University of Limerick Branch

"SMALL STEPS LEAD TO BIG CHANGE."

LATEST NEWS
E-NEWSLETTER

unite
theUNION

MARCH 2025

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FAREWELL MESSAGE FROM OUTGOING CONVENOR EOIN DEVEREUX REPORT

REBUILDING INSTITUTIONAL TRUST, HAVING AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION AND WITNESSING GENUINE ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE WAY IN WHICH UL IS MANAGED, NEEDS TO BE FRONT AND CENTER IN THE 'RE-SETTING' OF UL.

Dear Members, this is my final message as Convenor.

I want to thank the UL Unite Executive for the considerable work they have undertaken over the last three years. Their support, advice and guidance to me as Convenor has been stellar. **They do this work on a voluntary basis to support their colleagues in UL and represent what is best about the university.**

I also want to particularly acknowledge the work of Marian Healy; a long-time trade union stalwart and former UL Colleague who is the administrative engine room of UL Unite. I have been very fortunate to work alongside two very effective chairpersons – Tracey McKillen and Catherine Fitzgerald.

The 2022-25 executive has worked tirelessly on behalf of its growing number of members to provide support and advice. This has been undertaken at a very challenging time for the University of Limerick

Our workload as trade union activists effectively doubled in the last three years. UL Unite have taken a firm stance on many issues including those of **Dignity and Respect** for all employees; standing up against the weaponization of policies and procedures against our members. When UL denied and refused to tackle serious issues surrounding our organizational culture, we relied upon our own initiative and expertise to devise a Survey of UL's Organizational Culture. We have recently completed a second survey. There are some green shoots but there is a very long way to go to repair the damage done and to restore our trust.

IN THE MIDST OF THE CRISES AT UL, I HOPE THAT THE TRADE UNION HAS ALWAYS BEEN CONSTRUCTIVE BUT UNAFRAID TO TAKE AN UNPOPULAR STANCE.

It is for you the membership to judge how effective we have been as an Executive. As I leave the role, I would like to point to UL Unite's efforts in the last three years:

Improving communication with you as our valued members, keeping you up to date on the battles we have fought (and won).

We prioritized bringing our membership together socially at a time when the very fabric of University's culture was being bombarded by forces within and without.

Growth. Our numbers have grown month on month. Remember this – there is strength in numbers!

Engaging not only with HR through the JNCC but also engaging with the powers that be in UL at the level of Governing Authority and the UL Executive Committee.

A sustained engagement with HR as to how Policies and Procedures impact on our membership. UL Unite has been pro-active across many fronts in terms of developing or revising Policies and Procedures.

We have had a considerable caseload in terms of individual and collective cases. UL Unite has been hugely successful in fighting on behalf of our members. We have availed of expert advice from Unite nationally and from the union's legal advisors.

I realize that there are still many things to be resolved for our members. These include **promotion prospects** for groups such as University Teachers and Educational Developers and a proper career structure for Technical Staff. The uncertainties around **PAYS** are still not resolved.

Rebuilding Institutional Trust, having authentic communication and witnessing genuine accountability in the way in which UL is managed is front and center in the 're-setting' of UL. I know that the new Convenor and new Executive will continue to focus on these matters. I am confident that the next UL Unite Executive will be even stronger than the one I am leaving.

At a personal level, I have learned a great deal in working as Convenor. In my day job, I thought I understood how Power works. I didn't, until I undertook this role.

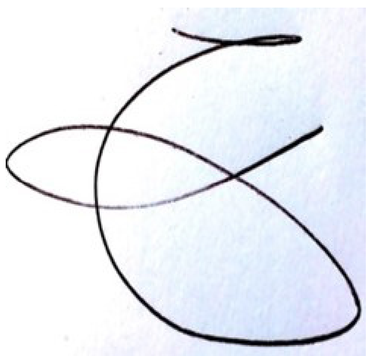
MY THREE YEARS AS CONVENOR HAS CONVINCED ME MORE THAN EVER ABOUT THE STRENGTH OF THE COLLECTIVE AND WHY BEING IN A TRADE UNION IS NOT OPTIONAL.

