

Committee Governance, Purpose & Structures

Regional Model Constitution Progress Report

The Participation Working Group have been clear that a key aspect on improving participation is supporting our members and activists in understanding 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. Members that become involved in one committee should not face any additional barriers in becoming involved in other committees and should have similar experiences within these meetings and democratic processes, subject to the core differences in functions and purposes.

As a result, the working group agreed the following recommendation:

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.

Research & Analysis

The starting point for this work was to consider the Self-Organised Group constitutions, the majority of these constitutions have been introduced or updated recently and several already had similar formats and elements. Due to the nature of the members that are involved in the Self-Organised Groups, there is additional complexity presented by ensuring democratic accountability whilst also reducing barriers to participation that is not applicable to the Service Groups who have more clearly defined constitutions and branch and national structures within which they sit.

Initial work was undertaken to compare and understand both the current constitutions of the SOG committees as well as the processes that were actually being used by Self-Organised Group Committees and understand the differences- i.e what was working, what was not covered by constitutions or what was no longer applicable.

Consideration was also given as to what the core requirements of constitutions were and what may be currently within constitutions but was not necessary and therefore could potentially be removed or reduced without impacting on the functioning of the committee or key processes.

From this research and analysis a draft constitution was developed, building on the best practise within the existing constitutions and using the commonality between them as an initial base. The constitution included considered usage of appendices to

support further clarity, a contents page and changes to language as well as processes.

Objectives of Model Constitution

The starting point in developing the model constitution was to identify the objectives of the new constitution, what was its purpose and how would this support participation. The success of the model constitution could then be measured against these objectives:

1. Consistent Language & Format
2. Consistent Processes
3. Meet the function of each different committee
4. Easy to understand & Accessible- can easily find answers to key Questions
5. Don't reinvent the wheel- preference for the familiar
6. Reduction in bureaucracy- business focussed & necessary – in favour of engaging, member-focussed activities
7. Every member has an equitable opportunity to participate

Key Questions

A key aspect of drafting the model constitution was to place ourselves in the shoes of ordinary members when approaching a committee or considering becoming active on a committee and consider what questions would they have. Another key test of the success of the constitution would be to understand how easy would it be to find the answers within the model constitution.

- What is the purpose of the Committee? What does it do?
- Who can be involved in the committee? (And how many total?)
- How do I get involved in the Committee?
- How can I get elected to the committee?
- What can I do on the committee?
- Who is the committee accountable to?
- How can I represent or further the committee's interests?
- How can I or the Committee make decisions? What decisions can we make?
- How can I or the Committee change UNISON policy?

Key Constitutional Elements

In order to meet the identified objectives and ensure that the key questions were answered, the model constitution included combining successful elements from the existing constitutions, capturing changes that have been made following the pandemic and in order to facilitate virtual meetings that have improved participation and introducing new changes to improve clarity or understanding. These are outlined below:

- Contents Page **pg 1**
- Reduction in Purposes/Objectives to core functions **point 2 & 3, pg 2**
- Composition – Total Membership clearly set out **point 4, pg 3**
- Election Processes in separate appendix

- AGM elects the Committee **point 5, pg 3**
- The Committee elect the officers/representatives to other bodies **point 6, pg 3**
- Ballots held in advance – those registered for AGM – **appendix**
- Fair procedure for filling vacancies **point 5.2 & 6.3, pg 3**
- Officer Positions/Representatives to other bodies in **separate appendix**
- Co-Chairs rather than Chair/Vice Chair - **appendix**
- AGM business reduced to core requirements – **point 7, pg 4**
- Virtual Meetings, Setting Meeting Dates, Paperwork Deadlines – **point 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, pg 4**
- Motions Procedure in separate, simplified SO **appendix**
- Quorum requirements clearly set out and consistent – **point 8.5, pg 5**

The use of appendices allows members to easily follow the processes and prevents repetition within the constitution or conflicting elements or inconsistency between sections of the constitution. The key changes to election processes already utilised by some committees and subsequently introduced to other committees in order to accommodate virtual meetings have proven to improve participation and be more easily understood.

Consultation

Meetings were held with each individual SOG Chair for feedback on the draft documents and to identify any differences between the committees that would either need to be taken into consideration as part of the model constitution or subsequently included as amendments when adopted by the individual SOG committee. This feedback was then included in the final drafts and amendments. Additionally, presentations have taken place at several committee meetings with subsequent presentation planned.

Recommendations

1. Comparison between existing Service Group Constitutions is undertaken to understand core differences between the SOG constitutional requirements and Service Group constitutional requirements.
2. Consultation with Service Group Chairs and Committees to consider model constitution and identify any changes to be included either within the model constitution or noted for inclusion within finalised individual Service Group Constitutions.
3. The model constitution is endorsed by the working group for subsequent adoption at the 2022 SOG/SG Regional committees AGMs via normal democratic processes.