

Members' Guide to the Annual Delegate Meeting



Usdaw
*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*
www.usdaw.org.uk



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Introduction

Most people belong to a trade union because by joining together everyone is stronger, and so better wages and conditions at work can be obtained. A Union cannot exist separately from its members – the members are the Union, and Unity is Strength.

In Usdaw each member belongs to a branch. Once a year delegates from branches meet together at the Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) to decide what Usdaw should do on behalf of our members. In this way everyone has a right to take part in Union activities and have a say in what the Union does. Usdaw is a democratic organisation and ADM is our Union's democracy in action.

This guide describes the main purpose of ADM, how it is organised and how it carries out its business. It is written for all Usdaw members, but particularly for those attending their first ADM. We hope that it will be a useful guide to ADM and encourage members to play a more active role in our Union.



'Usdaw is a democratic organisation and ADM is our Union's democracy in action.'



What is the Annual Delegate Meeting

The ADM (or Conference as it is also called) is the most important body in the Union.

The Union members who are delegates to the ADM make:

- The Union's Rules – such as the amount of members' weekly contributions.
- The Union's Policies – such as the support for the Living Wage.

The chief job of ADM is to discuss and vote on propositions that have been submitted by the branches of the Union and by the Executive Council (EC). These propositions deal with a variety of issues of concern to members such as part-time work, health and safety, unsocial hours, maternity rights, and international issues to name but a few.

During the 12 months between ADMs the Union is run by the EC. However, the EC is accountable to ADM for its activities. Therefore, in addition to discussing and deciding on propositions, the ADM also considers an Annual Report on the previous year's work. The Annual Report also contains a report on the Union's finances. Delegates can ask questions on any part of the Annual Report.

The task of organising ADM is a difficult one and involves a lot of time, effort and money. The Union's Administrative Services department organises Conference and ensures that it all runs smoothly.



Who Attends ADM?

There are over 400 Union branches. Each branch may elect at least one delegate to attend and vote at ADM.

The number of delegates a branch can send depends on the size of the branch. The Union Rules say there should be:

‘... one delegate from each branch of up to 500 members, one additional delegate up to 1,000 members, and one additional delegate for each complete 500 thereafter.’

Each branch can also send one or more visitors to ADM. The branch pays their fares and expenses. Visitors cannot vote or take part in Conference debates.

ADM is also attended by:

- The President, who is the Conference Chair.
- Members of the Executive Council.
- Members of the Union’s seven Divisional Councils.
- Full-time Officials at National and Divisional level.
- Central Office Officials.

Some of these take part in the debates but none can vote.

Only delegates from branches can vote.



Conference Agendas

ADM delegates receive a copy of the Final Agenda on the first day of Conference.

All branches can take part democratically in drawing up the agenda, as set out below:

1 Each branch may submit up to three propositions for ADM to the EC. Propositions must be signed by the Branch Secretary and Branch Chair and must reach Central Office at least 16 weeks before the start of ADM.

2 The EC considers the propositions and draws up a Preliminary Agenda – to be sent out to branches not less than 11 weeks before the start of ADM.

3 Branches discuss the Preliminary Agenda and each branch may submit up to three amendments to the EC at least six weeks before the start of ADM.

4 The EC draws up an Interim Agenda containing all the propositions and amendments. This is then sent out to branches.

5 Branches discuss the Interim Agenda and sometimes instruct their delegate(s) on how to vote, especially on important issues. This is known as mandating the delegate.

6 Delegates of branches that have submitted propositions or amendments on the same subjects may be called to attend the Standing Orders Committee the day before or during ADM to see if composite propositions can be agreed or amendments incorporated.

7 On the day before ADM begins, the Standing Orders Committee produces the Final Agenda.

8 At ADM delegates consider the Annual Report and debate and vote on the propositions and amendments in the Final Agenda.



Propositions and Amendments

Proposition

This is a formal suggestion put to ADM by a branch to be discussed and voted on.

Amendment

This is a suggested alteration to a proposition.

Resolution

This is a proposition that has been discussed, voted on and passed by ADM. All resolutions become the policy of the Union.

Example

Proposition: 'This ADM calls upon National Officers to negotiate, where possible, the provision of private facilities for use on Union business. Too often, when making phone calls or advising members, Shop Stewards are expected to use facilities which are unsuitable due to lack of privacy. The room could have a dual role for first aid, etc.'

Amendment: Delete all after 'privacy' in line eight.

Resolution: 'This ADM calls upon National Officers to negotiate, where possible, the provision of private facilities for use on Union business. Too often, when making phone calls or advising members, Shop Stewards are expected to use facilities which are unsuitable due to lack of privacy.'

