


ULR
TOOLKIT

USEFUL CONTACTS

Equality, Education & Development Department

CWU HQ, 150 The Broadway, Wimbledon, London, SW19 1RX

Tel: 0208 971 7340

Email: equality&education@cwu.org

Kate Hudson

Head of Equality, Education & Development Department

Tel: 0208 971 7238

Email: khudson@cwu.org

Paul Dovey

Training and Education Co-ordinator

Tel: 07702 529092

Email: pdovey@cwu.org

Simon Massen

Course Administrator

Tel: 07904 409661

Email: courseadmin@cwu.org

CWU Equality, Education & Development website

<https://education.cwu.org>

National Careers Services

England: <https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk>

Northern Ireland: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/careers-online-support>

Scotland: <https://careers.myworldofwork.co.uk>

Wales: <https://careerswales.gov.wales>



FOREWORD

Congratulations on being elected to the position of Union Learning Rep (ULR). You are now one of the thousands of CWU representatives, representing members and their interests all over the UK.

The role of ULR is very important within the CWU. As the world of work changes ever faster we all need the opportunity to learn new skills throughout our lives but educational inequality starts early in life and persists throughout our lives. It is to address this that we have enshrined within the objectives of the union to promote, organise and facilitate access to adult education to enable members to advance their skills for life. You can check out the CWU rule book here www.cwu.org/about-the-cwu/union-matters/rulebook for further details.

We work hard to support our ULRs and are committed to making sure you have all the support, training and information you need to make your role a success!

This guide has been produced to help you get started with the basics and provides practical information to help you make the most of your role.

We hope you find it useful.

INTRODUCTION

Access to education is one of the fundamental inequalities in our society. The educational opportunities available to the rich have never been available to the working class. A century after universal suffrage our leaders still mostly come from a couple of elite public schools and universities. Meanwhile, some 20% of adults still experience difficulty with either literacy or numeracy and many more lack the IT skills to fully participate in society. This is not the fault of individuals, it is a systemic failure.

Trade Unions always recognised that education was a vital element of improving our members' conditions. "Educate, Agitate, Organise," were the pillars on which we aimed to build a better world. We sought to provide learning opportunities at every level. Ragged Schools, Mechanics' Institutes, Ruskin College, the Workers Educational Association and the Plebs' League were just some of the organisations through which we sought to do this. Since their creation in 1998, Union Learning Reps (ULRs) have taken learning into the workplace, seeking more than the limited opportunities traditionally offered to workers. The CWU have created a national ULR network so, irrespective of your level of experience, there are always people to share ideas and offer support.

ULR ROLE

A Union Learning Representative (ULR) will be elected by their Branch as covered by the Branch rules. All ULRs are governed by their Branch rules and policies and by CWU National rules and policies.

The duties for a ULR shall include:

- Promoting lifelong learning to CWU members and the wider community
- Researching and analysing the learning needs of members and employers
- Compiling a directory of local and online learning opportunities
- Supporting members during their learning journey
- Providing initial learning information and advice to members and/or signposting them to external Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG) services as required
- Working with their branch to deliver learning opportunities in keeping with the rules, aims and objectives of the CWU
- Working with their Branch Officers to assess branch activist education needs and organise and support training as required
- Developing learning centres or learning access points where sustainable
- Organising and attending a Learning Steering Committee comprising of representatives of the Branch, ULR(s), Employers, Learning Providers and other bodies as decided by the committee
- Providing IAG and learning support to members leaving employment for whatever reason
- Developing learning clubs and societies and other informal learning opportunities
- Attending such courses, networking and dissemination events necessary to keep them informed of relevant developments in the field of lifelong learning and build contacts to enable them to provide wider learning opportunities for members and to develop the skills needed to support learners
- Representing the branch on learning issues both on internal CWU committees and external committees/networks as appropriate
- Negotiating with employers and education providers to provide lifelong learning opportunities and resources for their members, learners and themselves in line with national CWU Guidance
- Supporting the work of their Branch, Regional Education, Learning & Training Sub Committee and CWU Equality, Education & Development and the wider CWU

"I am learning computers skills which helps me cope with modern life technology."

Roman Cichosz



BRANCH LEAD ULR

Where a Branch has more than one ULR then there shall be a Lead ULR/Learning Officer/Learning Co-ordinator. This individual will be elected by their Branch as covered by the Branch rules.

