volunteer lay officers or staff.

Every member must be “allocated” to a branch (see rule G1.1).

Generally this is based on the principle that all employees of a common employer will be allocated to the same branch. A member can, however, appeal to the National Executive Committee (NEC) if they are unhappy with the branch to which they have been allocated and wish to choose another branch.

UNISON expects its branch officers and staff to provide their support to members in an organising way and in accordance with our procedures. That means members can expect to:

- be treated with dignity and respect at all times
- be involved in identifying issues, finding solutions and dealing with problems
- have their views sought, listened to and respected
- know how to access UNISON support and advice
- receive an explanation of what their rights are and to possible solutions to problems
- have a say in decisions that affect them
- be able to participate in UNISON’s democratic structures*
- have access to UNISON services when they need them
- receive regular information on matters that affect them, and
- retain confidentiality from the UNISON representatives dealing with their case.

** Members must have respect for one another’s right to express their view, especially when collective decisions are made at branch meetings. Members who hold a position of authority at work over other members must avoid a conflict of interest between their “professional objectives” and their activity as a union member. Where such potential conflict arises, the member should declare that interest and be circumspect about their contribution to or participation in any discussion.*

Branch officers should:

- ensure that new members receive confirmation of membership as soon as possible
- ensure that all new members are made welcome into UNISON and receive appropriate and clear information about their rights, responsibilities and opportunities
- supply new members with the following information:
 - the name and contact information of senior branch officers, their steward, health and safety representative and learning representative
 - the location of the branch office or main point of contact for the branch
 - a step-by-step guide to raising issues, specifying who is the first point of contact, for problems at work and within the union

- information on local or regional self organised groups and specialist officers who can be contacted directly for advice and support, where applicable
- encourage members to meet and discuss matters of interest and concern
- ensure members receive regular reports on branch activity and on matters that affect them
- ensure that members are invited to attend meetings at accessible venues and times, and are made welcome.

The organising approach requires that stewards and workplace representatives ensure that members are central to the solution of a problem and not just on the receiving end of a remote process.

Alongside the rights go responsibilities. Members must:

- ensure that their subscription is paid to the union on the date on which it is due
- observe UNISON rules, policies and procedures
- elect stewards and health and safety representatives to represent their workplace
- advise their branch of changes in name, workplace, job, home address etc. so that records can be accurate
- attend branch and workplace meetings so that decisions made are democratic and representative
- bring matters of concern to the attention of their representative as soon as possible
- co-operate with their representative when dealing with casework
- treat others with courtesy and respect
- abide by democratic decisions
- work collectively with other members and their representatives.

2.1.1 THE FOUR WEEK RULE

A member is entitled to receive free legal assistance in accordance with UNISON Rule K, providing s/he has been in membership of the union for at least four weeks prior to the incident or occurrence that leads to her/him seeking legal assistance from the union.

For the purpose of administering this rule membership starts from the date upon which the member's completed application form is received by a branch or regional office (recorded as the "entered office date" on the membership register).

Generally, UNISON will not provide representative support in respect of issues that occur with the first four weeks of membership or which pre-date the member joining. However, in respect of members who join and bring an equal pay claim as part of UNISON's mass litigation process, the NEC has waived the qualifying period. The four week rule will continue to apply to these members for all other services.

2.1.2 EXCLUSION OR EXPULSION FROM MEMBERSHIP

UNISON will normally admit into membership anyone who meets our rules for admission (see rules C1 and C5). There are stringent legal provisions that protect individuals and the union on questions about refusing someone to join the union, or disciplining and expelling a member.

Guidance on UNISON's disciplinary rules and process is referred to in section 2.6 below.

Branches must take advice from the regional secretary in the event they wish to exclude or expel someone from membership. Failure to follow this guidance could place the branch in legal jeopardy.

2.2 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

UNISON's most valuable resource is its people: those who join, those who volunteer, and those who work for the union. UNISON is committed to a strong partnership between members, elected representatives and staff – we cannot achieve our objectives without it. The key to successful partnership is mutual respect:

- recognition of complementary skills, expertise and experience
- recognition of the rights and responsibilities of others
- appreciation of shared objectives
- understanding the need for interdependence in order to succeed
- good communication and sharing information
- making time for each other
- working as a team
- supporting and empowering each other at all times
- not committing any act of discrimination or harassment or other discriminatory conduct, which is prejudicial to UNISON's aims and objectives.

Members have expectations, aspirations and real problems in response to which they look to UNISON for leadership and advice. With support, training and encouragement they may become activists.

Activists are all those members who volunteer to give their time and energy for the benefit of other members, many operating under considerable constraints and pressure. The majority will be active in their branch alone, but some will become active in senior regional or UNISON-wide committees and groups – all deserve respect and gratitude.

Sometimes activists in one branch or section of the union may need the cooperation of another. This is especially important where two branches may have a relationship with the same employer (for example local health branches and Managers in Partnership). In the huge family of UNISON it is important that we assist each other to make the union work effectively for its members.

UNISON organising staff, generally, have responsibility for several areas of work eg. a number of branches, employers, administrative tasks or other specialist functions. They too operate

under constraints and pressures, with limits as to what can be done and when.

All of us should be able to feel that we are valued and respected and to see that our contribution is making an impact.

2.3 COMMUNICATING WITH MEMBERS

Every branch should have a process to communicate with every member, irrespective of employer, on a regular basis. In a democratic union, members have a right to be informed about issues, to know what the branch and union is doing in their name. No campaign can be won without members being involved all along the way; No policy developed and supported unless members understand its relevance and agree the principles.

And for all the great work done by the union, and branch activists in particular, remembering to tell members what we're doing and have done is vital to retain members and attract new ones!

There are many different ways by which a branch can communicate with members. That includes having a branch website where members can access information (see sections 3.3 and 12.6 of this Code for more information), and simply keeping workplace notice boards up to date with relevant information. Here we are concerned with regular communication to all members from the branch. That means newsletters in hard copy or by email.

General points:

- remember your newsletter or bulletin is an official UNISON publication – respect it as such
- keep it regular – decide on a frequency you can maintain
- make it relevant – don't allow it to be dominated by issues with the largest employer and alienate sections of membership
- be clear about your objective when deciding what to say.
- your branch communications officer (see Section 11.3.9) should take the lead but network with convenors and senior stewards in all sections and departments.
- ask your regional office for help with design & print.

2.4 PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER UNIONS

While UNISON was created through the merger of three major unions, UNISON has also developed a variety of new partnership agreements with smaller unions and professional agencies. These generally provide for UNISON membership to apply to members of those organisations. In some cases members joining UNISON through these separate organisations may be allocated to the most relevant local UNISON branch, while in other cases there may be a separate branch for these members. In either case, UNISON branches should seek ways to include such members, and when appropriate their elected officers, on local matters common to them.

2.5 PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN BRANCHES

While most branches will deal with more than one employer, normally only one UNISON branch will deal with any one employer.

There are circumstances where one branch may wish to enter into dialogue with an employer covered by another UNISON branch. It is vital that such contact is conducted in such a way as to maintain unity and not compromise the recognised branch.

- **employer reorganisation** – where the merger of two or more employers covered by different branches is proposed. Such proposals should be addressed, with the region, in accordance with the NEC Scheme for Branch Restructuring, and branches should agree a protocol between them for how to conduct negotiations that may affect members in both branches
- **joint employer agreements** – the decisions of Local Strategic Partnerships, in particular, can have a significant impact on how local services work. Local branches should liaise to ensure the greatest coordinated impact on LSPs and other local dialogue between public sector employers.
- **citizen interest** – UNISON members are both providers and users of public services and so may have legitimate interest in services provided by local employers covered by another branch. Branches must work together, respecting the lead role of the recognised branch and that the common interest of members of both branches will best be served through working together.

2.6 DEALING WITH PROBLEMS

In an organisation the size and complexity of UNISON things can, and sometimes do, go wrong. Members may feel that their rights have been ignored and be unhappy with UNISON. Sometimes UNISON will be unhappy with a member who has not fulfilled their responsibilities. When these situations arise it is important that efforts are made to deal with problems quickly and that all parties are kept fully informed of the procedures and of progress.

The following paragraphs offer guidance on complaints and internal disciplinary procedures. It is important that members are made aware of their right to complain and, separately, of any disciplinary process that may affect them.

2.7 CONDUCT

UNISON members and staff are expected to treat each other with tolerance, dignity and respect. UNISON is made up of members from a complex and diverse range of social, cultural, religious and political backgrounds and it is essential that members respect this in all their dealings with each other.

It is particularly important that UNISON's elected representatives and staff set an example in this.

UNISON expects its members, activists and staff to behave with dignity and respect when representing UNISON at external events or with any third party, and that they should abide by the policy and rules of the union whenever they act on its behalf.

2.8 COMPLAINTS

Any member who is dissatisfied with standards of support, service or with the action or lack of action taken by the union is entitled to make a complaint against staff and/or elected representatives. Sometimes this will be despite the representative's best efforts, but in all cases complaints need to be heard and responded to quickly. The most aggravated complaints are often those where no one has been prepared to listen or take "ownership" to respond to the issue. Dealing with complaints can be an opportunity to review our organisation, approach, systems or training.

Many complaints or potential complaints can be resolved readily and quickly by the member discussing the complaint with their representative or a branch officer. This is where the process should start and, unless there are exceptional circumstances, there should be full discussion at this informal stage with all parties making every effort to reach a resolution.

Should this not prove possible members may register a formal complaint by writing to the regional secretary where the complaint is about a branch, a regional committee or a regional staff member, or to the relevant person at head office (see the procedure) where the complaint concerns a regional secretary, national staff, or national lay officials. Please refer to UNISON's complaints procedure (unison.org.uk/contact-us/frequently-asked-questions).

In the case of complaints by UNISON staff of harassment by a UNISON member, these are investigated and conducted in accordance with the procedure set out in appendix 2 of the UNISON rule book.

2.9 DISCIPLINE

All members of the Union have a responsibility to follow the rules of the union. In the rare situation that a member fails to do so, disciplinary action may be taken against a member who:

- disregards, disobeys or breaks any of the rules or regulations of the union applicable to her or him, or any instruction issued in accordance with the rules
- acts in a manner prejudicial or detrimental to the union, her/his branch, region or service group
- commits any act of discrimination or harassment on grounds of race, gender, marital status, sexuality, gender identity, disability, age, creed or social class or any other discriminatory conduct which is prejudicial to the aims and objectives of UNISON set out in Rule B1, B2 and B3
- misappropriates any money or property belonging to the union which is under her or his control, or fails properly to account for money which was, is or should be under her or his control or defrauds the union in any way.

Allegations against a member should be investigated on behalf of the branch committee. Where there appear to be reasonable grounds to think that a member might be guilty of a disciplinary offence, a detailed procedure is set out in schedule D of the UNISON rule book. UNISON Rules on Disciplinary Action are set out in full under Rule I on pages 34 and 35 of the Rule Book.

Branch officers must:

- ensure that members know their rights and responsibilities as UNISON members
- ensure confidentiality and respect is shown in respect of all parties always seek advice from the regional office to ensure compliance with UNISON procedures
- ensure that all elected representatives and members are aware of UNISON's opposition to harassment
- attempt to resolve complaints at the informal level but advise members of their right to complain further.

2.10 DISCIPLINE OF BRANCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Specific procedures governing the investigation of complaints against branch officers and possible discipline are contained in rule I of the UNISON rule book.

Branches must seek advice from the regional office to ensure compliance with UNISON procedures.

Where, following receipt of an allegation against a branch officer, the branch committee believes there may be grounds for disciplinary action, the branch secretary should refer the matter, without delay, to the general secretary for an investigation to take place.

2.11 HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

Members who have given the union exceptional service can be awarded honorary life membership on cessation of their normal membership.

Branches, regions, national committees and the NEC may make nominations.

Honorary life members are awarded a certificate and badge.

The decision on awarding Honorary Life Membership is made by the Development & Organisation Committee of the National Executive Council.

3.1 ENCOURAGING MEMBER PARTICIPATION

A strong union depends on the fullest possible participation of as many members as possible. This helps our negotiating strength; it ensures that we represent all members and that we are a democratic union.

“Participation” means in all aspects of union activity, for example:

- general branch meetings
- employer-level meetings
- workplace meetings
- self-organised group, young and retired members meetings
- in branch, regional or national elections or ballots
- in policy making
- in social activity
- receiving information about activities and issues
- accessing UNISON services.

Ensuring high levels of participation will be a challenge for many branches. UNISON members are employed by a wide range of organisations across the public, community, voluntary and private sectors. This brings particular difficulties in ensuring that our members, whoever they work for, have an equal opportunity to be involved and play a part in their union. Branches should not become disproportionately reliant upon or focussed upon those members employed by one particular employer.

The use of “electronic” communication – email distribution, e-conferencing, virtual meetings, etc can provide a realistic alternative to the “traditional” meeting, greatly increasing opportunities for participation.

UNISON members are also all kinds of different people with differing needs. They may work shifts, at night-time or work part-time hours; some with disabilities may be excluded from some meeting venues that are, for them, inaccessible or from receiving information distributed in a single format; they may have distinct language needs or live and work in remote areas. A flexible approach offering a variety of means of participation can provide realistic opportunities for all members to participate.

Members should be actively encouraged to meet and discuss matters of interest and concern. Stewards, health and safety representatives and learning representatives should encourage this through regular contact with their members.

If you identify that some sections of members appear under-represented at meetings it is important to try to find out why and to address the problem. Try holding a special meeting for or survey that sector. If appropriate, involve the self-organised group. And consider whether there are bargaining issues that could be promoted that would attract those members to participate.

Branch officers should:

- ensure meetings are organised for maximum member participation
- ensure good notice of meetings is given
- negotiate with employers to hold meetings in working time
- monitor attendances at meetings to identify if there are sections or groups of members who appear to be consistently under-represented
- review the branch structures and methods of operating – are they inclusive and fair? Does the branch have good membership participation e.g. do people attend meetings, take part in surveys, vote or stand in elections?
- check and identify whether access requirements are being met. Branches have obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and should ensure they obtain information on any access requirements their members may have and put measures in place to allow these members to participate. Remember: access is more than ensuring physical access to a venue; it may include, for example, the provision of information in different formats. Advice on this is available from your regional office or the membership participation unit at UNISON head office
- question whether some members may have childcare or dependent care needs which may prevent them participating. What support can the branch offer – providing a crèche, paying for carers, providing one-to-one information and input from the member
- review communication with members and consider using a range of different methods: newsletters, email and web, phone, meetings, surgeries, surveys.
- ensure that meeting agendas and branch activity are relevant to all sections of members
- review the responsibilities of core branch positions to ensure the work load is manageable. Encouraging job sharing for roles in the branch can be a means of involving new people
- promote the opportunities for participation offered through self-organisation (see section 11.2.6).

3.2 CONDUCT OF BRANCH AND WORKPLACE MEETINGS

Bringing members together is vital for formulating branch policy and democratic decision-making. Whether a formal branch meeting, a meeting in the workplace or for a small group of members, it is important that members who make the effort to attend find the experience rewarding. It is not only young members who complain that meetings can be “boring”. Meetings should have a clear purpose and it is up to the chair and other experienced branch officers to ensure that all attending are engaged to reach its conclusions.

