



# Diversity in participation

Why it matters and how to promote it

**UCU**

University and College Union

# Contents

1. Why diversity in participation is good for the union	3
---	---

---

2. UCU rules	8
--------------	---

---

3. The current picture of participation	13
---	----

---

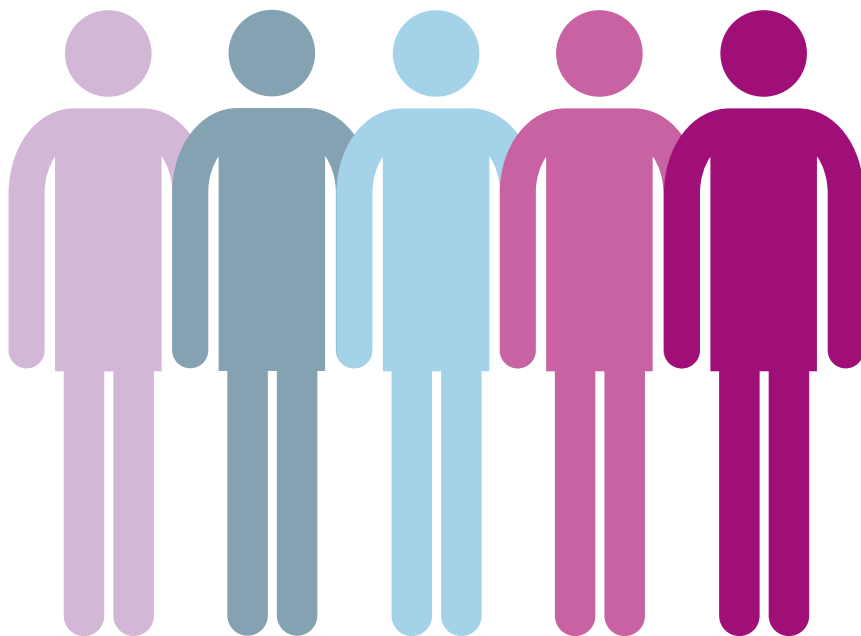
4. Improving participation	19
----------------------------	----

---

5. National participation	34
---------------------------	----

---

# Why diversity in participation is good for the union



### Introduction

Black workers, disabled workers, LGBT workers and women workers are all under represented in the various decision making structures of the union. This is a waste of experience, talent and knowledge, and means differing perspectives are missing when decisions are made.

Unions tend to operate in a way which makes it difficult for some members to participate. Working time, work patterns or domestic and caring responsibilities mean some members feel excluded from branch activities. The time of meetings or the impossibility of being able to fulfil all requirements of a branch post due to work and home commitments, means many members opt out.

Young members, for example, may also lack the time due to having precarious or short-term contracts.

The social culture of the union movement which can focus on relaxing over a drink in the pub means some members who do not include pub culture in their lives, miss out on networking and informal discussions.

Changing cultures is a challenging process as many committed activists have grown comfortable with how we work. Often change causes resistance because existing and institutionalised norms and values, and informal rules and privileges, are at stake and are challenged. We all need to experiment – just because ‘things have always been done this way’ doesn’t mean that is the only or, indeed, the best way.

For example, it is known that women may not participate fully due to family responsibilities but there are significant numbers of women who do not have these responsibilities and yet still do not participate. The cultural and practical barriers need to be broken down.

*The unbalanced representation of women and men in decision-making positions is another issue of deep inequality. Despite some increase of women in decision-making positions, the under-representation of women in politics is a serious issue of democracy and fundamental rights. There is a low proportion of women with*

*leadership roles in politics, in public administration, in public and private enterprises, in the media and universities, in employers' organisations, trade unions etc. Although women are becoming more and more qualified, barriers that prevent the access to decision-making and political representation persist.*

*The low representation of women in elected positions creates a democratic deficit and represents one of the key elements of the crisis of credibility of institutions; it also highlights the need to reform and restructure the representation and participation of women and men in all areas of life.* European Commission 2010

Understanding how trade unions work can be a major barrier. Knowing union policies, how union structures work and how to get elected to decision-making positions can be difficult to navigate. Many members, even when they have been elected, can be marginalised by being unclear about procedures at meetings and conferences. It is really important that this knowledge be shared.

Participation is not just about being a branch officer or getting involved in national structures. It is also about being kept informed of UCU activities and having your views taken into account on campaigns and issues.

Fair representation needs to affect representation throughout the union, from branch committees through to regional committees, national committees and the national executive council.

This document is about sharing good practice and contains ideas for improving involvement. UCU recognises that the huge issues that members are facing may make it challenging for any members to have the capacity to participate but it is important that all members are involved in our campaigns and practices.

Fair representation and participation will:

- enhance union democracy and the union's external image
- make the union dynamic, relevant and vibrant as an organisation open to

new and innovative ideas. This will transform union images and roles.

- bring balance and a more holistic approach to decision-making and to the negotiating table with perspectives which are relevant to all members in the workplace and in the union
- ensure the interests and needs of all members are met, and the union is in touch with what all members want in the workplace.

UCU wants to:

- share the reasons for diversity in participation and representation as a core union priority – as a realistic issue which is not tokenistic
- actively promote diversity in participation and representation at all levels of the union
- prepare all equality groups for decision making and leadership roles
- work together to build a union where every member counts
- address the image and culture of the union
- monitor and assess the outcomes of actions and initiatives to support better participation and representation.

At Congress 2016, UCU passed the following motion:

### ***Adopting a gender perspective in UCU***

*It is crucially important that women have equal access to representation and influence and the union is seen as a positive force for gender equality. To this end, Congress asks the NEC to consider a gender perspective throughout the work of the union and specifically to consult with the female membership to identify issues of concern for them and examples of good practice in this area. Similarly, Congress asks the NEC to examine gender disaggregated figures for union membership with a view to increasing women's representation. Furthermore, Congress asks the NEC to consider the gendered nature and impact of the work of the union in its broader activities, for example, the over-representation of women on casual contracts.*

The commitment is there and we need to work together to achieve change

### **The moral case**

There is an obvious strong moral case for UCU to have good equality and diversity practices. An inclusive organisation where everyone is treated with dignity and respect creates shared values and a commitment to the union and its members.

