

# EQUAL EANS

**MAKING IT HAPPEN**

An introduction to UNISON's  
Equality Scheme



**UNISON – making equality matter**

**UNISON**  
*the public service union*



## Foreword

Equality is at the very heart of our union. Trade unions exist to give workers a voice they cannot have alone. UNISON defends workers' rights, challenges discrimination and exploitation and campaigns for world class public services that meet everyone's needs.



UNISON leads the trade union movement on equality. But we are not complacent. We are developing an equality scheme for UNISON to make sure that we promote equality in every thing we do. This is an exciting initiative with a broad scope, including UNISON as a democratic membership organisation and UNISON as an employer.

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

Equality needs to become as natural as breathing. Our equality scheme can help make this happen. There is no mystery to it – it's a toolkit to check that equality is mainstreamed in everything we do. I don't underestimate the challenge - it will need the involvement of every single one of us. But it will also benefit every single one of us.

I urge you to read this introduction to the scheme and give us your views on how to take it forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Prentis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dave Prentis  
General Secretary

## What is UNISON's equality scheme?

UNISON's equality scheme is a way to make sure that equality is promoted and discrimination challenged in everything the union does.

It will be a plan of action for the whole of UNISON, with targets for achieving our equality goals. Our first scheme will be for 2008 – 2011. Progress towards targets will be monitored and reviewed and feed into the next three year plan.

### Action plans, equality goals and targets – so much jargon already?

While we try to keep jargon down, it can't be avoided altogether. Words and phrases highlighted in this text are explained in the **jargon buster** at the end.

To give an example of what we mean - an equality action plan could include increasing the number of women stewards with a target of say 60% women stewards by an agreed date. It could include increasing the numbers of branches with young members' officers from the current 10% to 15% in a year. It might include ensuring branch offices are wheelchair accessible.

### Equality is already written into our rulebook – why do we need to do more?

We should all be proud of UNISON's record on equality. We have a strong tradition of **self-organisation**. We push the equality bargaining agenda with employers. We campaign for - and win - equality laws and we challenge discrimination in workplaces. We have made great strides in **fair representation and proportionality** within our structures and seek to be a best practice employer to our own staff.

Now we want to go further. The UNISON equality scheme will build on our achievements and check that equality is promoted in everything we do, not just in our dedicated equalities work.





## When you say ‘everything we do’, what do you mean?

We really do mean everything.

When the scheme is developed, it will cover:

- our recruiting and organising and how we represent members
- how we negotiate and bargain, locally and nationally
- how we campaign and promote UNISON
- how we operate as a complex organisation, which offers a range of services to members and activists and which employs staff.

It applies to what we do now and to our plans for the future, to ‘business as usual’ and our high profile priorities.

It applies to our lay structures, democratic processes, branch organisation, head office and regional functions.

No small task then.

## How will it affect me?

As the scheme develops it will challenge each of us and benefit each of us – members and paid staff alike. It will challenge us to think equality in everything we do and demand of us that we do this in a systematic way. We share a vision of UNISON as a best practice organisation leading the way on equality. The scheme will help us ground our vision in reality.

Developing our own equality scheme will show us how we can win equality gains from our employers.

People who train as UNISON **equality auditors** will gain new skills with wide application.

## My employer has just published an equality scheme. Is this the same?

It is probably something similar. All public authorities are obliged by law to produce equality schemes setting out how they will promote equality and combat discrimination. These are referred to as the **public sector equality duties** in Britain and **Section 75 duties** in Northern Ireland.

Some organisations publish equality schemes separately for each equality ground – so they will have a race equality scheme, a disability equality scheme and so on. Confusingly, they sometimes refer to these just as their ‘equality scheme’. Others have single schemes covering a number of **equality grounds**.

In Britain, the Local Government and NHS employers both advise it is good practice to cover age, religion and belief and sexual orientation, as well as the legally required race, disability and gender. UNISON is campaigning for the law to be extended to cover all these grounds.

## What equality grounds will the UNISON scheme cover?


The UNISON scheme will be a single, integrated scheme covering age, disability, gender, gender identity, low pay, race, religion and belief and sexual orientation. This is the baseline – different parts of the union may decide to include additional grounds.

In deciding the scope of our scheme, we looked at our own membership and priorities, best practice in other organisations and the legal framework. We include low pay in our baseline because it is an issue that affects so many of our members and is central to our work as a trade union. We are not a public authority so we are not obliged to publish a scheme on any particular equality ground. But we pride ourselves on being a best practice organisation.

## Doesn't UNISON already have a race equality scheme?

UNISON has had a race equality scheme since 2004, following the recommendations of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry. We are





making sure that the race strand of our equality scheme dovetails with the work already in place on race equality.

### How will it work in practice?

The first step is to look at what we already do: our policies, our practices, what information we collect, how we make decisions. Then we consider the equalities impact of these. This is an **equality audit**.

To give a concrete example – say local union meetings are always held in a particular pub between 5 and 6pm on a Thursday. In conducting our equality audit, we would think about how this time and place impacts on men and women, including those with caring responsibilities and who work part-time or shifts, on low paid and black members, disabled and **LGBT** members, on people with different religions and on younger and older members. We would expect that the conclusion of this audit would be meetings should be held at a different time and place!

