

# Unite ULR Handbook

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## Part 1: Becoming a Unite learning rep

### 1.1 Introduction

Unite the union exists to fight poverty and unfairness; learning and skills are the key to a better job and a better life but are grossly unequally distributed. Our aim is to use learning as part of our radical vision to reject austerity and provide an alternative strategy in the UK providing jobs, homes and hope to all the British people.

*“Learning encourages people to join the union, but an effective workplace structure is the best recruitment tool there is. So we want to set up a long-term relationship that will develop the needs of the new reps. It’s important that we do something sustainable. You need to look at the industrial relations environment and you can’t impose lifelong learning in the workplace from outside ... You have to look at what members are worried about. Learning isn’t just some funny thing, it’s about demonstrating the real relevance, so you need to devolve all of that stuff down to workplace level and deliver what members say they need. And I think that it’s a key to rebuilding the trade union movement: building strong workplace structures and making sure that you have reps on the ground.”*  
**Regional Learning Organiser, Unite**

Learning is a key issue facing us today. It is important to our members in the same way that decent pay or reasonable hours of work are important. Put simply, with learning our life chances are better. Without it we are at risk in the labour market and disadvantaged in the community.

The rapid development of new technologies and the acceleration of economic and industrial change have had enormous effects on the labour market.

The modern labour market demands the constant improvement of existing skills and the acquisition of new skills, throughout our working lives. With education and development we have more choice, and hence control, over the way we earn a living and the way we live our lives.

With greater choice we need not be the victims of change. Indeed we are in better position to understand and influence the course of that change. We can feel more secure.

The benefits of learning, both in terms of job security and in terms of lifetime earnings, are huge.

The UK economy must radically improve skills at all levels but can only improve skills for all by reducing skills inequality, so prosperity and equality arguments go hand in hand.

Unions play a unique and crucial role in workplace learning: no other body can provide the essential go-between which employers and employees need.

We have always been involved in learning, whether training reps and officers, wider learning for members, or campaigning for a better education and skills system.

Learning is an equality issue, it’s about organising to make a difference. Unite’s Equality Strategy sets our 10 industrial priorities which clearly link with learning.

Wider campaigning and policy development is based on experience in the workplace, and vice versa; union learning should embrace both delivery and policy.

Union learning supports organising (and vice versa), and we are increasingly integrating learning and organising.

Our strategy for growth must include union learning; it is popular with members and potential members, it demonstrably aids recruitment and is a source of fresh, more representative activists.

Our vision for learning combines pragmatism and radicalism; involvement with government and external accreditation, audit and quality alongside independence and democratic member choice.

Learning has been at the heart of the trade union movement almost from the very beginning. Knowledge, skills and education were always central to that. Unions always emphasised the value of education and trained their own members and representatives. In the early 20th century, it was trade unions that fought and campaigned for a well-resourced education and training system, with financial support. They fought hard for a public library system, for state schooling and for quality vocational education and training.

In the 21st century it is still the same three principles we work towards:

- educate
- agitate
- organise.

*“Educate yourselves because we’ll need all your intelligence.  
Agitate because we’ll need all your enthusiasm.  
Organise yourselves because we’ll need all your strength.”*  
**Antonio Gramsci, Italian political activist**

## **1.2 Joining the union team**

As a union learning rep (ULR) you are an important part of the union team, promoting learning in the workplace and community.

Some ULRs will also be workplace reps, health & safety, equalities or other union reps, while others will be ULRs only.

Learning plays a key role in union activism. Activists work hard representing and supporting members but it is not all about reacting to problems and crises.

Union-led learning and skills initiatives ‘add value’ to the union and showcase our positive work.

Only through strong collective workplace organisation which unites workers around their common causes can Unite not only maintain, but also bolster its position as Britain and Ireland’s biggest and best trade union; for this to succeed, we need enthusiastic and knowledgeable ULRs – incorporating organising as one of their roles – armed with the confidence to grow our membership.

The trend towards ‘mainstreaming’ union learning is gathering pace. Unite now has formal recognition of ULRs in our rule books, places for ULRs on branch committees, learning committee structures which are accountable. At national level learning and skills is increasingly prominent on our bargaining agendas.

Many ULRs have become active more widely being elected to other lay officer roles, some have been appointed as full-time officers, bringing the learning agenda with them, and some have been appointed as staff and organisers promoting the learning agenda. Unite welcomes the influx of new activism that ULRs bring, many from under-represented groups, which helps us to reflect our membership better.

The ULR role widens opportunities and skills, building members’ self-confidence. In turn, members can improve job prospects and income. It also builds branch capacity,

enhances the union image and helps recruitment and retention.

Our learning strategy is to encourage a culture in which education and training is available and accessible for everyone. Learning should mean learning in the broadest sense, gaining skills and confidence to progress and participate in work, in the union and in the wider community.

Experience shows appreciative Unite learners go on to become active within the union's democratic structures.

*"Many union learners move on to becoming ULRs fostering the talent of their fellow workers and developing a culture of learning in their workplaces. What union learners are doing is more than changing their own lives – they are changing the world around them; their families, their friends, their place of work and how they see the world. An educated workforce is an economic necessity. An educated citizenry is a social necessity."*

**Peter Bunting, Assistant General Secretary Irish Congress of Trade Unions**

ULRs ensure workplace learning is both union-led and sustainable, thus making a massive difference to union organisation in the workplace. Working alongside existing reps and officials, ULRs get involved in, and support, workplace and branch structures and the wider work of the union.

ULR training is available to all ULRs. Branches should embrace learning, ensuring it is on the agenda of every branch meeting.

Negotiating a learning agreement helps embed learning in the workplace and secures employer commitment to lifelong learning.

Working together, ULRs and other reps can ensure work-based learning initiatives support the wider role of the union.

Union learning has already become strongly integrated within union structures; it is here to stay and is steadily growing.

An old Quaker proverb says: "It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness." Are you someone who will light that candle? Or will you continue to moan that things could be better without actually doing anything about it?

By becoming a Unite ULR you have decided to light that candle.

Few remember filling in the union application form but for those whose lives have changed by learning to read, write or gained some other skill, their gratitude, identification and commitment to the union is as good as permanent.

### **1.3 Your role as a ULR**

Learning is a unique and complex activity. It involves engaging with people, not telling them what to do. It is not about filling empty minds with knowledge (the deficit model) so much as encouraging people to grow their own understanding, using their existing skills to grow new skills. It is not about transferring knowledge from teacher to student but helping people how to find out and make sense of things for themselves.

All of this means learning is done working with people and not to them. Managers cannot make employees learn. Genuine understanding only comes with a genuine desire to learn. In other words working people will only learn if, literally, they feel like it and are motivated.

Through their ULRs, working people can collectively discuss the kind of learning they want, how it should be organised and delivered. Employees want and need learning that is wider and longer term than the more immediate profit driven needs of employers.

Reconciling these aims is the keystone of any skills strategy. By sitting down with employers, we can discuss and agree an employee training scheme which collectively meets both short and long-term needs, skills directly related to work and broader developmental learning.

Above all, ULRs provide the confidence and trust needed for successful work-based learning. Employees who may feel unsure of their skills are not likely to confide in their manager. They are far more likely to confide in their own ULR, who is one of them.

It is not enough just to gain qualifications. If skills are not used they are forgotten. ULRs can help employers to expand the scope of jobs to absorb new skills. Upskilling a workforce means changing culture, hierarchies and job design. A higher skilled workplace may well be less authoritarian, more open to debate, care more about ending dreary job routines – and of course have higher pay. Employees want all that and so should good employers, but achieving change needs joint commitment. The UK is poor at skill utilisation. We can help employers make it better.

The UK skills problem is not caused by people not wanting to learn. Working people know very well that better skills are the passport to a better life. But if managers don't know what kind of training their employees want then they will either not provide much training or provide the wrong kind – and if that results in a few volunteers then managers will wrongly conclude there is little appetite for training. So the ULR role is crucial.

Our understanding of the problems faced by our members at work is the basis of our campaigning for a better skills system.

Fighting poverty and inequality cannot be confined to the realm of politics, nor just to what happens at work.

Unite's Learnwithunite is a dynamic approach, which includes both practical support for learning at work and lobbying for better funding, rights and opportunities. Each rely on the other and together they form the unique and vital contribution made by union learning to the fight against poverty and unfairness, the fight for better quality work, and for a more prosperous society.

Learnwithunite is also democratic. It promotes members' right to progress, to carry on learning, either for its own sake or to achieve higher qualifications, skills and pay. Learners determine what their learning needs are. This is what our members want. ULRs are the bedrock of union learning.

In practice, the roles and responsibilities of ULRs will often vary by workplace but will include one or more of the following functions:

- working alongside other union reps, such as workplace reps, health & safety reps, equality reps and branch officers, to recruit, organise, represent and involve all members;
- securing equality in learning;
- creating a positive attitude towards learning;
- raising awareness of the benefits of learning;
- encouraging fellow workers to take up learning opportunities;
- supporting members in learning;
- providing advice and guidance on learning.

ULRs have an important role to play in engaging the enthusiasms and energy of employees in developing both their own and their employment-related capabilities. They have a unique contribution because of the strength of their relationship with non-traditional learners and those who may have been 'turned off' by formal learning.

ULRs can help workers in routine and manual jobs acquire the habits and skills of learning.

Where workers are motivated but lack opportunities, the ULR can facilitate access to learning.

ULRs can work with employees to identify areas they would like or need to develop that are not catered for in the workplace.

The role is demanding but also rewarding as the range of issues is wide:

- finding out if members have problems in reading instructions or doing simple calculations. The ULR could then be involved in arranging with the employer Skills for Life training in such a way that avoids the employees feeling stigmatised;
- giving advice on learning/training or on-line courses to union members who may never have done any learning since leaving school;
- providing mentoring for young workers in formal training such as Apprenticeships;
- explaining to a meeting of employees what potential training or learning opportunities or standards involve and how they might benefit from them;
- negotiating/consulting on paid time off for employees to train – whether it is for unqualified workers to acquire Skills for Life or skilled workers to access continuing professional development;
- negotiating any training required when employees are to be made redundant, in order to prepare them for new employment opportunities with local providers;
- encouraging an understanding of training and learning opportunities among local management, who may not be aware of the mutual benefits;
- liaising with their workplace reps and/or full-time officer about the importance of training and learning;
- promoting education for all workplace reps and members.

On being elected to be a ULR, your union should inform your employer in writing that you will be representing your branch as a ULR.

Inform your regional office that you have taken up the role as ULR and contact your Regional Learning Organiser.

Ensure you are put on to the next available Unite ULR course.

Notify your employer in writing that you are requesting paid time off to attend training for your role (acquaint yourself with policies and procedures for requesting paid time off in your workplace).

Find out if there is a learning committee in the workplace; if so, when and where it meets.

Establish if there is a learning agreement in place; if so, check it is current (no more than three years old), it is robust and fit for purpose and covered by normal collective bargaining procedures.

Determine what the branch/union workplace procedures for reporting back to branch, other reps and members are.

Check there are effective communications with members and other reps in place.

Familiarise yourself with other union committees in the workplace.

