

rganising at Work

Building stronger
unions in the workplace

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The job of a union representative has never been more important. The seemingly constant pace of change in workplaces places pressure on working people, which in turn increases the demand on reps for support, advice and representation.

All too often, in workplaces across all sectors of the economy, the job of maintaining the relevance and profile of the union and representing members falls on a small group of dedicated union activists.

The pressures that reps face can have an impact on the types of activity the union is able to undertake with, and on behalf of, members. Too often, reps find themselves 'fighting fires', reacting to initiatives by employers and spending the majority of their time representing individual members in disciplinary and grievance hearings.

But there are steps that we can take to change this: to encourage more people to not just join the union but to join in; to see the union not just as a third-party organisation that solves problems for them but as something that gives both them and their colleagues the ability to influence what happens to them at work.

Organising at Work is for union representatives who want to take steps in their branch or workplace to reaffirm, revitalise and rebuild the union. It contains a range of ideas to help union reps build union strength and increase the effectiveness of the union and the participation in union activity by members. The guide can be read in conjunction with *Organise 2 – A Voice in Every Workplace*, the TUC Education workbook available from your regional TUC office or local trade union education unit.

An organised workplace

What is organising?

Organising is not new, nor is it a term that should alienate people.

When we use the term 'organising' we are talking about:

- a union that draws its strength from not just the number of members it has, but also from the numbers of reps and activists
- a union that campaigns on issues that members care about and actively involves them in campaign activity
- a union that amongst its membership and activists, and through its activity, reflects the diversity of the workers it seeks to support and represent.

Five organising fundamentals

- 1** The strength of the union is linked to levels of membership and activity in work.
- 2** Members are encouraged to work collectively and have opportunities to campaign together on workplace issues that are important to them.
- 3** Paid officials and union representatives provide support, advice and leadership to assist members to win in their workplace.
- 4** The union is rooted in the workplace and is not seen as a third-party organisation.
- 5** The union is inclusive and creates opportunities for involvement and activism for all members.

Top Tip

Five indicators of an organised workplace

- There is a high level of union membership and activity.
- Reps are in all areas of the workplace, are well trained and have good facilities.
- Meetings are well attended.
- Members prioritise, and are involved in, branch activity.
- The union communicates with members regularly, using a variety of techniques.

Section 2

Getting to know your workplace

The importance of planning

We may think that planning is something that occurs in unions only at a national, regional or sector level. Yet it is just as vital for workplace union representatives.

Given the pressures on their time that reps already have to deal with, setting aside specific time for planning can appear a luxury. But, if we are serious about making a concerted effort about building union strength in the workplace, even some basic planning will pay dividends in the long term.

Planning enables us to:

- 1** take a snapshot of the union's strengths and weaknesses in the workplace
- 2** establish goals, objectives and allocate resources
- 3** decide how we will reach our goals and how we can measure our progress.

The plan should be regarded as a compass for the direction in which we want the union in the workplace to go.

Seven key stages of planning

There are a number of stages in planning effectively, none of which need take an enormous amount of time. Following them will make sure that your activity remains focussed on achieving your objectives.

1. Begin and maintain a map of your workplace

2. Develop a profile of your members and potential members

3. Assess areas of strength and weakness

4. Decide your objectives and priorities

5. Decide and allocate actions and resources

6. Implement

7. Evaluate and review

An introduction to mapping

Mapping is what we call the process of building up a picture of the environment – the workplace or the branch – in which we will be organising and campaigning.

Mapping is a useful way of collecting and analysing information about your workplace and the people in it. It is an essential tool in enabling the workplace union to organise successfully and can be used for a range of purposes.

Recruitment campaigns – using the map to identify areas of the workplace or branch where we have low numbers of members and/or activists can mean we target resources more effectively. If our map also contains information on reps, issues and the attitudes of management and supervisors we will be in a position to hone the message we target at potential members in areas where the union might be under-represented.

Communication networks – an organised workplace is one where there is regular communication between members and union activists. A workplace map can be used to develop a communication network to make sure that the union is able to gather the views of members as well as distributing information either via handouts or word of mouth. The map can make sure that there are contacts in all parts of the workplace who can be relied upon to gather information or get it out members.

Issue-based campaigns – by recording the issues that members in each part of the branch or workplace care and are concerned about, the map can help to decide which issues to run campaigns around. The map will help identify issues that are local to only certain parts of the workplace (which may be used in recruitment campaigns in that area) or more widely felt issues that resonate with workers across the whole branch or workplace. During negotiations, we can use the map and any member communication networks that we've established to feed back to members and get their thoughts.

