

Equality Reps' Project Overview

Unite the Union was formed in May 2007 as a result of the merger between Amicus and the TGWU to form a union with 2 million members strong. The instrument of amalgamation for the merger contains new rights of participation within the union's structures for Equality Reps.

Forming an integral part of the Unite Equality Strategy, the Equality Reps' Project facilitates implementation of Equality Representatives within the union's workplace, administrative and democratic structures in the two year transitional period prior to full integration of the union. The Project is receiving matched funding from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) via the Union Modernisation Fund (UMF).

The project involves the development of 400 members of the union as Equality Reps, ensuring they have access to training; recognition by their employers, the union and appropriate communication tools. Derek Simpson, Unite Joint General Secretary, commented "Equality Reps will improve the ability of the union to respond to the increasing diversity of the labour market, and to supply services geared to the needs of a diverse membership. By developing new methods of engaging members who experience discrimination, and encouraging members to become Equality Reps, the project aims to increase the diversity of both its membership and representatives. The union will also be engaging with employers to build best practice in facilitating the role of the Equality Reps in the workplace and to ensure that Equality Reps are fully recognised by the employer".

There are five distinct elements to the project that will assist in the transformation necessary to achieve the development and full involvement of Equality Reps in the union. These identify how the union needs to adapt to incorporate Equality Reps and develop tools for union modernisation in this field. Specifically the project will make adjustments to the unions administrative systems

necessary to include Equality Reps in the union's structures, cascade awareness of the role of an Equality Rep to the union's staff and officers, develop education programme and materials for Equality Reps and facilitate on-line networking. These elements will be guided by 5 steering groups and delivered by a project team consisting of a Project Manager and three Project Development Officers.

Siobhan Endean, Unite Section Head of Equality and Project Manager, said "this is a very exciting project which will disseminate the model of Equality Rep throughout the union and the wider trade union movement. Unite is committed to achieving equality in the workplace and if we are to do this we need trained Equality Reps who are negotiating with their employer and informing our members about equality issues and legislation and on how to go about making changes in the workplace that are actually going to make a difference to people's working lives."

The importance given to the role of Equality Reps within Unite is explicit in terms of the agreement by the National Executive Committee's ballot of all members on an instrument of amalgamation which enshrines the role of Equality Rep with the same rights to participation within the new union alongside workplace, learning and health & safety.

The Unite Amicus National Executive Committee also adopted an Equality Strategy at its September meeting of 2006 that contains a wide ranging consultation of all 12 regional councils and 24 national sector committee as to how the role of Equality Rep will develop in the workplace which will inform the project.

Unite Amicus is in the process of developing its education programme and training materials for Equality Reps. Equality Reps will be strongly encouraged to complete training before taking up the role, this is to ensure that Equality Reps can identify any areas of strength and development in areas of equality. We hope to be able to role the education programme in early part of 2009.

The overarching rationale of the project is to bring together this prior development work and create a new framework of support within the union to ensure that there are Equality Reps that are able to function effectively in the workplace as accredited representatives of the union and able to participate fully within the union's structures. The opportunity exists to develop new Equality Reps across the strands of equality, but also to ensure that the union's existing Equality Reps are recognised within the workplace and the union.

The core opportunity for union modernisation is that this project seeks to address and recognise that there is a range of discrimination and equality legislation which need to be implemented in the workplace if we are going to bring about more equality. Equality Reps will play a key role in achieving this by negotiating with the employer and making sure that members are better informed on their rights in this area. They will also play a vital role in acting on the recommendations of the Equalities Review, the Women and Work Commission Report and the report from the Commission on Integration and Cohesion.

If you would like to find out more about the project or arrange for a presentation on the Project then the contact details of the Equality Reps' Project Team are below:-



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