



Framework for joint branch and region assessments

Strengthening branches and defending jobs

A word on branch structures

When UNISON was created in 1993 it was based on "lead-employer" branches. The 2007 conference noted that while in some cases this has continued to work well, the rapid growth of privatisation and transfer of work and jobs to the private and voluntary sectors has brought new challenges about how a branch

organises and engages members across a range of new employers; where every member has equal rights and opportunities to participate in their union.

A branch committee where all its officers come from the same employer, and where its business is then dominated by that one employer, is not representative if the branch has members with other employers. The Code of Good Branch Practice advocates that most branches should adopt a sectional structure and explains how it would work. Adopting the Core Branch Rules in the Code will help the branch address this issue.

In some cases, following the assessment, the question might be asked, is this the right branch structure for UNISON to best organise new or reorganised employers? The National Executive Council has published a Scheme for the Establishment and Restructuring of Branches that will help branches and regions make changes to the structure of branches where necessary, to ensure we have sustainable branches capable for organising members even at times of employer restructuring, and where every member can be involved, irrespective of employer.

This guide is to help you prepare for your joint branch assessment. It outlines how you should approach the assessment and the issues to cover.

The aims of the assessment are to:

- identify the branch's development priorities
- prioritise a few key objectives and actions
- plan how to achieve them
- align regional support to where it is needed
- to ensure we have a branch structure that is capable
- of supporting and mobilising all members, irrespective of employer, to defend jobs and services, through change.

The branch assessment should take place each year and arises from a decision of the 2007 National Delegate Conference that emphasised the importance of ensuring we have and maintain strong and effective branch structures. The assessment is not a 'test' and there are no 'league tables'; it represents a partnership approach to building stronger branches where regional organisers are charged with supporting lay officers to build branch organisation and to make change where it is needed.

There are **FIVE** stages to ensuring Joint Branch Assessment is meaningful and effective in moving the branch forward.

1 Preparation

This is an evidence based assessment. Before you can assess what how effective is the branch, you need to collate the evidence – so you can make an informed assessment not just guesses.

A brief discussion between the branch secretary and regional organiser when planning to hold the assessment will allow each to agree what evidence needs to be collated, and who collects what. A crucial step will be to identify members by employer, the real or potential sections within the branch, so that you can look accurately at performance and participation within each employer.

2 The assessment

There are different techniques to making the assessment. It might first involve the branch secretary and regional organiser together, or it could involve the core branch officers and the regional organiser. Either way, this needs to be as objective as possible, with conclusions based on the evidence and without excuse, criticism or blame – you can't identify improvements needed unless you are frank about any weaknesses. And remember, you are looking across the whole of the branch's membership, not just the main employer. The assessment form invites you to look at key areas of activity, and gives prompts to the kind of things you could and should be doing. You may have additional ideas of things that could be done – good, what matters is what works.

It is recommended to move the time frame for assessment to begin in the Autumn. Branch finances should be integrated into the assessment process so that a plan can be ready for the AGM.

3 Plan

The assessment will flag up some things that need to be done - there will always be things to do and things made better, even in the best organised branch. Some things you'll deal with straight away; while others will be things that require planning and organisation, involve not just the branch secretary but the whole branch committee, that might need resources and a budget, and help from the region. There may even be a need for training before you can start implementation. Discuss these issues with your branch committee or management group; keep it manageable and select not more than 2 or 3 big issues to tackle this year; agree who will take responsibility for each area of work and the resources the branch will put into it. This is a plan that you should take to your AGM so the whole membership is united around addressing these priority building issues.

4 Implementation

Led by the responsible branch officer, overseen by the branch secretary, monitored with the regional organiser, and progress reported at branch committee meetings. Unless implementation remains on the branch committee agenda, and unless those charged with leading on each action are given support and encouragement, it won't happen. Regular reporting will also enable you and the branch committee to respond if there are changes in circumstances, if progress is slow or there are unforeseen difficulties.

