

AGM Survival Pack

This pack aims to assist Branches in organising annual general meetings.

It will be particularly useful for new Branch Officers who have not organised an AGM before.

It includes:

- * questions and answers on organising AGMs
- * suggested election procedures and timetable
- * guidance to help you to improve attendance at meetings
- * samples of paperwork that you can adapt for use in your Branch
- * information and administration

A [Model invitation letter](#) can be found online at

» www.unison-southern.org.uk/pdffiles/AGMletter.pdf

A [Model Postcard](#) can be found online at

» www.unison-southern.org.uk/pdffiles/5601.pdf

A [Model nomination form](#) can be found online at

» www.unison-southern.org.uk/pdffiles/AGMnominationform.pdf

A [Model agenda](#) can be found online at

» www.unison-southern.org.uk/pdffiles/AGMAgenda.pdf

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS °

WHY HOLD AN AGM?

- * To ensure that the branch is organised and administered effectively
- * To keep members informed of the work of the branch
- * To give members a voice in running the branch
- * To enable elections to take place

WHEN SHOULD THE AGM BE HELD?

- * Between 1 January and 31 March each year.

HOW SHOULD THE MEETING BE PUBLICISED?

- * All members should receive adequate written notice of the meeting
- * All members should receive an agenda and other relevant paperwork in advance of the meeting
- * Noticeboards should be used to display inviting posters
- * Stewards should be urged to speak to members and encourage them to attend

WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO TO ENCOURAGE MEMBERS TO ATTEND?

- * Provide refreshments before the meeting and/or a social afterwards
- * Invite a speaker on a topic of interest
- * Build agendas around members' concerns and interests
- * Include agenda items on campaigning issues
- * Ensure full disabled access to the meeting, including provision of signing, hearing induction loops etc if needed.
- * Hold the meeting in pleasant surroundings
- * Ensure the venue is easily accessible by public transport and let people know where car parking is available. Include a map with the paperwork sent to members

- * Ensure the venue is not off putting to any groups of members, for example some members may not feel comfortable meeting in a pub or in a smoky atmosphere.
- * Find out what time and venue is most convenient for members - this may mean holding a series of meetings at different times and locations and then aggregating the votes from the different meetings.
- * Make arrangements for members with caring commitments (e.g. a cr che or a refund of payments made to carers)
- * Coordinate transport if a group of people are travelling from a different location

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN THE AGM

- * °All members should be invited to submit motions. There should be a reasonable deadline for this so that any motions received can be circulated before the meeting and time allowed for members to submit amendments to them
- * All members should be entitled to nominate and be nominated for officer and steward positions
- * All members should be entitled to attend, speak and vote at the meeting

WHAT SHOULD THE MEETING BE LIKE?

- * Although there will be formal business, such as elections, to deal with, the meeting should be as relaxed and friendly as possible. The atmosphere should not be aggressive or overly procedural
- * Members should be encouraged to take an active part in discussion
- * Any procedures and deadlines set out in the branch rules and standing orders should be adhered to

WHAT SHOULD BE ON THE AGENDA?

- * Minutes of the last AGM
- * An annual report of branch activities (this should include a summary of outcomes from the previous year s branch development plan)
- * Audited accounts for the previous year.
- * Recommendations for payment of honoraria if these are provided for in the branch rules
- * Elections of branch officers (or confirmation of elections if these take place in advance of the meeting)
- * Ratification of elections of stewards
- * Any motions which members wish to debate
- * Any proposed changes to the branch rules
- * Many branches include other items such as an action plan for the year ahead

WHAT SHOULD BE COVERED IN STANDING ORDERS?