I have also been reminded about the importance of solidarity and of the need to be skeptical about what people in positions of power tell you.

Most of all, as trade union members we need to double down on calling things out and not being mere bystanders when injustices are being done.

Now, more than ever, we need a strong trade union at UL.

Good Night and Thank You... ☺



Professor Eoin Devereux

MESSAGE FROM INCOMING CONVENOR FERGAL O'BRIEN

I am very happy to take on the role of UL Unite Convenor. When I joined UL (over 25 years ago), one of the first pieces of (good) advice that I received was to "JOIN THE UNION". Thankfully, I have not needed the support of UL Unite during those 25 years but having spent a few years on the UL Unite Executive, I can see now how many of you have. This has been a real eye-opener for me, and has answered the question that is often asked – "What has the Union ever done for me?" As the UL Unite Culture surveys for the last two years show, there are issues here at UL that need to be addressed – some common feedback from members has been the lack of accountability and the inability of the organisation to communicate in an authentic manner. Culture is complex and UL's culture needs to be addressed … a starting point will be to develop and implement policies and procedures that are "employee friendly" and that are not weaponised to against our members.

The Workload Allocation Model (WAM) is concerning for many of our members … it is a big change for our academics. Its stated aim is to provide a fair and transparent approach for the allocation and distribution of workload for all academic staff at UL. UL Unite has supported it on that basis, and if it is implemented in any way that is detrimental to members, UL Unite will be ready to act.

I look forward to working for and on behalf of our UL Unite members. I hope to build on the exceptional work that Prof. Eoin Devereux has undertaken during his term as Convenor. Eoin skilfully guided us through a very turbulent period for UL and his achievements are many (and often unseen). I would like to particularly highlight the support that Eoin and the Unite Executive provided for members in distress. This ranged from whistleblowers and grievances (minor and major) to contract issues and every member was afforded the time and attention they deserved. The UL Unite Executive remains largely unchanged, but I would like to welcome Dr. Patrick Buckley to the Executive and to thank him for stepping up to his new role.

Finally, can each and every member actively promote union membership, as our strength lies in our numbers and as importantly in our unity.

PRESSING RESET: A TRADE UNION PERSPECTIVE

UL established itself and thrived on its ability to challenge, innovate, and battle. It does not need to mimic and conform; it can determine its own path. References like "this is what they do in (insert University of choice)" suggest that we follow, when we can lead. You never know how brave you are, until being brave is the only choice you have. A ship in harbour is safe, but that's not what ships are for.

At the most recent Town Hall there was some acknowledgement that the rank-and-file workers in UL did not cause the situation we find ourselves in today. From a Trade Union perspective this was very welcome and something that we all already knew. This admission, in turn, raises the question of **who** caused the situation and **what, if any,** are the consequences?

This welcome acknowledgement that we, the ordinary employees of UL, did not cause these catastrophic events raises deeper questions concerning **accountability.** Our university, rightly, espouses attributes that our graduates should have – two of them are being **"Courageous"** and **"Responsible."** Where exactly were these attributes in many of our senior leaders as UL hurtled from crisis to crisis over an extended period of time and across a number of Executives?

Was it because senior leaders felt "unsafe" in their roles? It is likely that the "unsafe" reference is really to do with "psychological safety", i.e., feeling safe to take interpersonal risks, to speak up, to disagree openly, to surface concerns without fear of negative repercussions or pressure to sugarcoat bad news. And what is so disappointing, is that in a university setting, many senior leaders were either unable or unwilling to challenge the consensus, to point out wrongdoing, or more simply to distinguish between right and wrong. A few senior leaders did and we owe them and the rank and file 'Whistleblowers' who did not remain bystanders, an immense debt of gratitude.

It would be interesting for our university leadership to experience or even understand the culture and atmosphere that many Unite members live with on a daily basis. The Unite Executive regularly deals with distressed members who suffer under poor management. These practices are to us, as a trade union, as concerning are the more extreme cases, where whistleblowers (were targeted because of their professional and brave disclosures of malpractice and broader issues).