Mapping should not be done alone and it certainly can't be done in one trip round the workplace. However, the very fact that you are out there mapping as a union team, talking to people, seeking information and asking their opinions means you have started to tackle the fundamentals of organising.

Top Tip

Mapping – an opportunity

Mapping provides a great opportunity to get members to do something for their union. They could be asked to provide information on people in their work area who aren't in the union, or keep you up to date with the issues that people are talking about.

Information to collect

Top Tip

Mapping – put it on the agenda

Include mapping in the work of your branch or workplace committee! Put it on the agenda for meetings to make sure that you remain focussed on it and keep the map up to date.

The only restriction on what information to collect is that it should be kept to what will be useful in helping you to plan, target resources and ultimately build the union in the workplace. Remember that too much information can be as problematic as having too little. All useful maps would contain at least the following information for each part of the workplace:

- 1 numbers working there (including gender, race, age)
- 2 working patterns (full/part time/permanent/contract)
- 3 job role
- 4 members
- 5 members of other unions
- 6 shift patterns
- 7 potential members
- 8 details and location of reps and activists (think of all reps including ULRs, health and safety etc.)

WARNING – When collecting and storing information for your map you will need to be aware of the implications of data protection legislation.

Top Tip

Mapping – public information

Don't include any information on members and potential members in your map that you wouldn't be comfortable with them seeing.

Recording information

The information that you want to include in your map can be kept in whatever format works best for those involved, but you should make sure that whatever system you use is accessible, easy to update and easy to analyse

Top Tip

Recording information

When recording information make sure that the format you choose passes the “THREE EASYS” test



The two most common forms of workplace maps are floor plans and spreadsheets.

Floor plans are almost literal maps of a particular work area indicating where people work, etc. They are particularly useful at providing a snapshot of the union's strengths and weaknesses in a particular area. Spreadsheets are easier to update and can be kept most conveniently on a PC.

In practice, there are advantages in using a combination of the two. Many union reps and organisers using maps will have a map of the workplace they are organising on the wall of the union office so that they have a visible representation of progress and areas to prioritise. However, they will also record more detailed information on a spreadsheet.

Example of a summary workplace map

Work area/section	No of Staff	Members	Activists	Density	Issues
Warehouse	50	30	2	60%	Strict supervisor Shift patterns Breaks
Packing	40	12	0	30%	Breaks carer leave

Workplace profile

Non-union members	
Union members	
Union reps	
Temporary/ Agency workers	
Part-time workers	
Workers under 25	
Women	
Men	
Number of employees	
Number of shifts	
Departments or sections	

Membership profile

If we are serious about engaging with members and potential members, we need to ask ourselves how much we know about them. What factors might influence their joining the union or getting active? Are there any identifiable differences in the profile of members and those not in the union? Are there differences between members and activists? Building a profile of the membership as a whole can inform our approaches and make sure that the union always appears relevant and understanding of members' lives in and beyond work.

Information that you might include in your membership profile would include:

- 1** gender
- 2** age
- 3** ethnicity
- 4** religious belief
- 5** educational background
- 6** childcare responsibilities
- 7** working patterns – full-time/part-time/job share
- 8** employment status – permanent/temporary/agency
- 9** information on any workers with disabilities
- 10** the types of jobs that workers do

This information can be kept separately or can of course be added to your workplace map.

More guidance on member profiles

See Activity 2, page 19 of *Organise 2! – A Voice in Every Workplace*

Section 3

Moving forward

Identifying your organising challenge

Of course, plans and maps aren't produced just for the sake of it; they are key tools that can help us to prioritise activity and direct resources.

When analysing your map, the following questions should assist in helping to identify areas on which to focus:

- 1 Where are there high/low levels of membership?
- 2 How many reps and other active members are there and where are they based?
- 3 Does the profile of the members/activists reflect that of the workforce?
- 4 Is membership spread evenly across the employer or concentrated in a few areas?
- 5 Are you recruiting part-time and contract or temporary staff as well as full-time staff?

Identifying your organising objectives

Once we have a clear understanding of our current position, and the external and internal challenges and issues we face, we can move onto establishing our goals and priorities.

When setting these out, try to make sure that they are:

S	Specific	Make sure goals are expressed in terms that everyone can understand.
M	Measurable	Tracking and measuring your progress can be helpful in making sure your campaign is on the right track or letting you know when you may need to make changes.
A	Achievable	Don't bite off more than you can chew. You will run the risk of people becoming disillusioned if progress is too slow. Pick goals that will give you quick wins.
R	Realistic	
T	Time-bound	Without a clear timetable our goals become meaningless. Make sure you set a realistic time within which to achieve goals.

