

# Branch Officer Roles

UNISON Southampton District



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# Explanation

Branch Officers are a vital part of a UNISON's local democracy.

They cover multiple important areas, from ensuring the practical operation of the branch to representing members that are part of Self Organised Groups (SOGs) such as LGBT+, Black or Young members.

A branch with a full compliment of officers is a branch that works effectively.

Branch members are expected to attend Branch Committee monthly, and provide reports on the activity they have undertaken.

Officers are elected at yearly AGMs.

If you are interested in taking a branch officer role, please contact the branch on **023 8083 2740**, or email **branchsecretary@unisonsouthampton.org.uk**.

# The Rules

Below is an extract from the *UNISON Rulebook 2017* regarding Branch Officers.

## 4 BRANCH OFFICERS

4.1.1 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, Retired Members' Secretary, Welfare Officer and such other officers as approved by the Branch.

4.1.2 The Branch Officers shall be elected annually.

4.1.3 The Branch Chairperson shall preside at all meetings of the branch and the branch committee and shall ensure that business is properly conducted.

4.1.4 In the absence from a meeting of the Branch Chairperson, the members present shall elect one of their number to chair the meeting.

4.1.5 Each branch office may be shared between two or more members, subject to the approval of the branch meeting.

4.1.6 A member shall hold only one of the branch secretary or branch treasurer posts at any one time, unless otherwise determined by the National Executive Council.

# Branch Chair

The branch chair facilitates branch and committee meetings, and may also be a senior negotiator.

This includes:

- chairing all meetings of the branch and branch committee, agreeing the agenda for meetings with the secretary and making sure that business is properly conducted in line with union democracy;
- advising branch officers and the branch committee on procedure and rules;
- making sure all functions of the branch are carried out;
- working closely with the secretary and other officers to provide leadership to the branch.

*N.B The Branch Vice-Chair performs these functions when the chair is unavailable.*

# Branch Secretary

The branch secretary is the main contact person with the wider union.

They handle branch administration and work with the branch chair and other leading officers to provide leadership. They may also be a senior negotiator.

The details of the role may vary depending on branch size, but typically it will cover areas such as:

acting as the strategic lead officer and co-ordinator within the branch;

encouraging partnership working within the branch committee and the development of new representatives and stewards;

managing any branch staff;

managing the delegation of work to other branch officers and branch staff as appropriate, while providing support and guidance;

guiding the branch's development by preparing and implementing a branch organisation and development plan;

making sure the representation of members within the branch is in accordance with national guidance and in partnership with regional staff;

convening and attending all meetings of the branch and branch committees and making sure proper minutes are kept and circulated;

making sure branch records are kept in a proper manner;

making sure the branch processes membership applications speedily and accurately and maintains records in accordance with UNISON's systems;

making sure there is regular communication with branch members, including news of campaigns, negotiations, issues, branch developments and activities;

communicating with the wider union, including the region and centre, on behalf of the branch;

making sure that branch members are aware of opportunities to take part in the activities of the wider union, including self-organisation if appropriate;

supporting, mentoring and encouraging stewards and reps in the branch on an individual and collective basis; co-ordinating all branch negotiations and industrial relations matters;

leading the branch committee in making sure that the branch observes the union's rules, supports UNISON campaigns and works towards achieving UNISON's objectives.

# Branch Treasurer

Responsible for managing branch finances, including keeping accounts.

The main responsibilities of branch treasurers include:

- keeping accounts in accordance with the rules;
- preparing budgets for defined areas of activities such as welfare, recruitment, campaigning, etc;
- providing reports on the financial position of the branch to the branch committee or branch executive committee;
- providing a detailed financial report for the annual branch meeting(s);
- advising the branch officers and branch committee on matters relating to financial management and appropriate expenditure;
- providing an audited annual return of branch income.
- See the Branch Finances Handbook [PDF] for more detail.

# Branch Health and Safety Officer

Promoting health and safety at work is one of the functions of the branch.

Even though employers have clear legal duties to make sure that employment does not cause death, injury or ill-health, health and safety is a trade union issue and not something which can be left to management.

