

Building Steward Networks



UNISON EASTERN REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MOTION TO NATIONAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE 2019

CONFERENCE AGREES that effective, strong and sustainable trade union organisation is dependent upon a network of well-trained motivated and energised workplace stewards representing members and acting as union ambassadors. It is no coincidence that workplaces with active stewards enjoy high union density, higher levels of participation and achieve more at the bargaining table.

The challenges faced with building effective steward networks are complex and undoubtedly influenced by the privatisation of public services which together with new models of corporate governance have combined to create a landscape of public service employers which is at best indifferent to trade union organisation and at worst hostile.

The environment contains a multiplicity of different employers, services fragmented, technology and automation drive new methods of work, workers are increasingly situated in smaller teams, or work alone, engagement with corporate structures is restricted, and the appreciation by ordinary workers of union organisation and workplace democracy limited.

Against this backdrop establishing the conditions necessary to build a network of workplace stewards is challenging and can only be achieved with a clear strategy, supported by a detailed plan and the organisational commitment to create the conditions necessary to support such activity.

Conference recognises that the best solution to the challenges faced by unions is a radical change in the legal framework supporting industrial relations. An opt-out system of trade union membership, a new settlement of sector wide collective bargaining, with new rights to paid time-off work for union duties and rights to access training are all necessary features of a new settlement. Conference agrees that this should be the unions objective and calls on the NEC to continue campaigning for the necessary legislative changes to deliver an industrial relations framework conducive to the development of improved union organisation.

Conference notes this ambition but recognises that until a democratic socialist party is elected to office such progressive policies that would help rebalance power in the workplace are highly unlikely.

Conference understands that our union has an overriding responsibility to our members and must therefore organise within the legal, political and economic environment of our time using all of the available resources within the union and the wider movement.

Conference therefore agrees to call on the NEC to:

1. Develop and prioritise a strategic plan to build on and enhance our existing network of workplace stewards.
2. Implement operational plans at each level of the Union with clear measurable outcomes and accountabilities to achieve a step change in the number of stewards across the union.
3. To hold a root and branch review of the current training and development programme with a view to creating revised offer that will meet the needs of all activists at each stage of their journey from member to activist.
4. Develop on-line and blended (mix of online and traditional face-face learning) courses for activists in recognition that access to paid time-off to attend training is not always possible and represents a major barrier to participation.
5. To consult regional convenors, self-organised groups and service groups in the development of points 1 to 4 above.
6. To report to NDC 2020 on the work undertaken and the outcomes secured as a result.