



NEWCASTLE CITY BRANCH

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4th March 2015

Dear Gill / Clare,

Newcastle City Branch structure currently consists of a Branch Executive of: Chair – Secretary – Treasurer – Deputy Branch Secretary x 2nr – Deputy Branch Secretary (YHN) x 1nr ----- 6 posts in total and the Branch Rules contain the following statement.

Proportionality:

Fair representation and proportionality help make sure all members have an effective voice. Things we need to consider include full and part time workers, manual and non-manual jobs, employer, age, disability, gender, race, faith and sexual identity.

The Branch Officers will:

- 1. Make sure the branch is inclusive and representative by knowing who our members are and where they work.*
- 2. Encourage fair representation at elections by encouraging involvement from all areas including people from underrepresented groups.*
- 3. Take account of fair representation when recommending delegations to conferences (see appendix 3).*
- 4. Make sure the negotiating agenda includes priorities of all groups of workers.*

The Branch standing orders contain the process and rules that govern how elections take place and what gender split is allowed in the Branch Executive, we have a specific requirement that at least 50% of the Branch Executive must be women; we believe this is in line with the Code of Branch Good Practice which states:

“Branches are required to meet the principles of proportionality when electing officers, choosing delegations or setting up structures”.

Appendix 3 – Standing Orders

The Standing Orders support the rules and ensure the smooth running of the branch.

Fair Representation and Proportionality

“Fair representation” and “proportionality” are key principles underpinning representation at all levels of UNISON’s structure. They are there to ensure that UNISON is an effective voice for all sections of membership.

The UNISON rulebook defines “fair representation” as:

“The broad balance of representation of members of the electorate, taking into account such factors as the balance between part-time and full-time workers, manual and non-manual workers, different occupations, skills, qualifications, responsibilities, race, sexuality, gender identity and disability.”

The UNISON rulebook defines “proportionality” as:

“The representation of women and men in fair proportion to the relevant number of female and male members comprising the electorate”.

Approximately 70% of the union’s membership is women. UNISON is committed to ensuring that women are represented in all our activities, including at branch level.

Branches are required to meet the principles of proportionality when electing officers, choosing delegations or setting up structures.

1. Elections

- a) *Nominations for officer posts must be submitted at least fourteen days before the meeting and should carry the signature of two nominators. All nominations shall be confirmed by the Branch Secretary with the nominated individual.*
- b) *In the event of an election being required all nominations shall submit biographical details (not exceeding 250 words) which will be made available to all those taking part in the vote.*
- c) *Voting on elections shall be by secret ballot.*
- d) **All posts should be reflective of Fair representation and proportionality and 3 out of the 6 senior branch officers listed below, must be occupied by women:**
 - **Chairperson**
 - **Secretary**
 - **Deputy Secretary x 2**
 - **Deputy Secretary (YHN)**
 - **Treasurer**
- e) *Where contested elections take place, voting for senior branch officer posts should take place in the following order:*
 - 1. *Chair*
 - 2. *Secretary*
 - 3. *Treasurer*
 - 4. *Deputy Secretary(s)*
 - 5. *Remaining Branch Officers positions on an alphabetical basis*

In the event that a branch officer position remains unfilled after the AGM, the senior branch officers will make recommendation to branch committee regarding how the work relating to that position will be covered.

All the existing Branch Officers re-nominated for their positions next year, and the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Deputy Branch Secretary (YHN) were unopposed so that would mean 1 woman and 3 men were elected unopposed. The remaining 2 Deputy Branch Secretaries who are two women were challenged by a man. However, as 50% of the Branch Executive would consist of unopposed men, the additional male nominee was informed he would be unable to stand in line with our rules.

The man was unhappy and spoke to both me and David Atkinson. He agreed to withdraw his nomination on the basis he wished to challenge the Branch rules, and I agreed he could raise the issue at April’s Branch Committee.

Issue:

At this month’s Branch Committee there was a discussion on the Branch rules as they needed to change to reflect some changes in the Branch over the last couple of years and the need to add virtual decision making to the rules. A couple of members

took the opportunity to use the examination of specific aspects of the existing rules to raise the issue of proportionality.

My take on this is that while I do not think that UNISON's rules dictate what Branch rules should say (at least I can't find anything specific that says that), I believe the Code of Good Branch Practice does, i.e. "**Branches are required**".

The issue was left unresolved as even if we were to change our rules they wouldn't have an impact on this year's elections, although the same commitment to discuss the matter further at April's Branch Committee was given.

Who is correct?

I would value a definitive answer from the region, preferably in writing, so I can share with Branch Committee members in advance of the next Branch Committee.

Thanks

PGJ

Paul Gilroy
UNISON Branch Secretary