### **The business case**

There is also a business case for equality.

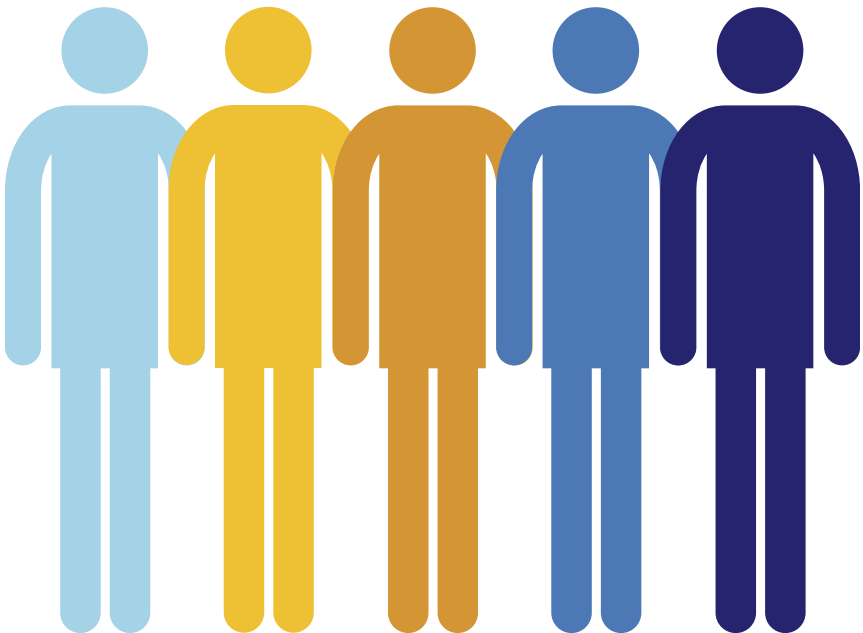
- An organisation is more likely to attract people from a wider pool of talent if it is explicit in its commitment to diversity and is demonstrating this through how it operates.
- Members are more likely to feel motivated and committed and therefore participate if they feel valued and respected in the trade union environment.
- Similarly, people are more likely to participate in the union if they believe that they will be treated equally.

### **The legal case**

It is unlawful for organisations to discriminate on the grounds of age, disability, gender, gender identity, race, religion and belief, sexual orientation in employment and training and in the provision of goods, facilities and services, except in very limited circumstances. It makes sense therefore for UCU to implement best practice to ensure that they are compliant with existing legislation. The costs associated with bad practice on equality far outweigh the costs of implementing good practice.

UCU rules

2





UCU has rules that focus on equality.

### **National rules**

Section 2 of the UCU rule book states clearly our aims and objectives to promote equality for all including through:

- collective bargaining, publicity material and campaigning, representation, union organisation and structures, education and training, organising and recruitment, the provision of all other services and benefits and all other activities
- the union's own employment practices to oppose actively all forms of harassment, prejudice and unfair discrimination whether on the grounds of sex, race, ethnic or national origin, religion, colour, class, caring responsibilities, marital status, sexuality, disability, age or other status or personal characteristics.

Our rule book also states that we will refuse membership to, or expel from existing membership, any person who is known member or activist of any extreme right wing political organisation including the BNP and National Front, where the organisation's aims, objectives and principles are contrary to those of UCU.

### **Regional committee model rules**

UCU has model rules for each regional committee to adapt for local purpose (with the agreement of the National Executive Council). Each region has a committee and it is commonplace for each committee to have an equality officer.

Following a motion to Congress in 2015, regional committees are being encouraged to have officer posts for black members, disabled members, LGBT members and women members.

To find out more about your regional committee contact your branch or regional contacts: [www.ucu.org.uk/yourcontacts](http://www.ucu.org.uk/yourcontacts)

**T**he North West Regional Committee has had LGBT visibility among its officers for some years now. There is no doubt that this greater confidence is the result of all the work UCU has done on equality within the union and more broadly. It is something we are actively seeking from all equality groups – with some way to go. Our recent activity around anti-racism (Equality Networking Day, the event at Manchester Uni for BME members, branch activity on Prevent, our current work on Refugees) creates a union for all members

*This also helps people see that all UCU issues are equality issues, and that equality issues are issues for all members. In the past, where there were no equality officers (or no offers from equality groups) there was a danger that equality issues would not be raised at all. It's also important for us to see that equality issues and industrial activity should not be separated. We are pleased to have elected four regional equality officers and we are hoping to continue to develop our equality work and support branches further.* Saira Weiner, NEC, WMSC (May 2016) and Joint Chair, North West Regional Committee

### **Local Branch rules**

Branches follow UCU branch rules which can be adapted for local use but must be submitted to the National Executive Committee for endorsement. There is an annual request for local rules to accompany each branch's annual financial return.

The rules include the role of equality officer in the branch but this can be expanded to include officers for specific groups.

### **Equality officer**

The equality officer will:

- have knowledge of and commitment to relevant issues, and be willing to undertake training according to the needs of UCU, monitor the implementation of equality policies within the institution, and, where appropriate, encourage and support local negotiations on equality matters
- monitor the volume and nature of personal casework which involves

equality issues to ensure that the Branch/LA has appropriate mechanisms in place for handling such cases

- where appropriate, provide information, encouragement and support to members about equality issues
- ensure that UCU's national annual meetings, and any other relevant events and opportunities for women, black members, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender members and disabled members are publicised locally, that members from all groups are encouraged to participate, and that the branch/LA maximises the opportunities for recruitment and organisation among all groups.
- where appropriate, provide liaison between the branch/LA and UCU's equality structures.

