



Adapting to the new normal for trade unions

TUC Digital Lab - August 2021

Acknowledgements

This report arises from a TUC Digital Lab workshop held on 17 March 2021 with members of the TUC Executive Committee and General Council, or senior nominees.

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CAST

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Introduction

2020 was a year of drastic change for all of society. Trade unions were not exempt from the effects of the pandemic and the response to it. We had to work quickly to get operations functioning with closed offices, safety concerns and huge disruption in our members' workplaces.

Digital played a large part in this adaptation. Denied physical meetings and conferences, and with travel options severely limited, there was no choice but to move as much activity online as possible.

Across the TUC's 48 affiliated unions, we saw a range of experiences. Many had recently moved to cloud office systems and CRM tools. These were helpful in overcoming initial hurdles as they enabled a quicker switch for staff and activists to working from home. Other unions brought forward change projects or enabled wider small-scale innovations across their organisations.

There has been a lot of good practice applied, and a lot of new ground broken in digital transformation. All unions have positive stories to tell about how they have coped. But there is a big opportunity for us in establishing common practice as well as isolated examples of good practice.

We all have something to learn from each other's experience of 2020 that can help us adapt better to 2021 and beyond.

Towards a new normal

At the TUC Digital Lab, we worked with a group of senior leaders and officials from across 19 TUC-affiliated trade unions. At an online workshop in partnership with [CAST](#) (the Centre for the Acceleration of Social Technologies), we collaboratively mapped a series of common challenges faced by the union movement after a year of adapting to the effects of Covid-19.

Some of these challenges have been caused by the response to the pandemic. Some are longer term or wider issues that the pandemic has increased the urgency or extent of dealing with. But in all these cases, these challenges are likely to stay with us for the long term.

We've grouped the resulting challenges into four main themes:

1. Maintaining the increased engagement level post Covid.
2. Balancing diverging experiences of work for members and staff.
3. Adapting union structures to fit the new reality.
4. Building relationships where contact is predominantly online.

Under each, we identified questions posed by our challenges. These are phrased as "How Might We" statements – a method used by digital design practitioners to establish a common understanding of a problem in a way that helps start to generate possible solutions.

Where possible, we have looked to show good practice from the union movement's experience, or from work outside the movement that holds transferable learning.

We've also suggested further reading links where people want to delve into other examples in more detail. We intend to build on this work by developing more in-depth sharable case studies, as well as publicising those published by unions themselves.

As this area is developing so fast, we'd value comments and suggestions from all our union stakeholders. Contact TUC Digital Lab manager John Wood at jwood@tuc.org.uk

Challenge 1: Maintaining the increased engagement level post Covid

The rapid move to using video conferencing and other digital communication and campaigning tools during the pandemic has allowed unions to engage with larger numbers of members.

Coupled with members' urgent need to access covid-related information, the new approaches have been very successful for many unions. Website access is up, and online enquiries have increased.

For union events and training, earlier barriers to attendance such as geographical distance, are much less of an issue. Unions have been able to organise a wider range of events, with shorter notice and associated costs, and these have been taken up by a wider range of members.

Bringing in more people has led to a broadening of activism, with many unions reporting a growth in new reps or members supporting campaigns.

A challenge for unions will be sustaining this level of activity once the urgent need for content subsides. Continuing to understand and meet members' needs as widely as possible is key if unions want to maintain this momentum.

1.1: How might we better understand the content members need?

Unions generate a lot of content. We have policy programmes for our various industries and key campaigns, reports of activity and governance, legal and safety advice resources, training for activism and professional development.

It is all generated to address needs perceived by the union's democratic or professional structures. Some of it is very effective, but we can sometimes end up producing materials that don't reach very far amongst the membership, or speak well to prospective members. When we look at how members describe their own priority problems, or non-members, we can sometimes find a disconnect with what we're publishing.

Conducting more regular interviews with users can help a union better understand their members' outlook. Even a small sample of interviews can yield more insight than the member surveys that we are often more used to running. In general people are good at talking about their opinions, but less so at accurately appraising their own real-life behaviours. If we only rely on surveys, we can risk giving people the answers they think we

want to hear, and not understanding what they are really likely to do in the situation we're interested in.

A good mix of in-depth interviews alongside survey results and actual usage data (derived from website usage, search terms or email engagement metrics) can help us build up a better picture of what's needed.

Armed with a more accurate set of member needs and design personas for specific user types, the union can produce the content that members self-identify a need for. It can also more effectively lead them to be interested in content that is valuable from the union's own perspectives.

Case study:

Prospect built engagement plans for digital communications by mapping a member's life cycle with the union, from joining an industry with a junior role through to retirement. Against this, they mapped the needs the member might have at each point, what the union could offer and the points of interaction with the union's processes.

Doing this helped them to better understand the context in which members would use the union's resources and to develop emails or website content for specific points. For example, they realised interest in the union would be at a high point right after joining and that members were to some extent still making their mind up about how positively they viewed the union.

They used this insight to plan a new onboarding journey that introduced the union, signposted key support, tracked their views and presented members with next step opportunities to get involved in activism or campaigns.

Links:

- [Getting more out of your union's content](#)
- [Getting started with service design for unions](#)

1.2 How might we target content to the right people?

With all organisations communicating predominantly via digital channels, competition for members' attention is growing.

Unions often produce generic monthly newsletters by email. But where these cover a wide range of user interests, they can end up with low open rates, or see many members unsubscribing. Segmenting members and delivering them a greater proportion of content that more closely matches their specific needs will help ensure more people use and act on our communications.

Over the lockdown, several unions have worked quickly to update older membership systems, which often did not link member data to communications tools as responsively as needed. Modern CRM (Customer Relationship Management) platforms can help target messages to members based on attributes such as sector, region, or interest group.

The accuracy of digital contact information held in these systems is also critically important, doubly so in situations where casual face to face conversations between reps and members are no longer as easy. Many unions report that whilst they have good coverage of members' email contact details, they estimate a significant proportion have changed without the member updating them.

Case study:

RCM worked with the TUC Digital Lab to devise pilot interventions to improve member data accuracy. A facilitated workshop brought together people from across the union's membership related functions to explore the issue. It identified specific points in the course of someone's membership at which the union might be more likely to lose contact, and where there might be opportunities in union processes to avoid or rectify that.

From this, a prototype was chosen, using free or cheap tools to test the idea. It focused on the switch from student midwife course to professional placement, where members might change from a university email address to an NHS email address and lose contact with the union if they didn't think to update.

