

Union Learning Representatives

UNISON

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UNISON

- UNISON is Britain's biggest trade union with more than 1.3 million members, who work in the public services, for private contractors providing public services and in the essential utilities.
- Last year UNISON recruited 155,000 new members - 425 per day.
- We work to protect and improve the public services, win equal pay and employment rights for everyone, improve safety in the workplace and end discrimination and harassment at work.

UNISON and Lifelong Learning

- UNISON has a long history of developing learning opportunities and led the way in promoting the need for workplace learning.
- UNISON recognises that training can improve individuals' prospects both economic and social.
- Over two thirds of UNISON's members are women, many come from ethnic minorities, some have extra difficulty accessing learning through work - part time, shift workers, home workers and freelance workers. Others have jobs without a base or obvious focus for learning activity - construction workers, drivers, for example.

UNISON's Structure

- **Branch (local members)**

ULRs promote lifelong learning to colleagues, and along with branch officers, negotiate Learning Agreements and organise workplace learning partnerships with their employer

- **Region (regional staff)**

Regional Learning & Development Organisers, promote a culture of learning within the region, support ULRs, develop links with employers and providers, provide information to branches and regional staff. Regional Education Officers provide activist training.

- **National level (national staff)**

The Learning and Organising department co-ordinates national Union Learning Fund initiatives including 'Establishing a culture of learning', works with Skills Sectors and national employers on learning policies, lobbies government on adult education policy, disseminates information to regional staff.

Social Care & Health Skills Escalator

Series of courses aimed towards a social care and health degree.

- Entry level literacy & numeracy
- Learning for you - study skills course
- K100 1st term of Open University Degree in Social Care & Health

ULR Roles and Responsibilities

Core Activities

- Source of information
- Confidential support
- Practical Support
- Advocate for learning
- Self Development

Strategic Role

- Learning needs survey
- Partnership learning projects
- Negotiate a Learning Agreement
- Promote equality of access to training within the organisation
- Raise awareness of skills for life issues

Spread the Word

Become a Union Learning Representative

UNISON's approach to learning is that getting involved in learning can help branches to recruit new members and activists.

As a Union Learning Rep (ULR) you would not only be helping fellow members and the union you will also enhance your own personal development and learning.

Union Learning Reps have the same rights as stewards and health and safety reps and work alongside them in increasing the number of UNISON branches.

It's easy to get involved!

You can be a ULR if you are interested in:

- Learning with UNISON
- Helping out others who are getting back into learning
- Getting more involved in UNISON
- Working with others in your branch to get your employer to think about training opportunities for UNISON members
- Raising awareness about the learning needs of you and your colleagues
- Helping involve more people in your branch



It's rewarding and interesting!

As a UNISON ULR you will:

- Be part of a regional and national network of over 2500 ULRs involved in a new and developing area of union activity
- Spread the word about UNISON's fantastic learning courses for members, and support and encourage potential learners
- Help build your branch
- Have time off to attend accredited training, with lots of opportunities for further development; and you don't need any qualifications to get started.

You'll be supported

As well as the giving ULRs opportunities for training and development UNISON offers support:

- By encouraging branches to set up branch education teams
- At regional level, with dedicated staff supporting organising around learning with regular networking activities and events
- At national level, with regular publications, new training opportunities and through the Union Learning Fund Establishing a Culture of Learning project.

See the back for more information →

Benefits to Employees

The ULR is a colleague who:

- they know already
- is independent,
- will treat everything they say in confidence if necessary
- gives advice in the familiar surroundings of the workplace
- provides information about learning opportunities *both* inside and outside of the workplace
- is a properly trained and informed advocate for their learning needs and interests with the employer
- is trained to work with providers of learning to make sure courses meet the needs of workplace learners
- provides reliable information about everyday training matters as well as new and existing learning and skills initiatives such as Basic and Key Skills, NVQs, foundation degrees and other professional qualifications

Benefits to the Union

- The ULR role attracts new people into union activism because it is less confrontational than the steward role.
- The ULR role attracts a wider range of activists than the steward role - particularly women, so makes the Union more representative.
- ULRs encourage a culture of learning within the union as well as within the organisations they work for.
- ULRs provide a way to engage positively with employers
- ULRs recruit around learning.

Benefits to the Employer

- add value to employers' efforts to develop their workforce;
- help overcome employee resistance to taking up learning opportunities;
- provide a means by which those who are unwilling to approach their employer or manager can get advice about training;
- help ensure that training providers meet the needs of workers, for instance by arranging provision which is accessible to part-time, shift workers, etc.;
- They help identify where learning needs are;
- They provide a source of expertise and input to action on training and organisations that have a weak training culture or where there is no dedicated training manager. (*Dept for Employment & Learning. Preliminary Regulatory Assessment 2002*)
- improve morale, skill utilisation and better employment relations(*UK Employment Act 2002 Chapter 22*)

ULRs and Change Management: Working Together

In the ADKAR Model of change management: staff must achieve five building blocks in order for change to be realized successfully.

- **Awareness** – of why the change is needed
- **Desire** – to support and participate in the change
- **Knowledge** – of how to change
- **Ability** – to implement new skills and behaviors
- **Reinforcement** – to sustain the change

Awareness

ULRs can make managers aware of what change is needed in training

Managers can make ULRs aware of why change is needed and what training will be made available

Desire

ULRs can spread enthusiasm to the shop floor.

Managers can spread desire for changes to other management levels.

Engaging with ULRs helps employers to send out positive messages about changes, as long as these changes are backed up with training.

Knowledge

Learning helps make workers more flexible, able to take on new tasks and be more open minded to change, it helps to overcome resistance and to 'unfreeze' people in the face of change.

Managers and ULRs need to consult on what training staff will need in order to change

Ability

ULRs encourage colleagues to take up training for personal and professional development

Reinforcement – to sustain the change

- ULRs feed back problems around training to managers
- ULRs provide ongoing encouragement for learners

Conclusions:

- ULRs can improve relations between the union and the employer by focussing on the positives of improving training and uptake of training in the organisation.
- ULRs can improve unions' ability to change by encouraging new activists from under-represented groups.
- ULRs can improve unions' ability to change by encouraging a culture of learning within the union as well as within the employer organisation.
- ULRs can help colleagues to deal with change by enabling improved skills and confidence to take on new roles.
- ULRs are well placed to support change management if there is honest, open communication from the employer.