

# A CAMPAIGN GUIDE TO RECRUIT WORKPLACE REPS

# BE THE REASON

*Unions lift wages for non-union members by creating a higher prevailing wage. Even if you aren't a union member, your pay is influenced by the strength or weakness of organised labour.*

*The presence of unions sets off a wage race to the top.  
Their absence sets off a race to the bottom*

*-Eric Liu*

# BE THE REASON WHY THINGS GET BETTER

Salaries, training and pensions are better in workplaces with on-site union representatives

Sign up to become a workplace representative  
[eastmidlands.unison.org.uk](http://eastmidlands.unison.org.uk)



# FOREWORD

**UNISON** Reps are the face and the voice of our union in the workplace. They are leaders, advisors, agitators, and organisers. When members in the workplace need someone to turn to for help and assistance it's the UNISON rep who is always on hand. It doesn't just mean the elected workplace steward role but encompasses Health and Safety, Union Learning Reps and Equality Reps.

It's an old adage but one that's true, that a unions power is measured in large part by the strength of its members. Our success will be measured against our ability to build strong communities of workers around a common agenda. To protect and improve pay and conditions of service, to create safe workplaces free from discrimination, and to design workplaces where people feel appreciated and respected.

None of this happens by luck. It's no game of chance. The conditions for strong and powerful unions start with building blocks of workplace democracy. UNISON Reps make this happen, whether it's their role in recruiting workers into the union, taking forward issues to the employer, keeping people informed through report backs, or helping to set the unions priorities. This is the important role that Reps play in helping to build a powerful union.

It's not all about falling out with the boss and arguing with employers. The most effective UNISON Reps understand the importance of building effective relationships with managers and employers, as well as with members. They're top-notch negotiators who use everything at their disposal to win agreements. And they're often respected in equal measure by managers and their members.

There are lots of our members who have the potential to be great UNION Reps. Our campaign 'Be the Reason' aims to identify and unlock that potential. A new generation of UNISON Reps ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow.

In this booklet you will find useful hints and tips on how to develop a successful plan to build more UNISON Reps in your Branch. We've produced some helpful materials that will get you started with a campaign, and we've included a reminder of the resources that are already available to support new and existing Reps.

I have also asked our regional staff to provide hands on support to assist you in planning and delivering your campaign.

As we emerge from pandemic let's make 2022 a year when our Union built back bigger.

*Kind Regards*  
Chris Jenkinson, Regional Secretary

# STEP ONE

## KNOWING YOUR STARTING POINT

The starting point in any plan is to know your strengths and weaknesses. Map your existing Reps and prioritise areas to target your campaign. Workplaces with live issues, for example, an impending business reorganisation, service closures, or changes to rotas often provide the ideal opportunity to appeal to those members motivated to try to help resolve the issue for them and their fellow workers. The objective is to plan a campaign with early wins, don't be too ambitious or plan for more than can be achieved.

## **STEP TWO**

### **RECRUITING TOMORROW'S REPS TODAY**

We often talk to workers about joining the union, but less frequent are discussions with existing members about becoming a Rep. Remember, existing members have already made a value judgement in favour of joining the Union. Becoming more involved has probably never crossed their mind, and the entry routes to becoming a rep are not always clear, so a targeted conversation with existing members in a particular workplace has the potential to reap rewards.

## **STEP THREE**

### **YES, I CAN DO THAT**

Use your branch communications to celebrate the work that Reps do on behalf of union members. Telling stories is important; it helps people understand the role and allows them to visualise what they could achieve. It's important too, to show that being a Rep isn't entirely about doing things for other people. Reps have access to training to develop skills and gain access to employer structures and experiences which allow opportunities to broaden their understanding of the organisation in which they work.

## **FUNFACTS**

**Union workers  
get paid around  
6.5% more than  
workers in similar  
non-unionised  
workplaces**

Based on average pay, that's an  
extra £12,800 every decade

## **STEP FOUR**

### **REMOVING THE BARRIERS**

Make the journey to becoming a Rep hassle free. If members must jump through hoops to make the extra commitment, they simply won't do it. Think about your branch rules and procedures and strip out any unnecessary barriers to keep the delay from interest to activism to an absolute minimum. A simple form that can be returned by email with a quick welcoming response will make the greatest impact.



## **STEP FIVE**

### **TOGETHER WE DO SO MUCH**

Trade Unions are all about the collective, people working together using their strength in numbers to bring about positive change on a shared agenda. The same foundations on which union organisation is built should be used to support the way we manage networks of Union Reps. Reps want to feel part of a community of people who are experiencing the same pressures and have the same interests. Make sure there is time for departmental Reps to meet with support from the branch.

It's often easier to recruit new reps as part of a campaign in the workplace. It will give members a real issue that they can identify with, and a cause that they will want to rally behind.



## Case Study

**JAMIE GODBER, SECRETARY  
NOTTINGHAM HOSPITALS AND ALLIED SERVICES**

Since first becoming a UNISON activist in 2015, Jamie has now found himself as the voice of almost 4000 members at one of the region's most diverse and challenging branches.

### **What's your biggest achievement?**

I am most proud of the team I have assembled. When the Trust cut back my facility time, they suggested I find more reps, so I did exactly that and recruited around 20 new activists. The team I put together makes up, what I believe to be the youngest and most diverse committee in the region. Of the 5 key officers in the branch (secretary, x2 assistant secretaries, treasurer, and chair) 80% are women, 60% are Black, 80% are disabled, at least 40% are LGBT+ and 60% are under the age of 30.

### **What are you hoping to achieve this year?**

Other than continuing to push for results in our campaigns, I'm hoping for the chance to really build the infrastructure of the branch, automate some processes and safeguard the future of the branch. It's my belief that a UNISON rep should always be the most competent person in the room, so I want to build a program of in-branch training for reps to make sure that the branch continues to function effectively and efficiently.

