

## PARTICIPATION PROJECT REPORT TO THE WORKING GROUP

At the previous two meetings, the Working Group considered how we could shape our response to the outcome of the consultation processes reported at the March meeting. This was further drilled down into four workstreams and questions were considered for further discussion and development at the last meeting.

Following this, we have started to shape the workstreams and recommendations on how we review what we currently do to enable and encourage greater and increased participation and how we start to develop these ideas before trialling, implementing and engaging other stakeholders on final proposals ahead of the Regional Council AGM 2022 and.

Once these recommendations are agreed upon, further work will begin on each workstream to develop them and will be reported back to the next meeting.

Based upon the clear evidence from our research, as discussed at our last working group meeting, there are several areas for consideration and further development;

### Meeting Arrangements & Structure

Meetings are a key element of our democratic structures, but the way in which we have held them in the past has prevented some of our members from participating. We acknowledge that we need to explore new ways of working to make it easier for a wider group of members to get involved. All audiences said TIME was the key barrier to participation (75%).

The overwhelming evidence was that to make meetings more accessible, people wanted to see more virtual meetings in future and liked the changes to accommodate these, including more structured and purposeful meetings encompassing shorter, timed agendas and regular breaks. All audiences (66%) supported much greater use of virtual time limited meetings.

**Recommendation 1. The Regional Constitution be amended to require that at least 50% of all regional meetings take place virtually.**

**Recommendation 2. The Regional Access Standards for virtual meetings are incorporated into the Regional Constitution and will apply to all regional meetings.**

Activists reported difficulty in getting Facility Time due to the diversity of our membership, including members in the private and community sector as well as over 80% women members. This is compounded for those with caring responsibilities. There should be greater flexibility on the timings of meetings to consider the possibility of holding meetings in the evening and at weekends.

**Recommendation 3. Regional Committees will be encouraged to**

**survey their members before setting meeting dates and time. They should consider what flexibility could be applied to allow for different working patterns or caring responsibilities, including holding some meetings in the evenings and weekends to allow those activists that cannot attend during the traditional working day to attend. Regional committees will be expected to review their meeting arrangements annually reflecting on the most successful meeting dates/times when setting dates for the following year.**

The content of meetings is another area where the clear feedback is that members are time-poor. In order to give up their time to attend a meeting, they want to know that their input will be welcome and valued and that there is a clear purpose and outcome to the meeting. Consistency across regional committees and ensuring all meetings are accessible is seen as positive and helpful in achieving this.

Furthermore, it is also clear from the feedback that we have received that the balance between formal business, learning/briefing and speakers needs to change to appeal to a wider audience.

**Recommendation 4. There will be model templates produced for all committees to adhere too that ensures a focus upon consistency, structure and the purpose of the committee. This will include template agendas, minutes, reports and motion submission templates.**

**Recommendation 5. The template model agenda will structure agendas with a focus on the business to be dealt with in line with the purpose of the committee balanced with a learning session to better equip our activists or a speaker to share experiences relevant to the purpose of the committee.**

**Recommendation 6. With the exception of Service Group Committees, all agendas must only include workplace or citizenship issues that apply appeal to all members regardless of service group unless related to the purpose of that committee or there is a clear link with UNISON's objectives. Chairs must ensure all discussions are accessible and are not focusing on one specific service group, whilst encouraging all member to share their experiences.**

How meetings are chaired is seen as key in ensuring those that attend are made to feel welcome and that their views are respected and valued as part of the discussion. All audiences felt a frustration with the same people speaking at meetings (60%). As a Union with over 1 million women, we will ensure that women's voices and other underrepresented groups within the region are heard at all meetings.

**Recommendation 7. Guidance for Chairs is produced, setting out how to conduct meetings to support greater participation. This will include**

**practical steps that can be taken in meetings to ensure a broader balance of contributions. This should include a proportionality guide for speakers so that women attendees are actively encouraged and supported to participate. Priority should also be given to ensure fair representation from our other equality groups, including Young, Black, Disabled, LGBT+ members.**

**Recommendation 8. Mandatory annual training for Chairs occurs at the start of each committee cycle to support them in their role and share best practise and guidance from more experienced chairs.**

We are committed to ensuring that the topics for discussion are relevant to as many members as possible and that we focus on workplace issues that matter to members and that equality is an integral component in all meetings.

