



## Rough Guide to CWU Conference

### Introduction

Within the CWU, Annual Conferences are the centre of our democracy and, as we are a democratic organisation, it follows they are also the centre of the Union.

For many years CWU Youth has hosted a briefing for new and young delegates on the eve of the Union's Annual General Conference. We also run a "mock conference" at the National Youth Education event each year to give delegates a taste of the real thing.

Now we have decided to produce a guide based on the mock conference exercise. The intention is to give the reader an understanding of the procedures and terms used at conference, its role and importance. Submission of Motions for Conference is dealt with in Letters to Branches that have already been issued.

Although this guide primarily deals with General Conference, all of the procedures and terminology are used for other conferences.

### What it is?

- Under the rules of the Union, the main CWU Conference happens every year usually in late spring or early summer.
- About 900 people attend General Conference: Around 650 voting delegates at any one time, branch and regional officials who attend on an *ex officio* (i.e. - as part of the office they hold) basis, the National Executive Council (NEC), Headquarters support staff and observers and visitors.
- The total cost is dispersed over many budgets but it has been conservatively being estimated at £0.8m per year.
- The CWU has one of the largest conferences of any trade union in the UK.

## **What is it there for?**

- Conference is the sovereign body of the Union when it is in session (the relevant Executive Committee is the sovereign body when it isn't).
- Conference means that branch delegates can hold the Executive and Officers accountable for their actions over the past year.
- Conference makes policy by debating and deciding on motions.
- Conference is an opportunity for the activists of the Union to get together to exchange ideas and debate issues.
- Conference is sometimes seen as a reward - "a week away from the daily grind".

## **Policy Making?**

Policy is made by Conference voting to adopt a motion or proposition (the two words mean the same thing).

### **A. Who can submit motions?**

Motions to General Conference can be submitted by the following:

- Branches
- Regions
- NEC/PEC/TFSE
- Regional Health and Safety committees
- Regional Women's committees
- Advisory Committee conferences
- Youth Conference

### **B. How many can they put in?**

It varies, but currently the allocation for General Conference is:

- Branches - up to 3 motions
- Regions - up to 3 motions , one of which must be submitted by the regional Women's Committee
- NEC - unlimited
- Regional Health and Safety committees - up to 3 policy motions to the Health and Safety section of the agenda
- Regional Women's committees - 1 policy motion (see Regions, above)
- Advisory Committee conferences - 2 policy motions
- Youth Conference – 2 policy motions

The entitlement for other conferences varies.

### **C. What happens after they are submitted?**

- When a motion is submitted, whoever submits it, receipt is acknowledged and then all the motions are looked at by the Standing Orders Committee.
- The Standing Orders Committee will determine whether or not a motion is "in" or "out" of order (i.e. whether or not it can be debated at Conference)

because of how it complies with the rules governing what can be submitted).

- They will then put the motions in order depending on their importance as they assess them.
- They will resolve any contradictions by means of consequential rulings (i.e: the adoption of one motion may mean that another automatically falls, so that we don't adopt conflicting policies on the same subject).
- They will then compile the agenda which will be published and distributed to those attending Conference.

#### **D. What happens to them at Conference?**

- At Conference motions are called for debate according to the timetable set out by the Standing Orders Committee but voted on and agreed by delegates at the start of the Conference.
- When the President calls a motion for debate, the organisation that has submitted the motion must rise to move it.
- The motion must then be seconded which can sometimes be by a delegate from the same organisation, but a more usual convention is that it is by a speaker from a different organisation.
- There is then debate with people being able to make contributions both for and against the motion.
- The Executive will also speak to make sure Conference knows what its view is. There will then be a vote by show of hands or, if it is a particularly close or controversial matter, by a card vote.
- There are only a set number of things that can happen to a motion at Conference. These are:

A. *Carried* - it is adopted as policy

B. *Lost* - it is defeated in the vote.

C. *Not Carried* - the vote is either a dead heat or because of some constitutional issue, it is not adopted despite receiving a majority hand vote.

D. *Falls* - the motion is not able to be debated, and can therefore not be voted upon, because policy on this issue has already been made by virtue of a debate higher up on the agenda.

E. *Remitted* - Conference has agreed to remit the motion to the Executive without voting on it (in other words they are agreeing to leave the matter up to Executive to pursue).

F. *Withdrawn* - motions can be withdrawn either before or at the Conference by the organisation that has submitted them to start with.

