



# Guide to union learning

## What is ATL?

ATL is led by its members, education professionals working across the UK in maintained, independent and post-16 schools and colleges.

From early years to higher education (HE), teachers to support staff, students to NQs/probationers, lecturers to leaders, we support education professionals in all sectors and throughout their careers.

### *A fresh approach*

ATL members expect more than just the standard benefits offered by other unions, after all, trade unions everywhere offer advice and support. Our members want to be part of a well trained and motivated workforce.

As the education union, ATL understands the value of professional and personal development. Each year ATL now provides over 2,500 of our members with direct access to new learning opportunities.

**Union Learning Reps (ULRs)** are at the heart of ATL's learning activities and form an extensive network of members trained to broker, provide and advise members about learning and development opportunities.

This leaflet outlines the various ATL ULR roles and the proven benefits they provide to staff and employers alike. ATL's ULRs, the learners they have assisted and their employers, describe in their own words the diverse range of benefits resulting from ULR activities: from identifying staff learning needs to overcoming personal barriers to learning; from establishing partnerships with learning providers to saving members, schools and colleges money.

## What is a Union Learning Rep?

A ULR is a union representative who is trained and accredited to work with employers and staff on training and learning in the workplace. Any ATL member, working full- or part-time, can be a ULR.

A ULR does not replicate or replace the duties of a continuing professional development (CPD) co-coordinator/committee or a line manager. Indeed, the functions of a ULR complement rather than compete with existing responsibilities within an institution.

The three main functions of a ULR are:

### 1 Helping to assess learning needs

Liaising with the CPD coordinator/committee to gather an overall picture of the learning interests and needs of the workforce. Very often, this learning needs analysis provides a CPD co-ordinator or line manager with a wider picture of learning needs within the workplace as it ranges from professional skills such as voice care, to personal learning such as wellbeing.

### 2 Providing information and advice

ULRs give impartial information and advice to staff and members on learning. Often this will include signposting to opportunities both within and outside the workplace and towards other sources of advice including the establishment's CPD programme/coordinator.

### 3 Engaging staff in learning

ULRs play a vital role in enthusing and engaging staff in their own learning. They help overcome barriers to accessing and maintaining a commitment to learning, such as time, availability of courses and equal opportunities.

## Working together in your school

Systematic performance management policies have increased the profile and status of CPD for the whole school workforce. Alongside headteachers and CPD co-ordinators, ULRs encourage staff to get involved in training and to overcome barriers that colleagues may face when accessing development opportunities.

In the independent sector, ULRs can assist employers to develop learning policies within establishments and tap into external sources of funding and training.

### CASE STUDY

**School** Beaufort Community School

**Workplace ULR** Stuart Glover

"Being a ULR in school has had quite an impact. I took on the role as I felt that I could get more ideas about what could be offered to staff. So, since taking on the role, I've worked with another ULR to put on a musical evening and aqua aerobics sessions thanks to the funding from the Union Learning Fund via ATL. We are gaining the benefit of having a ULR in our school as the events we focus on improve our work-life balance".

**Headteacher** Malcolm Bride

"I was delighted to find the ULRs working in tandem with us to provide staff with recreational activities. The school matched the funding they received and staff have really enjoyed the sessions put on. The aqua aerobics has proved very popular indeed!"



## Working together in your college

Regulations on CPD in the Post-Compulsory sector now require all full-time teachers, trainers and tutors to undertake at least 30-hours of CPD per year (pro-rata for part-timers), recorded with the Institute for Learning (IfL). The IfL has encouraged staff in FE to conceptualise CPD as more than just courses, workshops and formal study; it should also be a critical reflection on different learning experiences and result in action planning which demonstrates development.

College Wiltshire College  
ULR Liz Lee

"I enjoy the learning process; there is no end to learning! It's all about self esteem too and I want to promote this to others, including my own two children. If I can help others, that's brilliant. The College benefits because sometimes staff find it easier to talk to a colleague about their needs and I meet regularly with our Staff Development Officer and can bring ideas and suggestions. All this helps with the IfL process".



College Staff Development Officer  
Steve Warner

"Much of my work involves working out the training needs for the staff. A great deal of this work is based around what managers feel their staff should be learning. ULRs allow me to 'get in touch' with what the staff feel they need to know."

## Working together in your local authority

With the implementation of new school initiatives, changes in workforce and the move towards New Professionalism, ULRs are working with LAs to ensure a first class workforce for the 21st century.

CASE STUDY

Local authority Solihull.

ULR Geoff Rudge

"Having taught for a good number of years, I was looking to give something back to education and especially to work-life balance and professional development. What has been particularly important to achieve this has been working with the LA, as well as local FE and HE providers".



Solihull Lead Remodelling  
and Workforce Adviser – Quality

Sue Billington

"Unions have played an active and effective role in supporting and monitoring workforce modernisation and development since the signing of the National Agreement in January 2003; ULRs help build capacity and capability in supporting the development of the children's workforce in schools through the contribution of knowledge, skills and expertise which complement those of the LA."

## Working together to manage challenging behaviour

One of the main barriers to the success of achievement by students is the challenging behaviour of others in the classroom. Being able to deal with this when it arises, and in a positive manner, can go a long way to reducing stress levels for staff and students alike. ATL ULRs throughout the UK have been working with employers to offer behaviour workshops to enable colleagues to better tackle the problem.

