



## Branch guide to lifelong learning



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# Welcome

Union learning changes lives. It unlocks opportunities, reveals new possibilities, and builds the skills and confidence of UNISON members. At the same time, it raises our union's profile, gets people interested in what we do, and empowers members to step up and become more involved.

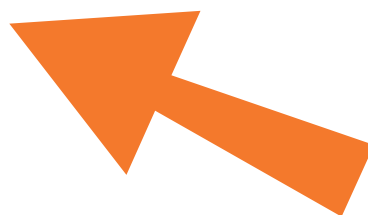
That's why one of my first actions as general secretary was to establish the UNISON College. Our College brings together all the activist training and member learning that takes place in UNISON into one coherent foundation.

UNISON College isn't a physical building – because union learning is something that doesn't happen in just one place. It happens in workplaces, in branches, in regional offices, in colleges, and at home. Anywhere that union members can gather together, whether online or face to face. And all of us can play a part in making it happen.

In this guide you'll find a wealth of advice and resources to help you establish and sustain lifelong learning in your branch. While the focus is on member learning, you'll find that as it helps to get members engaged and involved in the branch, it broadens your activist base and makes sure we continue to be the biggest union, winning for all members.



**UNISON General Secretary**







JESS HURD

# How learning builds ***stronger branches***

**Promoting learning boosts recruitment and retention and improves branch organisation.**

## ***UNISON College is making a difference***

**UNISON College is going to double the numbers of members and activists learning and developing through the union.**

This represents a major organising opportunity for a bigger, stronger union.

More members will get more chances to learn the skills they need to get on at work and in their home lives – thanks to UNISON.

And many of those members will become active in the union as a result of the confidence they gain from the courses they do.

In addition, increasing and improving the training available for reps will give them the knowledge and skills to better deliver for their members.

And better reps means stronger branches.

So both strands of UNISON College have the potential to help you build a stronger branch to get a better deal for your members.

## ***Growing your branch***

**Promoting workplace learning increases recruitment and retention and strengthens branch organisation.**

UNISON's learning programmes are targeted at those who have been traditionally excluded from learning and who don't get easy access to training at work.

So, organising English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes for, say, outsourced cleaners gives the branch the chance to recruit new members who are keen to improve their English skills.

In addition, completing an ESOL course will make those outsourced cleaners more confident about speaking up to their managers and help them feel more included in the union.

## ***Tackling inequality***

**Promoting learning helps your branch tackle inequalities in the workplace.**

- Creating learning opportunities for groups of members like care workers and school staff – many of them women – helps meet the needs of members who have been marginalised in the past.
- Targeting learning opportunities at people in jobs that are low-paid, part-time and customer-facing helps the branch reach Black members who are often concentrated in these roles as a result of structural racism.
- Organising learning and training opportunities that part-time, shift and night workers can access delivers a better deal for workers who often feel marginalised.
- Supporting dyslexic and other neurodivergent learners helps build a more inclusive branch and workplace.

## ***Supporting branch campaigning***

**Your branch can extend its campaigns by harnessing the power of learning.**

For example, if you're campaigning on the cost of living:

- Your activists could get training on effective communication about the political background to the campaign
- your ULRs could offer members sessions on how to create – and stick to – a household budget.

## ***Developing new activists***

**Taking part in learning can be a first step to getting involved in the branch.**

Hundreds of members who have enjoyed positive experiences on a UNISON course have volunteered to become ULRs as a result. And many of those new ULRs have gone on to become more involved in the rest of their branch's work.

Black leadership courses are engaging many Black members who might not otherwise have got more involved in the union.

Similarly, women, disabled, LGBT+, young and retired members often feel more confident about taking on a new role in the branch as a result of learning through the union.

## ***Broadening the bargaining agenda***

**Some employers who don't want to sign a collective bargaining agreement straightaway may be more open to a learning agreement.**

A partnership to upskill the workforce can prove to be a productive way to explore joint working on other issues for them.

A learning agreement can be a bridge to a recognition agreement. Once the learning is underway, and the employer can see the benefits, they may better understand the value of signing a recognition agreement with the branch.

When the branch has already secured recognition, it can use that as a foundation for a learning agreement.

Negotiating a learning agreement can then expand the bargaining agenda to include elements such as paid release for learners and for ULRs.

## ***Supporting personal and career development***

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**Being able to access courses such as Return to Learn and one-day Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops through UNISON is a big plus for our members.**

Many UNISON courses offer access to higher education: the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and The Open University (OU) have worked with UNISON to develop the courses that meet the needs of our members across all our service groups and sectors.

## ***Developing members' skills and confidence***

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**Learning something new boosts everyone's self-confidence and self-belief. That goes double for anyone who was made to feel they couldn't learn when they were at school.**

Learning in a group of like-minded UNISON members pays off because tutors make sure nobody feels left out and learners enjoy supporting each other.

For example, a group of women who met on a confidence course in Lincolnshire carried on meeting afterwards to check in on the progress they were making in their working lives.

By keeping in touch, many of the women were able to gain the confidence to find jobs they wouldn't have dreamed of going for before meeting each other on the course.



JESS HURD

# Getting organised

## *in your branch*

**Putting together an education team that works closely with all the branch activists will help you get the best results.**


### **1 Assembling a branch education team**

**A branch education team is a group of union learning reps (ULRs) and other active members interested in learning, who meet regularly to plan activity around learning.**

The team is usually led by the Branch Education Co-Ordinator (BEC) or Lifelong Learning Co-Ordinator (LLC).

To set up a learning team in your branch, table a discussion about organising around learning at a branch meeting and invite your Regional Learning and Development Officer (RLDO) or Regional Education Officer (REO) as well as your Regional Organiser (RO).

Use the discussion to identify members, ULRs and other activists who are interested in being part of a learning team.



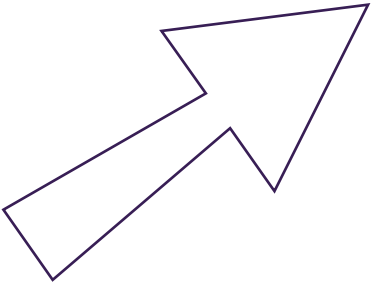
***“Teamwork  
also makes it  
easier to recruit  
new members  
and new ULRs”***

Promote the fact that you’re setting up the team by circulating information around the branch (e.g., in the branch newsletter and via social media) and talking to people about it on UNISON stalls or other events.

Building the team will take time, especially if the branch is relatively new to work around learning.

Look out for people who are interested in learning but who don’t necessarily know about learning through UNISON. They could be members undertaking professional development accessed through HR or studying independently with The Open University (OU).

Once the learning is set up, look out for potential ULRs among your learners – many people discover their passion for promoting learning through their positive experiences of learning through UNISON.



Make sure the learning team is integrated into the branch’s programme of work. That way, the learning team develops its work with the support of other branch activists and in line with branch priorities, while the branch benefits from the increased profile learning generates and the positivity associated with learning.

Make sure that learning is a standing item on the agenda at branch committee meetings and share your good news stories with the branch leadership and in your branch newsletter and on social media.



## **2 What branch education teams can achieve**

**The branch education team can ensure ULRs are supported and involved in the life of the branch beyond learning.**

It also creates a clear progression route for ULRs who want to get involved in other aspects of the branch.

