

NUT Health and Safety Reps' Guide



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teachers.org.uk/healthandsafety

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Introduction to being an NUT Health and Safety Rep

Thank you for agreeing to be an NUT health and safety rep. As an NUT health and safety rep you play a vital role in the largest teachers' union and are key to its continued success.

The NUT health and safety rep role is very rewarding, and many of the skills you develop in the role are transferable to your professional life. The role is also flexible – you decide how much time you can put in.

Any contribution towards building your union is greatly appreciated.

This guide sets out some of the activities in which an NUT health and safety rep can get involved. It may be that you undertake some, but not all, of the elements discussed in this guide.

Remember that the strength of the NUT is based upon members participating and making their voices heard. By acting together at work we can make a difference to the issues that are important to teachers.

If at any time you think that you need some advice, assistance or resources to help you in your role then you can visit our website www.teachers.org.uk and click on 'Health and Safety' or contact your local association/division or health and safety adviser. If you are not sure how to make contact, go to www.teachers.org.uk/contactus.

Part of the health and safety adviser's role is to support school health and safety reps.

If you are a new rep or have not yet attended training you are invited to book yourself a place on the NUT Health and Safety Reps' Course (see the NUT website at www.teachers.org.uk/courses/representatives).

So have a look at this introductory guide. It should help you get started with the basics of the role and point you in the right direction for help and support.

Together we can make a difference!

Your rights as an NUT Health and Safety Rep

As the NUT health and safety rep you have certain legal rights. You are entitled to:

- Time off for training and for undertaking health and safety workplace inspections;
- Somewhere to display NUT materials;
- The use of a room for meetings;
- Reasonable use of facilities, such as email, telephone and photocopier;
- Access to relevant documentation relating to health and safety issues.

Your association/division secretary or health and safety adviser can give you more details about how to assert these rights in your workplace.

Getting started

The role of an NUT health and safety rep is very rewarding. By starting with the basics and then moving on in the role at your own pace you can build your confidence and skill level as you go. Once you have taken on the role, please inform your local association health and safety adviser and head teacher that you have been appointed.

- Talk to the NUT school rep, who can introduce you to members, tell them about your role, and ask if anyone would like to help you with the work;
- If you have taken over from the previous NUT health and safety rep you may have inherited some resources. If not, don't worry, as a health and safety rep you will regularly be provided with materials to use and display, along with regular information bulletins to keep you updated;
- Your NUT school rep will have a list of NUT members in your workplace along with their emails, so you could have a health and safety item on any regular communication or you could email members independently on health and safety issues;
- If you have not attended a health and safety reps' training course you can book yourself a place on the next available course at our Stoke Rochford training centre. Visit www.teachers.org.uk/training for details;

You may wish to start off by asking a few basic questions of management, for example, does the school contain asbestos and, if so, are contractors advised of its location when working at the school? When was the last fire inspection? Has a stress risk assessment been undertaken? These are just suggestions. Each safety rep will have their own priorities.

Communicating with Members

Talking with colleagues

Talking to members about health and safety issues of importance to them is a crucial part of being a health and safety rep. It will help to listen to members' concerns and, where appropriate, you can then raise these with school management to find a solution, or feed back into your association/division for help or assistance. Please also communicate key health and safety messages and campaigns promoted by the Union, for example, on keeping staff and pupils safe from asbestos in schools.

There are many ways in which to communicate with members. The form of communication you adopt will depend on the specific context but also on the aim of your communication.

Your NUT school rep should be able to provide you with the email addresses of all NUT members in the school. This is probably one of the most efficient ways of communication, especially in larger schools or those occupying more than one site.

No NUT rep in your workplace?

- Let your division/association secretary know. You can also inform your regional/Wales office. (Go to www.teachers.org.uk/contactus)
- Talk to members in your workplace about becoming the NUT workplace rep.

Every workplace needs a strong union team!