The duties for a Lead ULR/Learning Officer/Learning Co-ordinator shall include:

- All the duties of a ULR as detailed above
- Co-coordinating the work and training (in consultation with the Branch Secretary) of the Branch's ULRs
- Organising and attending a Branch ULR committee (as per Branch rules)
- Representing ULRs to the Branch Committee
- Reporting on education and learning to the Branch Committee
- Being Lead Negotiator on learning issues for the Branch with employers, learning providers and other appropriate bodies.
- Representing the Branch as appropriate at Regional Education, Learning & Training Sub Committee meetings
- Supporting the work of their Branch, Regional Education, Learning & Training Sub Committee, CWU Equality, Education & Development and the wider CWU



RELTSC LEAD

Each CWU Region shall retain Regional Education, Learning and Training Sub Committees (RELTSC) for their Regional Sub Committee areas. The primary objective of the RELTSC is to support the CWU National Education Network. Each RELTSC shall elect a Lead representative who shall be the principal officer and oversee the RELTSC.

The term of office for the RELTSC Lead will be two years. The RELTSC Lead will:

- Be responsible for developing and delivering the policies, aims and objectives relevant to the RELTSC in accordance with the National Education Network strategy and the rules and policies of the union.
 - Assist and support branches regarding matters relevant to the CWU National Education Network strategy.
 - Provide regular updates on their work to the CWU Equality, Education & Development Department, Regional Official and Branches within their area of responsibility.
 - Be responsible for dealing with all correspondence relevant to their RELTSC.
 - Prepare an annual report that shall be placed before their RELTSC for approval.
 - Prepare the agenda and minutes of any RELTSC meetings and circulate them to the members of the RELTSC and Branch Secretaries to enable issues contained in the minutes to be pursued through the Branch and National Education Network as necessary.
 - Organise 4 meetings of the RELTSC per year.
 - Where the RELTSC is entitled to submit motions to Conferences etc, to ensure all branches within the Regional Sub Committee area are consulted ahead of the RELTSC meeting to agree the respective motion(s), which must have the endorsement of the majority of votes cast by branches in the Regional Sub Committee area to be valid.
- To ensure that all branches within the Regional Sub Committee area are fully consulted on any matter that could have significant implications or impact on branch finances, prior to any decisions being made.
 - Work with Branches and the CWU Equality, Education & Development Department to identify activist training needs.
 - Liaise with the CWU Equality, Education & Development Department with regard to the venue, location and scheduling of Regional programmes of training as required.
 - Assist the CWU Equality, Education & Development Department with the promotion of CWU training and education courses.
 - Liaise with the CWU Equality, Education & Development Department over issues relating to union lifelong learning.
 - Attend RELTSC Leads meetings twice a year, as arranged by CWU Equality, Education & Development Department.

"I am more confident using my phone to enable me to use the internet so I can shop on line. I have even managed to order my bus pass which previously I was not able to do."

Michael Webb

CWU EQUALITY, EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT

The CWU Equality, Education & Development team are always available to provide help and support. For ULR issues contact Paul Dovey, Training and Education Co-ordinator. For activist training issues contact Simon Massen, Course Administrator. Their contact details can be found under Useful Contacts at the front of this booklet.

ULR NETWORKING EVENT

Every year CWU Equality, Education & Development organise a National ULR Networking Event for ULRs to meet other reps from across the country to share experiences and ideas. The event includes workshops, guest speakers, partner organisations, fellow trade unionists and experts in relevant fields. You are entitled to paid release to attend this and your branch will cover your travel and accommodation. It will be publicised via a Letter to Branches, website and social media.

CWU EQUALITY, EDUCATION & DEVELOPMENT WEBSITE

The CWU Equality, Education & Development website offers a wide range of resources for ULRs and learners alike. Here you can find hundreds of online courses, learner case studies, blogs, course resources and much more. Visit <https://education.cwu.org>

CWU REPS TRAINING

It is possible that your branch might want you to assist with organising or supporting their Reps training. Our activist training programme is notified in advance via a Letter to Branches (LtB) and is available on the CWU Equality, Education & Development website. The programme is organised via courseadmin@cwu.org who will be able to assist you with enrolling reps on courses.

We also have a number of documents to enable you to support reps through the online elements of our activist programme. Your RELTSC Lead will be able to give you more information on this, as will CWU Equality, Education & Development.

"I am learning about the Solar System & the Moon which I find interesting and broadens my knowledge."

Mathew Painter



TAKING LEARNING TO THE MEMBERS

In order to take learning to the members you will need to map your membership and survey their learning needs and interests, to make sure you are offering what they want in a location that suits them.

Many branches have learning centres, either in the branch office or in the workplace. Learning Centres offer a bespoke location for members to access learning so they need to be in a central and accessible location. They can also serve as a base for your ULR activities.