Resources

Think about the resources you have available to plan and organise the campaign. Be realistic about your available resources – over-optimism about what you can achieve can lead to disillusionment. Your resources might include:

- people – reps and members
- money
- facility time
- phones, PCs, internet/intranet access
- printing
- distribution
- meeting rooms
- national and regional union resources.

Branch/workplace organising planning sheet

Summary of goals and objectives

Target areas and worker groups

Key tasks

Resources

Roles and responsibilities

An active member union

Everybody wants to be treated fairly and with respect, but we know that this isn't always the case at work. Although they might not say it openly, workers may feel powerless in bringing about the changes that they would like to see.

In signing people up to the union and getting them to join in with union activity, we want them to see this as a way of making working life better for them and their colleagues – as a way of giving them a voice and more control over their lives both inside and outside the workplace.

Signing up new members

The way that we sign new members up to the union can have an effect on their perceptions of what the union is and their relationship with it. If we sell union membership merely as a form of insurance policy, it becomes more difficult to get members involved in union activity because we have not established the link between membership and activity and the union's strength in the workplace.

By seeing workers not just as potential members but as people, and thinking about how we engage with them when speaking about the union, we can find out more about the workers we are trying to recruit and create a picture of the union in the workplace that is more relevant to them and consistent with the need to get members involved.

'Doing something union' – getting people involved

Once people have joined the union, we need to make sure that they are part of an organisation that allows them to join in the life of the union in the workplace.

If they have joined the union because they have seen the union campaigning on an issue that is important to them, getting them to 'do something union' may be easier. Whatever the context, there are a few simple rules to follow;

- 1** Don't be afraid to ask a member to 'do something union' – they can only say no and at least you'll have demonstrated that you meant what you said about the union being the members.
- 2** Be realistic about what you ask members to do.
- 3** Give members small tasks initially and follow up with larger, more detailed tasks as their confidence grows.
- 4** If they do say no, don't push, but consider asking for their reasons. They may not be opposed in principle, but may be scared of the reactions of management or lack the confidence to do what you've asked. They may be willing to do something else.
- 5** Never refuse an offer of help from a member.

What can members do?

When we think of all of the jobs that need to be done to make sure that the union works properly in the workplace, there are lots of things that members can do or be asked to do. Most don't require any training or huge amounts of time. However, they are all vital to ensuring that the union is seen as an active and relevant part of the workplace.

The following are examples of what you might ask members to do. There will be others more specific to particular workplace settings. Members can:

- distribute union literature
- provide information on where they work for the workplace map
- ask friends what they think or feel about an issue
- tell people what the union is doing
- get colleagues to complete a survey or petition
- ask others to join the union
- keep a notice board up to date
- bring a friend to a meeting.

How to encourage people to volunteer

Few people will volunteer their help out of the blue. This doesn't mean they don't want to be active – it's just that people wait to be asked. So ask them. Asking builds activity, and activity builds commitment.

- Ask in person rather than over the phone.
- Make it clear what job you are asking someone to do.
- Ask volunteers to do things they can do well.
- Tell volunteers how what they will be doing supports the wider campaign and effort to strengthen the union.
- Let volunteers know that their particular help is needed.
- Be prepared to discuss any difficulties.
- Ask if there is anything that they would like to know.
- Be enthusiastic about the importance of the work.

What motivates a member to be involved?	What stops people getting involved?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● A feeling of justice or unfairness● A particular issue that they want to see resolved● Previous involvement with a union● A sense that they want a voice, respect and dignity at work● Already active in other groups, for example in the community, Greenpeace	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Afraid of being singled out● Not enough time at work or other commitments● Not confident enough to get involved● Feel they lack the skills or knowledge● Haven't been asked● Times of meetings/venues are inappropriate

Meetings

Meetings play an important part in the life of unions at every level. Whilst they are a necessary part of how unions operate, to members they can often appear impenetrable and all too often the vast majority take little or no part in them. For those that do attend, the format of meetings and the jargon that is used, without explanation, can be alienating. After attending a meeting for the first time – the first step for many towards getting more active – too many members are put off and the chance to involve new people disappears.

It is of course possible to break out of this cycle by reviewing and re-organising union meetings in the branch and workplace. Of course, the formal meetings that the unions' rules and internal democracy oblige us to have will continue, but even these can be reviewed to make them more relevant and welcoming.

