



Branch Secretary

BRIEFING

FOR BRANCH ACTIVISTS AND MEMBERS

July 2013

2013 AGM Report

A busy 2013 AGM was held on 27 June with members and representatives from all across the country in attendance. Unfortunately Cliff Williams, AGS (Regional & Branch Governance) was unable to attend as the AGM Speaker, but none the less there was plenty of business to occupy those who came along.

The Minutes from the 2012 AGM were AGREED, and in addition the AGM RECEIVED the financial report which

set out the Branch's annual accounts for the 12 months to 31 March 2013. The Branch's annual report was also RECEIVED by the AGM.

However, the main focus of the AGM was on the Rule Changes and Motions that were debated, with several them being the subject of excited debate. The most significant of the Motions that were debated and AGREED was Motion 6 which paves the way for this Branch to enter into discussions with representatives from SUE to explore the possibility of a potential merger between both organisations. The week before the AGM SUE's Conference had also agreed to enter into discussions with this Branch.

Set out below are the Rule Changes and Motions, as amended, that were debated at the AGM. The outcome of each of the debates is also recorded. At the next Branch Committee it will consider the actions that are required to be undertaken for each Motion.

Photographs were taken at the AGM and these should be uploaded onto the Branch website soon.

Rule Change 1: Various Rule Changes

(i) In Sections 5.1; 5.2; 5.3; Appendix C, Paragraph 1; Appendix C, Paragraph 4; Appendix D, Paragraph 1; Appendix D, Paragraph 2 - **in each replace** "*biennially*" with "*triennially*";

- (ii) In Section 5.4.1; Appendix C, Paragraph 4 - **replace** *“biennially”* with *“annually”*;
- (iii) In Section 6.2 - **replace** *“November”* with *“June”*;
- (iv) In Appendix C, Paragraph 3 - **replace** *“January”* with *“July”*;
- (v) In Appendix C, Paragraph 4 - **replace** *“October”* with *“June”*;
- (vi) In Appendix F, Paragraph 9.2 - **replace** *“September”* with *“June”*;
- (vii) In Section 9.4 - **replace** *“TGWU”* with *“Unite”*;
- (viii) In Appendix D, Paragraph 11 - **replace** *“bi-monthly and”* with *“as and when necessary to ”*;
- (ix) In Appendix F, Paragraph 8 - **delete** *“must have two years continuous financial membership,”*.

These Rule Changes were AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 1: Stress Survey

In the UNISON Stress at Work – A guide for Safety Reps on Prevention for Members, it states “Stress is one of the biggest health issues at work today. Over half a million people will

have their physical or mental health damaged as a result of stress at work. The real extent of stress-related problems has been hidden because very few people are prepared to admit they are suffering from stress, or to seek help for it. Few people who have not experienced the depression, anxiety and despair which often accompanies stress, fully appreciate the effect it can have on people's lives".

The HSE has developed the 'Management Standards' approach to tackling work related stress; these Standards represent a set of conditions that, if present, reflect a high level of health, well-being and organisational performance. This approach helps those who have key roles in promoting organisational and individual health and well-being to develop systems to prevent illness resulting from stress. The HSE goes on to say "The Management Standards approach suggests using a survey as one useful source of information on whether work related stress appears to be a potential problem for your workforce and, if so, who is likely to be affected and how. Individual perceptions play an important role in predicting stress related ill health. Gathering the opinions of employees can be a useful indicator of the health of your organisation, and potential sources of work related stress".

This AGM notes the length of time it is taking for the employer to roll out a stress survey to all employees and instructs that the Branch as a matter of urgency, to seek to agree an early resolution to any issues that may be stalling this crucial best advice from the HSE.

Lastly, this AGM instructs the Branch to ensure that the Trade Union Side conduct a stress survey of members should the employer not have undertaken a joint survey within the next 3 months.

This Motion, which was amended by a proposal from the Branch Committee, was AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 2: Fertility Treatment

That this Branch believes members considering or undertaking fertility treatment should be provided with the best possible, stress free, policy of support.

This Branch will, therefore, consider this and engage via the Trade Union Side with management to review/implement a properly negotiated Policy.