Testing the assumption that they would keep their personal mobile during this change, an SMS-based update journey was piloted with a segment of members. The project found a useful increase in members updating contact data, which justified the increased focus on making the process easy for the member, and which gave the union further insights for their ongoing work on data accuracy.

Links:

- [Using SMS to verify and correct member data: RCM case study](#)
- [Message testing for recruitment campaigns with BECTU](#)
- [Data and unions: Digital Lab workshop report](#)

1.3 How might we use content to engage with new workers?

Once we understand how our target audiences perceive their needs, unions will have a better idea of how to develop content and services that are able to attract them and convince them to engage with the union.

Optimised content can help attract new users from online search, even if they are unfamiliar with the union to start with. Or it can be a base for promoting the union through digital advertising, targeted to prospective members by location, interests or employer.

In understanding user engagement, it can be helpful to view a new user's willingness to give the union their attention and to share their personal data as being a kind of currency. The union needs to offer something that is understood to be valuable in return in order to start a relationship with the non-member.

Consider what data you need to gather for your recruitment campaign to be effective. Asking for too much information, especially information users might be reluctant to provide, such as their employer, will reduce the number who get involved. This can be overcome if the offer is perceived as valuable enough and the request is appropriate to the context.

For example, a TUC pilot offering a redundancy advice webinar with a legal expert asked for useful organising detail on a user's employer or workplace when registering, explaining this would help the session offer more useful tailored advice. Over 70% responded to this optional field as a result.

Unions also need to consider how they manage an engagement journey with new users, demonstrating the union's value proposition by relating it to users' self-perceived needs. For groups who have little understanding of unionism, this work in relationship building will be worth the investment as it will be more effective in many cases than just a simple recruitment ask.

Case study:

At the start of lockdown, seafarers were hit by confusion at the border as they tried to join their ships in other countries. Nautilus developed a downloadable template letter for them to carry and show to Border Force. By placing this obviously valuable content on their website behind a basic registration form, they were able to capture consent to ongoing communication with the union from many seafarers who were not yet members.

They aim to develop a strand of support communications on the back of this work, mobilising them to back union campaigns and showing them more of the benefits of joining the union.

Links:

- [Answering big questions by starting small – developing the WorkSmart prototype](#)
- [Using online advice content to help unions find and engage with non-members](#)

1.4 How might we broaden engagement to excluded groups?

Engagement with union materials and events has risen dramatically during 2020 but is still not universal across membership. As well as sustaining these engagement levels, a challenge for unions will be reaching out to other groups who still aren't getting involved.

A greater focus on evaluation of events and key resources will help a union to find where they might not be reaching all sections of the membership.

Digital tools can be used to increase the accessibility of online events - providing live subtitles or transcripts of events, or recordings for use afterwards. Also consider platforms and methods of participation that don't require high levels of equipment – many members will only have a phone to get involved.

But access is also about timings and presentation. Branch meetings held in person in the evenings may traditionally have excluded those who lived further from the workplace or who had caring responsibilities. Many unions have found that attendance has risen and broadened as these meetings have moved online. Day time events may suit union staff to organise but be restrictive for activists who don't have good facility time.

Digital also allows us to broaden our speaker panels and increase diversity in events. People who may not have been able to commit the time to present to physical events may find it easier to engage online. Producing events that better reflect the communities we want to serve will be effective in extending our reach and engagement over time.

Case study:

NEU responded to members' need for information during the pandemic with an extensive programme of live online briefings, some of which gained an audience into the hundreds of thousands.

Recognising the increase in live content gave them a problem in providing BSL interpretation, they evaluated alternative options for improving the captioning available to participants. They have used an AI product Otter.ai, as a minimum level of service for events, adding live captions and transcripts to everything they offer, at better quality than the free offerings on platforms like Zoom. And for major or critical events they invest in a more expensive hybrid AI and human operator product verbit.ai to improve this quality still further and ensure greater accessibility.

They also sought to improve the range of people who could get involved in events by hosting meetings in the evenings after work and by broadening the range of platforms that they streamed content to, letting users follow the event in a way they found easiest.

Links:

- [Responding to the coronavirus crisis – NEU case study](#)

1.5 How might we boost the effectiveness of our online meetings?

Most unions have expanded their use of online meetings and events during 2020. Faced with a need to convene people for governance, training, or professional development, use of platforms like Zoom and Teams has become commonplace.

Effective online meetings and events share many characteristics. Presentation and facilitation are important to get right and investing in the development of staff and activists to host calls is worthwhile, as is ensuring they have access to high quality equipment and connectivity.

Safeguarding and moderation have also proven important. Many organisations' calls have been disrupted over the last year, including some unions. It pays to have colleagues who can advise on how to set up meetings for different scenarios, and moderation policies agreed in advance to keep events safe.

Unions have been able to make online meetings more engaging by involving a wider range of speakers than had previously been possible to present in physical meetings. Expert guests from other organisations or overseas are more able to spare the time to join an online meeting than they are to factor in travel time and costs too.

One area where unions could increase effectiveness of online events is in devoting more focus to event joining journeys. Signing people up to attend an event is only half the battle – we also need to make sure they actually join on the day. Attendees will have many competing calls on their time, and if an event is not happening in person, it can be easy to assume you won't be missed and decide not to join. Technical complexity or confusing details can also make people give up at the last minute.

Case study:

For the TUC's Organise 2020 festival, we operated a dedicated email journey for people who signed up for the overall event. This gave news on key speakers and sessions as they were released, building awareness of the event. We also enabled automatic reminders with one click joining links an hour beforehand for individual sessions, prompting people to attend sessions they had selected.

This approach paid off, with consistently over 70% of those registering actually joining each session.

Links:

- [Making a virtual out of a necessity – NASUWT case study](#)
- [Choosing the right video conferencing platforms for your union](#)
- [Improving your video call presence – a how to guide](#)

1.6 How might we broaden engagement in union learning?

Training activists becomes even more important for unions in times of change. Existing topics have had to be revised in terms of Covid-19, especially around safety at work. And the change in working patterns has highlighted the need for greater focus on digital skills.

Many unions have responded with programmes of bite-sized digital learning, delivered through web-based materials or webinar events.

Webinars in particular are easy and cheap to provide, so they can be developed for highly topical or timely subjects as well as for longer term ones. Offered to activists or members via email, and if held at times that are found to be convenient for the learners, they can easily attract more members to take part than would be able to join a physical union course in the past.

Whilst it's easier to run as a presentation rather than an open meeting, platforms like Zoom and Crowdcast offer ways to introduce interactivity through Q&A and polling. Recordings of events can be circulated to those unable to attend.