You will need,

- An accessible space large enough to comfortably accommodate a full course
- Computers, printers and a screen/projector for the tutor
- Furniture, broadband, heating, lighting and toilet facilities
- Secure storage for equipment and learner documents
- Paper, pens, ink and other consumables

If you can negotiate space in an occupied building (which you will want to do if you want to be where the members are) then much of the above could come as part of this but your branch might need to agree a budget to support any further equipment or resources you might need.

However a large part of our membership are remote workers and work over a range of shifts, so it might not be realistic or desirable to expect them to access a learning centre in a central location. Many ULRs take learning out to the members, organising meetings, presentations and consultations across their branch area. This might be facilitated by taking laptops or tablets out to the site or by utilising the members own devices.

Remember to make such learning outreach available to all, in terms of location, shift pattern, IT skills, accessibility and inclusion. Keep all of these in your mind when looking at participation rates. If your participation levels are not proportional to the membership of your Branch, this might suggest that there is a need that you may not have made provision for. Most learning providers should have resources to assist with accessibility.

ONLINE LEARNING

E-learning is increasingly popular. It can enable people to participate in learning activities irrespective of where they might be. Many ULRs have utilised online video platforms such as MS Teams or Zoom to organise courses for members from across their branch area, region or even nationally, significantly expanding the reach of their courses, making them both more accessible and more viable.

E-learning is flexible and often a less expensive or even free option. At its most immediate you can just type a subject into a search engine and be watching an instructional video within moments. The problem, as with all things on the internet, is ensuring quality, accuracy and safety of the information available. The CWU Equality, Education & Development webpage offers a wide range of online learning opportunities from reputable providers. This amounts to many hundreds of courses and constitutes a valuable resource for ULRs and members, covering everything from hobbies and interests to vocational and professional qualifications.

Of course, there is still a sizeable proportion of our membership who have not yet had the chance to gain the IT skills required to benefit from e-learning. Those members would benefit from ULR support through their first few sessions. If members prefer to learn as part of a group, it is also possible for ULRs to use e-learning content as the basis for group learning sessions in a learning centre or elsewhere.

WORKING WITH LEARNING PROVIDERS

The term Learning Providers covers not just colleges and universities but also community and commercial organisations that might deliver learning. The Workers' Educational Association have worked with trade unions for over a century and is organised in branches, much as we are. They can offer a range of courses, some fully funded and others at reasonable rates.

Some colleges may not be used to working with unions so might need a bit of an introduction to what we do. When negotiating with them it is worth remembering that they will have a number of funding targets that we could help them reach (such as English, maths, community engagement and non-traditional learners).

There are also many private learning providers who tend to focus on learning that is either in high demand commercially or attracts government funding. They are sometimes more flexible than colleges but also smaller and more susceptible to cash flow and organisational problems. We have experience of several of these going bust mid-course so they need to be approached with caution.

Other sources of learning include private tutors, local libraries, museums, charities, health authorities and online learning platforms. If you look widely enough it will be rare for a member to express interest in something that you will not be able to offer at least some options for.

FUNDING

Providers are paid for the learning they deliver, either through fees paid directly by the learner or via funding drawn down from either central government or local authorities. Fully funded courses should mean that the member does not have to pay a fee. Partially funded or non-funded courses will require the member to pay a fee to the college.

Funding for education is devolved, not only to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, who all have their own strategies and funding streams for adult learning, but also to many different regions of England. This means that what courses can be funded might change depending on the members' home postcode. This can be difficult to navigate but local providers should understand and be able to draw down funding for their local population. It might get a bit more difficult if you are dealing with providers who deliver nationwide (for example by distance or e-learning) as they will probably have areas where they cannot access funding. If a provider tells you they cannot fund a particular course it is worth checking whether this means that neither the government nor the local authority have directed funding to this course or whether the provider has chosen not to bid, or been unsuccessful in bidding, for that funding. If it is the latter then you should be able to find another provider locally who can fund it. If you need help to navigate this, talk to other ULRs, your RELTSC Lead or the CWU Training & Education Co-ordinator.

What Could I Write About?	Building Blocks Syllabic Verse	Building Blocks Rhyme	The Poets' Toolkit
Tried And Tested Forms	Free Verse & Experimental	Publication	Performance
Introducing Steve	Introducing Emma	Introducing Dave	Join The CWU Poetry Club

“Learning has meant to me a way of expanding my skillset and knowledge of related and new fields in IT.”

