



HEALTH & SAFETY Information sheet

• *UNISON Members Health and Safety Structure*

Updated June 2014

This information sheet gives guidance on the UNISON structure for dealing with members' health and safety issues. It includes information on: the national Health and Safety Unit including its functions; UNISON's international links; how to find the health and safety policies from the most recent National Delegate Conference (NDC); and the functions, structures, and resources at regional and branch level.

FUNCTIONS OF THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY UNIT.

The national health and safety unit is based at UNISON Centre and has the following functions:

- (a) SUPPORTING AND ADVISING health and safety representatives (safety reps), branches, regions, and service groups on all relevant work related health and safety issues;
- (b) PRODUCING bargaining, campaigning, organising and recruitment materials on relevant work-related health and safety matters;
- (c) SERVICING and working in partnership with the National Health and Safety Committee (NHSC) to develop policy on relevant workplace health and safety issues;
- (d) BRIEFING UNISON senior officers, negotiators, and representatives (reps) on such committees as the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Board, tripartite advisory committees and forums, and TUC committees;
- (e) INFLUENCING the UK and European health and safety legislative and regulatory framework both within the UK and the wider European Union;
- (f) DEVELOPING campaigning links with the TUC, other trade unions, charities, consumer groups, and our international partners such as PSI, ETUC and EPSU.
- (g) LIAISE with UNISON Learning and Organising Services (LAOS), branches, and regions to ensure UNISON meets the training requirements of UNISON's Safety Reps.
- (h) ENSURE that the activities of the Health and Safety Unit come within the finances available.

HEALTH AND SAFETY ORGANISATION WITHIN UNISON**NATIONAL LEVEL**

- a) ANNUAL (NATIONAL) DELEGATE CONFERENCE (NDC): sets the overall health and safety policy and campaigning priorities.
- b) NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (NEC): is responsible for interpreting and implementing the decisions of the NDC, and decides on issues and campaigns between conferences.
- c) NATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE (NHSC): is the health and safety advisory committee to the NEC with reps from UNISON regions, national service groups, and the NEC. It reports to the NEC via the Policy Development and Campaigns Committee (PDCC) and is responsible for developing and implementing general UNISON health and safety policy and campaigns.
- d) SERVICE GROUPS AND SELF ORGANISED GROUPS (SOGs): may pass motions of a health and safety nature at their various service group (Local Government; Community; Police and Justice; Health Care; Water, Environment, and Transport; Energy; and Higher Education) or self-organised group (Women, LGBT, Disabled, and Black members) conferences. The relevant service group or SOG is then responsible for the implementation of these motions and will liaise with the national health and safety unit in order to meet this aim.
- e) NATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY UNIT: part of the Bargaining, Negotiating and Equalities Directorate, is based at UNISON, UNISON Centre, 130 Euston Road, London, NW1 2AY. Staffed with specialist officers: Tracey Ayton Harding – National Health and Safety Officer, Robert Baughan – Assistant National Health and Safety Officer, and Vincent Borg – Assistant National Health and Safety Officer. It works with the NHSC on the development of policy and campaigns, and providing support, guidance, and advice on relevant work related health and safety issues for branches, regions and service groups.

REGIONAL LEVEL

- (a) REGIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE / FORUM has branch reps nominated by the regional council and from the regional service groups; reports to the regional council; and is responsible for implementing general UNISON health and safety policies and campaigns in the region. There are 12 regions within UNISON.
- (b) REGIONAL ORGANISERS: provide advice and assistance to safety reps, branch health and safety officers, stewards, and branch secretaries in dealing with health and safety concerns.



ORGANISING FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY IN THE BRANCH

The text below is taken from the UNISON Code of Good Branch Practice. UNISON also has a toolkit, *Organising for Health and Safety* available to order from UNISON's Communications Unit, stock number 2994.

BRANCH OFFICES

The UNISON rulebook stipulates that each branch shall elect, annually, a branch health and safety officer. All branch officer posts will be elected annually by individual ballot of members, at or in advance of the annual branch meeting, as decided by the inaugural meeting of the branch.