**Course** Challenging behaviour

**ULR** Debbie Polwarth

Debbie is a Special Needs Assistant and became involved as an ATL ULR through her interest in learning and working with members and employers to provide relevant training.



**Course attendee** Sam Purves

"Well, what can I say about this training course apart from the fact it was fantastic, informative and good fun!? As a new member to ATL I wasn't sure what to expect and felt a little nervous about attending the course, but all my worries were for nothing. This training and many others would not be available without the commitment and hard work of our on site ULR."

## Working together to create a positive relationship

### *The rights of a ULR*

Under the Employment Act 2002, ULRs have the right to reasonable paid time off to carry out their duties and training. However, in order to qualify for the time off, the ULR must have completed the accredited ATL training, or have committed to undertake it within six months, and notified their school/college once they have received ATL accreditation.

Specifically, ULRs use their time-off to:

- analyse learning or training needs in their school/college or branch;
- provide information and advice about learning or training matters;
- arrange learning or training;
- promote the value of learning or training;
- consult their employer about carrying out any such activities;
- prepare to carry out any of the above activities;
- undergo relevant training.

In addition to ULRs being granted reasonable time off to carry out their duties, members have a legal entitlement to reasonable unpaid time off to access the work of ULRs.



## *Learning Agreement*

Working together with an employer is one of the key characteristics of the ULR role. Improving policies and procedures and staff involvement in decision-making not only helps to create a shared responsibility for development but also enhances staff morale. One of the key ways that this can be achieved is through a learning agreement, which will set out the relationship between members, ULRs and school/college management specifically on learning and the access to opportunities. Agreements help to avoid misunderstandings, facilitate planning of resources and to give clear guidelines on time off. Typically, a learning agreement will outline:

- the aims and objectives of the agreement;
- the role of the ULR and responsibilities of joint working;
- what CPD is;
- time off arrangements where necessary;
- responsibilities of the school/college/local authority (LA).



## Working together to maximise CPD opportunities

As well as providing new learning opportunities to members directly, ATL ULRs also actively signpost members to ATL's in-house range of CPD courses and academic accreditation opportunities available through ATL's unique partnership with Edge Hill University, all largely **free of charge**.

Every year, all ATL members receive a copy of ATL's *Education and training programme* where they can choose from a wide variety of in-house courses throughout the academic year, including courses on managing challenging behaviour, voice care, leadership skills and assertiveness.

### *Complete an MA or a foundation degree with ATL*

ATL works in partnership with Edge Hill University to offer accreditation to all school and college staff engaging in professional development activities. More than one thousand members register with Edge Hill every year.

Edge Hill University is one of the UK's leading providers of professional development for the wider education workforce and has a highly successful track record in enabling staff to gain academic credit through portfolio evidence of professional activities undertaken on the job.

For staff with a first degree, accreditation is available at postgraduate level, up to and including an MA in Education. For those staff without a degree, accreditation is available at undergraduate level, up to and including foundation degrees in Supporting Teaching and Learning or in Professional Development.

Most of this accreditation is available to ATL members for **free**. For those working towards an MA, two-thirds of the credits can be earned for free, with just £500 payable for the final 60 credits. For those working towards a foundation degree, three-quarters of the credits can be earned for free, with just £615 payable for the final 60 credits.



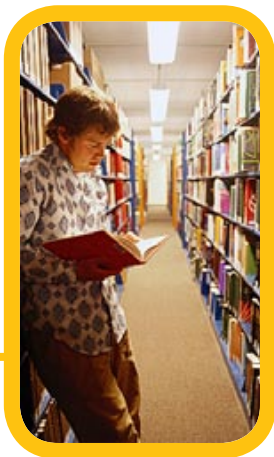
**Edge Hill University**  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

## Contact details

If you are interested in becoming a ULR, finding your local ULR or for more information on union learning, please email us at: **[ulr@atl.org.uk](mailto:ulr@atl.org.uk)**.

If you would like more information on ATL's *Learning programme* or the Edge Hill University partnership, please visit ATL's website at: **[www.atl.org.uk/training](http://www.atl.org.uk/training)**.

If you would like to join ATL, please call **0845 057 7000** or visit ATL's website at: **[www.atl.org.uk/join](http://www.atl.org.uk/join)**.



### **London**

7 Northumberland Street  
London WC2N 5RD  
Tel: 020 7930 6441  
Fax: 020 7930 1359  
Email: [info@atl.org.uk](mailto:info@atl.org.uk)

### **Belfast**

Unit C2  
West Bank Office Park  
West Bank Drive  
Belfast BT3  
Tel: 028 9032 7990  
Fax: 028 9032 7992  
Email: [ni@atl.org.uk](mailto:ni@atl.org.uk)

### **Cardiff**

First Floor  
64 Newport Road  
Cardiff CF24 0DF  
Tel: 029 2046 5000  
Fax: 029 2046 2000  
Email: [cymru@atl.org.uk](mailto:cymru@atl.org.uk)

### **Edinburgh**

ATL Scotland  
CBC House  
24 Canning Street  
Edinburgh, EH3 8EG  
Tel: 0131 272 2748  
Fax: 0131 272 2800  
Email: [Scotland@atl.org.uk](mailto:Scotland@atl.org.uk)

**[www.atl.org.uk](http://www.atl.org.uk)**