

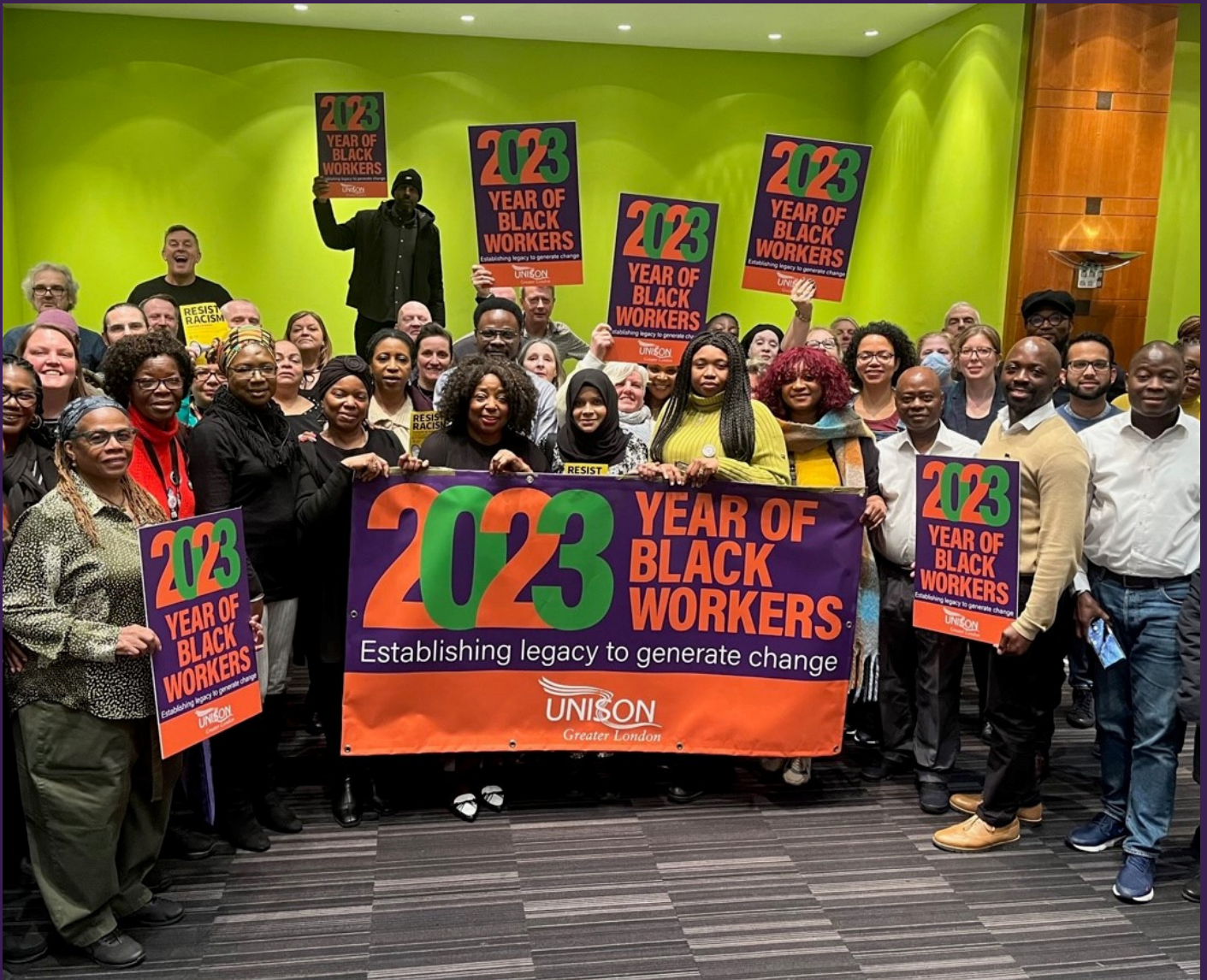
# 2023



## YEAR OF BLACK WORKERS

Establishing legacy to generate change

### SETTING UP A BRANCH BLACK MEMBERS GROUP



# 10 Good Reasons to have a Branch Black Members Group

- 1** Encourages the development of Black members into active members and activists
- 2** Promotes and encourages collective working in the branch on race equality issues
- 3** Promotes the Recruitment of Black members
- 4** Empowers Black members
- 5** Develops a greater understanding of Trade Unions and the history of Black trade unionism
- 6** Provides opportunity for training, improving confidence of Black members
- 7** Informs Branch bargaining agenda with employers
- 8** Helps Branch and employers focus on race issues facing Black members
- 9** Promotes representation of Black members as activist and in Branch positions
- 10** Informs the use and promotion of the unions Race Discrimination Claims Protocol and best practice in Branch

# UNISON's Rule Book Commitments

UNISON's rule book has, as a central theme, equality and increasing the participation of under-represented groups. UNISON calls these principles self organisation, proportionality and fair representation.

