



Workplace representatives' guide



Welcome

Thank you for becoming the National Education Union (NEU) rep in your workplace. You have joined thousands of representatives working in schools and colleges all over the country.

Our reps are the heart of the NEU – the largest education union in Europe. The role of a workplace rep is really rewarding and many of the skills you will develop are transferable to your professional life. And the role is flexible – you decide how much time you put in. Any contribution towards building your union is greatly appreciated.

This guide aims to set out some of the rights and responsibilities and activities a workplace rep can get involved in. You may undertake some, but not all, of the activities discussed here but, as you grow in confidence, and with support and training, you will feel able to take on more.

You should also look to involve other members – the strength of the union is based upon members participating and making their voices heard. By acting together, we can make a difference to the issues that are important to all staff working in education.

We work hard to support our reps and make sure you have all the training and information you need to be effective. There is plenty of advice, assistance and resources to help – just visit **www.neu.org.uk** or contact your local district or branch secretary, who will be happy to help. The Advice Line is contactable on **0345 811 8111** or email **advice@neu.org.uk**

If you are a new rep or have not previously attended training, book yourself into a Reps Foundation course – they are a great way to find out your rights, learn new skills and meet people just like you. You are entitled to paid time off to attend and travel expenses will be reimbursed. Visit **www.neu.org.uk/rep/your-rights** for details.

This guide should help you get started with the basics and point you in the right direction for help and support. Together we will make a difference.

What does a workplace rep do?

Build union presence in the workplace

- The single most important job of the rep to make everyone aware that the NEU exists and is a strong collective voice for members. Strong union groups experience fewer workplace issues – union presence stops management causing problems.
- Be visible – wear an NEU badge or lanyard and keep the noticeboard up-to-date.
- Talk to people about the union. Keep them aware of our wider activities by encouraging them to take part in union surveys or sharing campaign materials.
- Organise regular members' meetings.

Represent members

- Be available to talk to members about questions, problems or concerns they have.
- Assist members in raising concerns and accompanying them to meetings.
- Raise the collective concerns of members.
- Build relationships with other union representatives and managers to help resolve potential problems at an early stage.

Organise and recruit

- Recruit new members to the National Education Union.
- Involve members with our democratic structures, such as encouraging them to go along to a members' meeting or to attend their union branch or district meetings.
- Help to build a rep team in your workplace, eg recruiting a new health and safety rep and/or union learning rep to support the work of the union.
- Organise members to act collectively if there is an issue that needs tackling.
- Promote members' professional development by encouraging attendance at our learning events.

Communicate

- Keep members in your school/college informed about your work on their behalf.
- Circulate national and local information from your branch or district, or from the national union.
- Help members access advice, guidance and support.
- Communicate this through member meetings, emails and NEU noticeboards.

Your rights as a rep

As a workplace rep, you have certain rights under employment law. These are set out in the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) code of practice on time off for trade union duties and activities.

The NEU is recognised in the vast majority of schools and colleges, including all maintained schools and sixth-form colleges, the majority of academy schools and FE colleges and many independent schools.

If our union is recognised by your employer, you are entitled to:

- statutory paid time off for union duties and training
- approach non-members about joining
- somewhere to display NEU materials
- reasonable use of facilities, such as email, telephone and a photocopier
- use of a room for meetings.

You have the right to access documentation affecting members including job descriptions, staffing structures, pay and conditions of service documents, and local employment policies.

Your branch or district secretary can give you details about how to implement these rights in your workplace and how you can claim back any expenses you may incur.

For more information on your rights, visit www.neu.org.uk/reps/your-rights

Getting started

Being a workplace rep is exciting and rewarding. Start with the basics, move on at your own pace and you will build the confidence and skills you need as you go. Once you have been elected there a few important things you need to do:

- Let your head teacher/principal/manager know you are the rep – you will receive a certificate of accreditation from the NEU recognising your position. Arrange an informal meeting to discuss ways of working together.
- Get to know your members. Ask your branch or district to provide you with a list of the members in your workplace or go to **www.neu.org.uk/reps/your-members**
- If you have taken over from the previous workplace rep, you may have inherited some resources. If not, don't worry, you can order new materials at any time in the academic year by visiting **neu.org.uk/order-your-recruitment-materials**. You will also regularly be provided with materials to use and display.
- Claim union space on the staff noticeboard and put up NEU recruitment posters and other relevant information.