G. *Accepted* - There is a procedure which allows the Executive to tell Conference that it is quite happy with the motion and is quite happy to accept it before the debate. If the Executive says it wishes to accept a motion and there is no objection to the Executive doing this before the start of Conference, that motion is treated as if it has been carried without a debate or a vote.

## Card Votes

- Each branch has a booklet of card votes - literally slips of coloured papers with a bar code with the word "For", "Against" or "Abstain" printed on them.
- Either the chair of conference or branch delegates can call for a card vote.
- The Chair can simply announce it.
- For a delegates' call for a card vote to be successful, a set number of delegates must literally call for one when the outcome of a show of hands is declared by the Chair.
- The set numbers vary from conference to conference and are set out in the Standing Orders.
- To call for a card vote, the formal procedure is to stand in your place and call "Card vote please Chairperson". In reality, you leap to your feet calling "caarhvoh!" People will know what you mean.
- When a card vote is taken, no-one is allowed in or out of the conference hall (the Chair will ask the Stewards to close the doors).
- The Standing Orders Committee will walk through the rows of seats collecting the voting slips in ballot boxes.
- The votes are then counted and a vote declared. This usually takes no more than 10 minutes at most.
- Any business affected by the card vote can not be taken until the result of the card vote is declared.

## What happens after Conference?

- All the motions that have been adopted or remitted to the Executive are allocated to various sub-committees or working parties at Head Office.
- Progress is made and a report is given by means of Letters to Branches, by means of updating the Matrix of all the motions that are adopted that can be found on the CWU website.

## Where do motions come from?

- Although constitutionally speaking motions are submitted by the organisations listed above, the terms of the motions that are submitted come from debate, and decisions at meetings of those bodies.
- The debate is initiated by propositions drawn up by individual members and representatives.
- So in a very real sense, the motions that decide the future policy and allocation of resources within the Union come from individual members like you.

## Planning for Conference

- Conference planning is an important issue if you are to make sure that you make the most of the event.
- You should make sure that you are aware of all the relevant deadlines, including the deadline for submission of motions to the Conference (usually about three months in advance) and work backwards from that. Look out for Letters to Branches giving details of dates.

- Schedule meetings so as not to miss deadlines.
- Make sure you have a copy of the Executive's policy position (i.e. whether they are going to support, oppose or accept motions that are on the agenda) which is issued about a week before Conference.
- Make sure you have a copy of the agenda so you can see how issues that are important to your part of the organisation are going to be dealt with and discussed and consider what contribution you want to make to the debate.
- Make sure you know when the agenda and any other documentation are going to be published and that Head Office knows your correct email or postal address.
- Make sure you know the emergency procedure for getting items on the order paper. This is generally that a decision is needed on an issue that could not have been known about prior to the normal closing date.

## **Once you are there**

Once you are at Conference there will be a number of individuals or groups of people who have an important role. These are:

*President/Vice President.* The President and Vice President of the Union operate as a team and Chair Conference. You can tell who the President is because they are the person on the end of the top table usually on a slightly raised podium.

*Executive/Officers.* The members of the Executive and the Officers who support them will also be on the top table. You will see a fair bit of movement on the top table as the people who sit on the front row change depending on what subject is being debated.

*SOC.* The SOC or Standing Orders Committee is the Committee that makes sure Conference runs smoothly. Before Conference they have sifted through the motions and determined which ones meet the criteria for being debated, what order they should be placed in, what time slots should be allocated to what sections. The SOC are elected by the branches whose conferences they are responsible for – General TFSE and Postal. That way they retain accountability.

They sit on the same level as delegates to Conference but at the front either to the immediate left or right of the platform.

*Administration.* The administration of the Union needs to carry on during and in fact especially at Conference. There is an administrative team present to make sure that all necessary documentation and other arrangements are in place.

*Stewards.* Stewards are in place to act as a go-between between the top table, the administration and the Standing Orders Committee. They will ensure distribution of leaflets, provide assistance and answer queries to delegates. They are drawn from local branches and often retired branch activists and report to the head of the administrative team.

*Delegates/Observers/Visitors.* These are people who are probably just like you and are predominantly drawn from branches.

Delegates are people who are on the floor of Conference and have the right to vote.

Observers need to sit in reserved areas of the gallery and are not able to participate in the debate.

Visitors are individuals who are not attached to any branch or regional delegation.

Delegation sizes are spelt out in the rules of the Union. The bigger your branch the more voting delegates you can bring.