In your review of the meetings that take place in your branch and workplace, you may wish to consider the following:

RELEVANCE – Make as many meetings as possible relevant to as many members as possible. Put issues on the agenda that you know members care about and allow time for these to be discussed. Think about putting your meetings in the following categories and decide which are going to be the most relevant to members:

- **Administrative** – Meetings where you look after the basic running of the branch such as membership and accounts
- **Networking** – Meetings where you bring reps and/or members together to discuss issues in the workplace
- **Campaigning** – Meetings specifically related to an on-going campaign affecting the workplace where workplace union leaders would be reporting back or getting feedback from members.

PUBLICITY – Advertise the meeting as widely as possible (use your workplace map) and make the language that you use more welcoming. Make as many meetings as possible open to all members.

FORMAT – If it's a meeting that you know members are attending to raise a particular issue, take this first before moving onto the more formal part of the agenda. Try to make meetings livelier by inviting guest speakers and holding open discussion sessions. Think about holding quick informal briefings and feedback sessions for small groups of members.

ISSUES – Hold meetings that are specific to one or two particular issues in the branch or workplace. Advertise them in such a way that tells members (and potential members) that attending is a chance to get some up-to-date information or just as importantly, have their say on something that they care about.

TIME AND PLACE – If over time, meetings are attended by the same group of activists, the times and places that they are held are those that are convenient and preferred by the regular attendees. To increase attendance and participation think about the membership in the workplace and what might be convenient for them. Consider part-time members, access arrangements for those with disabilities, those with childcare needs and responsibilities. Think about suitable venues – pubs aren't always appropriate!

Section 5

Campaigning

Why campaigning is important

Through campaigning, the union becomes a more visible and active part of the workplace. Campaigns can help to improve perceptions of the union's relevance amongst a wider group of workers whether they are already members or not. They can be built around issues that affect everybody in the workplace or those that affect smaller groups of workers, some of which we may need to target to increase membership or activity. The benefits of running campaigns can be summarised as follows:

- 1** They increase understanding within the workplace about what the union does.
- 2** They demonstrate that the union acts on members' concerns.
- 3** They create opportunities for members to get active – making activity more accessible.
- 4** They build a sense of collectivism amongst members.
- 5** They demonstrate to members that working together they can change things.

Choosing the right issues

We need to make sure that the issues we base campaigns around are relevant to a significant number of workers either across the whole workplace or in particular areas. If we choose issues that are important to people, we will increase our chances of helping them to overcome any apathy or fear and getting them to join the union and get involved. The WIDELY FELT, DEEPLY FELT, WINNABLE and VISIBLE test can help us choose the right issues:

WIDELY FELT – Does the issue affect enough of the workers – either across the whole workplace or those in a particular group or department?

DEEPLY FELT – Are the workers affected sufficiently angry or concerned about an issue to want to do something about it?

WINNABLE – Is there a realistic chance of achieving something in relation to the issue via the campaign – e.g. getting a proposal reversed or amended?

VISIBLE – Will taking on the issue raise the profile of the union in the workplace and allow members to take part in the campaign?

We can find out about potential campaigning issues through listening to people in the workplace one-to-one, by using surveys, or via our mapping and at meetings.

More guidance on campaigning

See Section 7 of *Organise 2*

Key ingredients for an effective campaign

Once again, a little planning at the start of a campaign can be a valuable investment of time. Your campaign plan will help you think of:

- 1** the objectives of the campaign – what you want to achieve
- 2** the target of the campaign – who can give members what they want
- 3** the resources needed
- 4** the involvement of members
- 5** contingency planning.

The following key elements will help in both planning your campaign and rolling it out in such a way that it is really effective:

1 Build the campaign by:

- developing a campaign plan that includes the following information:
 - the objectives of the campaign
 - the target of the campaign
 - the resources needed
 - the involvement of members
 - contingency planning
- making contact with, and talking to, workers to establish issues in the workplace and the level of concern about them
- following up interest from potential members and existing members who may want to join the union and help out with the campaign.

2 Develop and maintain good communication with workers by:

- understanding where members are coming from and why they may be resistant to joining the union or getting involved in the campaign
- varying the messages and methods that you use to communicate with workers
- responding to what you hear and learn from workers.

3 Develop and sustain involvement by members by:

- creating as many ways as possible for members to help out with the campaign
- giving new activists small tasks to do initially but increasing the size and importance of these as they grow in experience and confidence
- setting up informal committees or networks of members that give them a say in how the campaign develops.

4 Evaluate your campaign by:

- reviewing progress against your objectives as you go along
- being honest about what worked and what didn't
- continuing to listen to the views of members and potential members about the union.