At the December Town Hall, our Chancellor and Acting President updated us on the progress being made in terms of resetting UL. It was mostly procedural, moving from one number to another number in a legislative process, cancelling vanity projects that have distracted from our core function, etc. It will take time for this to be felt on the ground and real accountability would be a good start.

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UL Unite warmly welcomes the RESPECT@UL Campaign

UL Unite welcomes the renewed focus on Dignity and Respect at UL. Almost three years ago the trade union highlighted serious issues in UL around bullying behaviors. The trade union highlighted bullying and noted that the university’s own data had documented incidences of bullying behaviour and sexual harassment. UL Unite demanded a new policy framework on Dignity and Respect and worked hard to agree a new set of policies with UL HR. These have now been unveiled.

We seen these developments in a positive light. It is our hope that this campaign and the new policy framework will stimulate a cultural shift in UL.

Policies and Procedures are, however, one thing, practice is another.

OUR UNIFED POSITION AS A TRADE UNION IS THAT UL UNITE WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE ZERO TOLERANCE FOR ANY BULLYING OR HARASSMENT BEHAVIOURS.

We encourage all of our members to familiarise themselves with the new policies and to contact your trade union representative if you have any concerns or questions.

REPORT FROM THE 2025 AGM

The UL Unite Branch AGM took place on 19th of February 2025. There were more than 70 members present at the meeting. The report of the meeting is as follows:

Item 1: Minutes of the 2022 AGM: Catherine Fitzgerald, the Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chair then presented the 2022 Minutes which were endorsed as presented.

Item 2: Chairperson's Address: The Chair opened her address by telling the meeting that she has been a member of the union for 29 years and a member of the Executive committee since 2018. She commented on the diligent work of the Executive committee members which has focused on increasing membership and retention of members by being relevant and accessible. As a result, the membership has grown significantly over the last number years and continues to grow month on month. She briefly touched on some of the issues being tackled by the Executive: ensuring Contracts of Indefinite Duration (CID's) are more transparent and dealt with in a more timely fashion; ensuring the Job Evaluation (JE) review of the framework brings forward a more transparent and equitable process; the need for the issue of Long Service Increments (LSIs) to be resolved fairly for all, stressing that this a very live issue at present. She advised that the remission of fees, which applied to all those employed prior to 1992, which was withheld from retired staff had been restored after UL UNITE took up the matter. The Chair concluded by explaining that the UL UNITE Executive engages in ongoing training to upskill and empower itself. She stressed the unions aim of ending what she terms the weaponisation or misuse of policies and procedures and always acting in the interest of staff and institute.

Item 3: Secretary/Convenor's Report: The Convenor welcomed the Regional Officer to the meeting and then thanked the other members of the Executive committee and the admin support worker for their support and guidance to him in his role in the last three years. He then went on to outline some key issues during his tenure such as the high level of cases work where dignity and respect is at the forefront of the Executive's work ensuring it is not afraid of representing its members in a constructive way. He touched on some of the positives he has been involved in such as the regular communication updates; regular social events for members now built into the yearly calendar; engagement with GA, UL Executive, UL Subcommittees;

attending UL Executive every three months to discuss the UL UNITE, essentially providing a 'Report Card' on UL Executive actions. He stressed the need for UL to do better in ensuring policies and procedures are implemented properly, particularly at first line level. He believed, while UL UNITE is remarkably successful in taking individual/collective cases, the process is too often a very lengthy, patient game. He mentioned three particular matters the union is engaged in at present – the proposed Time Off in Lieu (TOIL) policy; the University Teacher Framework where UL UNITE is seeking parity for those employed on teacher contracts often doing Assistant Professor and above work; Professional Added Years (PAYS) which has now been referred to UNITE's legal advisers in an attempt to break the deadlock between UL UNITE and UL. The Convener wished the new Executive all the best for the coming three years and encouraged all those present to encourage colleagues to join the union and to build on the positive increase in membership across all departments.

