

ORGANISING FOR LEARNING

UNISON BRANCH DEVELOPMENT & ORGANISING TOOLKIT



ORGANISING FOR LEARNING

Overview

This module has been developed to enable branches to plan recruitment and organising activity around the learning agenda.

The module covers:

- why learning and skills for life are trade union issues
- how to go about organising for learning
- getting started – making a plan which reflects where your branch is

The module will work best if you have already completed the core module of the Branch Development and Organising Toolkit (available from <http://www.unison.org.uk/activists>) and the branch mapping included within it. However it can also be used as a stand alone activity.

How long will this take?

This session will take around three hours.

What you need for the session

Any previous branch map

Precourse information as set out below

Flip chart paper and pens

Post it notes (x4 packs, preferably different colours)

Who is the session aimed at?

Branch officers and activists

Activists and members interested in learning

Members who have previously participated in UNISON Open College courses such as Return to Learn

What to do

In advance

In order to make most effective use of time, the facilitator/tutor, branch secretary and regional organiser should prepare the following information:

- information about any members who have participated in Open College courses in the past, where available

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- order copies of the Branch Guide to Lifelong Learning (stock number 2098) and any service group specific guidance - for health branches, the guide to the KSF, for local government branches, the Local Government Guide to Learning (stock number 3466), plus relevant guides to Open College courses
 - as much information as you can from your employer including -
 - which staff currently access employer training courses
 - the employer's policy on time off for learning
 - the employer's policy on development reviews
 - any information about existing or previous learning agreements and any
 - UNISON/Workers Education Association (WEA) partnership courses which have been run in the past
 - any previous branch mapping you have carried out

Running the session — tutors' notes

Introductions and getting started (15 minutes)

Start by asking everyone to introduce themselves. Explain the aims of the session set out above. This needs to be done quickly – if you are running the session in a half day there won't be time for an ice breaker.

Step 1

Why is learning an issue for UNISON? (60 minutes)

In advance, sketch out on two sheets of flipchart the diagram as set out in handout 1 for each group. Explain as set out on the handout. Ask the groups to start at the centre of the diagram and use post it notes to complete each section.

Some pointers to each stage of the activity:

Who is affected?

Ask them to be specific about groups of members and potential members who may be excluded from learning. This could be because of their kind of job, or it could be because of other barriers to learning which affect individuals – such as poor education, lack of access to learning or not having English as a first language. In each case encourage them to write down the groups of workers in their own workplaces who this might apply to.

What is the impact of their exclusion from learning?

This could be a variety of things, including lack of career development, low self esteem, disciplinaries arising from unidentified learning issues.

What are the barriers preventing the groups from accessing learning?

These may be external barriers – eg those imposed from outside, like a college requiring a minimum qualification for a course, or the employer not offering time off, or issues arising from caring responsibilities. They may also be internal to the person – eg fear of failure, a hidden learning disability such as dyslexia, the impact of a previous bad educational experience.

What is the role of the trade union?

Hopefully the issues covered so far will make it clear that learning is an issue trade unions should be taking seriously. Get the group to start filling this in now with practical ideas they have, but say that we will return to this at the end of the session to add further points and to prioritise.

To conclude the session

End by asking everyone to think about who in the branch will be involved in carrying out these roles – in addition to ULRs, stewards may be involved in some representation work and in identifying where to refer a member to a ULR, and the branch secretary and other branch level negotiators will be involved eg with negotiating a learning agreement.

Step 2

Skills for life in the workplace – mapping (45 minutes)

Introduce handout 2 and talk through key points.

Ask everyone to consider whether in the light of the information they have any more points to add to the diagrams put together in the previous activity.

Task 1

If the branch has already carried out a branch mapping exercise, introduce (or ask the branch secretary to introduce) to the group the key elements of the map, and if it is on flipcharts, display them around the room.

Distribute the pre course information you have gathered. Ask everyone to look through the information and think about the workplaces, employers and departments where those members or potential members who are excluded from learning are most likely to be found. Ask each group to identify possible target workplaces and groups of members eg catering staff employed by a particular private contractor; teaching assistants in schools.)

Task 2

Allocate each small group with one or two target groups and ask them to complete the checklist in the handout and report back. You should end up with a few potential targets which can either be prioritised now or else can be taken on to the branch committee to agree.

Step 3

Organising around learning (60 minutes)

Introduce Branch Guide to Lifelong Learning, and handout 3. Introduce the role of the Union Learning Rep and the branch education team, referring to pages 10 and 11 in the Guide.

Put the participants into groups and work through handout 3.

There are two parts to this: the first part (which will be recorded in Part A of the Branch Development and Organising Plan (BDOP), deals with practical steps the branch needs to take.

The second part deals with an organising campaign targeted at a group identified in step 2 (recorded in Part B of the BDOP, and set out in detail in the Action Planning Sheet).

Check with the branch secretary whether the plans the group come up will need to be ratified or agreed by a full branch committee and make sure the group have agreed how to take this forward. A copy of the BDOP and the Action planning sheets are included in the back of the module.