It is good practice to have an equality officer as it keeps equality on the agenda and the role can also encourage participation. UCU delivers a training course for equality reps: [www.ucu.org.uk/training](http://www.ucu.org.uk/training)

**C**oventry UCU is a growing and active branch. In order to drive forward the concerns and issues of our members we have created a number of working groups. One such working group addresses issues of equality and participation impacting our members. All four of the branch's equality and diversity officers – BME, women's, disability and LGBT – are actively involved. We discuss, plan, work together and continually share our ideas and plans with the wider committee. We encourage ideas from inside as well as outside of the working group and we are not separate but move within the slipstream of the branch.

Currently we are planning a film show to support Coventry Pride during June 2016. This was a branch suggestion, which the LGBT rep has welcomed and has also discussed the idea with the LGBT university network. All members of the working group will support the organisation and promotion of the event, but we also know that we will receive the full support of the branch committee.

*Since January 2016 we have also organised two equality and diversity events. In the first we invited Helen Carr, UCU's national head of equality and participation, but importantly we also encouraged local members to speak and present. We had an open discussion about activity to support BME members including Black History Month. The second event celebrated International Women's Day where we again invited branch and local members to present.*

*In a relatively short space of time the Coventry branch has made some progress to promote and encourage discussion on issues of equality and participation affecting our members. We also realise the importance of maintaining momentum and moving forward on other ideas and events to support our branch members.* Amrit Slaich,  
Equality and Diversity Officer (BME), Coventry University

Current picture  
of participation

3



### The Statistics (as of June 2016)

The table below shows the present representation in the union. The figures are an indication as some members will not have disclosed their protected characteristics and often branches do not have time to record changes to activists' roles etc.

	Total	Women members	Black members	Disabled members	LGBT members	Young members
Overall membership (2014)	105,373	53,037	7,677	2,737	3,250	11,003
Workplace reps	1,547	679	62	29	40	84
Learning reps	107	60	8	4	3	6
Health and safety reps	524	196	26	16	10	17
Branch officials or officers	1,052	444	51	34	29	50
Equality reps	302	206	53	19	23	19
Delegates to Congress 2016	316	149	24	55	41	6
2015 TUC delegation	12	6	1	unknown	unknown	0
NEC	59	36	3	6	10	0

The statistics demonstrate that participation is low for some groups in key positions and activities in the union. UCU has struggled to improve participation at Congress due to the fact that often only one member will attend from the branch and this will usually be the branch chair or secretary. Branches that can have more than one delegate are encouraged to take gender balance into account. This is why improving the number of black members or disabled members who are chairs or secretaries, for example, is critical as they will continue to have low representation at the main decision-making forum each year.

### **Update your UCU profile information**

Members can easily update and amend the information UCU holds about them. There are lots of good reasons to do so. Here are some of them.

- Updating your contact information helps us contact you – this can be especially important for ballots and elections.
- Updating your employment details means you do not miss out on information from UCU relating to your work and professional life.
- Updating your equality information enables us to send you information relevant to you, helps us understand who our members are and assess how well we are delivering on equality. It gives us the evidence for campaigning for action on equality in the workplace.
- Updating your contract type and earnings helps us conduct effective collective bargaining.

Members can do this by logging into the membership section of the UCU website or by emailing us at [membership@ucu.org.uk](mailto:membership@ucu.org.uk)

Disabled members and LGBT members may not feel confident about disclosing their equality group due to previous poor experience at work or in the union. It is important that all members are able to disclose as it means they and any campaigning and policies issues relating to that equality group are visible. For more information the following resources are available as pdf downloads:

Disclosing a disability [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5445/Disclosing-a-disability-UCU-guidance/pdf/Disclosing\\_a\\_disability.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5445/Disclosing-a-disability-UCU-guidance/pdf/Disclosing_a_disability.pdf)

Advancing LGBT equality <https://sgforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/12-steps-2013-final.pdf>

### **Build the Union**

UCU is a democratic organisation reliant, to a great degree, on the large-scale participation of its volunteer members. How effective we are as an industrial force and professional body, protecting our members, depends on how well our participatory structures work. Build the Union is UCU's national recruitment campaign which recognises the issues in participation and representation.

- Do we have enough local representatives?
- Are members able to get involved in raising the profile of the union locally?
- Are our branches communicating effectively with their members?
- Are members coming to branch meetings?
- Are members participating in elections and ballots?

The answers to all these questions determine how much our employers – and the government – listen to us.

That's why the union has put in place a series of new initiatives to help build our union:

- a drive to recruit new members to offset the effects of the government's cuts to post-secondary education
- a drive to recruit new local department or workplace representatives, to ensure that UCU branches are healthy at the most local level possible
- a drive to ensure that our branches are equipped with the resources and skills.

On the Build the Union section of the UCU website ([btu.web.ucu.org.uk](http://btu.web.ucu.org.uk)), UCU features all the latest advice and guidance to branches, alongside examples of good and inspiring practice that is already happening.

When focusing on equality and participation, there are a number of useful



reference documents:

- Tools for equality bargaining
- Equality reps toolkit
- Austerity and equality in multicultural Britain.

These can all be found at [www.ucu.org.uk/equality](http://www.ucu.org.uk/equality)

The UCU website also contains information about our national campaigns, the recruitment drive and how to get support. All this information will help you increase your knowledge of the union and the importance of integrating equality into all our work.

UCU sends a weekly email to members which informs everyone about key campaigns, policies and events. UCU also runs several different surveys every year which ask members about different issues.

