

NUT Representatives' Guide



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Making a difference: your introduction to being an NUT rep

Thank you for agreeing to be an NUT rep. As NUT rep you play a vital role in the largest teachers' union and are central to its continued success. The role of NUT rep is enormously rewarding, and many of the skills you will develop in the role are transferable to your professional life. The role is flexible – you decide how much time you can put in.

Any contribution towards building your union is greatly appreciated.

This guide aims to set out some of the activities an NUT rep can get involved in. It may be that you undertake some but not all of the elements discussed in this guide. That's fine. It may be that over time you grow in confidence and feel able to take on more tasks. Better still you could look to involve other members in activity. **Remember that the strength of the union is based upon members participating and making their voices heard.** By acting together at work we can make a difference to the issues that are of importance to teachers.

If at any time you think you would like some advice, assistance or resources to help you in your role then you can visit the union's website www.teachers.org.uk or contact your local association or division secretary, who will be happy to assist you. If you are a new rep or have not previously attended training you should also book yourself a place on the NUT Representatives': Level One course that will be taking place in your region or in Wales. Visit www.teachers.org.uk/training for details.

So have a look through this introductory guide. It should help you get started with the basics of the role and point you in the right direction for help and support.

Together we can make a difference!

Your rights as an NUT rep

As an NUT rep you have certain rights assigned to your role under employment law. You are entitled to:

- Time off for union duties and training;
- Approach non-members about joining;
- Somewhere to display NUT materials;
- Reasonable use of facilities, such as email, telephone and a photocopier;
- The use of a room for meetings;
- Access to relevant documentation affecting members including job descriptions, staffing structures, pay and conditions of service documents, local employment policies, which are in use in your workplace.

Your association/division secretary can give you more details about how to implement these rights in your workplace and how you can claim back any expenses you may incur.

Getting started

The role of an NUT rep is both exciting and rewarding. By starting with the basics and then moving on in the role at your own pace, you can build your confidence and skill level as you go. Once you have been elected there are several preliminary tasks you need to undertake, which are listed below:

- Let your head teacher/principal/manager know you are the rep. As a rep you will receive from the union a certificate of accreditation recognising your position;
- Ask your association/division to provide you with a list of the members in your workplace – this is a great time to introduce yourself to your members, update this list and ask non-union members to join. Also, why not ask other members if they can help out with some of the union work?
- If you have taken over from the previous NUT rep you may have been lucky enough to inherit some resources. If not, don't worry, as a rep you will regularly be provided with materials to use and display;
- If you have not been on the NUT Representatives': Level One training course, please book yourself a place on the next available course in your region or in Wales. Visit www.teachers.org.uk/training for details.

Making a difference where you work

The role of an NUT rep is varied and, in large part, dependent upon your specific workplace setting, how many members you can get involved and how much time you have available to give to the role. **Remember – no contribution is too small.** Some of the tasks an NUT rep could carry out are explored over the following pages.

Don't forget, the NUT is there to support you in this role, with advice, training and resources. By keeping in touch with your association/division you'll benefit from sharing experience with other NUT reps and officers.

Talking with colleagues

Talking to members about issues of importance to them is a crucial part of being a rep. As a rep you should listen to members' issues and concerns and, where appropriate, help them formulate solutions, or feed back into your association/division for help or assistance. You should also communicate key issues and campaigns promoted by the union.

There are many ways in which to communicate with members. The form of communication you adopt will depend on the specific context but also the aim of your communication.

Communication ABCs

At a basic level you should try and maintain an NUT notice board. You can use material that will be sent by the Union nationally or locally, and material you and colleagues produce. Try and ensure the notice board is in a prominent position and is kept up to date.

You should also ensure that you have email addresses for all members to help facilitate mass communication, although face to face communication is always better if practical.

Holding meetings

Meetings are important; they get members involved and facilitate discussion.

They will allow you to report on issues and will allow members to raise any issues that they have. Meetings need not be formal and should ideally be held at least once every half term.

