

Bangor University UCU Branch Handbook

1 Introduction

The aim of this document is to provide representatives and members of Bangor UCU with information which will allow the Branch to function effectively, transparently and consistently in its dealings with the employer and its members. The descriptions of roles and protocols are intended to support the work of caseworkers, negotiators, officers of the branch and staff working for Bangor UCU.

This is a working document and changes can be initiated following BUCU committee approval.

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2 Roles

2.1 Branch Committee Member

Members of the Branch committee are elected at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) or co-opted by the AGM or Branch committee.

The committee comprises up to 10 ordinary members (elected or co-opted), any member of the branch who is a member of the National Executive Committee of UCU or an Officer of UCU Wales Council, and the Branch officers:

- The Chair/President
- The Vice-Chair/Vice-President
- The Treasurer
- The Secretary
- The Equality Officer
- The Anti-Casualisation Officer

See branch rules sections 7 and 8 for further information.

The Branch committee is responsible for conducting the day-to-day business of the Branch. The committee normally meets every month.

At the first meeting of each newly elected Branch, the committee should discuss which campaigns or aspects of the branch's work each member would like to take a lead on.

2.2 Departmental Contacts

Departmental contacts are, for many members, their first point of contact with UCU. At Bangor we aim to have minimum of 1 departmental contact for each School/Central Service Area.

For a full description of the role of the Departmental contact, please refer to the document '*UCU Departmental Representative Job Description*' (download from the [BUCU website](#)), however some key aspects are summarized below.

Departmental contacts should introduce themselves to new members in their area and assist in explaining the role of the union. The Departmental contact should also convey to the Branch committee any generic priorities and/or any concerns that are within the remit of UCU activities.

They should signpost members to a member of the Branch committee if there are issues beyond the scope of the Departmental contact and pass them on to the committee if necessary.

They should encourage members to become involved with union activities.

2.3 Caseworker

The casework team, led by the Casework co-ordinator (elected by committee), are trained volunteers from among the branch membership who are competent to advise and support other members on workplace issues.

Casework is a fundamental part of the union activities that the branch undertakes on behalf of its members. Many UCU members rely heavily on the advice and support they receive in the workplace from lay representatives of UCU. Our ability to provide that advice and support is also what encourages others to join the union.

For a full description of casework protocol, please refer to the document '*Casework protocols - Bangor University College Union Branch*' (download from the [BUCU website](#)), however some key aspects are summarized below.

Members in need of support should be initially be asked to contact the Casework Co-ordinator (see the [Help & Support](#) section of the BUCU website) for an initial confidential discussion and to be assigned a personal caseworker. Once a request for help has been received by the casework co-ordinator, a membership check will be required by the Branch administrator, this will be confirmed with the caseworker/casework co-ordinator. This will allow for confirmation that the members' subscriptions are up to date. Why is this important? Access to the legal scheme is dependent on payments being up to date and being paid at the appropriate rate, depending on their earnings. We are also able to call on specialist advice and legal assistance if necessary from the Wales and UK UCU offices.

Caseworkers can discuss generic issues relating to cases they are working on at caseworker meetings or with the Branch committee meetings. These communications will not include the name of the member concerned and must be done in accordance with the GDPR statement that members asking for support should be asked to read and agree to.

2.4 Branch administrator supervisor

Bangor UCU funds the employment of one member of staff to work on Branch administration.

As an employer UCU has certain responsibilities which it must comply with.

The line manager of staff who undertake these roles is the Wales official. Given the constraints that this places on the employment relationship, UCU requires that a supervisor is drawn from among the branch officers to ensure support and advice can be given to the staff in a timely manner. The supervisor will meet regularly with the Branch administrator. The supervisor is usually to be the Branch President.

The supervisor must be able to commit to a face to face meeting every week of the academic year (excepting holidays), with regular email contact between meetings.

2.4.1 Arrangements for Absence

Recognising that the branch administrator's supervisor might at times be absent for either personal or business matters, at least one other branch officer should be chosen to provide that support in their absence. If there is no one available during any given week then the default position is that the supervisor should notify the Wales official in a timely manner, to ensure that support can be provided from the Wales office for the duration of the absence.

2.4.2 Tasks

The following are the required tasks the current incumbent has requested in terms of supervision. These will change with the post holder and should be a part of the probationary review to ensure ongoing support is provided by a local supervisor.

