



TimeForRealChange for a members' union

How to nominate – a branch guide to nominating in UNISON's NEC elections

Introduction

UNISON's NEC elections in 2023 will be the most important ever held. Time for Real Change in UNISON candidates won a significant majority on UNISON's National Executive Committee in June 2021. This was the first time the Left had won a majority on UNISON's NEC and raised hopes for a transformation of the union. Since then, Time for Real Change activists have made significant progress on a number of fronts but also faced serious challenges to our plans for change.

It is essential that Time For Real Change are re-elected to maintain control of the NEC, if we wish to see our union continue its journey to become a member-led, fighting union which wins for its members and is relevant to them.

Our election success in 2021 was built off years of rank and file organising by activists across the country and our plans for the future will rely on the same. To win these forthcoming NEC elections, we will need the backing of branches and branch activists, and this starts with the branch nomination process.

This guide is written with the aim of increasing understanding about UNISON's often complex internal processes, in order to boost turnout and participation in our elections.

An election of two halves

UNISON elections have two constituent parts.

1. The branch nomination process, which takes place from January 9th to February 13th.
2. The actual member vote, which takes place from April 17th to May 19th.

The branch nomination process allows branches to express a preference for candidates. Whether or not branches do this, the actual member vote will always proceed, but branch nominations are essential all the same.

Why nominate a candidate or group of candidates?

Branches taking the time and trouble to nominate NEC candidates, when they face so many other time-consuming challenges on a day-to-day basis, is vital for the following reasons:

- Your nomination/s tell your branch members who their leading branch activists are backing. Many members will look for this information when they cast their vote. A full list of nominating branches is published alongside each candidate they have backed.
- Your nomination/s tell all members who are voting, regardless of which branch they are in and whether their branch nominated or not, about the depth of support for a candidate and gives reassurance to the member that they are voting for someone who is credible and has support. Candidates with one nomination will tend to look much less impressive than those with one hundred names of branches listed out beside them!
- Only branches that have nominated a candidate are allowed to communicate with their own members about which candidate/s they support and why, in both the lead up to the voting period and during the voting period. Being able to tell your members about your nomination is vital. As stated, many members will want to know who their branch leadership favours. It will give members confidence to vote. And by communicating to members, you are raising the profile of the elections and encouraging members to take part, which is also vital as turnouts can be very low. We need members to take part in their union's democracy!

We have a separate guide for branches on how they can publicise their nominations to members. But this guide will focus on how to make a valid branch nomination.

Timescales

The nomination window opens on Monday 9th January and lasts until 5.00pm on Monday 13th February.

Identify a branch meeting in that period at which you could take nomination decisions. The nomination window is only short. If you don't have a meeting scheduled, you can organise one just for the purpose of making nominations. Meetings can be held virtually via Zoom or Teams if your branch rules allow you to meet in that way.

You also have to submit the nomination/s online using a special website page created by Civica Election Services (who run the election for UNISON) by the same deadline of 5.00pm on Monday 13th February. Bear this in mind when setting a date for your meeting. Submitting your nominations online should not take long in theory, but it is always best to factor in some time to allow for this.

Prior to the meeting

Some candidates will contact branches with their election addresses, seeking to persuade your committee they are deserving of their nomination. All candidate nomination requests received should be distributed to the committee members taking the decision, in advance in the usual ways. You should not only circulate to your committee the election requests of those candidates you favour, or using any other criteria to sift some out.

If there is a usual cut off point for circulation of branch committee papers, and nomination requests come in after that cut off point, there is no obligation to circulate these late arrivals but whatever approach is taken by the branch secretary should be consistent so all 'late' candidates are treated the same. It is acceptable to email round to your committee members the nomination requests received as scans (PDF, word, etc).

Regional presence at branch committee meetings

Regional staff are not required to oversee or validate the nominations process undertaken by branches. It is up to branches if they wish to invite regional staff to their committee meetings. Rule G9 is clear about the circumstances for which regional staff do not require an invitation and these circumstances are limited. You can read these in the Rulebook here:

[Rule G9 Visits by employed officials to branches.](#)

Where regional staff are in attendance, they would not seek to influence the discussion as this would be against the rules of the union.

Recommendations

To aid debate, any members of the committee can propose nominations for any candidate or group of candidates at the meeting, or prior to it if they notify the branch secretary in writing.

The chair should manage the debate in the normal way but is not excluded themselves from making recommendations to the committee if so desired.

Once the debate has taken place, a vote can be taken, for each candidate or for a group of candidates, so long as it is clear and clear for the minutes what decision is being taken.

Who can you nominate?

Candidates are split into three sections.