And don't forget to book yourself on to the union's Reps Training Programme. Starting with a three-day Rep Foundation course, it will give you the skills, knowledge, and confidence to represent NEU members effectively.

Communicating

Talking to members about what's important to them is crucial. You should listen to their issues and concerns and, where appropriate, help them come up with solutions, or seek assistance from your association/division. It's also important to keep them informed about the national union's campaigns. There are many ways to communicate with members.

The noticeboard

You can use material that will be sent by the union nationally or locally, and material you and colleagues produce. Try and ensure the noticeboard is in a prominent position and is kept up to date.

Holding meetings

Meetings are important as they get members involved and facilitate discussion. As well as allowing you to update members on matters of interest, it gives them the opportunity to raise issues they may have. Meetings don't need to be formal and should ideally be held at least once every half-term. They do not need to be long and never more than an hour.

Campaigns

You may need to organise a meeting to deal with specific concerns or campaigns as they arise. Members in some workplaces will not be used to meeting as a union group and it is important to show how discussing things together can make a positive difference.

With this in mind, you should think about how to plan a meeting and the format it will take. Things to remember include:

- choosing a convenient and accessible time and place

- letting members know what the meeting is about, why they should attend and encourage them to suggest items for discussion
- advertising the meeting well in advance and encouraging attendance by word of mouth, email, announcements and newsletters.

Remember to be inclusive and allow questions, contributions and discussion from all members. Avoid using jargon, don't presume or patronise and get members involved in activity where possible.

Finally, minute any action points and circulate them.

Set up an email group

Email is a quick and effective way to let members know what's going on and get their views. However, we would advise you not to use a work email – most employers reserve the right to view emails using a work account and, obviously, this may cause difficulties. In order to protect the data of members, it is best to blind copy (use the bcc tab) members into bulk emails rather than display everyone's individual address. We cover accessing, using and protecting member's personal data on the Rep Foundation training.

Surveys

We often run surveys to find out member opinion and experience. Keep an eye on what surveys are taking place and, if you think you and your members have something to say on the issue, encourage them to take part.

Building the Union

Recruiting to the NEU

The NEU is the largest education union, thanks to the recruitment work of our reps. It is important that you know who is and who isn't a union member in your workplace. If you don't have a recent membership list, contact your branch/district secretary and ask them to provide one or go to **www.neu.org.uk/reps/your-members**. Once you have this list, you will be able to identify who you should approach about joining or getting more involved.

Recruitment is a year-round activity. Keep your eye out for new members of staff, including part-time and supply, and support staff. Especially make an effort to introduce yourself and the union to those at the start of their career who may be training via School Direct (England Only), a Graduate Teacher Program (GTP) in Wales, and the Teach First scheme. NEU membership is free to trainee teachers. Try and build a rapport with them, highlight the work the NEU does and invite them to join if they aren't already members.

Recruitment tips

Most non-union members have simply never been asked to join and face-to-face contact is a good way to start. Always have plenty of information and literature to hand.

Other tips:

- Listen to what they have to say and try to address their questions and concerns by demonstrating the relevance of the NEU to them.
- Be professional. If a potential member is busy, leave them some literature and arrange a more convenient time to talk.

- Understand the different categories of membership on offer and always have plenty of recruitment forms with you.
- Seal the deal by getting the potential member to fill in a membership form while you are there. They can also join online at www.neu.org.uk/join or by phone on **0345 811 8111** – newly qualified teachers can join for just £1.

Recruiting trainees and NQs

Most schools/colleges receive new student placements throughout the year. If starters are new to education, or newly qualified, explain how vital union membership is from their first day in the job.

Ask them how things are going and refer them our dedicated trainee and newly qualified teachers/lecturers advice at www.neu.org.uk/help-and-advice/trainee-advice.

Leaders in the NEU

The NEU is the union for your whole career. Headteachers, principals, and all education professionals working in leadership roles can join and continue to play a huge part in the NEU through our dedicated member group, NEU Leadership. Please talk to your leadership colleagues, those recently promoted, and those aspiring to leadership positions about the unique support and opportunities which come from being a member of NEU Leadership and direct them for further information to www.neu.org.uk/leadership.