## **STEP SIX**

### **PROVIDING THE RIGHT SUPPORT**

From the outset Reps will want to know they've got support when they need it. Make sure they've got a named individual, or more than one, who new Reps can contact for advice and support. It can be a daunting experience when asked for advice especially if it's a new problem, Reps need to feel confident that they can turn to someone more experienced for advice.

## **STEP SEVEN**

### **IT'S ALL ABOUT THE BRANCH**

Building our activist base is essential if the union is going to develop stronger union organisation in the workplace, but it won't happen by accident. This must be a branch priority. The senior leadership team of the branch working in partnership with paid officials need a plan, with allocated responsibilities around who does what and when, along with an idea of how we measure success.

## **FUNFACTS**

# Unionised workplaces are safer workplaces

Every year, unions train 10,000 reps to spot unsafe working practices and cut accident rates. That's why workplaces with union representation have significantly lower injury rates.

## **STEP EIGHT**

### **MAKE USE OF EMPLOYERS**

Where we have existing recognition agreements ask the employers if you can use their communication networks to help get in touch with hard-to-reach members. Sometimes employers will also back your campaign, with positive statements around the value of workplace reps, and committing to time off and access to training. After all the more workplace issues that are nipped in bud at a local level the less time and resources are required elsewhere in the organisation.

## STEP NINE

### TRUST, SATISFACTION AND COMMITMENT

Three core principles help attract and retain activists: trust, satisfaction and commitment.

**Trust** includes integrity, competence, and dependability. Doing what you say and doing it in a timely manner helps to build trust. Promising the earth but delivering very little won't build up trust.

**Satisfaction** is rooted in positive feelings about the union and their role within it. We can all relate to experiences that we've enjoyed are the most rewarding. Managing positive relationships is such an important part of building workplace organisation.

**Commitment** is the value proposition, or the 'what's in it for me' question, be clear when planning your campaign what success looks like so members know what they'll get for their investment.

## **FUNFACTS**

**Union members  
are up to 5% more  
likely to have  
received off-the-  
job training in the  
past year.**

Every year, unions help more than 200,000 working people get the skills they need to get better-paid jobs



## **STEP TEN**

### **MAKE IT FUN AND ENJOYABLE**

If we are asking members to become Reps, we're asking them to make an extra contribution which will often mean additional time and focus taken away from other activities. The role needs to be rewarding but also fun. It takes a special kind of person to find motivation in some of the internal meetings so try and mix it up, add an element of social into your routine, and change the dynamics of the meeting. You could invite a speaker or ask for a longer contribution from one of your activists.

## TRAINED AND ACTIVE PROGRAMME

New Reps, and even those with experience under their belt, require access to good quality training as early as possible after becoming a Rep.

UNISON is committed to supporting training and development and we have arranged an excellent course to get them started.

But it's not just training in the classroom that will make them Grade A Reps, they will also need to build up experience in the workplace, representing members and negotiating with managers. This is where the 'trained and active' programme can make a real difference. It creates a structure of support that new Reps need, a buddy system, where a paid official or a more

experienced lay Rep is available to offer support and a guiding hand, ensuring our new Rep's don't feel overwhelmed and left on their own.

The trained and active plan should be completed jointly working as a live portfolio of progress and training. Reps should be encouraged to build on the plan as they progress and gain more experience in the union.

You can more about Trained and Active Programme on the UNISON national website <https://learning.unison.org.uk/supporting-learning/trained-and-active/>



# Case Study

**SEB WILKINS, SECRETARY  
CHARNWOOD**

Seb has come the union's ranks as a Young member and is now branch secretary at very busy and growing branch.

## **How long have you been a UNISON member?**

Since Nov 2017. I first got active in Jan 2019 when I went to the Young member's forum. From that I became a steward, moved jobs to Charnwood, and soon after became the Branch Secretary in March 2021.

## **What is your most recent achievement?**

Recruitment. For a relatively small branch we punch well above our weight and grew our membership by over 10% in a year! We have a diverse committee and a good mix of gender, age, race, and professional backgrounds. We've had excellent support from Nadeem and Scott as the organisers. When you know region have your back it is empowering.

## **Why do you think people are joining?**

We have eye catching and up to date noticeboards, photos of reps on posters with a single point of contact, feedback through newsletters and emails when required. It gives confidence that there is some structure and accountability to our members. We have a full map of our workplace, which means we can be very responsive to issues as they arise. We also promote positive stories like learning opportunities and increasing our membership. We also use small opportunities to be relevant – free tea and coffee in the kitchen, umbrella pool for rainy days etc.

## RECRUIT REPS READY TO ROLL-UP THEIR SLEEVES

Use every available channel to recruit Reps for your campaign or work program.

Your communication efforts should include

- Posters, postcards and flyers displayed in workplaces.
- Information prominently displayed on your website
- Social media posts with a link to the Rep nomination form
- Short videos work well especially when they're existing Reps telling their lived experience.

## RESOURCES

As part of the 'be the reason' campaign we have produced a range of useful branded materials that you can use. They include social media assets, flyers and posters.

If you need anything more to help your campaign, please let us know we will do what we can to provide it.

Visit

***[unison.org.uk/bethereason](https://unison.org.uk/bethereason)***

or scan the QR code below



## **FUNFACTS**

**Union members  
get better sickness  
and pension  
benefits, more  
paid holiday and  
more control over  
shifts and working  
hours**

produced by



*East Midlands*

[eastmidlands.unison.org.uk](http://eastmidlands.unison.org.uk)

“Without labour nothing prospers”

—Sophocles