***A**t the beginning of the academic year our branch agreed its three priorities for the forthcoming year. Equality and diversity topped that list. We used each of the priorities as a theme for one of the union recruitment weeks and joined with the students' union and university to have a week of events and activities focused around issues relating to sex, sexuality and consent. The week was tagged 'I heart consent' and events ranged from lectures on consent and the law and genderisation in popular music, to a panel discussion on sexual harassment on campus, and a workshop on consent and interpersonal violence from an LGBT perspective. The success of the week was due to us reaching out and working with a range of sister organisations. Speakers from the NUS and UCU were on the panel and the workshop was facilitated by Northamptonshire Rape Crisis. Nick Cartwright, Branch Secretary, UCU Northampton University*

*I find that personal contact and word of mouth are the best ways to increase membership and so, as branch chair, I am trying to visit each of our sites and talk to members at a staff meeting. Usually I am well received and staff listen and interact well. They leave with a lot of information about the union, posters, leaflets and lanyards.*

*Remember freebies always go down well and serve as a nagging reminder to that 'wavering not-a-member-yet'!*

*Try to know the background of the site/branch that you are visiting. Recent problems/casework or other matters can come from your prior contact with the site rep in a telephone call a night or two before you visit. That way you look well informed and up to date on what is happening and on matters that are relevant to the staff on site.*

*Finally, always make contact with the on-site manager and get them on board, emphasising that the union is not the enemy/opposition but rather an ally in creating a better, happier and safer workplace for them and their employees. Good luck recruiting.* Steve Boyce, People Plus, NEC LGBT rep, Chair of the LGBTMSC

### **UCU in your workplace – volunteer to be a local contact**

We are looking for people to take on the role of UCU local contacts in their workplaces or departments. This is a good way to become more confident about being more active in UCU.

#### **What is a local contact?**

A contact is someone who is willing to take on a range of smaller tasks that help raise the profile of the branch among your immediate colleagues.

A contact is also someone who ensures that members in your work area feel that the union is present, relevant and listens to them.

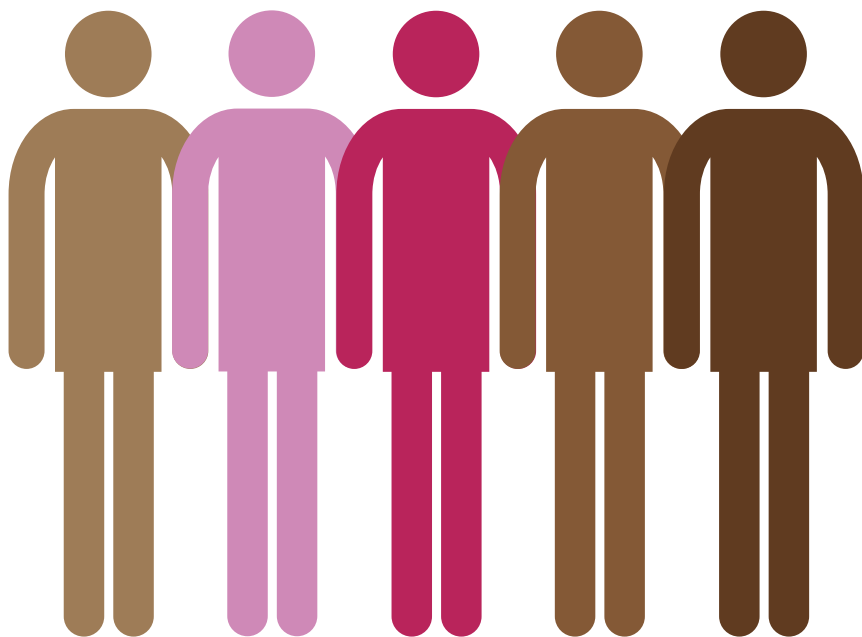
Not every branch's needs are the same, but if you do volunteer you should be happy to do the following:

- Distribute union literature on behalf of your branch or the national union to department or work area colleagues.
- Act as a point of liaison between members in your immediate work area and the branch.
- Distribute union messages to non-members.

For more information: <http://btu.web.ucu.org.uk/volunteer>

Improving  
participation

4



The following are some ways in which to develop good practice in widening participation

### **Meetings**

Meetings are an important way for members to get involved, discuss issues, meet other members and just feel part of the union. Getting to meetings can be difficult whether due to work or home commitments and if members find it difficult to get there, they can't turn up. Branches take a lot of time to organise meetings, so it's worth thinking about the following:

- Review times and locations of meetings including ensuring the venue is accessible.
- Avoid key faith dates or times when it may be difficult for some faiths to participate.
- For big meetings, can a crèche be provided for meetings outside working hours?
- Timetabling meetings for the year will assist members in planning their attendance
- Do not assume everyone is familiar with the issues or decision-making processes.
- Ensure there is space on the agenda for members to be able to raise other issues. Having your contribution heard is a positive experience and can make a member feel part of the branch.
- Ask members what they would prefer. Members can also be kept in touch through email or social media.
- UCU guide 'enabling not disabling' contains a checklist on access for disabled members. [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/1625/Enabling-not-disabling-UCU-Nov-15/pdf/ucu\\_enablingnotdisabling\\_nov15.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/1625/Enabling-not-disabling-UCU-Nov-15/pdf/ucu_enablingnotdisabling_nov15.pdf)

**T**he success in engaging BME staff in Manchester and eventually getting them to take on positions in the Branch executive can be attributed to several factors, some external to the university

*and others internal. The most important external factor was the Northern Black Workers' Network (NBWN). The network started as a self-help group bringing together a group of people in further and higher education who had been subjected to unfair treatment and discrimination in their workplace, and had received little or no support from UCU in challenging the institutions. One of their objectives was to share experiences and also learn how to challenge their various institutions. Members of the steering committee were either active or had been active in their local branch. We had regular working and social meetings to develop our constitution and a plan of action to support black staff across the North West region. We visited several institutions to talk to black members and this had a huge impact of the level of knowledge and strength to challenge institutions.*

*At the internal level, I was nominated as the equality officer of the UMIST UCU branch around 2000 and this was the first opportunity for me to engage other black members and discuss workplace issues with them. We managed to develop a small race equality network in UMIST around 2003, and this grew to become the University of Manchester BME (UM-BME) Network following the merger between UMIST and Manchester in 2004. Our first action was to meet with the university registrar and discuss the university's agenda on race equality. We argued that the university should be seen to be championing race equality as part of its drive to become a leading international brand. This led to the appointment of an associate vice-president for equality and diversity and the creation of an equality and diversity forum that included the president/vice-chancellor, trade unions and student representatives.*

*My position as a member of the University of Manchester UCU branch executive and branch president has been another major contributing factor to several black members being active in the branch. I was the only black member on the team when I joined the branch executive committee in 2000 and took advantage of this to bring the race agenda to the table. I invited a colleague from NBWN to speak to the executive*

