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REGIONAL WOMEN’S COMMITTEE HANDBOOK

2019

SOUTH EAST REGION

REGIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

**WORKING TOGETHER GUIDELINES INTRODUCTION**

**Working Together at UNIOSN meetings and Courses**

**Introduction**

UNISON is committed to the fullest possible participation of all its members in the activities of the trade union. On trade union education courses, so long as the applicant meets the advertised eligibility criteria for the course, no-one should be put off from participating because of the actions, attitudes or language of other course members. In particular, women, black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and disabled members have the right not to be made to feel ill at ease or distressed on a course as a result of other course members' behaviour.

The following guidelines have been drawn up to help course members meet UNISON's commitment to the full participation of all its members in a practical and constructive way. You will see that underlying this guide is a commitment to the principle that everyone has equal rights to benefit from, to contribute to and enjoy the course. This means, among other things, that we should avoid language and behaviour that is unacceptable to other members, because it is sexist, racist, homophobic or offensive to disabled people.

We assume that course members will agree with these principles and hope the guidelines will assist in putting them into practice.

**Working Together**

A key feature of trade union education is the value it places upon the knowledge, experience and skills that each member brings with them to the course - both in terms of their trade union work and their everyday lives. It is important that everyone feels equal and able to make a contribution if they so wish. So:

 *Listen to what others have to say, and avoid being dismissive of their contribution.*

 *Wait until a speaker has finished and do not interrupt their train of thought.*

 *Aim to have reasoned discussion, not arguments.*

 *Any criticism should be constructive and help members to develop confidence, skills and knowledge.*

 *Make your own contribution as clear and concise as possible and do not dominate the discussion.*

 *Ensure that everyone who wishes to speak is given encouragement and the opportunity to do so.*

 *It is equally important that members on the course can speak openly about problems they or their members have experienced in the full knowledge that personal or sensitive information is restricted to the classroom.*

***Confidentiality must be respected.***

**Language**

Language is important and UNISON's policy is not to use language which offends or hurts people. This type of language should always be avoided as it causes distress. Often it is a reflection of stereotyped thinking about UNISON's membership and policies. Do not be surprised if you are challenged if you make broad sweeping generalisations about any group of UNISON members, e.g. that women only go out to work for pin money.

Language which contains anti-lesbian, anti-gay or disablist sentiments and which is abusive or threatening in any way should not be used and nor should jokes or comments which perpetuate discrimination.

**Jargon**

Jargon is a barrier to good communication. The more we become involved in trade union work the more likely we are to use jargon. Take care to explain any jargon or initials you use which other members may not be familiar with so that everyone understands what you are talking about.

**Harassment**

There must be no sexual, racist, anti-lesbian/gay or disablist harassment of any kind:

***Sexual harassment***- is defined as any unwanted and unwelcome sexual comments, looks, actions, suggestions, or physical contact that is found to be objectionable and results in an unpleasant or intimidating environment being created.

***Racial harassment***- is defined as any unwanted and unwelcome terms, comments, looks, actions or behaviour relating to a person's race, ethnic origin or colour which members of a racial, cultural or religious group find offensive and results in an unpleasant or intimidating environment being created.

***Anti-lesbian/gay harassment***- is defined as any unwanted and unwelcome terms, comments, actions, or behaviour relating to a person's sexual preference or lifestyle which is found to be objectionable and results in an unpleasant or intimidating environment being created.

***Anti-disability harassment***- is defined as any unwanted and unwelcome terms, comments, actions, looks or behaviour relating to a person's condition or speculation about a person's condition.

**Outside Course Hours - Tea/Coffee/Lunch Breaks**

What has been outlined as guidance for behaviour during course hours is equally applicable to the scheduled breaks during the course.

**Outside Course Hours (Residential Courses)**

The social side of courses - discussions in the bar for example - should be both enjoyable and valuable. It is important that this is true for everyone. This means on the one hand, making sure that everyone feels able to join in if they want to - just as in the class - on the other hand, not putting pressure on individuals to fall in with a group if they do not want to, e.g. drinking alcohol, going out or staying up late. If you stay up late yourself, be careful not to disturb others - everyone needs to be able to participate fully at the first session in the morning.