One challenge here is to maintain the sense of community that union learning generates from cohorts taking courses together. This can be helpful in building the personal links we need to strengthen our wider union movement. Designing courses to be flexible can be helpful in tackling this. For example, new TUC organising course materials are designed in such a way that they can be taken as individual stand-alone self-guided learning where reps are time poor, or joined together into a broader course to be supported by a tutor and with exposure to a wider cohort of learners at the same time.

Case study:

By moving to a greater use of webinars for activist education, TUC Education dramatically increased the number of learning interactions they had with union reps over 2020. Importantly though, analysing the people who were taking online courses, they found there were a far greater number of people taking only a few short interactions, whereas previous years had seen a smaller number of reps (often those with good facility time arrangements to allow time out and travel) taking a larger number of courses each.

The change reflects both a growing diversity in the demographics of reps taking the new courses - with many more women and BAME reps engaging - as well as reps from a greater range of sectors, where facility time is not as common.

Links:

- [How to use webinars to reach workers and win change](#)
- [Running effective webinars and online events \(VIDEO\)](#)

1.7 How might we collaborate directly with more members?

Digital communications have been very effective in broadcasting a message to members more quickly and more frequently during the pandemic, and this has been a useful quick win for many unions to focus on. But just as unions offline are more about member-to-member communications than they are about the centre to members, there is a lot of potential for using digital more deeply.

A set of techniques collectively described as “big organising” have grown out of Bernie Sanders’ two Democratic primary campaigns in the US. In contrast to the centrally directed mobilisation approach of much digital campaigning, these attempt to use digital tools to scale traditional organising, letting members step up to take a leadership role in the campaign and giving them the digital tools they need to operate with initiative, aligned into a common campaign framework.

This might involve enabling members to contact others through phone banking or SMS tools, or giving them tools to take on leadership in managing their own campaign events or online petitions.

Digital also offers greater scope for crowdsourcing responses to allow the wider membership convenient ways to feed into policy or campaigns. This could be through consultations conducted by survey or in online workshops, or through dedicated group decision making tools such as ThoughtExchange or Loomio.

Case study:

UCU have expanded their use of peer-to-peer SMS contact during the pandemic.

The union first piloted this tactic with the TUC Digital Lab in 2019, enabling branch activists to have personal conversations at scale and speed with local members in a ballot campaign. Using the ThruText platform, activists were able to mass send SMS messages to members as personal contacts that members could respond to.

The PC based platform added personalised information and let activists move between multiple conversations, saving time with stock common responses. They managed to hold hundreds of personal conversations in a fraction of the time it would take by phone, and effectively deal with process questions like lost papers.

UCU organised a large number of industrial action ballots during the pandemic, following the government’s disastrous planning and implementation of the return to universities, and an increase in redundancies across universities and colleges. UCU have grown their training programme in using ThruText and many branches around the country have been able to use the platform in their own ballots to raise engagement and turnout.

On average, turnouts across the union’s statutory ballots have exceeded 50% since the union adopted ThruText, an important milestone for the union in meeting ballot thresholds.

Links:

- [Successful peer to peer digital campaigns \(VIDEO\)](#)

1.8 How might we counter Zoom fatigue?

As more and more interactions have moved online, online meetings have ceased to be a novelty for many people and have become a regular part of union business.

Zoom fatigue is a form of burnout, linked to the greater effort it takes to play an active part in online meetings than physical meetings. For example, it's harder to read people's tone online; attendees feel a greater need to present themselves well on camera at all times; and balancing a chaotic home environment or connection problems when meeting people professionally can add other stresses.

Also, many members will have had several calls in a day for work already, and other calls with family or friends. Having more calls with the union on top of this may sometimes feel too much.

So whilst online meetings are very powerful, unions need to be aware that we can't overuse them. We can't replace long but varied offline events like annual conferences with a similar length of time spent sitting in front of a screen. Shorter meetings and factoring in breaks and space between sessions has become even more important online. And mixing up session formats for longer events can help hold people's attention better.

Case study:

FDA dramatically increased the number of online union meetings and courses they held during the pandemic. Given their members were also heavily using this technology for work, they wanted to find a way to support them in dealing with burnout, which counterintuitively has involved more online calls.

They have held regular and very eclectic wellness sessions online, with members, staff and external experts hosting informal calls on a huge range of interests, from yoga to homebrewing.

Feedback has shown this has helped members unwind, as well as foregrounding the depth of community behind the union and helping build new bonds in an innovative way.

Challenge 2: Balancing diverging experiences of work for members and staff

Over the course of the pandemic, our members' experiences have been incredibly varied.

We heard examples of people switching easily to working from home, while others found this more challenging either due to a lack of tech/data infrastructure, or perhaps because their accessibility requirements weren't met by the new ways of working. For others, working from home simply wasn't an option due to the nature of their work, or indeed the nature of their living arrangements.

As the economy reopens, many furloughed members workers will have to catch up on months of rapid change in the organisations. There will also be work needed to support people who have started a new job during the lockdowns, many of whom have not met their new colleagues or been properly inducted into the culture of their organisations.

Similarly, as furlough ends, and the state of our economy becomes more apparent, whole industries and job functions will be subjected to pressure for radical change or suffer dramatic reductions in employment levels. Unions will need to stay ahead of the changing issues for the UK workforce and support members more responsively through challenging times.

And as employers themselves, unions face many of these same challenges within their own staff, many of whom may have been furloughed, or find themselves in areas of operation that the union has less scope to pursue.

2.1 How do we bring the next wave of members and staff up to speed?

Workers' experiences have diverged considerably over lockdown. For those working from home there has been a move to digital, with many learning new skills and technologies very quickly.

Others had roles that could not be performed from home, or their businesses had to close. Furlough meant their jobs were protected, but they may have become out of touch with the changed situation and have a lot to catch up on. However, furlough regulations do allow workers to undertake training. Taking advantage of this could help them return with greater confidence if access to digital learning can be arranged for them.

Even where the jobs they will return to retain broadly the same set of skills as before, many will need a greater awareness of workplace technologies in order to play a full role in a wider workplace community that will now include others working at distance rather than in

the physical workplace. Consideration should be given to technology access and training for all roles in the workplace.

This divergence has also affected many activists and members in their union roles. Where they've had the skills and access to equipment, there has been scope for many branches to move online very effectively and for reps to engage well with members through messaging or video calls. Other branches have not been able to do so much here though, and we will need to support them in making up ground or risk a divide within our unions as we adopt new ways of working longer term.

Case study:

Accord developed a series of briefings for reps using Microsoft Sway, a presentation package that forms part of the cloud package Office 365.