*committee and this had a positive impact as the committee began to understand the challenges facing BME staff. Through my membership of the UM-BME network, I encouraged three UCU members of the network to join the executive committee. Shortly after joining they were elected as equal opportunities officer, treasurer and secretary of the branch. In many respects, the mentoring evolved naturally and organically because of the good relationships we had built in the various networks outside UCU. We have been successful in bringing on a couple of more Black members to the executive as ordinary members so as to assure our presence in the future. We at Manchester continue to work hard at regional and national level to make the case for encouraging more BME members to join their branch executive committee since this is often the first step towards holding office at regional and national levels.* Adel Nasser, Senior President, UCU Branch Executive, University of Manchester

### **Prepare members for activism – training and education programme**

Branches should make full use of UCU's training and education programme to support the development of skills and knowledge of under-represented groups. UCU offers a wide range of courses for different roles in the union as well as the continuing professional development (CPD) programme. All the information can be found on the UCU website but branches should circulate this to members, particularly the training which is being offered in the region. It is not only an opportunity to learn new skills but to meet members from other branches and share good practice and knowledge.

In some cases if there are enough participants, training can be offered at branch level on specific issues.

UCU has recently developed a course for black members interested in becoming activists. This has already resulted in course participants attending the equality conference and joining the national black members committee.

## GETTING INVOLVED IN UCU - A COURSE FOR BLACK MEMBERS NEW TO ACTIVISM

To support the visibility and experience of black members in the union, UCU has developed a new course for members interested in becoming more active.

This course is aimed at new \*black activists and members who are keen to get involved with their branch and the wider union. The course will also contain a CPD session around leadership and mentoring.

This new one-day course is specifically designed for UCU black members who are interested in becoming more involved with UCU. The course will also include a leadership CPD session.

This course will cover:

- issues and positive solutions

- becoming active in UCU locally
- leadership and mentoring a professional development session
- UCU campaigns
- how you can get involved.

This course is for you: if you are new to activism in UCU; if you want to get more involved in your union and are looking to learn more about UCU; if you self-identify as black.

Contact [training@ucu.org.uk](mailto:training@ucu.org.uk)

*\*In UCU the word black is used in a political sense to describe people who self-identify as being from a visible minority (more usually from an Asian or African heritage) with a shared experience or understanding of discrimination*

### Branch audits

Branches can undertake branch audits so they understand who their members are. This should include the numbers of:

- black members
- disabled members

- LGBT members
- women members.

Branches can also look at hours of work and contract type. It is often difficult to accurately know how many disabled or LGBT members there are as many members who self-identify in these groups, do not disclose to their employer or the union. Branches need to encourage members to disclose by getting the message out that the more we know about our members, the better our negotiating and bargaining position. Branches should make it clear that information will be kept confidential and mechanisms put in place to ensure those who have not disclosed to their employer or department are not 'outed'.

Branches should also audit branch officer positions and analyse the equality composition of the branch committee and other branch posts such as caseworkers and departmental reps.

Comparing the membership breakdown with that of activists will identify which groups or members are under-represented.

### **UCU Survey of disabled members 2015**

Branches could also survey members about issues of concern. UCU recently undertook a number of surveys for black members, disabled members, LGBT members and women members which asked them about the issues they were facing at work and their place in the union. The disabled members survey showed that members are positive about initially disclosing to the employer, colleagues and students but:

- Once in work there is a lack of information or proactive work by employers on Access to Work and reasonable adjustments.
- Many members feel disability has worked against them in terms of development and career prospects and has made them more likely to face performance management. Barriers to promotion and capability procedures linked to sick leave were identified as major disability discrimination issues.



- Only 19 members had access to disability leave rather than it being recorded as sick leave.
- A significant group have been undermined by senior colleagues and have experienced unfavourable treatment including bullying.
- Engagement with the union is mainly through email communications with few holding branch positions.

This survey informed how we approached our priorities and some of the issues UCU is now focusing on are:

- ensuring disclosure is a positive experience throughout employment
- raising awareness of the importance of disability leave
- supporting members with reasonable adjustments
- ensuring disabled members know their rights
- ensuring branches involve and include disabled members and disability issues and ensuring branches understand different access issues.

### **Action plan**

Where there is an under-representation of a particular group or groups of members, the branch should draw up a plan to address the gaps. It is not a quick fix as encouraging members to become more active and to have the confidence to take on particular roles takes time. This guide includes examples of good branch practice which branches consider adopting. There are also national initiatives including the training programme which will assist.

- Use the 'Build the Union' objectives to support increasing participation.
- Use the national recruitment weeks to focus on underrepresented groups amongst the membership.
- Have equality as a standing item on your agenda so you always review the equality perspective of priorities and representation.

### **Role sharing**

Role sharing enables those who do not work full time (which is an increasingly large group within our sectors) to take up elected posts and play a greater role in the union. Role sharing also enables members with different experiences within the union or from different equality groups to share the responsibilities of a post. This prevents new activists feeling out of their depths as role sharing provides that very needed support.

Posts could also be divided into distinct roles. For example, a branch secretary post could be shared with one person responsible for negotiations and the other person for organising. How the work is divided can be agreed at branch level.

### **Time off for trade union duties**

Branches negotiate time off for trade union reps as part of their facilities agreement. Branches should pursue a written agreement which, not only details paid time off for reps, but acknowledges how the work of UCU reps supports the wellbeing of the institution. It also helps to avoid misunderstanding and allows better planning. UCU has produced guidance: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/1651/Facilities-and-time-off-for-UCU-reps/pdf/rep\\_facilities\\_1.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/1651/Facilities-and-time-off-for-UCU-reps/pdf/rep_facilities_1.pdf)

### **Equality networks**

Equality networks enable members experiencing discrimination and disadvantage to influence and participate in the activities and policy-making processes in the union.

The union can lose touch with the concerns of equality groups and these members can feel that the union is not interested in their problems and priorities so they will be less likely to participate in the union and continue to remain invisible and under-represented. If all members are not present, it sends out the wrong message that not all members are valued and do not have a voice.

