

# EQUAL EANS

MAKING IT HAPPEN



UNISON equality scheme |

**Making equality happen in UNISON branches**

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# INTRODUCTION

UNISON has a proud history of fighting discrimination and promoting equality.

This guide sets out how UNISON branches can make sure equality is part of everything they do. It introduces UNISON's equality scheme and explains how it can be put into practice locally. It includes a jargon buster (for words **in bold** in the main text) and where to go for further information.

Equality is not a minority issue or optional extra. Many of our members have historically been at the bottom of the pile. More than one million UNISON members are women, many of them low-paid. We champion our members' rights as women, and their rights as black, disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, young and older workers.

**Equality matters to every one of us.**

## For us, equality means:

- recognising that no two people are alike, and appreciating that everyone has an equal right to be treated with dignity and respect
- celebrating our multicultural and diverse society
- meeting people's actual – as opposed to assumed – needs
- understanding that groups of people who face prejudice are stronger through organising together to fight discrimination
- actively developing a skilled and diverse workforce
- making it happen.



# WHAT IS UNISON'S EQUALITY SCHEME?

UNISON's equality scheme is a tool to help us make sure that equality is promoted and discrimination challenged in everything the union does. It's a plan of action for the whole of UNISON, with targets for achieving our equality goals.

Ours is a single equality scheme, inspired by the **public sector equality duties**. It looks at equality in terms of age, disability, gender, **gender identity**, low pay, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation. Particular actions address other groups facing discrimination such as migrant workers or carers.

The first UNISON scheme runs between 2008 and 2011. Progress towards targets

is monitored and reviewed and feeds into the next three-year plan.

The scheme has been developed slowly, with consultation at every stage. It applies to all parts of the union, across the whole UK. The draft scheme was launched at national delegate conference in June 2008 and has been further revised after useful feedback from activists and staff.

The equality action plans in the published scheme are for head office units and for UNISON's 12 regions. But many actions are relevant for branches – and branches share responsibility for implementing the scheme.



## EXAMPLES OF EQUALITY ACTIONS

Some examples of equality actions are below. Every region has its own equality action plan. It's not possible to include many here so look in the scheme for your region's plan. The full scheme is on our website at [www.unison.org.uk/equality](http://www.unison.org.uk/equality) and copies are available from [equality@unison.co.uk](mailto:equality@unison.co.uk). Different formats can be provided on request.

- Croyde Bay holiday village is working to promote its 50% discount for low-paid members more effectively.
- UNISON's health group is tracking bargaining on low pay and other equality aspects in annual pay negotiations.
- Learning and organising services (activists training) are co-ordinating the delivery of the women's development programme "Pathways into UNISON".
- UNISON's local government group is developing equality work programmes for all its committees.
- Legal services are piloting a confidential route for members to request legal advice on sexual orientation discrimination.
- The policy department is making sure all campaigns have an equality dimension.
- The RMS membership system team is working to improve equality data held for members.
- Systems management at head office are ensuring that all facilities meet high standards of accessibility
- Cymru/Wales region is undertaking an equality audit of branch development plans.
- East Midlands is pushing core employers in the region to undertake gender pay gap analyses.
- Northern region is leading discussions with branches on community cohesion and anti-racism.
- North West is developing a plan to recruit migrant workers and address discriminatory work practices.
- South East region is analysing membership of regional committees by equality group and setting targets to address under-representation.
- West Midlands is running a return-to-learn education programme targeting low-paid black women.

# WHAT DOES THE EQUALITY SCHEME MEAN FOR BRANCHES?

All branches have a responsibility to make sure their activities promote equality and tackle discrimination. This is nothing new. Many branches already do lots on equality.

The purpose of the scheme is to help us be consistent and comprehensive in our equality work. It requires us to commit to equality action plans. These should have **SMART targets** and it should be clear who is going to do what. By setting targets, we can measure progress and publicise our successes.