Branch officers should:

- ensure meetings are friendly and welcoming. It is not only the chair who can help; other officers can introduce themselves to new members and explain the agenda and how the member can contribute
- review the agenda. Is it necessary to lengthily review the minutes of the last meeting and discuss matters arising at the start of the meeting? Is it necessary to report on a lengthy pile of correspondence received? Could these items be dealt with in a different way? Will a new member's introduction and first impression be a meeting focussed on the past and not on the future?
- avoid the use of jargon – so easily done
- ensure debate is conducted in a non-aggressive manner – take a break if things become difficult
- try to plan your meeting so that big debates can be held early before people become tired, and take a break before getting on with the next business
- ensure that decisions and actions are clear and understood – do not assume lack of comment means agreement to a proposal – ask!
- ensure that the members who attend know what will happen next and when the next meeting may be called
- ensure that no one member can dominate discussion by virtue of her/his professional role or employment status in relation to other members present. Members should be asked to declare “an interest” in matters where their professional responsibilities might be in conflict with the general interest of other members. Where such an interest is declared the chair should ensure that the member does not contribute to the discussion and, where appropriate, is asked to withdraw from the meeting.

3.3 CONDUCTING A “VIRTUAL” MEETING – THE “VIRTUAL BRANCH”

Increasingly, technology is providing new ways of enabling us to speak with each other. Just as the problems of distance can be overcome for two people by telephone or email communication, we can now use newer technologies for telephone conferencing or web-based discussion forums – allowing members to communicate or respond to proposals with relative ease. This can be of particular use for branches that cover a large geographical area or a large number of workplaces

There is no rule as to when discussion is best conducted by “traditional” or “virtual” means. It is a question of judgement aimed at securing the greatest possible participation. The branch's rules should prescribe the circumstances where formal branch business might be conducted in this way.

Not all members will necessarily have access to all technologies and care should be taken when planning virtual discussion to ensure that all members can participate either through

this or more traditional forms of communication. However, all branches should start to develop their own website linked to UNISON's own website.

A typical branch website might include:

- information explaining the work of the branch
- documents for discussion – proposals from an employer, branch responses or its own proposals, etc
- polls and consultations on key issues
- member discussion forums
- stewards' forums
- self-organised group forums
- on-line branch newsletters on the work of the branch
- information on routine workplace issues – an FAQ (frequently asked questions) approach can be particularly helpful and lighten the burden on branch officers
- an application form
- an email function to alert members of new content.

Guidance is available from the regional office or communications department to help a branch set up and administer its website. See also Sections 11.2 and 12.6 of this code.

3.4 YOUNG MEMBERS

Young workers are among the most vulnerable of those that UNISON seeks to recruit and organise. They are sometimes discriminated against in the salary structure, are more likely to be employed on temporary or short term contracts, regularly face bullying and harassment and suffer disproportionately high levels of accidents at work. Young workers therefore need the support and strength of UNISON to protect and develop their quality of life and work

The average age of UNISON members is old – but thanks to successful recruitment and organising work at branch, regional and national level, it is slowly reducing. The prospects for young people at UNISON are not good unless we work hard to maintain that trend and to bring our young members into UNISON activity at all levels of the union.

UNISON acknowledges that we have much to do in this area and has undertaken a range of initiatives to promote the relevance of trade unions to young people. However, there is a great deal more that must be done and much of this is the responsibility of branches which are the first point of contact for members.

Members aged 26 and under are UNISON young members, and it is this group of workers that is our biggest priority for long-term recruitment and organisation.

Branch officers should:

- identify young members within the branch
- ask young members about the issues that concern them, both in their workplace and in the local community
- encourage young members to participate and contribute to branch activity, particularly the recruitment of other young workers
- appoint a young members' officer to promote and support this work
- encourage participation in regional young members' forums
- ensure the "old" ways of working in the branch are changed to be relevant to the needs and experiences of younger members.

A central part of UNISON activity is developing policies that reflect the will and aspirations of our members; policies that address the current and future issues that confront our members in all aspects of their working lives, or the union as a whole; and working to achieve the aims of those policies through democratic change within the union or by campaigning and lobbying decision makers outside the union.

UNISON is a democratic organisation that seeks to involve all members in developing its policies, priorities and activity. Members will more likely pledge their active support for campaigns aimed at achieving change that they have had a part in demanding.

Much of our democracy is practised through meetings and more is said in section 3 of this code on how these can be conducted in ways that encourage members to participate, and also about how information technology can provide a more effective means of communication.

Branch officers have a special responsibility to ensure that every possible measure of membership participation is offered to ensure that decisions made are truly democratic: measures that inform members, seek their views, and ensure that the branch is accountable to its members for the decisions it takes. It is important to remember that any member should have the right to make a proposal that might eventually become branch (see 4.1 below) or UNISON policy.

Branches should adopt some, or all, of the following additional activities in order to increase levels of membership participation in guiding decision making, policy development and day-to-day practice:

- newsletters
- e-mail networks and a website
- telephone trees
- questionnaires and opinion polls
- informal ballots
- surgeries
- help-lines.

Above all, branches must listen to their members and keep them informed in equal measure.

4.1 PROMOTING, DEVELOPING AND MAKING POLICY

Every large organisation requires clear structures for decision-making. This is particularly so for democratic organisations. UNISON has a very democratic structure with a wide range of decision-making bodies.

Branches are an important part of the process of developing UNISON policy. The Democracy in UNISON Guidelines are endorsed by UNISON's national delegate conference to assist branches in this activity.

Key points on policy making are:

- all principal UNISON policy is determined by the National Delegate Conference to which branches can submit motions
- branches can also submit motions to other conferences, forums and committees, for example the regional council, the regional service group committee and the relevant service group conference, on matters within the terms of reference of that body
- branches are entitled and expected to send delegates to speak and vote at the national delegate conference and relevant service group conference, and to the regional council. Failure to send delegates may lead to the branch's funding being penalised (see 4.2 below)
- branches with self-organised, young members' and retired members' groups can submit motions to the respective conferences. Branches are encouraged to send delegates to these conferences according to the appropriate scheme of representation.
- any branch can develop policy within its own sphere of influence for matters associated with the employment and wider citizenship issues of its own members. However, such policy must be within the framework of primary policy as established by the National Delegate Conference, UNISON rules – including our aims and objectives – and any guidelines laid down by the NEC
- any branch wishing to develop or change policy must do so within the policy making structures and framework of the union
- branch proposals must be supported by a general branch meeting or the branch committee
- once policy has been agreed democratically at any level in the union, those members who originally voted or campaigned against it are expected to abide by it. It is important that all constituent parts of the union and branch work together to promote it and support it.

Branch officers must:

- ensure the branch is represented at the regional and national policy making conferences in accordance with the appropriate scheme of representation, made available to all branches attending. The NEC is responsible for the scheme for national delegate conference
- ensure they are familiar with the Democracy in UNISON Guidelines. The guidelines are crucial to ensuring effective and democratic policy and decision making.

The guidelines are simple, practical and easy to understand. Above all, they are based on common sense. They have been designed to enable all UNISON members to play an active part in promoting and developing policy, and to ensure that UNISON policy is based on winning support for views rather than imposing them.

4.2 REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Beyond the workplace, UNISON is a representative democracy. Members elect other members to represent their interests, their views and other concerns in branch, regional and national forums.

Branches must therefore take practical steps to ensure that elected representatives take their role as spokesperson for the wider membership seriously by identifying members' views, expressing these, and reporting back.

Branches should ensure that the election of all representatives is on the basis of the widest participation possible by establishing constituencies for the election of representatives and mechanisms for them to account to those who elected them.

The election of branch delegations to national conferences and regional councils and committees must meet with the rules laid down for the size and composition of delegations, which aim to ensure that delegations are reflective of the membership. Guidance is usually issued to branches with notification for registration of delegations. The NEC is responsible for the scheme of representation for national delegate conference.

Guidance is given in section 11 on a suitable process for the election of senior branch officers, but the same principles of encouraging participation and accountability apply for individuals elected to represent their workplace, or the branch at another level of UNISON policy and decision making.

4.3 FAIR REPRESENTATION AND PROPORTIONALITY

“Fair representation” and “proportionality” are key principles underpinning representation at all levels of UNISON’s structure. They are there to ensure that UNISON is an effective voice for all sections of membership.

The UNISON rulebook defines “fair representation” as:

“the broad balance of representation of members of the electorate, taking into account such factors as age and low pay, the balance between full time and part time workers, manual and non-manual workers, different occupations, skills, race, sexual orientation, disability and gender identity.”

This definition reflects an important principle about inclusion; it is not necessarily an exhaustive list. It is vital that branches ensure they are including all members and potential members, and that they understand who they are and where they work.

UNISON recognises the importance of taking positive measures to ensure the views of low-paid women workers are heard in the union. Rule Q sets out which members fall within the definition of low-paid. Branches should take this into account when determining their own representative structures and delegations.

Branch officers must:

- ensure the branch is inclusive and representative by knowing who their members are and where they work, by mapping the workplace
- take into account the principles of fair representation when electing officers, choosing delegations or setting up structures
- ensure the negotiating agenda reflects the priorities of all groups of workers covered by the branch.

The UNISON rulebook defines “proportionality” as:

“the representation of women and men in fair proportion to the relevant number of female and male members comprising the electorate”.

Over 70% of the union’s membership is women. UNISON is committed to ensuring that women are represented in all our activities, including at branch level.

Branches are required to meet the principles of proportionality when electing officers, choosing delegations or setting up structures.

If a branch is experiencing difficulties in getting women involved it is important that steps are taken to improve the situation. Much good practice in involving women is actually good practice for involving all members.

The NEC has responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the principles of fair representation and proportionality throughout the union. Branches may be penalised if they fail to address fair representation or proportionality, for example in their conference delegations.

4.4 CAMPAIGNING, PROMOTING AND IMPLEMENTING UNISON POLICY

Once UNISON policy is determined, there is an obligation on all constituent parts of the union to work to achieve its objectives by campaigning and promoting the policy. It is also important that different parts of the union work together, cooperatively and to avoid duplication of effort. Branches can support wider UNISON policies and objectives by explaining the issues and involving members in the campaign, and where appropriate, by raising the issue with their employers – chief executives, board chairs or political leaders.

4.4.1 CAMPAIGNING

The most effective campaigning can be that which influences a decision before it is made, rather than having to campaign against it once it is made. For branches that most often means ensuring there is regular “political” dialogue with the key decision makers at employer level – the chief executive, the board chair or the political leaders and that relationships with key opinion-formers and potential allies in the wider community, such as user groups or local media are built and maintained.

The Democracy in UNISON Guidelines give branches essential advice on how to campaign within and as a part of a greater structure, as well as limitations they should be aware of. Effective campaigning that involves members directly can recruit new members, build branch organisation and strengthen the branch's voice. A brief training module on strategic campaigning can assist branch officers in the planning and delivery of a campaign.

Branches officers should:

- initiate and plan campaigns to support the branch's bargaining objectives or to promote and persuade others to back wider community policies, having regard to UNISON's guidance on campaigning
- ensure that any campaign under the auspices of UNISON is in accordance with UNISON's policy, rules, aims and objectives, and any guidelines or regulations issued by the NEC
- ensure that any initiative is supported by a decision of a general meeting or the branch committee
- not extend beyond the branch's own boundaries and constituency without referring the initiative to the regional committee or regional service group committee for approval. Note, many branches share their community base with another and should ensure this prior consultation and agreement especially where the campaign extends to the wider community. These practices are not only common courtesy and avoid compromising UNISON colleagues, but can strengthen your campaigning voice
- ensure that any expenditure incurred is approved and accounted for in line with UNISON's financial rules and guidelines (see also the section below on financial support for campaigning)
- ensure that no payments are made for party political purposes or to political parties. Branches can seek support for such payments or donations through the region's Labour Link committee
- ensure that any event is governed by the UNISON Code of Conduct for Demonstrations and Lobbies contained in the Democracy in UNISON Guidelines.

4.4.2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CAMPAIGNING

UNISON's General Political Fund (GPF) exists to support campaigning at branch, regional, and national levels of the union.

Requests for GPF money to support campaigning must demonstrate how the proposed activity supports UNISON's objectives and must be submitted using the standard form to the regional secretary.

4.4.3 USING THE MEDIA

Effective communications, not least with the media, can be essential to the success of any campaign, even where the media is apparently hostile. Training on using the media is available for branch officers through regions. Again, the Democracy in UNISON Guidelines contain specific media guidelines that lay down guidance to branches on use of the media. In summary,

Branch officers should:

- agree a single media contact (normally the branch secretary, if possible supported by an elected branch communications officer) authorised to deal with the media on their behalf
- ensure the media contact is accountable to the branch committee
- ensure all statements issued to the media are in line with UNISON's aims, objectives, policies and rules; and that opinions expressed are what UNISON thinks – not the individual
- try to ensure that opportunity is taken to raise UNISON's profile among target groups, such as young people, when featuring individual members
- ensure any statement issued on behalf of UNISON is on appropriately headed paper, with contact details given.

4.4.4 DEMONSTRATING

The National Executive Committee has agreed a Code of Conduct for Demonstrations and Lobbies. Again, these are contained in UNISON's democracy guidelines and must be adhered to for any demonstration or lobby.

They are designed to:

- encourage solidarity and effective working between members, activists and UNISON staff
- ensure membership participation in decision-making, proportionality and fair representation
- support campaign activities to maintain and improve both the quality of public services and the interests of UNISON members
- strengthen the basis of joint union activity
- protect those engaged in the demonstration.

The guidelines will give branch officers an indication of actions that need to be taken when planning a demonstration, or when asked to support a demonstration initiated by another organisation, and of the assistance branches can expect. They refer to standards of behaviour of those attending demonstrations, also refer to demonstrations that might be held at UNISON premises or at UNISON conferences, and the specific actions that those branches wishing to organise or support such events must follow.

Branch officers must:

- adhere to the advice contained in the Democracy in UNISON Guidelines
- contact their regional secretary or regional service group head for advice or assistance in these matters.

One of the key functions of UNISON is to provide to its members advice and representation on grievance and disciplinary matters. Such occasions often provide opportunities to organise.

We should always aim to respond to a member's needs quickly. We can save time later if we seek to resolve grievance and disciplinary issues promptly and at workplace level.

The key role in achieving effective representation for members, and building workplace organisation, is the UNISON steward. Separate guidance (see UNISON guide to representation) is provided to all stewards setting out UNISON's approach to representing members and the standards expected. See also section 2.1.1 The 4 week rule.

Trained UNISON representatives are entitled to receive a special accreditation. With employers who recognise UNISON, there is seldom a problem with a steward accompanying a member at a grievance or disciplinary interview or hearing. The Employment Rights Act (ERA) 1999 gives employees the right to be accompanied by an accredited representative, even where no union is recognised.

In UNISON, an ERA accredited representative is one who has completed the stage 1 stewards course. This provides only a basic knowledge and attendance at a stage 2 course is recommended.

Branch officers should:

- ensure that members know who to contact if they have a problem at work
- ensure that members will receive a response quickly
- ensure that members are involved and informed about the progress of their case
- ensure that new stewards attend stage 1 training and training on representing members on grievance and disciplinary matters, at the earliest opportunity
- ensure that all stewards and branch officers follow the guidance set out in UNISON's representation guide.

Branch officers should not:

- agree to represent members at grievance or disciplinary hearings where the member is using an external representative (for example a solicitor). Note: UNISON representatives should be prepared to meet members who may, in special circumstances, have external advisers whose aim is to provide the member personal support (for example, a Race Equality Council representative supporting a black member), on the clear understanding that such advisers play no part in actual proceedings.

Case form

An essential tool when advising members on grievance and disciplinary matters is the case form. The form must be used whenever a member seeks our support. It helps ensure that the representative has all the details necessary, and it informs the members of their rights and obligations.

Branches that collect forms from completed cases can build a picture of activity in the branch – the success stories useful to recruit new members; the problem areas, employers and departments where there is an underlying issue to be addressed through organising and negotiation.

The case form must be used whenever a branch wishes to refer a case to regional level for assistance. The branch secretary is responsible for ensuring that all sections of the form are completed.