Supporting black members, disabled members, LGBT members and women members to network (which can be face to face or by email) will encourage participation in the wider union.

The networks should:

- establish their own priorities or give their perspective to current priorities for the branch. A focus on bargaining and employment issues will support the branch.
- be purposeful and effective. Networks should feed into the branch committee so members of the networks can feel confident their views being heard.
- provide for the exchange of informal advice and support where appropriate
- be a place to encourage activity in other parts of the union whether for example, this is a branch role or becoming a member of the national equality standing committees
- work within the established policies, rules and constitution of the union.

UCU is currently developing regional black member networks. For further information contact Chris Nicholas: [CNicholas@ucu.org.uk](mailto:CNicholas@ucu.org.uk)

The following questions and answers may help in setting up equality networks at your branch



### **We don't have any/many black, disabled, LGBT or women members**

The branch membership may not reflect the staffing in your institution. The other is that the staffing at your institution may be unrepresentative of the population.

What you need to do is establish, how many black, disabled, LGBT or women members there are in your branch and secondly how many black, disabled, LGBT or women members of staff there are. You can break down the data and identify where you focus in terms of departments or equality groups. Disabled members and LGBT members may not want to disclose as they may have had a poor experience with the employer so you need to think of ways to include people safely. Look at the page on events which will give you ideas.

UCU's branch model rules include the role of equality officer. The equality officer might look at issues around representation in your branch. Consider what steps you might take to increase the level of diversity in the branch at all levels. Think about what you can do to engage with these potential members? Find out why they are not joining the union?

If there are few black, disabled, LGBT or women members of staff then you need to be engaging with your employer about this issue and asking them why this is the case. The branch should be asking some searching questions about the culture of organisation and what the employers are doing to address it. This can be part of an ongoing dialogue with management on race, sexual orientation, disability or gender issues. Your employer should be in discussion with you under the Public Sector Equality Duty – see resources.

Make sure you publicise this work to members and non-members so that they know that UCU takes equality seriously.



### **There are no barriers to black, disabled, LGBT and women members joining/getting involved**

How do you know? Have you asked black, disabled or LGBT members and potential members what their experiences of the union are? Are your branch practices and procedures equality proofed? Holding meetings in pubs or on a Friday, for example, may alienate members from certain religious groups or those with caring responsibilities.

Are members and potential members aware of the equality work being undertaken by the branch? Does the branch highlight work on disability, race, sexual orientation, gender equality at induction sessions or when recruiting new members?

Are all new members and activists welcomed and not put off by established ways of doing things and 'cliques' within the branch? It's sometimes difficult, if you are already active, to see what may be putting off others from doing the same. The best way to find out is to ask.

You can then look at how you are addressing real or perceived barriers to members and prospective members.



**We treat all our members the same regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability**

It is worth reflecting on this statement. For example, black members often report that they are not fully appreciated for who they are and the range of experiences they may bring with them into work. The same can probably be said for all equality strands. The unspoken, and sometimes spoken expectation of normative behaviour patterns/culture can exclude UCU members who fit less easily into such confines.

It is a core trade union value that the rights afforded to one member are afforded/extended to all. It is therefore important that we understand, respect and protect the rights of those members whose background and experience we may be less familiar with.



**If black, disabled, LGBT or women members want to get involved then it is up to them to do so**

A positive, well-oiled branch is one which will have one eye on succession planning and will seek to be representative. Actively seeking out members to take on roles, pass on their experience and develop new skills will strengthen the branch in the long term. The branch which has a strong record of challenging inequality and engaging with all members is one which is more able to meet the challenges which lie ahead.

Some members may not want to immediately undertake a visible union role. You may want to consider setting up 'safe' spaces, for example, for black and LGBT members to meet where they can share their experiences. To underline the 'safe' nature consider holding such meetings off site. Once a network of members have confidence in this process they will be able to be in a position to feed ongoing concerns into the branch. Developing a network of this type can assist the branch in understanding the types of issues facing members and help the branch committee in progressing the equality agenda with management.

You could also consider developing a mentoring scheme for those who wish to become more active but are unsure of process/procedure. UCU provides many courses to support reps and branches [www.ucu.org.uk/training](http://www.ucu.org.uk/training)

### ***Branch and regional disabled members networks***

**I** am the disabled rep at Coventry University and for the West Midlands region. I have encouraged others to be disabled member reps to help raise awareness of disability with all members and have started a regional network. I always reiterate the importance of disability initiatives being led by disabled members – ‘nothing about us without us’.

When I was at Birmingham City University I was mainly involved in a campaign to raise concerns about reasonable adjustments that were either late or completely lacking, this involved meeting with HR and presenting multiple examples of where the university was failing disabled members.

When I started at Coventry I joined the committee immediately and suggested that I become a disabled rep. The committee already had an equality officer and I suggested that we should start inviting members become representatives from each of the equality groups. We now have a women’s, disabled, LGBT and black representative.

Coventry has been reasonably successful at organising events which included guest speakers. I suggested that it would be good to focus on events around the equality areas. Coventry’s committee is also organised into several subcommittees one of which is for equality matters. Within the equality group we have identified several areas of concern with how Coventry deals with disabled workers. We organised a meeting with the head of HR and presented findings to them. We are now awaiting a second meeting to hear their response.

In my capacity as regional disability officer for the West Midlands, I have identified two areas which I felt needed to be targeted. Firstly, the disabled members’ survey highlighted that there is a deficit of disabled members holding branch and regional positions. My first campaign was to try and encourage disabled people to become more active in their branches by promoting a dedicated committee role as a disabled officer/rep. This campaign was aimed at both encouraging disabled members to take part and also liaising with branch committees

*to encourage them to try to include disabled members in their structure. We now have six or seven disability reps in the region. Many of the campaigns aims have been achieved through email.*

*Secondly, I felt that there was a need to provide more support for disabled members within the region. To achieve this I set up the West Midlands Disabled Members Support Network, which met for an inaugural meeting. The network received responses from around 20 members in the region although the meeting was attended by several people. This is a good start and we aim to continue with this network by having meetings in different areas of the West Midlands, and introducing video conferencing. The Disabled Members Support Network has indicated that they feel that disability leave should be our primary goal. We want to try to encourage more universities to provide this, and I will be working with individual disability officers to encourage and advise.* Paul Lunn, National DMSC member and Coventry University and West Midlands Region Disabled Members rep

### **Events which focus on equality**

An effective way to widen participation and interest in UCU activities is to organise events around key dates of celebration and commemoration. UCU often organises national or regional events for particular commemorations or celebrations but there will also be other organisations in your locality who will be doing the same. For example Pride events take place in many of our major cities and are an opportunity to talk to members or potential members.