## Self organisation

The UNISON rule book enshrines the principles of self organisation. There are four self organised groups (SOGs) – Black members, disabled members, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT+) members and women members.

The self-organised groups work in partnership with other parts of the union to identify and promote our equality agenda, including monitoring proportionality and fair representation. Self organisation can and should be a vibrant and dynamic part of UNISON.

Self organisation matters because women, Black, disabled and LGBT+ people face discrimination every day. Often such discrimination extends into their working lives and may lead to them being treated less equally in relation to jobs, promotion, training and recruitment.





# Defining Black

In UNISON, 'Black' – with a capital B – is used to indicate people with a shared history. 'Black' is used in a broad political and inclusive sense to describe people in the UK who have suffered from colonialism and enslavement in the past and continue to experience racism and diminished opportunities in today's society.

The terms 'minority ethnic' and 'ethnic minority' are in widespread official use. But these terms have negative connotations of being marginal or less important. In many neighbourhoods, towns and cities in the UK it is inaccurate or misleading to describe Black groups as a minority

Since the '70s the term 'Black' has been used in anti-racist campaigning in recognition of the common struggle against racism and under-representation. Language changes and evolves but terminology is always important in terms of intention and direction. Using 'Black' is about creating unity in the fight against deep-rooted racism that sees Black people disadvantaged in housing, education, employment and the criminal justice and health systems.



# **Planning Branch Equality work**

**It is important to remember that self-organised groups are a part of the branch, not separate from it.**

**Branches and self-organised groups should agree annual equality work programmes, linked to current national and branch priorities. Proper planning means that resources, including finance, can be available when needed.**

**It is essential that there is a good flow of information between the groups and the branch committee and that initiatives complement and feed into each other.**

**Requests for financial support will be considered by the branch committee in the context of the union's priorities and agreed work programmes. As well as regular communication with the branch committee, self organised groups should provide an annual report to the branch AGM.**

**All parties should agree early on what responsibilities may be delegated by the branch to the self-organised group, what are the reporting lines, and generally how working relationships will operate.**

**Branches are encouraged to send delegates to the national self-organised group conferences. They can also elect representatives to regional self-organised group structures, as set out in regional rules. Self-organised groups and their delegates, however, remain accountable to their branch so arrangements should be in place for regular feedback and accountability from self-organised groups and any representatives to other bodies.**

# Representing members

**When members need union representation on a workplace matter this is usually provided by their elected workplace representative or steward. All union reps should be competent and confident in carrying out their role and able to deal with all issues of equality and discrimination, while knowing how to access specialist advice when needed.**

**Sometimes a member may ask to be represented by someone other than their workplace rep. For example, a Black member may ask for a rep who is themselves Black or a gay man may want to be represented by another gay man. This is understandable, but all UNISON reps should be able to deal with the range of issues that arise. One option is for a member of the self-organised group or the branch equality co-ordinator to work with the steward and member and remain involved throughout the process. However, everyone must clearly understand that only one representative acts for the member – the steward.**

**UNISON reps should together reflect the wider membership. Many members who first got involved through self-organisation have trained to become accredited workplace reps. This benefits us all and is to be much encouraged**

## **Setting up a Branch Self-Organised Group**

**Local self-organised groups may start off small. Talk to members about the issues they are facing in the workplace and whether they would be interested in meeting with others to discuss them.**

**Some branches have found that anonymous surveys, seeking information on what issues interest members, have been a catalyst for the creation of a branch self-organised group. You may be able to find a topical subject to raise interest in a first meeting. This might be a change to workplace rights affecting members, a new employer's policy out for consultation, or the motions for the national self-organised group conference.**

**Once there is a spark of interest, use the resources of the branch – newsletters, social media, notice boards and workplace reps – to spread the word and encourage members to get involved. UNISON regional offices should be able to assist branches in getting started, but success in setting up a branch self-organised group is mainly based on the same principles that work for all union organising**

## **Involving all**

**Meetings should be widely advertised. Do not make assumptions about which members will be interested in a particular group - just because a member is a woman or Black, does not necessarily mean they will want to be involved with self-organisation. Other Black and women members will want to. Some branches may believe they have no lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender + members - this will certainly not be true. Members may not be out about their sexual orientation or gender history but very interested in getting involved in a group, if they can do this on a confidential basis.**