## **1.4 Building the union presence in the workplace**

It cannot be stressed enough how important the workplace reps are in relation to representing Unite and explaining its aims and purposes to the workers, making them see the necessity of belonging to the union as well as showing that they themselves are important and that their efforts matter in the workplace. Hence, the visible presence of the union gives the workers confidence and creates a feeling of togetherness and strength.

The personal relations with individual workers that are built and maintained by the workplace reps and by other local trade unionists have an impact on potential new members.

As a ULR, it is vital to work with workplace reps and the branch reps to be effective in the workplace: they are paramount to workplace learning being put onto the bargaining agenda and seen by the membership as a union provision.

ULRs have a crucial role to play in helping to rectify the imbalance in the distribution of resources for learning in the workplace so that more attention is paid to the needs of workers in lower-grade jobs. This will contribute to raising the effectiveness of the workforce as a whole.

Being a Unite ULR involves developing your skills. We provide you with high quality training to become better skilled in:

- listening
- working in confidence
- interviewing
- presenting and providing information
- problem solving
- record keeping
- negotiating
- motivating people
- leading and organising
- teamwork and communication.

## **1.5 Knowing your rights as a ULR**

The Employment Act 2002 sets out the statutory rights of union learning representatives in organisations that recognise trade unions.

ULRs have a number of formal functions that can be performed and for which paid time off from their normal duties should be given.

ULRs are allowed time off for the following functions:

- analysing learning and training needs
- providing information and advice about learning or training matters
- arranging learning or training
- promoting the value of learning
- consulting the employer about such activities
- undergoing training for their ULR role

ULRs are entitled to 'reasonable' time off and facilities to perform their duties, taking into account the patterns of work and location of all workers.

Union members are also entitled to time off to receive the services of ULR, although there is

no requirement on the employer to pay them for this unless there is a learning agreement including this.

## **1.6 Facilities for ULRs**

To ensure that ULRs can carry out their functions, the employer should provide the following facilities as a minimum requirement:

- arrangements within the workplace for confidential consultation with the members they represent;
- use of a desk to prepare reports and other paperwork associated with the functions of the ULR;
- access to secure facilities for storing correspondence;
- access to a computer at one or more workplaces occupied by the employer together with the provision of an email account in the name of the organisation. This will allow access to the organisation's intranet, the internet and secure means of communication with other ULRs;
- access to internal and external telephones;
- access to duplicating, printing and fax facilities;
- a noticeboard or space on an existing noticeboard for the display of learning and development information in each workplace;
- subject to seeking the necessary management approval, time off work to perform the duties of a ULR in accordance with the agreed Policy on Time off Work for Trade Union Duties;
- reasonable time off work for trade union members (and non-members) to access the services of a ULR where it is not possible for practical reasons for meetings to take place out with normal working hours;
- access to appropriate information such as policy documents and approved codes of practice, copies of relevant statistics.

For further information, see the ACAS code of practice.

How to become a ULR will vary from workplace to workplace and company to company. In general, the Unite rulebook includes the principle of regular election of all reps including ULRs. Where there is a variation from this practice, it should always be discussed with the local full-time official.

## **1.7 Training and development for ULRs**

### **Unite's Union Learning Reps, Stage 1**

This course is designed to be the core initial training for all Unite ULRs. It helps them develop the basic knowledge and skills needed as a new rep working with colleagues in the workplace. The course forms a solid foundation for the new ULR to develop their skills and their own personal development.

On completion of the course, ULRs should be able to:

- understand the role of the ULR and the legal framework for ULRs;

- understand the structures of Unite and how ULRs can use them for support in the workplace;
- understand how you and your members can both implement and develop union policy;
- promote union learning;
- understand learning needs and barriers to learning;
- show knowledge of facilities, learning and recognition agreements;
- interview and support members with learning issues.

### **Unite's Union Learning Reps, Stage 2**

This course continues the core essential training for all Unite ULRs. It helps them further to develop the knowledge and skills needed as a ULR in the workplace – working with management, learning providers and other organisations. The course completes the foundation for the ULR and prepares the ULR to develop more specialised skills and knowledge.

On completion of the course, ULRs should be able to demonstrate knowledge of:

- the three pillars of learning
- presentation skills
- communication skills
- negotiating skills
- setting up and running a learning centre
- working with providers
- sustainability, reporting
- the ULR role as a facilitator/mentor.

These courses are accredited by NOCN & SQA.

## Part 2: Tackling barriers to learning

### 2.1 Introduction

Learning goes on throughout life. It takes place formally and informally. People learn through choice or automatically through their own experience. Learning takes place at home and in the wider world, as well as at school, college or work. People learn from family and friends, as well as teachers and mentors.

Adults have far more experience to draw on than children or young people do. This can help learning, but it can also be a barrier if attitudes are entrenched or self-esteem low.

Learning takes place with others, and can be a collective process.

Unite does not buy into the concept that we have unskilled people in the UK. How can anyone say that a parent is unskilled? How can people who are full-time carers be classed as unskilled? They may not have formal academic qualifications but they certainly possess a wide range of skills and may have been denied opportunity to develop their full potential.

Our twin aim is to help workers win life chances they thought had passed them by and develop Unite workplace organisation by offering jobs, homes and hope: the potential is enormous.

There are many things that will affect an individual's attitude to learning:

- their past experience of learning
- their perceptions of their own abilities
- whether they have the right information and are able to interpret it effectively
- financial incentives (e.g. better job, an increase in pay)
- the time they have available
- support from their employer.

Whether or not a member decides to make a commitment to learning will depend on a number of factors including:

- their level of interest and motivation
- the amount of free time they have available, other domestic commitments
- shift patterns
- financial commitments (requiring them to work additional hours, or hold down more than one job)
- geographical mobility (whether they can actually get to learning opportunities that take place outside of the workplace).

Above all, many members do not commit themselves to learning because they have a low expectation of their abilities and skills. Building confidence in members about the value and benefits of learning will be as important as providing the right information.

### 2.2 Responding to people's additional needs

Some people will have additional needs, for example if they have:

- a physical disability
- a hearing or sight impairment
- a mental health problem
- a learning disability such as dyslexia (which may well be disguised, and manifest itself in resistance to the idea of learning)
- poor written or communication skills; English is not their first or main language.

An individual's additional need is not always obvious. ULRs need to be aware that some people do have other needs, spot them as quickly as possible, and handle them sensitively and positively.

## **2.3 Equalities is a learning issue; learning is an equalities issue**

*“Let’s put equality and diversity at the heart of union learning. And let’s make learning part and parcel of the wider struggle for equality.”*

**Frances O’Grady, TUC General Secretary**

Learning and skills is an equality issue since it’s about:

- fairness
- tackling discrimination
- diversity and respect
- equal access to training and education
- hard-to-reach learners
- learning as a class issue.

## **2.4 Responding to cultural diversity**

Recognising the diversity of adult needs and aspirations, and the way these are influenced by factors such as race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, nationality, religion, language or disability, is one of the fundamental principles of our front-line advice and guidance activities. Members should be treated equally, and their individual needs and interests responded to objectively: it is important to avoid assumptions about or stereotype people, because of appearance, age, gender etc.

### **2.4.1 Respecting diversity**

The relationship between the ULR and the member is central to the success of the process. You need to respect and value the member and put yourself in his / her shoes. It’s also about ensuring equal access and inclusion. Are all shift workers, part-time workers, agency staff etc all represented and their needs addressed?

ULRs need to be able to communicate effectively and be aware of:

- the negative impact of inequality, discrimination and stereotyping
- how these factors can reinforce previous negative experiences
- how these factors can prevent people from engaging.

### **2.4.2 Prejudices and stereotyping**

ULRs will need to recognise their own prejudices and tendency to stereotype by ensuring that they:

- access equality and diversity training;
- recognise the rights of every individual to fair and accessible information and advice;
- recognise the influences that cultural factors may have on choice and development;
- offer realistic, relevant and appropriate opportunities and facilities;
- avoid patronising, stereotyping or fitting people into pre-conceived boxes;
- seek to provide a friendly and culturally diverse ethos and environment that immediately informs members that they are welcome and recognised.

### **2.4.3 Key principles for ULRs to help overcome barriers to learning**

1 Receive all members in a friendly, positive manner.

2 Provide a friendly and encouraging atmosphere which enables members to present their enquiry easily.

- 3 Recognise the individuality of all members.
- 4 Be responsive to the needs of a range of people, including those with particular needs, or who may not be able to present their learning needs in a clear or structured way.
- 5 Where appropriate, help people to express their needs and opinions.
- 6 Support and encourage people to take positive action as a result of the information or advice given.
- 7 Refer people effectively and accurately to other parts of the organisation, or, where appropriate, to external agencies.
- 8 Maintain an up-to-date list of key agencies and contacts within local learning provision.

Whatever your experience or background, as a Unite ULR it is essential that you can empathise and communicate easily with all the members you speak to. Discrimination, for whatever reason, and however unintended, is a disabling experience that undermines members' confidence, motivation and rights as well as being illegal under the Equality Act.

#### **2.4.4 Equality and diversity training**

Unite is founded upon principles of dignity and respect with equality, justice and fairness being at its heart. Our union is proud of the industrial and democratic structures that are in place to ensure our members can play a full part in Unite.

Within Unite's learning strategy in the workplace, ULRs are the custodians of maintaining the inclusivity of our learning strategy so that all feel welcome and able to participate fully with equality of opportunity to engage in learning and overcoming barriers that prevent such participation.

Unite encourages ULRs from under-represented groups and supports Equality Reps through our learning strategy.

We feel that it is an important part of the ULR development to fully understand equality and diversity and encourage equality and diversity training as part of their own progression and development .

#### **2.4.5 Access to workplace learning**

Any structure for workplace learning should provide ease of access for members in a wide variety of occupations. In particular, it should enable members to:

- be available at a time and place that does not exclude anyone;
- enter at a level appropriate to their current state of learning;
- learn at a pace suitable for them;
- receive recognition for their efforts;
- use a variety of routes and ladders for progression, where desired;
- develop an enthusiasm for, and confidence in, learning.

### **2.5 Closing the opportunity gap**

With the increasing pace of technological change, learning plays an important role in providing a route out of poverty and closing the opportunity gap. It also enables people to take an active part in society.

Investment in knowledge and skills brings direct economic benefits both to the learner, employer and to society as a whole. But people are not only interested in learning to increase their earnings.

Learning helps people to achieve other goals, such as taking an active part in civic life, encouraging participation in community activities, leading a more sustainable lifestyle and thus improving their health and well-being.

Learning is one of the major tools for working at achieving greater levels of equality among people whose initial fortune varies so vastly. It is the key to the acquisition of all forms of capital – economic, social, cultural and political. Without a certain level of education, in particular without a certain level of literacy, numeracy and ICT, the divide between people grows ever wider and the results of such inequality are catastrophic for any society.

We can put up with the status quo and be obedient and acquiescent or we can learn to question critically and join a struggle to create a more equal and just place for everyone to live. The fact that education currently does not serve everyone equally is well researched.

The inequalities that often lead to barriers to learning have a more far-reaching and cumulative effect. They continuously contribute to the marginalisation of those who cannot afford the trappings of privilege that systematically dictate the detail of the dominant culture. The resultant sense of being 'other' leads to discomfort and underachievement in the learning system. It is one reason for feelings of alienation and the avoidance of taking up learning opportunities. Against this backdrop, workplace learning can have a considerable beneficial effect.

