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**A TUC briefing**  
**Answering the critics**  
**October 2009**

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## **Union reps and facility time**

The Sunday Telegraph is using the Freedom of Information Act to find out from every local council what union facilities and facility time they provide. This comes on the heels of an [article](#) in the Times during Congress, which said that the Government spends millions every year to allow union reps to spend time on 'far-left political campaigns and making up false claims about the Conservative party'.

The Sunday Telegraph's approach to local authorities coincides with the recent furore over Royal Mail's plans to reduce facility time in response to the CWU's legitimate industrial action; and a series of Parliamentary questions tabled by Conservative MP Frances Maude and others relating to trade union finance, facilities and recognition agreements within the civil service.

### **TUC response**

*'In today's difficult economic climate, it is more important than ever that all resources available to the workplace are well deployed. Union representatives constitute a major resource: there are approximately 200,000 workers who act as lay union representatives. We believe that modern representatives have a lot to give their fellow employees and to the organisations that employ them.'*

Foreword by Brendan Barber TUC General Secretary, Lord Mandelson, Secretary of State for Business, Innovation & Skills and Richard Lambert, CBI Director General, to 'Reps in Action: how workplaces gain from modern union representation', BERR, May 2009

Union reps – and the facilities and facility time associated with union reps – cannot simply be regarded as a 'cost' on employers. On the contrary, union reps are an important resource both for employees and employers.

According to research published by the government in 2007, (<http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file36336.pdf>) union reps in the public sector save the taxpayer between **£167m** and **£397m** every year by helping resolve disputes, increase the take up of training and reduce staff turnover. The same research

suggested that reps in the public sector may be worth as much as **£1.2bn to £3.6bn** in productivity gains.

Reps in the public sector contribute up to **100,000 unpaid hours** of their own time each week to carry out their union duties, the research showed. This is time that directly benefits public services and the people who work in them.

Some commentators have recently referred to the £20m a year that Royal Mail allegedly spends on trade union facilities. In 2009 Royal Mail's turnover was in excess of £9.5bn – meaning that trade union facilities represented a financial cost equivalent to 0.2% of company turnover.

Earlier this year the TUC, [CBI](http://www.cbi.org.uk) and government came together to issue a joint statement on the positive role of union reps in the workplace <http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file51155.pdf>.

The statement set out the benefits that reps can bring, and said that they need appropriate time and facilities to undertake their work. In the public sector the cost in paying the wages is more than balanced by the broader contribution that reps make to the public sector. Staff commitment and morale is particularly vital for those in public services and no government or political party really interested in delivering excellent, efficient public services can afford to ignore.

### **The value of workplace reps to workplace performance and the economy**

- Union Learning Reps are worth **£94m-£156m** in enhanced productivity to employers and employees
- Workplace representatives mean 13,000- 25,000 fewer dismissals each year, creating a benefit of **£107m-£213m** for employers
- 17,000- 34,000 fewer voluntary 'exits', worth **£72m-£143m** to employers
- 3,600-7,300 fewer Employment Tribunal cases, **worth £22m-£43m** to business and exchequer
- 8,000-13,000 fewer injuries, equivalent to 161,000-241,000 fewer working days lost. Benefits range **£136m- £371m** to society.
- 3,000-8,000 fewer cases of work related illness equivalent to 125,000-375,000 fewer working days lost. Benefits range **£45m-£207m** to society.

In addition workplace representatives may be worth between £3.2bn and £10.2bn a year to the UK economy in terms of productivity gains. (2007 document as above).

In addition the ACAS Code of Practice recognised by both employers and unions <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1878> and with the force of law gives union officials rights to paid time off for certain duties.