5 Review and evaluation

Towards the end of the year, review how your plan has gone. It may be that some issues require a longer timescale and will continue into the next year, but check things are proceeding as planned and if your efforts are having the desired effect. And don't forget to praise and congratulate those who have made things happen, even if you didn't achieve the full outcome you'd planned for.

Branch planning process

Branch		Region
<p>Agree date to meet with Regional Organiser, involving other core branch officers as appropriate</p> <p>Identify the Sections within the branch</p> <p>Collate information from branch records so you can address all questions</p> <p>Liaise with Regional Organiser about the data that will be provided to you</p>	<p>PREPARATION</p>	<p>Agree a date with the B/Sec (and others as appropriate) when the assessment will take place</p> <p>Collect data from dashboard or other regional records</p> <p>Organise membership and performance data by Section within the branch</p> <p>Identify what information you don't have and ask the B/sec to provide</p>
<p>Make sure your joint assessment is evidence-based – be honest and frank! Discuss each of the questions in turn, using the evidence</p> <p>you have to assess what has gone well, and the issues the branch should focus on for the year ahead</p> <p>Remember to look at the position across the branch as a whole – not just the one or two largest employers</p>	<p>BEFORE THE AGM</p> <p>ASSESSMENT</p>	<p>Make sure your joint assessment is evidence-based – be honest and frank! Discuss each of the questions in turn, using the evidence</p> <p>you have to assess what has gone well, and the issues the branch should focus on for the year ahead</p> <p>Remember to look at the position across the branch as a whole – not just the one or two largest employers</p>
<p>Meet with the branch committee or branch management group</p> <p>Identify any easy/speedy actions to implement now</p> <p>Agree 2 or 3 priorities and who takes responsibility to lead on what</p> <p>Agree the budget for your plans</p> <p>Identify what support you need from region Outline your plan to the AGM</p> <p>Sign off with regional organiser</p>	<p>PLAN</p>	<p>Identify what support the branch needs</p> <p>Discuss with your manager through 1:1 meeting</p> <p>Provide support as appropriate</p> <p>Sign off with branch secretary</p>
<p>Ensure each element of your plan features on the agenda for each branch committee meeting</p> <p>Monitor progress and address where necessary</p> <p>Give support and encouragement to those leading on the various actions</p>	<p>THROUGHOUT THE YEAR</p> <p>IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR</p>	<p>Monitor branch performance through the Dashboard and other records</p> <p>Meet with the branch secretary through planned meetings to discuss implementation and variations to support needed</p> <p>Give encouragement</p> <p>Praise and congratulate on successful outcomes</p>
<p>Identify the reasons for what has gone well and what hasn't gone so well</p> <p>Use the answers to inform your next assessment and future actions</p>	<p>NOVEMBER – DECEMBER</p> <p>REVIEW AND EVALUATION</p>	<p>Identify the reasons for what has gone well and what hasn't gone so well</p> <p>Use the answers to inform your next assessment and future actions</p>

Branch assessment

Part one

Local bargaining and campaigns

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>1.1</p> <p>How well organised is the branch to meet the challenge of ongoing and new threats from each of the employers the branch covers?</p>	<p>Do we meet key decision makers in each employer? What are the Employers' plans?</p> <p>How can we improve the effectiveness of our lobbying employers?</p> <p>Are we getting our voice across to members and heard in the media?</p> <p>Our involvement in CLP and trades council</p>	<p>There are regular meetings between elected council members, C/E and Senior Management.</p> <p>Increase branch bulletins.</p> <p>Yes - branch have been very vocal in local press re LG cuts.</p> <p>Branch active in CLP's, PSA, TUC and Area Forums.</p>	<p>Organising plan in place for cuts and wider lobbying.</p> <p>An increase in local media required re cuts to terms and conditions.</p>

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>1.2</p> <p>Is the branch able to organise and support members irrespective of employer?</p>	<p>Do we meet key decision makers in each employer? What are the Employers' plans?</p> <p>How can we improve the effectiveness of our lobbying employers?</p> <p>Are we getting our voice across to members and heard in the media?</p> <p>Our involvement in CLP and trades council</p>	<p>As above</p>	