A series of bite-sized modules helped people get up to speed quickly with the basics around new topics where existing knowledge had to be updated or where familiar processes had changed. The union was able to measure impact by incorporating quizzes and feedback in the form of Microsoft Forms survey and gain an overview of performance by integrating it with Microsoft Lists for relevant managers to view in Sharepoint.

2.2 How do we support workers in a rapidly changing economy?

Many sectors have seen huge disruption over the pandemic. Activities relying on physical presence, such as hospitality and high street retail have suffered major losses in business and many employers have closed or face an uncertain future.

The furlough scheme, negotiated by unions has helped to smooth the transition period for millions of workers. But there will be shocks felt in many companies as this ends.

Unions will have a role in helping affected workers retrain to move to new jobs in their industry or other industries – a task made harder by the government's abolition of the Union Learning Fund. Online learning could play a strong role here.

And many unions will need to develop responsive content plans to deal with members' urgent need to know what's happening to their industry in a time of rapid change and how the union is responding. Video briefings from senior and expert staff will be popular. Key content can be developed in blogs and on social media and making these as open as possible will enable members to share it with easily colleagues, potentially offering a channel to recruit more members and build strength for any negotiations.

Case study:

Postal workers were a lifeline for their communities throughout the pandemic. After years of very difficult industrial relations and service cuts, a new CEO is starting to

look at the potential for growing the business to build on this community role, and the CWU has scope for advancing their own long-held vision for change.

The union is working on a major member engagement programme, using many of the same tactics they did during the dispute. It's aimed at establishing agreement on the kinds of change members support, and the conditions that might be required to fairly balance big changes like Sunday deliveries. Big WhatsApp broadcasts and Facebook Live events let the union take their message to a large audience, as well as providing a responsive sounding board of member opinion.

Using interactive channels is important to build members' trust in the process and their confidence to get involved. And members' thirst for information on the changes means the union needs to plan the timing of these events carefully. They are used to receiving hundreds of responses during and immediately after posting, and it's vital for leaders to be online to engage with questions as they are asked.

2.3 How do we support staff to reskill to meet new demand?

Many union processes are paper based and labour intensive, with less scope for member self-service than many companies or organisations. Unions often have a staffing profile that requires more administrative support than typical larger NGOs in order to service these. Many of these processes have had to undergo significant changes to keep running under lockdown.

Where staff have been furloughed, there is a risk that the new digital infrastructure and processes that have grown up during the pandemic will continue, and there could be less demand on their time when things start to return.

But moving to digital doesn't automatically mean needing fewer people. In many cases, automating processes can free up significant amounts of staff time. At the same time, there are new paths opening up which can make use of colleagues' experience in related but different ways.

For example, unions may need a greater investment in managing relationships with members. Digital communications in unions up until now has worked in a broadcast way, where a small central effort can scale at little additional cost. But when we consider mainstreaming digital across a union's functions, it can be as much about opening up new potential for high value interactions with members. Some unions are broadening their member contact teams to include multichannel one-to-one conversations. Whether on chat, email or social media, there will be a need for people who understand the union to support members, help them access union services, and have organising conversations.

Also there may be a greater staff requirement in the digital transformation itself. Skills at collecting and interpreting data will be extremely useful to the union in analysing how new initiatives are working and how to improve them.

Case study:

When PCS developed a new membership system using Salesforce, they recognised the importance of building skills in house if they were going to be able to take advantage of their new system to rework organisational processes. They formed a new digital projects team, with staff drawn from across the union who were interested in expanding their data and IT skills.

Making use of Salesforce's extensive online training resources, their team qualified in developing new applications and used their knowledge to help colleagues in different departments find ways to modernise their old processes, which were often paper based and labour intensive.

Now they are looking to a second phase of the project, they plan to train more colleagues in agile digital project management.

2.4 How do we deal with the increased surveillance of home workers?

The move to home working was welcomed by unions as a way of keeping many office-based workers safe, where they didn't need to be taking risks attending a workplace during the pandemic. It has also been popular with a large section of workers, who will likely want to continue a greater degree of flexibility in where they work once offices reopen.

But managing a home-based workforce has proved to be a concern for many employers, and there have been numerous stories of this technologically enabled flexibility also being used to monitor workers more closely than ever before.

Digital surveillance will be a key battleground in workers' rights over the coming years. It is rightly unpopular with workers and leads to a loss of trust in the work relationship and an increase in work related stress.

Unions have useful rights in this area, derived from data protection legislation. But exercising these will require an investment in reps' skills and knowledge.

Case study:

Union reps could be effective in negotiating with employers around data and surveillance issues, but the knowledge involved can make it hard to engage without support.

Prospect have developed resources to help reps understand and scrutinise Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) conducted by employers. A DPIA is a key tool in analysing the privacy risks in any new system and a legal requirement.

The union created a downloadable toolkit to help reps understand the real-world implications of workplace data rights and make use of this important point of leverage, alongside campaigning for changes to improve workplace rights in this area.

Links:

- [Data Protection Impact Assessments: Prospect guide for union representatives](#)

2.5 How might we support workers in developing fairer home working patterns?

We are already seeing indications that many large employers will offer hybrid working models in the future. And that a significant majority of the work force has a preference for flexible working, and for working from home where possible.

However, the rise in enforced home working has been accompanied by a significant drop in all other forms of flexible working arrangements since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. This creates the risk of a two-tier workforce on flexible working, with divisions marked by income, age and geography.

Unions will need to anticipate the risks that could result from employers unilaterally devising new patterns of work. These include:

- “Always-on” digital work, where the boundaries between work and homelife become so blurred they disappear altogether.
- Closure of offices as a result of reduced need, forcing those who do not want this (including those whose home is not an appropriate workspace) to continue home based working.
- Discrimination against those who would prefer to continue to work fully or partially remotely- a group where women and disabled people are likely to be overrepresented.
- And the introduction of remote working being used as a cover for undermining workers’ other conditions.

Given the popularity of home working amongst those workers who have been exposed to it, this is also a changed context for unions. It will need to inform our organising strategies and mechanisms, if we are to remain relevant to these workers.

Case study:

The TUC has devised guidelines for responsible ongoing flexible working and working-from-home arrangements.

Draft principles so far include: arrangements being open to all, voluntary and open to change; genuine flexibility for both worker and employer; protection from discrimination; fair access to training and development; trust and transparency of decisions; privacy and clear work-life boundaries; access to unions; safe working practices and employers covering work related costs; a commitment to communication and a collective experience of work.

