

GMB Congress explained

What is GMB Congress?

Congress is the supreme policy making authority of the GMB trade union, it's sovereign governing body. It deals with motions from GMB Branches, Regional Committees and the Central Executive Council (CEC). It also deals with other issues such as CEC special reports and financial statements. It is governed by GMB rules and is the arena where GMB members can set or change GMB policy, find out what is happening in the union as a whole, participate in debates, listen to guest speakers, attend fringe meetings, and of course, enjoy the social side of getting together with members from your Region and the union as a whole. Congress is where the General Secretary, Regional Secretaries and National Officials report back to the members on the National and Regional work of the union over a year and the policies and actions taken by the union as set out in the General Secretary's Report. Congress is more than just speeches; it's also a great opportunity to network with others, share ideas about organising and campaigning and to find out more about key issues in depth.

How often does it take place?

Congress meets in June each year. The venue for each Congress is decided two to three years in advance by the Central Executive Council (CEC) which takes into consideration the costs, facilities and accessibility offered by a range of proposed venues. What happens at Congress? Through their Branches, lay delegates put forward issues in the form of motions for the union to debate and develop its future policy on union organisation, economic, political and social matters. Congress does not deal with industrial matters related to negotiations as these are the remit of Section Conferences which take place every two years. From 2008 and in alternate years thereafter in line with the Rulebook, Section Conferences have been incorporated into Congress week, but remain separate from the Congress programme and in alternate years Rules Revision Congresses

take place. It is only in these Congress years that GMB rules can be changed by rule amendments submitted by GMB Branches and Regional Committees. However, the CEC may present rule amendments in any Congress year. Following the adoption of RA323 by Congress 2013, the National Equalities Conference will agree a motion to be debated at Congress and this will be included in the Preliminary Agenda.

Who attends Congress?

Delegates

Delegates from the nine GMB Regions attend to represent their members on the basis of 1 delegate per 1,500 members of the Region's membership at the end of the previous September. From 2011, 90% of delegates are elected by Branches and the Region's remaining 10% of delegates will be appointed by the Regional Committee to ensure that the Regional Delegation properly reflects the balance of the Regional membership in respect of industry, geographic spread, ethnicity, gender, disability, youth and sexual orientation. To be a delegate, you will have to have been a member for 53 weeks and have been nominated by your Branch and your name put forward to your Region for election or appointment. In line with the Rulebook, nominations from Branches close on 31 December and lists of candidates are distributed by Regional Offices to Branches during the third week in January and Branches' votes must reach the Regional Office by 28 February.

The President, Vice-president and General Secretary The President chairs Congress and is assisted by the Vice President. The General Secretary has the right to speak on any Congress business.

The Central Executive Council (CEC) The CEC attend Congress and can speak to give the union's position on motions.

GMB officials All Regional Secretaries and National Officials attend Congress, as well as some Regional Officials.

Guests and speakers Invited politicians, campaigners, international speakers, as well as media, press and invited visitors attend Congress.

GMB staff National Office staff who are involved in Congress preparations attend Congress to provide support for the platform and Congress delegates via the Press Office, Congress Office and Information Desk.

PA's to Regional Secretaries attend to support their Regional Secretary and Regional Delegation.

Comments from first time delegates to Congress

"It was my first Congress and I presented my first speech on the afternoon of Congress on the first day and support from fellow delegates and GMB"

"As a first time delegate I found everyone friendly and polite from all Regions. Everyone was helpful and made you feel very welcome"

"As a first time delegate, I have found it to be a very informative and enjoyable experience, and I shall go back to my branch re-energised for the struggles we're facing in the coming weeks and months."

"First time and enjoyed it."

"This was my first time and found how friendly everyone was, especially to someone like me who was a first time delegate."

"Truly inspirational and really enjoyed my first Congress"

"I spoke for the first time and hope to improve and speak again on other issues".

"Gives you a lift and makes you feel part of a great organisation."

"As a new delegate I was made to feel welcome right from the start"

"I enjoyed being a first time delegate – I received a lot of support which made my first speech easier"

"Feel a lot more confident after attending this first Congress as a delegate, everyone was so supportive"

"For a first time delegate daunting to begin with, also nervous and unsure what to expect, but as it progressed, with help from fellow activists became more confident"

"This was my first Congress and I found the organisation helpful and the stalls very interesting. The debates and motions I found very useful and will enable me to take some fresh ideas back to our branch meetings. There were several points that provided a rallying of hope that inspired me and gave the confidence needed to return home for a continued fight"

"First time at Congress, at first confusing but with help from others understanding then leading to a very interesting and enjoyable experience. I will try to attend next Congress, and take a more active part in this."

"For a first time delegate daunting to begin with, also nervous and unsure what to expect, but as it progressed, with help from fellow activists became more confident"

Other comments

"I was pleased at the number of first time delegates the richness of the motions debates and inspirational addresses. The support from the Region and Congress for speakers"

"The passion of lay representatives from all areas of the GMB and the friendships formed over the course of the week."

"Proud to have been able as a young lay member, to make the policy (in a small part) of my union. Wrote, moved and voted for a motion of my own making. Also proud of a General Secretary that recognises Young Members' contributions."

"All the fantastic first time delegate speeches, good future for the union"

"It was a shot in the arm. First time delegates and speakers were supported and encouraged to speak and contribute"

"An excellent experience to be part of the democracy of a great Union"

"I'm more aware of issues nationally, have more passion and feel valued"

"Excellent organisation, good friendly reception and a very enjoyable experience"

"Very enjoyable, illuminating and plenty to think about to take back and discuss with shop stewards and members"

"Educational and inspirational"

"Really enlightening"

"Enjoyable and inspiring"

"Uplifting"

"I have made a lot of new friends and learnt a great deal on how the Union works"

"The fringe meetings were varied, interesting and informative"

"I thought I was motivated before Congress and my motivation for the movement has now trebled. The support from everyone has been overwhelming and it is an honour to be part of this movement"