Craig Roberts



INFORMATION & ADVICE

It is vital that learners are given clear information on what they can expect from their course and what will be expected from them. This is a key part of the ULRs role. You do not need to know everything but it is useful to know what questions to ask and where you might be able to find the answers. If the member is looking for more detailed careers advice then this can be accessed via local careers services or the appropriate national careers website (listed under useful contacts). The member might need help to navigate this so a ULR being familiar with these sites can be helpful. When looking to signpost members to specific courses both you and the learner need to consider:

- What is the learner's aim? Are they looking for a qualification or certificate or are they just interested in gaining the skills they need? Are they doing it with a specific employment goal in mind? What are the requirements of the job they are seeking?
- How much does the course cost? Is it a complete course or is it a part of a larger learning programme? Does it cover examination and accreditation or is this separate? Are supporting materials provided or do learners need to buy additional text books etc?
- How long does the course take? What commitment is required from the learner in coursework, reading and assignments?
- What tutor / learner support does the provider offer? There should be an opportunity for the learner to raise questions and get feedback regarding their progress.
- Are there other courses available in this subject? How do they compare in terms of cost, quality and recognition?
- What are the completion rates? Do you have feedback from previous learners or ULRs who have used or delivered the course? Can the provider produce case studies or learner testimony?

Keeping these points in mind should enable both the ULR and the member to have confidence in the provision being signposted. Remember to keep seeking feedback from learners so you know both how their individual learning is progressing and that the provider or course is still worthy of the confidence you have placed in them.

FORMAL OR INFORMAL LEARNING?

Much of what we learn in life is learnt informally, through activity or experience rather than formal accredited learning provided by a college. Our members benefit from both formal and informal learning and ULRs are able to organise and signpost to both.

Formal learning is delivered by colleges and other accredited providers. It is structured, supported by qualified tutors, subject to quality control and often leads to a qualification. Informal learning covers anything else that results in our members gaining knowledge and skills. This might mean participating in an activity or challenge, such as Reading Ahead or Family Learning Week, attending a presentation on health and wellbeing, a trip to a museum, theatre or wildlife centre, researching their family history or watching a documentary or instructional video. The options for informal learning are limitless.

Which form of learning is most appropriate for each learner depends on their individual needs. Are they just interested in gaining the skills they need to be able to achieve something in their work or home life or are they interested in gaining a qualification to get a new job or promotion? There is no right or wrong. What is important is that the learner gets what they need. To that end it is important that members understand what they can expect from the learning they undertake and what will be expected of them.

Tools such as CPD diaries, portfolios and badges offer ways to achieve recognition of the skills gained through informal learning. More information can be found on the CWU Equality, Education & Development website.

LEARNING NEEDS ANALYSIS & FEEDBACK

Learning Needs Analysis is the *ongoing* process of understanding the range of learning that our members are interested in. This can take a number of forms:

- Membership surveys
- Feedback from Worktime Learning or Team Meetings
- 1-2-1 interviews and individual learning plans
- Learner progression through current courses
- Workplace mapping, including work location and shift pattern

It is also important to analyse participation. What are the completion rates? Are all shifts and work locations equally represented? Are all members represented proportionally? If not, this might indicate problems in promotion, delivery or accessibility that need to be addressed. Seek feedback from all learners. This not only helps to plan upcoming learning activity, it also provides information on the learner experience and gives you the chance to address any potential problems.

“Being a CWU Union Learning Rep over the years, has given me a lot of satisfaction to aid other Colleagues within the workplace. Members gaining a qualification and new lifelong skills, to build up their self-esteem and relighting their enthusiasm in learning, making new friends and hopefully improving their quality of life. Understanding the learning dynamics in an administrative role within the learning environment, and enjoying the challenges as a Union Learning Rep has been a very educational experience.”

George White

All personalised data should be handled in accordance with GDPR legislation (your Branch Secretary should be able to tell you more about this). Individual learners have a right to privacy. Trust is at the core of the ULR relationship with members – so individual learner details should not be divulged without permission. Headcount and broader data that does not identify individuals can be shared to help management understand the benefit ULR activity. In fact, many learners will be happy to celebrate their achievements and we should encourage them to do so. Seeing their friends and workmates enjoying learning inspires others to get involved. It enables them to picture themselves in the same position.

All of the above needs to be done regularly as a part of business as usual. This enables you to plan and promote your learning and ensure it is seen as a regular part of workplace activity.



ULR RELEASE

ULR release is covered by Section 43 of the Employment Act 2002 and Section 168a of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. Further explanation of all the above is available in the ACAS Code of Practice on time off for trade union duties. (Para 16 - 19 & Para 28 – 33)

Employees who are members of an independent trade union recognised by the employer can take reasonable time off to undertake the duties of a ULR, provided that the union has given the employer notice in writing, that the employee is a learning representative of the trade union and they have been sufficiently trained to carry out their duties (or will be within 6 months).

