**A disabled members Organising Guide**

**BECOMING A UNISON BRANCH DISABLED MEMBERS OFFICER**

Self-organisation brings together members from under-represented groups. In UNISON these are women members, Black members, disabled members and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender plus (LGBT+) members.

The purpose of self-organisation is to assist the union to:

1. Promote the union’s equalities and bargaining agenda
2. Ensure equality issues are considered in all areas of the business of the union
3. Defend jobs, terms and conditions and services
4. Build its density and have a strong and dynamic presence in the workplace.

Working within UNISON’s agreed policies, self-organised groups have the right to:

1. Meet to share concerns and aspirations and establish their own priorities
2. Elect their own representatives
3. Have adequate and agreed funding and other resources
4. Work within a flexible structure to build confidence and encourage participation.

There are lots of resources to support self-organisation, including UNISON guidelines on how it works: ‘Organising for equality’ stock no 1577 or [www.unison.org.uk/equality](http://www.unison.org.uk/equality). There is a host of resources specific to disabled members at:

* [UNISON disabled members web page](https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/)

LINK: https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/

Sign up to receive the disabled members’ regular eBulletin:

* [Sign up for the E-Bulletin](https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/subscribe-disabled-members-ebulletin/)

LINK: https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/subscribe-disabled-members-ebulletin/

Where there is a recognised branch disabled members self-organised group (SOG), the group can elect a representative to the branch committee. Whether or not there is a currently functioning disabled members group, many branches create the post of branch disabled members officer to provide a point of contact for issues affecting disabled members and members within the branch. The branch disabled members officer should be someone who self-identifies as a disabled person.

The information below was put together by members of the National Disabled Members committee.

**Key tasks of a Branch Disabled Members Officer**

You don’t need to do all of the below, but these are some ideas to get you started. Importantly, you are not expected to be the expert or to be the only person in the branch who has responsibility for working on disability equality. This should be the responsibility of everyone in the branch, not just you.

* Being visible
* Championing UNISON’s commitment to disability equality
* Encouraging disabled workers to join UNISON
* Keeping disabled members informed and getting them involved
* A point of contact for disabled members needing support or signposting for representation
* Organising branch disabled members meetings and events, for example Disability History Month
* Being the link between disabled members and the branch committee, and potentially with the regional disabled members’ group
* Representing the views of branch disabled members
* Sharing regional and national UNISON information for disabled members in the branch
* Working in partnership with any employer staff disabled members’ network
* If possible, setting up a branch disabled members self organised group if this isn’t already in place
* If possible, participating in the regional disabled members group
* If possible, organising branch participation in the annual national disabled members conference
* Encouraging attendance at national disabled members network meetings for under-represented disabled members in June and August.
* Building and improving links with local disability community groups
* Reporting on disabled members work at the branch AGM.

**Essential knowledge**

* Where to get information, advice, resources and support
* The issues your members are concerned about and interested in

**Important skills and qualities**

* A passion for trade unionism and disability equality
* Willingness to learn about the social model of disability and the Equality Act 2010
* Sense of humour
* Good listener
* Understanding and life experience
* Common sense
* Open minded and non judgemental
* Good communicator
* Time management skills and knowing your limits
* Resourcefulness
* Approachability
* Understanding of and commitment to confidentiality
* Determination

**Key contacts and support**

* Branch Secretary
* Branch Equalities Co-ordinator
* Regional disabled members SOG conveners and contact officer
* Regional Reps to National Disabled Members Committee and the National Officer for disability equality
* Other self-organised groups and SOG officers such as Black Members Officer, LGBT+ and Women’s Officer
* Young Members Officer
* Retired Members Officer
* Workplace Equality Reps
* Accredited Stewards
* Regional disabled members group
* Disabled member activists in other local branches for joint organising
* Local disabilities community groups
* Your members!

**Where to start**

**Audit your employer’s policies**

Look through your employer’s policies and check they are inclusive of disabled workers.  In particular look at whether there is a reasonable adjustment policy and a disability leave policy – you can use our bargaining guides to help you negotiate if these aren’t already in place.

* [UNISON’s Reasonable Adjustments and Passports bargaining guide](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/11/Reasonable-Adjustments-Bargaining-Guide.pdf)

LINK:https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/11/Reasonable-Adjustments-Bargaining-Guide.pdf

* [UNISON’s Disability Leave bargaining guide and model policy](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/11/Disability-Leave-bargaining-guide-and-model-policy.pdf)

LINK: https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2019/11/Disability-Leave-bargaining-guide-and-model-policy.pdf

Even if your employer has a disability leave policy, for example, check that it meets our key bargaining objectives and negotiate to get it updated if not.