The team should make sure that learning issues such as time off for learning and access to personal development are placed high on the bargaining agenda.

The team should highlight the link between learning and equalities: those groups excluded from learning are also often discriminated against inside and outside the workplace and under-represented in UNISON.

Teamwork also makes it easier to recruit new members and new ULRs and to organise around learning.



### 3 How a Lifelong Learning Coordinator pays off for your branch

The Lifelong Learning Co-Ordinator works closely with the Branch Education Co-Ordinator (the same person may take on both roles) to co-ordinate the activity of ULRs in the branch.

They also ensure that ULRs are fully integrated into branch structures and are closely involved in negotiating around learning with employers.

If your branch has a vacancy for a Lifelong Learning Coordinator, the first people to ask about taking on the role would be your existing ULRs.

### 4 Developing ULRs

Union learning reps (ULRs) are enthusiasts and advocates for workplace learning who should always be integrated with the work of the rest of the branch.

For example, branch officers and ULRs should work together to identify the workplace learning needs in the branch so that ULRs can then use their knowledge and connections to explore potential providers to meet the needs of members and potential members.

UNISON offers training for new ULRs, which employers should give ULRs time off to attend. UNISON developed an online training programme for all its activists in response to the Covid pandemic. Some regions are running ULR training courses, while Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) also run national courses.

To introduce the role to potential ULRs, you can encourage them to complete the short online learning module on UNISON's e-learning site:  
**<https://e-learning.unison.org.uk>** (login using My.UNISON).

# Promoting learning

## ***in your workplace***

Branches can use a wide range of tools to raise awareness of the learning that's available to UNISON members.

### **1** ***Raising the profile of learning in your workplace***

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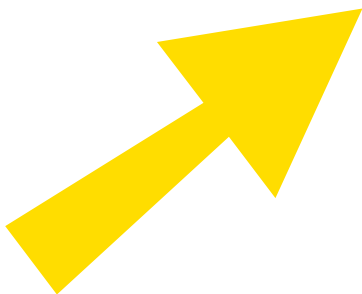
Using UNISON noticeboards, branch newsletters and social media channels and even employer resources will all help to spread the word about workplace learning opportunities.

Make sure to promote learning opportunities on UNISON noticeboards in recognised workplaces. Learning and Organising Services (LAOS) produce a range of leaflets and posters promoting learning. You can personalise one of our posters with your details. And including a photo always helps.

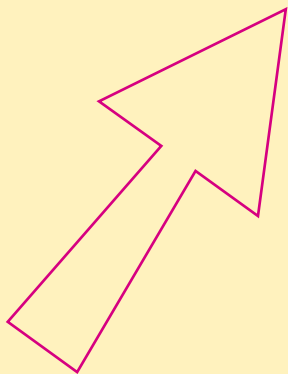
***"Make sure to promote learning opportunities on UNISON noticeboards in recognised workplaces"***

Aim to include something learning-related in every edition of your branch newsletter. If you have courses, drop-in sessions or events coming up, a mention in the newsletter will help you spread the word. If there's nothing on the stocks in the branch, signpost members to learning opportunities through UNISON College or through online learning partners such as Skills Academy.

Ask your employer(s) to promote UNISON learning opportunities through their channels, such as the staff intranet and other employer communications. When they can see the potential benefit for them, they're much more likely to help.



## 2 Organising learning surveys in your workplace



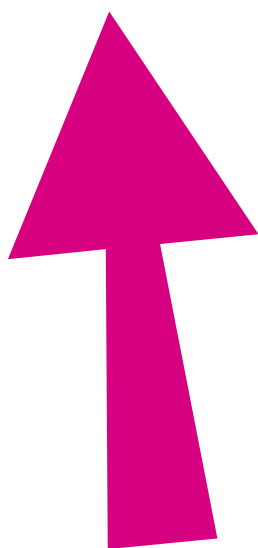
**Circulating a questionnaire / learning survey is a great way to raise members' awareness of all the learning opportunities through UNISON College.**

You can use your survey to gauge the appetite for learning on offer through UNISON College and the continuing professional development (CPD) courses and workshops from The Open University (OU) and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

You can also tailor the survey to specific learning needs in your workplace. For example, do people need help to gain English or maths qualifications needed to enrol on an apprenticeship?

There are further examples of learning surveys on the UNISON Organising Space: **<https://organisingspace.unison.org.uk/OS>** Once you have registered, you can find them in the 'learning resources' area under the 'learning and development' section.

## 3 Promoting learning through national awareness campaigns



**Learning at Work Week (LaWW) in May and Festival of Learning in June can be great springboards for learning in the workplace.**

Many people become more aware of learning during these campaigns because the Campaign for Learning and the Learning & Work Institute increase their activity on social media and successfully place stories in local, regional and national media outlets.

You can do something as relatively straightforward as organising a stall once or twice in the week in a workplace. Using UNISON College promotional materials and UNISON recruitment literature can help spread the word about learning and reach new members.

If you have the capacity, you can organise something on a bigger scale, which might involve inviting a local author to speak about their work or bringing in external providers to run fun taster sessions.

Many branches have also organised popular learning events during some of the other national awareness initiatives through the rest of the year, including:

- International Women's Day in March
- LGBTQ+ Pride in June
- Black History Month in October
- Disability History Month in November–December.



JESS HURD

# Making the most of **Learning at Work Week**

**The East Midlands regional learning team have reaped big rewards by helping branches take advantage of national initiatives like Learning at Work Week.**

Twenty-seven branches in the East Midlands organised 57 events between them during Learning at Work Week 2022, proving how productive it can be to sync branch learning activity with national initiatives.

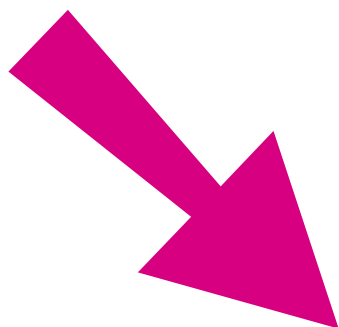
“They were all in-person events and they happened right across the region, which was really exciting,” says Regional Learning and Development Organiser Gavin McCann.

In the run-up to the week, the regional learning team created a dedicated page on the regional website to help branches make the most of the Week.

The page included ideas for activities; a learning newsletter branches could customise; posters for upcoming UNISON courses in the region; and posters for external providers including Leicester College and the Skills Academy.

Branches could also order a set of materials for their Learning at Work Week events that included eco carrier bags, recycled pens, multi-cable device chargers and printed posters for upcoming courses.





### ***What members think about UNISON learning***

- **“It’s good to feel that the union wants to help us workers progress, increase our knowledge and expand our minds.”**
- **“Having these courses available gives me control of the timing of my development and an independence of progress not controlled by the employer.”**
- **“I’m a lone worker so it’s very comforting to know someone actually cares enough to offer to help me.”**
- **“To find an unexpected area which is provided within the membership is like a gift.”**

All quotes from the 2022 UNISON East Midlands member learning survey

“We tried to make it as easy as we possibly could for branches to organise events and all we asked was they let us know what was going on,” Gavin says.

Northamptonshire Health Workers Branch ran UNISON stalls in four different workplaces, recruiting eight new members from their stall at Berrywood Hospital and 11 new members at Kettering General Hospital.