Links:

- [The future of flexible work](#)
- [Negotiating the new homeworking landscape – LRD guide for reps](#)

2.6 How might we preserve work life balance for staff and reps?

Whilst digital channels have allowed union work to continue during the pandemic, the ability to be always on has often raised expectations on our staff and reps. Many people report higher workloads, especially during the first lockdown whilst many new systems were still getting running.

The effort made clearly shows the commitment of people across the movement to protecting members' jobs and health. But it's also not something that can be sustained indefinitely.

This is not a new situation. When the TUC launched our first online community for reps in 2003, academic research into the network showed that as well as helping reps work more effectively and cut support calls to their union FTOs, it was also leading them to take on additional union work in supporting others, potentially increasing workloads and stress for some rather than reducing it.

Researching the impacts of tech and changed working patterns on reps will be important in helping to safeguard them from burnout. Involving reps directly in the design of new tools and processes as well will also help unions to ensure that they are genuinely helping reps use their time effectively, rather than adding to the burden on them.

Interventions that will be needed range from basic resources like providing people with useful forms of words to use on out of office messages, and campaigning for the right to disconnect, through to greater focus on mental health in the workforce, where the situation might be causing bigger problems.

Case study:

The TUC introduced a system of mental health first-aiders. These volunteers from across the staff were introduced working with staff union reps and publicised through the union. They were trained to spot if colleagues might be having difficulties and signpost them to help and were entitled to take time to intervene if they saw serious need.

This has since been complemented by provision of subscriptions to mental health support app MyMindPal for any staff who want to use it.

Challenge 3: Adapting union structures to fit the new reality

In responding to the challenges of the pandemic, new tools and approaches have been put in place, often at short notice. Some of these ways of working challenge the traditional rules, relationships, and hierarchies within unions.

We heard examples of unions where reps could communicate more freely and openly using WhatsApp, but bypassing traditional structures. In other cases, union members have been given in effect direct lines of communication with General Secretaries which, whilst opening new relationships, could also bypass union democratic structures such as branches and sectors.

As things return to normal, there will be a tension between continuing to run meetings and activities online – with all the benefits that brings - and returning to face-to-face activities which might work better for some members and align with traditional expectations.

There are concerns were around the accessibility of hybrid events, inclusivity in general of online events for people without access to tech/data and how to avoid duplication.

3.1 Democratic processes moved online temporarily. How might we find a longer-term balance for this?

Union conference season in 2020 coincided with the first period of lockdown. Many unions cancelled their 2020 conferences at short notice, referring conference business to their national executives instead. Others postponed and were able to run limited online conferences later in the year. For 2021, most unions are now operating online conferences, with delegates on video conference and voting on motions handled online.

Union governance adapted for the most part very well to the forced move online. Online executive meetings for national unions or for union sectors and regions have sometimes allowed for greater attendance than physical meetings. The reduction in travel time either side of a meeting might mean that an urgent matter arising on the same day can be fitted around a meeting more easily.

We have also heard of significant cost savings for unions in reducing travel and accommodation budgets that had previously been necessary for governance meetings at all levels. This has especially been the case for unions that have an international membership.

Case study:

Usdaw had to cancel their March 2020 National Executive meeting, which fell just a few days into the first lockdown. But they soon moved to meeting online, using Zoom

with documentation emailed to everyone in advance. This brought challenges in supporting both National Executive members and many senior officers as, whilst everyone already had a tablet or PC, few had much experience of video calling by that point. Dealing with online documentation was also a particular problem, as attendees were not usually used to reading that volume of content on screen.

With 2021's lockdown ending, the union tried its first hybrid meeting. Most National Executive members came to the office's main boardroom, whilst others joined online. This had been made easier by Usdaw's move during lockdown to a new-build HQ in Salford Quays. The modern building has large screens in the boardroom and meeting rooms, and mobile screens. Attendees joining on Zoom can all be visible on screen to attendees in the room, helping give a sense of equal participation. And the boardroom camera is set to follow speakers automatically, so online participants can see each in-person speaker in the same way as they can see other online speakers.

The union now wants to encourage the majority of National Executive members to attend physically as that is what the vast majority want. It is much easier to chair a physical meeting but the option of a hybrid meeting is a useful addition. For those who would otherwise need long journeys or overnight stays to come from the South or Scotland for just a two-hour meeting, diary commitments sometimes mean they have to drop out of participating. Being able to fall back to joining online should help get fuller participation more regularly than had been possible pre-pandemic.

And Usdaw are reviewing their approach as they gain experience. Online is especially expected to be useful when emergency Executive meetings are needed – helping them fit around diaries at shorter notice and with fewer complications. They may also consider a mix of online and hybrid meetings, depending on what proves best in terms of the greatest participation and best quality of meeting.

Links:

- [Supporting union governance in digital transformation](#)

3.2 How might we avoid duplication of offline and online?

Whilst staging online events and meetings has brought overall cost savings from physical only events for many unions, it has still required expense. Major events still need external production support and new costs have been incurred for digital platforms and IT equipment. Staff time is still required to perform the same functions, albeit through different channels.

When physical activity becomes viable again, there is a risk that we will see demand for both a return to offline, as well as a retention of online. Unions could end up paying twice on workload and costs, for less than twice the return.

Unions should be clear where possible which use cases will be serviced by digital technologies going forward and which will return to physical form.

Face-to-face may be the gold standard, but that isn't something we need to reach for every time. Rather, a clear and agreed view of which situation is best served by which method will help us get the best value in servicing each event.

Some events may be served by a hybrid model, with online channels offering access to a physical meeting for maximum participation. Care should be taken to balance such events, for example holding hybrid plenaries, where the format works for either type of participant, but splitting breakout rooms into all-online or all-physical attendees, to minimise disruption in collaboration.

Other events may work well staggered, with infrequent in person events helping to build community, and business happening more efficiently online for events in between.

Where possible, unions should also seek to minimise the growth of "shadow IT" - new digital services purchased and controlled by departments outside the policies and oversight of central IT. This brings with it data risks, but also potentially spiralling costs. Restricting the union to a smaller number of preferred platforms for different functions also makes them easier to support for users.

For example, some unions report that branches have purchased their own individual Zoom accounts in order to get online at short notice. This has enabled some great work to take place, but the union can end up paying far more than they would by centrally providing accounts on an enterprise plan.

It could also lead to far greater complication in dealing with members' data rights under GDPR if personal registration data is being stored in multiple accounts away from central oversight.

Case study:

BOSTU moved to online only union conferences at their AGMs in 2020 and 2021. The move brought unexpected benefits for them. From a normal offline audience of between 50 to 100, they increased to more than 200 when the events went digital (more than one in six of their members).

