

UNISON 2026 AGM NEWSLETTER

Down Education Branch

Down Education Branch AGM 2026

It's about You, Your Branch, Your Say and Your Vote. Our Branch AGM is the single most important meeting of the year. Every year UNISON requires its branch officers and stewards to stand for re-election. The AGM is your opportunity to have a say in how the branch is run and who will represent you in 2026. Please come along and bring a work colleague. It will still be a great opportunity to meet with other members and UNISON stewards and to find out how UNISON has been active on your behalf during the year. If you would like to become more active in UNISON: Representing your colleagues or becoming involved in solidarity or welfare work, please contact your branch.

AGM MEETING DATES 2026

Friday 6th Feb

7- 9pm

Rabbit Rooms, Bangor

Friday 20th Feb

7-9pm

Murphy's Bar, Downpatrick

Friday 27th Feb

7-9pm

Beechlawn Hotel, Dunmurry

***Refreshments and complimentary
treats will be provided ***

UNISON

**NJC pay award must
protect us against cost of
living pressures**

Throughout this year our membership employed by the EA have kept up significant pressure through pursuit of pay improvement. The 2025 pay offer was a 3.2% pay increase across all pay points. We worked with UNISON Centre to develop consultation materials for members in NI to highlight the effect of the offer on the pay scales that apply for education support services staff employed by the EA following the Pay and Grading Review. The UNISON NJC Committee of the Local Government Service Group Executive decided to advise members to reject the offer as part of a consultation in May and June. Whilst UNISON's consultation on the 2025 pay offer resulted in members voting to reject the offer, turnout in the consultation gave very little prospect of UNISON being able to conduct a successful industrial action ballot in England and Wales. Therefore, the NJC Committee sought a settlement of the pay round so that members could receive the pay uplift as soon as possible. Trade Union Side agreed to inform the employers that UNISON wished to settle the 2025 pay round. Funding to implement the pay settlement was secured to implement the 3.2% pay increase on all pay points. In September, EA employed staff received their pay uplift and backdated pay to 1st April. UNISON's NJC Committee is currently in the process of developing a timely 2026 pay claim.

Update your details

Changed name, moved house or have a new number?

Update your details using our online form at:

[https://www.unison-ni.org.uk/update-your details](https://www.unison-ni.org.uk/update-your-details) or
contact membership services on 028 90270190.

Not yet a member? JOIN UNISON TODAY!
Call **02890270190** or go to **www.unison-ni.org.uk/join**

Integrated and Voluntary Grammar Schools

Significant progress continues to be made in securing better outcomes for our members across Integrated and Voluntary Grammar Schools. The key goal is to secure a regional negotiating forum for UNISON members on their pay, terms and conditions. This will require Ministerial support and policy direction from the Department. We have been successful in the growth in recruitment of members and identification of new stewards outlined elsewhere recognition agreements with five schools have been secured, with Joint Negotiating Forums established. Our overarching goal remains to secure a regional negotiating forum for members across integrated and voluntary grammar schools on their pay, terms and conditions. This will require direct engagement with the Education Minister and the Department of Education and we are currently planning our next steps in this campaign.



Check out the full list of
UNISON College courses at
this URL:

<https://shorturl.at/KocGt>

Membership services

there
for you

Members experiencing financial and emotional difficulties can contact UNISON Welfare (There for You), which provides confidential advice and support services for members and their dependants.

<https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/there-for-you/>



Receive free legal advice and support on non employment matters from Thompsons, our specialist employment solicitors

<https://www.unison.org.uk/get-help/services-support/legal-services/>

Quilter

Request free expert financial advice from Quilter Financial Advisers, UNISON's financial services partner

<https://benefits.unison.org.uk/home/money/lighthouse-financial-advice/>

abbeyautoline

AbbeyAutoline offers discount for UNISON members.

<https://www.abbeyautoline.co.uk/>



UNISON is the largest union for Support Workers

Throughout 2025, our bargaining team despite the funding challenges in education, have continued working to protect and secure employment rights and health and safety standards for our support services members working in classroom assistant, school transport, cleaning, catering, estates and youth service roles. Our lay team participates directly in all the EA bargaining directorates - operational services (estates, catering, cleaning, transport), children & young people's services, education (curriculum and services), finance and HR. Key bargaining issues include: development of a new drivers' manual,

- review of retainer fee,
- essential car users allowance,
- restructures in Grounds Maintenance and the Education Welfare Service,
- implementation of Special Educational Needs reform – Local Impact Teams (LITS),
- the need for a framework recognition agreement with Voluntary Grammar schools and the ever-growing integrated sector (all individual employers),
- new flexi-time and TOIL policies,
- resources for EA youth services and,
- implementation of the Brazil and Agnew judgements on the calculation of annual leave for term time workers and payment of holiday pay respectively.

Earlier this year UNISON received information from the EA that out of 21,815 classroom assistant posts, 14,930 (68%) are temporary. Of those workers on temporary contracts, 2,727 have been employed by the EA in the same post for more than 4 years. Classroom assistants and the wider education support services workforce should not be in precarious employment with the associated risks of financial insecurity. Work has begun with the EA on urgently addressing the numbers of staff on temporary contracts. Further to this, work has also commenced on the development of a new classroom assistant employment model.

CALLING ALL CLASSROOM ASSISTANTS

We are building a public campaign to demand a better deal for classroom assistants and we need your help.

Unison is campaigning for respect and recognition for the classroom assistant workforce, in an education system that values classroom assistants, protects their rights as workers and supports the development of the profession. We want all children to have the support they need to access their right to an education and to reach their full potential, a vision that cannot be achieved without classroom assistants.

We have made real progress over recent years through negotiations and collective action, but we need the public and politicians to support the changes we want to see. This means demanding progress that is:

- ✓ Timely – Classroom assistants have waited long enough for fair treatment
- ✓ Resourced – the NI Executive must fund the changes necessary to bring about real change for classroom assistants
- ✓ Accountable – we all have a role to play in speaking up for classroom assistants and making sure they get a better deal

Our Classroom Assistants Good Work Charter will be launching at the start of 2026, with social media campaigning, events and political lobbying to follow. If you would like to get involved in shaping the campaign or kept up to date with campaign activities, please talk to your branch representatives.

Branch Contacts

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