



Organising for equality

This quick guide for equality officers has been designed to complement UCU training, which you are strongly urged to attend. Details of UCU courses can be found on the training pages of the website in the UCU Activists section, or contact the Equality Unit on eqadmin@ucu.org.uk or your regional office.

The role of the equality officer

Branches/LAs that have a high membership density and high level of activity tend to have better working conditions. They also tend to be more pro-active in campaigning for improvements, rather than having to react to threats from the employer. In order for the membership to remain active, involved and informed, a branch/LA needs to elect representatives to take on different roles.

On the UCU model rules, rule 8.1 states that: 'Members will be elected to the following officer roles within the branch/LA: chair/president, vice-chair/vice-president, treasurer, secretary, membership secretary, equality officer.'

Section 8.6 in the model rules describes the role of the equality officer:

8.6 Equality officer

The equality officer will:

- 8.6.1 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
- 8.6.2 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
- 8.6.3 where appropriate, provide information, encouragement and support to members about equality issues
- 8.6.4 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

8.6.5 where appropriate, provide liaison between the branch/LA and UCU's equality structures

In the absence of the equality officer, these duties will be performed by another officer or officers as the committee decides.

The role of the equality officer can vary according to the size and make up of the branch/LA. The model branch/LA plan (below) gives suggested plan a branch/LA can use. Not all the duties are exclusively those of the equality representatives; in fact you probably won't have the time

- 2 Ensure that there is a UCU representative on this committee.
- 3 Have an equality officer on the branch/LA committee, and get it established that she or he has the right to time off for relevant training.
- 4 Make sure that your college or university has adopted the nationally agreed policies. A full listing of agreements can be found on the UCU website (www.ucu.org.uk/1689).
- 5 Once adopted, negotiate on their proper implementation. For example:
 - Is monitoring being done, and targets set for improvement?
 - Is equality impact assessment being undertaken?
 - Is an equal pay review being undertaken?
- 6 Use the national pay agreements in both sectors as a vehicle in the campaign to get parity for hourly-paid lecturers.
- 7 Ensure that training is provide

Consider the most convenient times for members to attend. For example, late night meetings may disenfranchise members with childcare needs etc, or specific times may be difficult for those to whom religious observance is vital at particular points in the week.

If the branch/LA is located in more than one workplace, try and rotate the locations of the meetings.

Ensure the meeting ends at the advertised time.

Don't use union jargon.

Find out if any members need childcare and discuss what the union can do to help – for example by planning a babysitting rota or having a crèche in a room near the meeting.

This is not an exhaustive list. Your best course of action is to ask.

Branch/LA communications

One of the most important things a branch/LA should do to maintain involvement from members is to keep them informed. With ever increasing pressures of work this can be overlooked. Information can sometimes be sent out in a way that doesn't meet a member's needs.

Below is a checklist for branches/LAs to consider when communicating with members.

Recruitment and organisation