Inter-member disputes

A branch can face difficulty when a grievance or disciplinary issue places two members on opposing sides of an argument; and when both want representation. UNISON's Representation Guide contains specific guidance to branches on how such problems should be addressed

UNISONdirect

UNISONdirect provides a confidential FREEPHONE information service on 0800 0 857 857. Branches should publicise this number to all members.

More than 90% of calls to UNISONdirect are resolved by giving information to the member. Where assistance is required, UNISONdirect will:

- send a case form to the member
- notify a branch officer of the member's details. This will be the branch secretary unless the branch has provided other contact details. On receipt of notification from UNISONdirect, the branch officer must contact the member without delay.

(See also Section 8.8 on UNISONdirect)

5.1 LEGAL ADVICE ON EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

In accordance with Rule K, branches should be aware that legal advice and assistance can only be granted by the National Executive (NEC). The union has specific arrangements for the provision of advice and assistance by lawyers.

Legal advice on all employment matters must be accessed through the regional office initially. Branches should ensure that under no circumstances are solicitors and/or barristers instructed without the consent of the NEC. In addition no solicitors or barristers other than UNISON's NEC appointed solicitors should be invited to attend branch meetings or to meet members. Appropriate action will be taken under Rule I where members are referred by branches to solicitors other than UNISON solicitors without authority.

Branch organisation is always “work in progress”, improving membership density, the number of stewards, participation, etc, and responding to changes and challenges from the world about us.

At the start of each year, every branch will have an assessment carried out by the branch secretary and regional organiser together, focussed on key areas of activity. Detailed guidance on how to carry out the assessment is contained in the Branch Guide To The Framework For Joint Branch And Region Assessments. The assessment and the actions and targets agreed, should allow the branch officers to focus their efforts on the key work to be done, and assist the branch to secure help and resources from the region, including regional pool money (see section 8.1).

6.1 THE BRANCH DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANISING TOOLKIT

UNISON has produced a branch development and organising toolkit to assist branches in developing their workplace organisation by recruiting and organising new members and activists. The toolkit is a set of short planning modules that can help branches map and plan their branch organisation and membership. A summary of branch activity arising from the toolkit modules should be recorded in the branch development and organising plan. The modules are available via the activist’s section on the UNISON website.

All branches should aim to complete the core module Organising your branch. The Organising around race equality module is an important resource for branches promoting UNISON’s race equality strategy. Other modules include Organising for recognition, Organising for health and safety and Organising for Learning.

Each module is self contained and includes notes for the tutor or facilitator, handouts for participants and details of information that the tutor and branch secretary will need to put together in advance of the module. The modules are updated regularly. They can be used in any order, though all branches should use the Organising your branch module first. The modules can be run as a single session of around two to three hours or broken down over two shorter meetings. They are aimed at groups of branch officers and activists within a single branch.

Branches play a key role in negotiating improved pay and conditions for UNISON members. Even where pay negotiations are carried out at the national level, branch officers and stewards can still expect to negotiate with management on issues specific to their own employer or workplace. Branches must ensure that they have the skills and organisation needed to negotiate with every employer, on issues ranging from pay to PFI.

Workplace bargaining provides an excellent opportunity to create strong branch organisation. By including as many members as possible in the bargaining process, branches can use negotiation as a way of recruiting new members and increasing participation in the union.

7.1 RECOGNITION

Effective negotiations cannot take place unless the union is recognised for collective bargaining purposes. A recognition agreement establishes procedures for negotiations between management and the union, and facilities (such as time off) available to the union. It also determines what issues the management must talk to the trade unions about, such as pay and conditions, health and safety, discipline, equal opportunities and training.

The law states that where unions have recognition, the employer must consult on collective redundancies and staff transfers (TUPE), health and safety issues, and bargaining information. Additional consultation rights are provided under the Information and Consultation of Employees (ICE) Regulations 2004.

Under the Employment Relations Act 1999 unions have the right to be recognised for collective bargaining where there is majority support for recognition.

Branches should:

- monitor its membership density with each employer
- annually review with which employers it has, or does not have, a recognition agreement
- attempt to secure recognition where it does not already exist, and strengthen recognition agreements where they are weak.

7.2 NEGOTIATING STRUCTURES AND PROCEDURES

Branches must ensure that there are effective union/management structures in place for negotiation and consultation. These should include:

- a negotiating committee made up of a specified number of seats for management and trade unions, and the constituencies from which they are drawn
- a definition of the scope of the committee's powers, particularly identifying those areas subject to negotiation and those subject to consultation
- rules and procedures for how the committee conducts its business
- mechanisms for consultation with the workforce as a whole, worker involvement and notification of decisions

- provision for working parties and/or sub-committees to deal with specific issues
- a mechanism for dealing with disputes between the union and management
- mechanisms governing the appointment of UNISON representatives involved in negotiations, the facilities they are afforded (eg paid time off for bargaining meetings and consulting members), the limits on discretions delegated to them and their accountability to the branch committee

7.3 PARTICIPATION OF STEWARDS AND MEMBERS

Branches have much to gain from encouraging the widest possible participation in the negotiating process through:

- ensuring that those serving on negotiating bodies consult with and represent all sites and sectors of the workforce, including shift workers and those working part-time
- providing regular reports to members via newsletters, email bulletins, discussions at branch committee and special stewards' meetings
- canvassing of members' views and concerns
- promoting widespread participation in ballots, surveys, etc
- encouraging stewards to attend negotiating skills courses put on by UNISON regions
- helping stewards gain experience by shadowing more experienced negotiators
- circulating bargaining information produced by UNISON
- distributing time off for trade union duties and activities as widely as possible.

All of these measures can increase participation, build confidence and signal to non-members that they need to be in the union.

7.4 CONTRIBUTING TO THE UNION'S NEGOTIATING STRENGTH

When branches negotiate successfully, the benefits go beyond the immediate group of members involved. Good agreements also provide models of best practice that can be used by members in other branches and sectors. UNISON's Bargaining Zone (unison.org.uk/bargaining/index.asp) provides a wealth of support materials and information for branch negotiators.

Branches should:

- ensure that copies of completed agreements are sent (preferably electronically) to their regional organiser.

7.5 INDUSTRIAL ACTION

All outcomes from bargaining should be reported to the membership group. Where further progress through continued negotiation is impossible, and where all stages of the agreed bargaining or disputes procedures are exhausted, the negotiating group should report back to the branch committee to consider what further action to take.

Advice should be taken from the regional organiser at this stage.

UNISON has strict procedures to manage requests for, and the conduct of, industrial action ballots. The Industrial Action Handbook can be ordered from the online catalogue on the UNISON website. Branches may not ballot members outside these procedures.

Branches should:

- ensure any proposal from the employer and union response are reported widely to the members
- ensure all avenues for negotiation with the assistance of regional staff, are exhausted
- consider an “informal” ballot of members to assess the strength of feeling before proceeding with an industrial action ballot request
- ensure any request for an industrial action ballot is first discussed by and endorsed by the branch stewards committee, irrespective of the employment group
- make a written request for an industrial action ballot by writing to the regional secretary, using any procedure determined by the regional committee and providing such information as is requested
- ensure the branch committee is able to monitor the progress of any dispute, making such interventions as necessary to secure an offer in settlement
- use the opportunity of any ballot and campaign to recruit new members.

UNISON employs staff, principally at regional offices, to support local organising. Regional staff have a range of responsibilities. They include regional organisers who will support and advise branch officers on branch organisation and development, bargaining with the employer, and representing members in complex and “higher level” hearings.

Other staff providing specialist support to branch officers may include area and local organisers, regional women’s or equalities officers, regional education officers, learning and development officers and RMS support. They are supervised by a regional manager. The most senior manager is the regional secretary who has responsibility for the deployment of regional staff. The best way to ensure regional support to the branch on development or bargaining and campaigning issues, is through the branch plan that arises from the annual assessment process. Separately:

Branch officers must:

- give reasonable notice to staff for requests of assistance, advice and information, and should alert their regional organiser to potential problems
- facilitate the attendance of organising staff at meetings of the branch and branch committee
- ensure there are regular meetings and communication with organising staff to develop strategy, branch organisation, support, encouragement, motivation and expertise
- provide prompt responses to requests for information from staff
- expect a prompt response from organising staff to queries and requests for advice, and regular attendance at branch meetings
- establish a practice of working in partnership with staff
- treat UNISON staff with courtesy and respect, and expect the same in return.

8.1 JOINT BRANCH ASSESSMENTS

Each year branches and regional organisers are obliged to carry out, jointly, an assessment of branch organisation and performance using a standard template of questions. The aim is to strengthen the branch and to assess what support it may need from the region.

The assessment will enable the Branch Committee to prioritise and plan its core activities in the year ahead; to address any shortfalls or difficulties; to budget for planned activity; to agree lead responsibilities within the Branch Committee.

The outcome of the annual assessment should be reported to the Branch AGM together with the action plan for endorsement.

8.2 FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Additional financial support is available to the branch for specific activities.

The Regional Pool is to assist branches with a demonstrable need for additional funding to finance a development programme or actions arising from the annual branch assessment process.

Guidance on the Regional Pool, and an application form can be downloaded from *unison.org.uk/corebranchresources*.

The General Political Fund provides support for campaigning activity that is in line with UNISON's objectives and may be of a political, though not party political, nature. (See section on financial support in 4.4.2 Campaigning, above).

8.3 ORGANISATION, REPRESENTATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Most support to a branch will be through regional organising staff – a regional organiser, area or local organiser. Organisers are expected to ensure that UNISON branches work effectively and to ensure the implementation of UNISON policies and procedures. They work closely with the branch secretary and core branch officers to advise and support branch development, on the issues and actions identified arising from the annual joint assessment (see section 6). Organisers can assist with local bargaining and campaigns, in the context of the branch's plan. They will advise the branch secretary and stewards on casework issues and will represent members directly on cases referred to the regional office by the branch secretary, using a case form.

Organisers are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that branches operate in accordance with UNISON rule and this code.

8.4 MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

UNISON's primary function lays in building workplace organisation, empowering members, and supporting them on issues of workplace protection and representation. But UNISON also provides a wide range of membership services designed to help with recruitment and retention by offering added value to membership. By using the services available, members can make sufficient savings on the purchase of products and services to actually cover the cost of their annual union subscription. The products and services are those that almost everyone uses and include mortgages, insurance, financial services, and holidays and travel.

The companies supplying the services support UNISON's campaigning activities and welcome the opportunity to be involved in, and support, branch recruitment days and other activities. As well as providing discounts and increased benefits for UNISON members, the companies who provide these services will have demonstrated to UNISON proven high standards of customer service and good employment practises for their own staff.

8.5 THERE FOR YOU

UNISON's charity, There for You, provides a unique confidential advice and support service to members and their families including: debt advice and support, financial assistance, family holidays and get-well breaks. The service comes free with membership and is another incentive for joining UNISON that branches can use in their recruitment work.

8.6 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

UNISON branches have a key role to play in ensuring that branch officers (stewards, health and safety representatives, secretary, chair, treasurer, etc) are provided with and undertake appropriate training. All representatives have a right to expect that the union will provide them with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to do an effective job; and members have the right to expect that those working on their behalf are trained. Branches should ensure that information on relevant courses and workshops is readily and regularly available.

Branches should appoint a branch education coordinator whose job would include ensuring that all branch officers are trained. By arrangement with the regional organiser or regional education officer, training can be provided either solely to your branch or together with other branch representatives.

Regional staff will also support the development of lifelong learning opportunities for members in the branch.

(See also section 10 of the code).

8.7 WOMEN'S ORGANISATION

Achieving proportionality and fair representation

Although the majority of UNISON members and employees in the workforce are women, women are often under-represented in our structures. There are many social, cultural and economic reasons for this, but UNISON is committed to encouraging and assisting women's development to ensure that UNISON's leadership reflects the proportion of women in membership.

Black, disabled, LGBT and young members also experience disadvantage in the workplace and UNISON is similarly committed to ensuring that they are fairly represented in the structures.

Section 11.2.7 of this code deals in detail with self organisation and section 4.3 details measures to improve under- representation.

Some regional organisers are designated women's officer or equalities officer. These officers work with regional and branch self organised groups providing a range of advice, support and training on equality issues, including participation in SOG conferences and regional SOG groups.

8.8 SELF-ORGANISATION

Regional self-organised groups can provide direct support and assistance to branches and to individual members.

Where branches do not have the benefit of active self-organisation at branch or joint-branch level, members should be encouraged and supported to be actively involved with appropriate regional groups.

See also: section 3 Participation; section 4.3 Fair Representation and Proportionality; section 11.2.6 Self Organisation.

8.9 UNISONDIRECT

UNISONdirect provides a confidential FREEPHONE information service on 0800 0 857 857. Branches should ensure that all their members are made aware of this number. UNISONdirect can be contacted by telephone or email.

0800 0 857 857

direct@unison.co.uk

Text phone users have a separate number 0800 0 967 968

Telephone calls are answered Monday to Friday and on Saturdays from 9am to 4pm. Outside these times, callers can leave an answerphone message and UNISONdirect will call them back. Email queries are normally responded to within three hours on weekdays.

UNISONdirect is able to process straightforward queries on a range of issues including:

- joining the union
- information about UNISON, including membership services
- change of address or other RMS details
- accessing advice on personal injury, illness or accident.

In addition UNISONdirect is able to provide members and stewards with a wide range of UNISON factsheets and booklets on issues such as:

- health and safety
- equalities
- pensions
- employment rights
- professional issues.

If more detailed information is required than provided in UNISON documents, then UNISONdirect will seek to obtain the information or put the caller in touch with an expert in that area.

Branches can use the UNISONdirect number:

- On recruitment materials
- As a fallback contact number for use on branch answering machines or
- On branch publicity materials.

Where members contact UNISONdirect with workplace issues, the contact centre will refer details to the branch, using the branch's preferred method of communication (e.g. email to branch office, branch secretary mobile number, steward's work number, etc).

UNISONdirect is also used by the union centrally to gather information directly from stewards and branches on issues such as training and support.

Health and safety is a key organising issue for UNISON. Ensuring that employment does not cause ill health, injury or even death, is very important to our members.

In order to ensure that we can meet this challenge, UNISON branches need to establish a network of health and safety representatives in the branch. Where UNISON is recognised by an employer the union has the right to appoint safety representatives under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (SRSC Regulations) and the Safety Committees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1979 (available from the Health and Safety Executive hse.gov.uk).

9.1 THE ROLE OF HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES

Detailed information about the role of the health and safety representative can be found in the UNISON Health and Safety Representatives Guide (unison.org.uk/acrobat/13605.pdf and stock number 1684). Branches should also refer to the branch toolkit module, Organising for Health and Safety.

The role of the health and safety representative may be fulfilled in one of two ways:

- by stewards acting in a dual capacity
- by members who have an interest in health and safety elected to the role.

Where health and safety representatives are not also stewards, branches should ensure that those health and safety representatives are:

- accountable within branch arrangements to those they represent
- have access to local negotiations so that the health and safety implications of any decision are properly considered at an early stage
- trained in dealing with management and members
- valued equally with stewards and other representatives within the branch, and included in the branch committee
- encouraged to work with stewards, branch officers and members.

All safety representatives require regular information on health and safety issues, training, and support from the branch and regional office. Employers and the regional office must be notified in writing of the names of elected health and safety representatives, and of stewards who are also safety representatives.

Branches must:

- notify regional office of all newly elected safety representatives
- arrange for safety representatives to meet together with the branch health and safety officer, and to inform other meetings within the branch and other branch officers and representatives
- establish procedures for raising issues with management
- provide access to appropriate training
- allocate branch resources to the branch health and safety officer and to safety representatives.

Developing and supporting workplace representatives is a crucial role for all UNISON branches. UNISON values the contribution of every workplace representative and is committed to providing development opportunities to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively, including providing them with a named contact to point them in the right direction and support their development. Training is not only essential to enable representatives to do an effective job – it is also a requirement for the legal accreditation of stewards, health and safety reps and learning reps.

