

## Becoming a Branch Disabled Members Officer in UNISON

Self-organisation brings together members from under-represented groups – women members, Black members, disabled members and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender plus (LGBT+) members.

The purpose of self-organisation is to assist the union to:

1. Promote the union's equalities and bargaining agenda
2. Ensure equality issues are considered in all areas of the business of the union
3. Defend jobs, terms and conditions and services
4. Build its density and have a strong and dynamic presence in the workplace.

Working within UNISON's agreed policies, self-organised groups have the right to:

- Meet to share concerns and aspirations and establish their own priorities
- Elect their own representatives
- Have adequate and agreed funding and other resources
- Work within a flexible structure to build confidence and encourage participation.

There are lots of resources to support self-organisation, including UNISON guidelines on how it works: 'Organising for equality' stock no 1577 or [www.unison.org.uk/equality](http://www.unison.org.uk/equality). There is a host of resources specific to disabled members on the [UNISON website](#).

Sign up to receive the Equalities e-Bulletin and the disabled members' update:

**[Click here to sign up for Equality E-Bulletin](#)**

Where there is a recognised branch disabled members self-organised group (SOG), the group can elect a representative to the branch committee. Whether or not there is a currently functioning disabled members group, many branches create the post of branch disabled members officer to provide a point of contact for issues affecting disabled members and members within the branch. The branch disabled members officer should be someone who self-identifies as a disabled person.

The information below was put together by members of the National Disabled Members committee.

## Key tasks of a Branch Disabled Members Officer

Together with any Branch Disabled Members Group:

- Being visible
- Championing UNISON's commitment to disability equality
- Encouraging disabled workers to join UNISON
- Keeping disabled members informed and getting them involved
- A point of contact for disabled members needing support or signposting for representation
- Organising branch disabled members meetings and events eg Disability History Month
- Being the link between disabled members, the regional disabled members' self organised group and the branch committee
- Representing the views of branch disabled members
- Sharing regional and national UNISON information for disabled members in the branch
- Working in partnership/collaboration with any employer staff disabled members network
- Building and improving links with local disability community groups
- If possible, participating in the regional disabled members group
- If possible, organising branch participation in the annual national disabled members conference
- Encouraging attendance at the national disabled members network meetings held in June and August.
- Reporting on disabled members work at the branch AGM.

## Essential knowledge

- Where to get information, advice, resources and support
- The issues your members are concerned about and interested in

## Important skills and qualities

- A passion for trade unionism and disability equality
- Willingness to learn about the social model of disability and the Equality Act
- Sense of humour
- Good listener
- Understanding and life experience
- Common sense
- Open minded / non judgemental

- Good communicator
- Time management skills / knowing your limits
- Resourcefulness
- Approachability
- Understanding of and commitment to confidentiality
- Determination

## Key contacts / support

- Branch Secretary
- Branch Equalities Co-ordinator
- Regional disabled members SOG conveners, Regional Reps to National Disabled Members Committee and Regional disabled members lead officer
- Other self-organised groups/SOG officers such as Black Members Officer, LGBT+ and Women's Officer
- Young Members Officer
- Retired Members Officer
- Workplace Equality Reps
- Accredited Stewards
- Regional disabled members group and its contact officer
- National Disabled Members Committee and the National Officer for disability equality
- Disabled member activists in other local branches – for possible joint organising
- Local disabilities community groups
- Your members!

## Where to start

- Audit your employers policies

Look through your employers policies and check they are inclusive of disabled workers. In particular look at whether there is a reasonable adjustment policy and a disability leave policy – you can use our bargaining guides to help you negotiate if these aren't already in place.

[Click here for UNISON's Reasonable Adjustments and Passports bargaining guide](#)

[Click here for UNISON's Disability Leave bargaining guide and model policy](#)

Even if your employer has a disability leave policy, for example, check that it meets our key bargaining objectives and negotiate to get it updated if not.

- Survey disabled members

Find out what the issues are for disabled members in your branch by doing a survey. You could ask disabled members about their experience of asking for reasonable adjustments, of the sickness absence policy, and any experience of bullying or harassment or discrimination.

If you are using surveymonkey or similar make sure you can also provide paper copies for anyone with access needs.

- Hold a meeting for disabled members

Set up an in person or virtual meeting for disabled members to talk about their issues and come up with a plan of action. Remember to book an accessible room and to make sure virtual platforms are also accessible – ask people in advance if there are any adjustments they need to access the meeting.

- Set up a branch self organised group

Talk to members about the issues they are facing in the workplace and whether they would be interested in meeting with others to discuss them. Some branches have found that anonymous surveys, seeking information on what issues interest members, have been a catalyst for the creation of a branch self-organised group.

You may be able to find a topical subject to raise interest in a first meeting. This might be a change to workplace rights affecting members, a new employer's policy out for consultation, or the motions for the national self-organised group conference. Once there is a spark of interest, use the resources of the branch – newsletters, social media, notice boards and workplace reps – to spread the word and encourage members to get involved.

[Click here for Organising for Equality – UNISON guidelines on self-organisation](#)

- Run a stall or event for disability history month

Disability History Month takes place every year from 18 November to 18 December and includes the United Nations International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3 December. It is a perfect opportunity for UNISON branches and regions to run recruitment stalls showcasing the work UNISON does on equality for disabled workers and to encourage more disabled workers to join our union.

[Click here for the Disability History Month – Events Organising Guide](#)

For more information on any of this, contact your Regional disabled members group – contact details for the Regional Officer working with your regional group can be found on the [UNISON website](#)

Contact the National Disabled Members Group via [Disabilityissues@unison.co.uk](mailto:Disabilityissues@unison.co.uk)

Or contact: Deirdre Costigan, National Officer, Disability equality

- write to: UNISON, 130 Euston Road, London NW1 2AY
- email [Disabilityissues@unison.co.uk](mailto:Disabilityissues@unison.co.uk)

## Other helpful resources

You will find a number of other helpful organising resources for disabled members on the UNISON website at <https://www.unison.org.uk/about/what-we-do/fairness-equality/disabled-members/>

Including our Quick Guides:

- The Social Model
- Reasonable Adjustments
- Disability Language

## Regional Disabled Members Self Organised Groups – Contact Information

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