



# BUILD THE UNION

Recruitment  
Conversations

# Recruitment Conversations

## **Building the union is vital to our success. More members equal:**

- More power – to persuade employers to accept our demands
- More resources for union activities – your union's only income is membership fees
- More democracy – the more members we have the more we represent the post-16 education workforce. The more representative we are the more powerful we are

The single most common answer people give when asked why they are not part of their union is 'no one asked me.'

## **We must ask people to join their union**

Having a planned approach to recruitment is vital. Knowing who we are recruiting is important – use the guidance on mapping your structure. But having some kind of planned conversation or even a loose script can be helpful:

- It can make recruiters more confident. It can be daunting going to up to work colleagues or strangers and asking them to join their union – having a script can help
- Having a common approach to the language you are using makes their union seem better prepared to non-members
- Having a common approach allows recruiters to share feedback from non-members more easily.

## **RECRUITMENT CONVERSATIONS – THE STEPS**

- 1. Introduce yourself** Make it clear you are from their union and that you want to talk to them (and, more importantly, listen to them) about what matters to them at work.

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- 2. Ask them about work.** Maybe something like ‘what are the three things you’d like to change about work?’ It could be something specific to your workplace ‘what do you think about the X change the employer is making?’ or specific to UCU nationally, ‘what do you think about the pay offer?’ The vital thing is to spark a conversation *on their terms*. Your job is now to listen (it should be about a 70/30 split between listening and talking). You could intervene to check or to ask open questions – ‘how do you feel about that?’, ‘Does that seem fair to you?’ You need to listen carefully to the issues you raise because you’ll need them at the next stage.
- 3. Use the issues they have raised to turn them into ‘Why You Should Join The Union’ answers.** This is the key part of the conversation. You need to relate their issues back to them. If they said (for example) ‘My workload is too high’ then you could use the Workload issue in the FE Respect Charter as an example of what UCU is doing about it. If they comment on the cost-of-living crisis you can use the national or local pay claim. Make sure you have a few stock examples of what UCU is doing up your sleeve. The other technique is to get them to think about why joining together with other workers would provide a better chance of getting the employer to listen to their issue.
- 4. Ask them to join their union.** Wait. Don’t fill the awkward silence that will follow (we’ll come to answering difficult questions in a bit). Make sure you have an easy way to join available – joining page open on your tablet/laptop/phone etc.
- 5. Inoculate.** It can be useful to get them to think about what their boss/manager/employer will say when they join. Ask them “what might happen if you join UCU” and then put their mind at rest or explain what their union will do to protect them if their fears come true.
- 6. Next steps.** These could be – fill in the online form and hand it back, ask another colleague to join, come to the next meeting, put up a poster, put on a badge etc. It is important not to leave the conversation there – offer them something else to do or some form of activity.

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## Dealing with difficult questions

People may respond with a range of reasons why they don't want to join. These three techniques can help:

**Acknowledge/Affirm** – 'I know how you feel and that is a fair point. However...' Acknowledge the feeling not the excuse

**Answer** – If they have a question, answer it

**Redirect** – Take them back to the issues they raised at Step 2 and ask then how we can deal with that issue.'

**Questions like** – 'What is holding you back?' can be helpful. Always come back to the issues they raised in Step 2

## Specific Answers

- *I can't afford it.* Talk through the subs rate – non-members are often surprised at what the actual cost is – and claiming tax relief. Talk through the benefits of being part of the only dedicated post-16 trade union and how by acting collectively they can win. Talk about their contribution – how people want to hear from them. Make them feel they will be listened to and that their views are important.
- *Union meeting are full of people arguing.* Explain the importance of democracy and listening to everyone's voice.
- *Is collective action effective?* Yes, there are plenty of examples of successful union campaigns covering a range of issues eg pay, workload and insecure contracts. See UCU – Your support is needed <https://www.ucu.org.uk/your-support-is-needed>

**UCU**

[www.ucu.org.uk/join](https://www.ucu.org.uk/join)