Branch health and safety officers should ensure that they are appointed as safety reps so that any relevant activities are covered by the *Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations* (the Brown Book). See below for more information and also UNISON's guide for Health and Safety Reps (stock no. 1684) and the Brown Book (stock no 1819) and. Both are also orderable from UNISON's Communications Unit.

FUNCTIONS OF UNISON BRANCH OFFICERS

A number of functions are defined within the rulebook 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.

So that branches may make best use of the rule enabling branch posts to be shared, a 'job description' for the branch health and safety officer post is set out below. It is important that branches are aware that responsibility for a task does not necessarily mean doing the task. Each branch officer's post can be split into a number of discrete tasks and functions that can be shared by more than one person.

Whilst some branches will have the support and assistance of paid employees, others will have to find ways of undertaking the full range of responsibility. It is important to remember that many people are willing to do a little, but are not able to take on major tasks. Branches should seek out and encourage members who are prepared to stuff envelopes, type minutes, file circulars or any of the other time consuming necessities of a UNISON branch.

Tasks relating to the post of health and safety officer:

- Increase the awareness of members, safety reps, and branch officers of health and safety issues;
- Organise the information held by the branch on health and safety;
- Co-ordinate the activity of safety reps, for example in planning quarterly inspections;
- Organise regular meetings of safety reps to exchange information and consider priorities;
- Receive (in addition to the branch health and safety officer/branch secretary) correspondence on health and safety issues sent from regional and national level;
- Advise the branch committee on health and safety issues arising in the branch and to recommend policies and priorities;
- Act as a link between safety reps and other branch reps to ensure that health and safety issues are treated as an integral part of the work of the branch;
- Report on health and safety issues at branch meetings, committee meetings, and annual meetings;
- Liaise with relevant branch officers about priorities for health and safety training, campaigns, and publicity material;
- Maintain contact with the region and regional service groups, for example via the regional health and safety committee; and
- Liaise with the equal opportunities officer(s) to ensure that equal opportunities aspects of health and safety issues are taken into account and vice versa.

Branch responsibilities

Promoting health and safety at work is one of the functions of the branch. Even though employers have clear duties set out in law, ensuring that employment does not cause death, injury, or ill-health is a trade union issue and not something which can be left to management. Branches should ensure that:

- safety reps and branch health and safety officers are elected annually;
- arrangements are made for safety reps to meet together with the branch safety officer;
- all branch officers and reps are aware of the health and safety work of the branch and the issues of concern to members;
- members are kept informed, including taking account of people with disabilities and people whose first language is not English;
- procedures are in place for raising issues with management and for involving the branch health and safety officer in negotiations;
- branch health and safety officers and safety reps are trained;
- branch resources are allocated to health and safety;
- health and safety is used to recruit members; and
- more members are encouraged to take on active roles in health and safety.

SAFETY REPS

As well as having a branch health and safety officer to co-ordinate health and safety, a UNISON branch needs to establish a network of safety reps in the branch.

Where UNISON is recognised by an employer for bargaining purposes, the union has the right to appoint safety reps under the *Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977* (SRSC Regs or the *Brown Book*) in England, Scotland, and Wales. In Northern Ireland, this right exists under the *Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1979*.

These regulations give safety reps the right to carry out a number of specific functions. The employers' legal responsibilities to consult with safety reps and provide facilities are further extended by the *Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999*. Safety reps have the strongest rights of all trade union reps, so the branch should ensure that these rights are used to best advantage.

In addition to electing a branch health and safety officer, branches should ensure that:

- Enough safety reps are appointed to effectively represent and protect members' interests' in all workplaces. The guidance to the SRSC Regs says that the numbers appointed should be determined by the size of the workforce and workplace, whether there are different sites or members on different shifts or work rotas, the variety of different occupations, and the type and risk of work activity.
- All members are represented on union and joint management/union health and safety committees in the workplace. The guidance to the SRSC Regs also covers the make-up of these committees.
- Safety reps are elected annually for each work group or workplace, by members in that work group or workplace. The election of each safety rep must be reported to the annual branch meeting for ratification and the issue of credentials.
- Employers are notified in writing of the names of elected safety reps, as required by the SRSC Regs. Branches must keep up to date records of safety reps and stewards with health and safety role.
- The Regional Office is notified of the names of safety reps and of stewards who are also safety reps.