Item 4: Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer showed details of the auditor endorsed accounts of the Branch. He explained that UL-UNITE accounts are audited annually by Unite's national auditors in Dublin. The meeting noted the Treasurer sends all receipts, bank statements, income and expenditure reports to Unite's Account Manager every quarter. The Treasurer outlined for the meeting the branch income for 2022-2025 followed by the expenditure for 2022-2025 and concluded by informing the meeting of the current balance on account. There were no questions forthcoming so the financial statement, as presented, was endorsed by the meeting.

Item 5: Election of Branch Executive/Workplace Representatives 2025-2028: The Chair called for the duly nominated persons for the 2025-2025 Executive Committee and Workplace Representatives, as notified in advance to the meeting, to be declared elected. There being no dissent, the following is the make-up of the 2025-2028 UL

UNITE Executive Committee:
Chairperson: Catherine Fitzgerald
Secretary/Convenor: Fergal O'Brien
Treasurer: D.J. Collins
Equality Officer: Niamh O'Sullivan-Walsh
Executive Committee: Alan Dormer; Declan Greene; Elaine Kennedy; Gabriel Peters; Martin J. Power; Patrick Buckley; Robert Whelan and Siobhan Gleeson-Hayes
All twelve were elected as Workplace Representatives for UL-UNITE.

Election of Auditors: The meeting endorsed Adrienne Horan and John Kelly as the Auditors for the Branch.

Election of RISC Nominee: The meeting endorsed Adrian McDonagh as the branch nominee to the national RISC meetings.

Item 6: Overview/Key Findings from the Membership Survey: Fergal O'Brien took the meeting through a PowerPoint presentation which highlighted results from the most recent survey. He pointed out that 433 returns had been received this time compared with 439 on the previous occasion. He assured the meeting that the findings would be shared with the entire membership once the Executive Committee had met and agreed a strategy on how best to use the findings.

Fergal highlighted some of the individual comments posted by members, the majority of which continue to show concern that the organizational culture is not changing rapidly enough. **[See Fergal's Summary in his Welcome Note earlier in this Bulletin].**

Members Questions/Comments: The Chair welcomed questions/comments for the floor. The following is a summary:

- **Some attention needs to be given to understanding why there are less women than men in UL management. Likewise, why there are more men than women on the UL UNITE Executive.**
- **All data from the survey points to a lack of general acceptance that very few personnel caused ULs problems.**
- **Accountability is not happening, there is no tangible improvement.**
- **A simple change like restoring some things that were removed and repairing the ill treatment of retired staff through the restoration of their UL Email Addressses would send a positive signal to all.**

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking members for taking the time to attend and stressed the need for a strong trade union in the university. She asked members to encourage colleagues, not yet in membership, to join and get involved.

MEMBERS SURVEY – HIGHLIGHTS AND CHALLENGES

CULTURAL MEASURES STILL SHOW THAT ISSUES CONTINUE IN AREAS LIKE VERTICAL TRUST, ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY AND PERCEIVED ORGANISATIONAL JUSTICE.

At the UL Unite AGM, we presented high-level results from our 2025 culture survey. There have been no hugely significant changes from 2024. Cultural measures still show that issues continue in areas like vertical trust, organisational identity and perceived organisational justice. Discretionary effort also seems to be on the wane. A new question added this year was on “accountability”, and it is clear that UL Unite members are not satisfied with the level of accountability for the most recent controversies. More specifically, they disagreed strongly with the statement that “accountability is no longer important, we all need to move on”. UL Unite will share the results with the Acting President and the Chancellor and we look forward to their response. In due course, we will share the results with our membership.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES - UPDATE

The following are the Policies and Procedures that UL UNITE has been or is discussing/negotiating with UL HR.

1. Dignity and Respect Policy and Procedure for Students and Employees
2. PDRS Policy
3. Menopause Procedure
4. Elected Representatives (public office)
5. Time Off in Lieu (TOIL)
6. Marital Leave
7. Part Time Working
8. Leave of Absence
9. Consultancy
10. Teaching Buy Out

NOTE: UNDER THE TERMS OF THE RECOGNITION AGREEMENT BETWEEN UL AND UL UNITE ALL POLICY AND PROCEDURAL DOCUMENTS THAT RELATE TO STAFF TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE MUST BE NEGOTIATED PRIOR TO IMPLEMENTATION.