“I went to the Berrywood event on the Monday of Learning at Work Week and members were really pleased to see us,” Gavin says.

For the two new ULRs at Kettering General, who had trained online during the Covid lockdowns, this was the first in-person event they had organised, so they were thrilled that they were able to engage 150 people over the course of the day.

“The branch were over the moon,” Gavin says.

At Lincoln City Council, the branch ran stalls on the Tuesday and the Thursday of Learning at Work Week because so few staff are currently in the building five days a week.

The regional learning team also collected brilliant feedback from the annual survey it usually runs during Learning at Work Week.

Three-quarters of members in the region already knew they could learn through UNISON, with 43 per cent saying UNISON learning provides “real added value to my membership” and 38 pleased that the union offers learning opportunities (even if they don’t currently access them).

Health and wellbeing courses attracted enormous interest, with 57 per cent interested in mindfulness and anxiety management; 40 per cent in mental health awareness; 40 per cent in coping with change; and 35 in assertiveness.

Popular options to help members progress at work included management and team leading (32 per cent); project management (25 per cent); sign language (24 per cent); and autism awareness (23 per cent).



JESS HURD

# Getting the most out of a ***learning agreement***

**Learning agreements help branches extend learning to members who have often missed out in the past.**

## **1** *How learning agreements make a difference*

**Learning agreements enable your branch to secure more learning and development opportunities for your members by setting out how you and your employer will collaborate to promote learning in the workplace.**

Learning agreements help fill gaps caused when employers:

- offer little more than mandatory training to staff
- focus training opportunities on staff in senior positions
- neglect training opportunities for staff in lower pay bands.

Having a learning agreement helps ULRs (and other reps promoting learning) secure paid release for members to attend courses.

Once you have an agreement in place, you shouldn't have to battle with managers who have no personal commitment to workplace learning, or rely on more sympathetic supervisors to organise release for learners.

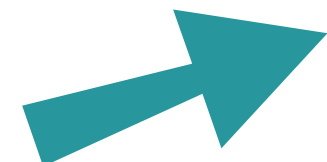
## 2 **How joint work promotes learning**

**A learning agreement should create some form of joint learning committee between the union and the employer.**

Setting up a learning committee helps secure management buy-in and ensure learning remains an organisational priority.

Having a learning committee helps the branch to work more effectively and more strategically with colleagues in human resources and / or learning and development to:

- fill gaps in the provision of learning opportunities
- ensure opportunities are made available to all staff, especially those who have traditionally been excluded, such as low-paid / part-time / women workers.



## 3 **What learning agreements cover**

**UNISON's model workplace learning agreement is the best place to start when preparing to negotiate. It is reproduced in full at the end of this booklet.**

The model agreement includes all the key components that should make up your new learning agreement, as well as guidance notes to several sections to help you draft wording that reflects local conditions.

Because learning agreements are negotiated between branches and employers to meet workplace needs and reflect local bargaining arrangements, they vary from branch to branch and from employer to employer.

## 4 **How to put a learning agreement into action**

**When you have successfully negotiated the learning agreement, plan an awareness-raising event to launch it.**

Launch events that feature fun and interesting taster sessions tend to be more successful at engaging members and potential members, and therefore build a firmer foundation for future success.

When you arrange the first learning opportunities, promote them as widely as possible within your employer – and with their help, if possible.

Make sure learning is a standing item on the branch committee agenda.

Find out more about using learning agreements in the unionlearn guide *Delivering Better Learning Agreements*  
<https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/publications/delivering-better-learning-agreements-guide-union-reps-and-officers>

## **1** *Has there ever been a learning agreement in your workplace?*

Check back through your branch files to find any previous learning agreement. If the employer signed a learning agreement before, they should be open to signing an updated version. And even if it's out of date, check through all of its provisions to ensure your new draft is at least as good as what has been in place in the past.

## **2** *Work out as a branch how you want to use the learning agreement*

Discuss with your branch secretary and other key activists how you will use the learning agreement to:

- boost recruitment (by raising the profile of the union and making membership more attractive)
- improve organising (by recruiting and training union learning reps and by giving members confidence to step up and get involved in the union).

## **10** *Organise a launch for the agreement*

Put together an awareness-raising event to launch the agreement. Organise some fun taster sessions learners could take part in to help people discover for themselves that learning in UNISON will be enjoyable.

# Your guide to a learning agreement

## **9** *Set a timeframe for negotiations*

As always, it's best if you can get an agreement signed within a relatively short timeframe. To guard against your employer dragging their feet, always set internal deadlines to keep the process on track.

## **8** *Identify your red lines*

Before you start negotiations, work together in the branch to identify any red lines that you will not cross in talks with your employer.



### 3 Ask your **UNISON regional team** for support

Contact your regional organiser and your regional education and / or learning team to let them know you're negotiating a learning agreement. Keep them in the loop throughout and ask them for help if you hit any bumps in the road.

### 4 Work together as a team to draft the wording of the agreement

Work with your branch secretary and other key activists on the draft wording of the agreement that you aim to present to your employer. The model learning agreement at the end of this booklet is the best place to start drafting your new agreement.

### 5 Identify your allies

Identify potential allies who might be interested in developing learning in the workplace, e.g., other recognised unions, training manager, HR manager, learning and development team. Talk to them in advance of your negotiation. Find out how they could help.

### 6 Prepare the business case for workplace learning

Prepare a detailed business case that sets out why a learning agreement will benefit your employer. This could include:

- reference to the skills challenges the employer faces at the moment
- how a joint approach to learning will meet those challenges
- the proven impact of workplace learning on staff morale, reduction in absenteeism, improvement in performance and productivity.

### 7 Highlight the value of government skills policies

Draw your employer's attention to skills policies and skills initiatives at regional, national or UK level that are designed to:

- help people improve their functional skills in English, maths and digital
- help employers close skills gaps
- develop a culture of lifelong learning.

## negotiating

Use this step-by-step guide to negotiate a new learning agreement.

## CASE STUDY

### How our learning agreement underpins our success

Leeds Local Government Branch Lifelong Learning Coordinator and Union Learning rep Carol McGrath explains how their learning agreement continues to make a difference in the local authority.



JESS HURD

“ One of the main reasons Leeds Local Government Branch is successful in promoting learning opportunities is because we have a joint learning agreement between the unions and the council.

It's a really good method of enabling the unions to work together in partnership with the employer to promote what each of the unions do to deliver what our members need and request.

The learning agreement includes recognition of the role of the Union Learning Rep, which is absolutely vital to the learners out there, and also the Lifelong Learning Coordinators that work in each of the unions.

When we reviewed our learning agreement pre-Covid, we said it's important to support Leeds City Council employees with positive wellbeing – and this is one of UNISON's strengths.

The workshops that are geared towards people's wellbeing and mental health in particular have been one of our major successes during the pandemic, when people have struggled with their mental health.

The council is right behind us in terms of getting what we do out there.

Leeds City Council uses the Performance and Learning (PAL) system, where employees can find out what's available in terms of their development needs.

Recently I was contacted by an officer who operates the PAL system who said, 'Would you like to promote your wellbeing workshops on PAL so people can book directly?' So now people contact me to put their name down for courses that they've seen on our internal system for learning.