Noticeboard

An NUT health and safety noticeboard is useful so you can display material that will be sent by the Union, and for notifying members about issues in your school. It is helpful if the notice board is in a prominent position and is kept up to date, perhaps by another NUT member.

School meetings

Discuss with your NUT school rep about having a regular health and safety agenda item at NUT meetings, so that members are aware of the NUT 'team'. Meetings need not be formal and can be more of a discussion between colleagues on specific issues of concern, for example, stress levels, or the presence of asbestos.

If there is no NUT school rep, members in some schools/workplaces will not be used to meeting as a union group. It is important to take the opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of members meeting and discussing issues collectively.

If you do wish to organise a meeting, these points may help:

- Choose a convenient and accessible time and place for members;
- Let members know what the meeting is about and why they should attend (members should also feel that they can suggest discussion items for meetings);
- Advertise the meeting well in advance;
- Encourage questions, contributions and discussion from all members;
- Avoid using jargon;
- Get members involved in activity where possible; and
- Minute any action points and circulate them to members.

Making a difference where you work

It can be especially valuable for members in academies/free schools where there is no school rep or union activity to have a health and safety rep. **Remember – any contribution is worthwhile.**

As a health and safety rep, members may approach you with a concern or a problem and seek your advice. You are not expected to know all the answers. Don't forget, the NUT is there to support you in this role, with advice, training and resources. By keeping in touch with your association/division you'll benefit from sharing experience with other NUT reps and officers.

The Role of the Health and Safety Rep

Newly appointed safety reps sometimes worry that the wide range of functions which they are entitled to undertake may also impose some legal duty upon them which goes beyond that of other employees. This is not the case and none of a safety rep's functions imposes any legal duty upon them, for example, safety reps will not be legally responsible in any way if they carry out an inspection and fail to notice a particular hazard.

Some of the tasks an NUT health and safety rep **could** carry out are set out below:

- Keeping up to date with current legal standards and requirements on health, safety and welfare in schools;
- Keeping up to date with NUT policy and guidance and local authority/school policy and guidance;
- Carrying out termly safety inspections at the school;

- Investigating complaints about health, safety and welfare made by members;
- Writing reports to the employer following inspections or investigations;
- Checking that action has been taken to resolve problems reported to the employer;
- Representing members in consultations with the employer; and
- Liaising with the NUT health and safety adviser or NUT regional/Wales office on any problems, particularly where there are serious disagreements with management.

It is always useful to distinguish whether a health and safety concern raised by a member is a collective issue or an individual one.

Individual Issues

Individual issues may range from a relatively minor concern to a more serious issue. Individual issues may include accidents at work, excessively high or low classroom temperatures or work-related stress. Again, it is not necessary for you to be aware of all procedures relating to these matters (although a little bit of knowledge will go a long way, visit www.teachers.org.uk and click on 'Health and Safety' for information). Rather, it is important that you are seen as someone with whom members feel comfortable talking about issues and concerns.

If you have any questions or want some advice please contact your association/division secretary or health and safety adviser.

Many problems that members bring to you as an individual issue will, however, also have a collective aspect. For example, a stress problem linked to a workload issue is unlikely to only affect a single teacher in a school. Members are often surprised to find that they can draw on the support of colleagues and work together to improve the situation.

Collective issues

If the issue or concern affects more than one member, then it is a good idea to get those members together. This could involve a meeting or just an informal chat. Some collective issues may be easily remedied by speaking with management, others may need to be resolved through the school health and safety committee or local authority/employer.

Before dealing with such concerns you need to make sure that the issue is relevant to members and potential members. If we campaign around issues that are important to colleagues, we increase our chances of getting them involved and of effecting positive change in the workplace. Before embarking on a campaign concerning any issue consider if it is:

- Widely felt – does the issue affect enough teachers – either across the whole school/workplace, within a particular department or amongst a specific group?
- Deeply felt – are the teachers affected sufficiently concerned or angry about the issue to want to engage with, and take part in, the campaign?
- Winnable – is there a realistic chance of achieving a concrete victory in relation to the issue via the campaign?

