

Getting the balance right A toolkit for achieving proportionality in UNISON





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Section 1

Introduction

When UNISON was formed in 1993, proportionality was key to our new structures. Traditionally trade unions had been dominated by men, with little flexibility and few opportunities for new activists, particularly women, to participate.

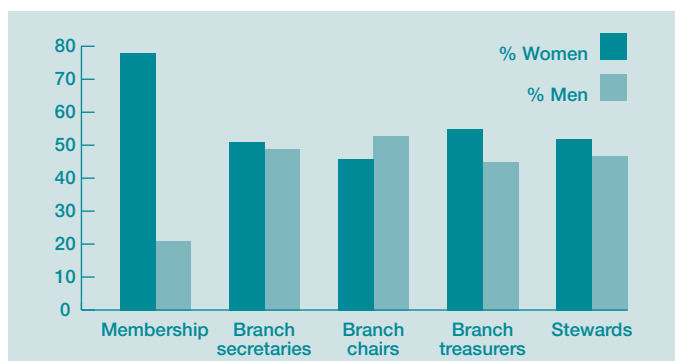
In UNISON, where the majority of members are women public sector workers, it was agreed from the outset that it was essential for these women to be assured that their voices would be heard, their issues would be taken seriously and that they would have the opportunity to play a full role in our union's decision making.

The idea met with some resistance – surely, it was argued, it should be the best person for the job, regardless of their sex? As women and men had equal rights to stand for posts such a change could be seen as tokenism, but it raised the question as to what more was necessary to achieve real change.

Fast forward more than 20 years and we have made enormous progress. However, we still find that women are frequently sidelined into less senior branch officer posts, while men continue to take control as branch secretaries (49%) and chairs (54%).

Our data at the end of 2016 showed that while they are more than three quarters of the membership, women occupy only about half of the most senior branch posts.

Further, although branch delegations to conferences are strictly governed by rules on proportionality and fair representation, apparently branches often struggle to comply. Yet a survey of members who attended women's conference revealed that many had never been given the opportunity to attend national delegate conference, or their service group conference.



Meanwhile, the barriers to women's full participation remain:

Societal barriers – expectations of women as carers and with primary responsibility for the home, which leaves less time for trade union duties;

Cultural barriers – women are still not viewed as strong and decisive people capable of being leaders; there are still stark divisions between perceptions of men's and women's roles; women often lack confidence in their own abilities;

Institutional barriers – the rigidity of union procedures and the historic culture of structures – including the timing and combative nature of meetings, use of jargon etc – together with prejudice and resistance to change.

Clearly there is still a problem, and we have much to do.

At women's conference 2016, it was agreed that we develop a new strategy for achieving proportionality (and fair representation). This toolkit is the first step. It outlines what happens in practice, and focuses on what can be achieved in the future.

Never forget, a woman's place is in her union – as a leader, a campaigner and a decision maker. We hope this toolkit will help branches to comply with our union's rules, and UNISON's one million women members to take their place.

Jargon is almost inevitable in any large organisation, and UNISON is no different. But jargon can be a barrier to participation by new members, and can be used to exclude people and create artificial barriers. We have therefore included a jargon buster at the back of this guide – Appendix A. It's not exhaustive, but it will help you navigate your way through many of UNISON's practices and events, and this toolkit.

Section 2

The Issue

The things that people say...

- We've tried to get women involved, but they're just not interested.
- We spent lots of money training women activists – but then they left.
- Women just aren't tough enough in negotiations.
- Women are more bothered about their home and kids than the union.
- Women are too scared to represent members at disciplinaries.
- We don't have the time or energy to train, support and mentor women activists.
- I had a woman rep once – she was useless.
- They're only interested in earning their money, they don't care about politics and social change.
- No women in our branch are interested in going to national delegate conference – what are we supposed to do?
- We don't have any low paid women in the branch.
- No-one is interested in being the branch women's officer, so we don't have a branch women's group.

You may have heard this and more. But is it true?

Women are people too!

Women have strengths and weaknesses with lives outside of the trade union movement, just as men do. Not every male rep is confident (or great!) at representation and negotiation, while many women are extremely confident and assertive. However, research has shown that women are often judged more harshly, in the trade union movement and in society as a whole:

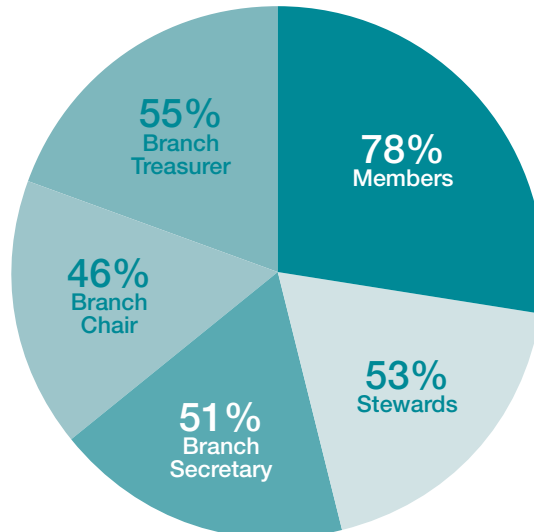
- If women are assertive they are seen as aggressive
- Successful women are regarded as hard, rather than competent
- People perceive that women speak up in meetings more than they actually do
- Men have to validate women's comments before they are taken on board
- Women have to out-perform men to be judged equal
- When women show anger, they are judged as too emotional

The talkativeness of women has been gauged in comparison not with men but with silence. Women have not been judged on the grounds of whether they talk more than men, but whether they talk more than silent women.

