

EQUITY

BRANCH STANDING ORDERS

Approved by the Council to take effect from: 1 February 2024

** References to Rules in these Standing Orders refer to the Rules in the Union's Rulebook.*

Establishment

1. The Council may establish and maintain such branches as it decides, from time to time.

Role

2. The role of the branches shall be to:
 - (a) provide a local forum for members to discuss, organise and campaign on issues relevant to their members;
 - (b) provide a channel of communication between members and the Council;
 - (c) propose motions for consideration at conference to the Union's annual regional and national meetings; and
 - (d) send representatives to conference.
3. The branches shall act in accordance with these Standing Orders, the Rules and the policies of the Union at all times. If there is any inconsistency between the Rules and these Standing Orders, the Rules shall apply.

Authority

4. Except as otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, no branch decisions shall be acted upon without the prior approval of the Council or the General Secretary acting on its behalf.

Membership

5. The Council shall determine the geographical areas for each of the Union's branches.

6. All members in benefit shall automatically be a member of the branch that covers their postal address and may attend and vote at their branch's meetings. Members' addresses on Equity's membership register shall be proof of residence for these purposes.
7. A member in benefit who wishes to be a member of a branch that is not their allocated branch may apply to the Head of Membership to request to transfer to a neighbouring branch. The application shall state the reason for the request.
8. A member in benefit who is temporarily resident or working in a branch's area may attend that branch's meeting but shall not count towards the quorum for the meeting and may not vote.
9. Branch committees may invite members and non-members of the Union to attend branch meetings as guest speakers or observers. Guests and observers shall not count toward the quorum and may not vote.

Name

10. The Council shall decide the name for each branch, having regard to commonly accepted names for the area/s the branch covers.

Funding & Finance

11. A new branch shall receive a founding grant from the Union of £250 in its first year.
12. Subject to 13. below, all branches, other than a reserved branch, shall receive an annual grant from the Union to be determined by the Council from time to time.
13. The annual grant shall only be payable on production by the branch to the Council of its:
 - (a) year-end accounts (year-end being 31 August); and
 - (b) bank statements which show funds held of less than £5,000.
14. With the prior approval of the Council, branches may raise additional funds.
15. Branch funds shall be held and administered in accordance with these Standing Orders, the Rules and the Council's financial policies and instructions.
16. Branch funds shall be the property of the Union.
17. Branches shall open a bank account in the name of the branch. Unless otherwise approved by the General Secretary, the branch's bank account shall be held with the Unity Trust Bank.

18. With the prior approval of the Council, branches may:
 - (a) open an additional bank account for a specific purpose; and/or
 - (b) maintain a branch benevolent fund.
19. Payments made from the branch account shall be authorised by at least two Branch Officers.
20. The Union shall reimburse branches their expenses incurred in hiring a room for branch Committee and branch meetings and in maintaining branch "zoom" accounts. Committee members may claim their reasonable travel costs to and from Committee meetings.
21. Other than the expenses at 20. above and 90. below, no other expenses shall be reimbursed by the Union. Branches may reimburse members for other expenses incurred in carrying out branch duties from branch funds if they choose.
22. All expenses claimed, whether from the Union or from branch funds, shall be recorded in the branch expense records.
23. Branch accounts, financial records and transactions shall be subject to audit by a member of Equity staff appointed by the General Secretary for this purpose.

Branch Committee Elections

24. Branches shall elect no fewer than five and no more than nine of their members to sit as the Branch Committee.
25. Candidates for election shall be members in benefit who are members of the branch.
26. Members who fall into any of the groups at Rule J17 shall not be eligible to stand for election.
27. Candidates shall not stand for election on a job share basis.
28. At least one Committee member shall be engaged in variety, cabaret, burlesque, circus, story-telling or similar entertainment within the three years prior to the date nominations open (a variety candidate). Candidates standing for election shall indicate if they are standing as a variety candidate.
29. All branch members in benefit may vote in the Committee elections.

30. Nomination forms shall be sent to all members on the branch register not later than 28 days before the date of the branch AGM. Candidates shall be proposed and seconded by two other branch members in benefit.
31. Voting papers shall be circulated not less than 14 days before the branch AGM. Candidates may submit a written election statement of not more than 150 words, to be circulated with the voting papers.
32. The General Secretary shall appoint a member of Equity staff as Returning Officer (RO). In accordance with an election timetable to be drawn up by the General Secretary, the RO shall:
 - (a) distribute the nomination forms and voting papers;
 - (b) count the returned votes; and
 - (c) declare the result to the branch AGM.
33. If the election is uncontested, there shall be no requirement to hold a vote.

