



# THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW AS A UNION LEARNING REP

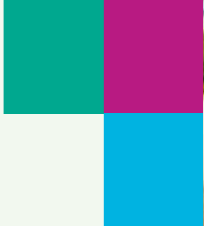
**Usdaw**  
*Union of Shop, Distributive  
and Allied Workers*

Union  
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Northern Ireland





# Introduction

This leaflet is aimed at brand new Union Learning Reps (ULRs) like you. It outlines your role and the rights that support you. It also has some tips and information to get you started when you are:

- **Talking to and advising people about learning.**
- **Promoting learning in your workplace.**
- **Consulting with your employer.**
- **Working with your Usdaw colleagues.**
- **Helping to widen Union membership.**



Usdaw is delighted that you have taken on the ULR role.

Learning is a key Usdaw campaign and offers many benefits for our members and the companies they work for. We are here to make sure you have the support and help you need.

You may already have other ULRs in your workplace. You will certainly have other Usdaw reps such as Shop Stewards and Health and Safety Reps. Find out who they are and introduce yourself to the team.





They will welcome you to the team and let you know what's happening in your workplace.

Your Usdaw Lifelong Learning Project Worker will meet with you very soon and give you a full induction into your role. S/he will also arrange your training course. Don't hesitate to contact her/him at any time for help and advice. Your local Usdaw office will be able to put you in touch.

You can get details on the Usdaw website [www.usdaw.org.uk/LLL](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/LLL) or from your rep colleagues.



# Getting Started

## – The Role of the ULR

You have four main roles as an Usdaw ULR.  
You:

- Give members information about learning opportunities either in the workplace or outside.
- Promote, arrange and support learning – organising promotional events or running short courses/taster sessions in your workplace.
- Identify learning needs by talking to staff, filling in questionnaires or organising surveys.
- Consult with the employer about learning – discussing how campaigns, surveys and courses will be organised.



You are entitled to the following to help you in your ULR role:

- Paid time off to attend ULR training courses. Your Project Worker will organise your initial training.
- Paid time off to undertake your duties in the workplace. This is usually agreed in advance with the employer.
- Facilities such as a noticeboard (often the Union noticeboard), somewhere safe to store paperwork and a place to speak to members in private.

In some workplaces these rights will be part of a written agreement. Your rep colleagues or Project Worker will let you know what is agreed in your workplace.



## Data Protection

As a rep you will regularly come across personal data and information about your members. Data Protection is therefore an important aspect of the rep's role and you will need to deal with personal data fairly, securely and confidentially. The Union has produced a booklet and an online short course that provides guidance for you to follow. For more details go to: [www.usdaw.org.uk/gdprguide](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/gdprguide)

You are also part of a wider Usdaw rep team in the workplace.

It's important to work closely with other Usdaw reps and let each other know what you are doing. The best way is to attend the workplace reps' meetings that are organised regularly in most workplaces.

Following your induction and training you will be able to link learning into other Usdaw campaigns in the workplace such as Pensions, Parents and Carers and Mental Health.





# Providing Information and Advice

Members will often come to you for information and advice about all kinds of learning – whether it's for work, personal or career development.

They may be worried about improving reading and writing skills. So it's important that you are approachable and have the skills and knowledge to deal with each enquiry impartially and confidentially.

You are not expected to have all the answers yourself – but you should be able to 'signpost' people to other places and experts who do. Sometimes you will need to do this for members who don't have the skills and confidence to do it themselves.



Your ULR training will help you develop the skills and knowledge you need to deal with these requests. You will learn:

- Good questioning skills – how to ask the right kind of questions to find out exactly what members want and what they want to achieve.
- Active listening skills – how to reassure and encourage people to speak up about things like poor literacy skills.
- About different kinds of learning – including how learning can be provided, what's free and what needs to be paid for and levels of learning.
- How to research what's available – using the internet, the different sources of information available, working with specialists such as career advisors and local providers.



# Promoting Learning

You may be involved in different learning promotions depending on what's happening in your workplace. They include:

- Workplace promotion days. Organised with the help of your Project Worker to raise awareness about learning opportunities. Promotions can be linked to events such as the opening of an on-site learning centre or can be part of the Check Out Learning campaign in retail.
- In smaller workplaces or those just starting, it often pays to advertise just one or two courses to generate interest. Whilst larger workplaces with on-site learning centres often advertise a series of courses through a brochure.



- Linking learning to other Usdaw campaigns. Experienced ULRs often work with their rep colleagues and make sure learning is linked into other workplace campaigns, such as Pensions, Parents and Carers or Mental Health campaigns.
- Working with employers to promote workplace training initiatives, for example National Vocational Qualifications or Apprenticeships.

To find out what is available, go to:  
**[www.usdaw.org.uk/learninggateway](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/learninggateway)**

Your Lifelong Learning Project Worker will help you plan and set up your promotions and access the range of promotional materials which Usdaw provides.



# Identifying Learning Needs

Having a clear picture of what people want to learn will help you promote and target learning and to set up the right courses. The simplest and most popular method is to complete a survey. This can be done in many different ways:

- Quick surveys using Usdaw's survey postcard are easy to complete and will quickly identify those interested in popular courses around English, Maths and Computers Skills.
- In-depth surveys using detailed questionnaires will get more information but require more time and effort to set and analyse.



- Specialist surveys by learning providers on subjects like English, Maths and Computer Skills will make sure members are started on the right level of learning.
- Face to face surveys give the most detailed information because you are able to talk to members, answer their questions and get them interested.

It's sometimes possible to agree time off for members to take part in surveys. Even giving 10 minutes extra for a lunch break can help.

Time off for English and Maths assessments or for an induction into a workplace learning centre is often included in the learning agreements that Usdaw has negotiated with the employer – check what you have available in your workplace.

Any assessments done as part of vocational schemes such as National Vocational Qualifications or Apprenticeships should be done in work time.



# Consulting with the Employer

Having the support of management makes life as a ULR much easier so try to develop a good working relationship.

Make sure that they understand that Lifelong Learning has many benefits for the company – even when it's not directly related to work:

- Improves staff motivation, morale and commitment of staff.
- Develops key skills like communication and computing.
- Attracts new staff and retains existing staff.
- Builds the self-confidence staff need to take on new roles.
- Supports colleague progression.

A good working relationship is built on three things:

- **Flexibility.** Work with management to minimise the disruption to the business. Plenty of notice about shift changes and time off always helps.
- **Involvement.** Managers are more likely to agree to learning when they have been involved in the early discussions. Getting management involved in promotion days often helps.
- **Communication and meetings.** Make sure you keep in touch regularly with management. Little and often is a golden rule. In larger workplaces there may be 'Joint Learning Committees' set up so campaigns can be planned together. Some retail stores' ULRs use joint meetings and forums to discuss learning.

If there is a problem developing, have a chat with your Project Worker or Area Organiser. Above all try to keep positive and focus on what you have achieved, not on what you are unable to do.



For further information ring our Helpline

**0800 030 80 30**

**[www.usdaw.org.uk/learninggateway](http://www.usdaw.org.uk/learninggateway)**

***Usdaw***  
*Union of Shop, Distributive  
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**Improving workers' lives  
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