**Recommendation 9. Each meeting should include a focussed agenda item on one of the equality strands or young members, guidance will be issued to support this.**

### Committee Governance, Purpose & Structures

We want all of our members and activists to understand how to get involved in their union UNISON and how to affect change within the union. Not understanding what our committees do affected over 50% of respondents. As part of this, we should introduce clear materials to explain the different parts of our democratic structures and policy is made in the union. We also need to review our current structures and practices to introduce greater clarity and consistency across the region.

**Recommendation 10. Engaging with relevant regional bodies, to review the scope of our committees to better define the purpose and scope of those committees. To further consider the remit, overlap, structure of our regional committees to strengthen and enhance democratic decision making and make them more easily understood and accessible.**

**Recommendation 11. To work with the SOGs and Service Groups to produce a model Regional Constitution that would apply across each of the regions committees, tailored where necessary, for each of the relevant groups to meet their purposes. The aim would be to introduce consistent language, format and core processes wherever possible whilst meeting the function of each committee.**

**Recommendation 12. We will produce short, user-friendly materials to explain our structures, how policy is made, what each of our committees do and to incorporate this into new stewards' inductions and branch officer training.**

We are committed to supporting all of our members in our democratic structures with a particular focus on those groups that may currently be underrepresented. To increase participation across all sections of our membership, we will pilot different ways of working to maximise the voices from all sections of our membership.

**Recommendation 13. In accordance with the Regional Strategy, we will identify and trial new ways of working or new structures to increase participation from groups of members outside of our traditional employers and workplaces such as those working in the private, community, voluntary, schools, social care, probation etc.**

## **Communication**

Many of our members and activists do not understand our regional structures, processes and language. Our strength as an organisation relies on members' active participation; therefore, we need to review how we communicate with members to make it more easily understood what we do and how they can get more involved. We have all seen the benefits of using digital media to communicate during the pandemic and we want to retain and maximise the benefits in the future.

**Recommendation 14. We will review all of our current documentation, including our constitution and standard committee reports and develop model paperwork, to make them more standardised, accessible and understandable, including a Glossary of frequently used terms or acronyms**

**Recommendation 15. We will develop a range of media/communication methods and work with branches to communicate more about our regional activities and how they could become more involved.**

**Recommendation 16. We will review where and how digital technology can enhance our communications and engagement with members, learn lessons from the past 16 months, and consider further areas to explore.**

## **Education & Activist Development**

We know that activists are under incredible pressure, and taking on additional responsibilities can seem daunting for new activists. We are committed to providing support to all members wishing to become more involved in the union.

**Recommendation 17. We will establish a network of lay and staff mentors to support newly active members at regional level who want to become more involved in the union.**

**Recommendation 18. We will develop an Activist's Handbook that includes 'job descriptions for key roles in the union. It will include basic guidance on how to understand committee paperwork and processes, as well as how policy is made, and signposts other support materials.**

Being part of a union is being part of a family or support network. It is important that there are opportunities to come together to provide mutual support and allow activists to get to know one another. We know that members are under pressure and do not have a lot of time to spare. We want to facilitate networking opportunities for members in addition to the more formal business of the union.

**Recommendation 19. We will explore ways of incorporating more structured networking opportunities within formal meetings and at events such as 'The Big Weekend' to engage new activists and encourage more branches to attend.**

Ensuring that all activists feel comfortable and confident to speak publicly and understand how to have their voice heard in UNISON is key to increasing participation and ensuring that we are truly representative of our membership. In particular, ensuring that those from underrepresented groups such as women, young members, disabled members, LGBT+ and Black members are both represented on our committees and feel able to actively participate.

**Recommendation 20. We will provide an annual programme of training aimed at developing key skills needed to fully participate in UNISON democratic structures, working with each Self-Organised Group to listen and respond to their individual needs whilst specifically targeting new activists.**