

Holding your branch meeting online

advice for branch officers

There has been a huge growth in meetings online, for both work and personal events.

Unite committees and branches have also been making use of the software that is out there to ensure that the business of the union can be conducted during this time of crisis, tiers, lockdowns and profound upheaval.

The union's rules and standing orders governing the conduct

of branch meetings were written with physical, in person, meetings in mind. But as Unite branches adapt by holding virtual meetings, this guidance has been produced to support you.

This guidance is designed to ensure that you can adhere to the requirements placed on branches by the Unite rule book for passing motions, spending branch funds, making nominations etc when holding your online meetings.

GETTING STARTED

Virtual (aka online) meetings may take the form of a telephone or video conference call.

What software should your branch use?

Video conferencing software, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, is readily available and easy to install.

Does your branch need special equipment?

No, Zoom and Microsoft Teams can be run on your desktop computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone. They will need you to be connected to your Wi-Fi. Check that your speaker and camera work because you will need these to participate in the meeting.

Notify members in advance

Your branch should contact members to ensure that they know that the meeting is upcoming. Make sure that you include the details needed to join the meeting, such as its ID and password.

Make use of My Account on the Unite membership system

Many branches have a notice on the My Account section of the membership system showing when and where they meet.

Branch secretaries should make sure that this notice is kept up to date. The date of the branch's virtual meeting should also be clear. The branch secretary should indicate that the meeting will be held in a virtual format and the date and time of the meeting should be indicated.

Make sure that the time, date and format of the branch meeting is clear to all members – and can be easily found.

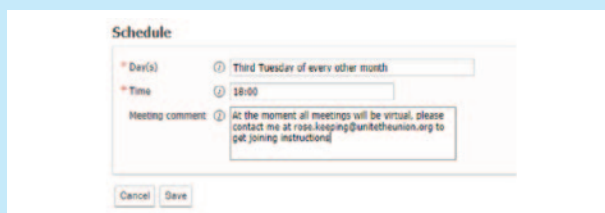
Make sure to include a notice asking members to contact the branch secretary for details of how to join the meeting.

Remember to include the branch secretary's e-mail address in the contact information for the branch.

Post your meeting on the branch portal

Branch secretaries should ensure that their branch's meeting details are up to date by logging on to the branch portal <https://branch.unitetheunion.org/>.

The screenshot below shows how the branch secretary can enter the information on the membership system using the branch portal.



What if your branch doesn't use My Account?

If your branch does not post details of its meetings on the membership website then email members with the arrangements for the meeting etc, when holding your online meeting.

IMPORTANT: Remember the GDPR rules when emailing members

Branch secretaries should always bear in mind GDPR issues around personal information when sending emails to branch members. You must use the BCC function to hide the names and e-mail addresses of the members. If you fail to do this, members could complain about a data breach.

Keep members' email and contact details up to date

Make that your branch secretary keeps the list of members' using the MyAccount facility on the website. You can also update a members e-mail address using the branch Portal. E-mail distribution lists should always be taken direct from branch information available using the Branch Portal, to ensure that you always use the most up to date data available.

If you don't have a member's email address...

Your branch may also write to members by post giving details of the virtual branch meeting, time, date, format and how to get joining details from the secretary. Your regional administration will be able to assist with this task. The cost of such mailings will be deducted from the branch administration allowance.

What about using social media to notify members?

Branches may also advertise their meetings on social media

and/or on their branch website. Branch secretaries should ensure that only the date and time of the meeting are advertised, joining instructions should not be circulated on social media or on websites; a member must contact the branch secretary to receive these.

Joining instructions are for branch members ONLY

The branch secretary should ensure that the joining instructions for a meeting are only sent to bona fide branch members. They can then check membership details on Stratum, if necessary.

Keep an attendance list

When admitting members to a meeting, the secretary should ensure that they keep a list of those in attendance for the minutes of the meeting.

Get the agenda ready – and circulate – in advance

When the branch secretary is notifying members of the meeting it is recommended that they list agenda items for discussion and request that members raise any other items they wish to consider prior to the meeting.

The branch secretary and the branch chair should agree the final agenda which should be sent with the joining instructions. The agenda for the meeting should not be posted on social media or on websites.

RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL ONLINE MEETING

At the meeting

The branch secretary and Chair should work closely together to make sure that the meeting runs in an orderly fashion.

The Chair should run the meeting in the way that they would an in-person meeting, calling people to speak, keeping order, and taking votes etc.

The mute button is the meeting's friend

People should be muted when they are not speaking. There should be no speaking over other people.