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>1.3</p> <p>Is the branch promoting equality?</p>	<p>Do we talk to every employer to ensure they are implementing their equality policies?</p>	<p>Yes - equalities policies are discussed but only with recognised employers or where there is a sufficient number of members in anyone workplace.</p>	<p>For those employers that do not have UNISON recognition - the equalities agenda is pushed through the disciplinary and grievance processes.</p>

Recruitment and organisation

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>2.1</p> <p>How effective is the branch in recruiting and organising?</p>	<p>Look at every employer the branch deals with, not just the lead employer.</p> <p>Is there an accurate branch map?</p> <p>Where can density levels be improved?</p> <p>Recruitment practices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Approaching new starters ● Attending inductions ● Following up non-joiners ● Recruitment events ● How easy is it to join? ● Is recruitment from across all grades, hours, etc, or are there disparities to address? ● How do stewards know their members? <p>Is recruitment planned, driven and monitored – how?</p>	<p>The branch is well organised in lead employers . However, there is a lack of organisation in the majority of community and voluntary organisations.</p> <p>Schools and Community and Voluntary Sectors .</p> <p>Yes in the main employer.</p> <p>As above</p> <p>As above</p> <p>There has been targeted recruitment weeks</p> <p>Yes in main employer and other recognised workplaces.</p> <p>There is a wide stewards network .</p> <p>Joiners and Leavers figures discussed at branch committees.</p>	<p>Due to the size of the branch and with the diverse nature of the employers, the branch have decided to set specific organising projects in C/V and Schools.</p>

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>2.2</p> <p>Has the branch an effective activist network?</p>	<p>Numbers in each employer and section</p> <p>Ratio of activists to members How do members know their steward?</p> <p>Annual elections</p> <p>Steward training</p> <p>Mentoring and buddying new stewards</p> <p>Support given to stewards</p> <p>How "active" are the activists – why are some not active and what can be done to encourage more activity? Is recruitment planned, driven and monitored – how?</p>	<p>According to the Organising Dashboard the membership density in the main employer is 46.83%.</p> <p>The ratio of stewards / officers to the whole membership is 1/6.</p> <p>All officers and stewards are ERA accredited.</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>The SBO and senior convenors are extremely active.</p>	<p>The branch is looking to provide specific training regarding redundancies and employment law updates.</p>

Representing members

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>3.1</p> <p>How effective is the branch in handling casework?</p>	<p>Proportion of stewards trained</p> <p>How many stewards actually represent? Use of casepapers for all cases</p> <p>How does the branch monitor quality of representation?</p> <p>Use of mentoring to support casework at workplace level</p> <p>Central record of cases completed Complaints received at region</p>	<p>The branch has the correct proportion of stewards trained.</p> <p>The branch officers and SBO are extremely active and effective in representational work.</p> <p>The branch have an effective CASE system.</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p>The branch is currently working with the RO to organise a Thompson's Employment Law briefing</p>

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>4.1</p> <p>How democratic is the branch?</p>	<p>Quorate AGM</p> <p>Regular general meetings</p> <p>Attendance from across all employers</p> <p>Is there a sectional structure? Membership profile of employment profile Efforts to reach all members</p> <p>Functioning SOGs groups and activity for young members and retired members What measures has the branch in place to increase the participation of low paid women members (including outsourced workers and agency staff) such as specific recruitment materials, providing support for children, training and facility time?</p> <p>Is the profile of activists the same as the membership by gender and race?</p>	<p>The AGM is well attended and is quorate .</p> <p>Yes - in most sectors - branch encourages participation.</p> <p>The branch is currently reviewing branch structure</p> <p>The branch is well represented in the identified SOGs: However, the new branch structure aims to encourage further participation.</p> <p>The branch is continually working towards making the branch more representative.</p>	<p>The new branch structure aims to identify issues with proportionality and participation.</p>

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
4.2 Participation in UNISON structures	What efforts are made to target low paid women members to ensure that UNISON's proportionality and fair representation rules are stringently applied within the branch and in the union's wider democratic structures?	The branch aims to encourage members who are low paid to participate within the democratic structures	The branch need to pass new structure through a branch committee and a general members meeting