Top Tips

Campaigning

- Your campaign should have clear and achievable goals – resolution of an issue and more members and activists.
- Make sure your campaign is widely supported and understood by your target group.
- Make your campaign visible in the workplace.
- Make sure you involve as many people as possible in supporting the campaign.
- Base your campaign on an issue identified by the workforce.
- Use the campaign and activity to engage potential members.
- Focus your campaign on the persons able to give you what you want.

Communication with workers

The importance of effective communication

How we communicate with members is important because it will have a strong bearing on their perceptions of the union – its role, its relevance and its effectiveness. It is important to get the balance right. Members rightly want to hear from the union about what it is doing, but it's also important to give members the opportunity to communicate with the union. It's important for the union to hear from members about what's going on in the workplace generally rather than just from individual members when they have an issue they want the union to help them with.

To make communication in the workplace really effective you will need to consider the context within which your communication is taking place: who you are trying to reach and the most appropriate form of communication depending on the circumstances.

Who are you communicating with?

In the same way that we need to be aware of the types of communication we use, you also need to consider who you are communicating with, i.e. who is your audience?

Given the circumstances, your audience may be made up from one or a combination of the following:

- members
- potential members
- activists
- management/employers
- the general public.

Once you have established who you want to reach, and in what circumstances, you will be better placed to decide on the most appropriate method and language.

The right kind of communication at the right time!

Not every form of communication suits every circumstance. Sometimes, for example during a round of negotiations, information needs to be distributed widely and quickly. On other occasions the priority will be to gather information from members either collectively or individually, such as during the process of recruiting members or establishing the issues that members in the workplace are most concerned about.

As you will see from the table opposite there are a variety of ways in which we can get information to and from members. You will need to think carefully in any given circumstance about which is the most effective and appropriate.

Uses for different types of communication

Type	Uses
Leaflets and posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● show the unions presence in the workplace ● get messages across easily and quickly ● advertise meetings, union campaigns and successes
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● plan collective actions/responses ● share ideas and making decisions ● gauge members feelings on issues ● create sense of collectivism
One-to-one contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● recruitment of members and activists ● getting information from members and potential members ● opportunity to inform about the union and its activities
Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● publicise issues ● celebrate successes ● illustrate union activity in the workplace
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● identify and test strength of feeling about issues ● identify campaign priorities ● demonstrate two-way communication
E-mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● distribute union information quickly and easily
Noticeboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● contact details ● celebrate successes ● shows that union is present in the workplace
Inductions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● profile-raising ● promote the union as key part of the workplace ● recruitment

Using the right language

Using the right language can be vital in ensuring that our communication with workers is really effective. This is important regardless of whether communication is written or verbal.

Written communication

A great deal of the written communication that unions produce is often aimed at potential members and current members who will have a range of knowledge about the union, how it works and what it is doing with and on behalf of members.

It is important, therefore, that when we are writing newsletters, leaflets, flyers and email circulars we use language that is understandable, accessible and doesn't unnecessarily alienate people. These aims can be achieved by considering the following guidelines:

- 1** Avoid the use of jargon, acronyms or dense wording.
- 2** Make the leaflet or newsletter short, snappy and informative – it's better to have a one- or two-page newsletter that comes out every couple of weeks than a 10-page one that comes out only once or twice per year!
- 3** Deliver as much of your written communication as possible by hand to increase opportunities to speak with people face to face.
- 4** Make the headline on the newsletter or leaflet about the main issue at work.
- 5** Always include reps contact details and if possible a membership form.
- 6** Think about where your audience will read the leaflet/newsletter and how much time they might have.
- 7** Avoid assuming that every member of your audience will have knowledge of the history of issues and events in the union or at work.
- 8** Consider using two different methods of communication for the same issue if you need to target different groups. For example, a leaflet on pensions might require a different angle for younger workers than for members nearing their retirement.
- 9** Don't restrict your written communications to members. As far as possible let potential members know what the union is doing.
- 10** Be aware of equality considerations! Not all your members may have English as their first language and others might have difficulty with written or spoken English. Some of your members may be disabled. All members have a right to expect their union to meet their communication needs.

Communicating one-to-one

Talking to workers and members about their hopes, fears, cares and concerns in the workplace is already something that most union reps do already. Often this is done during the course of the working day along with other subjects such as family, friends, football and what was on TV last night, to name but a few.

Union reps can take advantage of this if they see this communication as part of the effort to develop the relationship between workers and the union, establish and change perceptions and get people to sign up and get active.

The objectives of each one-to-one contact will depend on the circumstance and might include:

- learning something about the worker
- asking if they have any particular cares and concerns
- finding out their opinion on a particular issue
- building a relationship with them
- getting them to join the union
- asking them to 'do something union'.