Another example is when I was approached recently by an HR colleague who said there's a department that wants some help with developing their wellbeing strategy.

The wellbeing manager from that department then gave me a ring to ask about what we did. She was blown away when I told her about all the courses. So I'm now delivering a rolling programme for this department.

One thing that's a constant is looking at the barriers to people accessing learning – whether that's an accessible building where the learning is taking place, a time when people can attend, or getting paid time off to attend.

For example, the department that contacted me about their wellbeing strategy said the staff want to do the course when they finish work. 'Can you do it at five o'clock?' So I said yes. It's about making sure you reduce all the barriers. ”



JESS HURD

# Keeping learning on

Securing a learning agreement is just the beginning. Here are some initiatives you can take to build a learning culture in the workplace.

***the agenda***

## **1** *Making learning a branch priority*

Once you have your learning agreement in place, it's vital to maintain the momentum by keeping learning on the branch agenda.

That could include any of the following (depending on local circumstances):

- organising learning surveys to identify what members want and where there are needs
- organising learning opportunities in response to need
- making learning a standing item on branch committee agendas
- involving ULRs in branch learning policy discussions
- including learning in the branch newsletter
- promoting learning on the branch's social media channels.



## **2 Promoting your ULRs**

**You can help encourage greater take-up of learning opportunities by promoting your ULR(s) to your members.**

- Put up a poster on your UNISON noticeboard with their name and contact details and a photograph – it really helps.
- Include an article in your branch newsletter introducing your ULR(s) and explaining how they can help members access learning.
- Include them in your list of branch contacts on your website and / or social media channels.
- Ask your employer to include their details on the staff intranet.

## **3 Launching a space for learning**

**Setting up a space for learning in the workplace pays off for everyone.**

Learning centres of all varieties:

- offer safe and friendly environments where anxious learners can conquer their nerves
- break down barriers by making learning accessible at work
- create a focal point for learning in the workplace
- raise the profile of the branch and strengthen its presence in the workplace
- help employers reap the benefits of learning e.g., improved skills, greater productivity, higher staff morale.

The kind of learning centre your branch sets up depends on your local circumstances, relationship with your employer and availability of potential spaces.

Learning centres don't need to be enormous: Newcastle City Branch has helped frontline workers significantly improve their skills through their network of smaller Learning Zones (see case study).

## **4 Promoting the right to request time to train**

**Employees in large organisations throughout the UK have the legal right to ask their employers for time off for job-related learning or training.**

And while their employers are not obliged to agree, they must have a good reason for saying No.

The right to request time to train is not universal. You have to work in an organisation with more than 250 employees. You have to have worked there for more than six months. And you must be an employee, not an agency worker.





By law, applications for time to learn or train (made under section 63D of the Employment Rights Act 1996) have to include some very specific information, including:

- the date
- what you want to study
- when and where you want to study
- who's providing the course
- what qualification you could get (if any)
- how it would help you do your job better / help the business.

You can use the template letter set out in Appendix B.

So long as you include all the key information, your employer must consider your request and respond in writing within 28 days.

They can:

- say Yes
- ask for a meeting to discuss the request
- say No for one of eight specific business reasons.

## 5 Keeping accurate records

**Keeping accurate and up-to-date records, and storing them securely, helps you better support your learners.**

Maintaining records of the learning you organise will help you see patterns:

- which courses are most popular
- which groups of learners take part
- which groups of potential learners don't yet take part
- which learners are not yet union members
- which future courses could help current learners progress.

The record sheets are particularly important for branches:

- they help the branch identify potential recruitment opportunities from the records of members and potential members
- they help the branch track learning needs in the workplace that can then be fed into the bargaining agenda.

Branch Education Co-ordinators / Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator must comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) by securely storing record sheets and other information about learners and securely destroying or deleting them as necessary.

For more information about data protection in UNISON, you can complete the **Data Protection and the GDPR module** on the e-learning site.

***"While their employers are not obliged to agree, they must have a good reason for saying No"***



## 6 Accrediting new ULRs

**When you appoint a new ULR, make sure your branch completes the Notification of UNISON Workplace Representative form and sends a copy to your Regional Education Officer and regional RMS contact.**

That enables the union to notify your employer of the appointment and identify the best option for training them.

The branch has to notify your employer in advance whenever a ULR needs time off to train for their role.

Once notification is issued, the ULR has six months to attend training. If this deadline is missed, your employer has the right to withdraw recognition from them and refuse to accept a new notification of their appointment.

Once your region receives the notification, they will offer training to the ULR. When a learning rep accepts a particular course, the region will:

- either directly notify your employer
- or send the details of the ULR's training course to the branch so you can then notify the employer.

## CASE STUDY

### Getting in the Zone

Newcastle City Branch Lifelong Learning Coordinator and Union Learning rep Linda Slasor sets out how she promotes workplace learning through the network of Learning Zones for frontline workers.

“We are very fortunate, we have an exceptional relationship with Newcastle City Council, the main employer, and they’ve provided six rooms in depots where frontline workers are based that we run as Learning Zones. Each Learning Zone has a noticeboard, because not all of our frontline workers are digitally connected, and the learning agreement is on display. When I first put them up, a lot of members of staff didn’t even know we had an agreement with the employer where they could be released during the working day to learn. So that alone made a difference. I also hand out the learning agreement to middle management and supervisors in case there’s any discussion about a member of staff who wants to be released to do a course during the working day. That’s a deliberate ploy of mine, to remind them we have a learning agreement! I put a poster up next to where staff clock in for the beginning of their shift and I make sure my name and my work number is there so they can ring and have a conversation. I also put up posters listing all the Learning Zones and their opening times with my contact details – it’s something as simple as that and it’s there for staff to see and they like that. The Learning Zones are near where the staff go for their breaks and I put a notice on the doors and I’ve had numerous phone calls from people saying, ‘Can you give us a little bit more information about the Learning Zone?’ and they are genuinely blown away by the amount of information I can give them. Because I’ve been doing this project for a number of years now, people have got used to me being the person to come to for digital skills. I get a lot of referrals from our workplace reps: if they’re talking to a member who’s struggling with anything digital, they go, ‘Linda could help you with that’. When the branch organises visits to depots to promote UNISON to frontline staff, they always invite me to come and talk about learning. I make sure I’m there as much as possible, because then they know your face and you’re not just a name on the noticeboard. Our Branch Secretary, Paul Gilroy, sends a weekly update to all branch members. My contact details are on there and I promote the Learning Zones within that newsletter as well. My name and contact details are on the City Branch website and they’re on every email that goes out from the branch as well. But we have to be mindful that front-facing staff don’t switch a computer on when they start work and see all the latest newsletter updates. So when I go to a Learning Zone, I’ll put a newsletter out on the tables so that all staff can pick it up and read about what we’re doing.”



JESS HURD



JESS HURD

# Supporting members *into learning*

There is a huge range of learning opportunities that branches can help their members access through UNISON College and our learning partners.

## 1 **Promoting learning through UNISON College**

UNISON College brings together learning, education and training for members and activists into one coherent offer that

- equips activists with the confidence, knowledge and expertise they need to advocate for members
- empowers members to take control of their lives and shape their careers.

UNISON College isn't a physical building. It's a portfolio of workshops, courses and resources that's delivered in existing learning centres, regional offices, employers' facilities and online.