**The only way to reach all potential members is to publicise self-organised group information to every member of the branch. Meetings should take place at times and in venues that suit as many people as possible, but particularly those who have been traditionally under-represented, such as part-time and shift workers, members with caring responsibilities and disabled members.**

**It may help to rotate the timings and venues and it is essential that meetings are advertised well in advance. Branches have a responsibility to ensure all their members can participate and to provide the resources to make this possible. Retired members from self-organised groups are encouraged to get involved in retired members organisation. They can also participate in open meetings of branch and regional self-organised groups as long as they do not vote on matters relating to pay and conditions or vote for positions outside retired members organisation.**

**Meetings usually benefit from being informal, though members will want a clear sense of what the meeting and the group are setting out to achieve. Informality is not the same as a free for all: make sure all can participate in and contribute to the discussion.**

## **Disabled Members Access**

**Remember that access is not just an issue for the disabled members group: there will be disabled members in all the self-organised groups. The Equality Act requires unions, as well as employers and other service providers, to ensure they do not discriminate against disabled members. If there is an access issue, the union must make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, such as providing extra help or providing services in a different way.**



**Access is about far more than wheelchair ramps. Key points to remember include:**

- **not making assumptions – disability takes many forms**
- **asking members what access needs they have**
- **ensuring confidentiality**
- **planning ahead**
- **making sure local negotiators can consult with disabled members so agreements with employers are equality-proofed**

## **If at first you don't succeed**

**Don't be discouraged. The reason we have self-organisation is because we recognise these groups of members are not traditionally active in trade unions. This will not change overnight. There are some barriers to involvement that we can reduce but not entirely do away with. Any group may need more support and resources early on to help it get off the ground.**

**Do not aim too high. Members lead busy and complicated lives and few will welcome lots more meetings. Even one meeting a year, perhaps in the lead-up to the national self-organised group conference, can help keep members informed and involved and make sure self-organised group issues are being fed into the branch.**

# Check list for Branch Groups

Where a branch self-organised group has been established, there should be:



**Widely advertised meetings which members are able to attend fairly easily**



**Other methods for involving members who cannot attend meetings, such as newsletters and consultations**



**An annual meeting to elect officers and representatives and receive reports of the year's activities**



**Elections conducted in accordance with fair representation and proportionality**



**Participation on the branch committee, including the notes or minutes of meetings (while protecting confidentiality, if necessary)**



**Two-way communication with the regional self-organised group**

# **Key tasks for Black Members Officer**

**The main role of the Branch Black Members Officer, working in conjunction with the Branch Equalities Officer, is to be the voice of Black members within the branch; to ensure their views & issues are represented and to identify and challenge discrimination at work through the branches equality agenda.**

**Whilst this post has a number of important functions, it is not expected that the office holder will be the fount of all knowledge on all matters of race discrimination, nor carry sole responsibility for the branch's anti-discrimination or equality work. Everyone shares responsibility for tackling prejudice and discrimination and promoting equality.**

**The role of branch Black members officer is to co-ordinate and monitor this shared responsibility. The role includes:**

- 1. Being a point of contact for Black members**
- 2. Organising a Branch Black members group to collect and share information on Black members issues in that workplace**
- 3. Supporting Black members in their issues generally and campaigning on relevant issues (working with the branch committee, through the branches equality agenda)**
- 4. Making sure equality and challenging race discrimination is raised in all collective bargaining – not just in bargaining on 'pure' equalities issues;**

**Whilst this role is extremely important, no experience is necessary and training & support will be given. Similarly, the role doesn't have to be very time consuming – even if you just organised an informal meeting of Black members a few times a year and were the point of contact to direct issues Black members raise, you will make a big difference to improving the representation of Black members in your workplace.**

# Activities Branch Black Members Groups can undertake

Here are some suggestions below:

- Lunchtime events with guest speakers
- Meetings to discuss equality issues
- Black History events
- Black Members newsletter
- Discussing and Campaigning on workplace issues pertaining to Black staff
- Health & Wellbeing workshop
- Film shows
- Attendance at UNISON's National Black Members Conference

## Black members stronger together in UNISON

Black people have a long, successful history of organising collectively. But Black people suffer disproportionately from public spending cuts, both as communities that use public services and as employees. Fighting for equality is now more important than ever.

**UNISON** works to:

**CHALLENGE** racism in the workplace

**PROTECT** your rights at work

**SUPPORT** you in the workplace.