**Affective inequality** refers to the unequal access people have to care and support and the unequal distribution of burdens of care among people. This requires more recognition and equal distribution of the responsibility for care so that its influence on lifelong learning is as positive as possible.

In the context of workplace learning, affective inequality suggests mobilising the strength of union solidarity to support those workers who may be dealing in isolation and fear with burdens of unmet Skills for Life needs. It suggests having awareness and empathy for the complex issues those Skills for Life difficulties present for adults in general and for adults in the workplace in particular.

**Effective equality** highlights the importance for learning of feeling valued, being appreciated and having a sense of belonging. It requires respect and recognition for the responsibilities of care that are borne by many in relation to children, elderly people, those who are ill and those with disabilities. It also requires that relationships of trust and care be fostered between tutors, management, unions, ULRs and employees throughout the process of learning.

People involved in workplace learning can:

- deliver awareness-raising and empathy training in the workplace so that management and others are supportive and encouraging of those wishing to deal with unmet skills for life needs;
- use relationships of trust between union reps and members to support and encourage those who may wish to learn but are fearful;
- take the unequal burdens of care carried by many into consideration when organising provision;
- organise support groups for learners and boost confidence by celebrating achievements;
- provide support and training for ULRs and allow them the resources to meaningfully carry out their 'caring' role;
- ensure that in turn there is a support structure for the ULR whose mediating role may sometimes be burdensome.

## 2.6 Cultural inequality

**Cultural inequality** refers to the unequal value and recognition given to different individuals and groups of people. In the context of learning, cultural inequality raises issues of recognition and respect for difference and different needs within the educational systems.

Cultural equality requires that learning accommodates the full range of needs of individuals and groups, irrespective of class, race, gender, physical and mental capacity, sexual orientation, family status or religious or belief in urban and rural environments.

The promotion of equality requires taking a respectful view of diverse beliefs and cultures and ensuring that diverse learning needs are considered in all aspects of workplace provision. This can be promoted through a process of dialogue and reciprocal learning between all those involved.

Through listening and responding to the expressed needs and wishes of learners, it is likely that they will feel respected and an appropriate model will be deployed for different styles of learning.

People involved in workplace learning can:

- ensure respect for difference and diversity in learning styles and paces;
- listen to the expressed needs of learners;
- make provision for those with special resource needs e.g. large print text;
- attempt to accommodate cultural differences in the content of learning materials;
- celebrate diversity through skilled group facilitation.

## 2.7 Political inequality

**Political inequality** refers to the unequal distribution of power, representation and 'voice' given to different individuals and groups. It requires a widening of participation in policy and decision-making structures and openness to partnership, dialogue and accountability. In the context of learning, political inequality raises issues to do with the openness of learning organisations to their users. It suggests open, inclusive representative bodies that share power with workers, trade unions, management, and tutors and, where appropriate, with community groups.

Political equality suggests educating for empowerment and creating structures where that power can be exercised. It involves recognising that different needs require different treatment in order to achieve equality of condition. Providers of learning may need to examine their approach to delivery, to decision making and accountability and explore ways of making their structures more accessible and adaptable to the workplace environment.

Because the chasm between the learning institution and learner is often too great, the mediation role of the ULR should ensure that the workers' learning needs are represented clearly to the providing body.

People involved in workplace learning can:

- create quality workplace learning partnerships that ensure that all voices and viewpoints are equally represented;
- consult widely and accessibly;
- evaluate all aspects of the programmes and respond actively to feedback;
- ensure that all aspects of delivery are respectful of adults and that hierarchical

attitudes to learning are not imported into the workplace;

- work to create learning content that is empowering of learners and promotes egalitarian goals in a democratic manner.

These inequalities are rarely present individually but are often intricately interwoven and complex in the way they impact on individuals, families, organisations and communities. Their separation here for ease of discussion should not allow the situation to be over-simplified. Many suffer multiple disadvantages and inevitably this affects the extent to which they can reap the benefits of learning.

Unite is rooted in a culture of solidarity and an ethos of struggle for greater justice for workers and we should reflect these principles in all aspects of workplace learning provision. This is particularly important when that provision aims to satisfy the unmet Skills for Life needs of those in the workplace that have suffered the greatest educational disadvantage.

## **2.8 Promoting and encouraging positive attitudes to diversity**

ULRs should promote diversity and encourage positive attitudes towards it. We all need to make learning and training inclusive for everyone in the workplace who might include:

- part-time workers, fixed-term workers, shift workers, agency workers, atypical and disadvantaged workers
- migrant workers
- workers with disabilities and/or learning differences
- workers of all ages – we're never too old to learn, for example, 'silver surfers' are finding learning how to use the internet helps them to develop their hobby interests, keep in touch with their families etc.
- Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAEM) workers
- women workers.

There may be different reasons why certain diverse groups and individuals find it hard to learn and it is for ULRs to try and meet the learning needs of all. Some women, for example, may feel that with work and home commitments, fitting learning in might not be an option – yet they have as much right as anyone to learn.

People with disabilities and/or learning differences should not only be encouraged to learn but providers should also ensure they get all the necessary equipment, materials and support measures to enable their learning.

Meanwhile, Unite should always be looking to create diversity among our learning organisers and ULR teams so that, for example, they are representative of both our workforces and union membership. Having a diverse team of ULRs helps like-for-like learning support as well as the scope for like-for-like organising.

Regarding disability, social model based disability equality training for union reps and workplace managers will help ensure that disabled people working for your company and/or engaging on workplace learning and/or training are treated with respect and are given equality of opportunity.

Other ways to promote positive attitudes could include having ULRs with disabilities, showing that disability is no barrier to work and education. Workers with disabilities could be equality reps as well as ULRs.

Learning centres should also have policies that show their commitment to equality and diversity (as should the company concerned), such as the following type of statement:  
We will:

- aim to ensure that no one is treated less favourably than any other and all feel included;
- aim to provide an inclusive and harmonious place to work and study where

equality and diversity is promoted, valued and the rights and dignity of individuals are respected;

- not tolerate any form of prejudice, discrimination, victimisation or harassment against employees, learners, or members of the public.

Branches and workplace structures should take this opportunity to encourage a better gender and ethnic balance among reps by encouraging women, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAEM) and young workers to try their hand at being a ULR. Also, existing branch reps and activists, even if they do not formally accept a role as a ULR, should make every effort to familiarise themselves with the workplace learning and skills agenda.

With approximately 7 million adults having difficulty with basic literacy and numeracy, ULRs have become crucial in tackling this issue. They have helped encourage members to seek advice and guidance in order to improve their Skills for Life. Thousands of trade union members are now involved in learning in some form or other, perhaps increasing their vocational skills, exploring subjects they have a personal interest in or improving their Skills for Life. Without the work done by ULRs, this would have been impossible to achieve.

## **2.9 Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act came into force on 1 October 2010. The Equality Act brought together over 116 separate pieces of legislation into one single Act. Combined, they made up a new Act that provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and promotes equality for all. The Act provides Britain with a new discrimination law that not only protects individuals from unfair treatment but also promotes a fair and more equal society.

Equally, it is important to note that the definition of 'disabled' extends beyond the stereotype of people in wheelchairs. Wheelchair users are clearly an important constituency, but under the Act a disabled person is anyone with:

“A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his/her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

## Part 3: The three pillars of learning

### 3.1 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Britain in the 21st century is becoming an increasingly diverse society, with migrants from the former Eastern bloc countries as well as from more distant places such as Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq. For many migrant workers, the language barrier not only hampers access to work but also has the potential to disadvantage their participation in society generally. Conversely, developing their language skills through courses in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), they will be better able to do things like talking to doctors and teachers; understanding the laws and customs of the UK; doing courses to get qualifications; help their children with homework; and pass their citizenship test in order to become British citizens if they so desire.

Developing English language skills not only benefits the individuals concerned – for example, making them more employable – but will give added value to the union and trade unionists. First, the added confidence of having a good grasp of English could potentially encourage individuals to take a more proactive role within the union. Many migrants who become fluent in English are becoming trade union activists. Moreover, trade union activists with bi-lingual or multi-lingual skills are extremely well placed to act as intermediaries when it comes to things like sorting out workplace grievances, for example, if a group of migrant workers is having difficulty putting its case to management.

From a strictly trade union perspective, such bi-lingual or multi-lingual activists are strongly placed to become effective organisers and recruiters in ethnically diversified workplaces. They can not only communicate but also empathise with migrant workers and stress to them the benefits of being members of a major union such as Unite.

In another respect, the growth of technical jobs such as computer work, and the increasing need for workers to possess transferable skills, makes it vitally important that they have good English language skills. Conversely, those with a poor understanding of English will be discriminated against in the labour market, which would only be detrimental to the concept of true equality.

Unite offers a range of help, support and qualifications to members, both workplace and community-based, through a blended approach of guided and online learning.

### 3.2 Skills for Life

For the purposes of this handbook, we have used the terminology Skills for Life. We have used this terminology to cover the different variations of core skills used in different parts of the UK.

- In England, this is currently known as functional skills.
- In Northern Ireland, it is currently known as essential skills.
- In Scotland, it is currently known as everyday skills.
- In Wales, it is currently known as essential skills.

**Functional Skills** covers developing skills in maths, English and ICT, but also focuses on teaching learners how to apply these skills in everyday contexts and situations. For example, the government is putting more emphasis on functional maths, which focuses on problem-solving and gives learners practical strategies for applying and transferring skills in everyday situations. Functional Skills provide a single route to achievement from Entry Level to Level 2 for all learners.

Functional Skills can be accredited as free-standing qualifications but they can also be awarded as a component of Apprenticeships or other awards, including Diplomas or Foundation Learning.

The Functional Skills in English are made up of three units:

- reading

- writing
- speaking, listening and communication.

The Functional Skills in Mathematics are also made up of three units:

- representing (selecting the mathematics and information required to model a situation)
- analysing (processing and using mathematics)
- interpreting and communicating the results of analysis.

**Essential Skills** are nationally accredited adult qualifications available throughout Northern Ireland in:

- Entry Level Literacy
- Entry Level Numeracy
- Level 1 & 2 Communication
- Level 1 & 2 Application of Number

Level 1 is equivalent to GCSE grade D; Level 2 is equivalent to GCSE grade C.

**Everyday Skills** is used in Scotland to describe a wide range of skills required in the workplace and at home. Some examples include completing rotas and timesheets, reading customer orders, helping kids with their homework, writing letters, and understanding written and verbal job instructions.

There are many ways to access Everyday Skills opportunities across Scotland. Trade unions can make use of a range of support, including local authority Community Learning & Development Partnerships and specialist organisations such as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). In addition, some unions are developing their own workplace literacy tutor assistants

**Essential Skills Wales** (ESW) is a suite of three different skills qualifications.

Qualifications are available from Entry Level 1 through to Level 4 in:

- communication
- application of number
- Information Communication Technology (ICT).

ESW has been implemented in Wales since September 2010. ESW superseded Key Skills.

**Assessment** At entry level, the nature of the assessment will be determined by the awarding body delivering the qualification. However, the assessment must meet the assessment outcomes.