- Discuss workload and priorities for coming week(s).
- Advise on action to be taken on issues where necessary.
- Re-allocate work where necessary to manage workload.

If there are any performance issues which arise, the supervisor must discuss these with the role holder in the first instance, before raising concerns with the Wales official. Any discussions of this

nature must be recorded in writing and the notes agreed with the role holder. The executive meeting is not the place to discuss performance issues.

3 Protocols

3.1 Collective Negotiations

Our ability to effectively represent our members in relation to their terms and conditions of employment depends, to a significant extent, on the level of organisation which the branch engages with on behalf of its membership. It is therefore important that branches have communications strategies that effectively publicise what they do, and celebrate their successes (See Section 5).

Preparation and organisation are crucial factors in achieving success at the negotiating table. Our willingness to engage on behalf of members is what creates the momentum for successful campaigning and recruitment activity.

This collective negotiations protocol is an attempt to ensure that we make the most of the efforts of our reps and are able to make their activity on behalf of UCU as stress-free as possible. The remit under which BUCU negotiates is set in the recognition agreement and terms of reference of negotiation structures (Management of Change/Joint Negotiation Committee).

Bangor UCU does not normally have a negotiating committee separate to the branch committee, and therefore anyone in committee can volunteer to take part in negotiations as they arise. BUCU follow a tripartite negotiation structure, consisting of negotiation teams and their leads; a negotiation co-ordinator; and the branch negotiation lead (see below). Committee elect a negotiation team, usually of four members, for each issue that is subject to consultation and/or negotiation.

- Negotiation teams and leads: Team members are drawn from committee and can overlap with relevant working groups. Each negotiation team has a lead whose responsibility it is to maintain, in Teams, a record of relevant documents including e.g. policy drafts, responses, preparatory and other meeting minutes. The Team Lead (in consultation with the Branch Lead) is the only team member authorised to contact UCU professional staff (i.e. Wales Office or Head Office), to consult them on the negotiation process. The lead may also undertake strategic responsibilities (e.g. organising details of a MoC/JNC strategy (see below for definition) for the issue) at the team's discretion and with the agreement of the Branch Negotiation Lead.
- Negotiation co-ordinator: This is an administrative role, elected by committee using [single transferable vote](#). At the start of each year, as soon as is practical following the appointment of the negotiation co-ordinator, the negotiation co-ordinator will support the President/Branch Negotiation Lead in producing a negotiation plan for the year. This will include proposals for issues to be negotiated via the various negotiation and consultation machineries in our recognition agreement and facilities agreement (principally: JNC, Campus Union Forum, and Management of Change). The negotiation plan should include recommendations on the size and composition of each negotiation team for each issue. This negotiation plan should be discussed and approved by the branch committee. The co-ordinator, in collaboration with the branch administrator, ensures that there are teams and leaders appointed and briefed on each negotiation issue identified in the annual negotiation strategy, and co-ordinates all ongoing and upcoming negotiations. This includes keeping track of relevant dates and deadlines on a spreadsheet co-produced with HR (see Section

3.1.4), as well as retaining an oversight of the way in which different negotiations intersect and form part of BUCU's wider strategy.

- Branch negotiation lead: The negotiation lead develops and maintains an overview of the branch negotiation strategy and is usually present at JNC and MoC meetings concerning all issues. The Branch Negotiation Lead should be invited to attend all individual negotiation team meetings, in an ex officio capacity. The lead is usually the branch President, although committee can decide to elect an alternative Branch Negotiation Lead. The lead is expected to work closely with the negotiation co-ordinator and team leads to keep an overview of all ongoing negotiations. In meetings, their role is to represent the work of the relevant negotiation team.

The Joint Negotiation Committee (JNC) is the formal channel of negotiation between BUCU and BU Management. In some cases, related discussions and consultations will take place as part of the Management of Change (MoC) committee (Note: MoC comprises of two sub-groups, one focusing on restructuring and one on university policies & procedures). No issue can be considered signed or agreed by BUCU unless it has passed the JNC. A maximum of four Committee members can attend any one JNC meeting, and a maximum of two can attend any one MoC meeting. Therefore, where multiple issues are discussed within one meeting, it is expected that team leads or team members with the most relevant role (e.g. in working group or as Officer) will represent their team. It is recommended that those with significant negotiation responsibilities, especially negotiation team leads and the branch negotiation lead, engage in negotiation training (e.g. UCU-led).