Another example would be negotiations on a new staffing structure or new leave or family friendly policies. The new structure or policy may look OK, but the discipline of an **equality impact assessment** would make sure that its effect on all groups of members can be taken into account.

At first, the task may seem daunting. But once we have built equality auditing and equality impact assessing into our organising, the benefits will far outweigh the additional work.

### Who will be involved?

Every part of the union needs to be involved in its own equality auditing and equality impact assessing. It is not something that can be done from the outside, though there will be UNISON training and guidance, including toolkits with practical checklists and sample paperwork.

There is a strong requirement at the heart of the public sector equality duties that people in affected groups are involved in drawing

up equality schemes. This is a principle dear to our hearts as trade unionists and one which is incorporated into our scheme. It goes beyond mere consultation to active involvement.

We want everyone to give us their thoughts, starting now. There are questions for you to answer below.

### **How will we get from local equality audits to a published equality scheme?**

Once a head office department, region or lay committee, has carried out its initial equality audit, it will draw up a three year equality **action plan**. Even UNISON cannot change the world overnight, so this plan will have to be based on priorities and achievable targets.

Targets must be measurable, with timescales, and it must be clear who is responsible for meeting them. Action plans will be publicised, consulted on and improved.


We aim to publish our first, whole union equality scheme in the summer of 2008. It will include a statement of our overarching equality objectives, information on the principles of our equality scheme and how it was developed, and action plans for main UNISON functions. There will be consultation on the draft scheme. It will be a living document and will develop over the three years it covers. It will be superseded by a new scheme in 2011, which will build on its foundations.

### **How will it be monitored and reviewed?**

Because we are under no legal obligation to have an equality scheme, there is no external body to which UNISON is answerable. So we need to build the discipline of monitoring and review into our scheme. The requirement to set measurable targets with clear timescales and to publicise and consult on action plans will lend this discipline.

UNISON's NEC and senior management group provide leadership and **UNISON's Equality Liaison Committee** has a key role in





developing the union's thinking on cross-cutting equality issues.  
Responsibility for staffing lies with the NEC.

### **What's happening now?**

In spring and summer 2007, we are developing an equality audit tool and training. We will use this first with a sample of head office units and regions, who are our trailblazers in developing the scheme. It will then be rolled out to the rest of UNISON.

National Delegate Conference is our first opportunity to consult widely on plans for the scheme.

# Give us your views

## Have you been involved in equality auditing in your workplace?

If so – what worked well and what pitfalls should be avoided?

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Which UNISON activities are you involved in that could be equality audited?

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What information and resources do you need to help you equality audit your UNISON work?

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Your name

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Your branch

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How can we contact you?

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Email your ideas and questions to **[equality@unison.co.uk](mailto:equality@unison.co.uk)** or write to us at UNISON Means Equality, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ. This is an ongoing consultation, with no closing date, so please get in touch with your suggestions.





## JARGON BUSTER

**Action plan** Typically a three year plan setting out in table form: actions, checks against equality grounds, what will be done, who has responsibility, the timescale and what will be measured to judge success.

**Audit tool** Written advice on how to carry out an equality audit with checklists and templates to fill in, to guide you step by step through carrying out an audit. UNISON is devising its own audit tool for our scheme.

**Equality audit** An equality audit is a check on how policy and practice impact on different groups of people by equality ground. It may reveal gaps in information which have to be filled before the equality impact can be fully measured. It will lead to an equality action plan with targets and timescales for improvement.

**Equality auditors** People who carry out equality audits – any activist could be trained in this.

**Equality grounds** Sometimes referred to as equality strands – the types of discrimination we tackle – age, disability, gender, gender identity, low pay, race, religion/belief, sexual orientation.

**Equality impact assessment** Not an exact science, nor rocket science – quite simply - considering the impact of a new practice or policy on different groups of affected people, in consultation with those groups.

**Equality target** A measurable goal for improvement such as percentage of branches with an agreed strategy on challenging racism in the workplace; or UNISON recruitment stalls at LGBT Pride events.

**Fair representation and proportionality** UNISON's commitment to structures which 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. UNISON's membership is over

70% women. Structures 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, which is set out in the UNISON rule on fair representation.

**LGBT** Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender – one of UNISON's four self-organised groups is our LGBT group.

**Public sector equality duties / Section 75 duties** All public authorities are obliged by law to produce equality schemes setting out how they will promote equality and combat discrimination. In England, Scotland and Wales, the duties cover race, disability and gender. They are collectively known as the public sector equality duties.

In Northern Ireland the duties also include marital status, people with dependents and political opinion and are referred to as Section 75 duties (they arise from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998).

There is UNISON guidance on the public sector equality duties – including how to use them in organising and negotiations - at [www.unison.org.uk/equality](http://www.unison.org.uk/equality).

**Self-organisation** Part of UNISON's approach to achieving equality is the organisation of groups of members who may themselves face prejudice and discrimination. UNISON has four self-organised groups – for women members, black members, disabled members and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members. Self-organised groups work in partnership with other parts of the union to identify and promote our equality agenda.

**UNISON equality liaison committee** This national committee brings together senior members of the NEC strategic committees with the chairs of the self-organised group committees and national young members forum. It is chaired by UNISON's President.





Designed and produced by UNISON Communications Unit. Published by UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ.  
[www.unison.org.uk](http://www.unison.org.uk) CU/June07/16475/stock no 2583. Printers ref. 9409 Photography: Joanne O'Brien