Branch Committee Term

34. Committee elections shall take place every two years. The Committee term shall run from and to the end of the Branch AGM at which the election results are declared.
35. A Committee member found to have committed a disciplinary offence may be removed before the end of the Committee term in accordance with Rule S9(4).

Branch Officers

36. Branches shall have a:
 - (a) Chair;
 - (b) Secretary;
 - (c) Treasurer;
 - (d) Campaigns Officer; and
 - (e) Variety Officer.
37. The Officers shall be elected from amongst the branch Committee members at the first meeting of its term.
38. Candidates may be proposed by another member or may nominate themselves.

39. If only one variety candidate is elected to the Committee, they shall be the Variety Officer without the need for a vote.
40. A Committee that has at least two variety members may have two Variety Officers. In which case, a vote shall only be needed if more than two variety members confirm that they wish to hold the office.
41. Branch officer roles may be undertaken on a job share basis.
42. No member may hold the position of Chair, Secretary or Treasurer at the same time. A member may hold the position of Campaigns Officer or Variety Officer at the same time as another Officer position.
43. The duties of the branch officers shall be:

Office	Duties
Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair all branch committee and branch meetings at which present • Jointly authorise expenditure
Secretary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convene meetings • Record the minutes of all branch committee and branch meetings • Ensure copies of the minutes are provided to the Union's head Office to be stored centrally • Hold the branch books, correspondence and other papers in such place as directed by the branch committee while in office • Circulate the agenda and notice for all branch committee and branch meetings • Draw up the annual report • Jointly authorise expenditure • Pass on all written branch motions to the General Secretary for circulation to Council • Undertake the duties of other branch officers in the event of a vacancy until the vacancy is filled

Treasurer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the branch financial records and books • Jointly authorise expenditure • Make financial reports to branch meetings as required • Submit quarterly branch expenses to the Union's Head Office • Draw up the annual statement of accounts and present the statement to the branch AGM for adoption
Variety Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise variety events • Establish a local variety network (if requested by the branch) • Co-ordinate the branch's variety work
Campaigns Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead on the branch's local campaigning activities • Implement and support Union-wide campaigns • Co-ordinate with local trades councils and similar groups to support and further campaign aims

Vacancies

44. If a Committee seat becomes permanently vacant, the Committee may vote to co-opt another eligible member to fill the seat. Co-options shall be submitted to the Council for approval. Co-opted members shall not exceed the number of elected members.
45. If a permanent vacancy occurs amongst the Branch Officers, all Committee members shall be notified in writing by the Branch Secretary and invited to submit nominations, and the Branch Committee shall elect a new Officer at its next meeting.

Union Officers

46. Officers of the Union may attend branch meetings and branch Committee meetings of a branch that is not their branch but shall not vote, propose or second motions or form part of the quorum at the meeting.

Councillor Observers

47. Councillors may attend branch meetings of a branch that is not their branch as an observer.

48. Observers shall not vote, propose or second motions or form part of the quorum at a branch meeting. Their role is to observe the meeting and act as a direct channel of communication between the branch and the Council.
49. Councillors may only attend branch committee meetings if elected or co-opted to that branch Committee or if invited by the Committee to attend.

Branch Committee Business

50. The Committee shall conduct the business approved by the branch meetings. The branch Secretary shall report the committee's business at each branch meeting.
51. With the approval of a branch meeting, the Committee may appoint sub-committees made up of branch members and those temporarily resident or working in the branch's area.

Branch Committee Meetings

52. The Committee shall meet as often as is necessary to carry out branch business but not less than once between consecutive branch meetings.
53. Except as otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, only a Committee member may attend Committee meetings. All attendees shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
54. The Chair or, in their absence, another branch Officer shall preside at all meetings.
55. All meetings shall end no later than three hours after their start. If business is not complete, time may be extended by up to 30 minutes on a simple majority vote.
56. The quorum for branch Committee meetings is four Committee members, including any co-opted members. If a quorum is not present after 30 minutes of the time appointed for the meeting to start, the meeting shall be dissolved.
57. Attendance shall be in person or online (or a combination of both) at the discretion of the Secretary in consultation with the Chair.
58. Votes are passed by a simple majority.
59. The Secretary may record meetings to assist them with minute keeping but no other recording shall be permitted.
60. The Secretary, in consultation with the Chair, shall prepare the agenda for the meetings. The agenda shall be circulated with notice of the meeting to all Committee members at least seven days in advance of the meeting.

