

Guidance on the holding and conduct of branch delegate meetings

Introduction

Two motions passed at Congress 2018 referred to the need for clarification about the purpose, holding and conduct of branch delegate meetings.

Such meetings are usually held on an *ad hoc* basis in the lead-up to and during the conduct of national industrial action and campaigns.

The union's Strategy and Finance Committee (SFC) has now issued this guidance for use by the relevant committees (primarily HEC, FEC and ROCC). It is intended that the guidance be issued to branches when such meetings are called.

The nature of branch delegate meetings

These meetings are consultative. They are not constituted according to any rules or set procedures; the delegates present are not required to be elected in any particular way or to follow any set method for consulting or reporting back to their members.

Their purpose is to give branch representatives an opportunity to hear the latest developments on, for example, national negotiations, to ask questions and to express views on behalf of their members. NEC members, officers and negotiators are usually present to hear those views and to take them into account.

There is an argument to be made that formal procedures and voting are not appropriate at such meetings, since they cannot mandate the bodies with responsibility for decision-making under the rules.

The counter argument is that it is helpful to take the temperature of the meeting through a vote (on the understanding that this will help to inform but not to compel), since one purpose of the meeting is to provide the relevant committee with a steer on the views of branches about any particular proposal or circumstance that may arise during an industrial dispute or campaign. This is the view taken by SFC. These meetings often inform very important decisions and they should be clearly structured and consistently managed.

Role and purpose of branch delegate meetings

To gain feedback from branches at key points in the development of industrial action and campaigns in order to inform decision-making by the relevant elected union committees and negotiators.

Calling of meetings

Branch delegate meetings should normally be called by the general secretary following a decision of the committee of the union having responsibility under the rules for the oversight or conduct of the relevant industrial action or campaign. Where the meetings are urgent, the decision to call delegate meetings can be delegated to the officers of the relevant committee, who should report their decision to the committee members as soon as possible.

As much notice as possible should be given to branches to enable them to consult their members as thoroughly as practicable in the time available, preferably to include the opportunity to hold general meetings. However, it has to be recognised that there will be circumstances where events may be moving quickly and where both the length of notice of meetings and the ability of branches to hold meetings will be unavoidably curtailed. In such circumstances, branches should be encouraged to consult members by email and at least to hold a meeting of the branch committee or officers to agree on their delegates and the feedback to be given to the branch delegate meeting.

Subject matter for meetings

The communication to branches calling the meeting should make clear:

- why the meeting has been called
- the key issues to be discussed at the meeting
- the need for branches to gain feedback from members on those issues and for delegates to prepare themselves to make brief oral reports to the meeting
- an agenda for the meeting
- the identity of the chair of the meeting
- an indication of how the outcome of the meeting will be reported within the union's structures.

Conduct of meetings

The core business of branch delegate meetings should be to gain feedback from branches on members' views on the key issues for discussion.

When giving their reports delegates should describe how they have consulted members within the time available.

Other features of the meetings:

- provided that the main issue or issues are amenable to a vote (complex ones with a variety of possible outcomes usually are not) then indicative votes should be taken in order to gain a clear view of the balance of view of UCU members as reported by their branch delegates
- the chair or the meeting may propose that a vote be taken or the meeting may call for a vote
- votes should be weighted in accordance with the Congress delegate entitlement of each branch represented at the meeting
- an attendance list and note should be taken of all such meetings and subsequently distributed as soon as possible to those attending for information
- all delegates should be expected to report back to their members on the outcomes of the meeting within an agreed timeframe
- at the end of the meeting the chair should sum up the decisions taken and indicate how the outcomes of the meeting will inform any subsequent decision-making by the relevant union committee.

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