Propositions can be:

- Withdrawn (by agreement of Conference).
- Compositd.
- Voted on and carried.
- Voted on and lost.
- Referred to the EC (no vote is taken – Conference agrees that the proposition should be put to the EC to consider what to do).
- Referred to a Trades Conference.



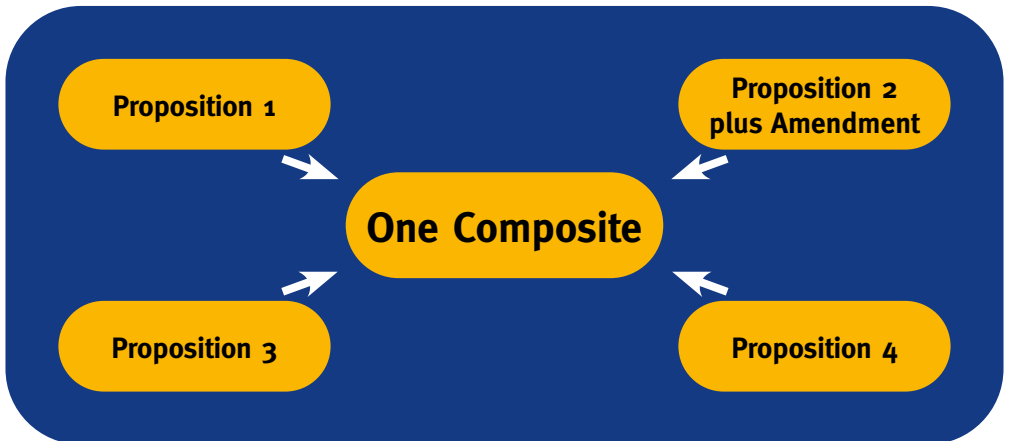
Standing Orders Committee

The Standing Orders Committee (SOC) consists of a Chair appointed by the EC and four members elected by a national vote of the branches.

SOC draws up a timetable for the debates and decides on the order in which they will be taken.

On the first morning of Conference the delegates vote to approve the timetable, which is put to them by the Chair of SOC. Therefore, SOC is accountable to Conference as a whole.

So that Conference can discuss as much business as possible, where there are several propositions and amendments on the same subject these are often combined to form a single composite proposition. This can only be done by SOC with the permission of the branches concerned. For example, four propositions (one of which has an amendment) all on the subject of Union Elections could form one composite as shown below.



The purpose of compositing is to ensure that Conference has time to thoroughly discuss all the important issues put before it by avoiding duplication of debates on the same issue.

The Chair of SOC presents periodic reports to delegates throughout the four days of Conference. Delegates and visitors alike soon get used to the SOC Chair announcing 'Standing Orders Committee, report number X'.

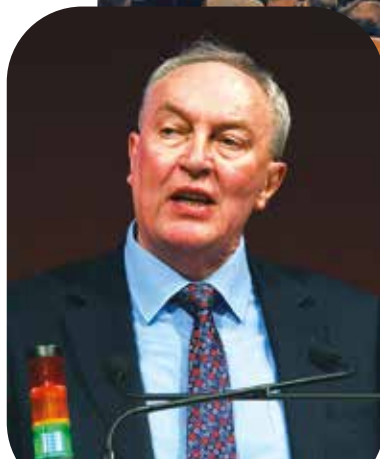
Conference Platform

On the platform sit the President, who chairs Conference, the General Secretary, Deputy General Secretary, Executive and Administration Officer, Central Treasurer and some members of the EC.

The EC is responsible for the business of the Union between Conferences and for carrying out the policy decisions determined by ADM.

Also on the platform may be special guests and fraternal delegates from overseas trade unions.

Throughout Conference, the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, acting on behalf of the EC, speak on propositions and policy documents and reply to debates. However, they cannot vote.



Conduct of Debates

All propositions and amendments must be moved and seconded before they can be debated. The mover (or proposer) is allowed 10 minutes to speak, with each succeeding speaker limited to five minutes. These time limits can be altered by SOC if Conference agrees.

After a debate, the General Secretary or Deputy General Secretary will reply and indicate the EC's view of the propositions and amendments. The mover of the original proposition has the right to reply to the points raised in the whole debate before voting takes place.

Role of the President

The Union's President is the Chair of ADM and gives an address to Conference on the first day.

The President's role as Chair is to ensure that the business of Conference is conducted properly and that propositions are discussed and voted on in an orderly manner. The Chair also gives guidance to delegates on the rules of debate and voting procedures.

Apart from the movers and seconders of propositions, delegates can only speak in a debate with the permission of the Chair and usually have to raise their hand in order to gain the Chair's attention.

