

Guide to Transition from Women's Forums to Women's Branches

Background

As part of implementing recommendations from the Democracy Review, the Labour Party is now in the process of setting up a National Labour Party Women's Organisation and a committee to oversee the organisation, to increase democratic engagement and representation of women in the Party. The National Labour Party Women's Committee will be elected at the next National Annual Women's Conference.

The democratic functions of Women's Forums are being strengthened too, so as of this year, all existing Women's Forums will transition to become Women's Branches. The change in name was decided to create equality within terminology for all parts that make up a CLP and Women's Branches will have increased democratic power, including making nominations for selections.

Update from 6th October NEC meeting

At the full NEC meeting that took place on 6th October 2020, it was agreed that all branch meetings can go ahead and AGMs were allowed to take place – this includes Women's Branches.

Now Women's Branches will be given the green light to conduct formal business online and will be given access to the software to do so, existing Women's Forums can hold AGMs and formally ratify the transition to becoming a Branch. However, where there are women's groups that are not fully fledged Forums, such groups will have to wait in order to become a formal Women's Branch.

The Governance and Legal Unit (GLU) will work with the HQ Stakeholders Team to develop a toolkit for existing Women's Forums to run online AGMs and formalise becoming a Branch.

Requests for NEC Women's Subcommittee Meeting:

- We are seeking input from the NEC Women's Subcommittee to shape the guidance that is included in the toolkit that is sent from the Labour Party.
- We are also seeking the Subcommittee's ideas for how to encourage Women's Forums and women members to view this transition as positive.

Please see the Annex to this paper for the draft guide.

Annex: Women's Forums becoming Women's Branches – A Guide

Why are Women's Forums changing?

As part of recommendations from the Democracy Review, the democratic functions of Women's Forums are being strengthened, with increased democratic rights that put Women's Branches on a par to CLP Branches. This will include Women's Branches being able to nominate for selections and select delegates.

The change in term from 'Forum' to 'Branch' is important too, as this will reflect the equality of all Branches in decision-making and the aim to empower members to play a more active role in the democracy of the Labour Party.

Will Women's Branches operate differently to Women's Forums?

Alongside bolstered democratic functions, Women's Branches will be able to elect a committee to oversee and drive women members' engagement within and beyond the Labour Party.

The CLP Women's Officer isn't the chair of the Women's Branch by default - there needs to be the election of an Executive Committee. These positions should be elected at the next Annual General Meeting for existing Women's Forum.

When can Women's Forums become Women's Branches?

The Labour Party has now given the green light for Branches to organise online meetings and AGMs can be held – this includes Women's Branches. We encourage Women's Forums to organise their AGMs, to formalise the transition and to resume these important meetings for Labour women members.

All existing Women's Forums will automatically become Women's Branches, but there are steps existing Forums need to take to formally transition and finalise the set up. Simply follow this step-by-step guide to complete the transition.

Can unratified Women's groups become Women's Branches?

Unfortunately, at present, any women's groups that aren't ratified Women's Forums won't be able to hold AGMs to become Women's Branches, although we aim to ensure this can happen in due course. The Party will inform members when this is possible.

Can a Women's Branch send delegates to the General Meeting of the CLP?

Yes, your Branch can send delegates to the General Meeting however, the General Meeting must agree changes to the basis of representation within its rules and standing orders. Until the changes are agreed, the Branch should send delegates based on what the Women's Forum has sent previously. Once the new basis of representation is agreed new delegates can be elected if needed.

Steps to transition from a Women's Forum to a Women's Branch

1. Organise an Annual General Meeting (AGM) for your Women's Forum - ensure women members of your CLP are notified at least 14 days prior to the meeting.
2. At the beginning of the AGM, the Branch should constitute the change from Forum to Branch – record this in the minutes.
3. Where possible the following officers should be elected: Chair, Vice chair, Secretary, and Treasurer. The Women's Branch should also appoint two auditors when required and other functional officers can be elected as required.
4. The Women's Branch Executive Committee should consist of the officers, the Women's Officer(s) of any CLP(s) covered by the Women's Branch and, if required, not more than four other members.
5. After the AGM, the Branch Executive Committee should notify their Regional Office about the transition – the change will be signed off by the Regional Director for your region and the National Women's Officer for the Labour Party.
6. AGMs should be held annually to elect Executive Committee members.