3.1.1 Negotiating strategy

Committee should agree on a negotiating strategy for the coming academic year as a top priority upon election. It is the responsibility of the branch negotiation lead, in consultation with the president, vice-president, and negotiation co-ordinator, to draft this document for committee. They should also consult the casework co-ordinator on potential outstanding areas of collective concern.

Any concerns relating to agreed issues should be raised with the appropriate negotiation team in the first instance. Where a new issue arises, committee should discuss it and agree a proposal for action (or inaction). If a proposal for action is agreed, committee will allocate a lead and a negotiating team to progress the matter as part of the negotiating strategy.

3.1.2 Arrangements for JNC/MoC meetings

Communications about negotiating and consultation meetings from HR should be received by the Branch President/Branch Lead Negotiator and the relevant negotiation team. The negotiation co-ordinator should be kept up to date of meetings.

After a JNC/MoC meeting, each relevant negotiation team lead should produce a short summary of the meeting to be filed in Teams. Substantial developments should be communicated to committee as working group reports, or dedicated agenda items as appropriate.

3.1.3 Negotiation procedures

UCU encourages reps who engage in negotiations on behalf of the branch to access UCU training to help develop their skills. What is provided here is a summary of the key attributes and decisions needed, to ensure UCU get the best negotiated settlement possible.

- Set up a distribution list for the negotiating team for the issue and remember to upload relevant documents to Teams, so that communications can be kept up to date for members;
- Always do your preparatory reading;

- Discuss and agree at Branch meeting the desired outcomes from the negotiations and decide on what you would be prepared to accept;
- Make sure you know what happens in comparable institutions;
- If it involves Unite and Unison, the other campus unions, always have a pre-meeting with them to prevent the employer playing one union against the other;
- Be prepared to alter your tactics to keep unanimity with Unite and Unison where possible;
- Avoid agreeing to negotiate at last minute meetings or meetings without a clear agenda.

3.1.4 Action sheet

This document is the responsibility of the branch administrator and negotiation co-ordinator, but it can only be an effective tool if those involved in negotiations keep them properly briefed on progress. It should list all active collective files. It must be updated as negotiations are opened and closed. This will ensure that all negotiators are aware of open/closed negotiations and who is responsible for them, in the event of absence/lack of availability. For each item listed there should be a corresponding folder in Teams, accessible to all who may need to use it; see appendix A for the file structure.

3.2 Casework

Confidentiality when dealing with casework is vital, and it is equally important that the way that we use the personal information about members complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). We need to be clear with members how their personal data will be used and get specific consent to share information about them. This must be considered particularly in relation to using individual cases for collective organisation. This is the purpose of the GDPR Notice that members receive when they submit a Casework Request.

Our ability to deliver consistent support that meets our confidentiality and data protection obligations is contingent on all caseworkers following the same rules and procedures. If we stray from that principle, it opens the union up to claims of discrimination, missed time limits and negligence. The purpose of this protocol is to set out the process and rules that we ask all caseworkers to follow.

3.2.1 Casework referrals

Details of the casework referral process can be found in the U: drive doc 'Caseworkers draft protocol'

4 Branch Meetings

Effective branch meetings play a significant role in the healthy functioning of the branch.

4.1 Branch Committee Meetings

The Branch committee meetings make decisions about the day to day work of the branch.

The Branch committee usually meets monthly, except in August (the rules require meetings at least every 4 months). The chair will ensure that each item on the agenda does not exceed its allocated time, whilst ensuring that matters which the Branch committee wish to action are properly debated and decisions are clear and unambiguous.

4.2 Standing items

Each time the committee meets, the following will be included on the agenda as standing items:

- Welcome and apologies

- Confirmation of the minutes of the last meeting
- Matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting
- Urgent Business
- Report of Chair's Actions
- Casework Report
- Reports from Working Groups
- Dates of next meetings

4.3 Drawing up the agenda

Any committee member who wishes to add an item to the agenda should notify the Branch Chair or Secretary as early as possible. Giving the committee plenty of advance warning will allow it to discuss how best to present the item, where it should sit in the agenda, and how much time to allocate to discussing it. However, the cut-off point for adding items to the agenda will normally be seven days before the date of the meeting. There will, of course, be exceptions to this rule – particularly when meetings are called at short notice – but as a general principle, committee members should stick to the seven-day deadline.

