­­­­­­­

W

A picture containing text

Description automatically generated

**How to…**run an effective union meeting

**Contents**

[Learning outcomes 3](#_Toc122431428)

[Branch roles 3](#_Toc122431429)

[Chair role 3](#_Toc122431430)

[Secretary role 3](#_Toc122431431)

[Typical types of meetings 4](#_Toc122431432)

[Branch meeting 4](#_Toc122431433)

[AGM (Annual General Meeting) 4](#_Toc122431434)

[Negotiation 4](#_Toc122431435)

[Consultation 4](#_Toc122431436)

[1-1 4](#_Toc122431437)

[Working party meeting 4](#_Toc122431438)

[Code of conduct of meetings 4](#_Toc122431439)

[Code of conduct for Prospect representatives 5](#_Toc122431440)

[Branch meetings – why do we need to do them? 7](#_Toc122431441)

[What could go wrong? 7](#_Toc122431442)

[Preparation 8](#_Toc122431443)

[Activity A: Check the purpose of a meeting 9](#_Toc122431444)

[Scheduling a meeting 10](#_Toc122431445)

[Activity B: What would make you attend a meeting? 10](#_Toc122431446)

[During the meeting 11](#_Toc122431447)

[Opening and introductions 11](#_Toc122431448)

[Running the meeting 12](#_Toc122431449)

[Getting through the business 13](#_Toc122431450)

[Activity C: How would you control the meeting? 13](#_Toc122431451)

[Closing the meeting 14](#_Toc122431452)

[Any questions? 15](#_Toc122431453)

# Learning outcomes

* To be able to prepare for the meeting
* To be able to encourage meeting attendance
* To be able to reach the objective of a meeting
* To know what to do about disruptions in a meeting

# Branch roles

For the purposes of this training, we refer to a Chair of a branch, it may depend on location or branch preference, but the chair can also be referred to as ‘President’ or ‘Convenor’ (branches based in Scotland). Below is an outline of the chair and secretary roles.

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice-Chair/Convenor/President may act in their place.

In the absence of the Secretary/Chief Steward, the Assistant Secretary/Deputy Chief Steward may act in their place.

The main roles we refer to in this training:

### Chair role

The Chair presides at all branch conferences or committee meetings and is responsible for:

* the proper conduct of the meeting
* ensuring that business is kept moving
* clarifying the issues under discussion
* ensuring that clear decisions are reached and recorded .

### Secretary role

This is the key role in most branches/sections/sub-sections. The Secretary’s duties include:

* calling committee meetings, conferences or annual general meetings and making all associated practical arrangements
* preparing and circulating agendas, minutes and action lists
* submitting to the committee matters referred to them by Prospect/Bectu headquarters or by any member or body with which the branch is associated
* during meetings, assisting the President/Chair by presenting information and introducing items for which they are responsible
* maintaining branch records
* dealing with correspondence and liaising with Prospect/Bectu headquarters as required
* guide the branches development through preparation and implementation of a branch development plan
* communication with members - circulars/newsletters. Can be delegated to Communications Rep if available
* taking responsibility for case management and distributing casework as appropriate.

# Typical types of meetings

### Branch meeting

An example would be where a meeting is called to discuss an issue. A meeting like this is normally open to all branch members and sometimes to non-members too.

### AGM (Annual General Meeting)

A specific yearly meeting that members can be elected to be reps and branch posts. It also provides an update on the work the branch has done over the year.

### Negotiation

This type of meeting could be between delegations from management and a branch

### Consultation

This type of meeting could be held by reps to ask members opinion on a topic or hosted by the management to look for views on suggested changes affecting the workforce.

### 1-1

This sort of meeting would normally be between a rep and a member about a personal issue

### Working party meeting

This could be with a group of members or between members and management to come up with options/solutions to a particular problem.

***Please note:*** *This list is not exhaustive. Other meeting types can be discussed, where relevant to the branch.*

## Code of conduct of meetings

* In workplace/external hire (health & safety, fire drills toilets etc)
* **Online** versus **In-person**
* Agree the rules of the meeting beforehand – instructed by Branch Chair (hand up to speak, for example)
* Set parameters (what the meeting needs to achieve)
* Do's and Don'ts (how those attending are expected to behave)

Double-check the information needed ahead of booking a meeting space. Is it an internal room or an external venue? Ensure clarity on the health and safety, fire drills, toilets, facilities, car parking if external venue etc.