Standing orders govern the conduct of meetings and help them to run smoothly. They do this by minimising potential areas of argument about procedures. They should be clear and concise and must not be used to exclude or patronise those with less experience. They should include:

- * Size of quorum (a level which enables business to be conducted but which also provides for meaningful democracy). It should not be set so low as to allow a small group to decide the affairs of a branch in an undemocratic way
- * Arrangements for chairing meetings
- * Deadlines for submitting motions, amendments to motions and nominations
- * There should be provision for emergency motions to be submitted at the meeting
- * Procedures for voting (generally this should be by a show of hands and a simple majority unless otherwise agreed. Where rule changes are being voted on it is usual to require a two thirds majority rather than a simple majority)
- * Restrictions on length of speeches
- * Arrangements for raising questions or points of order

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO AFTER THE MEETING

- * Complete credential forms (purple forms) indicating all changes to branch officers and stewards and send to the regional office
 - * Complete AGM election results form and send to the regional office
 - * Notify management of new stewards and officers (unless specified on credential form that you wish Regional Office to do this)
 - * Ensure all members are given a list of new officers and stewards, their role or constituency and details of how to contact them
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ELECTIONS

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Procedures for elections must be fair and open and should be specified in the branch rules. This will avoid conflict or allegations of rigging . For help with drawing up election rules you can refer to UNISON s national rule book, model rules and code of good branch practice. Your Regional Officer will also be able to assist.

Branch Officers°

Branch officers may be elected by a ballot or show of hands at the AGM. Alternatively they may be elected by ballot in advance of the AGM, with the results reported to the AGM.

°You can encourage people to come forward as branch officers by:

- * allowing members to play a support role to existing officers as a stepping stone
- * enabling two people to job share
- * ensuring plenty of training, information and support is available

The UNISON rule book sets out certain branch officer posts which must be filled. These are:

chairperson
secretary
treasurer
education co-ordinator
equality officer(s)
health and safety officer
communications officer
international officer
young members officer

The code of good branch practice provides model job descriptions for these roles.°

In addition many branches choose to have other officers to assist with the work of the branch such as membership, membership services, welfare or newssheet production. It is also useful to elect at least one vice chairperson so that if the chairperson is unable to attend a meeting there is always a substitute available to take on this role. It is up to the branch to decide what additional officer roles it would be useful to have.

The retired members of the branch may elect a retired members secretary.

Members paying into the affiliated political fund should also elect a political officer.

Members should be sent notification of forthcoming elections well in advance of the AGM. There should be a cut off date for nominations before the ballot takes place. Candidates should be written to in advance of the elections and given the right to withdraw their nomination by a specified number of days before the election takes place.

A typical timescale might be:

Closing date for nominations - 4 weeks before AGM

Candidates notified - the day following the closing date for nominations

Candidates given right to withdraw - 3 weeks before AGM

Ballot papers sent out - 2 days after deadline for candidates to withdraw

Closing date for ballot papers to be returned - 2 days before AGM

If elections are to take place at the AGM a list of candidates should be sent out with the AGM papers at least a week before the meeting

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Any member of the branch who has been a member for at least 13 weeks and is not in arrears with subscriptions is entitled to be nominated for election to any branch office.

There should be a requirement that any nominations is supported by at least two other members of the branch. The branch committee should also have the right to nominate officers.

You may wish to give candidates an opportunity to provide a written or verbal election address. This will help members to know who they are voting for. It is important that such procedures are fair and equitable. They should not make candidates feel they will be judged on their skills at writing or speech making. For example if a written address is to be sought you should specify the maximum number of words candidates must use and apply this to all candidates.

If elections are to take place by postal ballot every effort must be made to ensure all members receive a voting paper. The way you do this will depend on the structure of the branch and the communication procedures you have in place.

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Stewards

Stewards are fundamental to our workplace organisation. They

should be elected by their constituencies prior to the AGM. The AGM should then ratify these elections. Constituencies are usually based on workplaces, departments, occupational groups or shifts. If you have members working for small employers there should be at least one steward for each employer.

As with branch officers, you can encourage people to come forward as stewards by:

- * allowing people to be workplace contacts or representatives as a stepping stone
- * enabling two people to job share
- * ensuring plenty of training, information and support is available

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Other nominations and elections

The branch will probably also elect or nominate to a number of other bodies. For example:

- Joint negotiating committee
- Joint consultative committee
- UNISON regional committees
- UNISON national committees
- UNISON national conferences
- Local bodies such as trades councils°

Some branches carry out these elections at their AGM. Others deal with it at the branch committee after the AGM. You will probably want to ensure that members filling these positions are on the branch committee (so that they are accountable). You can do this either by making the positions only open to members of the branch committee or by making anyone elected to these positions *ex officio* members of the committee. By allowing all members to stand for these positions you will encourage more people to get involved in the work of the branch.