What's on offer from UNISON College is shaped by UNISON members and will continue to evolve in response to demand from members and activists.



**“Branches can use the expanded offer from UNISON College to promote learning”**

For example, more than 70 per cent of members who took part in our massive learning survey in spring 2022 said they were looking to develop their skills for work.

So UNISON College set up functional skills English and maths courses in three different regions and partnered with The Open University (OU) to create two new Continuous Professional Development (CPD) workshops.

Similarly, almost 60 per cent of activists in the survey said they wanted to develop the skills to help them improve in their roles.

So UNISON College immediately expanded its programme of advanced discrimination law courses and started training reps to become Mental Health First Aiders.

Branches can use the expanded offer from UNISON College to promote learning in the workplace by:

- signposting members to the information, advice and guidance (IAG) service
- alerting members to online learning available via UNISON College
- enrolling members on courses running in the regions and at national level.

You can keep up with all the latest courses via the member learning website <https://learning.unison.org.uk/member-learning/> and by contacting your regional learning team.

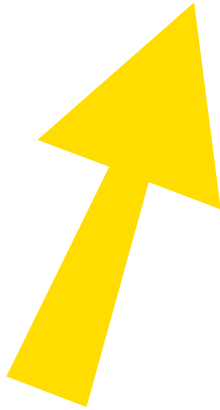
## 2 Using the new IAG service

**Branches can signpost members to UNISON College’s new information, advice and guidance (IAG) service, which is provided by The Learning Curve.**

Members get a free 30-minute phone consultation with a specialist trained adviser who can suggest specific courses and qualifications that would help them progress towards their career goals.

To sign up for an IAG session, members can contact Learning and Organising Services (LAOS). Visit: <https://learning.unison.org.uk/college>

### **3** *Developing English, Maths and digital skills*



**Branches can help members develop their functional skills (English, maths or digital) through a range of different pathways.**

- ULRs can use the unionlearn SkillCheck tool to help members assess their skills levels in English, maths and digital. You can access it via an app or via the web. <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/skillcheck>
- ULRs can set up informal ‘lunch and learn’ sessions using activities from the UNISON Making Every Penny Count toolkit, such as debt and budgeting. Download the toolkit from the A-Z of UNISON Learning resources: <https://learning.unison.org.uk/a-z-of-unison-learning-resources/> or find an interactive version on <https://e-learning.unison.org.uk>
- ULRs can signpost members to online functional skills courses available through UNISON College. To check what’s on offer at any one time, visit <https://learning.unison.org.uk/member-learning/> or contact your regional learning team.
- Branches can run the Reading Ahead challenge in the workplace. This is where participants pledge to read, rate and review six books, newspapers, magazines, poems or website materials. Find out more: <https://readingagency.org.uk/adults/quick-guides/reading-ahead/>

### **4** *Helping members with CPD*

**UNISON College is prioritising Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities to help members move on at work.**

Many regions run our popular workshops (in-person or online) covering some of the key issues for people working in the education sector (e.g., managing challenging behaviour) and health and social care (e.g., dementia awareness).

In-person sessions take one day and can be held in a workplace, branch office or OU space. Online sessions run over half a day.

To find out when your region is running any of the CPD workshops, contact your regional education team.

The College is also committed to working with external providers to offer a wide range of professional development qualifications to online learners.

To find out what’s on offer at any time, visit <https://learning.unison.org.uk/events>



## 5 **Developing specialist skills**

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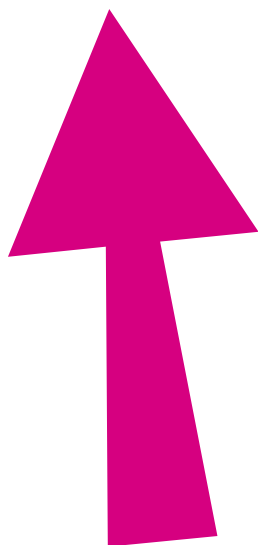
**Members can also develop the skills they need to navigate new or challenging situations at work through UNISON College.**

For example, the College has partnered with Cruse Bereavement Care to offer courses helping members deal with loss and bereavement; with bereavement by suicide; and working with children and young people experiencing grief.

The union originally developed the partnership with Cruse during the pandemic, offering online workshops for social care workers dealing both with the Covid-related deaths of people they were caring for and with the families bereaved during lockdowns.

UNISON College has also partnered with LGBTQ+ charity Mermaids to deliver training for schools staff keen to improve the support they offer to transgender and gender diverse children.

To find out what specialist courses and workshops are available at any time, get in touch with your regional learning team or visit **<https://learning.unison.org.uk/events>**





JESS HURD

# Making the most of **government skills policy**

**Governments and their policies may come and go. But major global economic trends mean they will always need to be developing strategies and allocating funds that branches can use to support UNISON members.**

**Government plans, policies and budgets for adult learning can help branches promote and deliver learning in the workplace.**

What makes this complicated is that skills policies come and go, like governments themselves.

In addition, devolution means that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have the power to set their own education priorities and determine their own education budgets.

And in England, the 10 Combined Authorities set up so far are now responsible for administering the adult education budgets in their areas.

In order to help ensure this booklet remains relevant for as long as possible, it does not contain a detailed breakdown of all the different funding streams available at UK, national and regional level at the time of going to press.

However, it is possible to highlight some key areas of government funding for adult education that are likely to endure, regardless of which party or parties are in office at all the different levels at any one time.

Being aware of these key issues helps branches stay on top of where funding is likely to be available for which kind of courses when they come to plan their learning programmes.

For example, branches based within any of the English Combined Authorities may be able to access funding for learning since CAs control their adult education budgets.

And branches in Scotland and Wales may be able to benefit from the funding both administrations provide to Scottish Union Learning's The Learning Fund and the Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) respectively.



## 1 Improving functional skills

**There are 9 million working-age adults in England with poor literacy or numeracy skills, and more than half of them struggle with both, according to the Learning & Work Institute (*Getting the basics right: The case for action on adult basic skills*, October 2021).**

In addition, about 11.7 million adults lack the digital life skills required to take part in a digital world, LWI says.

The reasons for this are not hard to find. While the government halved the budget for adult education between 2011-12 and 2019-20, adult participation in English courses fell by 63 per cent, in maths by 62 per cent and in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) by 17 per cent.

In Scotland, more than 905,000 adults have literacy skills at Level 1 or below, according to the 2019 Survey of Adult Skills by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In Wales, the figure is more than 520,000 adults. In Northern Ireland, the figure is more than 335,000. (<https://www.probonoeconomics.com/paying-the-price-the-cost-of-very-poor-adult-literacy>)

Branches should therefore research the funding available from the relevant administration for literacy, numeracy and digital skills learning. Local providers may well be able to help identify and draw down funding.

## 2 Supporting apprentices

**Apprenticeships are a tried and tested route for established staff to progress their careers, just as much as they can help young people make a solid start to their working lives. They have also proved very effective programmes for employers looking to plug their skills gaps.**

But government policies have failed to drive up either the quantity or the quality of apprenticeships in recent years.