Before you finish –

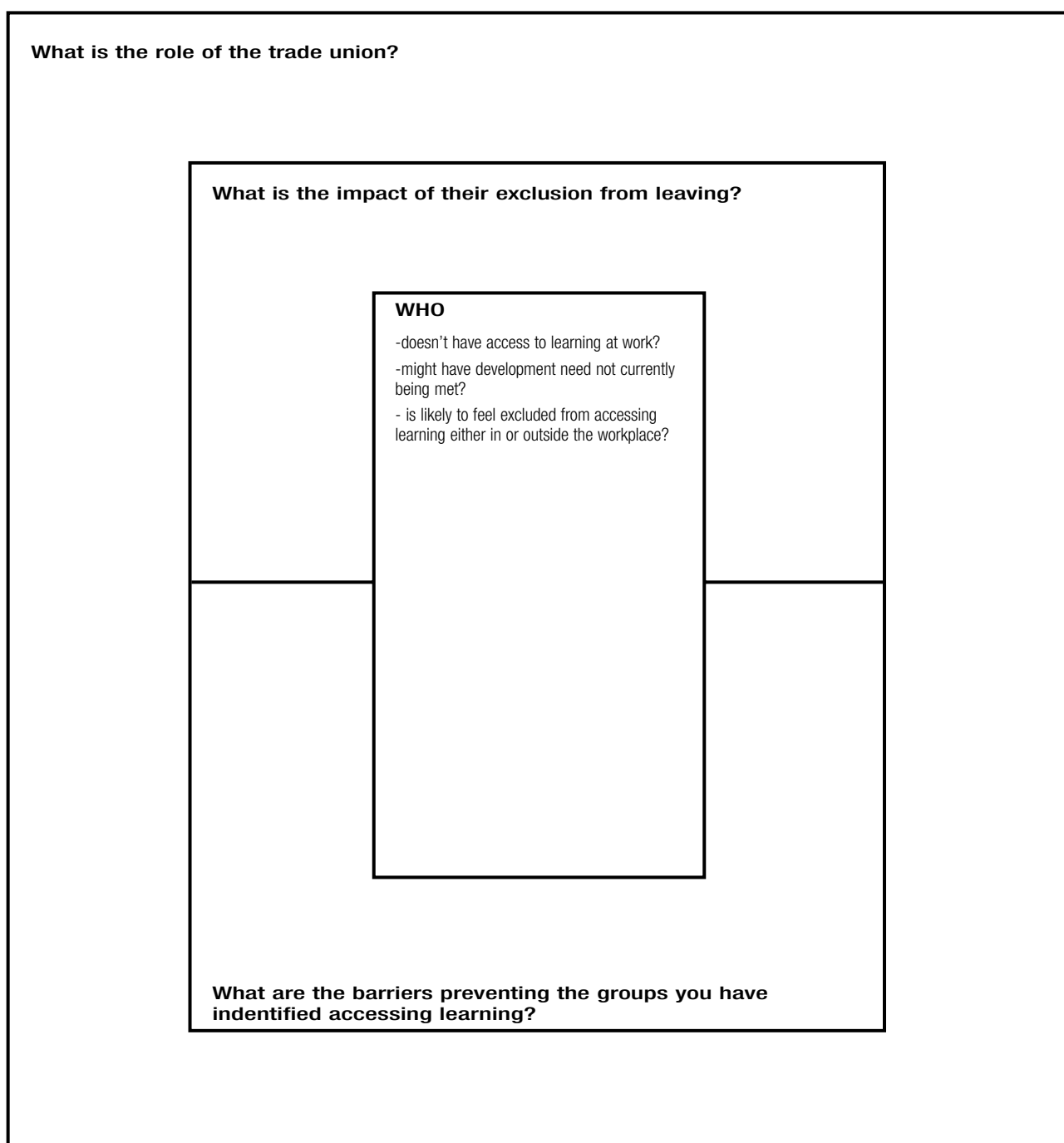
Make sure the participants have agreed when to meet again to take forward their plans, and how they will evaluate them both these issues are covered in the BDOP.

HANDOUT 1

Learning as a trade union issue

Working in groups, sketch out on flip chart the outline of a diagram as set out on page 6.

1. Start in the centre square. Write down on post its examples of those groups in the workplace who are least likely to take part in any kind of learning opportunity either at work or outside of work.
2. Now go on to the middle square, and write down the barriers you can identify and the impact of exclusion from learning.
3. Finally, write down in the outer square what you think a trade union should be doing to tackle the consequences of exclusion from learning.



HANDOUT 2

Skills for life in the workplace and mapping

What is Skills for Life?

'Skills for Life' is a term which is now used to describe what is also referred to as Basic Skills. 'Skills for Life' is also used to describe broader skills such as communication and team working which are of benefit in work and daily life.

The Basic Skills Agency is an independent organisation, funded by the Department for Education and Skills and the Welsh Assembly Government, to find and share best practice around basic skills/skills for life. They define basic skills as:

The ability to read, write and speak in English / Welsh and to use mathematics at a level necessary to function and progress at work and in society in general.