Obviously you may need to organise a meeting to deal with specific concerns or campaigns as they arise. Members in some schools/workplaces will not be used to meeting as a union group. We need to use the opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of members meeting and discussing issues collectively. With this in mind you should think about how to plan a meeting and the format the meeting will take. Remember to:

- Choose a convenient and accessible time for members;
- Advertise the meeting well in advance through email; announcements in briefings; speaking to members individually to encourage attendance; newsletters; and posters;
- Let members know what the meeting is about and why they should attend;
- Consider providing refreshments: check that your association/division will refund the cost;
- Keep the meeting short and focussed;
- Be inclusive;
- Give time over to questions and contributions from members;
- Avoid using jargon;
- Don't presume or patronise;
- Ask members to undertake activity where possible;
- Minute action points and circulate to members.

Building the Union

Recruiting to the NUT

The NUT is the largest teachers' union due to the recruitment work undertaken by our reps. It is important that you know who is and who isn't a union member in your workplace. If you do not have a recent membership list please contact your association or division secretary and ask them to provide one. Once you have this list you will be able to identify who you should approach about joining the NUT or getting more involved in the Union.

Remember that recruitment is an all-year round activity. You should always keep your eye out for any new members of staff, including part-time and supply teachers, and those who are on an employment-based route to teacher qualification. When student teachers join the school on placement introduce yourself as the NUT rep. You should try and build a rapport with them and highlight the work the NUT does, then ask them to join if they aren't already members.

Recruitment tips

Most non union members are so because they simply have never been asked to join. Below are some recruitment tips:

- Face to face contact is the best way to recruit;
- Listen to what any potential member has to say and try to address their questions and concerns. Try and demonstrate the relevance of the NUT to them;

- Be professional. If a potential member is busy, leave them some literature and arrange a more convenient time to talk to them;
- Understand the different categories of membership on offer. Always have plenty of recruitment forms with you;
- Try and seal the deal by getting the potential member to fill in a membership form whilst you are there, or ask them to call the joining hotlines on **0845 300 1669** or **020 7380 6369**. They can also join online at www.teachers.org.uk.

Getting members involved

As well as recruiting new members, it would be useful to ask members to become active in some way. There are many roles members could undertake. There are formal roles such as health and safety rep or union learning rep, but there are also informal jobs members could be asked to perform, such as taking responsibility for keeping the notice board up to date, organising meetings, taking notes at meetings and so on. Identifying a number of people willing to do a little will relieve you of workload and create a collective identity.

Getting people active in the union is easier if they see some relevance to that activity.

Below are some tips on getting members more involved:

- Don't be afraid to ask members to do something for the Union. After all, it is **their** Union and the worst that can happen is they say 'no';
- Ask in person rather than by email or telephone;
- Be realistic about what you ask members to do;

- Ask members initially to perform small tasks that you think they would be good at or enjoy. As they become more involved you could ask them to take on more responsibility;
- Let members know that their particular help is needed;
- Never refuse an offer of help;
- Be enthusiastic about the importance of the work undertaken.

Helping colleagues at work

As a rep, members may approach you with a concern or a problem and seek your advice. You are not expected to know all the answers or deal with every query yourself. Your association/division secretary or regional office in England or NUT Cymru in Wales is also at hand to help.

However, there are some basic issues you may be able to deal with. First, you need to distinguish if the issue is a collective issue or an individual issue.

Individual issues

Individual issues may range from a relatively minor concern to a more serious issue that has formal implications. Individual issues may include conditions of service questions, capability or disciplinary issues, discrimination, bullying and so on. Again, it is not necessary for you to know all policy and procedures relating to these matters (although a little bit of knowledge will go a long way, visit www.teachers.org.uk for information). Rather, it is important that you are seen as someone who members feel confident and comfortable talking to about issues and concerns.

If you have any questions or want some advice you should contact your association/division secretary. Many problems which members bring to you as an individual issue will also have a collective aspect. For example, a workload problem is unlikely to only affect a single teacher in a school. Many members feel surprised but relieved to find that they can draw on the support and camaraderie of colleagues and work together to improve the situation.