- The number of new apprenticeships in England has fallen by 35 per cent since 2015, with apprenticeships for under-19s crashing by 47 per cent. This meant the government failed to reach its target of creating 3 million new apprenticeships between 2015 and 2020.
- More than four in ten apprentices who did not complete their apprenticeships in 2021 blamed insufficient time for learning (44 per cent); training not meeting their expectations (43 per cent); and poor organisation of their apprenticeship (41 per cent).

***“Branches have the chance to help employers deliver high-quality apprenticeships”***

● NHS employers only managed to employ 1.5 per cent of their staff as new apprentice starts between April 2017 and March 2022 and local government employers 1.2 per cent – the government target was at least 2.3 per cent (and it has since been abandoned).

Government failures mean branches have the chance to step in to help employers use apprenticeships to deliver high-quality programmes for all their apprentices – new and existing staff.

All branch reps can play their part in helping to deliver high-quality apprenticeships:

- stewards can address apprentices’ contractual issues
- health and safety reps can ensure apprentices’ physical and mental health is protected
- ULRs can monitor apprentices’ training (both on and off the job) for quality
- all reps can undertake training to mentor apprentices through a structured mentoring programme.

### **3 Closing skills gaps**

**Skills gaps are a permanent feature of economies that evolve at a fast rate. They can be traced back to macro factors like technological advance, failings in the education system or economic upheavals such as Brexit and to micro factors such as organisational change or budget cuts.**

For example, now that more than 80 per cent of jobs require digital skills and over a quarter of employers say they need workers with advanced digital skills, digital skills gaps are opening up in many workplaces, according to the Learning and Work Institute <https://learningandwork.org.uk/resources/research-and-reports/disconnected-exploring-the-digital-skills-gap/>

And, on a bigger canvas, if the UK is to reach its target of net zero by 2050, every major sector in the economy will need to close significant gaps in green skills, according to the Green Alliance independent thinktank.

Branches that are aware of skills gaps at local level and / or in their sector more generally may be able to make the case to their employer that they can help close them by offering learning and development opportunities to staff through UNISON College.

## 4 **Developing a culture of lifelong learning**

**Branches can take advantage of the increasing recognition of the need for lifelong learning when developing their learning programmes.**

Throughout the 21st century, policy-makers have appreciated that technological advances are changing the world of work so fast that we need a new model of education to help us navigate our working lives.

Automation, artificial intelligence, big data and the development of entirely new born-digital industries mean all of us now need to develop our skills and acquire new ones throughout our working lives.

Gone are the days when you could leave school aged 15 and have learned enough to keep working for the next 40 years.

As the Education Select Committee pointed out in 2020: “The current approach to education funding is overwhelmingly focused on education before the age of 25. We must move away from this model, towards a system and culture of lifelong learning that encourages education at any age.” (*A plan for an adult skills and lifelong learning revolution*, Education Select Committee, December 2020).

The government is already planning to introduce a new Lifelong Loan Entitlement in 2025 to support a Lifetime Skills Guarantee, a promise to provide every adult with the training and education they need throughout their lifetime.

Branches can take advantage of this wider recognition of the importance of lifelong learning to persuade employers of the need for courses, workshops and other workplace learning opportunities. And keeping up to date with government initiatives like the planned Lifelong Loan Entitlement may help branches support members who need financial help to pursue new training or development opportunities.

# Making a request for

## ***time off to train***

If you work for an employer in England, Scotland or Wales that employs 250 or more employees, you have the right to request to take time off work to undertake study or training (or both).

Use the model letter (right) to help you draft your request. Your employer must consider your request and respond in writing within 28 days – but only if you include all the information set out here.

### ***How to make an application***

Your employer has 28 days to:

- accept the request
- hold a meeting with to discuss it with you (you can take your ULR or other UNISON rep to the meeting)
- turn down the request for one or more specific business reasons.

If they say No, you have the right to appeal within 14 days of their decision. The appeal must:

- be in writing
- be dated
- set out why you're appealing.

Your employer must then arrange a meeting with you to discuss the matter within 14 days of receiving your appeal. They then have 14 days to give you a decision in writing.

Get the government's detailed breakdown of the whole process at <https://www.gov.uk/training-study-work-your-rights>



**2 May 2023**

Dear (employer)

I'm writing to you to make a request for time off to train, under section 63D of the Employment Rights Act 1996.

Over the past couple of months, I've received a number of enquiries from residents who are keen to access massage therapy to reduce their stress levels and improve their overall wellbeing.

I've looked into training options and would like to enrol on a three-day Diploma in Body Massage course offered by Holistic Happiness Ltd in their training centre in Kings Norton in Birmingham.

The course dates are Thursday 15 June, Thursday 22 June and Thursday 27 July. The hours are 10am to 4pm on all three days.

The course costs £350, including a deposit of £100 to secure my place. I would like to ask you to consider if the home could cover the costs of this.

As part of the course, I have to complete nine treatments on three different clients in between the second and third sessions. I would like to do this with three of our residents, which would mean they would start to see the benefits of my training immediately.

By the end of the course, I will be able to provide back massages; back, neck and shoulder massages; and full body massages. The qualification would enable me to offer a range of different massages to residents, which would significantly enhance the service the home offers to residents, and improve their mental and physical wellbeing, which is one of the quality indicators for the Ardent Homes Group, without the expenditure incurred by bringing in a freelance practitioner.

You may recall that the last time I made a request was in January 2019 for time off to train to undertake Functional Skills maths with UNISON, which you kindly agreed to.

I would be happy to discuss this proposal with you. I would bring my Union Learning Rep to the meeting.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Sandra Williams

☛ Make sure you include the date you're sending your letter or email. Your employer has 28 days from this date to make their decision.

☛ Make sure you include the reference to the 1996 Act.

☛ You must include the subject matter of the training you're requesting; when and where it will take place; and what qualification you will gain (if any).

☛ If they agree to give you time off to train, your employer doesn't have to pay for the course but they can pay some or all of the fees if they think it will benefit the business.

☛ Make sure you include details of why you think your course will help you do their job better and / or help your employer's business.

☛ You have to include if you've made a request before and when – employees can only make one request per year under the regulations.

☛ You can take a union rep or another colleague to the meeting. If this person can't make the date, you can ask for it to be postponed to allow them to attend.

# Your rights ***as a ULR***

**The Employment Act 2002 gave ULRs the same statutory rights as other union representatives. These are the key relevant sections of the revised ACAS Code of Practice that sets out these rights.**

## ***Paid time off for ULRs***

☛ It is up to the ULR and the union to agree that the training condition is met – i.e., that the ULR is sufficiently trained to carry out their role.

Employees who are members of an independent trade union recognised by the employer can take reasonable time off to undertake the duties of a union learning representative (ULR), provided that the union has given notice in writing that the employee is a learning representative of the trade union and the training condition is met.

The functions for which time off as a union learning representative is allowed are:

- analysing learning or training needs
- providing information and advice about learning or training matters
- arranging learning or training
- promoting the value of learning or training
- consulting the employer about carrying on any such activities
- preparation to carry out any of the above
- undergoing relevant training.

## ***Qualifying for paid time off***

☛ ACAS says that the union should confirm in writing that the training undertaken is sufficient to allow the ULR to undertake their role.

**Employees who are members of an independent trade union recognised by the employer are entitled to reasonable paid time off to undertake the functions of a Union Learning Representative.**

To qualify for paid time off the member must be sufficiently trained to carry out duties as a learning representative:

- either at the time when their trade union gives notice to their employer in writing that they are a learning representative of the trade union
- or within six months of that date.