**A** few years ago, faced with massive cuts and course closures, and expecting to need to build support for a strike against redundancies, we organised a public consultation and local march. It was a cheeky idea to consult the public about cuts while the management consulted us and it allowed a wider range of members to get involved: finding a venue and lists of organisations, giving out leaflets and window posters to shops near their homes or college; talking to students and using classes to think about cuts; making posters and banners on the lawn at lunchtime; putting questions to the panel; contributing ideas for the kind of education we wanted and thinking up slogans for the march.

*Everywhere that members went, they found someone who talked fondly of the college because they or a relative had been taught in the college and we were clapped and cheered in the streets when we marched then and every year since. Our management felt it necessary to come to the public consultation and to get more involved in fighting for funding afterwards because we so successfully made the case that we were fighting for students and community when we fought for jobs. Since then we have had another packed and successful public meeting within the college, addressed by Disabled People against the Cuts, a young artist who had done work placement at the college, Noam Chomsky (via video link) and other campaigners. Other marches that have involved students have shown us we are supported and have lifted spirits.* Elane Heffernan, DMSC, WMSC and Hackney College Branch Committee

UCU has a huge range of resources which branches can access through the website. For example, each year there is:

- January 27: Holocaust Memorial Day
- February: LGBT History Month
- March 8: International Women's Day
- October: Black History Month
- November/December: Disability History Month



For a complete list see the link to the Equality Calendar:  
[https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8141/Equality-Calendar-2016/pdf/ucu\\_equalitycalendar2016\\_.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/8141/Equality-Calendar-2016/pdf/ucu_equalitycalendar2016_.pdf)

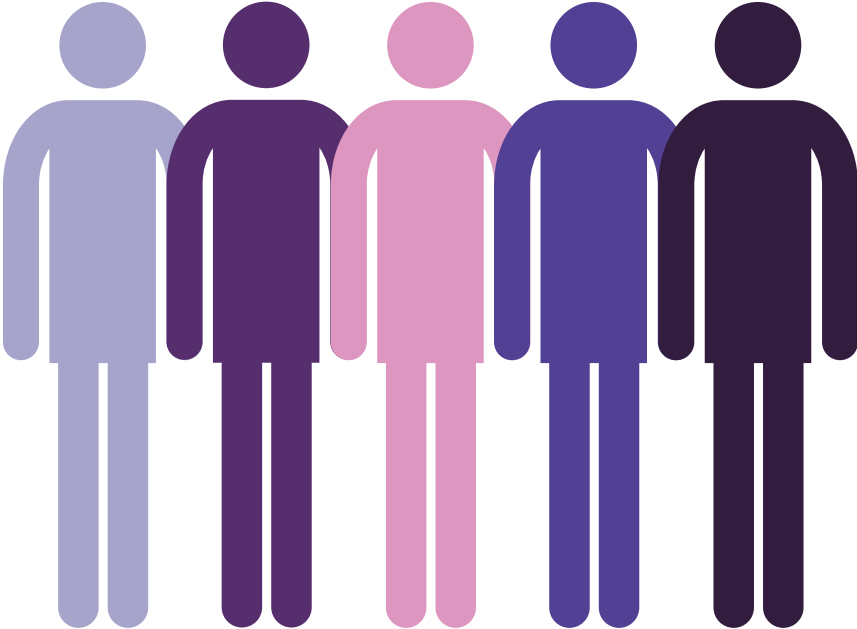
UCU also holds its own days such as UCU Day of Action against Workplace Racism (February each year) and an annual anti-casualisation day. These events all bring different members and potential members into UCU activity.

***N**orthumbria University has focused on specific campaigns to raise diversity issues. This has included commemorating Holocaust Memorial Day and celebrating International Women's Day. UCU provides plenty of resources for branches to access. The following details recent events.*

- *A Black History Month event was organised in the region which was circulated to UCU members here. We organised very successful events for both Holocaust Memorial Day in January and LGBT History Month in February (in conjunction with the Tyneside cinema) with film showings and speakers. Both events were sell-out events.*
- *International Women's Day was celebrated in March when a new National UCU film was produced and circulated in the branch.*
- *On 28 February there was a far right Pegida march in Newcastle. Many of us were there from the branch to oppose Pegida and were involved in the anti-fascist activities leading up to the day. On 23 May the Unity festival – designed to promote cultural integration took place in Newcastle (which UCU gave national funding) and attracted 5000 capacity.*
- *Local funding has been given to a feminist theatre company and a national feminist library as well as 'journey to justice.' Sue Abbott, NEC and Chair of WMSC*

National  
participation

5



One of the many ways to improve knowledge of the union and increase skills and experience is to get involved in national activities. The UCU website has an events page which will tell you about any conferences or activities that UCU is organising. Getting involved in the equality structures will help you gain confidence in a supportive atmosphere.

### **Equality conference and committees**

The UCU Equality Conference is held each year in November/December. The current format is for the conference to include four separate sessions for Black members; Disabled members, LGBT members and Women members. During those sessions, the Conference will elect members to the four national equality standing committees. These are:

- Black Members Standing Committee (BMSC)
- Disabled Members Standing Committee (DMSC)
- LGBT Members Standing Committee (LGBTMSC)
- Women Members Standing Committee (WMSC)

There are 12 members of the BMSC, DMSC and LGBTMSC and 15 members of the WMSC.

The main objectives of each Committee is to advise and make recommendations to the National Executive Committee of the union on issues specific to the members whom they represent.

