

EQUITY

MOTIONS AT EQUITY CONFERENCE

WHAT IS A MOTION?

A motion is a formal proposal from your committee or branch.

Motions usually ask for something to happen. Motions are normally on general policy. They can be used to create or change union policy, or to highlight/emphasise ongoing work. They may also be used to start the Rule change process, which is more complex and governed by the Rules (Rule T2).

All motions must be within the union's aims and powers (Rules B and C).

WHY ARE MOTIONS IMPORTANT?

Passing motions is an important part of how democratic organisations like Equity make decisions. For example, if your committee or branch believes that Equity should campaign for increased arts funding, you might frame a motion that calls on the Council to do that. If the conference agrees, a campaign will be launched.

HOW DO I WRITE A MOTION?

Motions usually call for some action from Equity, so the key to writing a good motion is to work out what you want Equity to do.

Remember, Equity is its membership. Although each constituent part of the union has defined roles and responsibilities, when writing a motion, authors should be careful not to speak about the union as if it is something separate from the membership of which they are a part.

Speak to others in your branch/committee to get their input, and the staff members who support that branch/committee. They may have more information, e.g. the history of a particular issue within Equity, which may strengthen your motion. It's also a way of testing the waters to see how well your motion will be received by others and to get support.

Opinions differ on how much of the argument in favour of your motion to include, but your motion should not be a speech – if the motion is too long or complicated your main proposal may get missed. It is a good idea to include some brief justification for the action you are calling for, and to leave the rest for your speech at conference.

We don't prescribe the format a motion must take. However, one format that is popular and very clear is called "notes, believes, resolves". For example:

This conference notes:

- *You would then include one or more bullet points setting out the key facts relevant to your motion. E.g. "the arts councils of the UK have been responsible for cuts totalling X% of funding over the past 10 years".*

This conference believes:

- *You would then include one or more bullet points setting out your views on these facts. E.g. "cuts to arts funding are detrimental not only to members, but also to the whole UK economy".*

This conference calls on Council to resolve to:*

1. *You would then include a numbered list of clear actions you want Equity to take to address the issue. E.g. "campaign for the reversal of funding cuts from all the UK arts councils over the past 10 years."*

*Motions should call on the Council to take action, rather than committing to take action themselves.

DOES EVERY MOTION HAVE TO BE ABOUT TAKING A PARTICULAR ACTION?

No, it is also in order to put forward a motion that expresses a proposed policy position. For example: "This committee/branch believes that Arts Council England is not fit for purpose." It does not propose action, but it clearly expresses a position.

HOW DO I PROPOSE A MOTION?

If you have an idea you want your committee or branch to support you should send it to either your committee or branch secretary in advance of the meeting. Motions may also arise out of discussions at committees and branches (as long as the issue concerned is on the agenda for the meeting).

When it's time to discuss your motion at the meeting, the chair will first ask if there is a seconder – one other person who will support your motion. If there is no seconder, your motion will not be discussed.

Once your motion has been seconded, the chair will ask you to propose your motion – which means explaining why you think it is a good idea. Your seconder will then be asked if they want to add anything in support. After that there will be a debate open to any member of the committee/branch.

If some members have opposed your motion, you will get what is called "a right of reply" before a vote is taken. This will allow you to answer any questions or concerns about the motion that have come up in debate. If a majority votes to select your motion, it will be sent to the Conference Business Committee. This is the body responsible for reviewing motions before conference.

HOW ARE MOTIONS FROM BRANCHES AND COMMITTEES SELECTED?

Industrial and equalities committees can send one motion each to the conference.

Branches and national committees can send one motion (or two motions in the case of branches in London) to their national/regional meeting. Your national/regional meeting will then select one motion (or two motions in the case of the London region and the East and South East region) to go to the conference on behalf of that nation/region.

WHAT DOES “OUT OF ORDER” MEAN?

All Equity meetings are governed by their own Standing Orders and the Rules of the Union. A motion which conflicts with any of these may be ruled “out of order”. For example, there is a Rule which states that motions must be no longer than 250 words. If your motion is 251 words long it is “out of order” and therefore will not be accepted for debate.

Similarly, if your motion is not about general policy or a Rule change then it will be deemed to be out of order.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A MOTION IS CARRIED?

Any motion passed by a two-thirds of those voting for and against at conference is union policy, and so binding on the Council to undertake. In an exceptional circumstance, the Council has the power to submit the motion to a referendum of all members. In such a case, the motion only becomes binding if confirmed by the referendum (Rule T15).

Any motion which is passed at conference but not by a two-thirds majority goes to the Council for consideration. The Council is not bound and can make whatever decision it thinks right (Rule T16).

WHAT HAPPENS IF A MOTION IS NOT CARRIED?

The simple answer is nothing. Defeating a motion does not make policy. If your motion calling for support for the BBC licence fee is not carried, it does not mean that Equity now opposes the BBC licence fee. Only a motion calling for Equity to oppose BBC licence fee could achieve that.

THE GOLDEN RULES

Try to make your motion clear, realistic and achievable.

Try to also look at what the union is doing already about the issue you care about, to avoid repeating current policy or campaigns that already exist. However, motions can be used to emphasise or develop current work and campaigns.

ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS?

If you have further questions about motions at conference, you can either contact your branch official or committee secretary, or the conference organiser Sam Winter: swinter@equity.org.uk