**A disabled members Organising Guide**

**GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUR UNION**

UNISON is a trade union and the trade union movement is all about workers coming together to organise around common issues so that we can fight for better workplace rights. So the more members who get in involved in the union, the stronger we are. There are about 200,000 disabled members in UNISON and we need more of them to get involved so we can make sure we reflect our membership and that we are putting the concerns and priorities of disabled people at the heart of your union.

Just like in the workplace and in society, there may be barriers in our union to disabled members getting more involved. This guide is about making sure you know how to get involved and how to overcome any barriers.

**Your right to get involved**

As a trade union, UNISON is covered by the Equality Act 2010 and we must provide ‘reasonable adjustments’ for members who want to get involved at all levels of the union. Meetings, conferences and training sessions should all take place in accessible, with papers available in advance and in different formats. Your branch or region should be able to help if you need changes such as taxis or an overnight stay for meetings because you cannot use public transport or travel after a long day.

**Getting started with your branch**

UNISON is built around branches and the first thing to do to get involved in the union is to make contact with your branch. If you don’t know who to contact in your branch then check out the [UNISON branch finder](https://branches.unison.org.uk/).

Your branch will have a lot of different ways you can get active. You can get involved as little or as much as you like. For example, you could ask to be a branch steward, where you represent members at meeting with employers, or to be a workplace contact who puts up union information on local workplace noticeboards. There are also other jobs such as a learning rep or a health and safety rep. Talk to your branch about what you would like to do.

Many disabled members start off by becoming the branch disabled members officer or contact. This is a job which is about helping the branch to organise disabled members and to identify and try to improve conditions with their employer. It is a support role so you would not have to represent members directly at meetings with management or do disciplinary cases, for example. However you might organise meetings to find out the issues, run surveys to identify solutions and work with the Equality Coordinator or Branch Secretary to negotiate a new disability leave policy, for example.

**Getting involved in the branch committee**

All branches have a branch committee and if you are the branch disabled members committee officer then you will automatically be on the branch committee. The branch committee is elected every year at the branch Annual General Meeting (AGM) and positions available include branch secretary, branch chair, convenors for different parts of the workforce (for example social care convenor or schools convenor), branch welfare officer and branch Equality coordinator.

**Getting involved in the regional disabled members group**

Each of UNISON’s 12 regions have a regional disabled members committee which is made up of disabled representatives of branches in the region. Each region has it’s own way of organising but all of them will have an AGM and you should ask your branch or your [regional disability contact](https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/group-structure-and-contacts/) for information on how to get involved.

The regional disabled members group will also have seats on many regional committees. The committee will be able to elect delegates to the Regional Council meetings and to sit on committees such as the Regional Committee, regional service group committees such as Health and Local Government committees, and other committees such as regional welfare, international and Labour link.

Elections to these regional committees usually take place at the regional disabled members group AGM so you will need to turn up to that to stand or send a nomination in advance.

**Attending conferences**

The best place to start is Disabled Members Conference which takes place every year in October. Most delegates attend on behalf of their branch. You branch will often elect delegates at their AGM so watch out for that as you may need to turn up for the AGM or send a nomination in advance. Full details of disabled members conference are posted on the UNISON Events webpage [**www.unison.org.uk/events/**](http://www.unison.org.uk/events/)

UNISON holds many other conferences which you can find out about on the Events page of the web site. Most delegates to conferences are elected by their branch and this is where you should start. Most conferences also allow two delegates to represent the national disabled members self organised group and these are elected to at disabled members conference in October.

**Getting involved in the national disabled members committee**

The National Disabled Members Committee (NDMC) is made up of about 40 representatives from regions, under-represented groups such as Black disabled members.

Each region elects two delegates to NDMC and this usually takes place at the regional disabled members committee AGM. At least one of the delegates must be a woman.

The other members of the NDMC are elected from the network meetings for under-represented groups, such as LGBT+ disabled members. There are also some seats for disabled members on other national self orgnasied group committees.

**Standing for national positions**

WE want to encourage disabled members to stand for some of the top positions in UNISON. This includes on UNISON’s National Executive Committee (NEC) and on the Service Group Execs (SGEs) for each of the different service groups, for example Health SGE.

**Elections in UNISON**

UNISON is a democratic union so we will ask for nominations in a fair way and if there are more people interested in a job than there are places then we will hold an election. Elections should always be by secret ballot.

If you are standing for election then you may need to provide an elections statement in advance – sometimes there will be a maximum number of works for this. You might also need to make a short speech saying why people should elect you. This is called a “hustings” speech. It is usually very short with a time limit of about two minutes.

**Proportionality and fair representation**

Equality is at the heart of the union’s beliefs. Since women make up two thirds of the UNISON’s membership, at least half of members to elected bodies must be women. We call this proportionality. For example if there are two seats on a committee or delegation then at least one of them would have to be for a woman. The other seat is called a general seat and could be held by a member of any gender.

UNISON also wants to make sure we fully include under-represented members such as Black and young members. The principle of fair representation means that we strive to ensure there is good representation from these groups on committees and delegations.

**Find out more**

[Get involved in your workplace](https://www.unison.org.uk/get-involved/in-your-workplace/)

[UNISON Organising for Equality](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/05/On-line-Catalogue222252.pdf)

[UNISON and Reasonable Adjustments](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2018/01/UNISON-and-Reasonable-Adjustments-a-guide-for-UNISON-disabled-members-and-branches.pdf)

[How to get to Disabled Members Conference](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2022/02/HOW-TO-GET-TO-UNISON-DISABLED-MEMBERS-CONFERENCE-2022.docx)

[UNISON Learning](https://learning.unison.org.uk/)