For example:

- The WMSC is advising the NEC on the impact of sexual harassment at work.
- The DMSC has advised the NEC on reasonable adjustments at work for disabled workers.
- The BMSC is advising the NEC on actions and initiatives that will ensure Black members are visible in all aspects of the union's work including establishing regional networks.
- The LGBTMSC has advised the NEC on the issues for LGBT staff working abroad.

The committees also plan the agenda for their conference every year and also participate in the TUC national equality conferences. The committees can also put motions to Congress and the sector conferences which ensures the issues facing equality groups are visible in our core campaigns and policies. Members of the committees are also encouraged to participate in their branches and regions so equality knowledge and expertise is shared across the union.

To be on the committees, you must self-identify as belonging to that equality group. For example, to be on the DMSC, you must self-identify as a disabled worker. All levels of experience of being active in the union are welcome as the committees provide support and guidance to all members, working together collectively.

To find out more, please contact a member of the Equality and Participation team who would be happy to speak to you. Please email: [eqadmin@ucu.org.uk](mailto:eqadmin@ucu.org.uk)

The annual young members conference is open to any member aged 35 or under. The conference does not have decision making powers and is non-resolutionary but aims to bring younger members together and showcase campaign work and resources available. For further information contact UCU campaigns: [campaigns@ucu.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@ucu.org.uk)

**T**he Black Members Standing Committee (BMSC) initiated the inaugural UCU day of action against workplace racism. It was felt that race had fallen off the agenda within our institutions and we needed the union to help challenge that. In the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence report (1999) it was widely acknowledged that institutional racism within public bodies and institutions needed to be tackled, and legislation was strengthened by means of the race relations amendment act (2000). Now, 16 years on, many of the lessons previously learned seem to have been forgotten.

*The BMSC produced a survey, returned by over 600 black members, that demonstrated incidents of racism were still prevalent in our*

*institutions and many of the barriers to career progression were still very much in place. The day of action was therefore the beginning of a process of raising awareness of workplace racism in its many forms and engaging the entire membership in a discussion of how we can effectively challenge it.*

*One key aim for the day was to reinforce the fact that workplace racism can only effectively be tackled by the membership collectively. Often black members are left to challenge racism individually by means of casework, and proving a case of discrimination can be very difficult. We need to be calling our managements out for practices and procedures that disadvantage black members. The day of action was to give confidence to both black members and branch officers to raise incidents of racism in their local branches and associations, and for the wider membership to feel empowered to support those affected.*

*On the day, many branches called a meeting to show the 'Witness' film produced by the union and used the worksheets provided to prompt debate. The challenge to members was to think of ways we can maintain a focus on improving the lives of black members in FE and HE. I think that the film and the survey report went a long way to helping members understand that there is still a problem of racial nequality in colleges and universities.*

*UCU is developing regional black activists networks to help inform policy and practice from branch level upwards and to bring on more black officers at all levels of the organisation. The West Midlands Black Members' Network has met on three occasions and has involved participants from both the FE and HE sectors; for some this was their first engagement with the union. Our initial meeting focused on the structure and purpose of the network, which it was decided was to be fairly fluid to respond to the wishes of the participants; subsequent meetings have involved discussions of race issues at our local workplaces.*

*At the next meeting we have the NUS President Elect, Malia Buoattia coming to speak to us about the Prevent Agenda and racism on campus from the students' perspective.* Dave Muritu, NEC, Chair of Equality Committee and Sandwell College Branch Committee

### **National Executive Committee and reserved seats for equality groups**

There are differing views on the effectiveness of reserved seats or quotas in increasing the number of under-represented membership groups' visibility on committees in the long term. The positive effect is that it does ensure a seat at the table for equality groups, but the challenge is getting those from equality groups elected without this mechanism. These actions work best when they include a range of support measures to move towards balanced representation such as targeted training and mentoring support.

At the national executive level, UCU has five women member seats, two black member seats, two LGBT seats and two disabled member seats on the NEC. These members are elected onto the NEC and are then automatically appointed to the equality committee and the appropriate advisory equality standing committee (black members, disabled members, LGBT members and women members)

Currently the representation of women on the NEC is good and there is a strong visibility in the presidential team. The representation of black members is low and it is task for all activists and officials to work to improve the situation.

UCU sends out information about standing for election to national positions. Existing or previous members are happy to talk to any member who is interested in getting involved at this level.

### **UCU Congress**

The number of members attending UCU Congress is calculated at one representative for every 400 members. Small branches are aggregated together. There is a limit of six members per branch. Branches are encouraged to achieve a gender balance in representation but this becomes more challenging when there is one delegate who will represent a number of

branches. Those branches who are able to send more than one delegate should be able to achieve gender balance and also reflect on other equality characteristics including black members, disabled members, LGBT members and younger members.

### **TUC Congress**

As agreed by the NEC, UCU's delegation to TUC Congress includes seven places elected by and from NEC members. Minimum criteria will apply across the delegation: at least six women and at least one black member.

The total number of the delegation is 12 – seven elected by the National Executive Committee, plus general secretary, president, vice-president, president elect and full-time official. The minimum criteria apply across the full delegation.

UCU sends 12 delegates to each TUC equality conference (and two to the young members conference). When deciding the delegations we do take gender and sectorial balance into account. The LGBT delegation to the LGBT TUC workers conference tries to get a balance across the four groups as well as sectorial balance (further education and higher education).

UCU Scotland also participates in the STUC (Scotland Trade Union Congress) and sends delegates to the STUC equality conferences.

### **Feedback**

Please familiarise yourself with the huge array of resources available on the UCU website. The website also contains all the information about events and national elections. All important information will be sent directly to your email every Friday.

If you have examples of good practice that we can include in this guide or want support in developing your equality practice, please get in touch with Helen Carr, National Head of Equality and Participation at [hcarr@ucu.org.uk](mailto:hcarr@ucu.org.uk)

---

Produced by UCU Equality and Participation  
Carlow Street, London NW1 7LH  
020 7756 2500 / [www.ucu.org.uk](http://www.ucu.org.uk) / September 2016

---