Branches benefit greatly from active engagement in learning and education. Attending training provides a great opportunity for sharing ideas and is a morale boost for activists, who bring back new ideas, practical problem-solving techniques and planning tools that can benefit the whole branch. There is much evidence that engagement in lifelong learning also gives a real boost to branch organisation, offering as it does the opportunity to recruit new members and activists from traditionally under-represented groups including women, part time workers and low paid workers.

Accordingly, branches should make adequate financial provision to ensure the training of all of its representatives.

Publicising courses

Branches should ensure that information on relevant courses and learning opportunities is readily and regularly available to activists, potential activists and members. U-Train – UNISON's guide to training and development is available on the UNISON website.

10.1 DEVELOPING AND SUPPORTING WORKPLACE REPRESENTATIVES

Guidance on supporting reps is available for branches in 'Developing and Supporting Workplace Representatives: a guide for branches'.

Branch Leadership

Branch secretaries and key branch officers should be trained for their roles. UNISON has a programme of training available for Branch Secretaries and other Branch Officers aimed at developing local leadership skills and ensuring the branch is efficient and effective.

Records and systems

Make sure you have an accurate and up-to-date record of all your workplace representatives, including stewards, contacts, health and safety, learning and equality reps, and the training they have completed.

Joint branch and regional assessment

Work with your regional organiser to complete your annual assessment and put steps in place to carry out the follow up activity. This will address some of the key building blocks to supporting and developing activists.

Branch education co-ordinator

The role of branch education co-ordinator is a crucial one. If there isn't one in your branch, encouraging someone to take on this role is an essential first step.

Trained and Active Plan

Make sure each workplace representative has a Trained and Active Plan in place and that this is followed up.

Practical tasks

Identify practical tasks reps can get involved in, and ask for their help. Encourage new representatives to shadow more experienced reps.

Support for new reps

Make sure that each new rep has a 'named contact', a buddy or mentor who will have a chat with them regularly to find out what training and support they may need and to catch up on how their role is progressing.

Regular catch-ups with existing reps

Arrange for regular catch-ups with existing workplace reps over a period of time, especially where they have not been active in the past or have recently completed training courses. Over time, aim to ensure that all reps in the branch have the opportunity for a twice yearly catch-up with a named contact, which could be the branch education co-ordinator or a trained mentor.

Branch funding for education

UNISON branches are expected to contribute money to help fund education activity. Training is a very effective way of encouraging potential activists to become more involved, so branch training budgets should also include financial support for initiatives to develop new activists, such as the Pathways course aimed at potential women activists.

10.2 SUPPORT FOR ACTIVIST EDUCATION

In the region:

- each UNISON region has at least one regional education officer (REO) and an education and training committee of lay members which oversees a regional programme of training for activists and members on a wide range of issues, including stewards training, organising and branch officer training courses
- some courses are aimed specifically at women and new members who are interested in getting more involved, and regions also organise training in conjunction with regional self-organised groups
- all UNISON activist courses are free to members, and they are friendly and informal. Training involves practical activities and working with groups of other UNISON members and activists

- some courses offer optional education credits via the Open College Network which are accepted as being equivalent to NVQs, GCSEs or A levels
- stewards, health and safety representatives, and learning representatives have the right to paid time off for training in their union duties in most workplaces
- organising staff are often able to offer branch-based training where there is a demand for it, including delivering stewards training and branch organising and development planning sessions (see section 6)
- regions offer stage 1 tutor training to activists interested in developing their tutoring skills. Lay tutors can help in a branch by facilitating members' meetings and running discussions
- the REO can also provide help and advice about accessing relevant TUC courses.

National courses

Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) runs a programme of national courses to complement regional provision which include law courses, women's development and second stage lay tutor courses. Courses aimed at national committee members, national service and self organised groups and for members in the voluntary and private sector are also developed and delivered by LAOS.

Lifelong learning in the UNISON branch

UNISON's Open College offers a comprehensive programme of learning opportunities including career development courses and its Learning at Work programme aimed at non-traditional learners. There are many things branches can do to promote these learning opportunities and maximise the opportunity to recruit and organise around them:

- encourage interested members to train as UNISON learning representatives (See Section 11.3). These roles are often attractive to members who have had a positive experience of learning and want to spread the word, but who may not have had involvement in the branch before
- once you have recruited some learning representatives, set up a **branch education team**. Led by the elected branch education co-ordinator, the team can co-ordinate learning activity and ensure that the branch is able effectively to recruit and organise around learning initiatives
- raise the issue of **workplace learning partnerships** with employers. Many learning partnerships have been drawn up with employers in which UNISON, through its partners the Workers Education Association, provides training, with the employer offering time off or paid time to attend training and other facilities such as access to training rooms. Partnerships should also include recognition of statutory rights for learning representatives and commitments to access to learning for all. See also Organising for Learning Branch toolkit.

10.3 SUPPORT AROUND THE LEARNING AGENDA

Thanks to funding from the Union Learning Fund, UNISON provides a lot of support to branches in their efforts to develop opportunities around learning:

- in the English regions there are specialist staff, regional learning and development organisers, whose role is to develop learning representatives in branches
- in every region the REO can provide advice and information on learning opportunities
- organising staff can provide help and advice on negotiating learning agreements. See Branch Guide to Lifelong Learning
- the UNISON Learning at Work programme, provided by the Workers Education Association, is provided free of charge to UNISON members
- regional networks of learning representatives are supported by the learning and development organiser and REO
- the Learning and Organising section of the UNISON website provides examples of learning agreements
- the UNISON website provides a discussion forum for all learning representatives.

11 Branch rules, structures and officers

11.1 BRANCH RULES

Branches are constitutional bodies established under UNISON rule. They are also required to have rules.

Branches are given flexibility to develop appropriate structures and ways of working in order to respond to the specific needs of members in different employment groups, as well as local organisational needs. However this flexibility is within the parameters of core branch rules laid down by the National Executive Committee. These core branch rules are contained as an appendix to this code for ease of reference.

Every branch must adopt a set of rules based upon the core branch rules. This is a job for the branch committee. A branch's proposed rules, or any change to its existing rules must be approved by a general meeting of the branch and then by the regional committee (or relevant sub-committee).

11.2 BRANCH STRUCTURES

UNISON branches vary considerably in their size and composition. However, all branches must be established and organised within agreed principles and procedures managed by the regional committees and the National Executive Committee. This section of the code gives guidance on the internal structure of branches and which groups of members branches are asked to organise. Branches should, however, note sections 3.3 and 12.6 outlining the advantages and opportunities offered by technologies that can maximise member participation, afford ease of access to information by members and ease of communication with members – the virtual branch.

11.2.1 BRANCH BOUNDARIES, RESTRUCTURING AND THE CREATION OF NEW BRANCHES

Branches are established in accordance with a scheme approved by the National Executive Committee, as laid down by rule G.1.2. The Scheme Governing the Establishment and Restructuring of UNISON Branches determines the principle by which branches are established and members allocated to them. In order that UNISON can continue to provide structures relevant to the work environment and employment structure of our members and potential members, this scheme also addresses how new branches might be established and existing branches closed or "restructured".

Under the scheme, regions, together with branches, are required to monitor and review the effectiveness of existing branch structures in the context of the Framework for Joint Branch/Region Assessments within the region. The process for considering and implementing change is laid down in the scheme. Change can be initiated by a branch or by a group of members; or at the request of the regional committee, the relevant sub-committee, an appropriate regional service group or by the regional secretary.

11.2.2 BRANCH INTERNAL STRUCTURES

Some elements of a branch's internal structure are for its members to determine; others are determined under UNISON rule. The regional committee has the responsibility to sanction a branch's constitutions and rules – branches cannot amend their constitution and rules without first gaining the agreement of their regional committee. All decisions about a branch's internal structure are governed by the need to ensure that it is designed to achieve those aims set out in the Standard for Branch Organisation in section 1.5 of this code, and in particular high levels of membership participation, leadership, effective decision making, membership growth, support to members and the accountability of its officers to its members.

11.2.2.1 SIMPLE BRANCH STRUCTURE

Rule G requires that each branch must hold general meetings for all members, one of which should be an annual general meeting, and that it should be managed by a branch committee (see section 11.2.4). For a small branch whose members are based at one workplace, and which can accommodate all its representatives on the branch committee, this may suffice.

The branch should hold sufficient general meetings to ensure that members can participate and the branch committee, comprising all the branch's representatives/officers, should meet as often as necessary to administer the business of the branch.

Even small branches should have regard to the guidance in this code about the conduct of general meetings (see section 3.2) and the need to ensure branch committee meetings are well structured to ensure the active participation of all officers.

11.2.2.2 MULTI-EMPLOYER BRANCH STRUCTURE

Larger branches and branches representing members from more than one employer should establish a sectional structure that will ensure, on common issues, the equal participation of members or their representatives irrespective of which employer, section or department they come from. At the same time an effective branch will be one that seeks to organise at the level of the workplace or bargaining unit, devolving power and responsibility to stewards and convenors for day-to-day industrial matters within a framework agreed by the branch.

Each section of the branch should have its own sectional committee with rights to send representatives and motions to the core branch committee. Branch committee rules should determine levels of autonomy – especially where the sections represent different employers. For example, in a multi-employer branch conditions of service matters may be devolved to each employer-level section, whilst the branch committee would retain responsibility for the organising and campaigning agenda, for resourcing its sections and for managing disputes arising with any constituent employer. In such cases care must be taken to ensure that the branch committee retains those responsibilities that lay with it under rule or specific procedures, whilst devolving resources and limited autonomy to empower sections to organise their membership.

Branches whose membership covers more than one service group should have particular

regard to ensuring that devolved structures allow members to participate in their own service group structures; that service group policy and the election of representatives is determined only by members in that group. The branch should ensure that non-service group specific, like non-section specific, issues are brought to the branch committee for determination.

Branches seeking to adopt a more complex structure should have care not to create a structure that overburdens activists with attending meetings at the expense of activity.

11.2.3 SUPPORTING NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL AND SECTOR GROUPS

In some cases, where there is no national or union-wide branch, the employer of members in the branch may cover an area outside the normal geographical boundary of the branch or even the region. UNISON organises occupational groups and sector groups to focus on the specific professional and bargaining interests of members. Such groups may have formal structures but will also have informal networks.

In these cases, branches should:

- devolve resources to elected representatives from the membership group, to recruit and to organise, to negotiate with the employer, to be involved in cross-branch networks and to represent members in accordance with UNISON's procedures
- devolve to the membership group responsibility for determining policy in relation to the particular employer
- ensure UNISON representatives are trained for the tasks required of them
- provide advice and support when needed
- understand that innovative ways need to be found to provide and encourage opportunities for members to participate on an equal footing with others.

11.2.3.1 RESOURCE CENTRES

A more structured approach to joint branch working can come through a resource centre enabling a group of branches to “pool” some of their functions, for example branch administration. Given the primacy for UNISON activists of building organisation and representing members in casework or bargaining and the evident difficulties in securing adequate facility time to carry out all branch functions, a resource centre can offer the opportunity for busy activists in a branch to “divest” themselves of the essential administrative functions of a branch whilst maximising opportunities to campaign on cross-branch or community issues.

How a resource centre is organised and funded, the extent of joint branch provision it provides and how its functions are made accountable are for the branches involved to decide, although the constitutional arrangements must be endorsed by the regional committee.

Functions that a resource centre can provide include:

- administration, for example:
 - printing
 - RMS operations
 - accounting functions
 - coordinating branch meeting agendas
 - meeting facilities
 - coordinating delivery of activist education and support
- recruitment and organising, for example:
 - cross branch recruitment campaigns
 - employment of organisers for small employers where there are few activists and facility time is scarce
 - newsletter production distribution
- campaigning support, for example:
 - managing communications
 - media releases
 - organising and leading UNISON input to community campaigns.

Advice on developing a resource centre, help in coordinating with potential partner branches and constitutional and funding arrangements including possible additional financial support can be obtained through the regional secretary.

11.2.4 THE BRANCH COMMITTEE

The branch committee (rule G.2) should be the centre and driving force of the branch. It is responsible for:

- building UNISON strength and influence through developing and implementing the branch's development and organising plan
- ensuring the effective representation of members
- coordinating local negotiation and determining the branch's bargaining strategy
- sustaining effective working relationships with employers
- ensuring that the branch conducts itself according to UNISON rule, this code and in accordance with UNISON policies and procedures
- ensuring that the branch officers properly exercise their functions and ensure they have the training and assistance to do so
- maintaining an accurate record of membership

- ensuring that the branch carries out its representative functions by sending delegates to national and regional policy making bodies
- ensuring that the branch works in partnership with UNISON staff and other structures within the union.

It follows that the branch committee is responsible for approving an annual budget to ensure that all planned activities and objectives are resourced (*see also Section 12.2.5 – Budget*). The branch committee should routinely monitor and review the budget, taking corrective action where necessary. The prior approval of the branch committee should be required for any item of branch expenditure, other than for minor administrative expenditure, or where the branch committee has devolved budgets to sections or allocated certain budgets to particular officers or groups of officers.

General Branch Officers shall be the Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, Education Co-ordinator, Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator, Equality Co-ordinator(s), Health & Safety Officer, Communications Officer, International Officer, Membership Officer, Young Members' Officer, Welfare Officer and such other officers as approved by the Branch.

The branch committee should meet monthly with a quorum of at least one third of its membership, providing that the attendance broadly reflects the requirements of proportionality and fair representation within the branch. For example, a branch committee comprising six men and 14 women should not consider a meeting of the six men to be properly quorate.

Where possible, agreement should be reached by consensus; otherwise decisions will be made by a show of hands with a simple majority of those voting, unless otherwise agreed. A written record of decisions taken at all meetings must be kept.

Branch committees should meet at times and venues to suit the majority of members. Some branch committee members will have difficulty attending due to work patterns or domestic arrangements. In these circumstances meeting times and venues should be varied to enable as many members to attend as regularly as possible. In addition, special efforts should be made to ensure that they are kept involved in the work of the committee even though they are unable to attend regularly.

Meetings should be organised to reflect the decision making requirements of the branch and, where possible, structured around the actions to help implement the branch's organisation plan.

11.2.5 BRANCH MANAGEMENT GROUP

The democratic structure for all branches rests on its general meetings (whether formal or virtual) and its branch committee. The responsibilities of the branch committee are set out in rule and cannot be delegated except where sector committees are established.

The officers of the branch are accountable to the branch committee and to the general meeting. For practical purposes, to ensure the business of the branch is properly conducted between meetings, and to share workloads, a branch may wish to establish a branch management group involving its senior officers, for example the secretary, chair, vice chair and treasurer. A branch management group can only make operational decisions within the confines of established branch policy.

11.2.6 THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Each branch is required to hold an annual general meeting (rule G.3) in the January – March quarter and to which all members should be invited to attend. Branches covering a large geographical area, whose members work a variety of shifts, which represent several employers or which have a membership base too large to be realistically accommodated at one meeting, should hold “aggregate” meetings – a series of meetings, each with the same agenda so as to facilitate attendance from all sections of the membership.

Branch rules should determine a quorum for its general meetings at a level that enables business to be done whilst providing for meaningful democracy. A quorum should not be set so low as to allow a small group to take over the affairs of the branch. Branches should seek guidance from their regional secretary on an appropriate quorum suitable for the circumstances of their branch.

All branch officers and the regional organiser should be encouraged to attend. A handy guide to AGM's is available in Appendix A1 of this Code.