**Time Keeping**

The course has a tight timetable and members are responsible for their own time keeping. When participating in the course, you will often have a limited amount of time. Make sure you use it well and return to the main group in time for the report back.

**Mobile Telephones**

Using mobile telephones during the course or leaving them switched 'on' for incoming calls during the course is not acceptable. PLEASE SWITCH THEM OFF

**Smoking**

Smoking is not permitted during course sessions. Smoking is an access issue for some members and smokers must remember this. Smokers who have difficulty in abstaining until scheduled breaks will be permitted to take smoking breaks during group/syndicate work, but not plenary sessions. (This will be subject to the rules of the establishment in which the course is being held.)

**Conclusion**

These guidelines are intended for you to use during the course to counter problems as they arise, and to ensure that no-one feels excluded from the course as a result of language, actions or attitudes of other course members. They also seek to promote UNISON's policies on discrimination and equal opportunities in a positive way as far as the conduct of trade union education courses is concerned.

# VISION STATEMENT

# The purpose of UNISON’s South East Regional Women’s Committee is to:

* **Promote women’s self-organisation, influence regional agendas and promote the interests of South East UNISON women at all levels of the union.**
* **Campaign for changes which remove discrimination and inequality, in partnership with other self-organised groups, in pursuit of equal rights.**

**We do this by encouraging, informing and educating all women in the region, including each other, thus empowering women by building confidence and facilitating the formation of networks.**

**We are committed to being a driving force within UNISON in the South East Region.**

# MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEE

* Chair
* Vice-Chairs (2)
* Women members (there are 20 seats on the committee)
* Plus 1 from each from the other Regional Self Organised Groups

i.e. Disabled members, Black members and Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender+ (LGBT +) members

* 1 Woman member from Young Members Regional Forum
* Women NEC members can attend in ex-officio capacity
* Regional Women's Officer is secretary to the committee.
* The Regional Women’s Committee and Regional Women’s Forum are open to all women members in the South East. The Regional Women’s Committee and Forum can send motions to National Women’s Conference.
* Regional Women’s Committee meetings are not open meetings due to the size of the membership however, women members from the South East Region may attend if the Regional Women’s Officer is notified so that accommodation and resources can be made available.

**JOB SHARING**

Job Sharing is positively encouraged by the Regional Women’s Committee. It is a way of working which helps less experienced women become involved and provides a more supportive environment in which to take on tasks. In difficult situations, two heads looking at issues are often more effective than one.

1. Those wishing to job share must indicate on the Regional Women’s Committee Nomination Form their intentions to do so.

2. Job sharers should ‘choose’ their own partners. Your partner must be

someone who you feel you can work closely with, that you have confidence in and can trust.

3. Job sharing means sharing rather than dividing up the tasks between two or more people. It should be co-operative, with all arrangements understood and agreed between the sharers.

4. Partners need to keep each other fully informed about what they are doing. Time needs to be set aside on a regular basis to share actions or difficulties, to plan work on contributions to meetings, and make joint decisions about issues.

5. All sharers should receive their own copy of relevant paperwork for committees/events they attend on behalf on the Regional Women’s Committee

6. When both/all sharers intend to attend a meeting or event on behalf of the Regional Women’s Committee, they need to check beforehand with the Co Chair/Convenor or Secretary of the Women’s Committee whether they are likely to encounter any difficulties. Some other UNISON committees refuse to allow both/all sharers to attend or will only pay one person’s expenses. We work to change these attitudes, but check so that you can make an informed decision as to whether you want to attend.