There are some specific equality actions that all branches should be taking:

- promoting UNISON's equality aims and values
- identifying under-represented groups of members, including migrant workers, and planning how to recruit and organise them
- making sure the profile of their activists (including officers, delegations and structures) meets the union's rules on **proportionality and fair representation**
- ensure meetings are organised for maximum member participation, considering – for example – access requirements, dependent care needs and shift patterns
- making sure the negotiating agenda reflects the priorities of all groups of workers covered by the branch
- electing annually the posts of equality officer (or officers) and young members officer as core branch officers
- recruiting to the new role of **branch equality rep**
- encouraging and supporting the development of **self-organisation** for black, disabled, **LGBT** and women members
- encouraging and supporting the organisation of young and retired members
- encouraging attendance at self-organised group conferences and young members' events.

These requirements are all set out in more detail in the *Code of Good Branch Practice* (stock number 0717) and the Framework for joint branch and region assessment. There is detailed advice on supporting self-organisation in the guidelines *Organising for Equality* (stock number 1577).



## WHAT SHOULD BRANCHES DO NEXT?

Branches should agree their own equality actions, based on the union's rules and priorities.

Some actions will be all about equality, for example, challenging racism in the workplace. Others will be checking the impact of something on different equality groups, for example, how will the employer's relocation proposals affect women, disabled staff, LGBT staff and so on.

### Step one: gather information

The first step is to do an audit of where you are now. This doesn't need to be a technical or laborious exercise. Information from the branch assessment tool will help. Some regions are including additional equality questions in the assessment framework.

Bearing all the **equality strands** (age, disability, gender and so on) of our scheme in mind, gather together as much information as you can. Some of the questions below may help.

- Is your equality data on RMS up to date?
- Does your membership reflect the make up of your workplaces?
- Are your stewards and other activists representative of your workplace and/or your membership?
- Do you know the bargaining priorities and needs for different groups of your members?
- Are there specific equality issues for certain groups of your members or with certain employers?
- Are your members participating in regional and national self-organised group and young/retired members' activities?

- Are local reps confident and informed on equality issues?
- What have your employers been doing on equality?

### Step two: consult

Once you've started to gather information, begin to consult. Talk to activists, members and potential members about how the branch is doing on equality. If you have identified gaps in your information, ask for ideas on what the issues might be and how the branch could make improvements. It's important to consult as widely as possible, give people a chance to have their say and influence the direction the branch is taking.

### Step three: plan

Consider what equality actions should go into your branch plan. Include actions that you hope to achieve within a year, and actions that will take two or three years.

Some examples of actions you could consider:

- increase the number of women activists, including part-timers
- review who your employers' harassment policies cover and negotiate to fill the gaps
- ask your employer for their workplace ethnicity breakdown and compare it to your membership
- improve the accessibility of your meetings
- find out if your employer has complied with the public sector equality duties and hold them to account on their equality plans

- ask to see the employer's **equality impact assessments** when they introduce or review policies
- take steps to recruit and organise migrant workers
- keep activists up to date on latest advice on winning equal pay
- plan towards sending delegates to each national self-organised group conference and the young members weekend.

### Step four: set targets

The equality scheme is all about practical steps to make improvements, rather than general good intentions. So it is essential that equality actions include measurable and realistic targets and make clear who is responsible for doing what.

Branches can use the template set out in our published equality scheme as the framework for their equality plans or incorporate equality actions into their branch plans.

It is important to regularly review progress on targets, make any necessary revisions, and report back to the membership on achievements.

### Who will lead this work in the branch?

Everyone shares responsibility for equality. But it's important to know who is taking the lead on specific actions. The action plan should make this clear.

UNISON introduced branch equality officers some time ago, to lead on branch equalities work. We are now developing a new role of workplace equality rep, with the aim of making sure every workplace has one. Workplace equality reps work as a team, co-ordinated by the branch equality officer. They will know about what's going on in their workplaces and can feed this into the branch, as well as

bringing equality information from the branch back into their workplace. There is more information on UNISON's website.

### What training is available?

Courses on using the public sector equality duties and challenging racism in the workplace are available to activists in all regions. They provide many of the skills needed to engage in developing the UNISON equality scheme locally, including how to use equality impact assessments.

Training for branch equality officers has been revised and there is new training for branch equality reps.



# UNISON'S EQUALITY SCHEME AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTIES

More than 90% of UNISON members work for public sector employers, which have a statutory duty to eliminate discrimination and promote equality. This duty includes a requirement that they publish equality schemes. It is a UNISON priority to use the public sector duties to promote equality and challenge discrimination in the workplace.

