

Union Learning Rep (ULR) Conference Summary



“ULRs are Activists!”

This year’s conference focused on reinforcing the importance of Union Learning Reps as a key activist role.

Takeaway points

- ULRs are fundamental in supporting learning at work – which in turn supports members in developing new and further skills personally and professionally
- Learning is a key organising tool and is integral to UNISON’s organising priorities and campaigns
- The learning activities that ULRs support widen and increase participation in our union and the workplace

“I really value the development and growth of our workforce, and to be able to direct and support members with the learning that UNISON provides. This can be especially important for career development pathways, where members have aspirations for the future but they’ve maybe not had the opportunities before.”

Sue Jugon
ULR, East Midlands Region

Highlights

Jon Richards, Assistant General Secretary (AGS) spoke passionately about the importance of the ULR role and the recognition it deserves in supporting the development of our members.

It was reported that the overall number of activists had increased in the last year, and member learning activity and involvement was up by 25%. This was in large part due to the tremendous efforts of the ULRs. There is now a drive to further increase the number of ULRs across the 12 regions.

It was highlighted that recent campaigns and UNISON’s organising priorities all have learning at the heart, including skills for members and activists – for both their personal and professional development. UNISON’s 2024 organising plan also includes the recognition that ULRs have a valuable role in the development of the whole union.

UNISON College core member learning offer

Delegates identified the following 4 areas of training opportunities they felt would be most beneficial to members:

Personal:

Public Speaking/Building Confidence; Dealing with Difficult Conversations; Financial Wellbeing; Pensions and Preparing for Retirement; Trade Union History; Creative Writing

Professional:

Neurodiversity; Challenging Racism; Interview Skills; Dealing with Suicide and Bereavement and Domestic Abuse Awareness.

Well-being & Support:

Assertiveness; Time Management; Mindfulness; and Mental Health First Aid; Menopause Awareness

Functional Skills

English; Maths; Digital skills



Further training for ULRs

Delegates identified a further training wish list for their ULR role.

- Using Digital Skills to promote courses and present activities to local members.
- Equality Courses
- Neurodiversity and Menopause Awareness
- Train the Trainer
- Negotiation Skills
- Trade Union / UNISON History

Digital Skills

An interactive digital session demonstrated a variety of ways that digital skills and activities can be incorporated to make online learning more interactive and fun. For ideas and info visit the [digital skills page](#)

Organising to Win

Head of LAOS, Sarah Hayes, and Education Officer, Suzanne Tipping, highlighted that UNISON's organising priorities and Organising to Win strategy both have learning at their core. There is a drive to increase ULRs by 30% in 2024 along with further activist training and development.

“Going to this conference has inspired me - I feel re-energised and enthused to engage members! I’m going to go back to my workplace and remind members I am the learning rep, because being a ULR is really about promoting access to learning opportunities.

And it’s also an opportunity to say to members that once they have accessed learning and training, they can also give back and consider becoming a ULR too!”

Amanda Trafford
ULR, North West Region

ULRs and Learning cafes

During the Covid-19 lockdown period regular online drop-in information and support sessions for ULRs were set up called “Learning Cafes”. They generally last between 1-2 hours and usually cover a particular topic or theme. The sessions are also used to provide space for ULRs to ask questions or seek help with any training query they may have.

The conference attendees were put into groups to experience being in a Learning Café. They explored how they might deal with a learning topic in their workplace or branch. The exercise helped promote the Learning Cafes that are run nationally, and also encourage ULRs to set up and run their own in at a local level.

Join the next virtual learning café [here](#) You can also set up a local face-to-face learning cafe.



ULR Pledges

If members attend at least 2 union learning events they are over 80% more likely to become more active within the union.

With that in mind, all delegates gave a written pledge detailing what they would do once back in their workplace and branch. How - it was asked - could they “bang the drum” to raise awareness of member learning in UNISON? Some of their pledges included:

- Link up with more local ULRs.
- Plan to recruit more members and ULRs.
- Improve course promotion and to a wider audience.
- Raise awareness of what is on offer locally, regionally and nationally..
- Carry out a needs assessment.
- Set up a local learning café.
- Set up a local bulletin or newsletter.
- Get Learning & Development on the Branch Agenda

For more info visit our [ULR page](#) and also take a look through the [UNISON College site](#)