



Branch Review

Branches are the union's lifeblood. With a reach across the United Kingdom branches are – or should be – a member's window into the world of Equity. They are a place to engage with and organise around industrial issues, to discuss common workplace concerns and their solutions and to meet like-minded members in an otherwise transient business.

In June 2017, the Equity Council passed a motion brought by Councillor Andrew Macbean that asked the union to review how branches develop membership engagement, particularly in relation to branch funding. In January 2019 I wrote to you to say that I would send you a series of questions on this and on wider issues concerning Equity's branch network to look at ensuring that branches can play their full part in the union's dynamic future.

The Council is set to consider the conclusions of this review in October 2019, alongside a review of the Online Branch. You can discuss these questions in branch meetings and with your branch committee, and I would be happy to arrange to come to a meeting of the branch where you intend to discuss this if I can help answer any questions.

Although I asked branches if they wished to add to the question topics I listed in January, there is also the opportunity to comment on any areas not covered at the end of the set questions.

Please do get in touch if you have any queries on the review.

Matt Hood
Assistant General Secretary
March 2019

Branch Aims & Objectives

The following is a list of aims and objects for branches, some of which appear in the branch rules and some which are commonly cited as core branch activities. Please rank those listed in order of importance, with 1 being the most important. If you do not believe that an item should be an aim or objective of the branch, please leave the score blank.

- To provide a forum for members to discuss matters of local concern
- To provide a forum for members to discuss matters of national concern
- To provide members a democratic voice in the running of the union
- To advance Equity campaigns in the local area covered by the branch
- To provide social activities for branch members
- To provide professional development opportunities to branch members
- To raise money for charity
- To serve as a link between local workplaces and the union, and vice-versa
- To serve as a link between the membership and the Council, and vice-versa

Branch Attendance

The number of members attending branch meetings is a regular cause for concern for some branches, and some of the following questions have been raised as potential reasons for non-attendance.

- Are meetings of your branch quorate:
- a) Always
 - b) Mostly
 - c) Sometimes
 - d) Never

What has been the average branch meeting attendance over the last 12 months?

What has been successful in encouraging members to attend?

- 1
- 2
- 3

What are the obstacles to members attending?

- 1
- 2
- 3

Branch Areas & Meeting Location

Have you mapped your branch area to ensure that your meeting location is central to where your members live?

Yes/No

Does your branch vary meeting location to ensure that members from different locations within your branch area can attend?

Yes/No

If yes – has this been successful?

Does your branch meet in a location that is accessible to D/deaf and disabled members without needing to request special arrangements in advance?

Yes/No/Sometimes

Consumption of alcohol is offensive to some members who practice certain faiths. Does your branch meet in a location that is not licensed to sell alcohol?

Yes/No/Sometimes

Does your branch meet in a location connected to a workplace for members?

Yes/No/Sometimes

Democratic Representation – Branch Membership

One of the roles of Equity branches is to provide members with both a democratic voice and vote within the union.

Do you agree that the union must ensure the integrity of our democratic processes?

Yes/No

In the recent decision of the Council to conduct a review of the Online Branch, Council also highlighted the anomaly that members were able to exercise their vote in more than one branch, and to limit members to voting in either a physical branch or the online branch. The anomaly remains that members can still vote in both variety and general branches.

Do you believe that members should be allowed to vote in only one branch – general, variety OR online?

Yes/No

Members who are not members of a branch can still attend as observers and be invited by the Chair to speak at a branch meeting. This would be preferable to creating a category of branch member without voting rights. Do you agree?

Yes/No

If any member was allowed to attend branch meetings, but only branch members could vote, would you be in favour of members being members of only one branch – general, variety or online?

Yes/No

Democratic Representation – Motions

Branch Rules & Standing Orders require motions to be submitted to the Secretary either 14 (general) or 7 (variety) days in advance and circulated to members ahead of the meeting. This gives all members of the branch the notice needed to both scrutinise the motion and attend to debate it. How

often are motions discussed by your branch submitted in advance and circulated to members?

- a) Always
- b) Mostly
- c) Sometimes
- d) Never

The Rules & Standing Orders also allow for motions to arise out of the formal business of the meeting. How often does this apply to the motions submitted to Council or ARC by your branch?

- a) Always
- b) Mostly
- c) Sometimes
- d) Never

Do you agree that motions submitted to Council or ARC should be on significant issues important to your whole branch membership, who should have the opportunity to discuss them at branch meetings?

Yes/No

Democratic Representation – ARC

Equity Rules allow for members to send one or two members to conference depending on whether they have fewer or more than 200 registered members. A branch of 201 members has the same democratic representation as one of 2501.

Do you believe that the current arrangements for ARC representatives are fair?

Yes/No

Should larger branches be able to send more representatives to ARC?

Yes/No

Members in London are the most proportionally underrepresented with 10 representatives for 17,000 members compared with 26 representatives for 6,000 members in the North of England.

How could this imbalance be addressed?

Branch Communications

We are aware that the Council's decision on branch data caused by the implementation of GDPR has been difficult for branches in their operation. The union processes both personal data and sensitive personal data, relating to trade union membership, that imposes certain legal duties on it. The union is also aware that the nature of our membership increases the risks of data hacking.