Our own equality scheme is inspired by, but not limited to, the public sector equality duties. We are not bound by this legislation and we have different functions and purposes to public sector bodies.

We recognise the importance of the legislation, but our scheme is designed to work for UNISON.

UNISON has developed a single equality scheme but we have not lost the focus on different equality strands. Self-organisation for specific equality groups is a key principle for UNISON. Nonetheless we believe that there is no hierarchy of discrimination. No equality group is more important than any other and no one person fits in a single box. Equality must mean equality for all.



## EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

In developing the UNISON scheme, we have produced our own guidance on carrying out an equality impact assessment.

Equality impact assessments address two questions:

1. How effective will this initiative be in promoting equality?
2. Could it affect different equality groups in different ways?

The equality impact assessment process involves gathering information and consulting members who will, or could, be affected by an initiative in order to answer the key questions.

UNISON initiatives are expected to promote equality strongly and effectively. Doing an equality impact assessment will help you decide if you need to strengthen an initiative's capacity to make a positive impact on equality groups.

The impact assessment will also show up

any unintentional negative impact. If this is the case, remedial action is needed.

In summary:

- accentuate the positive
- eliminate the negative.

Equality impact assessments are:

- part and parcel of good policy-making and service delivery
- a positive way to drive improvements
- outcome-focused.

They are not:

- rocket science or an exact science
- scary
- separate or different from mainstream decision-making
- a laborious process that will take months
- just a checklist or tick-box exercise



- an add-on or “after the event” rationalisation/justification
- an end in itself – the aim is to make improvements.

The full UNISON guidance on equality impact assessment is available from [equality@unison.co.uk](mailto:equality@unison.co.uk). It includes a seven-step process of:

- defining the initiative to be assessed
- making an initial assessment of its equality impact

- strengthening the evidence on which you make the assessment – this will involve consulting people
- making a final assessment
- taking action to improve the initiative’s equality impact
- putting systems in place for monitoring and reviewing
- making the equality impact assessment available.

## CONCLUSION

UNISON’s equality scheme is not a magic solution to make everything right. It is simply a tool to lend some discipline to how we build equality into all our union work. Not just equality for some, but equality for all, consistently and comprehensively. It is as useful as we make it.

As trade unionists, we know we can make a difference. Equality matters in UNISON.

# JARGON BUSTER

## Branch equality rep

New activist position. The aim is to have an equality rep in every workplace, working as team members co-ordinated by the branch equality officer.

## Equality impact assessment

Testing out whether a change, policy or service could affect different equality groups in different ways, and making sure that the needs of all groups are taken into account.

## Equality strands

The main equality strands covered by UNISON's scheme are age, disability, gender, gender identity, low pay, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation.

## Gender identity

A person's gender identity is their internal sense of their own gender. This is not necessarily the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Tackling discrimination on grounds of gender identity builds equality for transgender people.

## LGBT

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender.

## Proportionality and fair representation

UNISON's commitment to structures that represent our diverse membership is written into the union's rules. The rule on proportionality says that structures and activities should represent women and men in fair proportion to their membership. More than 70% of UNISON's members are women. The rule on fair representation says structures and activities should also be representative of part-time and full-time

workers, manual and non-manual workers, different occupations, skills, income, age, race, sexuality, gender identity and disability. This is not an exhaustive list; it is about the principle of inclusion.

## Public sector equality duties

Public bodies are required by law to produce equality schemes showing how they will tackle unlawful discrimination and promote equality. They are also required to publish equality impact assessments. There is UNISON guidance on using the public sector equality duties in negotiations (stock number 2645).

## Self-organisation

UNISON's approach to achieving equality includes the self-organisation of groups of members who may face prejudice and discrimination. UNISON has self-organised groups for women members, black members, disabled members and LGBT members. Self-organised groups work in partnership with other parts of the union to develop and promote the equalities agenda.

## SMART targets

SMART stands for:

**S**pecific

**M**easurable

**A**chievable

**R**elevant/**R**esourced

**T**imetabled.

This document is also available in large print, Braille and other formats. To request further copies or for more information, contact [equality@unison.co.uk](mailto:equality@unison.co.uk) or UNISON Means Equality, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ.