Representing members

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
5.1 Budgeting and expenditure	Budgeting for the Plan Is financial support provided across all sections of membership, incl retired members and SOGs? Devolution of budgets to organised sections	The branch is registered on OLBA The branch is looking to allocate funding to specific recruitment areas such as schools and community and voluntary sectors	Approval of branch committee required

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
5.2 Branch rules	Compliant with Core Branch rules? Approved by Region? Structure relevant to range of employers organised Honoraria reasonable and compliant with scheme All donations approved by general meeting and complaint with rule Are structural changes needed to respond to changes in membership and distribution of employers?	The branch are compliant with the branch rules. (please see part two) The branch is restructuring their core structure - this is not yet approved by region. Honoraria - branch is aware of the new Honoraria proposals Yes As mentioned the branch is restructuring to adapt to the ongoing pressures of LG cuts	The branch to follow regional advice and protocols.

Measure	Things to consider	Assessment	Possible actions
<p>5.3</p> <p>Branch staff</p>	<p>Use of XpertHR scheme</p> <p>Redundancy provision in accounts?</p> <p>Someone identified as manager of staff</p> <p>Regular staff appraisals</p>	<p>The branch do not use XpertHR scheme</p> <p>Yes - this has been passed by branch committee</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>	

Branch assessment

Part two

When the assessment has been completed there may be actions on some things you can take straight away. Enter here not more than 3 bigger actions that might take longer to implement, that require planning, resources and leadership, and which may require support from the region.

Priority actions	Lead branch officer	Target for year	Branch resources	Regional support requested
1	SBO	The branch are aiming to implement the new branch structure before the 2014 AGM	This will need to be approved by the branch committee and a general members meeting.	RO - support for advice in relation to the code of good branch practice
2	SBO - School Support Officer	The branch are aiming to increase the membership within schools and academies by 25%	The branch will look to appoint a schools support officer - who will work specifically on organising and recruiting within schools	RO / AO
3	SBO - communications officer	The branch will look to increase the circulation of their newsletter "Outlines" and improve their website	The branch have budgeted resources for these improvements	RO

This joint assessment has been completed and approved by the branch committee.
Any points of difference are recorded below:

BRANCH NAME	DATE / /
SIGNED Branch secretary	SIGNED Regional Organiser

**JOINT BRANCH ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK 2013 – ADDENDUM Newcastle City Branch
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST**

Measure	Assessment		Comment	
<p>On-line Branch Accounting System</p>	<p>Is the branch a live OLBA Branch?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>If NO what arrangements are being made to receive training? If Yes is the branch keeping OLBA up to date? Is the branch committee using OLBA data as an organisational tool to exercise financial management and budgetary control? Are regular financial reports submitted to branch committee?</p>	
<p>Budget Setting</p>	<p>Has the Branch set a budget for 2014?</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>If No what arrangements are in place for a 2014 budget to be set by 31 December 2013? If Yes is the budget consistent with the branch organisational standard set out in the code of good branch practice.</p>	

	Is the budget set up in OLBA?	Yes			
Expenditure	Does the branch employ staff?	Yes	If Yes is it appropriate and sustainable. Has the branch established a redundancy reserve	Yes Yes	
Property	Does the branch own or lease a property	No	If Yes is it sustainable Are funds set aside for planned and preventative maintenance?		
Sharing resources	Has the branch considered sharing resource options	Yes	If Yes what options have been considered and what progress has been made. If No why has this not been considered.	The branch currently provide RMS and Admin support for Newcastle University Branch	
Bank Account	Does the Branch have a current account with Unity Trust?	Yes	If NO what arrangements are being made to set this up before 31 December 2013?		
Honoraria	Does the Branch intend to pay honoraria for 2013? If Yes, is the branch compliant with points 2-8 of the revised	Yes/No No	If NO which points have not been complied with and what steps does	The branch is currently following the regional	

	scheme?		the Branch intend to take to ensure compliance?	protocol	
	If Yes, when will the proposals go before a Branch Committee?				
	What is the date(s) of the AGM?				