Branch Committee Motions

61. Members of the branch Committee, including co-opted members, may bring a motion to the Committee on any issue they reasonably believe merits committee discussion.
62. All motions shall be:
 - (a) in accordance with these Standing Orders, the Rules and the policies of the Union;
 - (b) proposed and seconded by two Committee members; and
 - (c) received in advance by the Secretary not less than 14 days before the meeting.
63. A motion that arises directly from a matter on the agenda and that does not propose any additional matter for discussion may be proposed, seconded and voted on without the need for prior notice.

Rescinding a Branch Committee Motion

64. A motion passed at a branch Committee meeting shall not be rescinded at any subsequent meeting unless all Committee members are provided with notice of the motion to rescind of not less than seven days.

Branch Meetings

65. Branch meetings shall take place not more than monthly and not less than every two months.
66. If further branch meetings are considered necessary by the branch Committee, these may be convened with the prior approval of the Council (or General Secretary acting on its behalf).
67. Attendance shall be in person or online (or a combination of both) at the discretion of the Secretary, in consultation with the Chair.
68. All attendees shall complete an attendance sheet, which shall be kept with the minutes.
69. All meetings shall end no later than three hours after their start. If business is not complete, time may be extended by up to 30 minutes on a simple majority vote.

70. The quorum for branch meetings shall be ten members. If a quorum is not present after 30 minutes of the time appointed for the meeting to start, the meeting shall be dissolved.
71. Votes are passed by a simple majority.
72. The Secretary may record meetings to assist them with minute keeping but no other recording shall be permitted.
73. The Secretary, in consultation with the Chair, shall prepare the agenda for branch meetings. The agenda shall be circulated with notice of the meeting to all branch members at least seven days in advance of the meeting.

Branch Meeting Motions

74. Branch members may bring a motion to a meeting on any issue they reasonably believe merits branch discussion.
75. All motions shall be:
 - (a) in accordance with these Standing Orders, the Rules and the policies of the Union;
 - (b) proposed and seconded by two branch members; and
 - (c) received in advance by the Secretary not less than 14 days before the meeting.
76. A motion that arises directly from a matter on the agenda and that does not propose any additional matter for discussion may be proposed, seconded and voted on without the need for prior notice.

Rescinding a Branch Motion

77. A motion passed at a branch meeting shall not be rescinded at any subsequent meeting unless branch members are provided with notice of the motion to rescind of not less than seven days.

Motions to the Council

78. Branches may submit motions to the Council. Such motions shall be received by the General Secretary by 9am on the Monday immediately preceding the circulation of the Council agenda on the following Friday. The Council shall consider the motion and provide a written response. The Council shall consider no more than one motion from each branch or committee at each of its meetings.

79. The dates on which the Council's meetings are scheduled to take place and the deadline for submission of motions to those meetings may be obtained from the Equity official for the branch. The Council does not usually schedule meetings in January, May and August.

Branch AGM

80. Branches shall hold an annual general meeting (AGM) in October or November each year.
81. The business of the AGM shall include:
- (a) adoption of the branch annual report and annual statement of accounts; and
 - (b) in an election year, declaring the Committee election results.
82. The quorum for the AGM shall be ten members. If a quorum is not present after 30 minutes of the time appointed for the meeting to start, the meeting shall be dissolved.

Working with Others

83. With the prior approval of the Council, branches may work with other organisations whose aims are the same or similar to the Union's Aims.

Local & Regional TUC, ICTU, STUC and WTUC Affiliations

84. Branches are encouraged to affiliate with local TUCs in their area. Affiliations shall be agreed at a branch meeting and sent to the Council for approval. If approved, branches shall elect one representative for each local TUC affiliation and notify the General Secretary of their names.
85. The local representatives shall provide a written report to branch meetings on the activities of the local TUC meetings they attend.
86. If two or more branches wish to affiliate with the same local TUC, the General Secretary shall determine which branch is to affiliate.
87. Motions to regional TUC conferences shall be proposed by branch meeting and submitted to the relevant Equity staff member who shall forward to the Council for approval.
88. Nominations for delegates to attend the meetings of regional TUC structures and conferences in England shall be managed by the Regional Official, in coordination with branches and regional meetings as appropriate.

89. The General Secretary may propose nominations from Equity officials to specific bodies where this is requested or they consider it necessary.
90. Reasonable travel expenses shall be paid for one representative only for local and regional TUC meetings on submission of an expense form accompanied by a report on the meeting. Other representatives may participate on a voluntary basis.