For Levels 1 to 4, the qualifications will be assessed via a portfolio of evidence.

**Qualification standards** Each level of the skills incorporates and builds on previous levels; therefore for each skill you can view the individual standards as well as progression grids.

**Future of Essential Skills Wales** After a review of ESW content, structure and assessment through comprehensive stakeholder engagement in 2013, new qualifications were trialled in 2014, with ICT replaced by a new Digital Literacy qualification.

### 3.3 Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)

Unite ULRs will be spearheading Unite's learning organising strategy in workplaces and so will be expected to impart information, advice and guidance in the workplace in order to engage workers back into learning.

ULRs can gain IAG qualifications as an opportunity to develop and gain recognition for their skills at a range of levels and in a variety of contexts as part of their Continued Professional Development (CPD).

As part of your ULR training you will become experienced in using and knowing what is available on our Learnwithunite platform.

As a ULR you will often come across the acronym 'IAG' and will be involved in its delivery.

Traditionally IAG tended to be called Careers Advice which also included educationally-related advice and guidance. A definition of these IAG elements can be offered as follows:

- information: a printed hand-out or a reference to a website;
- advice: this could take the form of a ULR offering a suggestion on how to use some printed information to best effect;
- guidance: typically this is a skilled intervention by a guidance practitioner qualified to Level 4 (at time of publication). Guidance may take the form of an interview or group session led by a qualified person. An action plan may result from this process. ULRs are increasingly assuming IAG roles within workplaces on completion of relevant training.

### **3.3.1 Understanding motivation**

Some people will be enthusiastic, have clear ideas about what they want and how to get it, and need little support. Others will be less clear, but with a little encouragement and the right information and advice, approach the idea of learning with enthusiasm and confidence. However members feel about learning, the kind of encouragement and support they receive through the advice and guidance process will be critical.

Motivation is what makes a person put effort and energy into what they are doing. Motivation will vary from person to person, dependent on things like personal commitment, external influences and responsibilities, levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, and the attitude of their employer.

Sometimes, when discussing learning options, a member may be enthusiastic about ideas or options, which are not really clear to the rep they are talking to. The skill is to be able to maintain the motivation of the person, while clarifying their ideas and exploring the options further.

Some pointers for advice and guidance:

- Members' motivation to take up learning will be based on their expectations of what the learning involves, and perceptions of the benefits.
- Expectations are, in turn, affected by previous experiences.
- Individuals are influenced when they see evidence that confirms, or contradicts, their current view. Evidence that contradicts that view may be ignored, or rationalised.
- Changes in the individual's expectations – and therefore in their motivation – can only arise as a result of changes in the way they think about learning.

Dealing with motivation, and people's pre-conceptions, will be central to giving successful information, advice and guidance.

### **3.3.2 What is good Information, Advice and Guidance?**

**1** Putting the needs of the member at the centre of the process.

**2** Ensuring equal support and access to all members regardless of gender, race, culture, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age or status of employment.

**3** Understanding the needs of diverse groups of people and how to work with them.

**4** Developing up-to-date information and knowledge of local learning provision, including key

contact names and contact details.

**5** Building up a good knowledge of other specialist advice, guidance and assessment provision locally.

**6** Knowing about all in-house online learning opportunities available on Learnwithunite platform.

**7** Knowing when to refer people on to external organisations or agencies.

### **3.3.3 Signposting and referrals**

The terms 'signposting' and 'referral' are used inconsistently. However, signposting is used most often to describe situations in which members are made aware of the services of another adviser or provider at an early stage of the process – similar, in practice, to information giving. Referral tends to be used when clients are directed towards a different adviser or service to facilitate further progress, after an initial exploration of the needs as presented.

### **3.3.4 High quality IAG is important for all learners**

The sort of things that IAG might cover would typically include:

- initial identification of a learner's needs or goals, which would be agreed by the IAG adviser and the learner then stated in a learner's Individual Learning Plan (ILP);
- the provision of (or ensuring access to) relevant, accurate and up-to-date information about learning and training opportunities;
- effective signposting or referral to Unite learning activities where they are available;
- effective signposting or referral to external agencies/organisations such as colleges or other adult education institutions. Such procedures take place when Unite is unable to meet the prospective learner's needs. The overriding objective of IAG advisers is to place each individual on the most suitable course to meet their needs; this sometimes means signposting or referral are the only options to 'in-house' learning.

Clients receiving IAG as a consequence of participating in learning or training are motivated chiefly by the desire to gain skills and/or to continue to receive benefit. High quality IAG can put them in the right direction but also help make them enthusiastic to learn more. This can only be beneficial in terms of up-skilling the learner and making them more employable.

In general terms, learners and potential learners have a very limited awareness and understanding of the full range of IAG services. This is a major constraint on their being able to access the most appropriate service at the optimal moment.

## **3.4 Key principles of learning for adult literacy and numeracy**

**1** Learning is a purposeful, goal-directed activity. Ongoing goal setting and self-assessment is central to effective learning.

**2** Purposeful learning builds on learners' prior knowledge and experience to shape and construct new knowledge. It should always be remembered that those who have faced prejudice and discrimination based on gender, race, age, sexuality or disability may have internalised some of these negative ideas about their capacity to learn.

**3** Learning is a social activity embedded in a particular culture and context. Learning occurs through engaged participation in the activities of knowledge communities such as workplace colleagues or family members.

**4** Effective transfer of learning from one context to another requires that the learner understand not only the facts but the 'big picture' – underlying principles, patterns and relationships – that is acquired through the application of knowledge.

**5** Knowing when and how to apply what has been learned (procedural knowledge) is central to expertise, and can be acquired only through practice.

**6** Teaching involves informed interpretations of, and responses to, learners approaches to learning. Tutors should always be aware of the effect of prejudice and discrimination based on gender, race, age, sexuality or disability.

**7** Metacognitive strategies (knowledge about one's own thinking processes) can be taught. Through monitoring and assessing their own progress, learners can develop metacognitive awareness and strategies.

**8** 'Scaffolding instruction' helps learners to develop their fluency, independence and range as they move from being a new learner to becoming an expert learner.

### **3.4.1 Individual Learning Plan (ILP)**

An Individual Learning Plan (ILP) should be kept for every learner. An ILP sets out the learner's plan to learn, a timetable for learning, ways of learning and resources required.

ILPs are compiled, reviewed and developed in consultation with the learner.

An Individual Learning Plan will:

- record the learner's contexts and goals, what they want to learn and how they want to learn it;
- include a record of initial discussions about learning and of assessments carried out;
- identify issues which may affect a learner's access to provision and strategies for dealing with them;
- set measurable goals so that the learner's progress can be assessed;
- provide a reminder for the learner of what the learning will involve (and details of the time and place of provision);
- encourage reflection on the effectiveness of learning;
- be developed over several sessions with a learner;
- focus on the individual's learning goals.

As you support your learners and potential learners, targets are important and they need to be SMART:

- **specific**: having a clear idea of what your aim
- **measurable**: being able to check if progress has been
- **achievable**: realistic and can be broken down into steps
- **relevant**: to the person, their goals and the time they have available
- **time-bound**: identifying dates (short- or long-term), including steps and a plan to check progress.

Setting targets can help members to:

- develop problem-solving skills
- take ownership of planning their future
- be realistic about what they can achieve
- break goals down into manageable actions
- identify resources needed to take plans forward
- check on own progress and adjust plans if necessary.

The ULR can help members identify:

- existing skills
- possible areas for improvement
- where they want to go
- how they will get there
- who might help.

### 3.4.2 Sample ILP

Name of learner		
Home address		
Tel	Home	Mobile
Email		
Contact preferences (tick)	<input type="checkbox"/> Phone <input type="checkbox"/> Email <input type="checkbox"/> Letter <input type="checkbox"/> No contact	
Previous learner? (tick)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Aim/goal		
Name of ULR		
Start date		
Next action date		
<p><b>Data Protection Act:</b> This form will be kept on computer; you have the right to inspect any records of which you are the subject. You will be given assistance (if required) to view records if you wish – speak to a member of staff/union.</p>		
<p><b>Where I need to improve my skills:</b></p> <div style="text-align: center;"> <pre> graph TD     C(( )) --&gt; W[<u>Work</u>]     C --&gt; F[<u>Family</u>]     C --&gt; Co[<u>Community</u>]     C --&gt; P[<u>Private</u>]           </pre> </div>		
<p><b>Further details/areas to be worked on:</b></p>		
<p><b>Signed</b> <b>(learner)</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p>	

<b>Session review</b>	<b>Due date</b>
So far, I like ...	
So far, I do not like ...	
What have I gained from attending?	
I would like to know more about/do more work on ...	
What reading/writing/number/computer skills did you want to improve when you started?	
Have you seen improvements? Please give us details	
What difference will this make to you?	
<b>Signed</b>  (learner)	<b>Date</b>

<b>Final review</b>	<b>Due date</b>
Identify something that you have learned that you couldn't do before	
How do you know you have learned it, or that you can now do it?	
What did you most enjoy working on? What is a good way of learning for you?	
What do you want to do now?	
Any other comments?	
<b>Signed</b>  (learner)	<b>Date:</b>

### 3.5 Our learning platform, Learnwithunite

Unite's very own virtual learning platform it is dedicated to supporting our members and activists, through the provision of quality online learning opportunities. Unite members can access it at [www.learnwithunite.org](http://www.learnwithunite.org)

This is the starting point for all ULRs to guide members to: it is the key area for developing organising as this is a developing platform offering online learning. Encourage your learning committee to endorse this site for online learning and endeavour to give all reps and branch committee members the training, confidence and skills required to access, use and promote online learning.

You should also promote this site for learning with members, potential members, employers and providers. It contains a resource bank to assist and update you and your other reps and is also a great networking tool.

The current platform of Learnwithunite has been developed to represent what our members want. That democratic base is the fundamental reason why it works. Looking to the future, jobs, pay, conditions and welfare will always be the centre of union activity, but learning will increasingly take its place alongside them.

This gives us a platform to cover a wide range of learning needs:

- it allows us to strike a balance between informal or accredited; job-related or wider learning;
- it allows us to centrally manage and devolve learning to regions and/or workplaces/branches by giving them their own pages;
- it allows us to forge strong partnerships and alliances with other providers;
- learners with disabilities often find this method of learning more accessible to their needs.

This in turn gives us leverage to determine a bargaining strategy. For example, whether to press the employer for:

- more Apprenticeships, with better pay and conditions and higher quality training;
- funding for learning centres;
- action on equality, prioritising skills for those who have least e.g. the low-paid, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAEM) or women members;
- stronger agreements, which include raising employer investment in learning;
- improved ULR facilities time;
- stronger joint bargaining, rather than just consultation, through a formalised learning committee.

These are some of the courses currently on offer:

- Learn My Way
- ESOL Entry Levels 1 – 3 (unaccredited)
- Online basics (a taster for novice users)
- An Introduction to ICT (ITQ L1 Award) course
- An Introduction to ICT Part two (ITQ L2 Certificate) course
- The Level 3 award in ITQ: units include Creating a web presence and Improving your research techniques via technology.
- Keyboard Skills Pro (touch typing skills)
- Redundancy support course

### **3.5.1 Take your skills to the next level**

Introduction to ICT Level 1, 2 & 3: Starting at Level 1 and building to Level 2, successful students gain firstly a Level 1 award in IT user skills (ITQ), then a Level 2 certificate in IT user skills (ITQ). The courses cover computer basics, file management, Word, Internet and email security, improving productivity, Excel and PowerPoint. These courses are currently free to all Unite members.