The purpose of the annual general meeting is to bring the branch committee and its officers to account:

- to report on the branch's finances
- to report on the branch's activity during the past year and the implementation of the actions agreed arising from the previous year's annual assessment
- to receive a report on the annual assessment and the branch committee's plan to meet the actions required during the following year
- to elect, or confirm the election if these took place by ballot, of branch officers for the coming year
- to elect or confirm the election of branch representatives to external bodies and to other levels of the union
- to seek approval for any proposed honoraria payments to be made (see section 12.3.2)

In the event of an inquorate annual general meeting, certain decisions cannot be taken and

must stand deferred until they can be approved at a quorate meeting. Where the meeting fails to reach its quorum, the branch officers should consider what measures can be taken to ensure a higher attendance at an alternative meeting, or whether aggregate meetings or ballots should be held.

Where the meeting is inquorate, the circumstances should be reported immediately to the regional organiser (for attention of the regional convenor and secretary).

In the event of an inquorate meeting, there are certain actions the branch will not be able to take. These include:

- electing officers, unless the elections were carried out by ballot in accordance with guidance in this Code. Where the election would have been carried out at the meeting, current officers should remain in post pending the decision of the reconvened meeting provided the region has been notified as above
- endorsing motions for submission to UNISON Conferences (in which case such matters may be referred to a quorate meeting of the branch committee)
- the appointment of delegates
- making policy decisions
- approving the payment of any honoraria (**Note.** the regional committee has the discretion to make a determination on behalf of the branch in these circumstances (see guidance on honoraria payments – section 12.3.2).

11.2.7 SELF-ORGANISATION

A key part of UNISON's approach to achieving equality is the organisation of groups of members who face prejudice and discrimination. UNISON has four self-organised groups – for women members, Black members, disabled members and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members.

Because prejudice and discrimination are deep-rooted in our society, these groups of members have traditionally been less visible in trade unions and under-represented in democratic structures. Self-organisation provides a means to address this by encouraging members to become activists. The self-organised groups work in partnership with other parts of the union to identify and promote our equality agenda for negotiating, campaigning and organising. They should be actively involved in their branch's mainstream recruitment, organising and bargaining initiatives.

However, it is important that branches recognise that promoting equality is the responsibility of all, not just the SOG reps or branch equalities co-ordinator.

The NEC has issued further guidance under Rule 4, Self Organised Groups, which is entitled Organising for Equality, stock number 1571.

Branches should encourage the development of self-organisation by:

- promoting self-organised group events and meetings – not just to known members of self-organised groups but to all potential members (effectively all members of the branch) and negotiating release for members to attend these meetings. Members often experience problems in securing paid release for self-organised group meetings, even though they are likely to be discussing terms and conditions. There is detailed advice in the UNISON guide to negotiating time off for trade union duties and activities – Time to Act stock number 2359)
- providing resources and support for the groups, including finance
- exploring and supporting self-organisation as a joint branch initiative where alone the branch has found setting up a group impossible
- ensuring that the self-organised groups are appropriately represented on the branch committee – there is provision UNISON rules D.4.4. and G.2. for the representation of SOG groups and the election of SOG representatives on the branch committee
- notifying the regional office when branch self-organised groups are established, including details of the point of contact
- having reports from the self-organised groups, including updates on the work programme and levels of participation, on branch committee and AGM agendas
- encouraging members to participate in branch, regional and national self-organised group meetings and conferences. This does not mean that everyone who wants to go to a national conference can go – it is reasonable for branches to set limits on numbers, but opportunities should be publicised widely and in good time. There is further information on participation in National SOG conferences in the Organising for Equality guidance.
- Being clear about the role and responsibilities of any SOG group reps and activists– a job description “menu” is included in the Organising for Equality guidelines.

It is important to remember that self-organised groups are a part of the branch, not separate from it. It is essential that there is a good flow of information between the groups and the branch committee and that initiatives complement and feed into each other. UNISON's objectives and priorities should be central to the groups' work, in the same way as for all other UNISON structures, with organising and recruitment key elements of any work programme.

UNISON's rules include provision for funding for self-organisation – rule D4.4.4 –“ the branch shall give them (SOGs) financial support within the union's guidelines”. However, requests for financial support should be considered by the branch committee in the context of the union's priorities and agreed work programmes. Whilst certain core expenditure would be needed for basic functions, groups may be encouraged by the branch to plan their activity so that the treasurer and branch committee can provide for adequate financial support through the branch's normal annual budget processes.

11.2.8 RETIRED MEMBERS

Retirement should not mark an end to interest in UNISON or collective issues. UNISON campaigns hard on issues like occupational and state pensions and elderly care and seeks to persuade employers to prepare employees for retirement.

Retired members can be a useful pool of volunteers willing to be active to help out on recruitment or administrative work for the branch.

Branches are encouraged to have a retired members' section and to encourage the appointment of a retired members' secretary to organise the group as well as such other retired members' officers as determined by them. Branches should ensure sufficient resources are delegated to the section to support its activity, and all activists should notify the retired members' secretary of members approaching retirement.

Retired members from self organised groups are encouraged to get actively involved in retired members organisation. Retired members can participate in open meetings of branch and regional self organised group, as long as they do not vote on matters relating to the pay and conditions of working members or vote for positions outside retired members organisation. They cannot hold a position on a regional self organised group committee (subject to 11.3.1.1), participate in the business part of a regional self organised group AGM.

11.2.9 LABOUR LINK

It is vital to strengthen connections between UNISON branches and the local Labour party. UNISON members in the branch who pay the Labour Link contribution can form a Labour Link section within the branch.

The Labour Link section can affiliate to the local Labour party and send representatives and motions to party meetings to win support for UNISON's aims. They can also elect a branch UNISON Labour Link officer who can act as the key point of contact to ensure that UNISON members remain informed. The Labour Link officer must also be an individual member of the Labour Party.

UNISON branches with Labour Link members can affiliate via their region to the appropriate constituency Labour Party or district Labour Party. Branches can also elect delegates to represent UNISON in the general management committees of local Labour parties, where policy, campaigning and organisational issues are agreed and where there are important links with local councillors and MPs.

11.3 BRANCH OFFICERS

11.3.1 GENERAL

The UNISON rule book requires that each branch shall elect, annually, the following core branch officers:

- branch chairperson
- branch secretary
- treasurer
- education co-ordinator
- lifelong learning co-ordinator
- equality co-ordinator
- health and safety officer
- communications officer
- membership officer
- international officer
- young members officer
- welfare officer
- Labour Link officer (elected by APF payers).

Branches are also entitled to elect other branch officers to assist with the work of the branch in accordance with the rules. This may include a branch women's officer, Black members' officer, LGBT officer, disabled members' officer. Branches may also wish to create branch officer posts to lead on recruitment, publicity, and/or social activities. Such positions may be directly elected or filled through a process of delegation and work-sharing within the branch committee. To support a sectional structure, branches may appoint "senior" stewards or "convenors" to lead organisation and bargaining at the level of each bargaining unit.

Each branch officer post may be shared between two or more members, subject to the approval of the branch. Branches are required to give serious consideration to making use of this facility as an effective means of sharing the workload and involving more members in the work of the branch.

Note. No one person can hold the positions of both Branch Secretary and Branch Treasurer at the same time (Rule G 4.1.6). This is to ensure probity and accountability, and a separation between the officer advising on action and the officer responsible for funding it. If this presents a problem for the branch (for example there is no-one nominated at the AGM or a postholder stands down mid-term, you can seek permission for temporary arrangements by writing to your regional secretary who will seek to assist the branch before referring any request to the General Secretary for consideration by the Development & Organisation Committee of the National Executive Council.

All of the above branch officer posts will be elected annually by individual ballot of members, at or in advance of the annual branch meeting. The election process must be detailed within branch rules.

In either case, all members of the branch should receive an invitation to nominate and notice of the election in time to participate fully. A suggested timetable for ballots is given in section 11.4 below.

Any member of the branch who has been a member for at least 13 weeks and is not in arrears with their subscriptions is entitled to be nominated for election to any of the branch offices. Any nomination must be supported by at least two members of the branch.

11.3.1.1 RETIRED MEMBERS AS BRANCH OFFICERS

The retired members in the branch have the right to elect a retired members' secretary (rule D6.3) annually. The secretary may attend and speak at normal meetings of the branch committee and can vote on any issue other than those which are concerned with the pay and conditions of work.

It is important that UNISON remains a vibrant union by encouraging new members to become active in all aspects of the union – bringing a fresh perspective and approach. UNISON rule prohibits retired members from standing for office other than in exceptional circumstances, and so officers who retire from work are expected to stand down immediately.

At the same time it is recognised that retired members take with them a great deal of valuable experience and sometimes have time to assist the branch in other ways – for example as recruiters or helping with administrative tasks. A member taking early retirement on grounds of disability may wish to continue to make a valuable contribution within a branch or regional disabled members group, as a member of the National Disabled Members Committee or as a delegate to the National Disabled Members Conference.

Where a branch has a special reason why a particular retired member might be allowed to stand for office, or continue in office following retirement, reference should be made to the Protocol on Retired Members Seeking Permission from the NEC to Hold Office at the earliest opportunity.

Where a disabled member wishes to hold office following retirement within disabled members self-organisation (as described above), the member may make application to do so by reference to the Protocol on “Early Retired” Disabled Members Applying to the NEC Under Rule C2.6.2.

In all cases, where branch officers are nearing retirement the branch committee should consider “succession planning” – what can be done to identify and encourage individuals to come forward and stand for election, to assist their development needs and to ensure a managed handover of responsibilities from the outgoing branch officer to the new.

11.3.1.2 FUNCTIONS OF BRANCH OFFICERS

A number of functions are defined within the rule book as the responsibility of specific branch officers. However these tend to be general statements covering overall responsibility for the proper running of the branch, each of which entails a large number of tasks.

In order that branches may make best use of the rule enabling branch officer posts to be shared, responsibilities of the core branch officer posts are detailed below. 'Responsibility for a task' does not necessarily mean 'doing the task'. All branch officer posts can be split into a number of tasks and functions that can be shared by more than one person.

It is important that branch committees evaluate the time demands on each post and seek to negotiate adequate facility time with the employer to allow the bulk of trades union duties to be carried out in paid time and at no loss to the officer (see Time to Act references in 11.2.6 above).

Branch committees may also wish to distinguish between those tasks and responsibilities that must be underpinned by elective authority, and those which do not and which could be delegated to branch employed staff or volunteers (see Section 12).

Most of the members who have become active within UNISON started by doing a little. Branches should seek out and encourage members who are prepared to contribute to UNISON in any way at all. Some will go on to become stewards, health and safety representatives or branch officers, but everyone that helps makes a significant contribution to developing UNISON as a dynamic, vibrant trade union.

Note: for some posts (eg retired members secretary, young members' officer, auditor) there are specific requirements or restrictions that determine who can stand for office in these posts.

11.3.2 CHAIRPERSON

Tasks relating to the office of branch chairperson

- to preside at all meetings of the branch and branch committee in accordance with the guidance given in Section 3.2
- to agree the agenda for meetings with the secretary
- to ensure that business is properly conducted
- to advise the branch officers and branch committee in respect of matters relating to procedure and interpretation of rules
- to ensure that all functions of the branch are carried out
- to work closely with the secretary to provide leadership to the branch.

11.3.3 SECRETARY

The branch secretary (rule G4.2) is responsible for ensuring the proper completion of the

following tasks. It is not expected that, especially in larger branches, the branch secretary will personally undertake all these functions but will act as the strategic lead officer and co-ordinator within the branch. The secretary will encourage partnership working within the branch committee and the development of new representatives, will be the manager of branch staff and will manage the delegation of work to other branch officers and branch staff as appropriate, whilst providing support and guidance.

Tasks relating to the office of branch secretary:

- to guide the branch's development through the preparation and implementation of a branch organisation and development plan
- to ensure the representation of members within the branch in accordance with national guidance (see UNISON guide to representation) and that case forms and applications for services forwarded to UNISON offices are properly completed and authorised
- to provide strategic leadership to the branch committee on implementing campaigning and lobbying activity on branch and wider UNISON objectives, working in liaison especially with the branch Labour Link officer and branch Communications officer
- to convene and attend all meetings of the branch and branch committee.
- to arrange for the minutes of meetings to be kept in a proper manner and circulated to all branch officers and stewards
- to arrange for branch records to be kept in a proper manner
- to ensure the branch, speedily and accurately, processes applications for membership and maintains records in accordance with UNISON's systems
- to ensure regular communication with the members of the branch with news of campaigns, negotiations, issues, branch developments and activities
- to communicate with the union's regional and head offices on behalf of the branch
- to ensure that branch members are aware of opportunities to participate in the activities of the wider union, or within self-organisation if appropriate
- to support, mentor and encourage the stewards in the branch on an individual and collective basis. The branch secretary should seek to meet with each steward on a one-to-one basis, to discuss issues and workplace organisation, on a six-monthly basis
- to ensure that members and stewards are aware, and take advantage, of educational and training opportunities within UNISON
- to ensure that appropriate publicity activities are developed and co-ordinated by the branch
- to act as spokesperson for the branch when in contact with other levels of the union and external organisations
- to ensure that members receive the benefits, rights and services to which they are entitled

- to co-ordinate all branch negotiations and industrial relations matters
- to ensure, in conjunction with the branch committee, that the branch observes the union's rules, supports UNISON campaigns and works towards achieving UNISON's objectives
- to ensure the proper management and direction of any branch employed staff.

11.3.4 TREASURER

Tasks relating to the office of branch treasurer

Refer also to the Branch Finances Handbook.

This is available on the UNISON website – search site for “Branch Finances Handbook”.

- to conduct the branch's financial business
- to be the key signatory authorising any item of branch expenditure
- to keep accounts in accordance with the rules
- to provide reports on the financial position of the branch to the branch committee or branch executive committee
- to provide a detailed financial report for the annual branch meeting(s)
- to advise the branch officers and branch committee in respect of matters relating to financial management and appropriate expenditure
- to provide an audited annual return of branch income.

Note. The same person cannot hold both the positions of Treasurer and Branch Secretary.
(See Section 11.3.1)

11.3.5 EDUCATION CO-ORDINATOR

Tasks relating to the post of branch education co-ordinator:

- to make sure all new stewards and safety representatives receive initial information and guidance about their duties, e.g. stewards handbook, rulebook, service conditions agreements, etc
- to publicise the range of educational and training opportunities available to members and activists
- to get untrained stewards, safety representatives and other branch officers onto appropriate training courses
- to co-ordinate and support the work of learning representatives
- to encourage branch members and activists to make use of the UNISON Open College courses, especially 'Return to Learn' and 'Women, Work and Society'
- to maintain contact with the regional education officer/regional education committee
- to establish a plan of training for activists and to produce an annual budget to meet its costs

- to keep records of what training has been undertaken and by whom within the branch
- to make sure that activists get paid time off for training where appropriate.

11.3.6 LIFELONG LEARNING CO-ORDINATOR

A branch with a number of learning representatives working as a team, led by a co-ordinator, can ensure that learning representatives are accountable and involved in the branch; that learning is high on the branch's agenda and linked into its organising, bargaining and equalities work; and can provide a clear progression route for learning representatives who want to become more involved in other aspects of branch activity.

Tasks relating to the post of branch lifelong learning co-ordinator:

- to work closely with the branch education Co-ordinator (the same person may take on both roles)
- to co-ordinate the activity of learning representatives in the branch education team
- to work with colleagues to recruit new learning representatives
- to be closely involved in negotiating around learning with the employer
- to co-ordinate and disseminate information on learning opportunities in the branch
- to ensure that the work of learning representatives is fully integrated into the branch.

11.3.7 EQUALITY CO-ORDINATOR(S)

All UNISON representatives should promote equality and challenge discrimination in their union role. Equality Co-ordinators, whilst not expected to be an expert on all equality matters, lead and co-ordinate the branch's equality work. The Equality Co-ordinator is not a representative of self-organised groups but is elected by the members at the Annual General meeting. They are however expected to work with representatives of self-organised groups, with equality representatives and all activists. They support the training and development of other union representatives and monitor progress. Branch Equality Co-ordinators should share good practice where there are multiple workplace representatives within branches.