On some issues, such as excessive workload, or concerns about bullying, you and the school rep will be able to work together. There are many areas of overlap between the role of the school rep and health and safety rep.

Building the Union

The NUT is the largest teachers' union thanks to the recruitment work undertaken by our reps. Please liaise with your school rep to ensure that you know who is, and is not, an NUT member in your workplace.

Remember that recruitment is a year round activity. When student teachers join the school please introduce yourself as the NUT health and safety rep. Try to build a rapport with them and highlight the work the NUT does, then ask them to join if they are not already members.

Getting members involved

As well as recruiting new members it would also be useful for you and the school rep to identify other roles in your workplace which members could undertake.

Identifying a number of people willing to do a little will relieve you of workload and create a collective identity.

Getting people active in the NUT is easier if they see some relevance to the activity. Below are some tips on getting members more involved:

- Don't be afraid to ask members to do something for the NUT. After all, it is their union and the worst that can happen is that they say 'no';
- Where possible ask in person rather than by email;
- Be realistic about what you ask members to do;

- Ask members initially to perform small tasks that you think they would be good at or enjoy. As they become more involved you could ask them to take on more responsibility;
- Let members know that their particular help would be appreciated;
- Never refuse an offer of help;
- Be enthusiastic about the importance of the work undertaken.

Talking with management

As NUT health and safety rep it is helpful to establish a dialogue with management. A productive working relationship with management is something to aim for. The key thing to remember is that, when you are talking to management you are speaking as a representative of, and on behalf of, all NUT members and that you have the strength of the membership behind you.

Below are some tips on meeting with management:

- Have a clear agreed agenda before the meeting;
- Have a clear idea of what you want from any meeting by talking to members beforehand;
- Always take notes and never be afraid to ask a question or seek clarification;
- Act in a professional and confident manner; and
- Always report back to members on any outcomes.

Get involved and keep in touch

As an NUT health and safety rep you are already fulfilling one of the most important roles in the Union. But you may want to extend your activity and involvement beyond your workplace, and encourage members to do the same.

If you feel you want to increase your involvement there are plenty of ways to do this:

- Go along to association/division meetings;
- Take up a role in your association/division;
- Engage with local training;
- Attend regional council, where you will meet activists from other areas, share good practice and get valuable information about what is going on in the Union nationally, regionally and locally;
- Attend annual conference. You need to be elected as either a delegate or observer; and
- Get involved in one of the Union's self-organised groups.

Your key point of contact is your association/division secretary or health and safety adviser. If you do not already have their contact details please visit www.teachers.org.uk/contactus where you will find them. They have a wealth of knowledge and expertise you can tap into, never be afraid to get in touch. It is only by understanding the real issues and concerns of its members that the NUT can make a positive impact on the working lives of teachers.

Thank you again for taking on this role – together we can make a difference!

NEED MORE INFORMATION?

If you wish to access more detailed information on the role of a school health and safety rep go to www.teachers.org.uk click on the 'Health and Safety' area, then click on the 'Health and Safety Reps' section, where you will find several documents setting out the role and functions of a rep, along with guidance on health and safety legislation, or click on the link <http://www.teachers.org.uk/healthandsafetyreps>.

Advice and Guidance

If you require advice and guidance on a specific topic then click on the 'Health and Safety Briefings' section where you will find topics listed alphabetically from Asbestos to Voice Care or click on the link <http://www.teachers.org.uk/briefings>.

E-bulletins

A termly health and safety e-mail bulletin from the NUT Health and Safety Unit is sent to health and safety reps and advisers for whom we hold an email address. If you wish to receive these bulletins you can check that we hold a current email address for you, by contacting the Records and Subscriptions Department on 0845 300 1666, or via e-mail at rss@nut.org.uk. The bulletins are also posted in the 'Health and Safety Bulletin' section or click on the link <http://www.teachers.org.uk/healthandsafetyreps/bulletin>.

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