Simply log onto [www.learnwithunite.org](http://www.learnwithunite.org) and create your free account: all you need is a valid email address.

Since we are looking to develop online learning for strategic purposes, It is important we use this resource in a positive and constructive way and do not make it a barrier for members. So be careful how you introduce it to members who are not comfortable with online learning, use their individual learning plan and introduce them to programmes like Learn My Way. It can also be used in a collective way using blended class and individual learning as a more effective learning strategy, especially the ESOL.

Learnwithunite is a powerful way in which we can strengthen and grow our membership in the workplace and community. It is unashamedly pragmatic, but also radical. It helps learners in their job or to get a better job; but also, if they wish, to transform their lives and do something quite different.

Learnwithunite is passionate about equality and fairness, challenging employers and educational structures to ensure that the most disadvantaged (not least migrant workers and communities) get a better deal.

## Part 4: Building a culture of learning at work

### 4.1 Conducting your learning survey

In producing a learning survey, ULRs should adopt the PIERS cycle (Plan, Implement, Evaluate, Record and Share) and use it throughout all learning activity. Survey templates will be available from your tutor or learning organiser.

#### 4.1.1 Planning your survey

It is important to map your workplace first so that you know what questions to ask, and how you will distribute your survey. You will also need to speak to your learning organiser or college contact to find out what courses are available.

The survey should be appropriate for your workplace. It needs to provide you with the information you need to run courses, as well as for wider organising activity, without being too long or too short.

Work with your learning organiser/other reps to design your survey, as they will have many examples or successful surveys to work from

There are two main kinds of survey questions: closed and open. They each have advantages and disadvantages.

It is important that you ask questions that give you enough information to run courses. The basic information you will need is:

1. Who? (Names and contact details of people interested in courses)
2. What? (What do people want to learn? What level?)
3. When? (When is an appropriate time to learn? Can you get time off? What are people's shift patterns? Which time slots are best?)

You can also ask other questions that will tell you more about your workplace, or help you with union organising targets. These can be questions about age, gender, union membership and so on. However, be careful about making your survey too long, as this may put people off.

#### 4.1.2 Distributing your survey

It is important to distribute your survey as widely as possible, and to also make an effort to collect the finished surveys back again. The most effective method is probably to go around the workplace personally, talking to people, handing out surveys and then collecting them again. The personal touch can make all the difference. However, this can be extremely time-consuming, and it isn't appropriate or even possible in all workplaces.

Some other distribution methods include:

1. holding an Open Day and inviting employees to fill in the survey on the day;
2. putting a survey on desks or work areas, with a box for people to put them in;
3. distributing the survey by email;
4. creating an online survey and sharing the link;
5. a combination of the above.

Think about your workplace, and the resources you have, including time off. What would be the most appropriate way for you to distribute your survey?

Sometimes it helps to give people an incentive to fill in the survey. Ask your employer if they will contribute a gift voucher or book token, and hold a prize draw for a winning participant.

Once you have planned your survey, establish who will conduct it, how you will ensure it targets who you want to reach and how many people are involved in collecting responses.

#### 4.1.3 Evaluating your survey

How will you evaluate your survey? If you want people to go on courses, make sure you

indicate timelines.

Remember to evaluate your plan and implementation to look at what was successful and what wasn't and look at the reasons why.

#### **4.1.4 Recording the results**

Record results and keep on file for a reasonable time.

#### **4.1.5 Sharing the results**

As a growing union, it is important we share information, good and bad, so lessons can be learned, both positive and negative, to enable us to learn from mistakes and share best practice.

It also allows us to identify trends and issues in workplaces and across regions and sectors.

It also allows us to identify leaders and activists to help grow the union.

When you have completed your survey you can interview members based on responses received.

## **4.2 Conducting interviews with learners**

Once again, use the PIERS cycle.

### **4.2.1 Planning before an interview**

- Who, when, where and why?
- For how long?
- Create the right atmosphere.
- Confidentiality.
- Resources you will need.
- Record the meeting.
- Boundary setting.

### **4.2.2 Conducting an interview**

What they might want to learn and why, where they would want to learn?

Their personal objectives:

- the individual member's interest in, and enthusiasm for, learning (i.e. motivational issues);
- any specific learning needs;
- the available information and learning resources in the workplace;
- how much additional support the individual member requires in pursuing their learning;
- the member's personal circumstances (e.g. domestic, travel, financial and time commitments, including shift working).

Undertake an enabling role when and where it seems appropriate.

Conduct all interviews within an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality: the relationship between the rep and the member is central to the success of the process. The rep will need to respect and value the member and put themselves in his/her shoes.

There are certain specific skills involved in interviewing members. At a very basic level, development of the following skills is essential:

- active listening
- questioning
- boundary setting
- clarifying and summarising
- challenging
- identifying next steps/setting targets.

Active listening is the most important skill. It is much more than just hearing. It involves:

- understanding
- checking

- memorising
- selecting
- relevant points
- verbal and non-verbal responses
- summarising.

Active listening is important in helping to:

- create a good atmosphere and helping the member feel at ease
- receive and check information
- work out appropriate responses to enquiries.

### **Five key steps to active listening**

- 1 Concentrate on what the other person is saying; avoid making assumptions.
- 2 Recognise any positive or negative feelings you may have about the individual, and try to set these aside.
- 3 Find ways of checking your own understanding directly with the individual by summarising what has been said.
- 4 Try to keep your own speaking to the minimum: do not monopolise the conversation.
- 5 Learn to close down discussions satisfactorily.

### **Barriers to active listening**

- thinking about other things
- being distracted by emotive words
- disagreeing with a particular point of view or idea
- listening for flaws in the other person's argument
- wanting to express your own thoughts and views
- prejudice
- lack of time.

It is important that the individual's needs are at the centre of the process and they are given the chance to state their needs, receive an empathetic hearing and have their views valued.

In this way, members can expect to:

- have the chance to express their initial needs or worries;
- receive clear information about the services and opportunities available to them;
- be given the chance to access this information and ask further questions;
- receive support and a positive response to their concerns;
- receive accurate information on referrals to other services.

When interviewing members, as a rough guide you should spend 70 per cent of your time listening and 30 per cent of your time asking questions and talking.

- Trust and confidentiality are vital: your role will involve discussing interests and needs which may be personal.
- Touching on areas of weakness (including actual or perceived loss of status in the eyes of their colleagues or management).

There may be times when the information given could get the member into difficulties with their employer. ULRs need to deal with confidential information sensitively as they already do when helping with other problems.

### **4.2.3 Evaluating an interview**

Give the member your understanding of what has been agreed and any goals set or follow up that is needed including timelines (where set) and get member to sign points agreed.

### **4.2.4 Recording an interview**

Recording the outcomes of each learning interview is actually good practice so we encourage

all ULRs to keep records for each learner interview. Please bear in mind the requirements for data protection.

#### **4.2.5 Sharing the results**

Share the results of interviews in various formats to learning committee, other reps, but remember to respect confidentiality of members.

#### **4.2.6 ULR interview checklist**

Interviewing people is an integral part of the role of a ULR, e.g. when:

- identifying individuals' needs
- conducting a learning survey.

##### **Before the interview**

Give some thought to the following:

- where the interview will take place
- how long you will need
- what might be discussed
- what information you require.

##### **During the interview**

Key points to be aware of:

- explain the reason for the interview
- stress the confidentiality of any information received
- be aware of your body language and that of the interviewee
- use eye contact
- face the person in a relaxed manner
- give them you full attention
- actively listen
- concentrate on what is being said – avoid making assumptions
- be objective
- do not monopolise the conversation
- use appropriate questions
- identify next steps.

##### **Clarify and summarise**

- help to identify individual needs
- ensure mutual understanding
- avoid confusion
- keep the discussion on track
- reassure the individual that they have been understood
- provide an opportunity to check and correct possible misunderstandings
- highlight key points.

### **4.3 Presentation and communication skills**

It is important for ULRs to develop good presentation and communication skills, of which the key elements are: listening; providing knowledgeable and helpful advice and information; having positive body language; and being empathic.

#### **4.3.1 Preparation**

Do as much research as possible in advance when presenting ideas or information to management, members or the union, if using figures or data ensure it is both accurate and up to date.

Style of presentation is not as important as ensuring you get your message across. PowerPoint, Prezi, smart board flipchart, video or paper hand-outs can all be used. Use whatever format you are comfortable with.

Practice and rehearse: if you have a timed slot to give a presentation, make sure you do not run over time as this may fail to get the desired outcome.

If using technology, ensure you have a back-up plan.

Think of questions that may be asked and have response ready.

#### **4.3.2 Delivery**

Arrive in plenty of time.

Speak in a friendly tone and make eye contact with your audience.

Keep to time limits.

Do not be distracted by people texting or tweeting.

Encourage interaction.

### **4.4 Negotiating skills**

#### **4.4.1 ULRs and negotiating**

ULRs are responsible for the promotion and representation of the collective and individual learning needs in their workplace. This may include activities such as negotiating with an employer for learning facilities and learning agreements.

#### **What can be negotiated?**

Collective bargaining practice varies between organisations. In some, particularly small organisations, everything may be negotiated at workplace level. In others, some items may be negotiated at company or national level, and others at local level. Some representatives negotiate on all aspects of work – including learning and training. You need to clarify what you can negotiate with other reps at work, your learning organiser and your full time officer.

#### **Who negotiates?**

In some organisations, full-time union officials do most of the negotiating; in others, it is the workplace reps. Where there is more than one union on site, it is vital to have joint union meetings to establish a unified position before meeting management.

The negotiating role usually involves the most experienced or senior reps. This, plus the responsibility involved can make the idea of negotiating with management particularly daunting for new reps. It will be good practice for you to consider how you can ease those new to negotiating into the role, so build confidence. A good place to start, if possible, is through observing, or note-taking as part of your workplace negotiating team. It is a good idea to share and build skills so that you are not overly dependent on one person.

#### **4.4.2 Develop a negotiating strategy**

- 1 Know what members want
- 2 Draw up agenda
- 3 Be clear about your aims
- 4 Check and be clear on the facts of your case
- 5 Anticipate management's response
- 6 Remember both sides are of equal status
- 7 Work as a team

- 8 Listen carefully and ask questions
- 9 Do not be side-tracked
- 10 Seek agreement on principles before discussing details
- 11 Seek clarification to avoid misunderstanding

### **Closing negotiations**

- 1 Have you raised all the issues that you wanted to discuss?
- 2 Do you fully understand the proposals that management are making?
- 3 Are you convinced that management fully understand your proposals?
- 4 Are you clear on how the agreement will be implemented – and on any timescales involved?
- 5 Get agreement in writing
- 6 Be prepared to challenge minutes
- 7 Do not sign minute/agreement until you are satisfied with content

## **4.5 Influencing the employer's training agenda**

Some employers are supportive of learning. However, if local management are slow to support learning activity, it often helps to be able to tell them that senior management is backing the union. If there is a learning agreement between the employer and Unite you can use this to gain support.