Getting members involved

As well as recruiting new members, it's good to ask existing ones to become active. There are formal roles such as health and safety rep, union learning rep or equality rep, as well as informal jobs such as keeping the noticeboard up to date, organising meetings, taking notes or acting as lead contact for a department or role.

Health and safety reps help the workplace rep deal with matters involving health and safety while learning reps specialise in supporting members with personal and professional development. Introductory courses are held for newcomers to both roles.

Building a team around you will help increase the visibility and influence of the union, and help make a difference in your workplace. Most reps find it helpful to have union colleagues to help discuss issues with. Having a team is a big part of feeling supported in your role.

Don't be afraid to ask members to do something – after all, it is their union and the worst that can happen is that they say 'no'.

Other tips on getting members more involved:

- ask in person rather than by email or telephone
- be realistic about what you ask them to do
- ask them initially to perform small tasks that you think they would be good at or enjoy; as they become more involved they may be happy to take on more responsibility
- let members know that their particular help is needed
- never refuse an offer of help
- be enthusiastic about the importance of the work undertaken.
- carry out a learning needs survey and encourage members to attend training and learning events.

Another way of making members feel involved is by promoting their professional development and encouraging attendance on training courses.

Representing your members

As a rep, members may approach you with a concern or problem and seek your advice. You are not expected to know all the answers or deal with every query yourself. Your branch/district secretary or regional office in England or NEU Cymru in Wales is also at hand to help.

As a workplace rep, you can also get guidance on representing members and the collective issues you may face in school or college by calling the Advice Line on **0345 811 8111**.

However, there are some basic issues you may be able to deal with. First, you need to distinguish if something is a collective issue or involves one individual.

Individual issues

These may range from a relatively minor concern to a more serious matter that has formal implications. They may include conditions of service questions, capability or disciplinary issues, discrimination or bullying.

You don't need to know all policy and procedures relating to these matters, although there is always information there to help you at **www.neu.org.uk**. But it's important that you are seen as someone who members feel confident and comfortable talking to about matters that concern them.

If you have any questions or want some advice, you should contact your district/branch secretary. Many problems which members bring to you as an individual issue will also have a collective aspect. For example, a workload problem is unlikely to affect only one member of staff in a school or college.

Often members feel surprised but relieved to find that they can draw on the support of colleagues and work together to improve their situation. This is a fundamental principle of being in a trade union.

Collective issues

If the issue or concern affects more than one person, you should seek to get members together for a meeting to discuss it and try to agree a collective way to tackle the problem. Unions are strongest when they act collectively so, if members are facing the same issue, then the best way to solve it is to agree.

Some collective issues may be addressed by speaking informally with the head teacher, principal or manager; others may need to be resolved through formal collective procedures. Sometimes more pressure may be needed to bring about positive change, such as members signing a joint letter or another way of showing the strength of feeling.

Before embarking, you should ask:

- is it widely felt – does the issue affect enough staff, either across the whole school/workplace, within a particular department or among a specific group?
- is it deeply felt – are people sufficiently concerned or angry to want to take part in solving the issue?
- is it winnable – is there a realistic chance of achieving success?
- is it visible – will taking on the issue raise the profile of the union and allow members to take part in the campaign?

It might be beneficial to hold regular meetings with your colleagues who are reps in other unions to share information and discuss ways you can work together.

You also need to establish clear objectives:

- identify the target – who can make the change, eg the head teacher, the principal, the governors?
- how members can get involved
- what resources are needed and available
- what to do if setbacks occur.

At the end of any sort of collective issue, you should evaluate what was achieved and what you can learn from good practice. Did you achieve your objectives? Did members engage in activity and did anyone join the union because of it? Did it make the union stronger and what could have been done differently to be more effective?

Talking with management

It is good to establish a dialogue with management if you can, so that you can address collective issues when necessary.

It is a good idea to have a formal meeting with management every half-term and sometimes they may request to meet with you to consult on, or negotiate, an issue. This is often a good way of resolving potential problems at an early stage.

A productive working relationship is something to aim for – after all, your head teacher, principal or manager may well be an NEU member.

The key thing to remember is that, when you are talking to management, you are speaking on behalf of all NEU members – and that you have the strength of the membership behind you.

