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## UNISON workplace representatives and activists

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A guide to getting more involved in your union

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# Introduction

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Being a member of UNISON is more than just a membership card; it's about what we build together to become a more powerful union. UNISON relies on its members and their time to run the union. UNISON workplace representatives (reps), stewards and other activists are the most important link between the union and its members.

This booklet sets out the different kinds of representative and activist roles that we ask UNISON members to consider taking on. Some of them take up a little time and require very little training; other roles are more demanding and we offer training and support to ensure you are confident and equipped to take them on.

The different kinds of UNISON representatives and activists include:

- workplace contacts
- workplace stewards
- union learning representatives
- young members officers
- equality representatives
- health and safety representatives.

If, when you have read this guide, you would like to get more involved, get in touch (see Further Information, page 7 for contact details).

**To find out more, visit: [learning.unison.org.uk/activist-training](https://learning.unison.org.uk/activist-training)**



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## The different kinds of UNISON representatives and activists

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### **Workplace contact**

The role of a workplace contact is to let your branch know what's happening in your workplace and to help the union get messages to its members. It's a good learning opportunity and starting point to get involved in the union.

As a contact you will:

- share information with colleagues and other UNISON members
- keep notice boards up to date with UNISON information
- have regular conversations with members in the workplace
- recruit new members.

### **Workplace steward**

Workplace stewards are the heart of our trade union. As a steward, your role is to help to organise your colleagues into an effective, strong and welcoming membership.

As a steward you will:

- be the first point of contact for members in your workplace
- talk to members about the union
- offer advice on issues at work and represent members in cases
- campaign for better working conditions
- recruit and organise new members
- encourage more members to get active in UNISON
- raise your members' issues with the branch.

Basic training for new stewards has two stages: Stage 1 covers key things a steward should know in their role and focuses on organising. Stage 2 is about representing members at work.

UNISON encourages new stewards to attend both stages.

To find out more, visit:  
**[learning.unison.org.uk/activist-training](https://learning.unison.org.uk/activist-training)**

### **Union learning representative**

Union learning representatives, often known as ULRs, are passionate about getting people involved in learning to help increase their confidence and skills.

This could be by promoting courses on confidence building, study skills, job skills, digital skills or improving maths and English.

Learning with UNISON gives members the opportunity to develop and gain new skills professionally and personally.

As a ULR you will:

- promote learning in your workplace
- support members to take up learning opportunities
- encourage adult learners to be active branch members
- organise workers around learning
- find out how learning could help to resolve issues at work
- recruit new members
- recruit new ULRs

See 'branch education team' at  
**[learning.unison.org.uk](https://learning.unison.org.uk)**

### **Young members officer**

Young members are important to the future of UNISON. If you're under 27, the role of young members officer is ideal as a way to get more involved in the union. It can be a more informal role than a steward or other workplace representative.

As a young members officer you will:

- represent the interests of young workers
- help with recruiting and organising young members in your branch
- build a branch young members organisation
- campaign on issues affecting young people in your workplace.

Why is the age cut-off 27? We know many people are still young at heart but we have to draw the line somewhere!

To find out more about young members, visit: **[unison.org.uk/equality](https://unison.org.uk/equality)**

### **Equality representative**

Equality is at the heart of everything we do and equality reps strive for fairness, especially for women, Black, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and disabled members, who may face discrimination throughout their working lives. (We have 'self-organised groups' for these members. These are groups of members who organise around their experience of prejudice and discrimination.)

Migrant workers can also be vulnerable to mistreatment in the workplace. The role of equality representative is crucial for changing views, policies and lives.

As an equality representative you will:

- work with your branch to improve workplace and employer equality policies
- campaign for equality in the workplace and the union
- promote national campaigns such as International Women's Day, LGBT History Month and Black History Month
- work with other reps to ensure your branch is inclusive and accessible
- recruit new members
- raise awareness of, and talk to members about, UNISON's self-organised groups and forums
- support or help establish self-organised groups in your branch.

To find out more, search the UNISON website for 'challenge inequality'.

## **Health and safety representative**

Health and safety representatives care about workers' safety and campaign for better working conditions. As a health and safety representative, you play a vital role in keeping our members healthy and happy at work.

As a health and safety rep you will:

- investigate potential hazards
- consult members on working conditions
- lobby your employer to improve safety
- support members with complaints about safety
- recruit new members
- identify members who could become more involved in health and safety issues.

To find out more, visit:  
**[learning.unison.org.uk](https://learning.unison.org.uk)**

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# Training, support and time off for representatives and activists

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## **Training and support**

As a UNISON activist you will be offered a wide range of free training and support as soon as you get involved. There will also be exclusive briefings and access to information to help you in your role

UNISON will cover reasonable expenses including travel, accommodation and childcare. You will be fully supported to take the lead and encourage other members to get involved. Whatever you are interested in there's something for you.

To find out more about training and support, visit:

**[learning.unison.org.uk/activist-training](https://learning.unison.org.uk/activist-training)**

To see our e-notes and other useful learning materials visit our learning site:

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

## **Time off**

Most activists in UNISON give some of their own time to fulfil the various roles in UNISON. Stewards, health and safety reps and ULRs are entitled to paid time off for initial training and should receive reasonable paid time off work to undertake work for the union. This is called facility time. UNISON actively pursues paid time off for all its representatives and will work with you to explore all options.

For more information, search 'facility time' at **[unison.org.uk](https://unison.org.uk)**

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## Further information

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If you are ready to get more involved with UNISON, contact your local branch or regional office.

If you don't know who they are, or you want further information visit: [branches.unison.org.uk](http://branches.unison.org.uk) or [unison.org.uk/regions](http://unison.org.uk/regions)

Or you can call our dedicated helpline on: **0800 0 857 857**



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# Get involved – become a UNISON workplace representative today!

There are many roles in UNISON that you can get involved with. So what are you waiting for? Get active today and help us build a stronger UNISON.

This booklet guides you through the options available to you as a UNISON representative and sets out the training and support you can receive.



## Three simple ways to join UNISON today:



Join online at  
[joinunison.org](http://joinunison.org)



Call us on  
**0800 171 2193**



Ask your UNISON rep  
for an application form