



UNISON H&S Seminar Summary

Four of our branch Safety Reps, Nick Creighton, Lee Bryan, Jenna Hudson and Mark Adcock, attended the UNISON Health and Safety Seminar on 29th March, 2017 at Edinburgh Corn Exchange. Mark Adcock gave us this summary:

"The introductory speeches covered the threat of Brexit to regulations that protect workers and how these will be written into UK laws. It was made clear that unions will need to monitor the proposed legislation carefully. It was noted that violence in UK workplaces is rising, as is general stress caused by work with 'demands of the job' as the biggest cause. There was a call for delegates to mingle and converse more, amid a general need for more networking among regions.

"Louise Taggart (FACK – Families Against Corporate Killers) was our keynote speaker on corporate killings. She gave many individual accounts of preventable deaths at work, which were incredibly moving. She explained how the Tories have decimated the HSE, caused an 80% drop in tribunals through their introduction of tribunal fees, and eased gang master legislation. She said the government still treat H&S regulations as a red tape burden rather than as the vital protections which stop even more workplace deaths each year. In 2016, 27 million working days were lost to work-related illness or injury, compared to just 800,000 days lost to strike action – and yet the government concentrated its efforts on the latter, bringing in the unnecessary Trade Union Act. She called on reps to use 'Hazards at Work' statistics rather than those of the HSE. Actual deaths at, and caused by, work are up to 10 times more than HSE reports. She closed by referring to the reps in the room as heroes, saying they were 'the barrier between life and death' for many people. Her speech was extremely humbling and she received a standing ovation.

"Mike Hines (UNISON Branch Chair, University of West of England) ran an excellent mental health workshop. He revealed that a recent BITC (Business in the Community) survey found three in four people will suffer mental health problems in their life (not one in four as has previously been reported), 77% of employees are

experiencing poor mental health, 62% said their condition was made worse by work, 56% of employees said they were offered no help when disclosing a mental health condition while just 7% were offered work changes and 5% were sacked. Lastly, nine out of ten people reported suffering discrimination at work after disclosing a mental health issue.

"The afternoon talk from Rob Vondy of the HSE focused on the reformed role of the HSE in modern health and safety. While Rob was given a warm welcome it's fair to say his talk received a mixed reception. This was due to a feeling that the HSE is no longer fit for purpose since being cut back by 46% by the present government."

Lee Bryan added: "My workshops were very good. We had to dissect a harassment and bullying policy and see if it mirrored one from UNISON. Ours did, but we thought they missed out prevention, intervention and also reporting. When we had to give feedback I got a round of applause for mentioning the most important people in any trade union, yes - the members!

"Mike Edwards, Head of Trade Union Studies at Shrewsbury College, ran 'The Union Effect' workshop. He was inspiring and spoke fondly of his time working for Caterpillar UK where he was Branch Secretary of a 4,500 strong workforce with 100% membership (not a closed shop) – it was a 100% legitimate talk about power in a union!

"And, after all the workshops and talks, we had a great time socialising together in Edinburgh."

March saw a visit from our Norwegian sister union Fagforbundet who came to Leeds for a training weekend. They invited our branch officers and reps to an informal talk and fact finding session. Afterwards, the Norwegians and some of our reps attended a football match at Elland Road.



Meet the Rep: Nick Creighton



What's your role? I work in Purchasing, but I have an agreement with UNISON and the University that 50% of my time is spent carrying out my role as Branch Health & Safety Officer and Steward.

Why did you become a UNISON rep? I was approached by the late Fred Whitaker (Branch Secretary) when a disabled member in my area challenged the University regarding disabled access. The member won their challenge and I became a Safety Rep and later a Branch H&S Officer and Steward.

How long have you been a rep? I became a Safety Rep 8 years ago and a Steward and Branch H&S Officer 6 years ago.

Most frequent member question? H&S-wise it's mainly about wellbeing in the workplace and the working environment (e.g. temperature). Stewarding tends to deal with returns to work following illness / absence.

The best thing about being a rep? Making a difference, from shaping the H&S agenda to supporting members who need assistance and fighting their corner for them.

And the worst? The time it takes to get things done can be frustrating. It's also challenging when members approach us for help the day before, or even on, the day of a meeting with managers.

Is it easy to balance your rep responsibilities and your role? This is made easier because I have formal buyout time, however this doesn't allow for last-minute issues or things that may over-run.

How was the training? UNISON uses the Horsforth TUC centre where the tutors are very experienced and the course is manageable for a full time worker.

Would you recommend being a rep? Yes, if you want to help others and make a difference. Once I had got to the top of my grade, I found that becoming a rep gave me the fresh challenge I was looking for.

Anything to add? A union gives you a voice in your workplace and lets you challenge unfair changes to workers' rights and the relaxing of H&S laws.