The branch health and safety officer's role includes:

- making sure members, safety reps and branch officers are aware of health and safety issues;
- co-ordinating the activity of safety reps, including making sure that there are enough reps in the workplaces organised by the branch, and convening regular meetings of safety reps;
- organising the information held by the branch on health and safety;
- acting as a link between safety reps and other branch reps to make sure that health and safety issues are treated as an integral part of the work of the branch;
- reporting on health and safety issues at branch meetings, committee meetings and annual meetings;
- liaising with relevant branch officers about priorities for health and safety training, campaigns and publicity materials;
- keeping contact with the region and regional service groups, for example via the regional health and safety committee and the national health and safety structures;
- liaising with the equalities officer(s) to make sure that equal opportunities aspects of health and safety issues are taken into account and vice versa.

# Branch 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.

The responsibilities include:

- recruiting new members and organising and encouraging existing young members to become active in the branch and in UNISON campaigns;
- building a branch young members' organisation and making sure there are potential new young members' officers in the future;
- making sure issues of concern to young workers are raised through the branch;
- acting as a focal point for all young workers in the branch and workplaces;
- receiving and distributing UNISON young members' information.
- Other branch officers will help in these tasks. Branch young members' officer must be under 27 years of age for the whole of their term of office.

# Branch Equalities

## Co-ordinator(s)

Work on equal rights issues including sex, race, disability and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues (there may be up to **four** per branch).

Branch equality co-ordinators have a number of important functions. But it is not expected that the office holder will be the fount of all knowledge on every equality issue, nor carry sole responsibility for the branch's equality work.

Everyone shares responsibility for tackling prejudice and discrimination and promoting equality.

The role of branch equality co-ordinators is to co-ordinate and monitor this shared responsibility. The role includes:

being the identified and well-publicised point of contact in the branch for equality issues;

- collecting and sharing information on equalities issues, including information from the regional and national self-organised groups;
- making sure other branch officers and the branch committee consider the equalities dimension of everything they do;
- making sure equality is raised in all collective bargaining – not just in bargaining on 'pure' equalities issues;
- encouraging and supporting the development of branch self-organised groups on behalf of the branch committee, co-ordinating among them and between them and the branch committee;
- making sure new recruits and potential members know about UNISON's commitment to equality and the opportunity to take part in self-organisation;
- advising the branch officers and branch committee on the development and monitoring of the action plan to achieve proportionality and fair representation;
- co-ordinating the development and training of members from under-represented groups;
- co-ordinating motions and support for delegates attending self-organised group conferences.

# Branch Education

## Co-ordinator

Helps arrange training courses and education programmes for members, stewards, health and safety reps and branch officers.

The role includes:

- making sure all new stewards and reps receive information about the branch and their role;
- publicising the range of educational and training opportunities available to members and activists, and making sure that all reps go on appropriate courses;
- talking to existing reps about their ongoing training and development needs;
- organising a plan of training for activists and producing an annual budget to meet its costs;
- keeping records of what training has been undertaken and by whom within the branch;
- negotiating with the employer, along with union learning reps on issues relating to learning including time off;
- supporting and co-ordinating the work of buddies and mentors in the branch.

# Branch Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator

Works with employers and co-ordinates the work of union learning reps in supporting members with lifelong learning and skills for life.

A branch with a number of union learning reps working as a team, led by a co-ordinator, can ensure:

- learning representatives are accountable and involved in the branch;
- learning is high on the branch's agenda and linked into its organising, bargaining and equalities work;
- a clear progression route for learning representatives who want to become more involved in other aspects of branch activity.
- The lifelong learning co-ordinator's role includes:
  - working closely with the branch education co-ordinator (the same person may take on both roles);
  - co-ordinating the activity of union learning reps in the branch education team;
  - working with colleagues to recruit and organise new learning representatives;
  - being closely involved in negotiating around learning with the employer;
  - making sure members have information on learning opportunities, including UNISON Open College courses, Return to Learn and Lifelong Learning;
  - making sure the work of learning reps is fully integrated into the branch.