Individual line managers may be supportive – you can use support from one line manager when dealing with those who are slower to come on board. Sometimes managers don't want to be the first to do things in case they're taken to task for it later. They may be reassured if you can point out to them that other people in their position are taking the initiative on learning.

Managers may sometimes be responsible for training and development or this may be a human resources function. It is important to identify who is responsible for these issues within the management structure.

Making learning part of the 'industrial process' means making it a common bargaining area in the workplace such as, for example, health and safety has become.

ULRs are crucial to the process of persuading more employers to work with us to develop a genuine culture of learning in our workplaces. Once this becomes the norm, rather than the exception, Unite will be in a stronger position to fulfil the mandate of improving the working lives of our members and helping them to realise their potential.

It is important to be aware of how adults make decisions about their learning. Many people find decision-making difficult, or lack confidence in their own judgements. Sometimes people are not clear of what they want, or give insufficient or misleading information. Taking discussions a step at a time might help the member to arrive at decisions gradually. Whatever the next steps are, the individual must be clear what happens next, and what he/she needs to do. In some cases, the next steps will be clear and straightforward. In other cases, the next steps may be more difficult. Either way, some sort of goal or target needs to be set – no matter how small.

All targets should be:

- realistic and attainable
- in keeping with the individual's interests and concerns
- set to a reasonable time frame
- based on up-to-date information.

#### **4.5.1 Mentoring**

As we develop ever more courses online with Learnwithunite, we have endeavoured to set up a tripartite model that consists of learner, online tutor and ULR as a mentor.

If a learner has not been online for five weeks, the tutor will contact the ULR who will arrange to meet learner, and report back to the tutor – the learner should be made aware of this arrangement at enrolment stage.

#### **4.5.2 Apprentices**

Union negotiators and reps – including ULRs, equality reps and safety reps – have a key role to play through collective bargaining in encouraging more employers to set up quality Apprenticeships, allowing under-represented groups to access them and ensuring that all apprentices receive good training, decent pay and a safe working environment.

Apprenticeships provide an ideal opportunity for unions to organise young workers who are currently under-represented at all levels in the union movement. We should set goals that get apprentices on the agenda for every meeting of the learning committee and a minimum of one apprentice rep on the committee to support and organise apprentices and to build equality and diversity.

In England and Wales, Apprenticeship frameworks are approved through Apprenticeships Framework Online. In Scotland, Apprenticeship frameworks are developed by Sector Skills Councils and approved by the Modern Apprenticeship Group. In Northern Ireland, Apprenticeship frameworks are approved through the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI) website. There are more than 100 frameworks on offer. The number is constantly growing as new frameworks are developed in different sectors. There are many job roles available for Apprentices, ranging from accountancy and business administration to engineering and wind turbine maintenance. Good quality and robust Apprenticeships can equip young people with the skills that can lead to good long-term employment.

Apprenticeships are also increasingly open to older workers to help them build a new set of skills to aid their progress into sustainable, high quality employment.

#### **4.5.3 Unite/ScotRail Adult Apprenticeship case study**

Unite negotiated and organised with ScotRail an apprenticeship programme to facilitate progression paths through the skills grades for our members. This group of members had hit a 'glass ceiling' within the employer as they were not accredited as being skilled despite having a huge amount of skills, knowledge & experience. The group were all semi-skilled 'B' grade fitters with ScotRail. This apprenticeship allowed them to have the opportunity to move to the skilled 'A' grade position within ScotRail.

The Adult Apprenticeship programme was negotiated and arranged by Unite Union Learning Representatives & the Sector Skills Council for Science Engineering & Manufacturing Technologies (SEMTA).

Before beginning their Apprenticeships, the members undertook an Open College Network accredited Brush Up Your Skills Course arranged and delivered by Unite. This course gave our members the confidence and skills to undertake the National Certificate studies & the skills to compile the portfolio for the SVQ Level 2 & SVQ Level 3. This everyday skills support was beneficial as a lot of our members had been away from learning for over 20 years before beginning the apprenticeship.

All nine members who undertook the apprenticeship programme have completed their studies to SVQ Level 3 and have completed a National Certificate in Mechanical & Electrical

Engineering within the last two years. They have combined practical knowledge with vocational learning and are now accredited as being skilled. They now have national industry-recognized qualifications that will allow them to progress to skilled positions within ScotRail or if they wish gain skilled employment elsewhere.

In undertaking this Apprenticeship programme, our members overcame many barriers. Some of these were being away from learning for over 20 to 30 years in some instances; doubt that the employer was committed to the scheme; doubt that the skilled workforce within ScotRail would recognise their apprenticeship as being 'pukka'; learning in their own time; attending night school; incorporating learning into their rotating shift patterns and still managing to fill their substantive role as a 'B' Grade Fitter within ScotRail. It is testimony to the group's determination that the members have overcome all of the above and completed their Apprenticeship and their National Certificate in Mechanical & Electrical Engineering.

All nine members' lives have been changed by undertaking Unite-led learning as they are now more confident and, more importantly, accredited skilled workers. This progression path in learning that Unite negotiated has facilitated the opportunity for our members to break that glass ceiling on progression with ScotRail and indeed within all employers within this sector.

Our engagement with the Apprenticeship programme is vital. Not only can we ensure high quality learning experiences, we can also establish good terms and conditions, decent pay rates, and a safe working environment. We can also ensure that Modern Apprenticeship programmes respect equality and diversity and we offer a source of support for apprentices, many of whom are new to the workplace.

#### **4.5.4 Rolls-Royce East Kilbride Deaf Modern Apprentice Case Study**

Oliver was a Modern Apprentice at the Rolls-Royce East Kilbride plant and is deaf. Oliver who can lip-read and sign found that some people at the plant were apprehensive when communicating with him. ULRs at the plant organised and delivered British Sign Language courses through Learnwithunite for all apprentices within the factory to aid communication with Oliver. The ULRs also ensured that Oliver's managers were also on the British Sign Language course.

When Oliver completed his Modern Apprenticeship and entered his permanent work area, ULRs organised British Sign Language courses for all his work colleagues so that all his colleagues in his work area on both shifts could communicate with him.

This example of ULRs mentoring apprentices and tackling an equality and disability issue within the workplace demonstrates the value that the ULR role brings to the individual involved, our members and their employers.

For many apprentices, this will be their first interaction with the trade union movement. A positive first experience can help build the next generation of Unite members and activists.

ULRs should work closely with the senior steward in a workplace to undertake a mentoring role within an Apprenticeship programme. All Apprenticeships include training around core skills, covering:

- communication
- numeracy
- IT
- problem-solving
- working with others.

Mentoring is particularly important for apprentices as they are often young people entering the workplace for the first time. The mentor relationship provides additional support, guidance and overall care removed from the apprentice's direct line management chain. It is also essential that issues between mentor and apprentice are confidential.

#### **4.6 Back to work membership and Unite 4 jobs**

Redundancies take place in various ways and in differing circumstances, ranging from a few due to organisational change or downsizing to full-scale closure of the workplace.

Unite has developed a back to work membership category at a reduced rate. When there is a redundancy situation, ULRs will be asked to assist other reps, the full-time officer and regional learning organiser.

Your role will include signing members up to the back to work membership scheme, helping with signing members up to Unite 4 jobs website and helping to survey members affected to ascertain learning needs and help required.

#### **4.7 Learning and training: what is the difference?**

Learning is the process by which a person constructs new knowledge, skills and capabilities; training is one of several responses an organisation can undertake to promote learning.

The shift in emphasis from training to learning doesn't mean that learning becomes the sole responsibility of the individual employee. It means enhancing the learning environment at work and supporting learning and development for all groups in the workplace.

It is not enough to declare, "We are a learning organisation" and expect everyone to get on with it. Learning needs to have a purpose, whether it is to provide job-related skills or linked to personal development. Moreover, if they are not to be haphazard, learning interventions involve planning and resources. Simply providing a programme of learning opportunities will not produce results – unless member participation is facilitated.

Some members are self-confident learners and are comfortable with self-managed learning. They may feel confident about asking their managers for support and may be able to manage their workload in a way that allows them to take time off for learning. But this is not the case for everyone, especially for those in jobs where the nature of their work provides few intrinsic opportunities for learning or opportunities for job progression.

Some staff may have had negative experiences of previous learning and be reluctant to participate in formal learning.

Managers' assumptions about members' needs and members' own expectations and aspirations for learning may be extremely narrow.

ULRs also have an important contribution to make in dealing with structural and organisational barriers to learning and in changing attitudes to learning.

Your role in advising members about their training, educational and development needs will contribute to raising 'bottom up' demand for learning and thus to a cultural change in your organisation.

Your involvement may also contribute in practical ways to resolving structural problems such as releasing members for learning.

If the core task of the union is to build collective power, the best way to do this is by building a work or occupational structure that is vibrant. That is how workers see the power of the union. The most durable trade union movements are those that have maintained a strong organisation at both central and local levels with effective cooperation between the two.

To succeed we have to continue to look at every aspect of organising, using and developing innovative strategies evaluating and learning from mistakes.

## Part 5: Strategy for growth

### 5.1 Union structures & strategy for growth

Like all unions, Unite faces huge challenges and our structures will adapt as we go forward, but our values remain intact. An injury or injustice to one is an injury to all.

The way we talk to members, potential members and activists has an impact on their understanding of why Unite exists and how we work. It is important that we are clear about the message that we send out.

Unite is an organising union. An organising union is member-led: everyone plays their part in ensuring the union is active in every workplace.

Members pay a subscription to become actively involved: they understand the importance of learning and working together.

Members are trained and encouraged to work collectively to campaign for improved opportunities for learning and other issues.

The union is proactive: it gives members the power to take up, challenge and resolve issues themselves; non-members are recruited around these issues and this philosophy.

#### 5.1.1 Unite structures

Unite is a modern trade union for the 21st century, democratic and responsive to members' needs. Unite's structure is one in which members are encouraged to get involved and have their say.

Unite is a member-led union with members in workplaces and communities nationwide.

Unite covers Britain and Ireland but also has members as far away as Gibraltar and Germany and at any time will have members working in all parts of the world.

Unite is a union based on the need to organise workers to secure success at the bargaining table.

We recognise that 100 per cent active membership gives us an opportunity to win for workers.

Our Unite workplaces must be strong and active to be able to develop a voice for workers.

#### 5.1.2 Branches

Everyone is in a union branch. Branches generally meet on a regular basis. Branches are usually based on workplaces but can be based on an industry such as the Merseyside finance workers branch or on a geographical location eg Sandwell branch, which has a number of different workplaces and sectors.

We also have Community membership branches, which are attached to Area Activist Committees (AAC).

Area Activist Committees exist in every region to represent workplaces, communities and industries in the area.

#### 5.1.3 Workplace representatives

Workplace representatives are elected at least every three years and consist of one or more of the following:

- workplace reps
- safety representatives
- ULRs
- equality representatives.

- 1 The main task of our reps is to organise our workplaces, building membership and developing activists.
- 2 Reps support, advise and represent members.
- 3 Problem-solving, communication, negotiating and influencing skills will be a key feature of the rep's job.
- 4 Full training is provided.
- 5 Reps are allowed time off for trade union duties.