Branches can elect equality representatives for each of their work groups. The role of the equality rep is to promote equality and challenge discrimination in their local area, keeping the Branch Equality Co-ordinator updated on developments.

Key tasks for the Equality Co-ordinator include:

- To be the central liaison point for equality in the branch and to distribute information on equality issues;
- To co-ordinate and support the work of UNISON equality reps at branch level;
- To liaise with and support their branch self organised groups;
- To promote an equality dimension in all the branch's work, including bargaining;

- To advise branch officers and the branch committee on proportionality and fair representation, including in branch elections;
- To act as a mentor or buddy to new equality reps and to help them identify their training needs.

11.3.8 HEALTH AND SAFETY OFFICER

Tasks relating to the post of health and safety officer:

- to increase the awareness of members, health and safety representatives and branch officers of health and safety issues
- to organise the information held by the branch on health and safety
- to co-ordinate the activity of health and safety representatives and to organise regular meetings of health & safety representatives to exchange information and consider priorities
- to be closely involved in all negotiations with the employer on matters related to health and safety
- to advise the branch committee on health and safety issues arising in the branch and to recommend policies and priorities
- to act as a link between the health and safety representatives and other branch representatives to ensure that health and safety issues are treated as an integral part of the work of the branch
- to maintain contact with the region and regional service groups, for example via the regional health and safety committee.

11.3.9 COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER

Tasks relating to the post of branch communications officer:

- to explain UNISON's policies and to provide the information members need to play an active role in their union
- to assist with efforts to recruit new members
- to help support UNISON's national and regional campaigns
- to help create a positive image for the branch among members, potential members and the public
- to produce news-sheets or bulletins for distribution to branch members.
- to lead on the development of electronic communication with members – email, web, etc
- to routinely and regularly contact convenors and stewards to check for news and to update the branch's website and/or e-bulletins
- to ensure branch communications are in the accessible formats members need – audit for any particular requirements such as large print/Braille etc

- to ensure that nationally and regionally produced publicity and campaign materials are distributed, as appropriate, to stewards and onward to members and non-members
- to monitor local media for stories which affect the branch and take appropriate action
- to help ensure that the branch makes effective contact with the media whenever necessary by:
 - creating and maintaining mailing lists to media outlets and contacts
 - writing press releases
 - ensuring that appropriate individuals within the branch are available for comments, interviews, etc
 - writing 'letters to the editor'.

11.3.10 MEMBERSHIP OFFICER

Tasks relating to the post of membership officer:

- to map the branch's membership in order to identify membership density and steward coverage
- to monitor the branch's recruitment, and also leavers rate
- to work with the branch committee to develop and implement its organisation and development plan
- to make recommendations to the branch committee on recruitment activities, targets, resources, budgets, etc.

11.3.11 INTERNATIONAL OFFICER

Tasks relating to the post of international officer:

- to co-ordinate the branch's work on international relations
- to ensure that branch members are informed of national policy on international matters
- to receive and distribute relevant information
- to encourage members to be aware of the importance of international solidarity issues within the context of the overall work of the union
- to liaise where appropriate with regional international structures and to ensure that the views of the branch on international activities are reported appropriately
- to liaise with other branch officers concerning publicity and education on international issues
- to liaise with the solidarity organisations and campaigns that UNISON is affiliated to
- to encourage members of the branch to take action and participate in international solidarity activities organised nationally or regionally

- to ensure that information on branch activity is shared at regional and national level
- to seek to develop an international perspective among members, stewards and branch officers.

11.3.12 YOUNG MEMBERS' OFFICER

The role of the branch young members' officer is ideal for someone who is interested in becoming more active in the union. The post may be a stepping stone to becoming a steward or taking on wider roles.

Tasks relating to the post of young members' officer:

- to recruit new members and to encourage existing young members to become active in the branch
- to make sure issues of concern to young workers are raised by the branch
- to act as a focal point for all young workers in the branch and workplaces
- to receive and distribute UNISON young members information
- to encourage involvement in UNISON young members campaigns
- to build branch young members organisation and to ensure there are potential new young members' officers in the future.

Other branch officers will assist in these tasks.

Branch young members' officer must be under 27 years of age for the whole of their term of office.

11.3.13 LABOUR LINK OFFICER

The Labour Link officer is elected and accountable to the Labour Link section within the branch and must be an individual member of the Labour Party – this is because the post holder should work to take UNISON policy forward in the party, often being a delegate to the general committee of the party and encouraging joint work and campaigning with the local constituency Labour Party (CLP).

The branch UNISON Labour Link officer is the key contact point for information about regional and national UNISON Labour Link matters and is responsible for co-ordinating our activities in the branch. They also represent the interests of Labour Link levy payers on the UNISON branch committee.

The Labour Link officer will receive support, training and advice on their role and responsibilities from their regional political officer.

Tasks relating to the post of Labour Link officer:

- to explain and develop the role of the UNISON Labour Link within the branch and ensure that correct procedures are followed regarding the rights of Labour Link levy payers

- to receive correspondence and information on Labour Link matters from national and regional levels and from the Labour Party
- to circulate information to Labour Link members in the branch and convene meetings of members as necessary
- to attend the UNISON branch committee and agree appropriate means of promoting UNISON policy in the party
- to organise elections for branch UNISON Labour Link representation within the regional Labour Link as necessary and ensure reports are made by branch delegates on their activities on behalf of members
- to liaise with the Labour Link regional political officer
- to promote political education and policy discussions
- to strengthen links with local Labour Parties by affiliating to constituencies and electing delegates to attend meetings
- to communicate with Labour Party members within the branch and encourage individual membership of the Labour Party
- to build campaigning work around key issues and co-ordinate campaigns with the Labour Party in council, Westminster, Scotland, Wales and European elections.

11.3.14 RETIRED MEMBERS' SECRETARY

The role of the retired members' secretary (rule D6.2) is to enable retired members of the branch to continue to be active in the union through the branch's retired members' section.

Tasks relating to the post of retired members' secretary:

- to ensure that those members approaching retirement have the opportunity to become retired members
- to organise meetings of the branch retired members
- to encourage the participation of retired members in branch activities as appropriate
- to establish links with other retirement organisations in the area
- to attend meetings of the branch committee (rule D6.5)
- to submit a budget to the branch committee to fund retired member activities
- to ensure that the retired members' section functions in accordance with UNISON Rule and any branch standing orders and procedures.

To be a branch retired members' secretary, you must be eligible for retired membership under Rule C2.6.1.

11.3.15 WELFARE OFFICER

Tasks relating to the post of branch welfare officer (*unison.org.uk/welfare*):

- to ensure that branch officers, stewards and workplace representatives, and also employers, have regular up-to date-information about UNISON Welfare and its range of services
- to ensure that members seeking welfare assistance receive a prompt, supportive and effective response
- to liaise and co-ordinate with regional and national levels to ensure that UNISON Welfare support is provided effectively
- to undertake training and seek advice from UNISON Welfare where necessary
- to develop and implement local welfare activity
- to develop links with local charities and sources of support such as Citizen's Advice Bureau and women's refuges.

11.3.16 AUDITOR

The role of the auditor is to act on behalf of the branch's members to ensure probity and that all branch expenditure is underpinned by democratic decisions made in accordance with UNISON rule. A candidate for the post of auditor cannot be a member of the branch committee.

Tasks Relating to the post of branch auditor:

- to oversee the financial records of the branch
- to undertake an annual audit of the branch financial records
- to provide a written report of the annual audit to the annual general meeting
- to report any financial irregularities to UNISON's internal audit department.

11.3.17 STEWARDS

The UNISON steward is the fundamental building block of workplace organisation. UNISON is committed to identifying, supporting and training as many members as possible to take on the role of steward or workplace contact.

Stewards might be active in different ways and to different degrees depending on their willingness and experience ranging from high-level negotiators to local contacts in the workplace.

Tasks relating to the post of steward (for references to stewards and workplace representatives in the text that follows, see Stewards and Workplace Representatives Handbook:

- to be the first and main point of contact for members with the union

- to recruit new members
- to work with members to establish an organised workplace
- to support and advise members on workplace issues
- to act as a spokesperson for the members they represent and for the branch
- to represent members with the employer, dependent on their experience and confidence
- to represent members within the branch committee
- to be answerable to the members they represent.

11.3.18 WORKPLACE CONTACTS

Members who might not be willing to take on the full role of elected steward can play a vital role in ensuring that UNISON has a presence in every workplace. Not an elected position, it can also prove a useful way for a member to gain experience or build confidence before making a further commitment.

Tasks relating to the post of workplace contact (see also workplace representatives leaflet):

- to be a point of contact between members and the branch
- to recruit new members or introduce new employees to a branch officer
- to give support to members at work by advising them where to seek assistance
- to keep notice boards up to date
- to distribute information sent by the branch for members.

11.3.19 HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES

See section 9.

11.3.20 LEARNING REPRESENTATIVES

Learning representatives (see the Learning Representatives Handbook, stock number 2345) are selected by branches and are volunteers who are willing to encourage and support other colleagues with “learning” in the workplace. The branch is responsible for ratifying their appointment and issuing credentials. Their work should be supported by the branch education co-ordinator and the branch lifelong learning co-ordinator. Learning representatives are accountable to the branch and branches should ensure that there are means by which learning representatives can report on activity and participate in the development of the branch through an education network led by the branch education and lifelong learning coordinators.

Tasks relating to the role of learning representative:

- to raise awareness of lifelong learning issues in the workplace

- to offer support and encouragement to learners
- to encourage learners to get involved in the branch
- to work with the branch to promote workplace learning with employers.

11.3.21 EQUALITY REPRESENTATIVES

Equality reps are elected by their workgroup to provide advice and support on equality and discrimination issues in their area. As workplace reps, equality reps talk to members and managers, tackling unfair treatment and ensuring the law and employer's policies on equality are applied. They may support stewards who are representing members in cases with an equalities aspect. Only reps who are trained and ERA certificated by UNISON should represent members with employers. Equality reps can also advise Branch negotiators on key policy and negotiating issues.

Equality reps liaise with the Branch Equality Co-ordinator who has a branch wide equality role. Equality reps and the Branch equality Co-ordinator all have a valuable role in keeping equalities central to the Branch. Equality reps do not have a statutory right to time off (unless they are also an ERA accredited steward), however some branches have negotiated some paid release to allow equality reps to fulfil their role in the workplace.

Equality representatives are encouraged to attend the UNISON training courses organised by UNISON regions.

Note: UNISON Equality reps and/or the UNISON Branch equality Co-ordinator may also be ERA accredited stewards and so take on case work. If not they can provide support to stewards who are accredited but will not be able to take cases themselves.

11.3.22 CONVENOR (SERVICE CONDITIONS OFFICER)

Larger branches should adopt a sub-structure based on bargaining units (smaller employers, the departments of a large employer) or large workplaces. A convenor should be elected to lead branch organisation at that level. Branch rules should determine whether the convenor should be elected, within the context of normal annual elections, by the members of the particular bargaining unit or by the stewards in that section from amongst their number.

Tasks relating to the role of convenor:

- to coordinate and lead the work of the team of UNISON representatives at the section or unit level within the degree of autonomy determined by the branch rules
- to develop branch organisation and recruitment at the section or unit level
- to negotiate and bargain with the employer
- to support stewards and other representatives in advising and representing members
- to account to the section or unit representatives' group and to the branch committee.

11.4 BRANCH ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY

UNISON, at all levels, is a representative democracy. Members elect other members to represent them both inside the union and outside to employers at local, regional and national level.

Branches must take practical steps to elect representatives in a fair and open way. In line with UNISON's policies on proportionality and fair representation particular attention must be given to ensure that groups of members who are often under-represented in UNISON structures (e.g. women, black members, disabled members and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members) are encouraged to stand for elected positions. Similarly, encouragement must be given to young members to take up roles.

Contested elections in a branch are a sign of an active branch with a healthy democracy and should not be shied away from.

Elections for branch officers, stewards, health and safety representatives and learning representatives should be conducted by secret ballot with the outcome ratified by the branch annual meeting(s). In some cases where a very large proportion of members can and do attend a formal annual general meeting, such elections can be carried out at the meeting. However, to increase participation it may be possible to use a postal ballot, ballot boxes in the workplace or electronic voting, or a combination of these. (*See 11.4.1 for election of workplace representatives.*)

Branches may want to include the election of delegates to national delegate conference and service group conferences, together with representatives to other relevant bodies like regional bodies or the local trades council at the annual meeting.

Branches need to allow plenty of time for elections and the timetable and procedures for branch elections should be included in the branch rules. The process set out below begins about 12 weeks before the branch AGM.

Note *retired members can only vote for positions in the retired members organisation (and also in general secretary elections and political fund ballots). Rule C 2.6.2.*

Branch officers must ensure:

- that all branch posts are subject to annual election
- that all election materials, and any meetings arranged, are accessible
- that consideration is given to the most effective means of communicating and balloting – increasingly opportunities for emailing and e-balloting are becoming available
- that members are able to nominate for all positions knowing what duties may be required of the post
- that an independent scrutineer is appointed to oversee the ballot process
- that members have sufficient information about the candidates to enable them to make an informed choice
- that all candidates have equal facility to canvass support
- that the ballot is conducted in secret

- that all members are equally able to cast their vote
- that the election timetable is sufficient to allow all members equally to participate at all stages
- that the regional office is notified promptly of the elected officials.

An example timetable for branch elections commencing 12 weeks before the AGM date:

Weeks 12/11 Send out nominations forms

Nominations forms should go to all workplaces where the branch has members. The branch may want to do this as a special branch newsletter, email or as a flyer to ensure it reaches as many members as possible. Any notice of elections should include detail to encourage new activists to stand. This could include:

- job descriptions
- an outline of meeting commitments
- any existing time-off arrangements
- an option to stand on a job share basis
- details of training available.

Branches could hold briefing sessions to explain in more detail what opting to stand might entail. Branches should consider how they would make any information relating to elections available in accessible formats e.g. large print. Advice on this should be available from regions.

The election notice should include details of the election procedure whether it will be a postal ballot to all members, a show of hands at the AGM or by ballot paper at the AGM.

Week 11 to Week 8 Nomination period

Any member who has been a member at least 13 weeks and is not arrears with their subscriptions is entitled for nomination to branch office. Members should be able to volunteer for posts.

Week 7 Nominations close

The branch should have a system for acknowledging nominations. Any posts receiving more than one nomination should be identified at this stage. The candidates should be notified. The branch may want to invite those standing in contested elections to prepare a statement of no more than 200 words to explain their position. However, the branch may need to offer assistance with this to less experienced candidates. The branch may wish to extend the nomination period for posts not receiving nominations, particularly key branch officer posts, or the branch may choose to receive nominations at the AGM.

Week 6 Preparation of ballot

Depending on how the branch chooses to hold the election will determine what action the branch takes next. Although a branch can hold elections by a show of hands, participation will

generally be better if a ballot paper is used. If the branch intends to hold a postal ballot of all members a number of tasks will need to be undertaken:

- the branch will need to identify to whom the ballot papers will be returned. This should not be any branch officer who intends to stand in the elections. If the branch has staff it may be appropriate that ballot papers are returned to them. The branch may want to seek assistance from their region or the electoral reform society
- the branch will need to print envelopes for all members. It might be helpful if the branch intends to run a postal ballot that they do some work on data cleansing prior to the ballot
- the return of ballot papers should be at no cost to the member. This can be achieved by a FREEPOST/prepaid envelope, using the internal post system or providing ballot boxes at strategic location.

Week 4 Despatch of ballot papers

In the event of the branch using an all-member postal ballot the ballot papers need to go out four weeks before the AGM.