Dale Spender

Women aren't interested

When we asked delegates to women's conference if they had ever attended national delegate conference, one in five said they had never been offered the opportunity. Others identified barriers to their participation – almost all of which could be overcome if there is the will to do so.



We have no low paid women in our branch

More than half of UNISON's women members meet the criteria for low paid seats in our union. Very few branches have a minimum wage guarantee that takes all staff above this level. Even in those branches, there will almost certainly be staff working for contractors who would still be eligible for membership – so rarely is it the case that there are no low paid women.

Section 3

So what do we do about it?

UNISON'S rules

Proportionality is defined within the UNISON rule book as “the representation of women and men in fair proportion to the relevant number of female and male members comprising the electorate” (Rule Q – definitions).

UNISON rules also address the issue of fair representation, which is defined as “the broad balance of representation of members of the electorate, taking into account such factors as age and low pay, the balance between full time and part time workers, manual and non-manual workers, different occupations, skills, race, sexual orientation, disability and gender identity (Rule D.2.12.3).

However, proportionality takes priority over fair representation. It is not acceptable to have two male delegates – one Black and one white man for example – instead of a female and male delegate, on the grounds of fair representation. Proportionality must first be met.

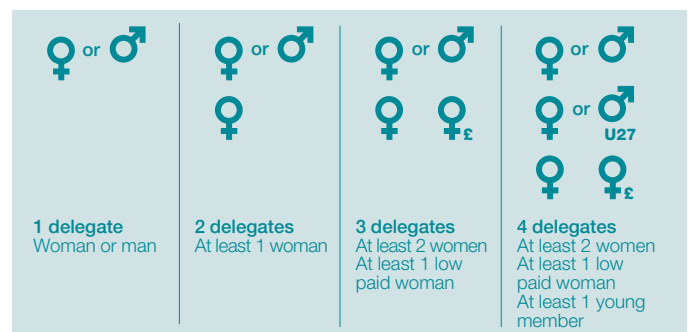
The National Executive Council (NEC) has the power and the responsibility to monitor, review and implement the principles of proportionality and fair representation throughout the union (Rule D.2.14.1), and further guidance is issued from time to time – for example in conference bulletins, or during elections.

How this works in practice

The principle of proportionality (and fair representation) is referred to several times within the rule book in relation to specific situations, as follows:

National Delegate Conference (D.1.4)

Proportionality and fair representation must be met when electing delegates to national delegate conference, in accordance with guidelines drawn up by the National Executive Council. The guidelines are included in the bulletin which is sent out each year in advance of conference.



Proportionality must continue to be met in bigger delegations. Black members must be represented in proportion to their membership in the workforce. Branches should endeavour to include disabled and LGBT members. More than one young member or low paid woman can be part of the delegation, provided proportionality is met.

The principle also applies to shared delegates (D.1.6) where branches are able to elect two members to share delegate seat(s) “in order to further promote proportionality, fair representation, or equal opportunities.”

It is also one of the functions of regions (F3.1.10) to “assist branches in promoting proportionality and fair representation among conference delegates.”

National Executive Council (D.2.1)

Elections to the NEC are conducted to ensure proportionality first, fair representation second. All regions can elect one male, one female and one low paid woman to the reserved seat. Larger regions can elect a second female while the largest regions can elect to a general seat, open to men and women.

Service group representatives on the NEC must also be elected in proportion, with the NEC determining the minimum number of women members in advance of the election. Again, guidance is issued with the nomination forms.

The presidential team

UNISON's presidential team is elected each year at national delegate conference, by the NEC. At least two members of the team will always be women. In 2014 for the first time all three were women.

Service groups (D.3)

The principles of proportionality and fair representation apply to all elections held in relation to service groups (D.3.6.6) – at regional and national level.

Regional council and committee (D.6)

The principles of proportionality and fair representation as defined in the rules apply to all regional council and committee elections. This applies when electing to those bodies, and any elections from and within them. For example, if the chair of the committee is a man, the vice chair must be a woman. However, if a woman is the chair, the vice chair may be another woman. If the regional committee appoints or elects two delegates to another body, at least one must be a woman. If there are three delegates, at least two must be women. If a self organised group (SOG) elects two representatives to a regional committee, at least one must be a woman.

This can be complicated where only one representative is appointed/elected. For example three of the four SOGs might elect a male rep. The balance of proportionality overall would therefore be wrong. By putting in place the measures in this toolkit, and increasing the numbers of women activists at senior level, it should be possible to avoid this situation. However, positive measures may also be necessary*.

The branch

Rule G2.2.2 allows for representatives of branch self organised groups to sit on the branch committee, and rule G.4.1.1 allows for the election of a branch women's officer. Later in this toolkit we explain why this is important to help your branch achieve proportionality. Section 11.2.7 of the Code of good branch practice also sets out UNISON's commitment to self organisation at branch level, and gives clear guidance on support for SOGs, including financial support and ensuring their participation in the branch.

Self organised groups (D.5)

The UNISON rule book enshrines the principles of self organisation. There are four self organised groups (SOGs) – Black members, disabled members, lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transgender (LGBT) members and women members. Young members have a national forum.

The self-organised groups work in partnership with other parts of the union to identify and promote our equality agenda, including monitoring proportionality and fair representation. Self organisation can and should be a vibrant and dynamic part of UNISON.