Rules of Debate

91. Rules V1 to V14 shall apply to branch and branch Committee meetings.
92. The mover of a motion may speak for not more than five minutes in support of the motion. The seconder and subsequent speakers, including the mover exercising their right of reply, may each speak for not more than three minutes.

Conflict of Interest

93. A conflict of interest is any situation in which a branch Committee member's personal interests (financial or otherwise) may unduly influence or may *appear* to unduly influence the member's participation in Committee business.
94. A member who believes that they may have a conflict of interest shall declare that this is the case before the relevant item is discussed. The declaration shall be recorded in the minutes.
95. A member who declares a conflict of interest may remain in the meeting and speak and/or vote on the item.
96. In addition to the continuing obligations above, all Committee members must complete a Declaration of Interest form within two months of being elected or co-opted to the Committee.

Chair's Vote

97. The Chair (or other presiding Officer) shall not vote on any question at a meeting unless there is a tied vote when they may exercise a casting vote.

Decisions of the Chair

98. The Chair's decision (on any point) shall be binding unless it is challenged by not less than two members entitled to vote, in which case all members entitled to vote shall then immediately vote on whether to uphold the Chair's ruling. If passed by a simple majority, the Chair's decision shall apply.

99. No challenge is permitted to the Chair's decision whether or not to accept a motion to suspend Standing Orders.

Equity Conference

100. Branches with fewer than 1,000 members may each elect two branch members in benefit to send to the Equity Conference (and any Special Conference) as representatives. Branches with more than 1,000 members may send one further branch member in benefit per 1,000 members.
101. The representatives shall be elected by a secret ballot at a branch meeting. All branch members in benefit and present may vote in the elections. Only branch members in benefit may stand as candidates for election as representatives. Candidates need not necessarily be present at the branch meeting.
102. The General Secretary shall appoint a member of Equity staff as Returning Officer (RO). The RO shall:
- (a) call for nominations for conference representatives;
 - (b) count the votes at the branch meeting; and
 - (c) declare the result to the meeting.
103. If an elected representative is unable to attend any day of the Conference, they shall immediately notify the General Secretary who shall invite the next unsuccessful candidate to attend in their place for that day.
104. The elected representatives shall discuss the conference agenda in a branch meeting in advance of the conference and report back to a branch meeting on conference business.
105. Each representative shall be free to decide how to vote at conference.
106. The branches, other than those in the London region, may each submit one motion to the annual national or regional meeting in their area proposing a motion for debate at the Equity Conference in accordance with Rule T19. The branches in the London region may each submit two motions
107. The annual national and regional meetings shall each decide on one motion to be submitted for debate at Equity Conference, except that each of the East and South East England and London meetings may decide on two motions for submission in accordance with Rule T20.

Reserved Branches

108. A branch shall be a reserved branch if:
- (a) it is a newly formed branch; or
 - (b) it is an existing branch that receives fewer than five Committee nominations and so cannot form a Committee; or
 - (c) having formed a Committee, the number of Committee members falls below five.
109. A reserved branch shall meet jointly with a neighbouring branch or branches until such time as it has sufficient members to form a Branch Committee. The Council shall determine the branches that shall make up the joint meetings.
110. A reserved branch may seek the Council's approval to have its reserved status removed. It will need to demonstrate that it has sufficient members to form a Committee.

Conduct

111. Attendees at branch and branch Committee meetings shall:
- (a) abide by the procedures set out in these Standing Orders; and,
 - (b) refrain from behaviour that contravenes Rule D14.
112. A failure to do so may result in disciplinary action in accordance with Rule S.

Alteration & Suspension of these Standing Orders

113. These Standing Orders shall not be altered without the prior approval of the Council.
114. The Chair may accept a motion to suspend these Standing Orders to allow a matter of urgency not on the agenda to be discussed. A motion to suspend shall be proposed and seconded by two branch members.
115. If passed by a two-thirds majority of those voting for and against, the suspension shall apply for not more than 30 minutes.

Interpretation

116. The Council shall interpret these Standing Orders if in dispute. The Council shall decide on any branch matter where these Standing Orders are silent. The Council's decisions shall be final and binding.

Copies of the Rules and Standing Orders

117. Copies of these Standing Orders and the Union's Rules are available to view and download on the Union's website at <https://www.equity.org.uk/about-us/how-were-run/rules-of-the-union/>