

Policy on the Future Structure of Unite

UniteNOW believes there is a fundamental need to establish more lay member involvement and accountability in the selection of Senior Officials of the union. The accountability of the GS is prescribed in law through election in a full membership ballot, and the GS is then answerable to the Executive Council that is also elected through a membership ballot. However, there is no clear unite procedure for dealing with other senior positions within UNITE.

In the former T&G Section the Deputy General Secretary (DGS) was elected by a membership ballot, whereas in the AMICUS Section the DGS was appointed by the GS and confirmed by the Executive Council. In both unions the GS appointed the Assistant General Secretaries (AGSs), with the decisions then being subject to ratification by the Executive Council. In both Sections the National Sector/Trade Group Officers were appointed by the GS and ratified or rejected by the Executive Council. This remained the case in the AMICUS Section despite a Conference decision to reinstate the election of officers.

We need to develop a system that is open and transparent, UNITE must become an even more democratic and accountable organisation, in which its membership plays an even more active role in deciding who should take the Union forward. UniteNOW believes that the proposals laid down in this document will help us achieve this.

Accountability of Senior UNITE Officials

We need to ensure real involvement of lay activists in the crucial decisions to appoint senior officials in the union, and through this involvement avoid a situation where the General Secretary effectively makes appointments to such important positions at his or her will.

While recognising that membership ballots for the Deputy General Secretary, Assistant General Secretaries, National Officers and Regional Secretaries would be both extremely costly and time consuming, there are other alternatives that have not yet been examined or explored.

Most unions in Europe do not elect either their General Secretaries, Deputies, Presidents or National Officers through membership ballots, rather the Congress (Policy Conference) is the organ through which the 'Executive' positions of the union are determined.

There is no reason why a specific system for UNITE cannot be devised along these lines – it is not just about appointments v elections, and UniteNOW would openly support the implementation of such a system in UNITE.

Assistant General Secretaries & Chief of Staff

UniteNOW supports the current structure of three Assistant General Secretaries with overall responsibility for the manufacturing, transport and services sectors. UniteNOW also recognises the value of having a Chief of Staff with overall responsibility for the union's administration.

However, UniteNOW remains firmly of the view that these extremely important positions should be subject to greater democratic control by the union's members' and maintains its proposal that the people taking these positions should be elected at the UNITE Policy Conference. This would undoubtedly increase their accountability to the membership and would also encourage greater activist interest and participation in a cost effective democratic process.

An open and transparent selection procedure should be put in place with candidates requiring nomination from 10 branches in the relevant sectors (not sector specific in the case of the Chief of Staff position). A short list of candidates would then be selected by an interview panel consisting of the General Secretary and Executive Council members;

- The three AGSs and Chief of Staff will then be elected by the Policy Conference from the short list;
- The AGSs and Chief of Staff should be re-elected at Policy Conferences (every 4 years);
 - In exceptional circumstances in which the General Secretary is no longer able to carry out his or her duties, the Executive Council will appoint one of the existing Assistant General Secretaries to the position of Deputy General Secretary. This shall be with no increase in remuneration and shall last until a new General Secretary has been elected.

Regional Secretaries

- Future Regional Secretary replacements should be achieved through short listing by a interview panel consisting of the Chief of Staff, EC members and members of the Regional Committee
- The Regional Secretary would then be elected from a shortlist by Regional Committee;
- Regional Secretaries would need to seek re-election if confronted with a no confidence vote (25% of Regional Committee), where re-election would be confirmed if supported by 51% of the Regional Sector Committee;

National Sector Officers

- There should be no more than one National Officer per Sector.

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- Future National Sector Officer replacements should be short listed by an interview panel consisting of the AGS responsible for the sector, and National Sector Committee members;
- The National Sector Officer would then be elected by the National Sector Committee from the shortlist;
- National Officers will need to seek re-election if confronted with a no confidence vote (25% of National Sector Committee), with re-election confirmed if supported by 51% of the National Sector Committee;

Unite Pay Structure

An elected structure requires an aligned, open and transparent pay and pensions' arrangement (which is distinctly missing at present and irrespective of these proposals needs to be progressed), that includes a process of redeployment to support such a proposal.

Regional Officers

UniteNOW supports the practice that has been established in which Regional Officers are appointed by an Executive Council panel, and in which Regional Officer positions' are open to all members in a region as well as UNITE staff. However, this process alone does not guarantee quality officers and UNITE needs to begin putting in place an Officer Development Programme that includes a comprehensive module structure for training, supporting, and assessing Officers development. Such a Development Programme would support Regional Officers to develop and enhance the skills and knowledge they need. Our members need and deserve professional and accountable Officers in the front line delivering for them. A programme of this sort should also be structured in a way to ensure that our future Officers become more representative of our membership through increasing the number of women, BAEM and young people that become Officers. It should also be structured to assist talented members and staff that may not have had, and might never be given, the opportunity to develop the skills required to be successful at the interview stage. UniteNOW will push for such a review and process to be put in place.

We all preach democracy but few wish to implement a democratic policy and process to the core of the union structure. UniteNOW aims to propose and pursue policies aimed at delivering a truly democratic and tolerant union based on lay member involvement.