In a large part this was because their members work in small units, where it is hard to get cover during the working day. The online conference ran Friday afternoon, when it is often easier to get time away from work rosters and Monday evening, when members were at home. As a result, many more were able to take part.

In planning for their 2022 events, the union are looking at a hybrid model. They want to move back to physical events, to gain the networking benefit, but also keep the benefits of wider digital access. They hope to do this by using large screens in the conference room to bring in members at home, and by retaining the outside work time hours where possible.

3.3 How might we protect and further the new routes to power that can enable a union movement to be more effective?

Unions have a well-developed model for recruiting and reps and supporting branches as a way for members to get involved in the union. This has remained remarkably constant over decades. However, many of the ways we operate were designed for an era where collaboration at distance or over time was cumbersome and prohibitively expensive.

We are also finding it harder to recruit reps as mainstream expectations change. As things stand, half our current reps are likely to retire within a decade.

If we were designing a union branch from scratch in 2021, it would likely look different in many ways. It would still be grounded in the values of the movement and in the understanding that all action needs to reinforce the collective. But its branch structures, processes and roles might be more flexible, allowing more people to contribute in a greater variety of ways.

For some unions, the pandemic has seen a revitalisation of branches, as members who previously could not (or did not want to) attend evening meetings in the workplace have been able to join remotely in greater numbers and have their voices heard in branch decisions. This engagement has been particularly important to unions that have needed to broaden participation during urgent campaigns related to Covid-safe working.

There is a risk that if things return to the old ways of working after the pandemic, then the engagement levels will similarly revert to where they were before. Branch leaderships may need support in making the transition to working in some of these ways longer term, in terms of training, equipment and union supported platforms for engaging directly with their members more effectively.

Case study:

CWU established a new branch for tech workers during 2020. United Tech and Allied Workers was formed by members of the London chapter of activist group Tech Workers' Coalition. Tech is a particularly under-unionised sector and UTAW is an attempt to find a vehicle for unionisation that could speak more to this group of workers who are unfamiliar with a traditional union offer.

It is supported by dedicated national officers in the CWU, smoothing the interface with the wider union, but its lay leadership (most of whom had never been union members before UTAW) and members have a lot of freedom in designing the infrastructure, rules and processes under which it operates.

The branch maintains distinct branding and communications that help it appeal more to tech workers. But it also operates a mostly separate technical infrastructure, collaborating online in ways that come more naturally to these "digital natives" than traditional union branch processes.

3.4 How might we align rapid change with our rulebooks?

Unions have been kept stable and sustainable over the years by their internal democracies, which set the rules they operate under.

Union rulebooks vary a lot in scope and detail, and there are different procedures for changing the rules – often only at specific rule change conferences, taking place alongside national conference only on alternate years.

Where union rules are more prescriptive about the detail of processes, these can cause problems when those processes need to change to keep up with modern expectations of them, or to make the most of new opportunities under the spirit rather than the letter of the laws.

Unions might find it useful to identify where rules are too prescriptive, and plan in ways to review them at future rule change conferences, so that the principles behind the rules can be retained and applied more flexibly to new circumstances as they arise.

There is an analogy here with the legislation preventing unions from using anything other than postal voting for statutory ballots. The technology was written into the rules when they were made, rather than specifying ideals of independent expert scrutiny and data integrity, which could have been reinterpreted for current technology.

3.5 How might we keep innovation happening?

Necessity is the mother of invention, and during the last year that urgent need has inspired many new ways of working. But as the crisis subsides, it could be easy to slacken the pace of change or even roll back.

Building an innovation culture in the union has been particularly important in the context of the pandemic, which has dramatically accelerated the rate of change and demanded fast responses. Innovation has been happening right across unions, from individual branches adopting new approaches to organising themselves during social distancing, through to unions centrally developing new tools and services.

There is a danger potentially in fragmentation, but there has also been a great benefit in testing many new approaches. Unions should be uncovering and celebrating the innovation that's taken place, analysing which interventions have had the most effect and devising ways to develop them further and spread good practice learned.

The Digital Lab's 8 principles for union digital transformation are a good place to start in establishing a culture that can help unions take advantage of the advantages digital design offers for innovation.

Case study:

Prospect have tried to develop ways of working across the union which foster innovation. They have brought key expertise together and focused more on trying new approaches and sharing the results.

A key part of this is understanding as an organisation where things fail and why as well as monitoring success. The failure rate in the commercial world is high, as live-testing new ideas is the best way to find which will work. Learning from what fails is as important as from what works.

Prospect have also devoted time to better understanding their members' needs and changing expectations. Members are interacting with many other organisations and companies and getting used to an ever-higher level of service, particularly digitally. This is something they expect unions to offer as well. Looking at the whole experience of the union from the perspective of the member has helped Prospect plan the processes and services most appropriate to members, as well as working more efficiently and making the most of resources.

Links:

- [*Creating a culture of innovation – including CWU case study \(VIDEO\)*](#)
- [*Union innovation in Denmark – HK Lab*](#)

Challenge 4: Building relationships where contact is predominantly online

The Union movement is built on honest relationships of solidarity, support and championing one another.

Where these relationships exist, digital tools have helped maintain these whilst being physically distant from one another. Where formal relationships can sometimes be difficult to sustain (such as between unions and government), the relative ease of more regular personal contact through online conferencing has in some cases enabled better working relationships.

However, the loss of in-person gatherings has reduced the opportunity to build new trusted relationships. It has also hampered the informal networking that builds stronger interpersonal connections and personal growth across the union movement.

These informal connections are often incidental and happen in 'unplanned' time at events, around breaks, overnight stays, and the margins of other activities. - they rarely translate into the very planned activities that take place in online communications.

And as increased working from home or hybrid working models are likely to feature more heavily for office-based workers in the future, this will leave many workplaces only partially staffed for much of the week, reducing the scope for engaging physically with a critical mass of the workforce.

4.1 How might we use digital to back up our lobbying work?

Over the pandemic, many unions found their lobbying work had changed, with a greater degree of access to ministers and civil servants than they were used to under a Conservative government. The need to collaborate rapidly and widely provided an incentive. And with the ease of arranging short online meetings over complex physical meetings meant there could be more opportunities to talk outside of previous formal engagement structures, with less of the usual politics about who was in the room.

As well as enabling this increased contact, digital also became more useful in broadening awareness of public support for unions' position. Using new tools such as crowdsourced video content and distributed event management, alongside more established tools like petitions and email campaigns, unions can help put real member's experiences in front of decision makers, providing useful and powerful evidence.

