

The UNISON Environment Officer or '**GREEN Rep**' role

Why does my branch need a **GREEN Rep**?

Half of UK carbon emissions are produced by work activity – in our energy-intensive industries, power stations and manufacturing plant. But all workplaces have a 'carbon footprint'. Public Services directly emit around 8% the UK's greenhouse gases and that excludes public transport. When you add in their influence on procurement, construction, social housing etc the impact is even bigger, and the government recognises that Public Services have a huge role to play in meeting our climate commitments by 2050.

So, our workplaces are an excellent place to start tackling climate change.

Just as unions and employers work together to improve health and safety in the workplace through safety committees, UNISON environmental officers (or **GREEN Reps**) should be elected to champion environmental issues. They can raise awareness and ensure that green issues are included in the negotiating or bargaining agenda at work.

The main concern of a union **GREEN Reps** is to agree a joint approach to 'greening the workplace'.

Organisations are far better placed than individuals to install cost-effective green measures and agree collective ways to change our behaviour at work – such as through recycling schemes.





With many employers facing tight budgets in the coming years, union action to green the workplace can help ensure that financial savings from resource and energy efficiency ease the pressure on other costs and helps to protect jobs. The need to strengthen the link between sustainable workplaces and sustainable jobs has never been more urgent.

What can I do – what will the role entail?

The **GREEN Rep** can be a significant player on the Branch Committee, and you may be ready and raring to go on all aspects of the role. But if you are new to the role you don't have to start big. It may be that at first you may just want to be a point of contact and information for the branch on environmental issues. This may involve distributing leaflets and reporting any concerns.

But, over time, and as you gain confidence, this role can expand into negotiating and organising on all Green issues.

Unions are best placed to:

- monitor the effectiveness of environmental policies and provide staff input
- gain staff support for changes to workplace practices
- use existing union structures and procedures to influence and develop members' thinking and actions
- raise staff awareness and encourage behavioural change
- improve operational procedures.

Appointing a GREEN Rep

A rule change at the 2022 UNISON National Delegate Conference ensured that our rules changed to add the role of Environment Officer (**GREEN Rep**) to the list of formal Branch officer positions. This means that each branch should seek to elect a rep at each election cycle, or in-between election cycles if the role is currently vacant.

Is there training?

There are training materials available right now on Green Skills and for general awareness raising. We are developing rep specific training modules right now. Contact your local UNISON learning rep to discuss what's available. See further down for some useful links to resources.

Is there facility time / time off to undertake this role?

Many employers will give reasonable time off for these duties just as they would with other trade union roles. However, currently they don't have to. This is a relatively new role for employers to deal with and the law hasn't caught up with the need to recognise its importance. UNISON is committed to campaigning for facility time for this role but one of the first actions you might take, in conjunction with senior branch officers, might be to negotiate with your employer for facility time in line with other union roles.

Doing our bit to make public services greener





Negotiating on a green agenda

If your employer has no local or national agreement on union environmental reps (check with your union), you'll need to convince them that **GREEN reps** have a role to play. Consider:

- checking for any existing environmental policies in your organisation
- finding out if existing policies make reference to staff engagement or involvement
- identifying a range of points that could be put to management to illustrate why involving the union is the best way to achieve better environmental standards, highlighting how unions can help the employer to manage risks
- using examples of where union involvement has improved environmental and business performance – if you can't find anything for your industry or company, take a look at the case studies in Cutting Carbon, Growing Skills and contact your own union for examples of best practice.

Consider establishing a green committee.

You may decide you would prefer to set up a 'green forum' to meet management. This may be a sub-committee of an existing structure like a health, safety and environment committee, or a separate arrangement. Either way you will need to consider:

- **Membership:** the management side should be represented by a senior manager and include roles like facilities, purchasing and any staff with a specific environmental management role. The staff side should consist of union reps from recognised unions. Additional involvement may be needed on an ad hoc basis, for example, the HR department or specific staff who deal with particular aspects of policy and implementation.
- **Conduct:** establishing procedures on how the committee will function. For example, frequency of meetings, who will chair the committee and its relationship to other bodies.
- **Terms of reference:** this should outline the range of issues to be discussed.

This is all new to me, where do I start?

Speak to your UNISON Learning rep to find out what training is available but there are also other good resources for first steps in greening the workplace, for instance, a good place to start is the unionlearn.org.uk/publications/cutting-carbon-growing-skills-green-skills-just-transition

Other actions and points to consider:

To check out our **GREEN UNISON** campaign pages and/or join the **GREEN UNISON** Network go to unison.org.uk/our-campaigns/green-unison/

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