They must wait until asked by the Chair before they come to the rostrum on the platform. The Chair always tries to make sure that different views are heard and that a proper debate takes place.



Voting Procedures

Show of hands

After a debate, the Chair puts the proposition to the vote.

If the proposition has an amendment, it is dealt with as follows:

- The amendment is voted on first.
- If it is lost, Conference votes on the original proposition.
- If the amendment is carried, the original proposition, as amended, is put to the vote.

Votes are normally by a show of hands of all delegates.

Card vote

Delegates may request that a card vote is taken in respect of a particular proposition.

A delegate of each branch attending Conference has four sheets of perforated voting cards for their branch.

Two sheets are of one colour, representing a vote **FOR**, and the other two are of a different colour, representing a vote **AGAINST**.

Each of the cards has a barcode that indicates:

- The number of members in that branch at the end of the previous December.
- The number of members paying the political levy.

The President will announce when a card vote is to take place.

First, the President will ask the delegates whose branches wish to vote in favour to tear off one of the **FOR** cards, and hold it up for collection by a Teller.

Once all the **FOR** votes have been collected by the Tellers, the President will ask the delegates whose branches wish to vote against the proposition to tear off one of the **AGAINST** cards, hold it up and have it collected by a Teller.



Nobody may enter or leave the Conference hall whilst a card vote is being taken, and delegates are asked to remain in their seats during the voting process.

The barcode on each card is then read by a machine which calculates the votes **FOR** and **AGAINST**.

If the proposition is about a non-political issue (an 'industrial' vote) the machine counts the total number of branch members.

In contrast, if the proposition is about a political issue, the machine only counts the number of branch members who pay the political levy.

In either case, the proposition is carried or lost on a simple majority.

The position is different for propositions involving a change of the Union's Rules. These require a two-thirds support of the branches voting in order to be carried. For this reason, unless there is clear unanimous support on a show of hands, all such propositions require a card vote.

Business usually continues while the card votes are being counted and the result is announced in due course.



Fringe Meetings

A number of fringe meetings take place throughout ADM.

The first is the Eve of Conference meeting which takes place on the Saturday evening and allows:

- All new delegates and visitors to be informed about how ADM works and the procedures involved.
- Delegates and visitors to meet up and get to know one another.

Politics and Equalities are other regular fringe meetings. They cover issues of real importance to Usdaw members.

At these fringe meetings there are usually guest speakers from various organisations. Other speakers will include Usdaw officials and lay members.

The fringe meetings are interesting and enjoyable and finish in good time to allow delegates and visitors to relax and enjoy some of the social life around ADM.



Key Words Explained

ADM

Annual Delegate Meeting (also known as Conference).

Agenda

A list of topics to be raised at a meeting and the order in which they are to be discussed.

Amendment

A proposed alteration to a proposition.

Annual Report

A report on the previous year's Union activity submitted to ADM.

Card vote

A vote where delegates hand in a card which has on it the total number of voting members in their branch.

Composite

A proposition combining several propositions and/or amendments on the same topic.

Delegate

A person nominated by a branch to represent it at ADM.

Executive Council (EC)

The body governing the Union between ADMs, consisting of the President, the General Secretary, and lay members elected from each of the seven divisions.

Final Agenda

The Agenda containing all the propositions, amendments and composite propositions to be debated and voted on at ADM.

Formally second

Where the seconder of a proposition does not wish to speak in support of the proposition they can simply say 'I formally second'. However, they can speak later in the debate.

Interim Agenda

The Agenda containing all the valid propositions and valid amendments.

Mandating

The process of a branch instructing its delegate(s) how to vote.

Mover

The person who introduces a proposition and speaks on it first.

Point of order

A request to the Chair to interrupt the debate in order to see that it is conducted fairly or in accordance with the rules of debate.

Political levy

A small deduction from members' weekly contributions which is put into the Union's Political Fund.

Preliminary Agenda

The Agenda containing the valid propositions.

Proposition

A formal suggestion put to ADM for discussion and to be voted on.

Referred to EC

Where a proposition is referred back to the EC for further consideration without Conference voting on it.

Resolution

The name given to a proposition that has been discussed, voted on and passed by Conference.

Rostrum

The stand on the platform where speakers address Conference.

Seconder

The person who speaks in support of a proposition after the mover.

Show of hands

A vote where delegates put up their hands to indicate how they are voting.

Standing Orders

The rules and procedures by which meetings are conducted.

Standing Orders Committee (SOC)

The committee set up to ensure that ADM procedures are carried out properly and to report to ADM on matters such as the agenda and timetable for debates.

Teller

A person who collects and counts the card votes.

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