Here are some tips on meeting with management:

- have an agreed agenda before the meeting
- have a clear idea of what you want by talking to members beforehand
- don't agree to something you are uncertain about
- act in a professional and confident manner
- if an issue is raised that you are not prepared for, tell the manager you will need to speak with members before giving a response

- always report back to members on any outcomes.

Don't be afraid to take notes, ask questions or seek clarification. If possible, have someone else with you who can help by taking notes. If the meeting involves reps from other unions, you may want to agree your approach in advance.

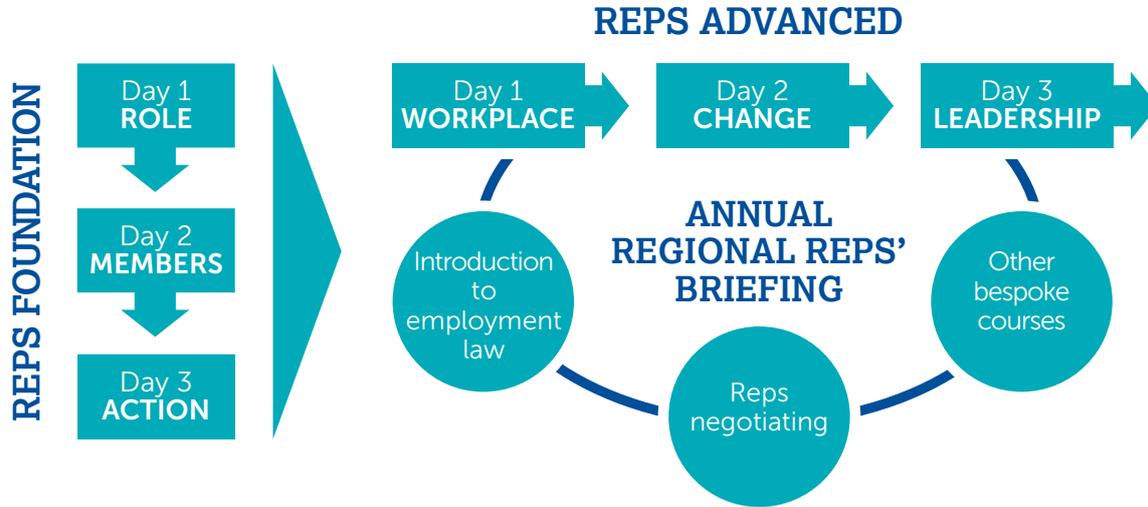
It is important to understand the differences between negotiation and consultation. In negotiation, both parties seek to reach an agreement, whereas a consultation is a commitment to exchange views. Consultation is much more than a giving an opinion – it's a way of ensuring the views of members and the union are heard.

Training and development

The NEU Rep Training Programme will provide you with the skills, knowledge, and confidence you need to be effective in your role.

Training enhances your skills, from understanding the rights of your members and communicating what we can offer, to helping resolve casework problems. You learn to develop your skills in a supportive, relaxed and informed environment and give you a chance to meet other reps too.

All our training is delivered in regions and Wales. Your starting point is the three-day Rep Foundation course. Once you have completed your Foundation training, there will be a number of courses you can attend including an Introduction to Employment Law, Negotiating Skills, Representing Members in Capability etc. The final part of your training (although you don't have to take courses in any order once you've completed the Foundation) is a three-day Reps Advanced course. For more details, go to www.neu.org.uk/learning



Reps in further education, sixth-form colleges, independent schools or academies can also attend sector-specific events and briefings. On top of this, we have special courses for health and safety and union learning reps.

All rep courses are free and your travel costs are covered by the union. Accredited union and safety representatives have a legal right to reasonable time off with pay to attend courses approved by the TUC or the rep's union.

If you have difficulty in obtaining paid release, contact your branch/district secretary or your Regional/Wales office. You can also email training@neu.org.uk.

Support and resources

The union provides a range of advice, information and support to help you get the most out of your role.

Organise

Each term you will receive a copy of *Organise*. This will keep you up-to-date on the latest advice and guidance, campaign issues, case studies from other reps, information on health and safety, learning and so much more.

You might even want to contribute something yourself.

Once you've read it, you can pass it on to a colleague, or cut relevant items and stick them up on the noticeboard.