It is:

- about reading, writing, communicating effectively through speech and using numbers
- not just about learning to read or write from scratch – the national definition of basic skills includes any adult without GCSE level English and maths
- is about developing the English/Welsh (literacy) or maths (numeracy) skills each individual may need to function effectively and progress
- is about each individual learning the skills at the level they may need in their lives and work
- is about higher level skills such as minute-taking and working out percentages as well as spelling names and reading instructions

Why should employers, workers and trade unions be interested in skills for life?

The level of skills needed in life and work has increased dramatically over the past few decades. The key factors are:

- changing nature of industry from more manual based to technology and consumer based
- use of information technology in the workplace and in society in general – most jobs now use computers
- importance of quality standards in the workplace – this may be through standards you may be familiar with eg Investors in People, BS 5750, ISO 900 or through increased emphasis on customer care for example
- introduction and importance of training in the workplace – often vocational training such as NVQs
- changing work practices

The organisation, not the individual

Traditionally basic skills needs have been seen as a problem for the individual. This has contributed to the stigma around basic skills and has acted as an additional barrier to people accessing learning and support. UNISON's approach focuses on the role of the whole organisation. For example an employer may use examples of incorrectly filled in paperwork

as evidence that staff have literacy needs, whereas the problem may be that forms are badly designed, not fit for purpose, or that insufficient time is allocated in the working day for completing documentation. Policies may be difficult for staff to read and understand because of unnecessary jargon. UNISON's focus is not to look at what the individual cannot do but to look at what changes an organisation can make, including in training provision, to enable each employee to reach their full potential.

Task

1. Working in groups using your existing branch map, and the information provided, identify the workplaces, employers, or departments where there are groups of potential UNISON members who have a learning issue around which you can organise. The tutor will write up a list.

2. You will be allocated with one or two potential target workplaces to check against the following list.

Note: if you don't have the information you need to complete this exercise now, try out the checklist below against one or two groups that you know something about.

Choosing a target for a campaign to organise around learning

How many of the following questions can you answer yes to?

- Is there a learning or skills for life issue which affects members and potential members?
- Are there potential negotiating issues?
- Are there a reasonable number of potential members within the group?
- Are there a few existing members you can involve?
- Are there any activists already in that workplace?

Based on your answers, identify one or two potential target groups.

HANDOUT 3

Organising around learning

The tutor will introduce the role of the Union Learning Rep and the branch education team, using the Branch Guide to Lifelong Learning as a guide.

Task 1

Working in small groups:

- look at the steps set out on page 5 of the Guide, and tick off the ones your branch has already completed
- agree the next steps you need to take to take forward organising around learning
- develop an action plan which includes an organising campaign around learning based on the target(s) you identified in the last activity. You can use the Action Planning Sheet which follows to plan the activity in more detail.

If there is not enough time to go into detail make sure that you at least plan with the group what the first few steps are and make a date for the next meeting about this.

Keeping a record of your plans

Your next steps can be added to Part A of your Branch Development and Organising Plan, and your priority issue can be added to Part B of your Branch Development and Organising Plan. (A template for the plan is included at the end of this module).

If your branch has completed another toolkit module already you should update your existing plan with your new activities.

When you have summarised your ideas give them to the branch secretary at the end of the course for consultation with the branch committee.

Branch development and organising plan

A Developing the branch

Activity 1:

AIM

- Start and end date of activity

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- Who will be involved

.....

.....

.....

- Progress report by

Activity 2:

AIM

- Start and end date of activity

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

- Who will be involved

.....

.....

.....

- Progress report by

Activity 3:

AIM

- Start and end date of activity

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

- Who will be involved

.....

.....

.....

- Progress report by

B Campaign to recruit new members and activists
(can include campaigns developed through other toolkit modules)

Campaign 1:

AIM

Target group of potential members

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Target group of potential activists

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- Start and end date of activity

| |

| |

- Who will be involved

.....

.....

.....

- Progress report by

Campaign 2:

AIM

Target group of potential members

.....

Target group of potential activists

.....

- Start and end date of activity

| |

| |

- Who will be involved

.....

.....

.....

- Progress report by

Campaign 3:

AIM

Target group of potential members

.....

Target group of potential activists

.....

- Start and end date of activity

| |

| |

- Who will be involved

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.....

- Progress report by

Campaign 4:

AIM

Target group of potential members

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Target group of potential activists

.....

- Start and end date of activity

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| |

- Who will be involved

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- Progress report by

C Branch mapping

Attach your updated mapping record.

- Updated RMS/COGNOS report returned (date)

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CAMPAIGN PLAN

Use the sheet below or your own version of it, with appropriate timescale and relevant areas of work. Break each area down into tasks and write in with the initials of the lead person responsible in the appropriate time slot.

Main areas of work	Weeks 1 - 3	Who?	Weeks 4 – 6	Who?	Weeks 7 - 9	Who?	Weeks 10 - 12	Who?
For example: Awareness raising	Identify targets for awareness raising: Develop appropriate materials		Circulate materials – plan series of workplace events		Run events			

**Further copies can be ordered by logging onto:
www.unison.org.uk/activists/doc_view.asp?did=1448**

