# GFTU and Birkbeck launch activist-focused labour law certificate to arm union leaders



The General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) Educational Trust, in partnership with the Institute of Employment Rights and Birkbeck, University of London, has launched a new certificate course aimed squarely at trade union activists and organisers. Titled Empowering workers: a trade union certificate in labour law and the labour movement, the programme seeks to combine technical grounding in employment law with a wider historical, political and social framing of labour struggles — an approach the organisers say is designed to strengthen activists’ capacity to defend and advance workers’ rights.

According to the Institute of Employment Rights announcement, the course deliberately moves beyond the narrow legalistic focus of many mainstream labour-law modules to explore how law, politics and economics shape workplace relations and collective struggle. Speaking in that announcement, Oscar Guardiola‑Rivera, the course’s lead tutor and a senior lecturer at Birkbeck School of Law, argued that workers and communities worldwide are “transforming themselves to confront employer power” through inventive industrial, legal and political tactics; his remarks, the organisers say, underline the course’s emphasis on contemporary movements as well as legal doctrine.

The organisers present the programme as accessible to trade union activists at different stages of experience: no prior legal qualifications are required, though some background in union campaigning or negotiation is assumed. The course is aimed particularly at senior activists and those preparing for leadership roles within the movement; the GFTU says it will provide a foundation in the history and politics of labour law that is intended to be practical and action-oriented rather than purely academic.

Practical arrangements combine residential and blended learning. Teaching will run across weekend sessions between October 2025 and July 2026, including a residential block at the GFTU’s Quorn Grange Hotel in Leicestershire and four in‑person days at Birkbeck School of Law and Hamilton House in London, supplemented by online group sessions and self‑study. Applications must be submitted by 12 September 2025; the course fee is £2,150 and applicants are expected to secure their union’s backing for both fees and release time to complete the programme.

Organisers have assembled a roster of tutors drawn from established figures in labour law and movement education. Oscar Guardiola‑Rivera leads the teaching and is listed by Birkbeck as Professor of Human Rights and Political Philosophy; the programme also names Lord John Hendy KC, a specialist in collective labour and trade-union law, alongside contributors from the Institute of Employment Rights and the Marx Memorial Library. The inclusion of Geoff Shears — long associated with trade-union legal practice — and the suggested participation of public figures such as Baroness Shami Chakrabarti and campaigner Yvette Williams were presented in the announcement as indicative of the course’s blend of legal, historical and campaigning perspectives.

The course arrives at a moment when organisers say labour movements are experimenting with new tactics and broadening the scope of campaigns to connect workplace issues with housing, climate and community struggles. The Institute of Employment Rights framed the certificate as responding to those developments: by situating legal knowledge within movement history and political strategy, the course aspires to equip activists with tools to turn legal argument and collective action into tangible gains for workers.

Those interested in applying or seeking further practical details are asked to consult the GFTU Educational Trust and the Institute of Employment Rights for entry requirements, dates and contact information; the application deadline is 12 September 2025 and places are limited, the organisers warn.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[2]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[3]](https://gftuet.org.uk/education)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[2]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[4]](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/our-staff/profile/8005393/oscar-guardiola-rivera)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[2]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[2]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[3]](https://gftuet.org.uk/education)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[4]](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/our-staff/profile/8005393/oscar-guardiola-rivera), [[5]](https://oldsquare.co.uk/people/lord-hendy-kc/), [[7]](https://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/marx-memorial-library-and-workers%E2%80%99-school-and-peel-centre-announce-opening-radical-clerkenwell), [[6]](https://www.thompsons.law/news/news-releases/our-firm-news/thompsons-announces-new-equity-partners)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[2]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[4]](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/our-staff/profile/8005393/oscar-guardiola-rivera), [[3]](https://gftuet.org.uk/education)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/), [[3]](https://gftuet.org.uk/education), [[2]](https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ier.org.uk/news/gftu-launches-empowering-workers-a-trade-union-certificate-in-labour-law/> - GFTU launches ‘Empowering Workers: A Trade Union Certificate in Labour Law and the Labour Movement’ is an Institute of Employment Rights news piece announcing a course run by the GFTU Educational Trust with IER and Birkbeck. It describes the programme’s distinctive approach — combining technical employment law with broader historical, social and political context — and quotes lead tutor Oscar Guardiola‑Rivera on contemporary labour struggles and inventive tactics. The item lists course aims, target participants, residential venues (Quorn Grange, Birkbeck, Hamilton House), dates spanning October 2025 to July 2026, a fee of £2150, and a 12 September 2025 application deadline.
3. <https://gftuet.org.uk/education> - The GFTU Educational Trust’s education programme page lists its 2025–26 courses and confirms 'Empowering Workers: a Trade Union Certificate in Labour Law and the Labour Movement' among offerings. It notes that many programmes are residential at the Trust’s Quorn Grange Hotel near Loughborough, gives the course application deadline as 12 September 2025, and states sessions run variously between October 2025 and July 2026. The page emphasises blended learning, outlines support and logistic details, and provides contact information for the Trust and Quorn Grange Hotel, enabling unions and activists to register and obtain practical information about dates, locations, and administrative arrangements.
4. <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/our-staff/profile/8005393/oscar-guardiola-rivera> - Professor Oscar Guardiola‑Rivera’s staff profile at Birkbeck University sets out his role as Professor of Human Rights and Political Philosophy and PGT Director in the School of Law. The page summarises his publications, research interests in human rights, political philosophy, decolonial methods, and law and the humanities, noting teaching responsibilities and modules. It confirms his academic standing and expertise in areas relevant to labour law education and indicates his suitability to lead the GFTU course. The profile provides institutional contact details and background on his research projects, prizes, and involvement in public debate and interdisciplinary initiatives and collaborations with colleagues.
5. <https://oldsquare.co.uk/people/lord-hendy-kc/> - Old Square Chambers’ profile for Lord (John) Hendy KC outlines his distinguished career as a leading silk specialising in collective labour and trade union law. The page details his call to the Bar in 1972, taking silk in 1987, extensive case history, advisory and academic roles, and leadership positions including Chair of the Institute of Employment Rights. It highlights recognition by legal directories and his reputation for expertise in industrial relations and collective action. The profile corroborates his suitability as a tutor on a labour law course and his prominence within the trade union legal community in the UK today.
6. <https://www.thompsons.law/news/news-releases/our-firm-news/thompsons-announces-new-equity-partners> - The Thompsons Solicitors news release from May 2002 reports internal appointments and quotes Geoff Shears as chief executive officer, confirming his executive role at the trade union law firm. The item describes the promotion of equity partners and reflects on Thompsons’ corporate structure, staff developments, and commitment to client service. Historical context on the firm’s trade union connections and leadership is evident, substantiating the claim that Geoff Shears has served in senior executive capacities at Thompsons. The release provides contemporary evidence of his management role and underlines his association with labour movement legal practice in the UK trade union community.
7. <https://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/marx-memorial-library-and-workers%E2%80%99-school-and-peel-centre-announce-opening-radical-clerkenwell> - The Marx Memorial Library news announcement for the 'Radical Clerkenwell Reinterpreted' exhibition names Meirian Jump as Director of the Marx Memorial Library and Workers’ School and quotes her on opening the community exhibition. The page outlines the museum’s role, collections and public engagement, describes the exhibition aims, dates and partnerships, and provides Meirian Jump’s contact details. It confirms her leadership role at the institution, supporting the IER article’s listing of Meirian Jump among course tutors. The item demonstrates the Library’s active educational work and its connection to labour movement history and learning and community outreach in London today and beyond.