## FUNCTIONS OF THE REGIONAL WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

**"The South East Region Women’s Committee intends to develop a clear and focussed political agenda for women in UNISON South East Region in a friendly, supportive and non-oppressive framework. The committee will develop, medium and short-term strategies to achieve this, setting realistic goals, prioritising important issues and monitoring and reviewing work in progress” (SE RWC Constitution, 2019). The SE RWC aims to;**

* Promote the interests of all South East women within the union and the workplace
* Promote proportionality and fair representation and make recommendations on and encourage participation of all women, including new members and younger women, throughout the union in the South East
* Advise the Regional Committee and service groups on specific social and political issues of concern to women and on priorities for women in negotiations, campaigns and policies.
* Promote awareness of difference (e.g., culture, class, lifestyle, faith), challenge the multiple discrimination faced by Black women, lesbians, disabled women and transgender, encourage anti-discrimination initiatives and work to eliminate discrimination in the union.
* Organise the Annual Regional Women’s Meeting
* Support a wide range of activities in furtherance of the objectives of the committee, including the regular production of newsletters and any publicity materials.
* Maintain regular liaison with the other self-organised groups in the region to campaign jointly for changes which remove discrimination and inequality.

* Regularly set objectives which are realistic, achievable, meaningful and cost effective; establish priorities; draw up an action plan with a timetable to achieve these and monitor and review progress and work with a set budget.

Members of the Regional Women's Committee agree to try and implement the policies and practices of the Committee within their own branches.

**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Chair/Vice-Chairs**

* To set the agenda and chair meetings of the Regional Women’s Committee (RWC)
* To ensure that business is conducted in accordance with UNISON/RWC guidelines and within UNISON rules
* To act as a point of contact for the RWC between meetings
* To take decisions or participate in consultation on behalf of the RWC between meetings, as agreed by the Committee and/or within the limits of existing policy
* To liaise with other RWC members regarding their representation work on other regional level committees
* To contribute to and assist in the development of RWC policy as agreed by the committee
* To maintain regular contact with each other and with the Regional Women’s Officer
* To meet with the National Women’s Committee reps to discuss and agree their action before each meeting of the National Women’s Committee as determined by the Regional Women’s Committee meetings.

**Roles and responsibilities of Regional Committee Members**

* To be accountable to their electing group/body (e.g. other SOGs, South East region women members, branch women members, Regional Committee, NEC etc) as appropriate
* To feed back to/from their electing group
* To work together to support members in meetings of the RWC
* To work to support RWC members in other forums
* To encourage women friendly policies and ways of working
* To work with their branch and to encourage other branches to seek joint UNISON and employer agreements on domestic violence
* To attend meetings and/or let people know in advance where this is not possible
* To share knowledge and experience
* To set realistic and achievable aims (for ourselves and others)

**Regional Women’s Officer (secretary to committee)**

* To convene and co-ordinate RWC meetings in discussion with the Chair and Vice-Chairs
* To provide support at RWC meetings including working and supporting the Chair with preparation of the agenda.
* To generate relevant information (including Minutes and Agenda) for RWC meetings and on issues/events relevant to Women In UNISON
* To act as policy adviser to the committee and be responsible for managing the budget.
* To work with the RWC/Chair/Vice-Chair in the production of the action plan and budget.
* To provide advice to RWC and Chair and Vice-Chairs on Policy/Conduct etc.
* To work with the committee and assist with the work programme flowing form national women’s conference motion decision.
* To provide regular updates on the women’s training programme which supports UNISON policy on increasing the participation of women and working towards achieving proportionality.
* To share knowledge and experience
* To support the work of the RWC

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**COMMITTEES ON WHICH THE REGIONAL WOMEN’S**

### COMMITTEE HAS A ‘RESERVED’ SEAT

##### COMMITTEE NUMBER OF SEATS

**1. REGIONAL ELECTIONS** (held at RWC AGM in October)

Regional Council **2**

Regional Committee **2**

#### Education and Training Committee **1**

#### Finance Committee **1**

Publicity & Campaigning Committee **1**

#### Health & Safety Committee **0**

International Committee **0**

Welfare Committee **0**

Local Government Committee **1**

Health Care Committee **1**

#### Higher Education Committee **1**

#### Community Committee **1**

Police & Justice Committee **1**

Energy **1**

Water, Environment & Transport Committee **1**

Labour Link **1**

**2. NATIONAL ELECTIONS** (at RWC AGM October)

National Women's Committee **2** (in post for 2 yrs)