Each national and regional SOG has developed its own way of operating. Women's self organisation works hard to ensure that the full diversity of women is included within its structures, but the primary focus must be on ensuring proportionality within UNISON and challenging where it is not applied fairly.

The NEC has the responsibility to promote the involvement of members and representatives of the SOGs in the activities of the union, in light of the principles of fair representation and proportionality, and to regularly review the arrangements with the groups concerned.

The equality liaison committee is a body where the chairs of the NEC strategic committees and the SOGs chairs meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest, and to ensure equality is central to UNISON's organising, negotiating and campaigning agendas.

**The rule book commitments should be regarded as the base-line for proportionality, but true proportionality would, with the current membership, be closer to four fifths than two thirds representation. It may also, therefore, be necessary to consider positive action measures.*

This may be as simple as increasing the number of seats open to election for women only (as opposed to general/ male seats) which would create a better balance. But other more creative solutions should be considered. For example, bodies which appoint only one representative could be required to elect a woman at least two out of every three years – preferably three out of every four years.

This works effectively in the UNISON delegation to Labour Party conference, where each region elects two representatives annually. Working on a three year cycle, three or four of the regions are required to send only women representatives, increasing proportionality in the delegation.

Section 4

The benefits of achieving proportionality

In achieving proportionality, the goal is to achieve a stronger branch and union, not just to comply with UNISON's rules. The organising aim is to grow branches and increase the participation of members, particularly those who have traditionally faced barriers to becoming more involved in union activity. To have an inclusive and reflective branch ensures that members who are directly affected by issues that only affect them have a voice, and can directly contribute.

Good democracy depends on the participation of our diverse membership. Nationally, women make up 78% of the membership. Branches are the bedrock of UNISON democracy and if branches are not reflective of their membership then it brings that democracy into jeopardy.

More women than men are joining trade unions now as they are the most vulnerable members of the workforce and have borne the brunt of austerity in the UK. It is vital that trade unions support, actively encourage and facilitate women's participation. By involving more women in trade union activity and mainstreaming 'women's issues' the chances of raising equality, improving the lives of women and breaking down gendered barriers are far higher.

Ensuring women's voices are heard, and improving communications with the majority of the workforce, ensures that we are better placed to give a considered response on employer issues, which will win the support of the member

Margaret McKee **Belfast Hospitals NHS Trust**

Margaret's route to activism is not unusual. She is a woman from an ordinary background, who has combined her UNISON work with her family life.

She became involved in the union because she perceived unfairness in her working life.

Over 36 years ago, working in the catering department in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast, Margaret became concerned about the way in which women in the hospital were paid. She took up a role as a steward and mounted a campaign for equal pay. Since then, she has led branch negotiations against privatisation, cuts to services, zero hours contracts and much more.

Being involved with UNISON has given her the opportunity to bring about change.

Because of the things she had witnessed living in Northern Ireland, and through

her involvement in the regional women's committee, Margaret then became a key player in setting up a workplace scheme to support the victims of domestic violence. She has also been instrumental in work on suicide awareness and prevention, and has worked with other women from the region to support women in local prisons, including organising education courses with the aim of giving them better opportunities on their release.

With the support of others, she has progressed through UNISON.

With the encouragement and support of



her branch, senior activists and regional officials, she became involved in UNISON at regional level, standing for a seat on the regional committee and health service group, as well as the regional women's committee. She was then encouraged to stand for the low paid women's seat on the NEC.

In 2016 Margaret was also elected as vice president of UNISON, and received the accolade of winning the TUC women's gold badge, which is awarded annually in recognition of a member's contribution to trade unionism and their community.

She believes in supporting other women.

As a member of the NEC, Margaret was selected as a representative to the national women's committee. The NEC representatives play an important role in providing the link between the committees and the union's other strategic committees, but Margaret believes it is equally important to support and advise other women who aspire to play a leadership role in our union.

Section 5

Practical steps to achieve (and retain) proportionality

Most branches and activists are aware of UNISON's rules on proportionality but some find it difficult to achieve. Below are some ideas for branches that need to improve the gender balance on the branch committee and/or within the branch steward network to comply with UNISON's rules and to improve the branch effectiveness.

Branch proportionality plans

Make equality a priority

- Develop communication systems with members, potential members and activists to advertise national women's conference, branch and regional women's committee and SOG activities.
- A UNISON survey of women activists revealed that over 70% use smart phones and/or tablets, with the same number using social networking. Branches could therefore expand their use of social media as a form of communicating with women members, especially young women members.
- Recruit and train a branch women's officer (Appendix B).
- Set up a branch women's group.
- Set up a branch equality team.
- Send delegate(s) and visitor(s) to national women's conference.
- Run campaigns with local relevance for women members and potential members eg equal pay, sexual harassment, pregnancy discrimination.

The annual joint branch assessment

There are many ways in which the branch assessment process can make equality and proportionality into a reality. It is not necessary to implement them all at once, but they will evolve once women become involved and active:

- Develop strategies to recruit new women members.
- hold recruitment events across various workplaces during women's history month (March).
- make sure that shift workers are covered – particularly if you are targeting low paid women in contracted out services.
- remember like recruits like – involve existing women activists in the recruitment events.

- involve the regional office who will be able to advise and provide resources.
- Carry out a mapping exercises to identify where low paid women members are;
- Set up and support the maintenance of a branch women's SOG;
- Allocate funding for women's involvement - the branch group, regional women's committee/network events, targeted training and national women's conference;
- Organise an equality training course for all officers on the branch committee;
- Negotiate UNISON's model domestic violence policy with employers;
- Ensure there is a branch equality action plan with clear aims and objectives – see Appendix C for a checklist.