Collective issues

If the issue or concern affects more than one member, then, if appropriate, you should seek to get those members together. This could be a meeting or an informal chat. Some collective issues may be able to be addressed by speaking with the head teacher or manager, others may need to be resolved through formal procedures. However, with some collective issues more negotiation and pressure to bring about positive change may be needed.

Before dealing with such concerns you need to make sure that the issue is genuinely relevant to members and potential members. If we campaign around issues that are important to teachers, we increase our chances of getting them involved, and increase the likelihood of effecting positive change in the workplace. Before embarking on a campaign concerning any issue you should ask if it is:

- widely felt – does the issue affect enough teachers – either across the whole school/workplace, within a particular department or amongst a specific group?
- deeply felt – are the teachers affected sufficiently concerned or angry about the issue to want to engage with, and take part in, the campaign?
- winnable – is there a realistic chance of achieving a concrete victory in relation to the issue via the campaign?
- visible – will taking on the issue raise the profile of the Union and allow members to take part in the campaign?

Campaign objectives

You also need to establish clear objectives for the campaign which include:

- Identifying who is the target of the campaign - who can make the change (e.g. the head teacher, the governors)?
- Thinking about how members can get involved in the campaign at each stage;
- Establishing what resources are needed and available;
- Contingency planning – what to do if setbacks occur.

Reviewing a campaign

At the end of any sort of collective issue or campaign it is useful to evaluate what was achieved so as to learn from good practice. It is useful to ask:

- Did the campaign achieve its objectives?
- Did members engage in activity?
- Did anyone join the union because of campaign activity?
- Has the campaign made the union stronger and more visible?
- What could we have done differently to be more effective?

Talking with management

As well as helping members with individual problems, as a rep you should also look to establish a dialogue with management so that you can be involved in collective issues affecting members. You should also try to create an environment in the workplace which avoids individual problems arising as much as possible. It is a good idea to have a formal meeting with management once every half term to discuss issues. At times management may request to talk with you as the NUT rep to consult on or negotiate an issue.

A productive working relationship with management is something to aim for. Your head teacher or manager may well be an NUT member. This should ensure a constructive dialogue. The key thing to remember is that, when you are talking to management, you are speaking as a representative of and on behalf of all NUT members and that you have the strength of the membership behind you.

Below are some tips on meeting with management:

- Have a clear agreed agenda before the meeting;
- Have a clear idea of what you want from any meeting by talking to members beforehand;
- Have an agreed contingency position; but don't agree to something you are uncertain about;
- Act in a professional and confident manner;

- Always take notes and never be afraid to ask a question or seek clarification.
If possible have someone else with you to assist by taking notes or, if the meeting involves reps from other unions, agree with them in advance who will take notes on behalf of all unions present;
- If an issue is raised that you are not prepared for, tell the manager you will need to speak with members before giving a response;
- Always report back to members on any outcomes.

Get involved and keep in touch

As an NUT rep you are already fulfilling one of the most important roles in the Union. But you may want to extend your activity and involvement beyond your workplace, and encourage your members to do the same.

If you feel you want to increase your involvement there are plenty of ways to do this:

- go along to association/division meetings;
- take up a role in your association/division;
- engage with local training;
- attend regional/Wales council, where you will meet activists from other areas, share good practice and get valuable information about what is going on in the Union nationally, regionally and locally;
- attend annual conference. You need to be elected by your association/division, and you could go as either a delegate or observer;
- get involved in one of the Union's self-organised groups.

Your key point of contact is your association/division secretary. If you do not already have their contact details please visit www.teachers.org.uk/contactus where you will find them. They have a wealth of knowledge and expertise you can tap into, never be afraid to get in touch. It is only by understanding the real issues and concerns of union members that the NUT can make a positive impact on the working lives of teachers.

Thank you again for taking on this role – together we can make a difference!

The largest teachers' union

Our aim: one union for all teachers



www.teachers.org.uk