This Motion, which was amended by a proposal from the Branch Committee, was AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 3: UNISON Training for Branch Employed Staff

This AGM recognises:-

1. UNISON Branches are increasingly employing staff in organising/representing roles.

2. For our members in these jobs to perform their roles properly, they need access to adequate training in all key aspects of their roles.
3. UNISON's policy on allowing BES to partake of UNISON training differs from Region to Region.
4. Inadequate or insufficient training can be detrimental both to our members and the UNISON members they represent, collectively and individually.

Therefore, we instruct the Branch Committee, through our representatives on the Trade Union Side, to open negotiations with UNISON nationally to secure a common policy across UNISON's Regions that will facilitate our BES members being able to access the relevant UNISON training that, at no cost to our members that their various UNISON Branch employers deem necessary.

This Motion, which was amended by a proposal from the Branch Committee, was AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 4: Employer Supported Volunteering Programme

This AGM recognises that a number of employers offer their employees an employer supported volunteering programme. For example, the Co-op Bank matches employer supported volunteering in their own time with paid leave up to a maximum of 3 days a year. Happy Computers supports and encourages their staff to work fully paid, one day a month for a charity of their choice and there is a time bank of

100 days which can be claimed for projects that bring 'mutual benefit'.

Employer supported volunteering programmes can enhance networking with voluntary organisations and charities and help to forge new relationships, as well as generating powerful alliances capable of tackling community issues. Forging alliances with community groups is one of UNISON's main objectives.

Volunteering offers employees a chance to develop personal skills such as time management, communication and presentation skills, and an opportunity to contribute to an issue that they really care about. A survey found that the majority of employees (58 per cent) said they would be very or fairly likely to volunteer if their employer offered them help to do so.

However, this AGM recognises that funding cuts have led to voluntary organisations and charities having to rely on volunteers to deliver services that paid staff previously undertook. Understandably, UNISON employees cannot be seen to be replacing paid workers. Therefore, any volunteering must complement and not substitute work performed by paid staff in the voluntary sector.

This AGM calls on the Branch to:

1. Through the Trade Union Side negotiate an employer supported volunteering policy with the employer.

2. The policy should include paid time off for staff involved in volunteering activities; not replace paid staff roles; and be in line with the TUC/ Volunteering England charter.
3. Call on the employer to donate resource (such as furniture or computer equipment) that it no longer needs to voluntary or community organisations.
4. Call on the employer to consider support for employees in fundraising activities, including practical help such as use of meeting rooms, telephones, photocopying and by offering to match the amount they raise.
5. Ask the employer to encourage staff to volunteer as trustees and management committee members for voluntary organisations and charities, enabling staff to influence good employment practice and industrial relations.

This Motion, which was amended by a proposal from the Branch Committee, was AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 5: Workloads

Workload continues to be an issue for staff, despite the Branch progressing the review of staffing, following the remittance of the Cymru/Wales motion to the Branch Committee at the 2012 AGM.

This AGM therefore resolves to complete this work by 31.8.13.

A second staffing meeting will be convened by the Branch Secretary, with a call for papers asking those constituencies affected to provide reports in advance. This meeting will then make recommendations to the October Branch Committee meeting – giving time for papers to be circulated.

This Motion was AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 6: Exploring a Merger with SUE

This AGM agrees to enter into constructive and meaningful discussions with SUE to explore the possibility and potential terms of merger.

This Motion was AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 7: Flexible Retirement

Two years ago, a Flexible Retirement Motion was carried at the AGM. It read “This AGM is concerned to note that UNISON as an employer is dragging its feet in agreeing flexible retirement for its own employees. This AGM instructs the Branch to seek a satisfactory flexible retirement policy/agreement with UNISON as a matter of urgency”.

Once again, this AGM instructs the Branch to seek a satisfactory flexible retirement policy/agreement with UNISON as a matter of urgency.

This Motion was AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 8: Travel Costs

That this Branch will undertake a review of travel costs across the Union. This is to ensure that no agreements are lost, but that all colleagues are treated equally.

The TUS should then continue negotiations with management, taking into account the recent changes, and make recommendations to the Branch Committee, to include a strategy about ensuring parity of treatment at the earliest opportunity.

This Motion was AGREED as being Ruled Out of Order by the AGM.

Motion 9: Staffing in UNISON's Organising Roles

Unite-in-Acts members understand that, like all other workers, their jobs, pay, terms and conditions are reliant on the viability of their respective employers.

Recognising this, our members, nationally and branch employed, have been enthusiastically recruiting workers to

UNISON, including the mass recruitment campaign launched in March this year.

