

Young members officer handbook



# THE NEXT

GENERATION  
IS HERE



UNISON



**Dear Colleague,**

I want to thank you for taking up the role of branch young members officer.

UNISON's young members' section is a great success story and I am pleased you have decided to play a part in ensuring that success continues.

Your experience in the role will depend on how much you want to put into it and what you want to get out of it. It also depends on how well the union makes sure you are supported and encouraged – that's in your branch, your region, and at national level.

There's a real job of work ahead – but it's nothing that we can't do together. I hope you find this handbook useful in setting you on the road to getting organised, but please take up the opportunities provided to get training, education and to get involved in the many other activities UNISON offers.

I am proud to lead an organisation as principled, as positive and as strong as UNISON and I look forward to working with you to make it even better, even younger. I also hope your work with young members will inspire you to take up other roles in the union now and in the future. You are our next generation.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Prentis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'P' at the start of the last name.

**Dave Prentis**  
General Secretary

## What is the role of a branch Young members officer?

A branch young member's officer is the ideal role for someone who is interested in becoming active, or becoming a steward, and wants to learn more about what is involved. Branch young members officers can have a more informal role than stewards or safety reps and can operate as part of a network supporting an elected steward. Like stewards they have access to some benefits from UNISON, including

- regular UNISON information
- involvement in branch work
- some training courses
- advice on dealing with workplace problems.

*\* Please note, to be a branch young members officer you must be under 27 years of age.*

## The organising approach

UNISON is committed to what is called the 'organising' approach. In essence, this is about ensuring members are involved in finding solutions to their workplace problems. It means listening to their views and encouraging them to participate, which is vitally important.

If a member has an individual problem we try and see if this is actually a collective problem that can be resolved with the help of other members. At the very least it is about saying to

that member, “What can we do about this together?” rather than saying, “Leave it with me and I’ll sort it out for you.” This means that we avoid overloading workplace representatives with lots of casework and we hopefully encourage members to become more active – which can only be good for the branch.

Through this approach branches are organic, living entities – where there is a two-way dialogue between members and stewards. Members must feel that their stewards or representatives are accountable to them and take on board their views and ideas. Communication – be it face to face or through newsletters and emails – is vital.

Of course taking a collective approach to problem solving means that a branch must be strong, in numbers as well as democratically. So recruitment of new members is always a priority. But we shouldn’t just forget about the members once they’ve filled in their application form.

Perhaps there are particular issues that they’re concerned about – and that is why they’ve joined. Or perhaps they are the first person to join from a particular workplace or department. Whatever, there is usually some route to getting them to become more involved in the union – even if it’s just being a ‘postbox’ for that particular department, where they pass communications on to their colleagues.

The important thing is to remember that they are as important as our stewards. It is their union and we must involve them in our plans and decisions.

## Now that you're a branch young members officer, here's a bite-sized guide to what to do in the role

Don't be worried if this seems a massive responsibility, you can do as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. Talk to your branch secretary and regional young members contacts (see page 15 for how to get in touch with your regional young members contacts).

### **Here are some examples of what you might want to do**

The young member's officer is there to work with other branch officers:

- to recruit new members and encourage existing young members to become active
- to work to make sure that when you become 27 or leave, there is someone to take your place as branch young members officer
- to make sure issues of concern to young workers are raised by the branch
- to be a focal point for all young members in the branch and workplace so they can come to you with ideas, concerns and problems.

### **You might also want to:**

- help set up activities with the branch on issues relevant to young workers

- visit places where young people either work or are educated, to raise the profile of trade unionism and make people aware of its relevance to them.

It's a chance for you to get involved in union activity and a chance for UNISON to learn from young workers and respond to their needs.

## **The first thing you need to do once you're in post is:**

### **1 Get informed!**

First of all check with the branch that they have informed the regional young members contact that you have taken up the post of branch young members officer and that you are registered to receive the UNISON activists monthly magazine InFocus. Ask them to check that your date of birth is on the UNISON membership records system (known as the RMS).

### **Find out**

- who your other branch officers are
- who to contact for specific issues, eg. welfare officer, equalities officer, health and safety officer
- who your regional officer is
- who your regional young members contact is (see page 15)
- how to get training and support for your new duties
- how to get a list of young members in your branch.

***You're better***

*off in a union*



## Once you're informed, make sure you...

### ② Stay informed!

- keep up to date with local and national campaigns and cases via the unison website at **www.unison.org.uk** and In Focus magazine and branch circulars.
- Check out the young members webpages regularly to keep up to date with developments at **www.unison.org.uk/young** where you can also sign up for the monthly young members email bulletin
- Register for the SMS text messaging service by sending your name, branch, and membership number (if known) and mobile phone number to **young.members@unison.co.uk**
- Read the national young members' newsletter '*The Next Generation*' which comes out 3 times a year.

### ③ Recruit

- Find out from your branch secretary who in your workplace is currently a UNISON member.
- Ask your branch secretary to get you a full list from the employer of all staff employed in your workplace.
- Match the two lists together to identify potential members.
- Speak face to face with members and non-members alike to identify their key workplace concerns: health and safety, pay, access to training and development opportunities etc.

