

Breaking Down Barriers

Black Members'
Development Programme
Reps' Newsletter



Usdaw has launched a new education and skills programme for Black members and I want to make sure every rep gets to hear about this.

Right across the trade union movement Black workers are underrepresented as union reps, branch officers, activists and more.

If we want the trade union movement to fully reflect the workers it represents and to strengthen our movement, we need to remove the barriers that prevent Black members from becoming active and developing within our movement.

That's why Usdaw is offering a new development programme for Black activists. The programme is called Breaking Down Barriers and it will support members to develop the knowledge, skills and networks they need to become active and more visible in Usdaw.

Members can self-nominate to the programme or be nominated by someone else.

If you know of a Black member who has completed their Usdaw rep, Health and Safety or ULR training and would like to broaden their skills and get more active please encourage them to apply to the programme.

By Black we mean anyone who is at risk of discrimination or racism because of the colour of their skin. This includes a wide range of members including Asian members, African and Caribbean members, Chinese members and members of mixed heritage or multiple ethnicities.

The programme will run for 12 months at a time and there will be a mix of classroom and non-classroom activities. Members will need a total of 18-20 days off work to take part in the programme and will be supported to get release from work. Where paid release is not possible the Union will reimburse any loss of wages.


Paddy Lillis
General Secretary

Usdaw spoke to some of our most experienced Black reps and activists to ask them why they think the Breaking Down Barriers programme is needed and what they hope it will achieve.

Janet Hankin NEC member



There is lots of work going on within the Trade Union movement regarding tackling racism, not just in workplaces but in our own structures.

I've been in Usdaw for 27 years and haven't seen many Black members coming forward.

I started off as a rep, got involved in my branch and have gone through all the courses. I'm now on the National Executive Committee. I hope my role will give others the confidence to say, "if Janet can do it..."

We already have a network of Black members where we share knowledge and support each other. We have Black members' events too, but we need Black issues on Usdaw's agenda. The Union is aware there is an issue, and this programme will support Black activists to get more involved. It's all very positive for the future.

Challenging racism is on the Union agenda and we will make sure it stays there. Eventually it will be reflected in the structures of the Union. Black members will be more likely to put themselves forward and overcome these barriers if they can see somebody who looks like them.

The only way we can change things is if members come forward for the programme so we know what the barriers are and make sure we are challenging them, making a better path for our Black activists to feel part of Usdaw. It's their Union as well.

Rashel Ahmed



Although Usdaw is doing a great job, there is more to be done helping current members and recruiting new ones, including from different backgrounds and ethnicities. As a Union we need more people developing from these groups. It could be that there is a lack of opportunities given to these specific groups of people.

Having more reps from different backgrounds and who can speak different languages might help.

After becoming a rep, I was given opportunities to go on Stand Down, Academy 1, and now Academy 2. I'm absolutely enjoying it. I'm looking into spotting new talent in our membership and promoting their work too.

There needs to be trust with the Black and Asian communities that there is opportunity. If you feel passionate and feel you have what it takes to contribute to this amazing organisation, go for it.

If talking about this motivates somebody else to get involved, that would make me proud.

Lebo Phakoe



We need to encourage Black members to engage with the Union and for the Union to be inclusive. We don't just need recognition, we need a commitment to action.

In wider Union meetings, people might feel they don't fit in, so don't even feel able to say what the barriers are. This will be a place for Black activists to open up in a safe place and to overcome the barriers they face.

When I started, I lacked confidence, felt fearful of other people's opinions if I was to fail and be alone. But I built confidence within myself to take up other peoples' issues and resolve them. I became Chair of my branch, and progressed from there to become a Regional Councillor.

When I first received training, I had a Black tutor. That put me at ease instantly. Having somebody I could relate to was very important.

The sort of person who would apply is somebody who feels the need to make more of themselves, who wants to make a change. It could be a stepping stone to bigger achievements, whether in Usdaw or personally, thanks to the skills you will develop.

It will give confidence, a sense of belonging, a safe place. Just apply, go for it, and you will learn as you go. We can break down those barriers.



Roger Bourne



The programme will help develop the Black talent that's out there and bring activists through. It should break down the barriers that are in the workplace and in Union structures.

It's an exciting programme. I'm pleased and proud Usdaw are taking the step to deliver it. I feel it shows we are trying to be an inclusive Union.

There are lots of barriers and they are vast. It can be language, cultural differences, problems with management or getting involved in branch structures.

My only barrier has been racism.

The barriers will be different for each and every person. I hope this programme will break them down and give people confidence to take into the workplace.

My advice is to just apply. This could be life changing. It could open doors, build on your skills that you may have already acquired through your Union learning and journey, and provide experiences which empower you, that you can take into other areas.

I was honoured to have been asked to contribute to this programme, sit on the steering groups, and help deliver this to the wider Union. I hope it is successful and will rank alongside other Union initiatives in terms of its impact.

Raktima Sarkar



It's really important that this programme encourages more Black members to get involved and do more.

I had barriers, including the language barrier, which can be a big problem. If you have a lack of understanding of British law, politics and history, you may feel less confident or that you don't fit in.

In my Region, I was the only one from a Black and Ethnic Minority background on Academy 1. And on Academy 2, most people were white British.

I hope this programme will give members enough knowledge, skills and confidence to change their lives and themselves. Not only as a Rep, but as a human being also. This is how Academy 2 helped me.

Don't hesitate. Just take one step, and we will support you a lot. You're not the only one.

At the last ADM, there were a lot of new faces from different backgrounds. That was really encouraging. More people can involve themselves. People will feel, "it's not just me, there are people from the same background. If they can do it, I can do it also."

Maureen Loxley



We need to empower our Black members in their workplace and in the Union.

So many of us do various roles, but when you look around, representation of Black members is poor. You are sort of limited. We need this Union to reflect us, so we can make a difference, and build trust. When you get so much

knock-back, you tend to lose your confidence, interest and self-esteem. People should be able to become whatever they like.

Sometimes Black members say they feel disheartened when they see there have been Union events where there are no Black members, or not many.

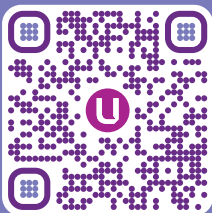
This development programme will help make us more visible within the Union. But everyone else needs to buy into it.

I have been in the Union for over 40 years. If it's your first time at a Union event and you can't see anybody from your background or colour, it's very daunting.

I remember thinking I can't see anybody else that looks like me. But if I didn't go either, there wouldn't have been any Black reps.

I'm glad we are seeing more Black members on Regional Councils for instance. We need other reps to see the potential in Black members and buy into this.

I'm sure anyone joining the programme won't be on their own. They will have someone to coach them and give advice, making sure their potential is picked up.



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find out
more.





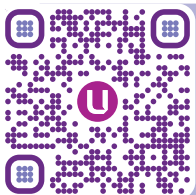
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We are doing this because we need to break down the barriers that stand in the way of their getting involved in the Union.

Are you, or do you know, of a Black member who has completed their Usdaw rep, H&S rep or ULR training, and would like to broaden their skills and get more active in the Union?

*By Black we mean anyone who is at risk of discrimination or racism because of the colour of their skin, including members of mixed heritage.



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Contact us at breakingdownbarriers@usdaw.org.uk
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