To do this effectively there are a few simple rules that will make one-to-one communication with members more effective.

- 1 Don't try and sell the union** – think about how you react when a salesperson contacts you and gives you a list of reasons why you should buy a product. Most often in such situations people become defensive, think of as many reasons as they can why they don't need whatever it is they are being offered and try and get out of the situation as soon as possible.

In any case, the reasons you list might not be relevant to the person you are talking to and telling people that they can't look after themselves is not something many people want to hear.

It's much better to have a conversation with a person that lets them draw their own conclusion that joining the union or getting involved in some form of activity is the right thing to do.

To do this we need to make sure that we listen to them

More guidance on one-to-one communication

See pages 50 to 59 of the *Organise 2* workbook for more guidance on how to conduct an effective one-to-one contact.

- 2 Listen actively** – it's not surprising that most people prefer to talk with someone who shows an interest in what they are saying. Only by listening to people properly will we find out where they are coming from – what they know/think about unions and any issues that they care about – and be able to create a picture of the union that is relevant to them.

Listening actively doesn't of course mean remaining silent. You will demonstrate that you are listening to the person by how you respond to what they say and in the types of questions that you ask them.

Listening to members also earns us the right to give them some information about the union – obviously this will be information that is relevant to the members given what we have learned about them.

- 3 Ask the right questions** – This is important because it demonstrates that you have listened to the person and also because it provides the opportunity to find out more about them.

Obviously, some questions are better than others depending on the circumstances.

'Closed questions' – those that can be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no' – run the risk of shutting down a conversation. Asking too many can make the conversation look more like an interrogation. However the time will come when you might have to ask such a question – such as 'do you want to join the union?' or "will you help?" Remember, however, that a negative answer will leave you little room for manoeuvre so it's important to ask 'closed questions' at the right time.

'Open questions' are those that promote discussion and encourage people to share their thoughts and opinions. These are obviously useful in getting more information about or from a person – examples of 'open questions' are "how do you feel about working here?" and "what is your view of unions?"

A simple summary of open questions is that they are most often how/why/what/when/who questions.

If the one-to-one contact has been used to develop a relationship with the member and listen to their cares and concerns, it will be possible to suggest action to them consistent with how they see the union or a particular issue.

Once again, it is important that this opportunity to 'educate' them should not take the form of a speech or sales pitch. The education should be about them realising that joining the union or taking part in a campaign is a way of them influencing their working life for the better – that the union is all about workers coming together to have the power to win changes and resolve issues that affect everybody.

Top Tips

One-to-one communication

Some phrases to use during one to one communication:

Introduction – who are you and why you're there

- “We are concerned about...”
- “Some people have contacted us about...”
- “We’ve been talking to some other people and...”
- “We’ve been trying to get people together to...”

Basic information – learn about the worker and the workplace

- “What’s your job/role?”
- “How long have you worked here?”
- “How many other people work here?”

Identifying issues

Identify issues by using questions such as:

- “How are things going here at work?”
- “What’s changed here recently?”
- “What’s good about working here?”
- “What would you change if you could?”

If you are already aware of an issue:

- “Are you worried about...?”
- “What’s happening about...?”
- “Who else could be affected?”
- “How do you think you and your workmates could be affected by...?”

More guidance on one-to-one communication

See pages 48 to 59 of *Organise 2*

Building the organising team

Efforts to build the strength and effectiveness of the union in the workplace can't be left to one person. We have already considered in Section 4 how we might get members more involved in union activity. In this section we will look at how to build organising teams and how other representative roles can contribute to building an organised workplace.

Who might be in the team?

An organising team is not necessarily a fixed group of people employed by or members of the union – though this may be your core group.

A typical team might consist of:

- yourself
- other union representatives in the workplace
- members
- union officers or organisers.

Members of the team will probably come and go at different stages of any organising campaign. The most successful organising teams are loose and flexible, but clear about their goal.

Making the organising team work

In making sure that the team works effectively, it is important to take into account the context that the team is operating in. When running an organising campaign you will need to work out how best to co-ordinate the efforts and activities of the both the team and any wider groups of individuals who may be assisting you.

It may be useful to bear the following points in mind.

- It is probable that not every member of your team will have daily contact with all the others. This means that attention will have to be paid to making sure that a sound communication system is in place between all members of the team to keep everybody in the loop.
- The majority of your team may well be volunteers. Those outside the workplace who are involved may also have a wider set of aims. Make sure everyone is committed to a clear agenda.
- Show leadership! There's no harm in having someone leading the organising effort from whom others can draw advice, support and inspiration.