1. Regional candidates
2. National seat candidates
3. Service group candidates

Branches can only nominate candidates from the **Region** they are from. They can though nominate in every single regional seat available to them: General seat, Female seat, Male seat, Reserved seat. Regions will have between three and five regional seats to nominate in, dependent on their size. Branches can nominate in every single seat for which there is an election in their region: i.e. in a situation where a branch committee did not have a low-paid female serving on its committee, other committee members present could still make a nomination to the Reserved seat for low-paid women.

Branches can also make nominations to all the **National seat** elections. The same principle applies. If you did not have a young member on your committee, you could still make a nomination of your preferred candidate to a national young members' seat.

Service Group seats are treated differently though. Branches often represent members from multiple service groups. Due to the extreme fragmentation of public services it is not uncommon for one branch to contain members from four or five or even six service groups. Where this is the case, those branches may make nominations for candidates in all of those service groups they represent members in. However, Election Rule 38d applies here:

Rule 38d Within a nominating body, only the members of the service group, region or regional self-organised group for which nominations are sought can take part in the nominating process including any voting to decide which candidates to nominate. Those nominations should then be confirmed at a quorate nominating meeting [NB Nominations may be invalidated if evidence is received demonstrating a breach of this rule].

What this means:

If a branch committee has a great majority of members in one service group and only one or two members in another service group, it will be sufficient for the one or two committee members present to be responsible for nominations in their service group.

Example 1:

Your branch committee has 12 members from local government, 4 from health, and 1 from higher education. Your branch committee can make nominations at its committee meeting, with a vote taken at the meeting, in all 3 service groups, so long as there is at least one committee member present from each service group.

If the member from higher education knew they would be absent, they could write to the branch secretary with their preferred nomination/s for their service group, and the branch committee could then go on to affirm their choice in the vote taken.

Example 2:

Where you have members in more service groups but they are not represented on the branch committee

- A branch has 5 Service Groups represented within its membership.
- 2 of these are represented on the branch committee so members at the committee can determine nominations for those 2 service groups (see above).
- 3 other service groups represented within the membership have 300, 50 and 1 members respectively.
- Zoom/Teams meetings x 3 are set up to take place 1-2 days before the branch committee is scheduled to take its decisions.
- 3 WARMS bulk emails go out to members in advance for those respective Service Groups with the meeting joining instructions, any nomination requests received by that date, and explaining why the meeting is being held.
- Prior to the meetings, branch officers can ring round any known members or reps from those Service Groups to encourage attendance.
- The virtual meetings are held. Members present take a vote on their preferred candidates from nominations received, with the necessary context provided by branch secretary/officer chairing the meeting.
- In the Service Group with 1 member, it may be as efficient to telephone the member to discuss their preferences.
- Meeting outcomes should be recorded in brief notes.
- There are no attendance thresholds.
- Just as regional staff are not required to be present at any branch committee nomination meetings, they are not required either to be present at any nomination meetings called in service groups to establish the views of members.
- The outcomes should then be relayed to the wider Branch Committee meeting taking place in the next 1-2 days, who can then confirm by vote the nominations made by service group members.

If you need support with any of this, or a template email to send to members in this scenario to invite them to the meeting, please get in touch! Branch secretaries are busy people and we have a range of materials to assist.

As stated, this is not an issue or rule which is relevant for nominations to national seats (black members, disabled members, young members) or regional seats.

Submitting your branch nomination

Every year some branches make all the effort to make nominations only to fail to submit their nominations to Civica. Remember to submit them! The branch will, at the outset of the election, receive an email unique to their branch which they must use to submit their online nominations.

Branch officers should look out for this email at the start of the nomination period (9th January). Put the email to one side or in a special folder so you can find it easily at the time you need it, which could be up to 5 weeks later.

The nomination submission must be completed online (by either the branch secretary or chair), and include the date of the meeting, the type of meeting where the decision was taken, the number of people who attended, and the quorum (the minimum number of people needed to make that meeting valid). It is also important that whoever completes the online form e.g. the branch secretary, is listed as the branch secretary on WARMS at the time they complete the form.

If the membership number of the online submitter does not match that on WARMS for their particular role (e.g. branch secretary, chair), the nomination will be ruled out of order. If you have had a change of branch secretary or chair in your branch recently, check WARMS is up-to-date! If it is ruled out of order though for this reason, all is not lost. It is usually quite easy to get these nominations ruled back in order, on appeal.

Appeals

At every election there are a large number of appeals necessary when Civica decide to rule out a branch's nomination. Nominations ruled out are usually done so for relatively trivial reasons, and it is definitely worth appealing. A brief appeal will suffice, but if your branch finds itself in this position, so contact us for support and advice on drafting your appeal. We may have a template appeal you can use or adapt.

Any more questions?

Nominating NEC candidates is definitely worth doing, for all the reasons we outlined above. If you want your union to change, we need your branch's involvement in the democratic process!

For more information or if you have any questions at all, do not hesitate to contact:
tfrc.unison@gmail.com

In solidarity

The Time For Real Change in UNISON campaign team