

## Changes to the UNISON education programme from January 2011

From the 1<sup>st</sup> of January there will be significant changes to the UNISON education programme. This note provides some background information and an explanation of the changes. Why is the programme changing?

From January 2011 the Skills Funding Agency (the organisation which funds all trade union education courses delivered via the TUC) have said that they can only fund full qualifications, and at fewer levels than before. This means that while we could previously offer a large range of short courses, this is no longer an option without the union incurring large costs. For that reason the UNISON education programme has had to be reviewed, resulting in some courses merging to meet the funding requirements. The programme still offers excellent induction training for all reps with clear follow-on progression. In fact, some consider it to have improved provision in that dealing with a grievance and representation skills are now built into the stewards' induction programme 'The Organising Steward'. Regional Education Officers will be offering additional courses to suit local needs.

What will the new programme look like?

The new introductory courses will now be 5 days, which, when delivered by TUC will attract an "Award" at Level 1. These are available for Stewards, Safety Reps, and Union Learning Reps [ULRs]. The new Stewards' tba will replace the old *Organising Steward* and *Handling Grievance and Disciplinarys* courses. The Safety Reps' tba will comprise the old *Health and Safety Representatives* and *Risk assessment* courses. The new ULR tba will bring together the old *Union Learning Reps Introductory* and the *Organising and Negotiating Around Learning* courses.

Once reps have completed the Awards [?] they are encouraged to progress on to the new 10-day Stewards' Certificate level course the TUC Health and Safety Stage 1 or new TUC ULR Stage 2 course respectively. The 10 day courses, TUC and UNISON, follow-on courses are known as "Certificates" and are accredited at Level 2.

Why Awards and Certificates? And what do the "Levels" mean?

The system that underpins the accreditation of all vocational qualifications in England is known as the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF). Wales has the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales, and Scotland has the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. The purpose of these frameworks is to make it possible to easily compare different sorts of qualifications. The TUC Education programme includes three sizes of qualifications, Awards, Certificates and Diplomas, at Levels 1, 2 and 3. Awards will take typically 5 full days to complete, Certificates 10-12 days and Diplomas roughly 36 days. The "Level" refers to how difficult the course is with Level 3 being broadly equivalent to A Level standard. Under the various national frameworks credits are built up into qualifications.

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Award	6 credits		
Certificate	15 credits	18 credits	
Diploma		48 credits	48 credits

If you want to find out more about the QCF there are lots of useful resources at: <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/resources/4374.aspx>.

Will I have to complete all five days to get my Award?

Yes, you will. Regional Education Officers are putting together programmes that are flexible so that there will be a range of ways that the course will be delivered. Your course could be delivered over five weeks, it could be three days one week and then two more days after a gap of a few weeks, or there could be an online element that won't require attendance in the classroom. Speak to your REO for more information.

Will I get time off work for training?

Stewards and branch officers have the right to time off for trade union duties, training and union activities.

These rights come from the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, which sets out the basic rules governing the rights of trade union representatives to paid time off for union duties.

Practical guidance on how the law should apply is laid down by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) in their code of practice on Time Off for Trade Union Duties and Activities.

The law distinguishes between trade union work which should receive paid time off and that which may only be unpaid.

Paid time off should be made available for trade union duties and training.

Trade union duties cover all matters relating to collective bargaining and individual representation.

These include meetings with management, preparation for these meetings, and keeping members informed about negotiations, discussions with management, terms and conditions etc.

The ACAS code stresses the importance of employers giving paid time off for stewards to be trained as soon as possible after they have been elected, for further updating training in specialist areas and where legislative change may affect industrial relations.

Employers should agree to stewards taking unpaid time off to make them available for trade union activities. These include keeping members informed, attending trade union meetings, administration and recruitment.

Some employers will agree to pay stewards for time off for some of these activities because they recognise that this may lead to improved industrial relations.

The ACAS code encourages this. You can download a copy of the code from:

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2391>

Often facilities agreements will state when stewards are entitled to paid and unpaid time off and sometimes specify a fixed amount of time that is available each week or month.

What's the benefit of all this?

When you complete your course the qualification that you gain will be easy to compare with any other, showing the true value of your learning. Before the Qualifications and Credit Framework different organisations ("Awarding Bodies" in the jargon) could use words like "Award" and "Diploma" to mean different things, making it impossible to know the real value of any qualification. THE QCF makes everything much more transparent. This matters because we are proud of the training our reps receive and we want employers to understand it, value it and respect it too.

