
BFAWU Branch Secretary Network meeting July 2024

Overview of last meeting

An update was given on the district WhatsApp groups, the retired members work and the importance of keeping members engaged.

Issues round the branches

People joining and pulling out frequently, or when there is a ballot or an issue

There was a discussion about the fact that branches can be quite quiet, people not willing to join in recognised branches, until the last minute when there is an issue, either a grievance or disciplinary situation or because there is a pay ballot happening which can be frustrating. Examples were given of people who had been in the workplace 5 plus years, who have been asked multiple times whether they want to join the union and have declined for various reasons, yet they get into trouble and want to suddenly join.

It was agreed that if someone was new to the workplace, it is different, they may not have been asked to join, or had the opportunity to if the union isn't attending inductions.

The conundrum is how do we deal with this, in recognised branches there can be a position agreed at branch meetings, but in unstructured branches or district ones this can be harder, especially when direct debit members are taken into account. There are different methods in the movement – notice periods between joining and getting support, which can be complicated, unfair and off putting, getting back payments for support, but that doesn't drive continued membership, can be complicated, unfair and off putting and there is the situation where there are organising opportunities signing people up on the back of a situation and supporting them in some cases. It was suggested that these situations should be looked at on a case-by-case basis, decisions being made democratically by the branch.

Members without bank accounts

People who haven't got a fixed address, or a job can struggle to get a bank account, there was a discussion about the advert that was circulated a while ago that mentioned these issues and how people could still get a bank account and whether there was something we as a union, our reps could do to signpost people to the right places to get a bank account in these situations, it was suggested that we look into this as a union to support members who are struggling to get a bank account.

Briefings/Newsletters

Companies are putting out regular briefings and newsletters to their employees updating them about what is going on and coming up, how can we either feed into this, or do something similar to ensure members are kept informed about what is going on in the branch, region and nationally. Could we have sections for shop steward, health and safety and ULR advice, i.e. how to report absence properly, importance of reporting near misses, check courses etc. and link it to looking at the Foodworker too. It may be an idea to have a national template with set information on around credit union for example but space for local updates and regional updates, these can then be put on noticeboards.

QR Codes

Getting them everywhere, with stickers and business cards so people can access the join us page when it suits them rather than just when we ask, though it is still important to ask people to join!

Opportunity to shout about wins (even when they aren't traditional ones!)

When groups of members act on behalf of themselves and win a pay rise, it is important to celebrate this rather than challenge that they haven't gone through reps and encourage them to elect a rep for that group, it is important though to have oversight as branch secretary in case they miss something that could lead to them being worse off in the long run, an example was given where a handful of members approached their employer as they had been given more responsibilities and asked for a pay rise, the employer agreed but their new contract would have taken them out of the collective bargaining unit, this was picked up and challenged by the branch secretary who pushed for them to remain in the agreement pool, but with improved terms and conditions!



Accidents

Members are having accidents and are afraid to put claims in, even if that claim isn't against their employer, we need to be empowering members to put in claims when they have an accident, ensuring the process is clear for them to follow and that expectations are realistic, as the routes are a lot harder now after 14 years of cuts and attacks, but it is important members contact our legal services if they have an accident at work, going to or from work, or more generally because they could be losing out if they don't.

Digital Screens in workplaces

Some companies are moving away from traditional noticeboards to digital ones and we need to have a template structure ready for branches to be able to access and use rather than waiting and potentially losing out on the space.