E-communications

In addition, you will also receive regular e-bulletins with up-to-the-minute information relevant to your role or sector, so make sure we always have your latest email address.

My members' details

On the NEU website go to **www.neu.org.uk/reps/your-members** which enables you to check what members you have where you work.

Recruitment posters and flyers

We will regularly send you the latest posters and flyers designed to help you recruit new members. You can always check out what is available or order extra copies at **www.neu.org.uk/order-recruitment-materials**

Help and advice

There is plenty of legal and employment advice to assist you in your role and to help answer members' questions. The help and advice section of the website covers all the key topics, from stress and workload to maternity rights and disciplinary procedures. Each page includes resources and useful links, which cover some of the most commonly asked questions, from sick leave, observation and cyberbullying to allegations of abuse, teachers' pay and meetings with management. Visit **www.neu.org.uk/help-and-advice**

Campaigns

The union has a whole host of national campaign materials on everything from funding, workload and pay to baseline assessment and asbestos in schools. You can pin up material of relevance to your members on the noticeboard or email them directly. Visit **www.neu.org.uk/campaigns**

Publications

The union produces a number of publications and handbooks on a whole host of subjects such as maternity rights, managing classroom behaviour and rights for supply teachers. It also has publications for specific types of workplaces including independent schools, academies and post-16. You may wish to create a publications library or have reference copies to hand, and encourage members to download publications for their own use. All resources are free for members and can be accessed at **www.neu.org.uk/help-and-advice/publications-and-resources**

Get more involved with your union

As a workplace rep you are already fulfilling one of the most important roles in the union. But you may want to go beyond your workplace, and encourage your members to do the same. Your local branch will support you with issues in the workplace and you may want to talk to your branch secretary about getting more involved.

You should always remember that your union is a democratic structure, where decisions are made by the members and by taking part in your local district you can contribute. The local district is the place where you can start to take part in the democracy of the wider union.

There are plenty of ways to do this:

- go along to district meetings.
- take up a role in your district.
- attend annual conference, where the policy decisions for the whole union are made.
- get involved in one of the union's self-organised groups.

Attending regional/Wales activities gives reps the opportunity to meet activists from other areas, share good practice and get valuable information about what is going on in the union nationally, regionally and locally.

Your key point of contact is your branch/district secretary; if you do not already have their contact details, you can ask your region for them. Find them at www.neu.org.uk/contact-us

The secretaries have a wealth of knowledge and expertise you can tap into, so never be afraid to get in touch. It is only by understanding the real issues and concerns of union members that the NEU can make a positive impact on the working lives of those working in education.

Specific guidance for learning reps

Union Learning Reps (ULRs) specialise in advising and supporting members with their continuing personal and professional development. They work closely with their members and management to identify ways to improve access and quality of current training provision, as well as help source new opportunities.

The role of the ULR includes:

- identifying members' learning needs
- organising learning events with the help of other members and NEU staff
- raising awareness and promoting the value of learning
- signposting members to available learning opportunities
- working with employers and partners to improve access to learning
- monitoring quality of provision and overcoming barriers to learning
- recruiting non-members to the NEU

To find out more about becoming a ULR go to www.neu.org.uk/reps/learning-reps or email the CPD team at cpd@neu.org.uk

Specific guidance for health and safety reps

Health and Safety Reps are trade union representatives appointed by trade union members to represent their interests on health and safety issues. Every year, far too many teachers are injured at work or suffer illness and ill-health brought on by their work. Statistics show that workplaces with safety reps are safer than ones without them.

The role of a Health and Safety Rep includes:

- investigating complaints by union members about health, safety and welfare issues
- communicating with union members about health and safety issues that affect them
- raising health and safety issues with employers
- carrying out health and safety inspections of the workplace
- investigating potential hazards and dangerous occurrences and examining the causes of accidents

Health and safety reps are legally entitled to *such time off with pay during the employee's working hours as shall be necessary* to perform the functions set out above.

If you would like more information on health and safety representatives then visit www.neu.org.uk/reps/safety-reps

Useful contacts

General enquiries

0345 811 8111
enquiries@neu.org.uk

Advice Line

0345 811 8111
Adviceline@neu.org.uk

Membership enquiries

0345 811 8111
membership@neu.org.uk

To join

0345 811 8111
www.neu.org.uk/join



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