

The Branch Chair

This is probably the most influential position in your branch, as the chair is the person around whom the branch revolves. She is usually the public face of the NCT in her area, and her actions and attitudes could make the difference as to whether the branch thrives or fails.

What Does A Branch Chair Do?

Chairs really do need to know how committee work and procedures can make a branch work well. Gaining that knowledge will make the chair and the branch more confident. A major duty of the chair is to motivate others by being optimistic (although realistic) and enthusiastic. A successful chair will know the rules and make sure that everyone plays by those rules. She needs to have, or be willing to obtain, a good knowledge of the NCT, and our Aims, Vision and Mission. This knowledge can help the branch to make the right decision. The chair needs to be:

- supportive
- a facilitator
- a good listener
- discreet
- good on the telephone
- an organiser
- a good communicator
- able to delegate
- a team builder

The chair is the focal point of the branch, and so the responsibilities are quite broad.

The chair must:

- support branch committee members by listening to individuals
- know what each team or sub-committee is doing and pass that information on as appropriate
- be the motivator
- organise training for committee members when necessary
- represent the branch at area, regional and UK activities
- report back to the branch decisions taken at area, regional and UK level
- ensure that annual plans are produced, reviewed, and implemented

One of the main functions of the chair is to ensure that branch and Annual General Meetings are run effectively and are likely to attract volunteers. In this role the chair must:

- draw up branch meeting agendas, together with the secretary
- run branch meetings and keep them to time
- ensure that the meetings are focussed and kept brief
- involve everyone at meetings
- organise, publicise, and run the branch Annual General Meeting (AGM) and, in certain circumstances, an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)
- be one of the joint signatories to branch cheques
- ensure that everyone is aware of decisions taken by the branch committee, particularly when a decision involves individuals

As branch chair, you may be called upon to be a spokesperson for the NCT, and to represent the NCT locally to:

- the local press
- health professionals
- Community Health Councils
- Maternity Services Liaison Committees
- local health authorities and
- Primary Care Groups

Working with the branch press officer, the chair may often be asked to represent the branch by talking to local journalists, either newspaper, television or radio. You will find elsewhere in this pack (THE BRANCH PRESS OFFICER) lots of information on how to deal with the press. However, if you ever feel that you may have a problem with the media please do not hesitate to ring the NCT press office, as they are always there to help and guide where necessary.

It is important to remember that the chair is not alone. Apart from other branch members, who should work as a team, the chair will have the support of the area rep, who works closely with the regional co-ordinator. Whenever you need advice, help or just an understanding voice on the end of a telephone, the area rep and the regional co-ordinator will be there for you.

In addition there will probably be a previous chair to talk to, or a chair from a neighbouring branch. You can get to know chairs from neighbouring branches by going along to area meetings, which are arranged regularly by your area rep. You can talk to other members of the regional team, who will have particular knowledge and expertise (for example the regional treasurer or the regional fundraising co-ordinator). You can also talk to your regional trustee and the staff at UK Office on a variety of subjects. In addition, there are non NCT bodies, e.g. your local Volunteer Bureau. All of these people have either done what you are doing now, or have knowledge about how the NCT works. The other thing they have in common is that they do not mind sharing this knowledge. Don't hesitate - if in doubt, ask for advice.

You will also find it very helpful to make use of the training available. You should complete NCT Foundation Training (modules 1, 2, 3 and 4), and chairs' workshops are organised once or twice a year in each region. You could pick up some good tips by going along to meetings run by your local Community Health Council, local council or PTA. Read old branch minutes, as they are often a good source of on the job training. Going to NCT area and regional meetings provides valuable insight and feedback from other chairs.

Delegation is very, very important. Branches can only be successful if people learn how to delegate. The chair should manage the branch and not try to do everything herself.

- don't wait for volunteers - many people are pleased to be asked but may not have stepped forward themselves
- ask people to take on specific tasks
- encourage and thank volunteers
- don't ask individuals to take on too much
- learn to recognise what people are good at and allocate the right kind of tasks to them
- learn to recognise when someone, no matter how willing, has taken on more than she can chew
- understand and apply team building skills
- be there for members and volunteers
- be firm when necessary

Being the branch chair can be hard work, and often challenging, but always worthwhile. The chair makes the branch tick and her work is really appreciated.