In the latter case, the trade union is required to give the employer notice in writing that the employee will be undergoing such training and when the employee has done so to give the employer notice of that fact.

☛ ACAS says that the six-month qualifying period may be extended, with agreement, to take into account any significant unforeseen circumstances.

During the six-month period in which they are undergoing this training, the Union Learning Representative must be allowed time off to perform their duties.

### ***Payment for time off for training***

**An employer who permits ULRs time off to attend relevant training must pay them for the time off taken. The employer must pay either the amount that the ULR would have earned had they worked during the time off taken or, where earnings vary with the work done, an amount calculated by reference to the average hourly earnings for the work they are employed to do.**

There is no statutory requirement to pay for time off where training is undertaken at a time when the ULR would not otherwise have been at work unless the ULR works flexible hours, such as night shift, but needs to undertake training during normal hours. Staff who work part time will be entitled to be paid if staff who work full time would be entitled to be paid. In all cases, the amount of time off must be reasonable.

### ***What qualifies as sufficient training to become a ULR***

**An employee could demonstrate to their trade union that they have received sufficient training to enable them to operate competently:**

- by completing a training course approved by the TUC or by UNISON
- or by showing that they have previously gained the relevant expertise and experience to operate effectively as a ULR.

☛ ACAS examples of previous experience and expertise include: extensive on-the-job training and experience gained in shadowing an experienced ULR; teaching; training; counselling; providing careers advice and guidance; and human resource development.

Download the ACAS Code of Practice on time off for trade union duties and activities including guidance on time off for union learning representatives from **<https://www.acas.org.uk/acas-code-of-practice-on-time-off-for-trade-union-duties-and-activities/html>**

# Model workplace

## ***learning agreement***

This model agreement is a resource for branch use at local level and includes some general ideas and ground rules that branches can adapt to suit local circumstances. Guidance notes to some sections are provided in the boxes to the right of the main text.

### **Section 1: Introduction**

#### **1.1 Who is involved**

This agreement covers the following parties:

- (UNISON / the joint unions)
- (name of employer)

☛ If you are negotiating a multi-union agreement each union will need to be included here. The agreement may cover an entire employer or it may be restricted to certain departments. This should be reflected in this section. It would not normally be the case that the learning provider will be included at this formal point of the agreement.

#### **1.2 Links to external organisations**

(Employer) and (UNISON / the joint unions) will liaise jointly with external learning providers and other bodies as appropriate to meet the need of learners.

☛ In UNISON's case this may be the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), The Open University (OU), National Extension College. Employers and unions may also have relationships with other potential funding bodies including learning and skills councils, sector skills councils and, in the NHS, strategic health authorities.



### 1.3 Statement of intent

The agreement has been drawn up to reinforce the importance of workplace learning to *(employer)* and *(UNISON / the joint unions)*. It is designed as an overarching policy statement which will deliver effective learning for employees of *(employer)*

• Even if the agreement is relatively narrow in scope, try to include a statement demonstrating UNISON's commitment to learning which is focused on non-traditional learners, which aims to benefit not just the employer but also the learner outside work and as a member of the community.

## Section 2: Principles

### 2.1 Principles

This policy is based on the fundamental principle that learning should develop the confidence and the skills of the individual, which will benefit them at work, at home and as citizens.

### 2.2 Definitions

**Learning** in this document refers to learning which is accessible to everyone, for life and for work, and especially for those who have been traditionally excluded from learning. Learning should be flexible and responsive to the needs of learners. Learning is about individual self development but it is also about working together to meet a collective need – be it in the workplace, in the union or in society.

**Partnership:** A partnership is one in which both sides have a contribution to make, and in which all partners recognise the strengths of each partner. The partnership has to be embedded throughout the structures of each partner organisation. An effective partnership is one which has at its centre the needs of learners and which is flexible and dynamic.

achievement and develop lifelong learning so that every individual whatever their age or starting point can realise their full potential in learning, work and within the community. *(Employer)* commits to implementing the learning strategy from the highest level, to raising awareness and support for the strategy through all levels of the organisation, and to providing the necessary resources to enable this to happen.

### UNISON commitments

Trade unions are crucial to the success of encouraging non-traditional learners back into learning. UNISON is committed to working with its members and activists to support learning initiatives and to developing union learning reps to encourage and support learners and to enthuse about the benefits of learning.

The union brings to the partnership its experience of championing learning with non-traditional learners, its national Learning at Work programme, and its branch organisation.

• A learning agreement with an employer involves more than union learning reps. This section sets out the central function of the branch and its education or lifelong learning co-ordinator and team. Any learning agreement should be negotiated by or with the close involvement of the branch secretary and relevant lead officers.

## Section 3: Statement of intent

### 3.1 Employer commitments

It is the responsibility and aim of *(employer)* to raise educational

The union has developed / will develop a network of union learning reps whose role is set out below.

Union learning reps are an integral part of the UNISON branch structure and as such will be supported by the branch committee and will work closely with the branch education co-ordinator as part of the branch education team. The union's network of stewards and workplace contacts are also points of contact for potential learners who can then be channelled to the union learning reps for appropriate support and signposting.

The union provides two stages of training for union learning reps.

### 3.2 A learning audit

*(Employer)* will carry out an audit of learning across the organisation on an annual basis to identify who is currently accessing learning, and the nature and level of learning taking place, and will monitor regularly access to learning.

### 3.3 Combating inequality

*(Employer)* will work to tackle the barriers to learning to ensure that all staff can access learning which meets their needs and the needs of the organisation. *(Employer)* resolves to work with *(UNISON / the joint unions)* and the learning provider to identify and address barriers to equality in access to learning including access, and flexibility in learning materials and delivery.

☛ It is important not to confuse this with a skills audit – the focus should be on how the employer is currently providing for its staff, and on what percentage of training budget and support goes to different groups of staff and on who has personal development plans.

☛ A specific further point to include here should cover how the employer will tackle access – eg ensuring flexibility of delivery to meet the needs of part-time workers and shift workers.

### 3.4 Time for learning and other resources

(Employer) commits to resourcing fully the learning agreement in order to meet the needs of learners, which may include protected learning time, paid time off, physical space in which to learn or other support. (Employer) commits to providing physical space and time off and appropriate back fill to enable the running of (specific courses) each year (to be reviewed as appropriate).

### 3.5 Facilities and time off for union learning reps

(Employer) will carry out an audit of learning across the organisation on an annual basis to identify who is currently accessing learning, and the nature and level of learning taking place, and will monitor regularly access to learning.

## Section 4: Mechanisms and roles

### 4.1 General statement

This statement recognises the commitment of (employer) to an employee learning programme that will help staff pursue learning and development opportunities with support from (employer). It is recognised that in order to support staff in developing their skills and abilities, a range of support mechanisms will need to be put in place as follows. This includes:

- An annual development assessment review with their line manager to set out a plan for development opportunities for the year ahead. The plan should be reviewed and updated by mutual agreement at least once during the course of the year. This is consistent with good Investors in People (IIP) practice.
- A clear entitlement to learning and development which is appropriately

Different learners will have different support needs. While many learners will want to take advantage of paid time off to learn, others may wish to learn with a group of their colleagues outside of their work hours, or they may wish to take advantage of protected time for learning in the workplace. The agreement needs to acknowledge that learners' needs will vary and that the approach of the employer, union and learning provider should be flexible. This section of the agreement should include the specific commitments of the union to identify and develop union learning reps and recruit learners.