If any issues arise after the agenda has been sent out, then please contact the Branch Chair or Secretary to request that they be discussed under Urgent Business. Items tabled under Urgent Business should be genuinely urgent in nature, and the committee will vote on whether to add them to the agenda or not, during the meeting. Where possible, we will notify committee members in advance, over email, of requests to add items under Urgent Business. The agenda will not include Any Other Business.

4.4 Discussion and decision-making

Committee is a decision-making body, and its meetings are business meetings. Meetings should be timetabled for two hours, but should aim to conclude its business within an hour to hour-and-a-half. Longer, more detailed discussions should take place within the Working Groups.

The Working Groups should present written reports to committee, using the pro forma provided by Wales Office. Working Group reports should contain a recommendation or recommendations for committee to approve or reject. Working Groups may also present **short** verbal updates on their activities.

4.5 Report of Chair's Actions

Under this standing item, the Chair will inform the committee of any actions that they have taken since the last committee meeting, in accordance with the Branch Rules. They will endeavour to include this in written form, as part of the committee papers, seven days before the date of the committee meeting. When this is not possible, they will provide a verbal statement to the committee, that will be minuted.

4.6 Dates of Next Meetings

Dates of future meetings should be set as early as possible, to enable committee members to arrange working patterns and childcare in advance. This agenda item is included as a reminder of dates that have already been set, and committee will not normally set meeting dates on a month-by-month basis.

5 Communication with members

Following important decisions made at committee or MoC/JNC level, BUCU committee should write to all members, providing them with a summary of the decisions made. The Branch Secretary is responsible for this communication, but may delegate the task to another member of committee, or to the Branch Administrator.

6 General Meetings

These meetings are opportunities for the whole membership to debate motions, hear updates on campaigns and direct the work of the union. General meetings also often hear from an invited speaker.

There are usually 3 general meetings per year, the third of which in May is designated as the AGM. The AGM elects the committee for the following academic year. Extraordinary general meetings may be called at the request of the committee or the membership (see the branch rules, section 14).

The secretary will give all members at least 14 days' notice of the meeting (42 day in the case of the AGM). The secretary will circulate the agenda at least 10 days in advance (see the branch rules section 13).

7 Emails and UCU email Account

It is important that you cc the branch/administrator into any generic or important correspondence you send on behalf of the branch that has not been sent from/cc'd to the bucu@bangor.ac.uk email account. This is in order that they are kept up to date with developments and not have to resort to chasing for information. If you wish to ask the Branch administrator to undertake a task then please contact either the President or Vice President.

8 Welsh Language Policy

BUCU committee commits itself to working bilingually, based on the following principles:

- All communications to the BUCU membership (on paper or other materials or electronically) by BUCU will be available in both Welsh and English
- The text or communication will be equal in Welsh and English in terms of format, size, clarity and prominence
- Welsh and English texts will be published and sent simultaneously
- Simultaneous translation will be provided at all BUCU members' meetings

9 Appendix A: File Structure for Casework & Collective Negotiation

A file should contain all correspondence with parties involved and papers should be ordered in the following basic structure. This reflects the file structures used in the Wales Office. The papers should be filed in date order with the most recent exchange on the top of the sub section within the file. Electronic files should also use this folder structure.

Casework:	Correspondence employer
	Correspondence member
	Policies/procedures
Collective:	Correspondence employer
	Correspondence members
	Correspondence branch
	Drafts (if policy/procedures)
	Policy/procedures

10 Appendix B: Training and Support for Casework

Online resources are available on the national website here: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/Caseworkers>

A guide written for caseworkers, *Handling Casework: a guide for UCU reps*, is available as a PDF here: https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5916/Handling-casework-a-guide-for-UCU-reps/pdf/Handling_casework.pdf

These resources do not replace the need for training, which will be available periodically through the Regional Office, but outline the legal framework and provide answers to many common workplace problems.

11 Appendix C: Legal Scheme

https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/5929/UCU-Legal-Scheme-Regulations-October-2017/pdf/ucu_legalscheme_oct17.pdf