Members in organising roles have led campaigns in branches and directed the work with sacrifice and dedication. Other members, whose primary roles are administrative, have not been found wanting in volunteering to help. UNISON should be immensely proud of the efforts our members have made, often working longer hours and weeks than their individual contracts of employment demand.

This AGM congratulates all members for the roles they are playing in building the trade union movement, through their UNISON jobs.

However, the new emphasis on organising that came with Meeting The Organising Challenge (MTOC) has brought its own difficulties. Workers graded below Regional Organiser level, most commonly at Area Organiser (or individual UNISON branches' equivalent), are now expected to do casework. The amount of casework each member does differs both between and within regions but many of our organising members are spending much of their time in individual and collective representation.

More worryingly, although outside of the job description, we know that in some areas, Local Organiser (or branch equivalent) have come under pressure to conduct casework or other representative roles.

Our employers have also introduced a raft of organisers on differing lengths of short-term/fixed-term contracts which have caused consternation amongst members. Many concerns have been fed back to UNISON nationally and, through negotiation, have been partially addressed. But there is scope for standardisation across UNISON.

The situation has been exacerbated with UNISON's intended use of an employment agency that specialises in recruiting people to work in our high streets and shopping malls for charities – the so-called chuggers – to assist in recruitment drives. Members fear these extra 'resources' from an agency will have limited usefulness as such 'staff' will be unable to answer work-related queries raised by potential UNISON members.

It is also known that UNISON is considering a new, lower-graded, recruitment post at Grade 9. We view with real concern this possible development and the temptation for UNISON to employ lower-graded 'single issue' workers at the expense of already-established organising grades.

Our members on permanent contracts are also frustrated that working relationships they develop are constantly under threat by fixed-term contract staff moving on to other employment. Building long-lasting union organisation that attracts and benefits workers in this era of austerity cannot be achieved by a stream of forever-changing temporary recruits.

It is imperative that Unite-in-ACTS listen to the fears and ideas of our members over staffing; some members get the impression we simply accept what UNISON says without putting forward alternative points of view. It is immaterial whether this is the case – the impression needs tackling and changing.

Therefore, this AGM resolves the following:-

1. To oppose the use of agency recruiters;
2. To oppose the introduction of a lower-graded job specifically centred on recruitment activities;
3. To oppose the continued use of fixed-term contracts where they are clearly being used by UNISON to prevent workers from securing proper employment rights;
4. To confirm with UNISON that all workers recruited nationally by UNISON on fixed-term contracts are placed on UNISON pay, terms and conditions and that their contracts are with UNISON not individual branches or groups of branches;
5. To ascertain from members in organising grades below Regional Organiser, the levels of casework/representational work they are being expected to do;
6. Re-issue guidance to our members about what they should (or shouldn't) be undertaking as part of their specific job roles.

This Motion was NOT AGREED by the AGM.

Motion 10: Better Connections with Unite Nationally & Regionally

All Unite in Acts members have the right to actively participate in UNITE's structures and internal democracy. This AGM positively encourages members to become more involved in their union.

Because this Branch is a national Branch within one Unite Region – London & Eastern – many members may be unaware of how Unite is organised and how they can get involved in Unite's internal democratic structures.

Members and their representatives may be also unaware of what processes need to be followed in order to progress their cases within the Branch and where appropriate with Unite's assistance.

In response to these issues, the Branch Committee is charged with:-

1. Ensuring all our elected Stewards are registered as such with UNITE so they receive all the literature circulated to activists direct from the union.
2. Circulating to Stewards the representational procedures to be used and followed.
3. Circulating details of how members can be involved in their UNITE Industrial Sector, local Area Activists Committees, equalities and other political work etc to all members and put on the Branch website.

4. Ensuring that any minutes and documents from the national and Regional Industry Sector Committees for the Community, Youth Workers and Not for Profit Sector are available for activists to view/download.
5. Developing more robust communication links between the Branch Committee and UNITE's Regional Officers.

This Motion, which was amended by a proposal from the Branch Committee, was AGREED by the AGM.

BRIEFING is intended to provide stewards and members of the branch with accurate and up to date information on branch policies and activities as well as details of external campaigns supported by the branch. It is sent to all branch activists who have a valid email address listed in the branch directory. Activists are encouraged to forward it to all of the members that they represent and to print off and display copies in the workplace. If you have any comments on the contents or problems receiving or reading them please email us feedback@uniteinacts.com

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