Note: this should be in line with existing arrangements for other workplace representatives, and time agreed should be in addition to existing facility time. This section should formally update the recognition and facilities agreement.

The entitlement to access learning may be linked to a specific joint union / employer training programme.

resourced and supported each year.

- An employee assistance programme which will provide information and support for staff who wish to take part in wider learning opportunities.
- All staff will have the opportunity for training and learning which meets their own development needs.

### 4.2 Roles and responsibilities

**Employer.** (Employer) has a clear responsibility to all employees in relation to their learning, training and development in line with the commitment stated above.



**Chief officer and senior management team.** It is the duty of the chief officer and the senior management team to ensure that all their employees have their right to learning upheld. This reflects an equal entitlement to learning for all staff.

**Managers and supervisors.** Managers have responsibility for ensuring that all staff have access to learning and training opportunities, can get the necessary time off and that their work is properly covered while they are attending courses or other learning opportunities. All managers and supervisors have a central responsibility for the training and development of employees reporting to them. They are also responsible for ensuring that each employee is made aware of the workplace learning policy and the learning opportunities available to them.

**Organisational development/training specialist.** All officers with specific responsibilities for the co-ordination, management and/or delivery of learning and development must comply with the workplace learning policy.

**Employees.** Employees should think creatively about their own development needs and be prepared to make suggestions to their managers.

**Trade unions.** Trade unions are crucial to the success of encouraging non-traditional learners back to learning. They need to help enthuse workers about the opportunities learning creates, and offer support and encouragement to union learning representatives.

**Union learning representatives.** Union learning representatives will work with members of staff in accordance with the duties and responsibilities outlined in the relevant ACAS Code of Practice.

#### 4.3 A learning committee

A learning committee will be established comprising representatives of (*UNISON / the joint unions*), including representatives of learners, and senior management, where the arrangements for and monitoring of the success of the learning agreement will be the subject of joint discussion between (*employer*) and (*UNISON / the joint unions*).



- There are different approaches to the learning committee: one option is to see it as a negotiating committee which should be a sub committee of the joint consultative committee, another is to see it as a consultative committee on which learners can also sit. If you adopt the second approach you will need to include some reference to important matters including:
  - who will sit on the committee
  - what will be its functions and remit – eg will it be advisory or will it be a negotiating committee?
  - how the committee will fit in to the existing negotiating and consultative arrangements
  - how the views of learners and union learning reps will be represented on the committee
  - how often it will meet.
- The committee's membership should reflect the interests and needs of learners who should, along with union learning reps, be represented on the committee.
- Some issues it may discuss:**
  - setting up courses
  - reviewing learning audits and acting on their findings
  - how it will address equalities issues.



#### 4.4 Communications strategy

Matters referred to in this policy will be communicated to staff through inclusion in team briefing sessions, notice boards, staff bulletins and via jointly agreed statements from the learning committee. Meetings of learners engaged in learning programmes and meetings of the branch education team should be facilitated, and their views fed into the learning committee.

☛ The agreement will need to define how these issues will be communicated to staff, how any new learning initiatives will be advertised to staff and how staff will have the opportunity to have some input in terms of raising issues or suggesting how learning needs can be met.

#### 4.5 Representation and recognition

(Employer) and (UNISON / the joint unions) recognise the key role of union workplace reps in the successful realisation of lifelong learning.

The union will appoint union learning representatives in accordance with its rules. These will be notified to the employer by the union.

The employer will normally allow time off for training within six months of notification of appointment by the union. Union learning representatives will be afforded time off to perform their duties in accordance with the relevant ACAS code of practice.

UNISON will provide appropriate training for union learning representatives.

☛ Note that if you are negotiating a multi-union agreement it should be made clear that each union will have the right to train its own union learning reps.

The agreement needs to spell out the fact that communication is a two way process and that communications going out from the learning committee need to be jointly owned, clear and accessible for all members of staff and preferably use different methods to ensure that the message gets across.

The inclusion of paid time off for regular meetings of learners and union learning reps is also important, in order to ensure that their issues are heard and addressed and that the quality and effectiveness of the programme is monitored.

### Section 5: Resolving disagreements

Should disagreements arise between (employer) and (UNISON / the joint unions) about any matters covered by this agreement, they will, in the first instance be discussed at the learning committee. Should resolution not be reached at the learning committee, (employer's) normal dispute resolution procedure shall be applied.

☛ This could be by joint agreement of the learning committee or through the operation of your employer's grievance or disputes procedure if all else fails. You should try to specify different levels for airing such disagreements so that both sides have the chance to resolve them at the lowest level possible.

## Section 6: Review and monitoring

It is recognised that changes sometimes occur which may affect any of the parties to this agreement. Therefore any such changes may need to be considered through joint consultation in the learning committee.

If necessary this agreement may be amended through the normal joint consultative arrangements that exist between (*employer*) and (*UNISON / the joint unions*).

A minimum of three months notice will be given for proposed changes to this agreement, unless both parties jointly agree to a lesser notice period.

- ☛ You will need to include details of:
- how the agreement (and the workplace learning that it supports) will be monitored
  - who will collect and distribute the information to enable you to do this
  - how often the information will be provided
  - what sort of information you will require
  - what the learning committee will do with the information.

Qualitative information about learners' reactions to learning, for example, as well information about numbers accessing training, is important.

Finally in this section you may want to add a section that gives you the right to review the agreement as a whole after a defined period. This will give you the opportunity to amend it if that is necessary.

# Resources

## **UNISON resources**

- Union learning rep poster: includes blank space for ULRs to advertise contact details and events. Available from LAOS: **learningandorganising@unison.co.uk / 020 7121 5116**
- Member Learning Leaflet. Available from LAOS: **learningandorganising@unison.co.uk / 020 7121 5116**
- UNISON Organising Space: **organisingspace.unison.org.uk** – login with your My.UNISON account
- UNISON Learning website: **learning.unison.org.uk**  
– for all the latest information about UNISON College learning and training opportunities
- UNISON e-learning site: **e-learning.unison.org.uk**  
– includes access to UNISON learning e-notes (log in with your My.UNISON account).
- A-Z of UNISON learning resources – searchable index of online resources created by UNISON and other organisations: **https://learning.unison.org.uk/a-z-of-unison-learning-resources/**

## **Partner resources**

- Learning and Work Institute: **www.learningandwork.org.uk**
- National Numeracy: **www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk**
- Open University UNISON partnership: **https://learning.unison.org.uk/member-learning/open-university**
- The Reading Agency: **readingagency.org.uk** – includes the latest information on Quick Reads and the Reading Challenge
- Unionlearn: **www.unionlearn.org.uk** – includes access to the SkillCheck online assessment tool
- Workers' Educational Association: **www.wea.org.uk**

To find out more about UNISON and  
how to join contact UNISONdirect  
on **0800 0 857 857**

Textphone users FREEPHONE call  
**0800 0 967 968**

Lines open from 6am – midnight  
Monday to Friday, 9am – 4pm Saturday

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