#### **5.1.4 Unite's 11 Regions**

East Midlands, Ireland, London & Eastern, North East Yorkshire & Humberside, North West, Scotland, South East, South West, Wales, West Midlands and Gibraltar.

In each region, the Regional Secretary is subject to the Regional Committee, a lay-elected body that runs the affairs of the region.

Every region has a Regional Committee made up of reps elected from:

- Area Activist Committees
- Regional Industrial Sector Committees
- Regional Women's, Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities, Disabled Members and LGBT Committees
- Observer delegates from Young Members and Retired Members.

Each region also has a lay body known as a Finance and General Purposes Committee (FGPC) that deals with finance and day-to-day decisions.

Each region has a team of organisers, who work on the union's key strategic organising targets.

#### **5.1.5 Making and delivering union policy**

The Unite Policy Conference is the supreme decision-making body of the union. Held every two years, it is made up of around 650 lay members from Unite's industrial sectors, regions and equality structures.

The Executive Council of Unite is the senior policy-making body of the union between conferences that deals with the organisation of the union, interpretation of rules and policy decisions.

The wheels of Unite are kept turning by an excellent team of regional and nationally based administrators who work to regional and national officers.

The aim is to build an active and sustainable organisation within the workplace that can gain the benefits of learning and training for all our members. It is founded on the principles of improving working conditions and pay; better work-life balance; equality and dignity for all at work – achieved through the process of democratic collective activity. These are Unite principles and values.

#### **5.1.6 Unite Organising Strategy**

The Unite Organising Strategy seeks to put the union on the front foot and represents a step change from the rearguard mentality of the recent past. Strategic Sectoral Organising is the core function of Unite organising and often involves organising groups of workers that are new to the union.

Another vital component has been the launch of the redeveloped 100 per cent membership campaign, 100% UNITE. Finally, 'leverage' is deployed by the Organising Department on behalf of workers within critical industrial disputes.

The National Organising Department spearheads the strategy for growth and drives the organising agenda forward through our structure of Regional Organising teams.

Seeking to organise workers strategically across sectors, maximising bargaining power and developing sectoral industrial strategy are key organising and industrial principles.

The critical pillar of Unite Organising is the emphasis and commitment to re-building the workplace reps' movement. It is the central belief of Unite Organising that the trade union and wider labour movement can only be rebuilt upon the foundation stone of credible and committed workplace leaders.

## **5.2 The organising role of the ULR**

Worker-to-worker organising is the most effective way to organise.

Organising is about:

- developing leaders
- taking action
- power
- thinking strategically.

### **5.2.1 Developing workplace/community leaders**

Organising needs leaders. A leader is someone who has earned respect and is influential in shaping opinions in their workplace/community and remains confident when taken out of their comfort zone.

Part of sharing in the PIERS cycle is identifying leaders and activists as we grow our union.

### **5.2.2 Talking to colleagues about the union**

Every Unite rep has a role to play in building the union locally. An essential part of this is communicating effectively with members and non-members alike. As a ULR, you will have opportunities to talk to your colleagues about their learning needs. You may talk to members who otherwise may not have very much contact with the union. This is a great opportunity to talk to them about their concerns at work, about the union and to get them to do something or (if they are not a member) to join the union.

Before talking to members or potential members, plan your approach taking into consideration the following:

- How much time do you have?
- What impression do you want to give potential members of Unite?
- What you want to achieve with them and what it is practical to achieve.
- Do you want them to join the union, do something like go to a meeting, distribute a leaflet, and talk to their colleagues about something?
- Do you know who they are and where they're going to be working?
- What about follow-up? Who will do it and when?

Here are some helpful hints about communicating one-to-one with members and potential members:

- When asking questions, it's best to use open questions (those that cannot be answered with 'yes' or 'no').
- Open questions are useful when you need to: gather information; build the conversation; explore issues.
- Write down some open questions you can ask before you meet with people.
- Closed questions (those that can only be answered with 'yes' or 'no') should only be used when you need to: confirm information you have been given; gain commitment to join the union or participate in an activity; bring the conversation to

a close.

- Finally, don't forget to liaise with other reps: tell them what you are doing – even if they don't ask – and make sure you know what they are doing to avoid duplication.

### 5.2.3 Visibility

Visibility, in the form of marketing material at the workplace, in newspapers and magazines aimed at workers, as well as in the form of actual trade union presence in the workplace, along with campaigning efforts in general, are important factors when organising workers.

Other activities to increase the visibility are seminars about trade union work and the way they function, the distribution of trade union posters in the workplace as well as offering services to potential members on the spot.

ULRs should keep in mind that one-to-one communication is even better than written material. If the union is to rely on written communication, then it is generally material that the workers produce themselves, with their faces, their stories and by-lines, that are far more likely to be read. The more remote from the day-to-day experience, the less likely the material will be read.

Take photos and video footage of learning as it happens in the workplace and use them for newsletters or promotional videos: it will promote further learning in your workplace.

Ensure everyone is fully aware of union role in learning: make screensavers etc Unite logo or message; include Unite in logins, passwords etc; Learnwithunite is the brand name in your learning centre.

## 5.3 Unite learning agenda

ULRs and union officials provide support and advice to help members win on learning in the workplace.

In the London and Eastern Region, the union's learning agenda is having a significant impact in contributing to the union at branch level.

*“Naturally, every new initiative or service offered by our union helps to attract new members; but more importantly our workplace representatives are reporting the benefits at the negotiating table. Not only are we increasing the levels of workplace (Unite) membership, we are also seeing that our representatives are becoming more and more confident at negotiating, representing members and speaking out as they develop new key skills. In addition, the learning agenda also brings a collective feel as workers learn together in groups providing an excellent platform to discuss collective workplace issues. The union cannot be separated from the workplace, as members and management understand that the workers are the union; the union is directly associated with learning and increasing skills of members.”*

**Unite activist, London and Eastern Region**

The Learnwithunite team works to create flexible, quality learning opportunities within the workplace and communities. We support members in their personal development, improving employment prospects and quality of life while enhancing the union's strategy for growth.

We have a vast amount of experience and knowledge in being able to identify and create flexible learning opportunities for members and potential members, which enables them to embark on a learning journey of their choice.

All of our highly motivated team have worked with union ULRs in creating robust relationships with employers and education providers, underpinned by learning agreements. Thousands of

members have been able to increase their personal skills and qualifications increasing the likelihood of their long-term employability. The Unite lifelong learning team also take great pride in delivering the member retention strategy to the benefit of our members and our union.

In parallel with education opportunities being offered to working people, we also focus on bringing their skills and knowledge into our communities. This enables more people to access education through flexible learning programmes, breaking down barriers to learning and helping local communities and their members to develop new skills.

As a representative body for workers, we must stimulate the motivation to learn for our members. This can increase demand and encourage individuals to take ownership of their own lifelong learning leading to personal growth, the acquisition of new skills and continuing career development.

We must seek ways to extend learning for our members within our own provision, through collective bargaining and collective agreements and in forging links with appropriate funders and providers.

As well as increasing opportunities for individual members and developing a learning culture at the workplace, learning renews union activism and strengthens the union voice. This, in turn, sustains learning activities.

Learning has become a key strand in Unite's campaigns, particularly around organising migrant and agency workers.

The next major step is to go further down the road of bargaining on learning, which will be necessarily complex but could well be a source of substantial achievements

Learning is taking its place at the heart of our union activity, making a powerful contribution to the fight against poverty and unfairness.

Learning is humanising; it helps reassert human values above material values, the value of thinking, listening and working together – the key to well-being and happiness.

Fighting poverty, low pay, unfairness and dreary work are what Unite is all about; whether by confronting poor employers or by campaigning for a fairer society. But it is not enough just to tackle the symptoms. And that is why we care about learning. It is not something peripheral; learning is at the heart of all that we do as a fighting back and campaigning union. It was, and still is, the key to progress in fighting poverty, inequality and unfairness.

Equality and prosperity go hand in hand. If we want to campaign against poverty and inequality, we need to improve skills. If we want a prosperous society, we need to improve skills. And if we want to improve skills, we have to do so at all levels, not just for the better off. In this area, learning has a key role to play.

Nor can this be left to the next generation. It is an oft-quoted statistic that 80 per cent of those at work in the year 2020 are already at work today. Demographics and political pressures suggest we will work longer and retire later, so the figure looks closer to 85 per cent. So learning needs to be about those already working more than preparing the next generation for the world of work.

There is radicalism too in our union vision of learning. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire famously argued for an education built around the learner, their understanding of their place in society, their oppression and how it has evolved. He argued for an educational system based not on authoritarian hierarchies but on shared problem-solving: "In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation."

This could easily serve as a description of Learnwithunite. It builds on the experience of the learner, develops their understanding of their situation and their ability to act, through

negotiation and organising, to change it – as evidenced by the United Migrant Workers Education Project (UMWEP) in London. This is what we mean when we talk about Unite's Alternative Education Model.

This wider, radical, vision is immensely powerful. It was vividly brought to life in *The Pitmen Painters*, Lee Hall's hit play describing a group of miners in the 1930s who took up painting in an evening class which they largely ran themselves, though their tutor was a university academic provided through the WEA. The same vision drove the early pioneers who set up working men's or Mechanics' Institutes, the weavers who recited Shelley at their looms, and just as much today, the thousands of working people who have set up learning centres at their workplace or in their community so they have their own space where they feel comfortable learning.

It is a vision that crosses political boundaries and it is a vision that has massive public support, evident in the surging numbers attending museums or art galleries, digging up local or family history, watching TV documentaries, forming book clubs or attending pub quiz nights. Learning, especially learning that is enjoyable and organised by the learner, is more popular than ever before.

Increasingly Learnwithunite is taking its place at the centre of union affairs. It should continue to make a major contribution to our central mission of fighting poverty and unfairness and helping members improve their lives.

And finally, there is one further argument in support of Learnwithunite. We stand for a set of values based on care and respect for people; that society and the economy should be the servants of the people and not the other way round. Learning does that. It is a profoundly human activity, involving thinking, listening, discussing and collectively sharing some common learning goals. Learning at the workplace helps humanise the world of work, it encourages managers to listen to their employees (and vice versa), it provides a space within which human issues such as different learning styles and interests can be voiced. It encourages learning for its own sake, a central element in union learning. In short it helps us create a world where work is enjoyable and fulfilling.

## **5.4 Developing sustainable workplace learning**

Experience from previous projects has resulted in a checklist of the steps needed to ensure that a workplace organised for learning is effective, sustainable and works with the full involvement of Unite the union, the employer and provider(s).

The following steps are seen as the building blocks to establish a sustainable learning culture and embed learning and training into collective bargaining in the workplace.

Steps 1–4 need to be taken first before learning takes place to ensure sustainability.

### **1. Elect your ULRs**

- Unite the union elects an agreed number of ULRs.
- Unite notifies the employer, the regional officer (RIO) and the learning organiser of the names and locations of the new ULRs.

### **2. Train your ULRs**

- Union representatives to be trained by Unite/TUC.
- Initial five-day Induction course within six months of ULR election.

