

Trade unions are groups of employees who join together to maintain and improve their conditions of employment.

The typical activities of a trade union include providing assistance and services to their members, collectively bargaining for better pay and conditions for all workers, working to improve the quality of public services, political campaigning and industrial action.

What do trade unions do?

Unions train and organise workplace representatives who help union members with the problems they face at work.

Reps provide support and advice and campaign for better conditions and pay.

Unions have brought significant changes to society, including:

- a national minimum wage;
- the abolition of child labour;
- improved worker safety;
- improving living standards by reducing the number of hours in the working week and encouraging a healthy work/life balance;
- improved parental leave;
- equality legislation;
- better protection of migrant workers and a reduction in exploitation;
- minimum holiday and sickness entitlements.
- Unions have also made thousands of local agreements on issues affecting individual workplaces following consultation, negotiation and bargaining..



How trade unions are organised

Most unions are structured as a network of local branches with reps in every workplace.

Union reps:

- negotiate agreements with employers on pay and conditions;
- discuss major changes such as redundancy;
- discuss members' concerns with employers;
- accompany members to disciplinary and grievance meetings;
- help members with legal and financial problems.

Legal status of trade unions

Trade unions have a special status in law which gives them special rights that professional associations don't have.

Employers have to work with recognised unions to:

- negotiate pay and working conditions;
- inform and consult over changes at work such as redundancies;
- make sure that the health and safety of workers is protected.

Why join a trade union?

In workplaces where there are unions, members benefit from the strength and security that comes from working together to tackle problems. Employees at unionised workplaces earn around 12.5% more than non-unionised workplaces.

The major benefits are:

- better working conditions such as improved health and safety or pay;
- training for new skills to help you develop your career;
- advice on your legal employment rights;
- advice on finance and problems at work.