UL UNITE insists an effective appeals process MUST be included in all policy and/or procedure documents.

If a policy and/or procedure document is not agreed by UL UNITE a separate communication will be issued to the membership advising accordingly.

NEWLY ELECTED EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR 2025-2028

MEMBERS SHOULD, IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, CONTACT THE UNITE REPRESENTATIVE (SHOP STEWARD) FOR YOUR AREA. CONTACT DETAILS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

Position/Lead Contact for	Name	**Contact details**
Convenor	Fergal G. O'Brien	Ext: 2718 Email: Fergal.g.obrien@ul.ie
Chair AND Professional and Support Staff members	Catherine Fitzgerald	Ext: 3729 Email: catherine.fitzgerald@ul.ie
Treasurer	D.J. Collins	Ext 3075 Email: d.j.collins@ul.ie
Equality Officer ALL Equality Issues AND Professional and Support Staff members	Niamh O'Sullivan-Walsh	Ext 4187 Email: niamh.osullivan.walsh@ul.ie
Technical members	Robert Whelan	Email: Robert.whelan@ul.ie
Professor and Associate Professor members	Paddy Buckley	Email: Patrick.buckley@ul.ie
Assistant Professors and All Research (Academic) members	Martin J Power	Ext 4968 Email: martin.j.power@ul.ie
Professional and Support Staff	Gabriel Peters	Ext 2515 Email: Gabriel.peters@ul.ie
Teacher/Tutor members	Declan Greene	Declan.greene@ul.ie
Information Technology and CTL members	Siobhan Gleeson-Hayes	Email: siobhan.gleesonhayes@ul.ie
Library and Information Services members	Elaine Hayes	Ext: 2504 Email: elaine.kennedy@ul.ie
Chief Technical and Senior Technical members	Alan Dormer	Ext 2726 email: alan.dormer@ul.ie

AS A UL UNITE MEMBER, you will be aware that it is your legal and constitutional right to join a trade union. The UL UNITE Executive Committee believe it is clearly in every employee's interest to do so. Very few people would consider going to court without legal advice, fewer again would embark on major structural work to their homes without some expert input and suggestions. The same standards should apply to work and that is why all employees in UL should join Unite, the recognised trade union, at the University of Limerick.

UL UNITE is recognised by UL Management to represent **ALL** staff at the University, a significant strength when dealing with contentious issues of pay, grading and like matters on behalf of members. All matters relating to terms and conditions of employment and salary rates are determined through negotiation between UL Management and elected representatives of UL UNITE Executive Committee.



UPCOMING EVENTS

19 March 2025	New Executive takes effect
May 2025	Members Get-together/ Recruitment Event. Eden Restaurant. Date/Time tbc
June 2025	General Meeting of Members. Venue/Date/Time tbc
December 2025	Christmas Pie/ Recruitment Event – Eden Restaurant. Date/Time tbc