Branch meetings

The timing, location and duration of meetings are important if we are to be successful in increasing the participation of women.

A feature of the today's public sector workforce is that not all workers work from one main building, the workforce is spread out over many worksites and across many employers (the fragmented workforce). However, sometimes that way of thinking prevails and members have to make lengthy trips to attend branch meetings.

Generally, this is much more difficult for women. Women still shoulder the burden of caring and domestic responsibility which can impact on their ability to attend meetings outside of their working hours, and they may be further restricted by a lack of facility time. See Appendix D for the equality checklist for branch meetings.

Involving low paid women members

In recent years much work has been carried out to understand why it is difficult to recruit and organise among our lowest paid members who are predominantly women.

Occupational segregation – the inequality in the distribution of women and men across different occupational groups – means a large concentration of women are employed in the lowest graded jobs.



Jobs in cleaning, catering, clerical and caring jobs are among the lowest paid. UNISON has always been at the forefront of campaigning to increase the pay and terms and conditions of our low paid members.

More than 50% of UNISON's women members meet the criteria for low paid workers as defined by the UNISON rule book. The UNISON low paid rate is different to that of the Living Wage, Minimum Wage and the new National Living Wage, and is updated annually. The important thing to note is that whilst your employer might pay the Living Wage or National Living Wage rates, they are all still below the UNISON low paid rate.

In fact the largest growing groups of members within UNISON are care workers and teaching assistants. Given the nature of their employment contracts (often term time only and/or zero hours) women from these groups are very likely to meet the low paid criteria.

However, some women feel that 'low paid' is a stigmatising

label that reveals how little an employer values them. UNISON values all members whatever the pay band and recognises that low paid workers are likely to be the most vulnerable of workers. Branches need to consider how to approach low paid women in a way that doesn't damage their confidence or self esteem.

Branches should consider:

- Mapping women members to ascertain how many low paid women there are, and where they work;
- Working with regional teams to develop to recruit and organise low paid women identified by the mapping exercise;
- Carrying out site visits to talk to and engage with low paid women members;
- Carrying out a survey of key issues for those workers;
- Developing a strategy for recruiting and engaging with women migrant workers (UNISON's strategic organising unit may be able to assist);
- Members in the fragmented workforce.