The role of a UNISON safety rep

This role may be fulfilled in one of two ways:

- by stewards acting in a dual capacity, or
- by members who may have a particular interest in health and safety.

Each option is equally acceptable. However, branches should ensure that all members and stewards are aware of the arrangements that apply to them. Branches should also make sure that the following arrangements are taken into account in order to provide safety reps with the support that they require.

Where safety reps are not also stewards, branches should ensure that those safety reps are:

- accountable within branch arrangements. They should have the same status as stewards and access, as appropriate, to any branch committees;
- given access to local negotiations so that the health and safety implications of any decision are properly considered at an early stage;
- given particular training in dealing with management and members, such as the investigation of problems and negotiating skills;
- valued equally with stewards and other activists within the branch; and
- encouraged to work with stewards, branch officers, activists and members.

If stewards also carry out the functions of safety reps, branches should ensure that:

- there is a sufficient number of stewards for each workgroup or workplace;
- the **employers are notified, in writing**, that the steward is also a UNISON safety rep, where stewards are not automatically safety reps as well; and
- such stewards receive health and safety training, information, and support.

HEALTH AND SAFETY RESOLUTIONS

Health and safety motions may be passed as resolutions by UNISON's NDC, service group or SOG conferences. The latest resolutions can be found on the UNISON Conference Database which is available here: <http://www.unison.org.uk/conference/>.

UNISON'S INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS**Public Services International**

An international confederation of trade unions to which UNISON is affiliated. Postal address: PSI, 45 avenue Voltaire, BP 9, 01211 Ferney-Voltaire Cedex, France. Tel: 0033 450 406 464. Fax: 0033 450 407 320. Email: psi@world-psi.org. Website: www.world-psi.org.

European Federation of Public Services Unions

The European part of PSI. Postal address: 45 rue Royale, Box 1, 1000 Brussels, Belgium. Tel: 0032 22 50 10 80. Fax: 00 32 22 50 10 99. Email: epsu@epsu.org. Website: www.epsu.org.

For further information contact the: International Unit, UNISON, UNISON Centre, 130 Euston Road, London, NW1 2AY. Email: IRelations@unison.co.uk.

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

Promotes and represents the interests of working people at European Level. It has a membership of 85 National Trade Union Confederations from 36 European countries, as well as 10 European industry federations. Postal address: International Trade Union House (ITUH), Boulevard Roi Albert II, 5 B-

1210, Brussels, Belgium. Tel: 0032 22 24 04 11. Fax: 0032 22 24 04 54/5. Email: etuc@etuc.org.
Website: <http://www.etuc.org/>.

RESOURCES

UNISON promotes various campaigns, and publishes various guidance and other useful materials for safety reps. These are available, through branches, from UNISON's Communications Department, UNISON's Health and Safety Unit, and from the web. For more information on these, including how to order the various items, go to our website at: www.UNISON.ORG.UK/safety. For on-line ordering go to www.unison.org.uk/resources/onlinecatalogue.asp.

Safety reps can also keep up to date with health and safety issues with the bulletin for UNISON's safety activists, *Health and Safety Organiser*. Branch health and safety officers also receive "Safety in Numbers" which can be used to keep members informed and recruit new members. If you should, but do not, receive these as expected, check RMS, UNISON's membership database to ensure you are correctly shown as a safety rep or branch safety officer (or ask your branch or region to do this) and to make sure that it includes your up-to-date email address.

UNISON's main homepage is at: www.UNISON.ORG.UK. You can also keep in touch with our latest campaigning health & safety news through our twitter (https://twitter.com/UNISON_HS) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/UNISONHS) accounts.