- Once you have identified these key issues along with the rest of the branch committee sit down and plan a campaign that will reach out to the entire workforce. Remember it is always easier to recruit members on the back of an issue-based campaign than it is to simply try and recruit them cold.
- Get your branch publicity officer/secretary to order a stock of recruitment and campaign materials from the UNISON online catalogue by visiting the branch resources page of the UNISON website [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)
- Remember that the most successful way of recruiting new members is by the one-to-one approach but don't be too pushy as it will only put potential recruits off.
- Run regular recruitment drives and campaigns to keep up the union's visibility.
- Keep a log of all staff who have expressed an interest in joining the union and make sure you get back to them at a later date.

## 4 Retain

**It's not enough to get members. We've got to keep them as well. So to do that:**

- Keep members informed of UNISON's successes, locally and regionally.
- Keep in touch with members and keep them active.
- Set aside regular times when you can be contacted in

person or by phone. Answer emails members send you.

- Make sure notice boards have things of relevance to young workers and keep them up to date and interesting. They may be the main point of contact for some members, especially shift workers who work outside normal hours. Nobody bothers to look at a neglected notice board – but if you can get people into the habit of looking at a notice board as a regular source of information, it will become a valuable tool.
- Contribute news and articles to any existing newsletters in the branch or workplace, and also regionally.
- Consider setting up your own newsletter within the workplace to publicise your successes and campaigns – but check with your branch before producing or circulating anything in UNISON’s name. You can get a huge range of materials via UNISON’s website at **[www.unison.org.uk/communicating](http://www.unison.org.uk/communicating)**
- Some branches run their own websites and they can be a very effective way of providing up-to-the-minute information to members. You could make a dedicated page for young members. Remember, though, that not all members have access to the internet.

## 5 Campaign

UNISON has a proud tradition as a campaigning union, both inside and outside the workplace. The union campaigns on all sorts of issues, from abolishing the age-differentiated rates of the National Minimum Wage to fair trade, from opposing the government’s decision to introduce tuition fees and abolish

the student grant to winning equal pay for women.

All campaigns rely on publicising the arguments. You can do this by handing out printed leaflets, which UNISON provides. You can also hold demonstrations, public meetings and publicity stunts. It's important to try and involve other organisations in a campaign, and to build links with local press contacts to get events publicised and to air the arguments. Campaigning can be very rewarding – and great fun!

For more information on building successful campaigns order a copy of the UNISON publication *Positively Public Campaign Pack – UNISON Campaigning Guide* stock no 1971. For details on how to order publicity material visit the branch publicity page located within the resources section of the UNISON website [www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)

## 6 Get involved in UNISON

All regions have regional young members forums. These forums are made up of young member activists from branch level and they are responsible for co-ordinating and planning young workers campaigns and recruitment drives. Recently we have seen regional forums become involved in a variety of work, from running recruitment activities at music festivals to visiting local schools to talk to young people about the role of trade unions. The forums meet on average three – four times a year and they operate on a friendly, informal basis. If you want to become a member of your regional forum then notify your regional staff contact (see page 15).

Each regional forum also gets to elect two young members to sit on the UNISON National Young Members Forum (NYMF). The NYMF is responsible for conducting young

members campaigns and organising initiatives at a national level. They ensure that young workers concerns are central to UNISON's priorities.

The NYMF also gets to send delegates and motions to the UNISON National Delegate Conference and the majority of UNISON service group and self-organised group conferences. Like the regional forums the NYMF meets around four times a year and it operates on a friendly, informal basis.

To sit on either the regional or national forum you have to be less than 27 years of age.

For more info on how to get involved please visit the young members section of the UNISON website.

## **7 Other opportunities to get involved**

The union wants to encourage young activists to move beyond branch young members officer posts as soon as possible and take up mainstream positions at all levels of the union. We have recently seen young members elected on to the NEC and to branch secretary and other senior positions. Speak to your branch secretary about taking up mainstream branch posts such as health and safety rep or learning rep, or you might want to get involved with the branch Labour Link structures. You can also speak to members of your regional young members forum for advice on how to take up mainstream posts at a regional level. The key is to use the position of branch young members as a starting point to your involvement in the union and not an end in itself.

## Materials and resources available

For a full list of all publicity materials and resources which you can access through the website **[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk)** – go to resources then click on the branch publicity page. Keep a regular eye on the young members’ section of the online publicity catalogue for new materials that may be of use to you. Other useful items are:

- Young members introduction/contact cards (stock no 2433)
- Stewards Handbook (stock no 1055)
- Brief Guide to UNISON (stock no 2316)
- Time to act— a negotiating guide to time off for trade union duties (stock no 2359)

## Regional Young Member Contacts

Each region allocates a member of UNISON staff whose responsibilities include organising young members in the region. If you want to find out how to get in touch with your regional contact, visit

**[www.unison.org.uk/young/officers.asp](http://www.unison.org.uk/young/officers.asp)**

### **Finally – thank you, again!**

You’re taking on an important role – important for your branch, the union, and you. We hope you will make the most of, and enjoy, the opportunities available.