Section 6

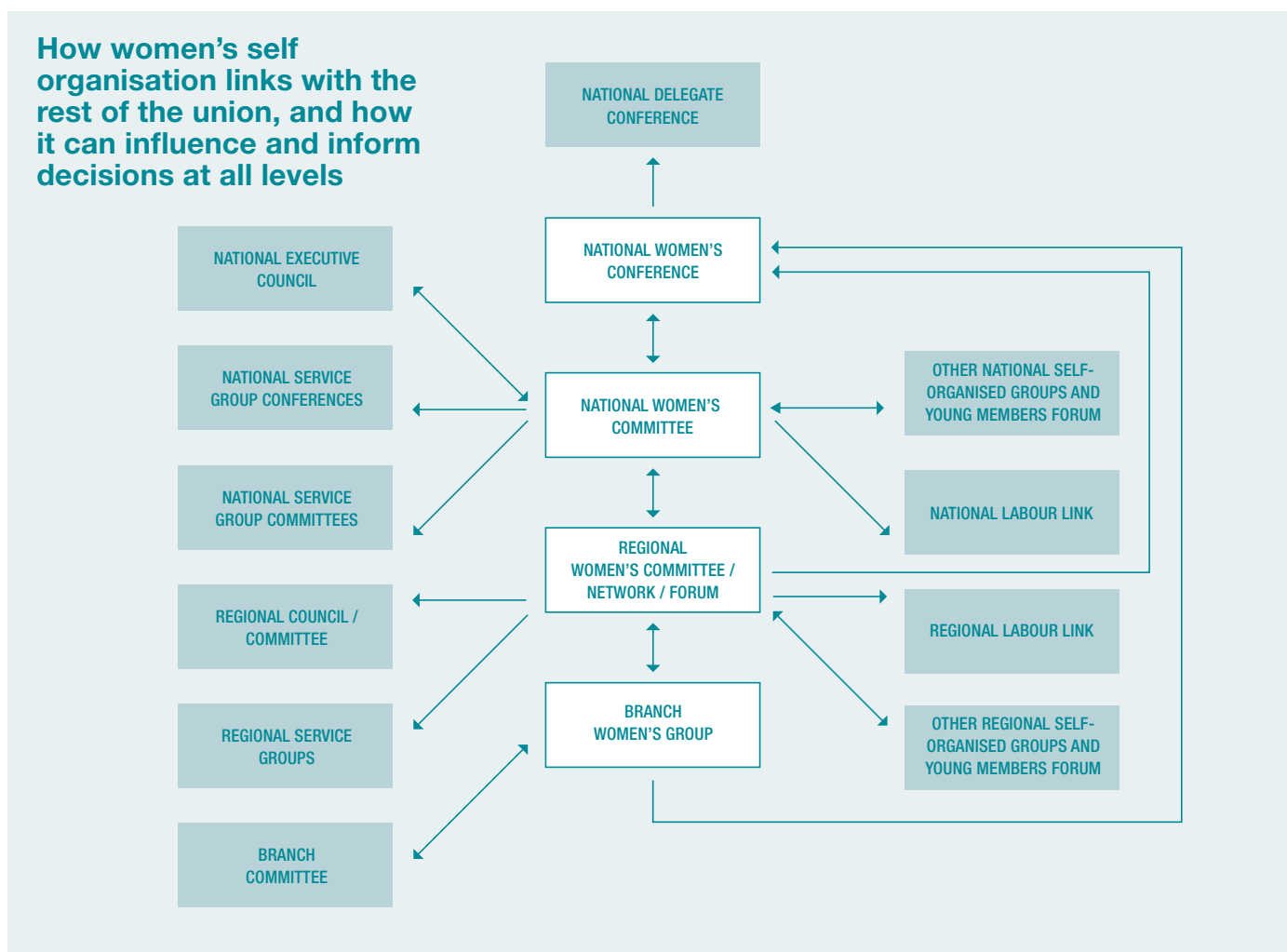
Women's self organisation

UNISON is recognised among the trade union movement for the innovative way in which the union worked to ensure that women were fairly represented from the beginning of the new union in 1993. However, some members question why, in a union where more than three quarters of the members are women, it is still necessary to have a women's SOG.

The answer is in the introduction to this document. Because prejudice and discrimination are deep-rooted in our society, women members have traditionally been less visible in trade unions and under-represented in democratic structures. Many members who become involved via a self-organised group go on to hold senior positions at branch, regional and national level.

Women's self organisation is just one way to encourage more women to become engaged and active. Women's self organisation:

- welcomes new activists;
- allows women's voices to be heard;
- helps the union identify and challenge discrimination and build equality;
- is a way for members to get involved in the union, developing skills, expertise and confidence;
- is an alternative pathway into trade union activism through identity politics;
- may be the first point of contact with the union for members and potential members;
- provides a safe space for women to share their issues and concerns.



UNWinD **UNISON Women in Dorset**

Early in 2015 a few women in Dorset County branch discussed the need for women to come together. The invitation was initially to branch members but, knowing some women in other Dorset branches, it was later opened to women members in all branches in the county. 15 women responded to the open invitation and attended the first meeting in April. They have met once a month since. Meetings are always well attended.

Why a women's group?

Although the majority of members in the union, the women in Dorset recognised that they saw very little of each other and had little opportunity to discuss issues that are important to them. They particularly identified the difficulties posed by living in a large rural county and that they were all struggling to live on less money. The group offers an opportunity to socialise with women, discuss political and trade union issues and also have some much needed fun.

When do they meet?

Alternate Tuesday and Thursday evenings (and also occasional walks on Sunday). Meetings are planned 6 months in advance in recognition of women's busy lives.

What do they do?

At the first meeting women discussed what they wanted from a group. A 'talking shop' was not enough. They recognised that women have always worked best by 'doing something' whilst engaging in discussion and campaigning. Activities have included making feminist bunting for their UNISON gazebo, a clothes swap, jewellery recycling, BBQ on the beach, a walk, bring and share meal and hula hooping. The women have enjoyed learning from each other and developing new skills.

What do they discuss?

All discussions are led by the women and are generally impromptu. Women have found the group a safe place to explore issues and they describe some 'feisty debates' on prostitution, Brexit and the

Labour leadership. There have also been significant discussions on workplace issues and maternity and parental rights.

How is it funded?

All from branch funds. The group is very importantly no cost to members.

What has it achieved?

Discussing issues in a safe place has increased women's confidence to engage in discussions elsewhere. They are generally more interested in politics and trade union matters and have a greater understanding of what UNISON has to offer including education and learning. There has also been examples of individuals improving workplace practices for themselves and others such as concerning bullying. The members of UNWinD have also attended demos, had a stall at a diversity festival and many of them were stewards at Tolpuddle.

Setting up a branch women's group

Branches are encouraged, within the Code of good branch practice, to develop self organisation. If a branch has elected a branch women's officer, she is the obvious person to lead on this, with support from other branch officers and activists. If not, the branch should consider electing a branch women's officer as a starting point (Appendix B).

- Talk to women members, stewards and branch officers about setting up a group – they may have suggestions for women who would be interested in being involved.
- Discuss within the branch committee, including how

the group will be funded.

- Involve the branch education officer, who may have resources available and information on women-only courses.
- Involve the branch equality co-ordinator, who may already have been involved in setting up other SOGs.
- Ensure that the group is publicised, the campaigns they identify are acted upon and supported.

There is a resources guide at Appendix E where you will find links to further information and guidance. You can also ask your regional officer and/or the regional women's officer/contact.



Julia O’Connell
Isle of Wight local
government branch

Julia O’Connell has been a member of the south east regional women’s committee and a branch women’s officer for the Isle of Wight branch since 2008. Julia has always had a keen interest in education and training and after attending the branch women’s officer course, Julia decided to organise a branch women’s group around the theme of learning, and advertised the UNISON Women’s lives course to members.

It was to be the start of a branch women’s group that is still going strong and some of the women who attended the course and who were not actively involved beforehand are active at branch and at regional level.

Liaising with national office, tutors and venues, Julia played a crucial role in organising the course, and participated herself. There was interest amongst the group for a follow-on course in assertiveness skills that Julia also arranged. One of the biggest benefits to members was that both courses were held on the Isle of Wight, something which has often been difficult to achieve in the past with members generally having to make a ferry journey to the mainland for training courses.

The Women’s lives course is specifically designed for women who have been away from learning for some time but who would like to take up new learning opportunities. It looks at issues of interest to women and draws on personal experiences at work and at home and develops skills in writing, research, analysis and problem solving.

