

**PARTNERSHIP WORKING AT REGIONAL
LEVEL**

Introduction

Regions play a key role in UNISON's development and governance. Their function is set out in detail in Rule F of UNISON's Rulebook .This includes overseeing the deployment of regional resources, organisation and the development and implementation of policy.

In 1998, the union's Strategic Review highlighted the importance of regions and their relationship with the national union. The subsequent report on devolution took account of the impact of UK devolution and enhancing regional policy making powers.

It is crucial to the success of the union that regions function effectively. While the Regional Secretary, on behalf of the General Secretary, has responsibility for the day to day management of the region, Regional Lay Leadership has a legitimate role in monitoring deployment of resources to region. In particular, there should be partnership working between Regional Secretaries, members of the Regional Management Team (RMT) and the Regional Convenor's Team.

National Liaison

Regions have a central role in developing UNISON's lay democracy and organisation. The regional leadership must ensure that regions are collectively and independently consulted on priority and strategic issues. To aid this process, there should be national meetings of Regional Convenors, including an Annual two-day seminar; plus two national joint meetings with Regional Secretaries.

How Partnership Works

A close working relationship means ensuring that information is shared within the region between the regional secretary, the RMT, the regional convenor and the regional lay leadership, on issues such as:

- Branch organisation
- Policy development
- Campaigning priorities
- Deployment of resources
- Communications
- Industrial action

Facilities for Senior Regional Lay Leadership

Adequate facilities, resources and equipment must be provided for the senior lay leadership to carry out their duties. UNISON email addresses, regular meetings and training sessions will be arranged as required.

A minimum provision of facilities should normally include:

- use of facilities within the regional office
- access to regional office, including use of meeting rooms, by arrangement, subject to availability
- secretarial and administrative support
- allocation of a PC and printer with access to email
- supply of printed stationery in the convenor's name, to include headed note
- paper, compliment slips and business cards
- supply of a mobile phone where required
- feedback from meetings of the Regional Management Team
- systems developed to facilitate communication between the lay and full time structures of the union
- consideration should be given to a regional group of senior lay activists/officers and management team, or similar liaison group, to meet on a frequent basis to discuss regional strategic issues and the resolutions of council and committee.

Additional costs arising from the above will be charged to the lay activity budget, other than premises and staff support.

Regional Constitutions

Broadly in line with national rules, regional constitutions have been developed to reflect regional activities and working practices. They aim to help develop union organisation and improve participation.

Supporting Branch Organisation

In addition to the working with Regional Council and Service Groups, there is a requirement that regions have a lead role in promoting and monitoring branch development. This includes responsibility for managing the process of restructuring branches, as delegated by the National Executive Council in accordance with Rule F 3.3.

In doing so Regions will be required to:

- work within UNISON's national policies, objectives and procedures

- apply the core principles laid down in the NEC's Scheme of Core Principles concerning the establishment and restructuring of UNISON branches
- liaise with the national office as appropriate
- comment on allocation of members to service groups, as NEC exercises its powers under Rule D.3.2.

As part of this process, regions identify a joint body made up of lay officers and paid staff, based on partnership principles, to manage the process on a day to day basis (known as the regional group). This group has the power to initiate and assess proposals for branch restructuring.

Regions are also responsible for managing the Regional Pool. Requests for additional funding should be linked with Organising Framework and agreed at regional level using the lay structures of the region. Decisions taken at regional level should follow a national protocol agreed by the NEC.

Role at National Delegate Conference

Regions have an important role to play in the union's democracy. At National Delegate Conference there is close liaison with regions from the Standing Orders Committee and the NEC. Regional delegates have an important role to play in co-ordinating input from delegates in their respective regions and liaising between regions.

Before conference, the region also has responsibility for implementing the scheme of representation and determining branch appeals. Working to the union's national objectives, regions need to set work plans that work within these parameters. There is a need for regular reviews to ensure these are being met. There must be some flexibility within the system to take account of issues which arise which are unplanned but have to be serviced – such as industrial disputes. However, variations should be limited, to prevent priorities becoming a 'wish list' and the system falling into disrepute.

Mechanisms need to be developed to ensure Service Groups and Self Organised Groups are an integral part of this process rather than being seen as groups who need to be consulted. Additionally, staff within the region need to ensure their objectives and responsibilities reflect the regional priorities.

Regional/Branch Interface

Good communication with branches is essential.

This should cover good working relationship practices and communications between regions and branches and vice versa. These agreements should include written, telephonic and electronic communication between members, their branches and the region.

Democracy in UNISON

Regional representatives, like all representatives in the union, have a responsibility to those they represent. Therefore, they should ensure that they represent the views and policy of the region when using their regional title. They also have a responsibility to report back to their region and to ensure that they uphold UNISON rules and procedures.

More information can be found in the 'Democracy in UNISON' guidelines.

Politics and Campaigning

Regions are responsible for the co-ordination and development of political structures across the union in line with national delegate conference policy. This includes promotion of Labour Link activity and encouraging branch and regional access to Campaign Fund (where regions have delegated expenditure to a limit of £5,000 in line with Campaign Fund guidelines). With political devolution, there is an increased need for regions and the NEC to work together as set out in the Devolution Protocol.

In relation to press and broadcasting activities, regions should ensure compliance with the UNISON media guidelines, which are contained within the 'Democracy in UNISON' guidelines.