NWC Standing Orders **1** (in post for 2 yrs)

**3. OTHER BODIES**

Regional TUC LESE Women's Committee **4**

###### INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMMITTEES/BODIES

**1. REGIONAL COUNCIL**

This is the governing body of UNISON in the South East. All branches can send a delegate(s) to Regional Council meetings. It meets 3 times a year (including AGM) at various locations in the region.

Regional Council determine, each year, a set of objectives and priorities for the Region in line with the union’s national objectives and priorities. It receives and approves reports from all Regional Committees and self-organised groups and deals with matters directed to it by branches, self-organised groups and committees.

At its annual general meeting in February, elections are held for all the committees in the region. Each recognised self-organised group (SOG) is entitled to appoint two delegates to the Regional Council, in accordance with the principles of proportionality and fair representation, who shall have the same rights as branch delegates (except for card votes).

**2. REGIONAL COMMITTEE**

The Regional Committee is the operational body of the Regional council. It operates within the policies laid down by the Regional Council. The Regional Committee exercises the functions of the Regional council between its meetings and is accountable to the Regional Council to which it submits regular reports. The Committee meets 4 times a year and the meetings usually last 3 hours.

The composition of the Regional Committee is;

 1 x Regional Convenor

 2 x Deputy Regional Convenors

 6 x Co-Chairs of Strategic Committees.

 5 x General Seats

15 x Women’s Seats

 4 x reserved low-paid seats (these seats are reserved for low-paid women
 members who earn below a defined hourly rate - £9.94 June 2018)

 2 x reserved seats for members from each of the Service Groups

 2 x reserved seats for members from Young Members Forum

 2 x reserved seats for members from each of the SOG’s

 2 x reserved seats for members from the Retired Members Group

 2 x reserved seats for Labour Link members

**3.** **REGIONAL** **STRATEGIC COMMITTEES**

These 3 Committees carry out specific work as identified by their titles and which report to the Regional Council. They meet no more than 4 times a year. Some meetings wil be held during the week with at least one on a weekend. **There is 1 reserved seat for a representative from each of the SOG groups and Service Groups.**

The majority of the meetings take place at the UNISON Regional Head Office, Ranger House, Guildford or at UNISON Centre in London. Tea and coffee facilities are always available.

The committees and their respective work areas are briefly described below:-

**(a) Education and Training Committee**

This Committee plans the region's education training programme in conjunction with requests made from service groups, self-organised groups and other bodies of the union. This Committee is also responsible for overseeing some of the major pieces of work within the region. For example, recruitment and membership density analysis, branch assessment, branch re-structures, membership systems and DOCAS processing, and the Organising Fair.

The composition of this committee is;

 9 x Women’s seats

 3 x General seats

**(b) Finance Committee**

The Finance Committee is accountable to the Regional Council for all finances in the regional relating to the Lay Member Budget. The Finance Committee is elected annually at the Regional Council AGM. The Finance Committee is responsible for producing the Regional budget, in line with UNISON’s objectives, which is approved by the Regional Council at its AGM. The budget is prepared in consultation with the Regional Convenors, Chairs of Committees or Groups and staff with budget responsibilities.

The composition of this committee;

 9 x Women’s seats

 3 x General seats

**(c) Publicity and Campaigning Committee**

This Committee is responsible for the focus and direction of regional campaigning and provides a forum for the development of regional policies, including the allocation of funds from the General Political and Fund Regional Pool bids to branches and for regional events.

The composition of this committee;

 9 x Women’s seats

 3 x General seats

**4. REGIONAL STANDING COMMITTEES**

**(d) Health and Safety Committee**

This Committee’s function is to co-ordinate and develop our Health and Safety work strategies in the region.