Here is what some of the women from the Isle of Wight have to say about learning with UNISON:

Having recently had a baby I wasn’t sure how easy it would be for me to participate in the course but UNISON were so accommodating and I never felt left out which was so important.
Shantel

I decided to do the course even though I didn’t know much about what it would entail. I was nervous but I went along and I learnt so much. I recommend it!
Maureen

It was a challenge to get the course off the ground but it has been very rewarding.
Julia, branch women’s officer

Since the courses in 2012, Julia has become more involved in the regional democratic structures, attending regional council and committee regularly; being elected to the regional education, training and development committee; as the chair of the regional women’s committee and the branch education officer, and recently to the national women’s committee.

UNISON’s education and learning opportunities for members are an excellent way to encourage greater participation from under represented groups of members, especially women members. This is particularly true for women who work part time hours and/or who are low paid, as these members generally have few opportunities to access good quality training in their workplace.

Why you should send branch delegates to women's conference

Members often come to women's self organisation as a first step in their engaging with UNISON. They may not have become a workplace steward, or have been active in their workplace before, but they will bring their personal experiences to the agenda, their involvement with other campaigning groups and organisations. It is not uncommon to have lots of experience of campaigning but little or no experience or knowledge of UNISON.

Each of UNISON's self organised groups has its own annual conference. The purpose of women's conference is to develop policy and campaigns on women's issues. Women's conference also has seminars, service group meetings and fringe meetings. The conferences are a valuable way for our members to come together to debate, share experience and expertise, update and increase knowledge, network and increase skills and confidence.

Women's conference takes place in mid-February each year, on a Thursday/Friday/Saturday, and is held in different venues throughout the UK. Every branch can send at least one delegate and multiple visitors (who can attend all the seminars and meetings but cannot speak or vote). You do not need to have a branch self organised group set up and functioning to send a delegate or visitor, but you do need to have a branch women's group if you want to submit motions to conference.

The benefits for your branch are that you have the opportunity to help grow new activists for your branch – new activists who have access to a network of supporters with expertise. Consistently, those that attend women's conference find it stimulating, encouraging, inspirational, thought provoking and motivational. Many return from conference determined to become more involved in UNISON, to set up a branch group (if there is not already one) and to work with the branch officers to increase visibility of UNISON's equality campaigning.

Luton Borough branch

In 2011, several women from Luton Borough branch attended national women's conference in Harrogate. As part of the conference, they were participants in the domestic violence and abuse workshop.

Returning back to their branch, they discovered the employer did not have a domestic abuse policy for staff. They worked with the regional women's officer and tabled a draft model policy, tailored to the employer. Following negotiations, the policy was agreed and implemented.

The women negotiators were able to negotiate significantly better than the model policy. Using their experience as trade union activists and knowing the needs of their women members, they included support for victims/survivors which included special paid leave up to a maximum of 20 days for relevant appointments, including with support agencies, solicitors, to re-arrange housing or childcare, and for court appointments.

The policy negotiated has enabled women affected by domestic abuse to be supported to remain in the workforce, in safety. It sent out a powerful message that UNISON supports its members. For the women who negotiated the policy, it has empowered them to play an even greater role in the union, and they are now key activists in their branch.

What women's conference is all about

Debates are wide ranging, and are linked to UNISON's objectives and priorities, just as they are at national delegate conference. We discuss:

- How to challenge government policy which has a detrimental affect on our members' lives;
- New ways of working and how they impact on women – zero hours contracts, term-time contracts, legislative changes – mainstream issues affecting all areas of the union;
- Women's health, particularly how it affects their working lives;
- Ending violence against women in all forms, including why domestic violence is a workplace issue and how we can support members experiencing abuse;
- Women in society – increasing women's participation in political and union life, how to bring about change;
- Campaigning around other issues which are important to women, including international affairs.

Members also have the chance to attend seminars which are intended to provide practical skills and

knowledge, to equip them to become more involved in the branch and to develop their campaigning and organising skills.

And of course there are service group meetings where they have the chance to hear and raise questions with UNISON senior officers on the latest campaigns and developments within their service group.

The cost to the branch

Travel costs for delegates will be funded nationally. Travel costs for visitors must be paid for by the branch.

Branches are also responsible for funding their delegates' and visitors' attendance at conference, but financial assistance may be available – the conference bulletin, which is issued in the late summer each year, has details. Subsistence should cover the cost of accommodation, meals, childcare, dependent care and facilitation, and should be paid at the same rate for attendance for any other UNISON conference.

unison.org.uk/events



Section 7

Top tips for encouraging women to be involved

Engage them

Get their input – what matters to them?

What's on the agenda? Is it relevant and important to women?

Address women's true priorities

What are you doing to change things?

Tell them about it.

Create and support formal mentoring programmes.

Demystify the union, its language and structures.

Support women activists.

Provide opportunities for women to strategise together

Support them to attend national women's conference and regional women's events.

Support them to organise a branch women's group.

Long and tedious meetings are not the only way to make progress.

Put women in leadership

The more visible women are in leadership roles, the more other women will be enthused.

Highlight the importance of women's contributions

Give equal status to women's concerns.

Credit women for their ideas and successes.

Provide flexible options for involvement

Don't throw them in at the deep end!

Job sharing should be an option – there are rarely real obstacles to it working effectively.

Small tasks and practical jobs encourage greater involvement.

Provide training on mobilising women

Give women the skills they need.