The issues highlighted with regard to branch data were that it was:

- it was not secure
- it was not up to date
- it contained information unnecessary to fulfil the duties of the branch

It was further advised that providing branch access to aggregate data, rather than individual data, was safer and more compliant.

However, we recognise that this does not address all the issues that branches have raised. We are proposing an online portal whereby branch officials can access (but not download) an up to date and accurate list of branch members in order to verify members attending branches or asking for assistance. This portal would also enable branches to edit their welcome emails to new members.

Would you be in favour of this portal?

Yes/No

In order to ascertain the level of detail which the portal could provide it is necessary to understand what branches would require individual data for (as

opposed to aggregate data to contact all branch members at once). Please can you detail the purposes for which your branch believes that it would need personal contact details for members?

Branch Membership

With the current and proposed arrangements for branch data, there is no longer a necessity to place a branch opt out on the online and paper application forms. Are you in favour of all new members joining a branch automatically on entering the union?

Yes/No

Branch Funding

Branches currently receive 25p per member per year to put towards campaigning, educational and branch building activities. At the ARC 2018 a motion was passed committing the union to increase the level of per capita funding, but the increase was coupled with an examination of the purposes on which the funds could be spent.

Do you believe that per capita branch should be restricted to campaigning, educational and branch building activities?

Yes/No

If no, what further purposes do you believe that this funding should be used for?

Current arrangements involve scrutiny of branch annual accounts and the return (in reality offsetting) of unspent funds which causes significant delay in paying branches their monies. An alternative would be for the union to provide a fund for campaigning, educational and branch building activities which branches could apply to, up to a universal limit that would apply to all branches. Would you welcome further consideration of this?

Yes/No

Remote Access

Equity has two current approaches to non-physical decision making – remote access to general or variety branches or the online branch.

Has your branch introduced remote access?

Yes/No/Planning to

Do you believe that the online branch has affected the number of members attending your branch meetings?

Yes/No

There is currently a cap on 4 members attending branch meetings by remote means in order to ensure that the majority of members attending are physically present. Are you in favour of this cap?

Yes/No

The Council is currently reviewing the Online Branch, and is trialling reforms of the branch with a view to keeping a branch with the same decision making powers as physical branches. Subject to the outcome to the trial, are you in favour of the online branch continuing as present?

Yes/No

When commissioning the review the Council considered replacing the branch with an online platform where members could discuss and formulate ideas

which would then be brought to physical branches to create motions. Do you have an opinion on this option?

Yes/No

If Yes please state:

Campaigning

Equity is a national campaigning union, fighting for members' professional rights. Campaigning needs engaged members to deliver those campaigns, and the union looks to branches to lead local campaigning activities. However, the Arts Policy and Campaign Working Party report to Council in January 2019 identified further development needs for branches in delivering union campaigns, including campaign co-ordinators.

Does your branch now have a branch campaign co-ordinator?

Yes/No

Would you have a committee member willing to be appointed as a branch campaign co-ordinator?

Yes/No

Does your branch have contacts or working relationships with local authorities that fund – or should fund – arts in your branch area?

Yes/No

Have those contacts been invited to address your branch meetings?

Yes/No

Does your branch have contacts or working relationships with local employers (e.g. artistic directors/club secretaries) in your branch area?

Yes/No

Have those contacts been invited to address your branch meetings?

Yes/No

The formality of branch meetings has been cited as a reason why members do not attend. Would you welcome a relaxing of branch standing orders to allow for both business meetings with a formal agenda and more discursive meetings where the branch could concentrate on campaigning issues?

Yes/No

National/Area Councillors

Other than attending the 11 meetings of the Council each year and the conference, the only additional duties of these Councillors is set out in Rule 16.4.1.1 “to report on behalf of the Council, the decisions and activities of the Council to the ... Annual General Meeting for the geographical area”. National Councillors also attend the 6 meetings of their National Committees each year, and Area Councillors the 2 meetings of the Area Networks. By contrast Specialist and Equalities Councillors attend 4 or 5 meetings of the relevant Industrial, Specialist or Equalities committees each year – and General List Councillors have no further duties.

It has been suggested that National/Area Councillors should have further duties in attending regular meetings of the branches in their nation or area, and in co-ordinating communications and campaigning between those branches. This would place additional duties on these Councillors beyond those of their fellow Councillors.

The number of National/Area Councillors is not dependent on the number of members or branches in those nations or areas.

Do you believe that it is fair that National/Area Councillors should have additional formal duties compared to specialist, equalities and general list Councillors?

Yes/No

Relationships between General & Variety Branches

If your branch overlaps closely with the area of a sister general or variety branch, do you meet regularly to discuss issues of common interest, such as campaigning?

Yes/No

If your branch meets in an area outside that of a sister general or variety branch, does your branch consider issues of interest to members of that other branch?

Yes/No

Many members find the distinction between general and variety branches to be confusing. What do you believe are the key benefits of maintaining two separate forms of physical branch?

Branch Rules

Do you believe that the branch rules should be simplified?

Yes/No

If yes, do you have suggestions for how they could be made simpler without removing the guidance that branches require?

Do you believe that the rules of physical branches should be unified?

Yes/No

Training

Have any of your branch committee received training on branch organising, chairing or being a branch official?

Yes/No

Would your branch committee members like to receive training on the above?

Yes/No

Do you believe that training should be compulsory for branch officials like chair and secretary?

Yes/No