### **3. Establish learning committee**

- Use the Unite model learning agreement to facilitate discussion on the learning committee terms of reference especially roles and responsibilities; how often to meet etc. as well as time off.
- Set up a workplace learning committee to include all ULRs; senior management (including training manager/HR); senior workplace rep (if not also a ULR); learning organiser (initially); education providers.

### *Membership of the committee*

The group should normally comprise of nominated ULRs, union reps such as a senior shop steward, senior managers, (one of which should always be in attendance) representative/s each from human resources and training departments and nominated people from education providers. The group will also reserve the right to co-opt representatives from outside agencies e.g. local colleges, Sector Skills Councils etc to assist when necessary. The group will meet on a regular basis as required.

### *Responsibilities of the committee*

- Work to identify learning needs and aspirations of employees on site.
- Increase accessibility and participation in learning for all staff by establishing on site learning.
- Monitor and evaluate learning activities and projects.
- Liaise and work with outside agencies to maximise potential for learning opportunities.
- Identify funding both internal and external to assist with learning activities.
- Support the network of ULRs in their role as advocates of learning.
- Identify and explore new initiatives both within and outside the company.

ULRs should discuss these issues with their workplace reps, senior stewards and/or union officials and – most importantly – members in order to develop a strategic workplace learning agenda.

If it is not possible to have such a committee, then it is important that ULRs regularly report to the workplace reps' committee or branch, in order that their activities do not become 'detached' from the rest of the union activities in the workplace.

## **4. Learning agreement**

- Check with learning organiser if a learning agreement has already been signed either nationally, locally or other sites.
- Use the Unite model learning agreements as a basis for negotiation.
- Include time off for learners; this should be agreed before any learning starts.
- Learning agreements should be negotiated through normal procedures and signed by the RIO or senior rep on behalf of Unite (whoever normally signs collective agreements in that workplace).

## **5. Learning needs survey**

- This is not a training needs analysis: it gives an idea of the sort of learning that employees want and their availability.
- The agreed survey to be organised and conducted by the ULRs.
- Collate results with the learning organiser for reporting to the learning committee.
- Education providers to be invited to the learning committee to discuss their offer.
- Information shared and possibilities discussed by the learning committee.

## **6. Keep your members informed**

- Keep members informed through leaflets, posters, etc.
- Use learning to recruit new members and develop Unite organisation at the workplace.
- ULR to report back to workplace union committees and branches on current learning, ensuring learning and training is embedded into the union structure and the workplace collective bargaining structures.

## **7. ULR progression**

- ULRs trained in Unite follow-on modules and updates, especially the ULR Stage 2, Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) and Functional Skills.
- Progress through using the [www.learnwithunite.org](http://www.learnwithunite.org) website and inducting new learners.

## **8. Support your learners**

- ULRs to encourage learners and support those accessing learning opportunities organise promotional events, etc.
- ULRs to publicise and hold monthly surgeries for members to discuss and access learning.
- ULRs to record and collect information on learners, including equality and diversity statistics.

- ULRs to promote local, regional and national learning initiatives e.g. Learning at Work Week; World Book Day; family learning; Quick Reads; etc.

### **9. Set up a union learning centre**

- Endeavour to set up a Unite learning centre in the workplace to be able to offer e-learning and taught courses. Target Skills for Life provision. Ensure all learners undertake skills checks/assessments/diagnostics and are then signposted and supported to appropriate Skills for Life provision.
- ULRs to pilot initial courses and then support learners.

### **10. Keep the union informed**

- ULRs to submit learner activities regularly to Unite for Union Learning Fund purposes.
- ULRs to keep branch/workplace reps committee/RIO and learning organiser informed of learning activities.
- Attend regional ULR forums, Unite networking events to keep updated on learning initiatives.
- Case studies to be developed and publicised through Unite.

## **5.5 Action plans**

A failure to plan is planning to fail.

*What is an action plan?*

An action plan is a methodical approach intended to harness the Unite vision of learning at a point in time that is going to put into action all that has been learned on a ULR course.

It is intended to encapsulate that we have developed and harnessed your skills as a leader and organiser.

Vision without action is a daydreamer. Action without vision is a nightmare.

Your learning plan will be a strategic goal relevant to your workplace or community. It will incorporate the PIERS cycle planning, implementation, evaluation, recording and sharing.

Planning is not saying, "I will map the workplace" – that is a statement, not a plan. Showing how you will map the workplace is a plan. Your plan could be mapping the workplace, setting up a learning committee or getting a learning agreement signed with employer, or putting on a course at your workplace.

## 5.6 Sample action plan

<b>Name:</b>		<b>Workplace:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>			
<b>Project aims: establish a learning committee</b>			
<b>Objectives/main areas for research</b>	<b>How I will achieve the objective(s) (methods/sources)</b>	<b>Who to involve</b>	<b>Timescales</b>
<i>Identify relevant committee members</i>	<i>Discuss who should be involved with learning organiser (LO) in order to work out appropriate composition</i>	<i>Possibly: other unions (UNISON, GMB), HR, chief executive's office, Unite branch</i>	<i>Apr – May 2014</i>
<i>Establish a purpose for committee</i>	<i>Discuss with LO, read relevant literature hold individual discussions with potential members with a view to agreeing a purpose prior to first meeting</i>	<i>As above</i>	<i>Apr – May 2014</i>
<i>Arrange meeting</i>	<i>Identify venue, set date and time etc</i>	<i>As above plus facilities management</i>	<i>May 2014</i>
<i>Get agreement on functions and work to be carried out</i>	<i>Set agenda including:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning agreement</i></li> <li>• <i>Membership (of committee)</i></li> <li>• <i>Frequency of meetings</i></li> <li>• <i>Roles and purpose</i></li> <li>• <i>Learning needs survey</i></li> </ul>	<i>As above</i>	<i>End May/beginning June 2014</i>
<b>Action Plan discussed &amp; agreed with (please tick):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>tutor</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Learning Organiser</b>		<b>Action Plan sent to (please tick):</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>full-time officer and/or</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>convenor and/or</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>branch secretary</b>	

## Part 6: Useful websites and contacts

Organisation	Web address	Details
BBC Learning	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/learning">www.bbc.co.uk/learning</a>	Popular site for news and information about adult learning
BBC Skillswise	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise">www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise</a>	News, information, literacy and numeracy games and quizzes, newsletter via email
BBC Webwise	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/webwise">www.bbc.co.uk/webwise</a>	Internet user guide, online beginners course, newsletter via email
Campaign for Learning	<a href="http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk">www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk</a>	National charity supporting workplace learning
Learn My Way	<a href="http://www.learnmyway.com">www.learnmyway.com</a>	Free online courses for beginners to develop digital skills
British Dyslexia Association	<a href="http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk">www.bdadyslexia.org.uk</a>	Support and resources for dyslexic learners
Learning Light	<a href="http://www.e-learningcentre.co.uk">www.e-learningcentre.co.uk</a>	Information about learning online
Alison	<a href="http://www.alison.com">www.alison.com</a>	Free online courses
Skills Workshop	<a href="http://www.skillsworkshop.org">www.skillsworkshop.org</a>	Free functional skills resources
Skills Funding Agency	<a href="http://www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk">www.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk</a>	Organisation responsible for all aspects of adult education in England and Wales
Move On	<a href="http://www.move-on.org.uk">www.move-on.org.uk</a>	National campaign to improve adult literacy and numeracy. Resources, materials and mini practice tests
Lifelong Learning	<a href="http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk">www.lifelonglearning.co.uk</a>	News and information in the lifelong learning sector

Learndirect	<a href="http://www.learndirect.co.uk">www.learndirect.co.uk</a>	Advice, information, search for courses, online learning
National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)	<a href="http://www.niace.org.uk">www.niace.org.uk</a>	News, events, resources promoting adult education
Openlearn	<a href="http://www.openlearn.open.ac.uk">www.openlearn.open.ac.uk</a>	Access to course materials from The Open University
Open Study College	<a href="http://www.openstudycollege.com">www.openstudycollege.com</a>	Wide range of home study courses
Six Book Challenge	<a href="http://www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk">www.sixbookchallenge.org.uk</a>	Information and resources for setting up reading initiatives
National Literacy Trust	<a href="http://www.literacytrust.org.uk">www.literacytrust.org.uk</a>	Information about literacy in the UK
Quick Reads	<a href="http://www.quickreads.org.uk">www.quickreads.org.uk</a>	Information and resources. Requires registration
Union Reps	<a href="http://www.unionreps.org.uk">www.unionreps.org.uk</a>	Information, networking, resources, email newsletter, forums
Learnwithunite	<a href="http://www.learnwithunite.org">www.learnwithunite.org</a>	Online courses, information, news, events, forum, chat room. Requires registration
Unite	<a href="http://www.unitetheunion.org">www.unitetheunion.org</a>	Online Unite course information and contact details for ULF project
Unionlearn	<a href="http://www.unionlearn.org.uk">www.unionlearn.org.uk</a>	Learning and education department of TUC. News, information, events, publications and email alerts
Scottish Union Learning	<a href="http://www.scottishunionlearning.com">www.scottishunionlearning.com</a>	Skills, lifelong learning and activist education arm of STUC

UK Online Centres	<a href="http://www.ukonlinecentres.com">www.ukonlinecentres.com</a>	Support for learners who don't have access to a computer
University for Industry Charitable Trust	<a href="http://www.ufi.com">www.ufi.com</a>	Offers funding opportunities for adult learning using technology
UK government online	<a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>	Click on the link 'Education and learning'
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)	<a href="http://www.bis.gov.uk">www.bis.gov.uk</a>	Government department responsible for Further and Higher Education
British Institute of Human Rights	<a href="http://www.bihar.org">www.bihar.org</a>	Organisations supporting people to use human rights principles and standards to improve their own lives and as a tool for organisations to develop more effective policy and practice
TUC	<a href="http://www.tuc.org.uk">www.tuc.org.uk</a>	Trade Union Congress
STUC	<a href="http://www.stuc.org.uk">www.stuc.org.uk</a>	Scottish Trade Union Congress
ICTU	<a href="http://www.ictu.ie">www.ictu.ie</a>	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
National Careers Service	<a href="http://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk">nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk</a>	Provides careers advice and information on a wide range of jobs, training course resources and funding
National Learning Network (NLN)	<a href="http://www.nln.ac.uk">www.nln.ac.uk</a>	National partnership programme aiming to increase the uptake of Information and Learning Technology (ILT) across post-16 education in England

ACAS	<a href="http://www.acas.org.uk">www.acas.org.uk</a>	Organisation devoted to preventing and resolving employment disputes
Do-it	<a href="http://www.do-it.org.uk">www.do-it.org.uk</a>	UK's national volunteering database
City of Sanctuary	<a href="http://www.cityofsanctuary.org">www.cityofsanctuary.org</a>	A national movement of local people and organisations working towards making their city a place of welcome and safety to those seeking sanctuary from war and persecution
OCR	<a href="http://www.ocr.org.uk">www.ocr.org.uk</a>	Leading UK awarding body, providing qualifications for learners of all ages at school, college, in work or through part-time learning programmes
Edexcel	<a href="http://www.edexcel.com">www.edexcel.com</a>	UK's largest awarding body, offering academic and vocational qualifications and testing in the UK