If you need any further information or advice, please contact your regional office and ask to speak to the officer who works with the regional women's committee, or email women@unison.co.uk

Appendix A

UNISON jargon buster

What is self organisation?

Self organisation

Groups facing discrimination, meeting and organising to determine their collective agenda and feeding it into UNISON's structure.

SOGs

The four self-organised groups: defined by UNISON national rules as women members, Black members, disabled members and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members.

NDMC

National disabled members' committee

NLGBTC

National lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender committee

NBMC

National Black members' committee

NWC

National women's committee

NYMF

National young members' forum

MPU

Membership participation unit – the UNISON department where the staff who work with and support the national self organised groups work.

The terms we use

Positive action

Action to combat the prejudice and discrimination experienced by members of the self organised groups.

Self-definition

Right of people to define themselves, e.g. as disabled or lesbian.

Proportionality

The representation of women and men in fair proportion to the relevant number of female and male members of

the electorate. UNISON has a rulebook commitment to proportionality.

Fair representation

The broad balance of representation of members of the electorate, taking into account such factors as age and low pay, the balance between full-time and part-time time workers, manual and non-manual workers, different occupations, skills, race, sexual orientation, disability and gender identity. UNISON has a rulebook commitment to fair representation.

Code of good branch practice

A set of guidelines, including a chapter on self organisation, drawn up by the national executive council which it considers desirable for branches to follow.

Labour Link levy

A fund made up of contributions from opted-in members used to support the Labour Party.

General political fund (GPF)

A fund made up of contributions from opted-in members used for non party-political campaigning.

Mapping

Creating an organising 'map' which identifies employers, workplaces, members, low paid workers, potential members, gaps in membership, stewards and reps, potential activists etc, as well as the main issues of concern to the members.

UNISON's organisation

National delegate conference (NDC)

Supreme decision-making body of UNISON – annual conference of branch delegates at which the self-organised groups have representation.

NEC

National executive council – elected body of lay members.

Lay member

A member who is not an employee of the union.

Lay structure

A body that does not consist of employees of the union.

Regions

UNISON is organised into 12 regions around the country, each with their own regional office and staff.

Service groups

UNISON organises members in the following services – energy, health care, education, local government, police and justice, water, environment & transport, community and voluntary sector. The service group has autonomy to decide the group's general policy and negotiate on behalf of its members. Each service group has an annual conference of delegates which sets the group's agenda for the following year.

Sector

A sub-group of a service group, e.g. the nursing and midwives sector of the healthcare service group.



Appendix B

The branch women's officer

Members may feel that women's issues are not prioritised in the branch and/or that the employer does not treat women's issues seriously.

Electing a branch women's officer (BWO) offers the opportunity to bring about important changes for women in the workplace. UNISON can provide training for the role, and the BWO can network and work collaboratively with other branch women's officers in their area. They can become involved in the regional women's committee/forum or network, attend national women's conference and help UNISON agree its work plan priorities for the national women's committee. The branch women's officer is an important role in UNISON.

What the BWO role is:

- Building links with women's sector organisations and where appropriate signposting to specialist organisations for women (domestic abuse/Rape Crisis) and assisting in negotiations on employer policies on violence against women;
- Ensuring that the branch has a wide range of resources for women, such as books, videos and leaflets, and making these resources accessible to all women in the branch;
- Organising a women's group and identifying concerns, possibly using a survey/social media;
- Identifying women members of the branch, and liaising with the branch committee on progress towards proportionality;
- Being a focal point for women's issues for members and raising issues affecting women, particularly those with service conditions implications with the branch committee;
- Supporting women in their issues generally and campaigning on issues that are important to women.

Why this role is important for your branch:

- To ensure women's views are known;
- To increase women's confidence;
- To encourage women to get involved in UNISON;
- To influence decision making in the branch;
- To influence negotiating priorities with your employer;
- To build links with the regional women's committee.

Recruiting a branch women's officer

Becoming a branch women's officer (BWO) can appear a daunting and isolating responsibility. That is why it is important that branches do not rely solely on the BWO to ensure that women's voices are heard.

Things to consider:

- A branch that is truly inclusive is much more likely to recruit a BWO;
- Establish a network of workplace contacts – start small;
- Get out there and talk to women. Experience shows women often don't believe they have the skills or confidence and only consider it when asked;
- The post may appear more attractive if it is genuinely seen as a key branch officer position with the work being integral to all the activities of the branch;
- Consider negotiating facility time (or allocating a share of existing facility time);
- The role could be offered as a job-share;
- Promote education and training to membership and activists to increase confidence and knowledge, and consider sending women on the branch women's officers' training course to find out more about the role.

Appendix C

Joint branch assessment equality checklist

Local bargaining and campaigns

- Have any reps undertaken training in equality impact assessment/equality analysis?
- Is the branch involved in equality impact assessment with the employer?
- Has the branch undertaken training in the Public Sector Equality Duty?
- Has the branch run any campaigns with an equality focus?

Recruitment and organisation

- Has the branch participated in equality awareness training?
- Has the branch run any events aimed at underrepresented groups?
- Have any reps undertaken training in the Equality Act?

Representation

- Does the branch monitor how many discrimination cases have been run?
- Have any reps undertaken discrimination law training?
- Have any reps undertaken disability discrimination and fit note training?

Participation

- Does the branch send representatives to self organised group national conferences?
- Does the branch send representatives to regional self organised group meetings?
- Does the branch have a proportional number of members and activists from under-represented groups?
- Are the SOG and equality officer positions filled in the branch?
- Does the branch have trained equality reps?
- Are there active self organised groups or an equality group in the branch?
- Does the branch promote self organisation in any way eg display equality posters?