The composition of this committee;

 6 x Women’s seats

 2 x General seats

**(e) International Committee**

The Intentional Committee oversees and co-ordinates the region's international links with trade unions in other countries. Beyond that, it also considers wide ranging human rights issues as befitting of Britain's biggest trades union.

The composition of this committee;

 6 x Women’s seats

 2 x General seats

**(f) Welfare Committee**

Whilst all committees place service to members at the top of their agenda, the Welfare Committee is uniquely able to provide an individual member's service in cases of great need. It is a vital part of UNISON's work for which many members have personal reason to be grateful.

The composition of this committee;

 4 x Women’s seats

 2 x General seats

**(g) Editorial and communications Committee**

The Ed and Comms Committee take a lead in the production of regional publicity materials and monitor the use of the regions website and the information that is supplied to it.

The composition of this committee;

 4 x Women’s seats

 2 x General seats

**5. SERVICE GROUP COMMITTEES**

Each service group i.e. Health Care, Local Government, Energy, Higher Education, Community and Water, Environment & Transport has its own Committee at regional level. Members of the Committee’s have to be employed in the relevant Service Group, and are nominated directly by branches in that service and/or SOG’s and Young Members Group.

Their purpose is to make regional policy for that service group, mount campaigns, and deal with issues of relevance to members in that service.

Each service group committee meets approximately 3 or 4 times a year. **There is 1 reserved seat for women’s SOG.**

**6.** **NATIONAL COMMITTEES**

The regional women’s committee has 2 seats on the National Women's Committee. This Committee organises a National Women’s Annual Conference and carries out work as instructed by National Women’s Conference and any work referred to it by Regional Women's Groups.

There are 2 to 3 meetings a year, usually requiring an over night stay. Additionally there are occasional training days/weekends (Friday and Saturday) and work to be done between meetings. Meeting are not all held in London and some travelling is required to other regions. All accommodation, travel and expenses are met by the national women’s committee.

**7.** **OTHER BODIES**

Regional SERTUC Women's Committee has 4 seats for UNISON South East Region. It meets approximately 6 times a year, mostly during the week, in London and generally late afternoon early evening. It receives reports on what the TUC is doing for women nationally and organises activities/shares information about women's issues across the south east region.

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REPRESENTATION ON OTHER COMMITTEES/BODIES

If you are chosen by the Regional Women's Committee to represent them on another Committee or body, you have the following responsibilities:-

**1.** Although the regional women’s officer will forward your name to the person responsible for organising the other committee/body, you should contact them to;-

i) get their schedule of meetings,

ii) find out when their agendas are sent out,

iii) get a list of who is on the committee.

**2.** Ensure that you (or your job-sharer) attend/s the meeting.

**3.** Prepare for the meeting and make the best input that you can.

**4.** Provide a short written report of the meeting about the issues that the Regional Women's Committee should know about. Ensure that the women’s officer receives this at least 10 days before our next meeting, so that it can be circulated with the agenda.

**Your role on that committee/body is to:**

**a.** Be accountable to the Regional Women's Committee.

**b.** Liaise with the Regional Women's Committee to ensure that you are clear on what they want you to do.

**c.** Provide regular progress reports to the Regional Women's Committee showing how their wishes are/are not being implemented.

**d.** Look for the women's perspective on matters being discussed. Take it forward in discussion, challenge when it is ignored.

**e.** Attend Regional Women's Committee meetings so you feed back to them.

**f.** Work within the guidelines produced for the Regional Women's Committee.

AFFILIATIONS

The Regional Women's Committee reviews its affiliations and subscriptions each year. The advantages of affiliation are that we can then use that organisation's help and expertise. They get a regular flow of income from us, which is usually vital to their work.

If any Committee member wishes to challenge an affiliation or add a new one, please put the matter on the next AGM agenda. Please see the regional women’s committee action plan and budget for a list of organisation/s affiliated to.

Information sent in from these organisations is circulated with the correspondence during meetings.