**Survey disabled members**

Find out what the issues are for disabled members in your branch by doing a survey.  You could ask disabled members about their experience of asking for reasonable adjustments, or the sickness absence policy, and any experience of bullying or harassment or discrimination.

If you are using surveymonkey or similar make sure you can also provide paper copies for anyone with access needs.

**Hold a meeting for disabled members**

Set up an in-person or virtual meeting for disabled members to talk about their issues and come up with a plan of action.  Remember to book an accessible room and to make sure virtual platforms are also accessible – ask people in advance if there are any adjustments they need to access the meeting.

**Set up a branch self organised group**

Talk to members about the issues they are facing in the workplace and whether they would be interested in meeting with others to discuss them. Some branches have found that anonymous surveys, seeking information on what issues interest members, have been a catalyst for the creation of a branch self-organised group.

You may be able to find a topical subject to raise interest in a first meeting. This might be a change to workplace rights affecting members, a new employer’s policy out for consultation, or the motions for the national self-organised group conference. Once there is a spark of interest, use the resources of the branch – newsletters, social media, notice boards and workplace reps – to spread the word and encourage members to get involved.

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

LINK: https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/05/On-line-Catalogue222252.pdf

**Run a stall or event for disability history month**

Disability History Month takes place every year from 18 November to 18 December and includes the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December. It is a perfect opportunity for UNISON branches and regions to run recruitment stalls showcasing the work UNISON does on equality for disabled workers and to encourage more disabled workers to join our union.

* [Disability History Month – Events Organising Guide](https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/10/Disability-History-Month-Events-Organising-Guide-November-20212.docx)

LINK: https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2021/10/Disability-History-Month-Events-Organising-Guide-November-20212.docx

**Further Information and training**

UNISON also offers regular training for disabled members officers. Check with you region or for national course check [www.unison.org.uk/events/](https://www.unison.org.uk/events/)

For more information, contact your regional disabled members group. Contact details for the Regional Officer working with the regional group are at:

* [UNISON website](https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/group-structure-and-contacts/)

LINK: https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/group-structure-and-contacts/

Email the National Disabled Members Group on disabilityissues@unison.co.uk

Other helpful organising resources for disabled members can be found on:

* [UNISON disabled members web page](https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/)

LINK: https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/

#### Regional Disabled Members Self Organised Groups – Contact Information

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| **Eastern**Jennie AndersonUNISONChurch Lane House, Church Lane, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1NHj.anderson@unison.co.uk  | **East Midlands**Preet JohalUNISON Regional CentreVivian AvenueNottingham NG5 1AFM.johal@unison.co.uk | **Greater London**Nicholas TurnbullUNISON, Congress HouseGreat Russell StreetLondon WC1 3LSN.Turnbull@unison.co.uk |
| **Northern**Gill TowardUNISON140-150 Pilgrim StreetNewcastle Upon Tyne NE1 6THg.toward2@unison.co.uk | **Northern Ireland**Joe McCuskerUNISONGalway House, 165 York Street, Belfast BT15 1ALj.mccusker@unison.co.uk | **North West**Angela LysonsUNISONArena Point1 Hunts BankManchester M3 1UNa.lysons@unison.co.uk |
| **Scotland**Kirsty JohnstonUNISONDouglas House, 60 Belford RoadEdinburgh EH4 3UQ K.Johnston@unison.co.uk | **South Eastern**Liz WoodhouseUNISON 1st Floor, 56 Queens RoadReading, BerkshireRG1 4AZe.woodhouse@unison.co.uk | **South West** Georgina KnightUNISONRyan House, Sandford Lane Estate, Wareham, Dorset. BH20 4DYG.knight@unison.co.uk |
| **Cymru/Wales**Gill SmithUNISON 491 Abergele RoadOld ColwynColwyn BayConwy LL29 9AEG.smith@unison.co.uk | **West Midlands**Keith McKenzieUNISON24 Livery StreetBirmingham B3 2PAk.McKenzie@unison.co.uk | **Yorkshire and Humberside**Jordan StapletonUNISONHumberside regional centreQuayside HouseCanal WharfLeeds LS11 5PSJ.stapleton@unison.co.uk |