If online is the preferred option for the meeting, what is needed for preparation? Brief recap on how to use the online forum/etiquette.

### Code of conduct for Prospect representatives

Prospect is committed to building an inclusive environment where opportunities are open to all, diversity is valued, and where everybody can contribute without fear of harassment, prejudice or discrimination.

Prospect represents members across a broad range of industries and specialist disciplines. Our members are passionate about their professional roles, and they bring an incredible depth of knowledge and expertise to any debate.

This is a very real strength of Prospect, but on occasion it brings challenges. As individuals we will not agree with everyone, but we do respect those different perspectives. As individuals we will not like everyone, but we do engage respectfully with all people.

The purpose of this code of conduct is to set out the standards of behaviour that Prospect expects to protect this approach. The standards of behaviour that representatives expect and campaign for in their workplaces apply equally to engagement in Prospect activities.

A separate code of conduct sets out behavioural expectations of Prospect employees. Although routes to resolving issues are different for employed staff, the same standards apply in relation to treating people with dignity and respect, free from harassment or discrimination.

It is the responsibility of all representatives and staff to ensure, to the extent they are able, that this code of conduct is implemented effectively.

This code of conduct therefore aims to:

• Provide you with clarity about your responsibilities to ensure the respect of others.

• Inform you about your rights if you feel you are not being treated with respect.

#### Responsibilities

Representatives must:

* Act honestly, responsibly and with integrity.
* Communicate respectfully and honestly.
* Treat others with fairness, dignity, and respect.
* Encourage the open expression of views at meetings but accept collective responsibility for all decisions and policies once finalised.
* Not behave in ways that may cause physical or mental harm or distress to another person, such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, assault, bullying, or discrimination or harassment.

In representing Prospect, representatives must:

* Only speak or act on behalf of Prospect when authorised to do so and clarify the capacity in which you are speaking.
* Always be mindful of their responsibility to maintain and develop Prospect’s ethos and reputation.
* Declare any interests that may conflict with their role in Prospect, for example in a professional or political capacity.
* Respect confidentiality and ensure GDPR compliance in dealing with any documents, material, or devices containing confidential information.
* Not bring Prospect into disrepute, including through the use of email, social and mainstream media and other internet sites.

This code of conduct is underpinned by the union’s rules. All branches should ensure that their representatives have read and comply with this code of conduct.

#### Complaints

This code of conduct should be used to recognise unacceptable behaviour and ideally to informally address any alleged incidents of unacceptable behaviour, including bullying, harassment, or intimidation.

If the behaviour concerned continues or if it is of a more serious nature, this may be considered in any investigation under rule 2.5(5) which states:

*‘Members shall be expected at all times to behave reasonably in dealing with fellow members and Prospect staff and to treat them with respect and courtesy. Any member deemed by the National Executive Committee to have behaved unreasonably towards another member or a Prospect staff member may be subject to the disciplinary regulations’.*

Complaints should be made under the procedure set out at **https://prospect.org.uk/about/complaints** and mailed to **complaints@prospect.org.uk**

All representatives will be made aware of this code of conduct and the standards of behaviour expected. All representatives are encouraged to attend Prospect training courses to address any skills gaps and support their development.

The branch rules templates can be found within the course resource page link provided with the details of this training.

# Branch meetings – why do we need to do them?

According to the Prospect union rulebook 4.7 (5) “*a branch must hold at least one general meeting annually or bi-annually at which to elect or make arrangements for the election of Branch Officers and any Negotiation Committee specified by the Branch Rule, to receive a Branch Annual Report and Statement of Accounts and to determine Branch policy to submit Motions and nominations to National Conference, Sector Executive(s) and the National Executive Committee. Should a Branch choose to hold a Biennial Delegate Conference or Biennial General Meeting, provision must be made to approve the Branch Annual Report and Statement of Accounts at a relevant Branch Executive Meeting in the alternate year.*”

This is to ensure a branch is democratic and it means those who represent the branch have a mandate to do so. For a rep or a committee, it is very empowering to be voted in by the branch. It shows that the members they represent trust and endorse them.

From experience, people prefer to be asked their opinion and be involved in decisions that may affect them. A meeting virtual or face-to-face gives that opportunity.

How can we expect members to be involved in branch activities if the branch doesn’t keep members up to date with what ongoing issues and involve them in finding solutions?

By agreeing an approach to a solving an issue, we are getting what is known as a mandate to act on the branch member’s behalf. This could well be a voted decision where the majority have voted in favour of items in a pay claim to management. This is then presented to the management by the branch committee on behalf of their membership as an example.