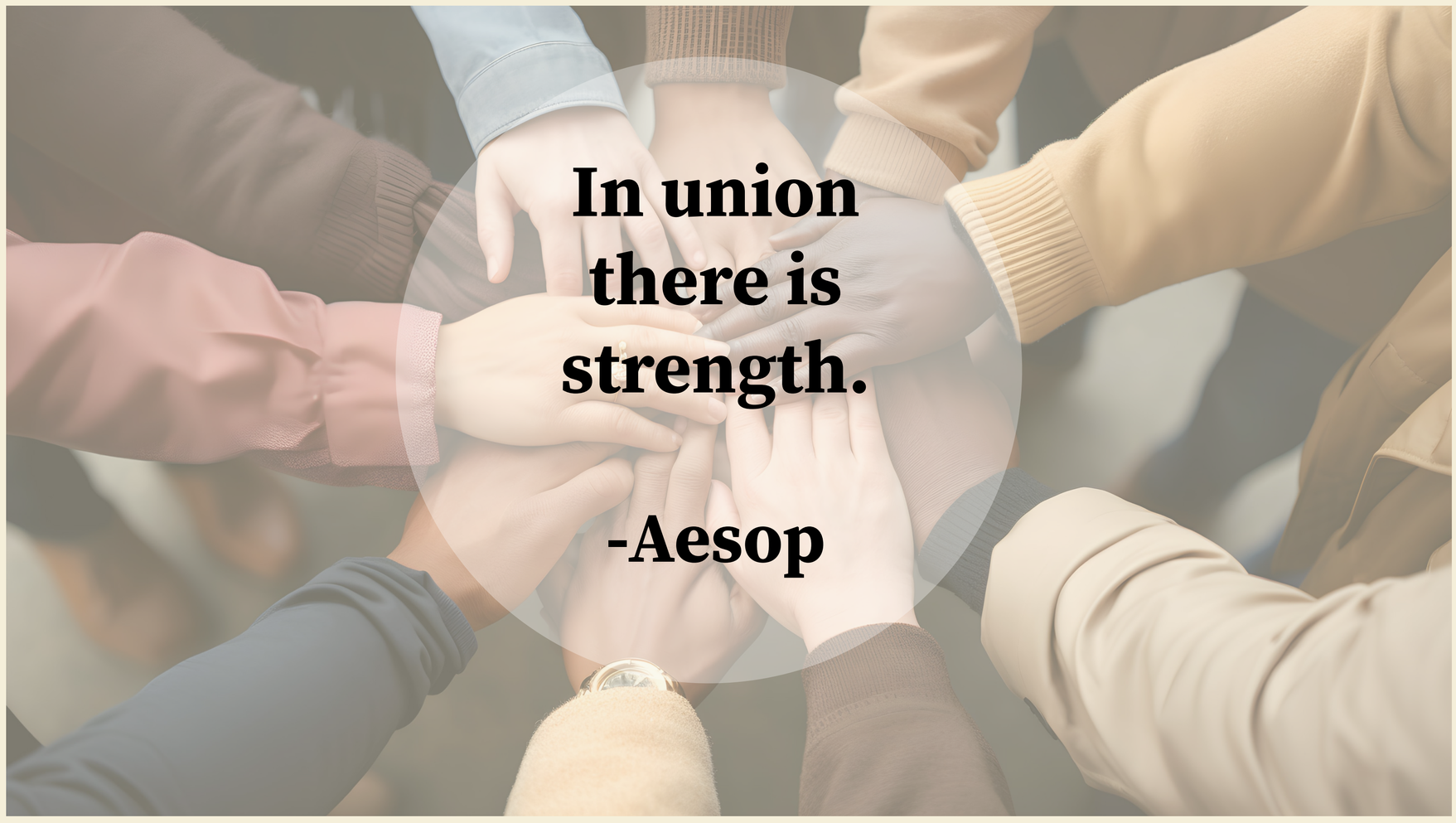
Further details of all the above and any other events will be issued in advance and published in further newsletters.

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT UL QR CODE

UL Unite held discussions with UL HR on raising awareness of Health and Safety information at UL, and on employee awareness of what to do in the event of a medical emergency.

The following QR code links to the Health & Safety webpage for First Aid & AED information, including links to the UL Medical Emergency Procedure.

UNITY IS STRENGTH… WHEN THERE IS TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION, WONDERFUL THINGS CAN BE ACHIEVED - (Mattie Stefanik)



Remember the real strength of a trade union is in the collective. UL UNITE is recognised by University Management to represent ALL staff at the University. Being a member UL UNITE makes you a member of the collective. Encourage your non-union colleagues to join today. Application forms are available from the UL UNITE website and from the UL UNITE Office Administrator Marian Healy who can be contacted at healym23@gmail.com or marian.healy@ul.ie

Unite
University of Limerick Branch
NEWSLETTER – MARCH 2025