Self Organisation

Regions should promote Equalities in line with UNISON national guidelines, in particular ensuring the close liaison of self organised groups and mainstreaming of equalities work into union structures.

The regional lay leadership has a key role in promoting UNISON's equality objectives across all activities. This includes ensuring good two way communication with the self-organised and young members groups. These equality groups bring together groups of members facing particular disadvantage to identify workplace and campaign issues and encourage activism, informing and assisting in UNISON bargaining, campaigning and organising.

Regional equality organising is particularly important as few branches sustain regular activity for all equality groups. Regional self-organisation and young members organisation feeds back into branches, encouraging participation.

UNISON guidance on self organisation 'Organising for equality' <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/05/On-line-Catalogue222252.pdf> and includes detailed advice on regional self organisation.

Finance

Lay activity budgets are overseen by regional committee with budgets allocated to regional standing committees, SOGs, young members, retired members and service groups etc. following consultation; regional operating budgets (in accordance with the regional funding formula) are managed by regional secretaries but subject to consultation as per Rule F 3.1.1.

Regional Convenors and Regional Secretaries have a role in:

- monitoring the allocation of resources
- resolving branch complaints
- assisting with organisational problems
- ensuring probity at branch level

Key Tasks of Regional Convener

The Regional Convener is elected by Regional Council Delegates and is the senior lay member at regional level [Rule F 4.4.6]. The Regional Convener usually chairs regional council and regional committee meetings.

Tasks relating to the office of Regional Convener include:

- ensuring development and maintenance of strong and flexible branch structures including supervising allocation of regional pool
- monitoring deployment of resources allocated to the region to ensure that UNISON objectives are being effectively pursued
- implementation of national policies and campaign strategies, in particular, organising strategies
- liaison with region's NEC representatives
- supporting union communications and lay member education provision at regional level
- liaison with self organised groups, retired members and young members
- consulting with, and representing the union on, external bodies in relation to economic, political and social issues in accordance with Democracy in UNISON guidelines and devolution protocol
- participating in the Regional Convenors' Group at national level
- in partnership with the Regional Secretary, ensuring effective lay governance via Regional Council and other lay member democratic structures within the region.

Other Regional Lay Posts

Many regions have established collective lay leadership teams with established roles for Deputy Convenors and, in some cases Regional Treasurer. The specific roles and responsibilities of these posts should be set out in regional council constitutions.

Key Tasks of Regional Secretary

The Regional Secretary is appointed by the NEC and reports to the relevant Assistant General Secretary.

Tasks relating to the post of Regional Secretary include:

- effective management of all staff employed in the region
- ensuring that the region fulfils rule book duties and obligations
- delivery of the union's equality policies, in particular fair representation and proportionality
- efficient financial management and deployment of resources within the region
- promotion and delivery of UNISON objectives and priorities
- participation in Senior Management Group
- management of relationships with external bodies
- media spokesperson for the union at regional level, in liaison with the Regional Convenor, in accordance with UNISON media guidelines
- in partnership with Regional Convenor, ensuring effective lay governance via Regional Council and other lay member democratic structures within the region.

A list of Regional Secretaries (and locations) is outlined below:

Eastern

Regional Secretary - **Vacant (as at January 2020)**

UNISON Eastern
Higdon House
Kempson Way
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP32 7AR

East Midlands

Regional Secretary - Chris Jenkinson
UNISON
East Midlands Regional Office
Vivian Avenue
Nottingham
NG5 1AF

Greater London

Regional Secretary - Maggi Ferncombe
UNISON
1st floor
Congress House
Great Russell Street
London
WC1B 3LS

Northern

Regional Secretary - Clare Williams
UNISON Northern
140-150 Pilgrim Street
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 6TH

Northern Ireland

Regional Secretary - Patricia McKeown
UNISON
Galway House
165 York Street
Belfast
BT15 1AL

North West

Regional Secretary - Kevan Nelson
UNISON North West Regional Centre
Arena Point
1 Hunts Bank
Manchester
M3 1UN

Scotland

Regional Secretary - Mike Kirby
UNISON House
14 West Campbell Street
Glasgow
G2 6RX

South East

Regional Secretary - Steve Torrance
Ground Floor
Ranger House
Walnut Tree Close
Guildford
Surrey
GU1 4UL

South West

Regional Secretary - Joanne Kaye
1st Floor Vintry House
Wine House
Bristol
BS1 2BD

Wales/Cymru

Regional Secretary - Tanya Palmer (Acting)
UNISON Cymru/Wales
UNISON House
Custom House Street
Cardiff
CF10 1AP

West Midlands

Regional Secretary - Ravi Subramanian
UNISON West Midlands
24 Livery Street
Birmingham
B3 2PA

Yorkshire & Humberside

Regional Secretary – John Cafferty
UNISON Yorkshire & Humberside Regional Centre
Commerce House
Wade Lane
Leeds
LS2 8NJ

Other useful publications

The following publications can be downloaded from UNISON website:

Democracy in UNISON guidelines:

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/06/On-line-Catalogue133053.pdf>

Code of good branch practice

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/10/On-line-Catalogue224272.pdf>

The devolution protocol for bargaining, communications and policy development

<https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/11/NEC-Devolution-Protocol-FINAL.doc>

NEC Handbook

https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/11/25782_NECHandbook_8th_proof.pdf