Organising around health and safety

Despite the fact that health and safety is a major activity for unions in workplaces and is often one of the main reasons why workers want unions in their workplaces, it can often be seen as a specialist area and sometimes separate from other union activities.

However, in building the organised workplace we can take advantage of health and safety matters in a number of ways:

- 1 There are winnable objectives** – Health and safety issues can be resolved during the course of a campaign and this can make a considerable difference in working conditions. This will obviously reflect well on the union in the workplace.
- 2 The issues are easy to understand** – Health and safety issues will be part of a workers everyday experience. They will often care about them without any effort by the union.
- 3 Resolving the issues can give workers a sense of their own power** – Health and safety is an area in which all workers can get actively involved and bring about results for themselves.
- 4 It sends a message to the employer** – Addressing these issues collectively demonstrates to the employer that members feel empowered to make their working lives better.
- 5 Safety reps have an established role and rights to carry out that out in the workplace.**

The organising role of health and safety reps and committees

The role of the workplace safety rep is one of the most valued and vital union representative positions. Most safety reps have an enormous amount of knowledge of health and safety issues that they use to the benefit of their colleagues at work.

Safety reps and committees can play a key role in building the organised workplace. They can:

- 1** identify current and potential health and safety issues
- 2** identify effective union strategies for raising health and safety issues as part of the organising campaign
- 3** advise and support campaign committees and member networks on integrating health and safety issues into their work and strategies
- 4** act as a union-based focal point for members concerns about health and safety and building member involvement in the union's health and safety efforts
- 5** contribute to the development and maintenance of workplace maps via workplace inspections.

Key activities for health and safety organising

The following are some activities that can be used to incorporate action around health and safety into the workplace organising plan:

- 1** Carry out a survey amongst workers to identify workplace safety cares and concerns.
- 2** Set up a members' health and safety committee or network.
- 3** Brief members on their rights in relation to health and safety and how to identify hazards.
- 4** Include reported accidents and hazards in the workplace map to identify collective issues.
- 5** Organise group activities around health and safety issues, such as members asserting their rights via filing complaints on hazards; organising petitions and wearing badges highlighting workplace hazards; and asking the HSE to conduct a workplace inspection.

For further information refer to these TUC publications:

- *Organising for Health and Safety – What makes Health and Safety a Good Organising Issue*
- *Organising for Health and Safety – a TUC Resource for Use in the Workplace*

Learning and organising – building union strength through learning and skills

By 2010, there will be over 22,000 trained union learning representatives (ULRs) based in workplaces across all sectors of the economy, bargaining and campaigning for better access to learning and skills opportunities for their colleagues.

As with the work carried out by union safety reps, the activities of ULRs have become increasingly valued by union members and have contributed towards improving the perceptions of unions by both members and potential members alike.

In addition to the benefits that this area of union activity has brought for individuals, unions can and have benefited organisationally because the work that unions undertake around learning and skills offers a means of developing union organisation.

In 2004, TUC-commissioned research of learning reps revealed that the majority of those surveyed reported a positive impact on membership levels (59 per cent); on the way that the union was perceived by both members and non-members (69 per cent); and on relations between the union and the employer (74 per cent).

For further guidance on learning and organising refer to:

- The unionlearn website at www.unionlearn.org.uk
- The TUC publication – *Learning and Organising: Union Strength Through the Learning Agenda*
- Section 7 of *Organise 2*

More generally, the organising benefits that work on learning and skills can bring includes:

- 1 Representing the workforce** – Many people who have become involved in trade unions via learning and skills work have been those who unions have found it most difficult to organise. ULRs themselves have tended to be more representative of the workforce than they represent, with more women, black and minority ethnic workers and young people getting involved.
- 2 Improving perceptions** – Work on learning and skills has helped unions retain existing members and increased trade union influence at national, regional and local levels. In many workplaces, the work of unions has convinced employers of the value of learning.
- 3 Building activism and activity** – In 2003, the ULRs survey found that 30 per cent of ULRs were new to union activism. The learning opportunities that they have created, many delivered in union established learning centres, have brought members and potential members into contact with the union and union representatives for the first time, in a positive environment.