## **Standing Orders**

- The Standing Orders are to be found at the front of every Conference agenda. These are the rules of the Conference.
- At first reading they can seem very intimidating, but they are essentially common sense - to make sure people know how to conduct themselves.
- There is a lot of jargon but if you have any questions the Standing Order Committee or any member of the Executive will be happy to answer them.
- Importantly the Standing Orders give details of:
  - The timetable
  - How to move a motion
  - How long you can speak for
  - What to do if you think things are not going right.
- The Standing Orders also contain "points of order". These are procedural devices that can be used if you think things are going wrong.
- Overall the Standing Orders are very much like a road map. It pays to read them immediately prior to Conference.

## **Points of Order**

- Points of Order are procedural devices to try and influence the way on which business is being conducted.
- The things you can raise a point of order on are listed in the Standing Orders.
- You raise a Point of Order by raising your hand in the air from your place on the floor and shouting "point of order".
- The Chair is then required to stop the speaker and ask you to clarify what your point of order is.
- The Chair will then give a ruling which either supports your point of order or rejects it, or he/she may refer it to the Standing Orders Committee or put it to a vote of conference.

## **General Secretary**

- The General Secretary has particular responsibilities when it comes to Conference.
- S/He is the Union's primary spokesperson and therefore will deliver an opening address to Conference.

- S/He will contribute on debates of particular importance.
- S/He will lead the National Executive Council's response to motions as a whole.

## **Other conferences**

As well as the General, Industrial and Section conferences that take place, there are other conferences. These are:

*Rules Revision conference.* Every four years (or exceptionally at other times) the Union has a Rules Revision Conference. At Rules Revision conference, branches and regions can submit up to three proposed rule amendments. These are then debated and are carried if they receive a majority of the votes and a majority in each of the Postal and TFS constituencies.

*Special Conferences.* The Executive has the ability to convene a Special Conference on a matter of particular importance such as, for example, a merger with another Union.

Additionally a Special General Conference may be called at the request of not less than 50% of branches. Branch requests have to come from a properly constituted branch membership meeting.

A Special Conference can only deal with the business for which it has been called.

*Advisory Committees.* All the Advisory Committees have their own conferences but they work in slightly different ways. All Advisory Conferences and the Youth Conference operate on the basis of branch delegations.

All Advisory Committee Conferences have the ability to send two motions adopted at the Advisory Committee conference to General Conference.

The Retired Members and Youth Committee conferences also have the ability to each send two delegates to represent the conference at General Conference.

## **Speaking at Conference**

- If you wish to make a contribution to Conference you need to catch the eye of the Chairperson. This is usually by raising your hand when he/she asks for speakers. It sometimes helps to be holding in your hand something very visible - perhaps a very brightly coloured piece of paper.
- Alternatively, you can try and talk to the Chairperson before the start of the formal sessions of conference to say that you do wish to make a contribution and to ask him/her to keep an eye out for you.
- When you approach the microphone, it is adjustable so make sure it is at the right height for you.
- Position yourself 15cms away from the microphone and speak normally. Do not shout.
- Start by giving your name and the organisation you are speaking on behalf of. If you are a first-time speaker, say that too.

- It can be unnerving hearing your own voice amplified back at you a split second after you have spoken. Try and attend the Eve of Conference briefing session to speak through the microphone so you know what it sounds like.
- Every speaker has a different style in terms of preparation. It may take you a little while to find which one is right for you - either no notes at all, cards with clearly written headings on them, or a fully scripted speech.
- Another reason to look at the lectern before the business of conference starts is that you can have an idea about where you want to put your notes if you are using them. The time set out by the Standing Orders is the maximum time for your contribution.
- You will see what are known as "traffic lights" on the top of the lectern - one green, amber and red light.
- When the amber light shows you have one minute of speaking time left.
- When the red light shows you must conclude your remarks.
- If you carry on beyond some concluding remarks and the red light is showing the Chair will instruct you to leave the lectern and the sound will be cut.
- Remember to give your name and the organisation you are representing when you start your contribution.

### **Finally.....**

- Please let us know what you think of this publication.
- Please also let us know what you think about Conference. Is it the best way to do business? How can it be improved?
- Remember Conference arrangements were not ordained on tablets of stone handed down from on high. They were created to make sure we have a set down understood way of making policy and conducting debate. They are certainly capable of being changed, and it is up to you to decide whether they should be.

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