*Under-represented groups – women, Black members, disabled members, young, LGBT members and low paid members.



Appendix D

Equality checklist for meetings

Pre-meeting publicity

- Advertise widely. Assumptions should not be made in relation to who will and who won't be interested in attending or being involved. Make an attempt to contact all women members.
- Ensure all notices are available in suitable formats such as e-mail and hard copies (other alternatives may be requested eg USB, Braille).
- Offer financial assistance for members with dependants and/or provide a crèche/childcare (on request). Ensure that members are aware that these facilities are available, and that rates are in line with national guidelines which are updated regularly.

Agenda and meeting business

- Agree and confirm meeting dates well in advance.
- Rotate venues and times of meetings to maximise members attendance/involvement.
- Ensure equality is a standing item on all agendas.
- Ensure a plan is in place to take into account the concerns of all members.
- The purpose, aims and intended achievements of the meeting should be clear from the outset.
- Alternative methods should be made available for members to contribute towards any meetings they are unable to attend.
- Ongoing committee/group meetings should include an annual election of officers and reps (in accordance with 'fair representation and proportionality' rules) and receive reports of the year's activities, achievements and work-plans for the next year.
- If the meeting is a SOG meeting make clear that attendees have to meet the criteria for that SOG.
- Reports should be provided to other relevant groups (taking into account confidentiality as necessary).

Access

Access is about much more than just wheelchair ramps, it's about:

- Ensuring attendees familiarity with UNISON's disability policy and working together guidelines;
- Not making assumptions;
- Enquiring as to what needs people have;
- Ensuring confidentiality.

Planning ahead

- Ensure the venue is accessible to all members. Consider public transport availability and availability of parking for disabled members close to the venue (reserved disabled spaces).
- Ensure members can all move around freely between areas without obstacles, and that the venue has: level ground, handrails, clear signposting, lifts where necessary, ramps not steps, automatic doors, accessible toilets, adjustable lighting.
- Ensure dietary requirements are catered for.
- Is there an adequate space which could perform the same function as a prayer/quiet room.
- Entrances to buildings should be suitable for visible and hearing impaired members.
- Note that venues where alcohol is consumed will prevent some members from attending.
- Is an induction loop provided and is it working?
- Is seating spaced apart adequately to accommodate the needs of members with mobility impairments?
- Are wheelchair users able to sit with their colleagues?
- Are microphones accessible to all?
- Ensure someone is aware of the emergency procedures and has access to emergency numbers for the building (ie burglar alarms, fire procedures etc).

Appendix E

UNISON resources supporting women members

unison.org.uk/women

This is the website section for women members and women's self-organised groups. Useful resources can be found listed at the bottom of the webpage including:

- [Women in UNISON campaigning handbook](#)
This is updated each year following national women's conference. It is a key tool for getting women involved in campaigns which are important to UNISON's women members, as identified at national women's conference each year.
- [Model equality and diversity policy and guide](#)
- [Women's mental health issues: not to be ignored at work](#)
- [Women's health issues: a workplace issue](#)
- [Pregnancy: your rights at work](#)
- [Counting the cost: how council cuts shrink women's lives \(from 2014\)](#)
UNISON's analysis of responses from councils across the UK and women surveyed about their experiences of cuts.
- [Women deserve better: a better deal for women aged 50 and over in employment \(from 2014\)](#)
UNISON commissioned a large-scale survey to examine the emerging patterns and trends in discrimination being experienced by older women in the workplace.

unison.org.uk/get-involved/learning-development/activists/negotiating-and-bargaining

In-depth guides and model agreements for effective negotiating and bargaining including:

- [Flexible working guidance](#)
- [Gender pay reporting](#)
- [Medical screening leave factsheet](#)
- [Menopause factsheet](#)
- [Negotiating for working parents](#)
- [Women's reproductive health issues](#)

unison.org.uk/onlinecatalogue

- [Organising for equality: UNISON guidelines on self-organisation](#), stock number 1577
- [A guide to equality in UNISON](#), stock number 2778

- [Harassment at work – a UNISON guide](#), stock number 1359
- [Domestic violence and abuse: a trade union issue](#), stock number 3477
- [We won't look the other way: domestic abuse poster](#), stock number 2539
- [We won't look the other way: domestic abuse leaflet](#), stock number 3558
- [Menopause and work](#) stock number 3075
- [Gender, safety and health](#), stock number 1982

UNISON's rules and guidance for branches, including funding of women's (and other self organised) groups

- [Code of good branch practice](#), stock number 224272
- [The UNISON rule book | How we work | UNISON National](#) order by telephone 020 7121 5131

Keeping informed

www.unison.org.uk/women

www.facebook.com/unisonwomen

Twitter [@WomenInUNISON](https://twitter.com/WomenInUNISON)

are used to promote our own campaigns and those which UNISON supports, share information and raise awareness of the work we are doing.

The women's e-bulletin is sent to all women activists registered on our membership database. If you are not included but would like to receive a copy you can opt in by emailing women@unison.co.uk. This is also the email address for any general queries you may have.

Regional advice

All UNISON regions have a member of UNISON staff working with the regional women's SOG. You can contact them by calling your regional office – the contact details are here www.unison.org.uk/regions

Further reading

[I knew I could do this work](#)

Seven strategies that promote women's activism and leadership in unions by Amy Caiazza (December 2007).