Who is the Host?

On Zoom the person setting up the meeting is called the Host. This person may chair the meeting, but for a branch meeting it is better that the secretary is the Host.

The secretary can make the Chair a co-host, but as Host the secretary will have more control over the virtual part of the meeting.

What is the Waiting Room?

When setting up the meeting the branch secretary (Host) should make sure that there is a waiting room facility or similar for the meeting. This will allow them to verify that people seeking to join the meeting are branch members and to keep a note of who joins for minuting purposes.

For larger meetings, the secretary may need another person (e.g. a branch committee member) to assist them in ensuring that people are admitted and noted in an efficient way.

Do you need a Minute Secretary?

The branch should also consider whether they need a minute secretary to support the branch secretary in capturing the decisions of the meeting including voting records.

Make sure all names are displayed

Each person in attendance at the meeting should have their correct name displayed for identification purposes. The secretary may advise someone to amend the name showing on screen or they may do this for them.

Members intending to join the meeting by smart phone should give the number to the branch secretary to allow them to be identified when they seek access to the meeting. If someone is joining by smart phone their number should be replaced by their proper name (on Zoom, the Host can rename a participant).

Quorum still stands

The requirement for a minimum of 5 members in attendance to make a quorum is not varied for virtual meetings.

Voters must be seen – and votes must be verified

It is common practice in video meeting calls for people in attendance to turn off their video, e.g. if they have a poor Wi-Fi signal.

However, when taking a vote the Chair should ensure that all members voting can be seen and have their

video turned on to verify that the meeting remains quorate.

If the member cannot turn on their video they should verbally confirm that they are still in the meeting.

If the chair is uncertain whether a member is actually on the call when a vote is being taken they should speak to them to verify the position.

In smaller meetings, the chair can ask for a show of hands on screen and may call out how each member has voted. This helps whoever is taking minutes.

For larger meetings, there is a voting facility on Zoom which allows those in attendance to indicate yes, no or abstain, providing an instantaneous count.

Keep it confidential

Members attending a branch meeting in a virtual format should treat it as if it is an in-person meeting. The usual requirements to respect others in attendance and to keep the confidentiality and integrity of the meeting remain in place.

HELP IS ON HAND

Where a branch secretary does not have suitable IT equipment to set up such a meeting or does not have a Wi-Fi connection, the branch fund may be used to support them. That could mean assisting in the provision of a laptop or tablet, webcam, headphones or Wi-Fi connection. Unite can purchase a laptop for the branch at a discount. The cost would be deducted from the branch fund.

Where a branch has insufficient funds to assist then the branch may apply to their region for financial assistance. The cost of this regional support would be set against the branch fund.

Zoom discount available

Unite can provide a substantially discounted subscription to Zoom to any branch that would like to set one up to conduct virtual branch meetings.

Contact Unite ICT helpdesk for information on discounts available on email: icthelpdesk@unitetheunion.org or call: 020 3371 2100.

The operation of such accounts is subject to Unite policies. The charge for such an account will be deducted from the branch fund.

Help with a branch website

Any branch that wants to set up a branch website should also contact the ICT helpdesk or their Regional Digital Assistant for further details.

No cost for meetings

The branch should not be responsible for any cost incurred by individual members for joining a virtual meeting.

Your region can help

Regional administrations should be available to assist in showing a branch how to set up a meeting. Zoom training for branch secretaries and Chairs will be offered as soon as is practicable. Details will be available from Regional Education Officers or your Regional Digital Assistant.

USEFUL RESOURCES

Unite has produced a number of Digital guides that will help branches in setting up a meeting. These are available on Vimeo and YouTube:

On Vimeo:

Setting up a video call

<https://vimeo.com/486858075>

How to use Zoom

<https://vimeo.com/486848140>

Video call etiquette

<https://vimeo.com/486854744>

How to use WhatsApp

<https://vimeo.com/486861243>

And on YouTube:

The guides are in a playlist on YouTube so you only need to do one click and the videos are in one place.

Playlist link:

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL_CA8fbghqrKTw4-yYK9ZhGJMAwyOFixw

If anyone wants the individual links:

How to use Zoom: <https://youtu.be/73lUQozfdWs>

Setting up a video call: <https://youtu.be/unTweB1v3m0>

Video call etiquette: <https://youtu.be/tVJtlYieNdg>

How to use WhatsApp: <https://youtu.be/ryBJoRI3OSg>

If you require further advice on the Branch Portal please contact your Regional Office.



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