

Shop stewards and their role

The role of the shop steward in the workplace is extremely important, both for union members as well as for the management of the unions and their employees. The role and position of the shop steward is determined both in law and in collective wage agreements.

Election of shop stewards

- All workplaces with five or more employees are expected to have a shop steward.
- If there are more than 50 employees, two shop stewards may be elected.
- If the workplace does not elect a shop steward, the union may appoint one.
- Shop stewards are elected for a term of not more than two years.

What does a shop steward do?

- The shop steward is the union's representative in the workplace, and as such, he is the contact person between the union and the employees.
- The shop steward is to ensure that employment contracts and collective wage agreements are complied with and that the rights of employees are not violated.
- Employees are to contact the shop steward with their complaints. The shop steward is to investigate the matter immediately. If he finds that the complaints have foundation in fact, he shall approach the employer or his representative with the complaint and demand remedial action.
The shop steward need not wait for the submission of a complaint. If he suspects that an employee's rights are being violated, he can begin investigating the matter. Shop stewards are under obligation to send the union a report on any complaints as soon as possible.
- All information given to the shop steward is confidential!

The rights of shop stewards

- Shop stewards may undertake their duties as shop stewards in consultation with floor managers, and their wages may not be reduced because of such work.
- Shop stewards may call workplace meetings twice a year in consultation with the union and the employer. The meeting is to be called with three days' notice and is to be held during working hours.
- Shop stewards must have access to lockable storage space at their place of work.
- Shop stewards shall present employees' complaints to their floor managers or other managers within the company before approaching other parties. Shop stewards, however, may always consult with the union and seek its advice.
- New employees in the workplace may obtain information from their shop steward as regards the main rules and practices in the workplace as well as information about the union.
- Employers and their representatives may not terminate the employment of the shop steward as a result of their work as shop steward nor may shop stewards be made to suffer any adverse consequences due to the fact that a union has asked them to undertake shop steward duties for the union. If the employee needs to reduce the number of workers, the shop steward shall generally have priority as regards remaining employed.

Education and training of shop stewards

- Félagsmálaskóli alþýðu (Workers' Academy) is operated by ASÍ and BSRB, and its role is to organise and implement training courses for the shop stewards of member associations, employees and managers.
- The Academy organises both longer and shorter courses according to the wishes of the members, while shop steward training courses are taught according to the curriculum from Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins (FA) (the Education and Training Service Centre).
- The shop steward training courses are most often held in the area of each association.
- The website of the Academy provides access to the Shop Steward Handbook, one of the tools prepared for shop stewards. In addition, the site contains the curriculum of FA for the shop steward courses. The website contains advertisements for upcoming courses, and registration for most courses takes place on the site www.felagsmalaskoli.is.

Further information on shop stewards may be found on Vinnuréttarvef ASÍ.