This digital campaigning activity will also become more important as the pandemic subsides. In many areas, government willingness to collaborate with unions quickly subsided again as well, and unions have needed to make use of public campaigning and

other points of influence in order to get their messages across.

Case study:

In the run up to the 2021 budget, the TUC worked with affiliates to translate the national campaign for a key workers' pay rise into local campaigns targeting MPs. By engaging widely to gather supporters and then using an online organising call and geographical segmentation, the TUC was able to find activists willing to run local online meetings, and key workers willing to speak at them.

Providing a digital platform and tech support for activists to schedule events and build their own audience helped them to take a local leadership role in a co-ordinated campaign. The campaign also generated impactful video testimonies to use in lobbying work with other MPs.

Links:

- [New digital tactics behind our key workers' pay campaign](#)

4.2 How might we negotiate effectively when nuance has become harder?

Under social distancing, negotiations between unions and employers largely moved online. Zoom calls have replaced meetings, with larger negotiations able to break out into smaller side sessions using breakout room features.

This has had benefits in scheduling meetings more easily and in running quick consultations alongside a negotiation, enabling the union side to be more responsive to member views.

However, it's also brought difficulties in managing meetings. Skilled negotiators can read the room better when they're in it, by picking up clues from body language and interactions between people on the opposite side of the table. The ability to pick up on things like this, and to make informal approaches where they could be useful, becomes harder for both sides.

Case study:

The CWU held major negotiations with employers at BT over the course of lockdown. Most sessions were held online, with only small meetings held in person. Without the ability to hold focused in-person talks, with large numbers attending from both sides over several days, the negotiation process online became much more protracted.

However, this approach worked well for the union. The slower pace meant the union could take progress back to members more regularly and more openly in mass online meetings. This provided regular opportunities to demonstrate continued strength of

feeling to the employer, enabling the union to return to the next meeting with a renewed mandate. The CWU had greater scope than the employer to be open with developments over such a long process, and this tactic helped secure big changes in the final deal.

4.3 How might we recruit and organise members who are more distanced from us and each other?

The pandemic has made physical access to many workplaces difficult or impossible. And millions of workers have not been in the workplace at all - working from home or spending months on furlough.

Whilst more workplaces will reopen, it may be a long time before social distancing conditions improve to allow meetings and casual contact between workers and activists. Also, with more people likely to continue working from home, it will be harder to talk with a critical mass of workers at any point.

However, these challenges are not new to unions. With the rise in independent and gig working, just in time staffing and agency work, unions have had to deal with an ever more fragmented workforce. The TUC's Young Workers' Project identified the erosion of trust between workers as being one of the biggest barriers to collective action. As young workers had fewer collective experiences at work and faced a more individualised work culture, they were less likely to establish the bonds of solidarity with their colleagues that would be needed to win change.

Developing new ways to organise isolated members will be necessary to overcome these long-term trends as well as the accelerating effects of the pandemic.

And a key part of solving this will be finding digital ways to allow workers to hear from each other and establish trust and solidarity. There is an opportunity here to build this trust not just within a workplace, but between dispersed workers who could never normally have met each other without connections made online.

Case study:

At the start of the first lockdown, pub chain JD Wetherspoon announced they would not pay their 40,000 laid off staff. BFAWU had already been campaigning at Wetherspoon and launched an online petition with Megaphone.org.uk, which gained 14,000 supporters in a few days.

The campaign won its headline demand from the employer, but the petition had also asked people signing if they were Wetherspoons workers. BFAWU were able to reach out to this group, who had mostly been drawn to the campaign by social sharing from their friends and colleagues.

250 of them joined WhatsApp groups set up by the union to talk to each other about work issues at Wetherspoon in the pandemic. These groups have been a good source of contacts and intelligence for the union in organising workers who are spread right

across the country, and who have mostly been furloughed during the pandemic, unable to meet in person.

An organising Zoom call delivered by young BFAWU Wetherspoons activists attracted 100 participants and 50 workers agreed on the call to become campaign contacts in their branches, establishing contact with organisers to help build the campaign.

4.4 How might we better support new starters?

At the time of writing, we're 14 months into social distancing. After a reduction in hiring, this has resumed online, and we've seen many new starters in jobs in that time. For those who work from home this has sometimes meant people starting and moving on to new jobs whilst never physically meeting their colleagues.

New starters have been disadvantaged in many unions, which are often characterised by long staff tenures and a strong sense of organisational memory. Where there isn't the regular informal contact with experienced colleagues to help ease people into their role, this can leave them outside union processes.

This can also be an issue for the many reps who have taken up new roles during the pandemic, and not had access to the standard orienteering structures they would expect.

Onboarding journeys for new starters need to incorporate skills and processes that people need to learn, as well as an understanding of how to access support.

Case study:

The TUC had around 15 new starters during 2020, many of whom had no chance to physically meet colleagues all year or to network much with colleagues outside immediate teams.

One of the new staff volunteered to co-ordinate a "Class of 2020" group, convening informal networking for new staff over Zoom. The group discussed their experiences of joining in different teams and could act as a sounding board for each other, providing advice and solidarity.

This self-organised format was particularly valuable to new starters as it allowed for greater honesty in discussions than if it had been convened by managers or by personnel. Everyone involved understood their shared experiences and the group were also able to devise recommendations to feed back to the TUC.

When starting in a physical workplace, in-passing chats and nuanced communication help new starters work out more easily who they can comfortably go to with questions. Even after offices start to return, this technique could be useful to continue, especially for staff in smaller teams or office locations away from the organisation's main HQ.

4.5 How might we build community in workplaces given fewer physical meetings?

Organisation inside the workplace is a unique advantage of a trade union. It means the union can be more effective for its members than other support services that may be competing with unions for members.

Building strong branches is vital to this. By introducing members to each other socially at branch meetings, the union can build community in the workplace, developing the solidarity between workers that it will call on when it needs to.

This becomes harder when meetings move online. Many people can join, but they can be less visible to each other as individuals. Without being able to read the room, less experienced members may be less willing to speak up. Even the little things like informal chat whilst getting coffee before the meeting starts have a value in building community that can be hard to replicate online.

There are several techniques branches can consider here. Keeping events open as meetings rather than more closed as webinars can help make the sense of community more tangible – especially if members are willing to show their cameras. Foregrounding as many reps as possible can help members identify key people they need to know.

Supporting branches to broaden facilitation techniques may also be a useful idea for unions to consider. For example, starting off meetings with icebreaker activities that everyone can get involved with, or making more use of breakout rooms so that people feel less apprehensive about speaking up.

Case study:

Freelance entertainment technicians were initially denied support when the pandemic closed their industry. Bectu had early successes in campaigning for self-employed grants and pressuring employers to furlough PAYE freelancers. The union saw over 1,500 new members, as well as increased engagement with existing members.

