

Delegates Support at Conference

Guidance for Delegates

It's an exciting time to be elected to go to Conference and UNISON is committed to supporting participation of delegates to attend Conference.

UNISON works with the social model of disability and not the medical model. In order to be able to meet delegates reasonable adjustments, UNISON needs to understand the particular barriers you face and how these adjustments will affect your ability to participate in conference. Everyone's access needs are different and are individual to the person. It is therefore essential that individual delegates are directly involved in making their own application for reasonable adjustments and are involved in discussions about hotel bookings and travel arrangements.

This is particularly important if you are a first-time delegate who has never been to conference before. First Time delegates should have the discussion with their Branch or Nominating Body about their needs.

UNISON endeavours to meet all reasonable adjustment requests. However, we may not necessarily be able to meet everybody's needs as there is a fixed capacity to the venue, the number of chairs and tables that we can accommodate, and we could be in a position where meeting one delegates needs could mean that the conference becomes inaccessible for others.

Requesting Additional Support on the OCS (Online Conference System)

Once registered, all delegates to Conference will get an email from the Online Conferencing System (OCS). This will advise you to put in their requests for childcare or reasonable adjustments in the Conference Hall. Requests should be made within the deadlines stated on the Conference Bulletin as we cannot accept any requests outside of these deadlines.

It is not possible to accommodate requests received after the deadline except as an emergency if you as delegate became disabled after the deadline or when there is a late change of delegate. Branches or delegates should contact the Conference Office in this event.

Please register your own support as soon as they are registered for conference.

If you are a delegate who is attending more than one conference, you will need to make separate requests for each conference.

Reasonable Adjustments

You, as a delegate may be Disabled and need reasonable adjustments to participate fully at Conference. There are several ways that UNISON can support you, as follows:

Reasonable Adjustments in the Hall

Some delegates may need different seating arrangements or a table or some other kind of support to fully participate in Conference business. Once you have been registered as a delegate, you should log-on to the OCS, go to the “MyUNISON” section and make a request for a reasonable adjustment. You will be advised if the request has been accepted, rejected, or requires further information. Please note, reasonable adjustments in the hall are not available for Visitors (except for at Disabled Members Conference).

Personal Assistants

Some delegates may require the support of a Personal Assistant (PA) at Conference as they may be away from home for a period of time.

You, as a delegate should talk to your “nominating body” (Branch for Branch delegates, Region for Regional Reps, SOG (Self Organised Groups) Officer for SOG Reps and so on) to request to take a PA to conference. You will need to outline what barriers you face and how taking a PA will help you overcome them. You should also explain what support the PA will provide (for example Personal care or help to understand conference) and for how long per day your PA will work.

The nominating body will decide whether this request is reasonable. A decision cannot be based just on the cost. You can find guidance on what you need to consider when deciding if an adjustment is reasonable at <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/business/employing-people-workplace-adjustments/what-do-we-mean-reasonable>. Although this guidance is for employers it also applies to members of a trade union. UNISON would encourage nominating bodies to carefully consider all requests for reasonable adjustments from their elected delegates.

It is the nominating bodies responsibility to pay for the PA to attend Conference and should cover subsistence, accommodation, and other expenses in the same way that they would pay for you as the associated delegate. In addition to this, PAs are also able to claim a payment of £11.44 per hour (rate applicable after 1st April 2024) (chargeable pro-rata for a minimum of 15 minutes) for any actual time they are performing their PA’s duties, up to a maximum of 13 hours per day – but the nominating body must be advised of the expected hours and role required by the delegate before agreeing to support a PA’s attendance.

It should also be noted that a PA cannot attend Conference in any other capacity. If a delegate has another delegate provide PA support at Conference, that person will only be able to claim subsistence / expenses for their primary role.

Travel for PAs is covered by the National Office in the same way as it would for the delegate. National Office does not cover travel for Sharer 2’s and Visitors – this would be the responsibility of the nominating body.

Please note: UNISON will not usually provide reasonable adjustments for PAs. The PA is the reasonable adjustment we are providing for the member. There are some exceptions, for example information in large print, but not adjustments such as high-backed chairs or mobility scooters.

Booking accommodation

It is the nominating body's responsibility to book accommodation for you as their delegate.

Branches should be mindful when booking accommodation for disabled delegates, those with additional needs and delegates travelling with a PA or with children – so please discuss your needs with your branch.

Nominating bodies should liaise with their delegation to ensure their needs are met – for example – if a delegate needs an accessible room, discussions should be had with you as the delegate **before** booking to ensure that the room is suitable to support your individual needs. The distance of the hotel from the main conference centre should also be taken into account for those with mobility issues, as taxis may be required, and these would be paid for by the nominating body. It should be noted that hotel accommodation which actually meets the needs of the delegates might cost more to the branch and that is not a reason for the branch to refuse a reasonable request.

Upgraded Travel or Driving to Conference

Delegates requesting upgraded travel or wishing to drive to conference, should contact Tracey Ayton Harding, Head of Conferences at t.aytonharding@unison.co.uk to request this with an explanation as to why the upgrade or driving is required and what barriers will be overcome by this.

The Head of Conferences will consider the request and will advise the delegate directly whether the request has been agreed or not. National Office will pay the equivalent of standard rail fare for any requests that are not approved if the delegate chooses to upgrade or drive. All other extras (such as taxis, parking, or tolls) are the responsibility of the nominating body.

Childcare at Conference

UNISON provides crèche facilities for delegates and Sharer 1's at most Conferences with our service partner Nipperbout. Children can be enrolled into the creche from 3 months old to 16 years old inclusive. The delegate must be the legal guardian of the child and be a Delegate or Sharer 1 or on the Executive or Standing Orders committee of that conference. We also take children of visitors to conference for Women's Conference only. We do not take children of visitors to any other conference, nor do we take the children of PA's. Although Nipperbout can usually accept most children into the crèche, there may be exceptional circumstances, where they may not be able to meet the child's needs and the delegate may have to make alternative arrangements.

Please note: UNISON doesn't pay for childcare with any other provider if the child is attending conference with their parent or legal guardian.

Once you have been registered as a delegate, and if a creche place is required, you should log-on the OCS, in the "MyUNISON" section, to make a request for a creche place for each child. You will be advised if the request has been accepted, rejected, or requires further information. Baby sitting is sometimes available at Conference for you, as a delegate to participate in evening activities. Delegates should approach their "nominating body" (Branch for Branch delegates, Region for Regional Reps, SOG Officer for SOG Reps) to request a babysitter – they will need to outline what dates and times you will need babysitting and what activities they wish to participate in.

The nominating body will decide whether this request is reasonable as all babysitting support is charged to the nominating body.

If you are a delegate who is attending more than one conference, you will need to make separate requests for each conference.