### What could go wrong?

Everybody worries that a meeting they oversee will:

* Have no one turn up
* That the meeting descends into chaos with disagreements and ends up with people feuding over issues.
* No agreements on actions are made and nothing gets sorted out
* Everyone feels the meeting was a waste of their time

Don’t worry, all these things can simply be sorted.

* Make sure that the meeting is properly advertised and at a date and time most people can attend.
* By setting simple rules for the meeting that the person chairing the meeting can run the meeting by
* Always be clear what needs to be achieved at the meeting and allow for that to happen
* Make it clear to those that have attended what they have achieved by attending

### Preparation

For the purposes of this training, we refer to a Chair of a branch, it may depend on location or branch preference, but the chair can also be referred to as ‘President’ or ‘Convenor’ (branches based in Scotland)

As most with things that are successful someone has spent time preparing for it. The same is true of running a successful meeting.

It needs to be decided what is the purpose and the objective of the meeting. Who needs to be consulted about the purpose and objectives?

We could answer this by using a simple checklist of questions:

1. Have I defined a purpose for the meeting?
2. How could we benefit be having a meeting about this?
3. Does more than one person need to attend?
4. Is this issue that would benefit from being discussed, or is it purely a distribution of information?
5. What is the desired outcome?

#### As an example, let’s take this scenario:

The branch chair of a small workplace branch wants to increase attendance at their next Annual General Meeting (AGM). It is also conference year where branch motions can be submitted. Any motion will need to be submitted within the deadline for conference submissions. The chair feels that the committee needs to meet to discuss this.

Let’s check this against our checklist:

Have I defined a purpose for the meeting?

Yes, we need to find out the committee’s thoughts on how we can get more members to attend the AGM. Can the tasks be split between the committee members to make it easier to set up? We can identify the key issues affecting members that need to be raised at conference this year.

How could we benefit by having a meeting about this?

The planning of both the AGM and motions to conference has normally fallen to the branch secretary and they have found it too much to deal with previously and getting committee members involved will mean more chance of new ideas coming forward. It will be good for the branch for other reps/committee members to learn what tasks need to be done to call a meeting. The branch members will look to the committee for guidance on putting forward motions for conference.

Does more than one person need to attend?

Yes, it should be a full committee meeting to get every committee member involved.

Is this issue that would benefit from being discussed, or is it purely a distribution of information?

The objective of the meeting is to look at getting some new ideas and raising issues that will need a motion at conference. It would be better for everyone to bounce ideas off each other.

What is the desired outcome?

The desired outcome is to improve attendance at the AGM, get volunteers to help with the setting up of the meeting and ensure that real issues affecting the members are turned into actions via motions to conference.

### Activity A: Check the purpose of a meeting

The management have made a pay offer with a couple of conditions. As Chair you must decide on which course of action to do next:

* Email all the branch members with the offer asking for comment
* Call a full branch meeting
* Call a committee meeting

# Scheduling a meeting

It is very important that a meeting is scheduled to allow as many members to attend as possible. If you don’t know what date or time that could be, then ask those you want to attend what suits and use the majority of those who replied for your date and time. You could use something like [How to create a free Doodle poll - in minutes! | Doodle](https://doodle.com/free-poll) to make it easier to collate the information.

#### Remember:

* Allow enough time for discussion and a decision made on the purpose of the meeting
* You need to allow enough time after the meeting to be able act on any decisions if there is a time limit for response to management for instance
* Once you have scheduled your meeting, you need to look at how we can get as many members as possible to want to attend.

### Activity B: What would make you attend a meeting?

In your breakout groups discuss what you could put on the calling notice that would persuade a member to attend the following meeting:

* a meeting about proposed contract changes
* an annual general meeting (AGM)
* a meeting about the submission of the union’s annual pay claim
* a meeting about equality, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace

# During the meeting

The chair of a meeting has the responsibility to keep the structure of the meeting and achieve the reason for the meeting. The chair of the meeting also must control the participants during the meeting. The structure will be to follow the agenda and has three sections:

1. Opening and introductions
2. Business of the meeting
3. Closure

In the **opening and introductions**, the chair should set the scene for the reason for the meeting and what is hoped to be achieved. It helps everyone if to know the name, role and who they are representing at a meeting.