Once they moved on to Zoom, branches that had previously found it hard to get people along to meetings started seeing regular large attendances, driven also by the involvement of members who had not previously been able to join in person. The union wanted to find a way for these members to collaborate, to give them a positive experience and help cement their interest in further activism.

They undertook a crowdsourced authoring project to produce extensive safety guidance for the industry, addressing members' concern for a safe reopening as soon as possible. Over long zoom meeting with shared documents, hundreds of workers dropped in hour by hour to discuss their own specialist roles and how each could be performed safely.

A 101-page manual of practical guidance and template risk assessments was drawn up, which was widely taken up by employers and insurers, helping achieve

an earlier reopening. The collaborative process and its results helped members feel a stronger sense of ownership, moving on from seeing the union as a service into something they could take a more active role in.

4.6 How might we better share informal knowledge?

When responding to fast moving changes in society and their effect on the union, it pays to develop a culture of knowledge sharing. Many things being tested for the first time in one area will have applicability in other parts of the organisation. And things under rapid development for one union function may have unforeseen consequences elsewhere if those perspectives are not included early on.

During the pandemic, online learning has greatly increased the accessibility and efficiency of formal training and meetings with a set agenda. It has been less effective though at sharing informal insights. Finding ways to replicate “water cooler” conversations between staff in different teams and with reps, will make digital transformation much easier to bed in across the union.

There will be many ways to increase this level of openness, with options suitable to different unions. Unions might consider blogging on internal developments, in public on or the union’s intranet. More use of informal meetups for sharing on cross-team issues could help broaden perspectives.

Greater use of collaboration tools could also be helpful here, and many unions have started to make fuller use of these, after initially moving their office systems and telephony to the cloud in response to the pandemic. These include functions in Microsoft Office 365 or Google Docs that allow multiple users to comment or suggest edits to documents in shares storage, or internal networks for informal communication via group chat and document sharing, such as the collaboration tools found in Microsoft Teams.

Case study:

UNISON's Data Club is a small, regular gathering of colleagues where they discuss data and how to use it better to help the union. It started in 2018 with an open invite to colleagues to bring their lunch and talk to each other about data-based projects and questions they were working on. Everyone could feed back on each other's presentations, and it helped get extra perspectives on a problem, or new insights into an existing set of results. At the start of lockdown, Data Club switched to a weekly informal online call.

All this fits into a wider pattern of data-driven transformation at UNISON, with questions about what data the union needs, where it should be stored, and how it can be provided in a timely way. As such it is a principle that applies across departmental boundaries, and where there can be a lot of transferable learning. It has been particularly important during the pandemic in helping gain consensus quickly across teams in areas of digital change.

4.7 How can we replace lost benefits of networking?

When translating union activity onto digital it can be easy to focus on the most tangible outputs at the expense of potential outcomes. For example, the outputs of a union conference could be said to be the number of motions voted upon. But there's a lot more going on at our national, sectoral or regional conferences, which also serve a need in building community for the union or training new activists to take on leadership roles.

In considering the cost savings when planning future events, unions should consider that they have saved some of this money because the solution they chose did not necessarily replicate the full range of useful outcomes of an event. Part of the savings could be reinvested in other ways to replicate those lost benefits.

Case study:

Seeking to find ways to retain informal contacts and relationships between activists during social distancing, CWU staged three "Big Night In" social gathering events. These were evening online events from 7.30 to 10pm, attracting between 100 and 250 participants a time.

The General Secretary and Head of Communications compered an open conversation with and between members, playing music and taking requests alongside. The Zoom meeting format let people be called in to speak. Everyone could see who else was on the call and could message the hosts to be put into breakout rooms to talk to friends in smaller groups before returning to the main conversation.

Hosting the events was an experiment, but the union plans to continue them as they are an opportunity for everyone to develop a personal connection with leadership, as well as keeping important interpersonal relationships active across the union.

4.8 How might we keep the focus on the collective?

When developing digital interactions between members and the union, we need to ensure they don't undermine our collective focus.

This was identified as one of our core principles for union digital transformation at the start of the Digital Lab project. We recognise that solving individual user needs is quick and effective online, but it can lead to a more service-orientated view of the union, unless we view everything through a filter of how it can also contribute to building union organisation.

This is one area where a union has a more difficult job in digital transformation. To be viable, new digital start-ups have to find a way to marry their service's value to the user with value to their business case. A union has a third consideration of value to our mission. Ignoring any of these three sources of value will produce outcomes that don't deliver for the union overall.

Case study:

NEU Escalation is a digital tool developed during the first lockdown to support branches at scale in managing safety concerns.

Realising the union did not have resources to support 20,000 workplaces directly, they built a simple quiz tool which helped reps to identify the next steps in escalating Covid-safety disputes with local management. The tool asked questions about what had happened so far, and gave reps tailored advice on processes to follow, letting them return at any time to get the next stage.

This helped branches to build a local campaign alongside the union's national campaign, engaging with members and demonstrating their value in the workplace. The aggregated data provided also fed back to the NEU, which gave the union up-to-the-minute national and regional intelligence into the situation in schools, and which helped organisers allocate their time more effectively across their areas.

Links:

- [Recruiting hard-to-engage workers on digital during Covid-19](#)
- [Online to offline organising – lessons from the US and Australia](#)

Further reading and resources

The union experience during the pandemic

- **Work in 2020 – A tale of two economies (CLASS)**
This annual report considers who has been impacted most by the economic fallout of COVID-19, and looks at the wave of organising activity that has come in its wake.
classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/work-in-2021-a-tale-of-two-economies
- **Covid 19 and the work of unions: New challenges and new responses (Unions21)**
This report with Sheffield University's SPERI looks at how the work of unions changed during the pandemic.
unions21.org.uk/ideas/covid-19-and-the-work-of-unions-new-challenges-and-new-response

Developing digital change projects in unions and non-profits

- **8 principles for union digital transformation**
TUC Digital Lab report on the underlying principles of organisational culture that will be needed in unions in order to make a success of digital change projects.
digital.tuc.org.uk/principles-for-union-digital-transformation
- **Service recipes for charities**
Our colleagues at CAST support the Catalyst network for digital transformation in NGOs. This mini site collates and shares examples of good practice in delivering digital solutions.
recipes.thecatalyst.org.uk

The TUC's Digital Lab project supports TUC affiliate unions to develop and share good practice in all aspects of digital transformation.

You can find resources and events at digital.tuc.org.uk, and subscribe to regular email updates.



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