ULRs are entitled to take time off during working hours for the purpose of:

- Analysing learning or training needs
- Providing information or advice about learning or training matters
- Arranging learning or training
- Promoting the value of learning or training

ULRs must also be allowed time off to:

- Consult the employer about carrying out such activities for qualifying members
- Prepare for activities within these purposes
- Undergo training relevant to their function as a learning rep, including training to become a learning rep

The right to payment is specifically covered by Section 169 of the Trade Union & Labour (Consolidation) Act 1992. ULRs should be paid the amount they would have earned if they were working. This should also reflect any shift premiums or bonuses etc.

The amount of time off allowed is based on what is “reasonable” in the circumstances. It is useful to plan activities across the year to provide a clear idea of the structure of the release you will be needing. It is reasonable that you will need to communicate every new learning opportunity to every workplace and duty across the branch area. As you plan this out it will give you a regular rotation across the branch, as each new term or learning opportunity arises. It is good practice to be planning the next programme of courses while the current programme is running. This maintains a lively culture of learning in the workplace.

In order to support your release claims we recommend you keep a diary of your ULR activities – even if your manager does not initially ask for one. Managers and attitudes change. Having evidence of your activities and the time required to do them can avoid problems at a later date.

If your manager refuses your request for paid release, you should seek support from your branch to raise a formal disagreement. Do this promptly and if you are already receiving ULR release, seek to maintain the status quo while the case is heard. Keep records throughout and request your manager’s response in writing. Any appeals will need to be based on evidence such as this.

The Equality, Education & Development team are always available to offer support and advice.

“It’s good to learn new things as it can improve your confidence and open up new and different opportunities.”

Sandra Absalom



"The Learning Centre gives learners the opportunity to study different courses which can enhance their CV."

Laz Desouza

"Our book Club has proved very successful. We have members who used to read very rarely, and now they look forward to each new book. It has improved members concentration and has a positive impact on their mental health."

Susan Harkin



MAKING THE CASE FOR LEARNING

Over the past 20 years a number of documents have been produced by the government, TUC, CBI and others explaining the value of learning in the workplace but in brief the benefits are:

- To members
 - Improves job security & employability
 - Increases opportunities for progression
 - Improves well-being
 - Addresses inequality
- To the employer
 - Develops and promotes a culture of learning
 - Builds learner confidence through peer support
 - Increases workplace skills
 - Improves staff morale and supports good mental health

All learning is beneficial as it improves confidence and well-being. Certain skills are considered essential to individual and workplace effectiveness:

- English – improves workplace relationships, enhances communication, reduces misunderstandings and enables staff to clearly understand company goals, messages and instructions.
- Maths – improves performance, confidence and cognitive skills, removes barriers to career development, reduces reliance on key staff and avoids costly mistakes. Business runs on data but if people do not understand that data it is meaningless.
- IT – provides the confidence to use workplace systems, increases self-esteem, personal development and contribution to the business. It enables staff to undertake new and different roles and can lead to promotion, increased motivation and job satisfaction.
- Health & wellbeing – working with local health authorities and charities, health and well-being education in areas such as cancer awareness, heart health, dietary advice and mental health has improved well-being and saved lives.

All learning makes staff feel appreciated and invested in, improving retention and morale. Essential skills can be embedded in hobby courses to provide individual relevance and make courses less intimidating to those who may have had previous bad experiences in education. Adopting a culture of learning in the workplace reduces the potential stigma for those who have often spent many years trying to cover-up their difficulties.

Research by the Marchmont Observatory, University of Exeter, found that 88% of CWU learners felt that their union was either extremely important or very important in supporting their learning.

- 91% of participants in union learning were more enthusiastic about learning
- 87% were more confident in their abilities
- 87% were more likely to undertake further learning and training in future
- 77% felt that union learning had given them new skills that they might use in their current job
- 67% felt that they had gained new skills that they might use to get a new job or promotion



“Continuous learning holds great significance for me. As a graduate student in IT, staying abreast of the latest developments in the tech world is essential. It not only provides me with a sense of accomplishment but also opens up new avenues for exploration and opportunities.”

Yifei Wang





CWU Headquarters: 150 The Broadway | Wimbledon | SW19 1RX T: 020 8971 7200 | F: 020 8971 7300
08635 Published by the Communication Workers Union 2026

 [DaveWardGS](#)

   [CWUNews](#)

 [The Communications Union](#)

[#TheCWU](#)

[CWU.ORG](#)