Top Tips

Learning and organising

- When planning your workplace learning project, remember to think about how you can maximise its potential to strengthen workplace organisation or attract new members.
- Incorporate work around learning and skills into your workplace organising plan. Make sure that your priorities here reflect what members want.
- Make your learning initiatives sustainable – this will mean new members are more likely to stay in the union.
- Include information on learning and skills needs in your workplace map and list of issues. Think about the particular needs of new groups or members such as young, graduate, ethnic minority, casual or women workers.
- Maximise the impact of ULRs by ensuring that they work alongside existing reps and stewards, get involved in and support existing workplace or branch structures, and contribute to the wider work of the union.
- Think about running a campaign around the negotiation of a learning agreement. This will embed learning in the workplace and secure employer commitment to supporting lifelong learning and skills.
- Make sure that members and potential members alike are aware of union successes, and the role the union has played in delivering better learning and skills opportunities to the workplace.
- Some 30 per cent of ULRs are new activists. Think about how you can use your workplace learning activity to encourage more members to play an active role in the union. Lifelong learning can't be 'done' to members – think creatively about how you engage them in your project or activity. Don't forget that many people who come into union activism via learning then go on to other roles within the union.

Having the time to organise and campaign

Although time is one of the key resources that union representatives need to build the union in the workplace, it is the resource that is often under the most pressure.

The majority of union representatives in workplaces where the union is recognised will have some form of facilities agreement between the union and the employer that sets out the amount of facility time the union and its reps has been allocated and the activities that the time allocated can be used for.

Part of the approach to building the organised workplace should involve looking at the resources at the union's disposal as represented by facility time and facilities.

During your review of the facilities available and needed you should consider the following:

What work do the reps do?

- What tasks are covered by those with time off?
- What activities make the heaviest demands on reps' time?
- How many hours per week or month do people spend on recruitment, organising and campaigning, representation of members, meetings, training, and negotiations?
- What are the most frequent problems raised by members?
- Are these different depending on area? Are they a collective issue to build an organising campaign around?
- How many hours do reps spend keeping members informed?
- Do they cover members outside their own workplace?
- Where are the gaps? Are there areas of work being neglected?

How do the current time off arrangements work?

- Are arrangements in writing, or are they based on verbal understanding with managers?
- How much time off does the workplace union/branch currently have?
- Are reps entitled to a specific number of hours per week or month, or are they allowed 'reasonable' time off?
- How is time off organised by the employer?
- Does your employer set a maximum ratio of reps to members?
- What trade union duties and activities are covered by paid time off?
- Are reps allowed to represent members in worksites other than their own?
- Are reps able to exercise the time off rights they are entitled to?
- What changes would make the work more effective?
- Try to collect agreements held by other branches within the union.

Moving forward

Once you have completed your review you will have a clearer idea of what you will need your facilities agreement to contain to allow you to move forward in building a union organisation. This may mean that either a revised or new facilities agreement has to be negotiated. If this is the case, the following will assist you in developing your proposals:

- 1** The starting point and basis of the proposal should be built on the aim of growing and strengthening the union.
- 2** Establish a workplace working group made up of reps and members.
- 3** Keep in mind the following basic negotiating principles:
 - High union density in the workplace provides a strong position from which to negotiate.
 - Paid time off is a vital resource. It belongs to the union and therefore reps should be accountable for how they use it. Make sure that there are systems in place for recording and analysing the use of facility time.
 - Keep the agreement flexible.
- 4** Bear in mind the ACAS Code of Practice on trade union duties which states that time off agreements should specify:
 - the amount of time permitted
 - when it can be taken
 - the circumstances in which time off will be paid
 - to whom it will be paid
 - the procedure for requesting time off
 - the procedure for resolving grievances about time off.
- 5** Think about how you want each of the above within your proposals. Relate them to how you will use them to build strong union organisation in the workplace.
 - Establish the legal position.
 - Develop key negotiating points. Go beyond the law, e.g. build in time off for organising and recruitment activities.
 - Build a business case for your proposals.

For further guidance and resources on union facilities and facility time:

- Visit the TUC Bargaining to Organise website at www.tuc.org.uk/b2o

Top Tips

Model time off and facilities checklist

As far as possible make sure that your facilities agreement includes the following so that it has a key role in building a strong workplace union:

- commencement date
- introduction setting out purpose and coverage
- representation – who the agreement covers
- time off for general trade union representation
- the function of reps – what they do and are responsible for
- time off for health and safety reps
- time off for union learning reps
- time off for information and consultation reps
- time off for equality reps
- time off for trade union duties
- time off for branch secretaries and senior representatives
- time off to cover related workplaces
- payment and cover for time off
- time to attend training and conferences
- procedures: how the agreement operates – how reps request time, etc.
- trade union facilities, including access to IT
- no detriment clauses ensuring reps have equal access to promotion, bonuses, work-related training and aren't victimised in any other way for being an activist
- disputes: how matters relating to the operation of the agreement are dealt with
- amendment agreements.





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