The **business of the meeting** must achieve the following:

* **Discussion,** allow time for all the issues on the agenda to be discussed to the satisfaction of those present
* **Opinions,** everyone attending may have an opinion on an issue, make sure everyone has the chance to speak
* **Objectives,** always work towards the objectives of the meeting
* **Decisions,** try to get the meeting participants to make an agreed decision on each agenda issue.

At the **closure of the meeting**, the chair should recap what has been achieved and thank everyone for their participation

### Opening and introductions

The Chair should want everyone at the meeting to feel comfortable about speaking and putting their point of view. For a meeting to work well, everyone needs to feel welcome, included, and informed.

The chair should personally or organise someone to welcome people as they arrive. Never let a new person sit ignored while everyone else chats.

Make sure everyone has the agenda and any papers - put them on chairs or give them to people at the door. In an online meeting put the document links in the chat function.

The chair should introduce themselves and other speakers at the start of the meeting. If it is a small meeting, ask everyone to introduce themselves. Sometimes it works well to get people to say a bit more about themselves as part of the introductions.

The chair should tell everyone what the meeting is about. Don’t assume everyone knows as much as you do.

### Running the meeting

Every Chair needs some guidelines about how the group wants their meetings to be run. It helps to set out some simple rules - these must be ones everyone accepts and is prepared to work with, or they’ll be useless. These are commonly known as branch by-laws and can be decided at committee and agreed to be adopted at the next branch meeting.

Once there are some rules agreed, it is much easier to chair the meeting, and people are less likely to take it personally when asked not to interrupt or asked to stop from wandering off the topic.

You need to work out the rules that suit your group, but here are some that are commonly used:

* Ask people to speak ‘through the chair’. This means putting their hand up if you want to speak or use the online function and waiting for the chair to say it’s their turn.
* Don’t interrupt other people.
* Stick to the item on the agenda.
* Don’t talk amongst each other.
* Respect other people’s views - don’t groan or pull faces when someone else is speaking. Wait until they’ve finished and then put your point of view calmly and politely.
* Keep contributions short and to the point.
* Start and finish the meeting on time.

#### Remember:

* The chair will need to remind people of the meeting rules at each meeting. There may be new people there, and even regular attendees will forget.
* A group can take a while to get used to the meeting rules they have agreed. If it doesn’t perfectly work first time, keep on trying.
* Prospect has a code of practice that places responsibilities on reps it expects to uphold.
* Act honestly, responsibly and with integrity.
* Communicate respectfully and honestly.
* Treat others with fairness, dignity, and respect.
* Encourage the open expression of views at meetings but accept collective responsibility for all decisions and policies once finalised.
* Not behave in ways that may cause physical or mental harm or distress to another person, such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, assault, bullying, or discrimination or harassment.

The link to this is [Code of Conduct for Prospect Representatives](https://members.prospect.org.uk/library/id/2021/01222)

### Getting through the business

It’s very frustrating for everyone if a meeting doesn’t deal with the business it needs to, or if it drags on for hours. People leave feeling demoralised and irritated and quite possibly won’t come back.

#### Here are a few tips:

* Have a clear agenda with rough timings.
* Someone briefly introduces each agenda.
* Never assume people know what is being talked about. The chair should take time to go over the issues and explain why they are being discussed.
* The chair should always keep an eye on the time and move items on if necessary.
* Stick to the agenda item under discussion. If people, try to raise
* other issues, the chair should acknowledge them, but not get drawn in, eg “That’s an important point which we can come back to later...”
* Stop private conversations and asides as soon as they start.
* The chair should tell the meeting what decisions need to be made and why, eg “I’m going to give this discussion another five minutes and then draw it to a close.”

#### Remember:

* The Chair and other committee members shouldn’t use their position as an opportunity to impose their views.
* The chair is there to facilitate the meeting, not dominate it.
* Listen to other people.
* Make sure all viewpoints get heard - including those you disagree with.
* The chair should not be under-assertive. the people will be looking to the chair and the chair should not be afraid of speaking out.

### Activity C: How would you control the meeting?

What do you think the Chair should do in the following situations?

* Two members are animatedly and problematically discussing an agenda item, the Chair has tried to get them back on the subject once.
* A member is constantly putting their point of view at length on all the agenda items and replying to other members point of view.
* A member makes a derogatory comment to another member.

### Closing the meeting

Closing the meeting the chair should do the following:

* Summarise what has been agreed and the actions to be done by whom
* Date of next meeting
* Thank everyone for attending
* Have some time for a social catch up

# Any questions?

Recap learning outcomes and suggest other training as part of this **‘How to...’** series for branches to develop further.