# Branch Communications Officer

The branch communications officer's role includes:

- explaining UNISON's policies and providing the information members need to play an active role in their union;
- helping the branch's recruitment and organising;
- supporting UNISON's national and regional campaigns;
- creating a positive image for the branch and wider union among members, potential members and the public;
- producing news-sheets, bulletins or digital communication for distribution to branch members;
- making sure branch communications are in the accessible formats members need;
- making sure that centrally and regionally produced publicity, communications and campaign materials are distributed, as appropriate, to stewards, members and non-members;
- monitoring and liaising with local media.

# Branch International Relations Officer

This officer develops and leads on international solidarity activities including campaigns, twinning with sister unions and support for projects abroad.

The role includes:

- co-ordinating the branch's work on international relations;
- making sure members are informed of national policy on international matters;
- receiving and distributing relevant information;
- encouraging members to be aware of the importance of international solidarity issues within the context of the overall work of the union;
- liaising where appropriate with central and regional international structures and reporting the views of the branch on international activities;
- liaising with other branch officers concerning publicity and education on international issues;
- liaising with the solidarity organisations and campaigns that UNISON is affiliated to;
- encouraging members of the branch to take action and take part in international solidarity activities organised nationally or regionally;
- developing an international perspective among members, stewards and branch officers.

# Branch Membership Officer

Keeps track of the branch's membership and works to develop recruitment and organising.

The role includes:

- mapping the branch's membership to identify membership density and steward coverage – and where there are gaps;
- making sure the branch and union has accurate membership records;
- monitoring the branch's recruitment and retention rate;
- working with the branch committee and regional organising staff to develop and implement the branch's organisation and development plan;
- making recommendations to the branch committee on recruitment activities, targets, resources, budgets, etc.

# Branch Welfare Officer

Makes sure that that members seeking welfare assistance receive a prompt, supportive and effective response. This includes:

- making sure branch officers, stewards and workplace reps, as well as employers, have regular up-to-date information about There for You (UNISON's Welfare charity) and its range of services;
- liaising and co-ordinating with the UNISON centre and regions to make sure There for You support is provided effectively;
- undertaking training and seek advice from There for You where necessary;
- developing and co-ordinating local welfare activity;
- developing links with local charities and sources of support such as citizen's advice bureaus and women's refuges.

# Retired Members Officer

The retired members' officer enables retired members of the branch to continue to be active in the union through the branch's retired members' section.

This includes:

- making sure that members approaching retirement have the opportunity to become retired members;
- organising meetings of the branch retired members;
- encouraging the participation of retired members in branch activities as appropriate;
- making links with other retirement organisations in the area and UNISON's national retired members' structures;
- attending meetings of the branch committee;
- making sure the retired members section functions in accordance with UNISON rules and any branch standing orders and procedures.

# Labour Link Officer

*N.B. England, Scotland, and Wales only.*

The Labour Link officer is elected by, 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, including being a delegate to the general committee of the party and encouraging joint work and campaigning with the local constituency Labour Party.

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 role includes:

- explaining and developing the role of the UNISON Labour Link within the branch and ensuring that correct procedures are followed regarding the rights of Labour Link levy payers;
- acting as the central contact point for information on Labour Link matters from national and regional levels of the union, and from the Labour Party, and circulating it to Labour Link members in the branch,
- convening meetings of members as necessary;
- communicating with Labour Party members within the branch and encouraging individual membership of the Labour Party;
- attending the UNISON branch committee and agreeing appropriate means of promoting UNISON policy in the Labour Party;
- organising elections for branch UNISON Labour Link representation within the regional Labour Link as necessary and making sure branch delegates report on their activities on behalf of members;
- liaising with the Labour Link regional political officer;
- promoting political education and policy discussions;
- strengthening links with Labour locally by getting the branch to affiliate to the local Labour Party and electing delegates to attend meetings;
- building campaigning work around key issues and co-ordinating campaigns with the Labour Party in council, Westminster, Scotland, Wales and European elections

# Environmental Officer

Co-ordinates the union's green and environmental agenda in the branch.

This is still a new role in many UNISON branches. The job of trade union environmental representative involves representing the workforce in discussions and negotiations regarding the development and implementation of company / employer environmental policies and practices.

Where resources and capacity exist, the job can also involve acting on behalf of members as a link person with local environmental campaign organisations such as Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace or Stop Climate Chaos.

Environmental policies and practices can cover areas such as energy use, recycling, travel and procurement.

