

Organising effective branch meetings

Every form of communication has its strengths and weaknesses. For all the development in communications technology, the mass meeting is still the best way to discuss issues with members, argue our case and establish a proper dialogue with members. That's why it remains the primary democratic space of the branch.

The problem is that not enough members are coming to meetings.

These tips for organising good mass branch meetings are based on best practice in UCU and research conducted by the Labour Research Department. Read more about this here: (LRD survey):

How often?

Every branch should be meeting at least once every term. Some branches meet every month. Every term should be a minimum expectation.

Open or closed?

- Branches should aim to hold at least one open meeting as part of their cycle of meetings.
- These are meetings to which non-members are welcome. Open meetings are best held around big local issues at your workplace.
- Open meetings are an opportunity to showcase the union. They should not include reports on the committee's various work areas, but should be focused on:
 1. what management are doing
 2. what the union says about this
 3. what the union is doing about it
 4. what members can do to help
 5. the importance of more people joining UCU.

Promoting your meeting: a checklist

Three weeks before the meeting

- Include meeting details in email to membership

Two weeks before the meeting

- Feature the meeting details in email to membership (higher up)

- Email your reps and contacts asking them to contact members with a reminder about the meeting and distribute posters in the department.

- Ensure that details are on your blogsite or in your newsletter.

One week before the meeting

- Email a reminder to all members explaining why attendance is important

- Email reminder to reps and local contacts

One day before the meeting

- Final reminder to members

MEETING POSTER TEMPLATE:

Running your meeting

- Keep as much of the union's business as possible off the agenda - lengthy reports can be kept for branch committees.
- Keep your big local campaigning issue at the forefront and make this the focus: update your members, give them the union's view and tell them how they can help.
- Invite guest speakers, either from the national union or external speakers on an issue you think members will be interested in.
- Use film showings: a number of branches have shown the US film, *College Inc.* at their meetings.
- Providing food and drink often helps with turnout.
- Vary the format from meeting to meeting and review when and where you hold your meetings to make sure you aren't timing or placing them badly for a large attendance.
- Keep to your agenda and your timings and make sure the key union business (a vote for example) is not left to the end when people may be leaving.
- Always include closing remarks about what members can do to help the union - whether it's being a local contact, recruiting a colleague or taking an action that supports your campaigning.

MODEL MEETING AGENDA

Chair's/President's welcome (2 minutes)

Main subject: explanation of local industrial issue and what union is doing about it/Guest speaker
(20 minutes)

Questions and discussion from members
(20 minutes)

Voting on any motion put to the branch
(5 minutes)

Other items: (local successes/upcoming issues)
(5 minutes)

Closing remarks on how members can help the branch (for example, helping the branch through issue based focus groups/ becoming a local contact or rep/ recruiting their colleagues)
(5 minutes)

Date of the next meeting

Close of meeting

Films you can show at your meetings

College Inc.

<http://video.pbs.org/video/1485280975>

A shorter version is available from UCU; email campaigns@ucu.org.uk. There are speaker's notes to accompany the film at http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/m/5/College_Inc_speaker_notes.pdf.

A Day in the Life

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4TCWLd6c1M&feature=youtu.be>

This is also good for circulating among members and non-members to advertise the union's work.