Week 3

If using a postal ballot this will be the ballot period. Any returned papers should be kept securely. During the ballot period or after nominations close, if elections are taking place at the AGM the branch must not promote one candidate over another and the branch rules should specify this. This is particularly important if one candidate is already in the post. Existing post holders should not use branch facilities or time off arrangements to enhance their campaign if these facilities are not made to other candidates. During this period if the branch is conducting a postal ballot they may wish to hold meetings for candidates to outline why they should be elected; these are traditionally called hustings.

Week 1

Postal ballot closes and votes are counted.

Week 0

Branch AGM. If a full postal ballot has been used the results will be notified at the AGM. If a combination of postal ballot and election at the AGM or election at the AGM alone, ballot papers will need to be distributed and collected. The AGM will need to elect tellers who have no interest in the elections to collect and count the ballot papers. The candidates may be offered the opportunity to address the AGM. If elections are to be held at the annual general meeting the branch should ensure the meeting is as accessible as possible. Accessibility should cover the physical access to the venue, the time at which the meeting is held and provision of a crèche or dependant care payments. Large branches may wish to hold a number of Branch AGMs and aggregate the elections results. The branch will need to ensure that members only vote once.

After the AGM

Notify the members of the branch and the region who has been elected. Ensure that the appropriate accreditation is completed. Ensure training is offered to new activists.

11.4.1 ELECTION OF WORKPLACE REPRESENTATIVES

Stewards and Health & Safety Representatives are specifically representatives of members in a workplace or a particular workgroup. Learning representatives and Equality Representatives may also be appointed to represent specific workplaces or groups..

Every branch must make arrangements on an annual basis (see below), for the nomination and election of workplace representatives within the workplace or group. The result of those elections must then be reported to the Annual General meeting of the Branch for endorsement and ratification.

In many cases it will be sufficient for the branch to notify all members when giving notice of the AGM that all workplace representative positions are open for (re)election. If the branch secretary is unable to visit all workplaces, other stewards can be asked to convene meetings and oversee elections at another's workplace.

At the end of the process, the branch must have evidence not only that a member has volunteered, but also that the member has the endorsement of a majority of other members in the workplace or group concerned.

11.5 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

UNISON holds various elections to union office at national level, including to the National Executive Council, service group executives and the post of general secretary.

UNISON branch funds, property or resources, including IT equipment, cannot be used to support campaigning for any particular prospective or confirmed candidate, except to advise members of a nomination made through the branch's usual channel of communications, for example a newsletter.

Branches must not allow any access, by prospective or confirmed candidates or their supporters to the (UNISON) electoral roll. This means that branch or workplace registers of members cannot be used for election purposes. The register of members will only be used for the official distribution of ballot papers and statements. Unauthorised use of the register of members is not permitted by the Data Protection Act 1998.

Advice on all aspects of UNISON elections is available on UNISON's web-site.

12.1 ADMINISTRATION

Administration is one of the biggest tasks and responsibilities of a UNISON branch. Achieving good administrative systems and practices is key to building good organisation and a dynamic organising union.

Administrative functions can be undertaken by volunteers or staff employed by the branch, in which case the branch Committee should ensure proper arrangements for the management, direction, supervision, training and discipline of volunteers or staff.

Among the most important functions are:

- processing membership applications speedily so that new members join us as soon as possible and subscriptions can be collected
- maintaining accurate membership records – we must know who and where our members are if we want to involve them in our activity
- accrediting newly elected stewards so they can be placed on the national and regional mailing lists and employers notified
- providing proper notice and timetabling for branch meetings and branch elections to encourage maximum participation
- ensuring meetings and documentation meet members' access requirements
- ensuring full representation to regional council, national conferences and other bodies in order to be fully involved in the democratic processes of the union
- maintaining proper financial records to ensure sufficient funds for branch activity
- managing individual and collective casework to ensure that members receive the support that they need, and maintain files confidentially with a central register
- ensuring UNISON circulars and correspondence are speedily referred to the appropriate branch officer(s) or committee
- ensure that the branch annual return or requests for information from the branch are dealt with on time
- ensure the branch operates to a plan based upon achieving UNISON's objectives and priorities.

Timetables and deadlines

Branches are encouraged to establish and publicise annual timetables for branch and regional activities. This will ensure that members are aware of the work of the branch and that deadlines for the submission of nominations etc are not missed. For example:

- delegates and nominations for regional council
- delegates to national conference, service group and other conferences.
- branch financial returns
- branch elections.

12.1.1 ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

Employers are required to provide recognised unions with facilities. For most branches this should include an office and may extend to facilities for individual stewards. Branches of all sizes will require:

- a telephone number and an answer-phone to improve the opportunity for members to contact the branch. Facilities to store casework files and maintain a register of cases in the branch
- stock of application forms and recruitment materials
- a reference point for policy documents, UNISON and bargaining information
- a computer to hold branch records, provide support for the treasurer, access the UNISON website and help to produce the branch newsletter.

12.1.2 DATA PROTECTION

Branches and branch officers must exercise care and respect for all data and files about, or kept on behalf of, a member or potential member. UNISON has a single registration under the Data Protection Act 1998 and so there is no need for branches to register separately. Guidance on complying with the legislation can be found on UNISON's website by typing "privacy policy and data protection" into search site. More detailed guidance is available in your branch. It is very important that branches use this guidance as key reference material – the Information Commissioner has powers to stop UNISON processing information if he/she sees that UNISON is not complying with the Data Protection Act .

Key points for branches to note are:

- member details should only be extracted from RMS/WARMS for a specific purpose. Lists of member details should not be kept once they have been used for a task
- membership records should not be disclosed to third parties
- data on RMS, or data received or obtained for recruitment and organising purposes, must be obtained from a legitimate source and must be kept accurate
- branch computers or files must be secure from unauthorised access
- lists of members' details should always be destroyed securely
- there should be no need to print a member's complete record from RMS
- remember that written or electronic documents containing information or opinions about an individual may be viewed by that individual at some stage under DPA rules
- branches must pass any requests for information under the DPA to the regional office as quickly as possible, and should not send any information to the individual unless requested to do so by the region or Data Protection Officer.

12.1.3 USE OF IT EQUIPMENT PROVIDED FROM BRANCH FUNDS

Computer equipment purchased using UNISON funds are the property of UNISON and should be used only for UNISON purposes and for activities in line with UNISON's rules, aims and policies; this includes political activity where any use is restricted by UNISON's policies and rules relating to its political funds (Rule J). The Computer Misuse Act, 1990 provides a legislative framework within which all branches must work, and makes the following activities illegal : outputting, altering, copying or deleting data or a computer program without the proper authority; downloading pornographic or obscene materials for distribution; gaining unauthorised access to a computer with another person's ID in order to transmit offensive material; deliberately deleting or corrupting programs or data – including the introduction of viruses where these result in modification or destruction of data; unlicensed software and downloading music which breaches copyright. UNISON reserves the right to carry out investigations when any of the above activities are alleged.

Branches and branch officers must ensure that branch officers who are allocated equipment to assist them in their union duties at all times comply with these guidelines and that any such equipment is returned to the branch at the end of their period of office (Rule G.4.2.5).

12.1.4 BRANCH ADDRESS

It may seem an obvious point but every branch must have a clear central point of contact for members and the wider union, both during and, where possible, outside normal working hours. This must include a postal address, telephone and email address. Where the branch has a dedicated office this would be the normal point of contact. Otherwise it would be the contact details for the branch secretary either at home or at work (provided that the workplace is secure for receipt of email and post). Where receiving post at the workplace may not be secure, and the branch secretary prefers not to make public a home address, a post office box number is acceptable linked to the home address.

Under Rule G1.3, the branch must provide to the regional secretary both email and postal addresses for the branch, and ensure the region is notified promptly of any changes.

12.2 BRANCH FINANCE

Commencing 1st January 2014 branches will manage financial matters using the national online branch accounting system (OLBA). This is in accordance with Rule G2.2.8.

Branches shall, from 1st January 2014 develop an annual budget as part of the Joint Branch Assessment process. It is expected that the Branch Treasurer and Branch Secretary will liaise with the appropriate Organiser from Regional office to complete the Joint Branch Assessment – Rule G2.2.9

UNISON has an essential and practical guide to branch finances- the Branch Finances Handbook. The Branch Secretary and Branch Treasurer, in particular, should ensure they are familiar with this handbook and that branch finances are conducted in accordance with the guidance. The

Branch Finances Handbook can be found on the UNISON website – search site for “Branch Resources”. All UNISON representatives and members have a responsibility for honesty and good financial practice to protect themselves and UNISON.

All UNISON branches require clear and straightforward financial procedures that take into account established practices in UNISON.

No branch officer may incur branch expenditure or commit the branch to expenditure without the prior approval of the branch committee. The branch treasurer is responsible for the management of branch expenditure and the implementation of the agreed branch budget.

12.2.1 FINANCIAL YEAR

The UNISON financial year runs from 1 January to 31 December. Branches are required to submit an audited annual return to national office which must arrive on or before 15 March under rule. Branches should also present audited income and expenditure accounts and a balance sheet to their AGM.

If Branches fail to meet the 15 March deadline, they are likely to incur financial penalties and may also forfeit rights to attend national conferences.

12.2.2 SUBSCRIPTION INCOME

Each branch must ensure that all subscription income is forwarded in its entirety to head office or to its regional office. Only income collected from retired members may be retained in the branch.

Branches should collect the full subscription income. The administration of monies associated with opt-outs from political funds should be dealt with centrally.

Branches may have local levies to supplement subscription income. However, these are subject to NEC approval and must comply fully with UNISON rules (rule H6).

12.2.3 LEVIES

Branches should find that normal branch funding is sufficient for normal needs. Increasing membership is the best means to improve branch income, but assistance can also be obtained from the regional pool (see Section 8.1) or by making an application for assistance under section C of the branch funding scheme.

Exceptionally, branches may wish to raise money for a specific project or expenditure. A branch may raise additional income from its members in the form of a levy. Branches will wish to exercise caution when considering this option which could impact on recruitment and the retention of members.

Any consideration by a branch of raising money through a levy must be within the framework, principles and procedures outlined in the NEC’s Protocol on Branch Local Levies.

12.2.4 BRANCH FUNDING

With effect from 1st January 2014 appropriate payments shall be remitted to branches in accordance with a timetable to be published to the branches concerned by the National Executive Council and paid into a current account held in the name of the branch with Unity Trust Bank – Rule H4.2

Branch funding is currently based on a basic 20% of subscription income with additional elements to take into account membership numbers, low subscription income, low reserves, geographical spread and multiple employer situations. Branch funding will, however, be reduced by up to 2.5% where the branch fails to be represented at national delegate conference, service group conference and regional council by at least 50% of its delegate entitlement. These arrangements are described in the branch funding scheme. The information used to determine branch funding is taken from the annual return and failure to complete this will result in restrictions.

Branches may, on application, be granted additional funding where a genuine case can be made and can apply for regional pool and general political fund money as appropriate and as described in section 8.

12.2.5 BUDGET

Branches should prepare and approve a budget for each financial year. It is the job of the Branch Treasurer to prepare the budget, the branch to approve it through the AGM, and for the Branch Committee to monitor its implementation and agree any necessary variance.

The budget should cover all routine expenditure and also those actions agreed by the branch committee arising from the annual joint branch assessment. In particular the budget should be sufficient to fund:

- Recruitment and organising activity
- Activist training
- Expenses incurred by devolved sections to ensure activity in all employers
- Communication with members
- Campaigns and negotiations, both branch led and broader UNISON campaigns
- Ensuring members have access to UNISON's services

Cost heading to be budgeted for may include:

- newsletters
- branch meetings
- devolved sections
- steward and member education
- young members/self organised groups
- office running and property costs

- costs of meeting members' access and facilitation needs
- costs of any branch-employed and -based staff
- legitimate expenses claims from branch officers and honoraria
- annual conferences and regional council
- local campaigns
- affiliations
- retired member activity
- certain representation costs (but not the employment of solicitors).

Each branch committee meeting should receive a financial report from the treasurer which compares the budgeted position to actual expenditure.

12.2.6 LIMITATIONS ON USE OF BRANCH FUNDS

No payments shall be made for political purposes or to political parties from branch funds. Such payments should be dealt with through the affiliated political fund or general political fund, which are managed nationally and regionally.

Branches may affiliate to or make donations to organisations whose objectives are sympathetic to or consistent with those of UNISON. However, before determining any affiliation or donation, branches must have regard to any constraints contained in the NEC's Democracy in UNISON Guidelines.

Branch funds should not be used to make loans to members.

12.2.7 AUDITORS

Branches should appoint two auditors from within the branch to review the financial procedures and to audit the branch's annual accounts and annual return.

Branches are required to control and ensure the safe custody of all assets by maintaining adequate records and, where appropriate, to ensure these against loss or damage.

12.3 EXPENSES

12.3.1 BRANCH OFFICERS' AND STEWARDS' EXPENSES

Expenses covered in this section are those items of expenditure necessarily incurred by an individual branch officer to carry out the routine responsibilities and tasks associated with the role. It may include the cost of travel, postage or telephone costs, subsistence and, in exceptional cases, loss of earnings. The branch committee should agree a scheme so that officers are aware of what expenditure can be reimbursed by the branch and how, and what expenditure requires the prior approval of the branch committee. Receipts for expenditure

incurred should be provided to the branch. Branches should ensure that no officer or steward is debarred or deterred from trade union activity because of financial considerations.

Travel costs should be reimbursed on the basis of public transport costs or an equivalent mileage rate. It is strongly recommended that the rate paid is no more than the NEC mileage rate.

The level of subsistence expenses should be determined by the branch, based on what it can afford. Branches may wish to refer to the NEC rates as a maximum level of payment. Carers and childcare costs should be approved in advance by the branch for specific and known reasons to enable all members to participate in trade union activity; again, reference may be made to the NEC scheme. They should include reasonable expenditure actually incurred in respect of travel, babysitting, care assistance and other reasonably expected costs. Delegates to self-organised group conferences should normally be given the same level of subsistence as branch delegates to other UNISON conferences.

Every endeavour should be made to ensure paid release of activists to attend meetings but where this cannot be achieved advance branch approval should be given to the payment for loss of earnings. Times of meetings should be considered to minimise the need for payment of loss of earnings.

All travel and subsistence rates payable by the branch should be agreed by the annual general meeting and a record of payments made in the previous year should be available for scrutiny.

12.3.2 HONORARIA PAYMENTS

Honoraria are discretionary one-off payments made to elected branch committee members (including branch auditors) to recognise their voluntary work for the branch.

A branch committee must consider honoraria payments as part of their overall financial planning and branch committee proposals on honoraria must not interfere with the ability of the branch to fulfil its day to day functions from funding it receives under national Rule H 4.1.

Branch officers are elected annually. Any discretionary honoraria payments will follow their period of office and cannot be paid in advance whether monthly, quarterly or half-yearly. Honoraria cannot be paid in lieu of expenses.

Honoraria payments to UNISON branch officers are not remuneration for services, but are liable for income tax and Class 1 National Insurance contributions. HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) requires the union to declare all payments in accordance with the agreement reached with HMRC which may exempt honoraria from NI payments.

All honoraria payments made for a period of office beginning on or after 1st January 2009 are subject to the Rules and Procedures agreed by the NEC Finance and Resource Management Committee on 20th November 2013. Full details can be found in the revised Branch Finances Handbook.

Branches and Regions are reminded that failure to implement the changes could place the branch in breach of UNISON Rules and/or HMRC regulations.

12.3.3 FUNDING BRANCH DELEGATES TO CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Branches are responsible for sending delegates to various national conferences and other events. It is important that branches budget for such expenditure and ensure that an equitable approach is taken to meeting costs and expenses. Detailed guidance is available on the types of expenditure that should be regarded as legitimate, how it should be accounted for and how prior administration by branches can avoid the burden of costs falling on delegates.

12.3.4 MEETING MEMBER EXPENSES ARISING FROM FORMAL HEARINGS

UNISON represents members in a range of disciplinary or grievance hearings. Where hearings are held before the employer, legitimate expenses should be met by the employer. However external bodies make no provision to meet legitimate expenses, even when they find no case to answer. These include Employment Tribunals and fitness to practice / misconduct cases before professional registration bodies, such as the Health and Care Professions Council and Nursing and Midwifery Council. We also represent registered professionals at appeals to the Care Standards Tribunals and the High Court, or their equivalent in different UK countries.

During the course of the proceedings, members incur expenses such as travelling to hearings and attending meetings with their representatives - if the case is referred to head office, they are required to travel to meetings in London. Expenses are also incurred in relation to supporting witnesses, including expert witnesses. In many cases, usually by virtue of the allegations, the member is unemployed and unable to meet these expenses.

Branches are required to pay all legitimate expenses incurred by members when they are not reimbursed by the employer or external body, provided UNISON represents them before that body or at an appeal. This does not include legal expenses if the case is outsourced, but it does include the usual expenses that a branch would normally pay for an activist to attend a meeting, such as travel and hotel. Branches are expected to pay these expenses promptly on production of receipts – or in advance in cases of hardship, where the member would otherwise not be able to purchase their fare in advance of a meeting. This applies equally to employed, unemployed and retired members, provided they have paid their subscriptions and UNISON is representing them.

12.4 MEMBERS MOVING BRANCHES

UNISON allocates members to branches according to factors such as their employer, place of work or occupation.

Where any of these factors change for a member it will be necessary to transfer the member between branches. To avoid members lapsing their membership due to a move to a role covered by a new branch, it is important that branches regularly and routinely monitor their membership records against the subscription receipts, and ensure that any members who are not known to have left the union but for whom a subscription payment has not been received are approached accordingly.

Members who have left (or are leaving) to a post covered by a new branch should be given

a new application form, together with a reassurance that they will not be treated as a new member. An advantage of the central membership register is that an existing member can be identified and so avoid duplication.

Both the former branch and new branch have a role to play in ensuring that members are able to continue their membership with the minimum disruption. A member who is changing branch should be assisted to identify the membership number when completing the new form, giving fresh authority for the payment/collection of union subscriptions and their revised details.

Where, through major reorganisation, a group of members will be transferred from one branch to another, the regional office should be notified of the membership details of all of the members covered. All inter-branch transfers are managed by regional RMS staff even where a branch has access to RMS.

12.5 MEMBERS WHO HOLD MORE THAN ONE JOB

A member's subscription banding is based on gross contractual income from employment qualifying for UNISON membership. Where all jobs are with the same employer who deducts subscriptions from salary (docas), the correct banding should be applied routinely. Where more than one employer is involved, separate docas arrangements should operate. Alternatively, arrangements will need to be made directly with the member to ensure that the full subscription is paid and the member is guaranteed support when needed, arising from either job.

If the member's two employments are organised by different branches, the member should be formally allocated to the branch responsible for the primary employer. Both employment details will be recorded on RMS.

In the event of the member needing support for a work-related problem, branches are expected to cooperate and ensure that assistance is provided to the member by the branch appropriate to the job in question.

12.6 THE VIRTUAL BRANCH

Sections 3.3 and 11.2 of this code outline many of the advantages offered to a branch by using modern technologies to increase participation and assist communications within the branch – to members, from members and between members.

An approach based upon "the virtual branch" can also have other benefits for the branch. It can:

- reduce communication costs – for example cut print and postage costs, time spent filling envelopes
- reduce travel costs and time for members, making it easier for them to participate
- cut accommodation costs for meetings
- provide access to information on current or routine issues and reduce time spent by branch office staff or branch officers dealing with these queries
- enhance the IT skills of branch officials

- reduce the administration of branch elections, votes or discussion
- demonstrate to members that UNISON is a modern trades union in touch with its environment
- act as an organising tool.

For more information about developing virtual branch technologies, contact your regional organiser or the communications department at head office.

12.7 BRANCH STAFF

It is open to branches to employ their own staff to undertake administrative duties within a branch. All the costs of employing such staff must be met by the branch from within branch funds.

Employees of the union or employees of a branch are not permitted to be office holders in a branch. (*See Rule C 2.9.2.1.*)

Branches must, prior to employing any such staff, ensure that they have sufficient funding to meet both current and future liabilities in respect of such employment.

Where such staff are employed the branch is legally the employer and not the union nationally. Branches that choose to employ staff on a joint basis must ensure that there is a clear written agreement between them of each other's liabilities and responsibilities. Equally, the employee should be given a clear statement setting out the contractual arrangements and responsibilities for supervision in these circumstances.

Branches considering the employment of staff should alert their regional office. Branches should be aware of their legal obligations as employer (issuing contracts of employment, determining terms and conditions, addressing grievance or disciplinary issues, redundancy contingency, etc) and equip themselves to address any issue that might arise from the day to day employment of staff. Branches are strongly encouraged to obtain legal advice on how best to meet their obligations as good employers. Although this cannot be given directly by UNISON officers or by the union's solicitors, a scheme for branches has been negotiated with XpertHR.

Branch employed staff are not eligible to hold any office within the branch, or to substitute for lay officers at meetings.

12.8 EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES FOR STAFF

Branches are responsible for meeting all the employer costs for such staff. These normally include cost of salaries and any allowances payable, employer national insurance costs and employer contributions towards any pension scheme. Branches can apply to the UNISON staff pension scheme for admitted body status to enable staff to enter that scheme.

Branches must ensure that payroll facilities are established to enable salaries to be paid and appropriate deductions accounted for. This could for example be done through the principle employer covered by the branch on a rechargeable basis.

Branches, as the employer, are also responsible for ensuring the health and safety of any staff they may employ.

12.9 SUPERVISION OF STAFF

Branches must ensure they have in place proper arrangements for supervising the work of any staff employed by the branch. There must be a designated manager/supervisor to whom the member of staff regularly reports and takes instructions from, normally the branch secretary. In that respect the branch secretary is responsible not only for the day-to-day supervision of staff, but for ensuring their professional development and training.

Branches must also ensure they have in place arrangements which meet the minimum requirement of the statutory grievance and disciplinary procedures so as to ensure that any disciplinary or grievance matters are properly dealt with.

UNISON has negotiated a scheme with XperTHR to provide efficient and dedicated advice and support to UNISON branches on their responsibilities as employer
www.vivid-host.com/rbi/xperthr/19606/

12.10 TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Branches as the employer are able to make decisions on applying appropriate terms and conditions of employment to staff that they employ. Some branches make arrangements for the principle employer covering a branch to employ the member of staff and for that member of staff to then be seconded to the branch on a rechargeable basis.

Other branches directly employ staff and apply terms and conditions which are similar to those that apply to staff employed by UNISON.

Branches must ensure that a clear written statement of terms and conditions are issued to staff.

12.11 ACCOMMODATION

Where branches have their own office accommodation or use premises supplied by an employer they must ensure that the appropriate health and safety legislation and regulations are correctly applied to those premises and to any individuals who work in them, including any staff employed by the branch, branch officers, members and visitors. Branches must ensure their premises are accessible to all members in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

Branches considering the purchase or lease of premises must obtain the prior permission of the national trustees (rules M3.4 and M8).

Advice is available from the regional secretary.

12.12 INSURANCE

UNISON provides corporate insurance cover for all branches centrally and at no cost to the branch. The cover extends to the normal business needs of a typical branch – branch business activities (business interruption, public liability), branch property and possessions (property, contents, money), branch officials on branch business (personal accident cover, employer's liability). More detail about the extent of the cover is available by calling UNISONdirect on 0800 0 857 857, who can also provide details of additional cover available for requirements over and above normal business requirements (for example sports and social activity).

CORE BRANCH RULES

AS AGREED BY THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN 2009

Branches should draw up branch rules based on these core rules, relevant to their size and spread of membership, having regard to the explanations and options in the footnotes.

To view this document in word go to: unison.org.uk/acrobat/W5005.doc

1 BRANCH NAME

The branch shall be called “(.....)” Branch of UNISON and is referred throughout the rules as “the branch”.

2 AIMS OF THE BRANCH

- a) To support and pursue the Aims and Objectives contained in the UNISON Rule Book, and the Objectives agreed by UNISON’s National Executive Committee annually, and in particular:
- b) to achieve the aims and targets set annually through the branch assessment.

3 MEMBERSHIP

Eligibility for membership shall be in accordance with the Rules of the union.

4 BRANCH STRUCTURE

- a) There will be an Annual General Meeting of the branch to confirm the election by ballot of branch officers and members of the branch committee, to receive the branch accounts and report on branch development from the branch committee. The AGM may comprise one meeting or a series of aggregate meetings based on sections or geographical areas in order to maximise the active participation of members.
- b) The AGM will determine the basis of representation in the branch and the number of stewards and other representatives to be elected in each work group or workplace.
- c) Other general meetings may be called by the branch committee or by 20 members of the branch or 5% of the membership, whichever is the greater.
- d) The quorum for any general meeting, including the annual meeting is x%¹ of the branch at a single meeting or through aggregate meetings.
- e) Sections will be established for each bargaining group covered by the branch to provide for the participation and representation of members in that section in accordance with rule 8 below².

¹ See section 11.2.6.

² Relevant to larger, multi-employer branches and branches covering more than one service group.

- f) The branch committee will comprise all branch officers (see rule 5 below), and stewards³ and will be responsible for the general organisation and development of the branch and for policy and decision making on matters affecting all members within the branch between general meetings.
- g) The branch management group⁴ will be responsible for the day to day management of the branch in accordance with the decisions and authority delegated by the branch committee. Its membership and role is as described in rule 7 below.

5 BRANCH OFFICERS

- a) The branch shall elect the following officers annually in accordance with rule 5c:
- chairperson
 - secretary
 - treasurer
 - education co-ordinator
 - Lifelong Learning co-ordinator
 - equality coordinator(s)
 - health and safety officer
 - communications officer
 - international officer
 - membership officer
 - young members officer
 - welfare officer
 - labour link officer (elected by the members who pay the political levy only)
 - retired members' secretary (elected by the retired members)
 - others to be determined as necessary for the effective operation of the branch.
- b) Each section within the branch shall elect a convenor (senior steward) from amongst the stewards in that section in accordance with rule 5d.
- c) Election of branch officers:
- i. branch officers may be nominated by the branch committee or any two members, with the exception of the Labour Link officer who will be elected by the APF members only
 - ii. nominations will be invited 12 weeks before the AGM and nomination forms will be made available through the branch web-site. All nominations must be received in writing at least 7 weeks before the AGM

³ Smaller branches may include all stewards; branches operating a sectional structure may choose to include only the convenor of each section.

⁴ It is acknowledged that some branches already have an "Executive" or "Finance & General Purposes committee" which should comply with this rule. See 11.2.5.

- iii. each nominee will be notified and given the right to withdraw not later than 6 weeks before the AGM
 - iv. if there is more than one candidate, a vote will be held
 - v. the vote will be conducted by postal ballot in accordance with the procedure and timescales contained in the Code of Good Branch Practice⁵
 - vi. where no valid nomination has been received before the deadline, nominations may be called for and candidate elected at the AGM, or endorsed by the branch committee subject to ratification by the next general meeting.
- d) election of convenors
- i. the process for nomination and election shall be as in (c) save that the nomination may be by the section committee or any two members employed in that section, and only members employed in the relevant section may participate in the election.

6 BRANCH COMMITTEE

- a) Representation on the branch committee will be agreed by the AGM and will include:
- branch officers
 - representatives of self-organised groups
 - the convenors for each section (or all stewards where there is no sectional structure).
- b) The branch committee shall administer branch business in accordance with UNISON rules and guidance.
- c) The quorum for the branch committee shall be 33% (one third) of the members of the committee.
- d) The branch committee shall ensure that sections within the branch are appropriately and equitably resourced to ensure the effective participation of members, recruitment and organisation, representation, and collective bargaining and campaigning on behalf of members in each section.
- e) The branch committee will establish arrangements for the individual representation of members.
- f) The branch committee shall meet *monthly/quarterly*⁶.

7 BRANCH MANAGEMENT GROUP⁷

- a) The Branch Management Group shall comprise the branch secretary, branch chair, branch treasurer, section convenors, the branch equality coordinator (and others as appropriate).
- b) The Branch Management Group will meet weekly⁸ to ensure the effective day to day management of the branch within the parameters of the decisions and guidance issued by the branch

⁵ Section 11.4 of the Code advises that use of a ballot paper is recommended over "show of hands" and that branches should opt for a postal ballot for the election of its officers

⁶ The branch committee should hold a minimum of 4 meetings a year.

⁷ A Branch Management Group will normally be required only in larger branches. See 11.2.5. of Code.

⁸ The branch should decide on a frequency that reflects the purpose of the group and that decisions are not left solely to one or two senior branch officers.

committee. The Branch Management Group may commit to no expenditure, policy decision or affiliation that has not been previously agreed by the branch committee.

8 SECTIONS

- a) Sections comprise all members within the relevant service group and/or bargaining group and will have autonomy within the branch in respect of collective bargaining with their employer(s) only, subject to the policies and any guidelines and procedures of the branch, region and national union⁹.
- b) Sections will be led by a convenor elected in accordance with rule 5d and who will be the senior accredited representative within the section, and a committee of all accredited representatives within the section.

9 CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

- a) All meetings will be conducted in a fair and democratic manner.
- b) All meetings will be advertised widely as far in advance as possible (in the case of the AGM, all members will be notified in writing at least 12 weeks before the meeting (or first aggregate meeting)).
- c) The procedures to be used at the meeting will be explained clearly.
- d) The branches will maintain records of all meetings and other appropriate records to enable the branch to function.

10 MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

Communications to the media on behalf of the branch shall be made only by officer(s) authorised by the committee.

11 AFFILIATIONS

- a) Affiliations to relevant constituency Labour Parties will be decided by the APF membership.
- b) Affiliations to trade councils shall be determined by the AGM or branch committee.

12 FINANCE

The branch shall keep a Unity Trust Bank account in the name of the branch and will maintain a financial record of all assets and transactions in accordance with UNISON guidelines.

⁹ The branch may wish to identify its sections here.

13 DONATIONS

Donations shall be agreed by the AGM or branch committee in accordance with the union's policies and objectives and subject to provisions of national rule.

14 EXPENSES

Rates of expenses for members attending meetings or carrying out other activities on behalf of the branch shall be agreed by the AGM in accordance with the Scheme for Branch Expenses contained in the Branch Finances Handbook.

(See also Section 12.3.)

15 HONORARIA

Any honorarium paid to a branch officer will only be made in accordance with the Scheme for Honoraria Payments in Branches contained in the Branch Finances Handbook.

(See also Section 12.3.)

16 BRANCH STAFF

- a) The branch secretary will be responsible for the employment, direction and supervision of any staff employed by the branch consistent with employment law and current good practice.
- b) In the event of any first stage hearings of staff disciplinary or grievance matters, the branch secretary will be joined by another senior branch officer other than the branch chair.
- c) Any appeal arising from a first stage grievance or disciplinary hearing will be heard by the branch chair and other senior branch officers not involved at the first stage hearing.
- d) The outcome of any disciplinary or grievance hearing will remain confidential and the outcome only will be reported to the branch committee on its conclusion.

17 APPROVAL/ALTERATION TO BRANCH RULES

- a) Branch rules must be agreed by two thirds of members present and voting at a quorate branch meeting.
- b) Branch rules must be approved in accordance with UNISON's procedures.
- c) Any changes to branch rules must be agreed and approved in the same way.

CODE OF GOOD
BRANCH PRACTICE

UNISON 2014



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