

Trade Unions at Work

UNIT
1



A BETTER WAY TO WORK



Acknowledgements

The materials were originally written by Julia Fiehn and Andrew Miller, Centre for Education and Industry, University of Warwick. This revised fourth edition has been edited by Professor Andrew Miller, Director of Active Learning Research Associates Ltd.

The TUC would particularly like to acknowledge the contributions from trade unions who were represented on the steering group, organisations which provided comments and teachers from the following schools and colleges who took part in trials and consultations: Bridgend College, Cantonian School, Connaught School, Court Moor School, Firth Park School, Fitzalan School, Gabalfa School, Glyn Derw School, Herbert Thompson School, Holgate School, King Egbert Secondary School, Llanrumney School, Radyr School, Robert Mays School, Royston School, St. Michael's School, Willowgarth High School, Yately School.

Thanks also to Gary Forrest, Richard Foweather and Margaret Matthews, Roger Buck of Hampshire EBP, Allen Gray of Barnsley LEA, Hazel Jones of Sheffield EBP, Hazel Watson of St Helen's Community Centre and Chris Young of Hampshire Youth Service.

© Trades Union Congress 1997, 2001, 2003, 2006.

Copyright is lifted on student materials only. These may be photocopied for use in schools, colleges, youth clubs and other educational institutions for the purposes of education and training.

ISBN 1 85006 689 2

First published November 1997.

Second edition published September 2001.

Third edition published October 2003.

Fourth edition published September 2006.

Trade Unions at Work

The aims of this unit are to:

- provide examples of what trade unions do for their members at work
- encourage young people to consider how trade unions help build positive relationships at work
- introduce young people to the changing role of trade unions.

The unit consists of eight sections:

- *What's Your Opinion?* – a research activity in which young people find out each other's views on trade unions.
- *Union News* – an introductory activity on the issues tackled by trade unions.
- *Interviewing Skills* – a work experience preparation activity in which students build their confidence in interview techniques.
- *Call Centres* – a case study of some of the problems encountered by call centre staff.
- *Safe With Us* – case studies about journalists protecting their sources of information.
- *Campaign* – a citizenship discussion activity on the campaigning role of trade unions based on the Amicus *Agenda for Better Jobs*.
- *The Union Representative* – an assignment on the work of the union representative which students can use to produce evidence of key skills.
- *Living Wage* – a simulation exploring the campaigning role of trade unions in the context of low wages.

Background Information

The section encourages young people to learn about the role of trade unions in the workplace. A knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees is part of the statutory orders for Citizenship at key stage 4.

For more than 100 years, trade unions have existed to protect and improve their members' terms and conditions of employment. During this period there have been many changes to the laws relating to trade unions.

Modern trade unions provide a wide range of services for members:

- They still represent members to employers and negotiate on their behalf for better wages and working conditions. This is called 'collective bargaining'.
- They provide information and advice to individual members if they have a problem at work.
- They also provide a network of health and safety representatives at the workplace. Since the introduction of the Health and Safety at Work Act (1974), employers have had to provide health and safety policies and procedures for putting it in place. Trade unions provide trained health and safety representatives who employers can consult.
- Trade unions are interested in actively promoting equal opportunities at work and providing advice and support to their members on the legislation.
- Trade unions run campaigns to improve working conditions and working lives, not just for British workers, but also for workers in other countries affected by globalisation.
- There are a number of other services that trade unions provide to individual members: welfare benefits, legal assistance, education and training, financial services and discounts.

The unit also covers the various roles of trade unionists at the workplace and the different issues with which they become involved. It is important that trade unionists are involved in the activities in this unit, where possible. These could be people who work on the site or visitors from local trade unions. Trade unions are always very happy to send out materials and information which will add to those provided here.

Information is available online at www.tuc.org.uk

The TUC has produced a leaflet on trade union support, *Your job and the law*, which can be downloaded or from the TUC 'Know Your Rights' line: 0870 600 4882.

What's Your Opinion?

Description

In this activity, young people research each other's opinions of trade unions. Each student is given a question which he/she has to ask at least six other students in the class. The answers are recorded and students then work in groups made up of all the students who asked the same question. The findings are summarised and fed back to the whole class.

Learning outcomes

- Young people develop their own views on trade unions.
- They learn what trade unions do for their members.
- They find out about the role of the trade union representative at the workplace.

Method

- Give each student a copy of the sheet *What's Your Opinion?* with one of the questions circled. Ensure that equal numbers of each question are distributed throughout the group. Tell them that they should ask at least six other students the question circled. They will be asked their views on the other questions by students they interview.
- Ask them to keep a note at the bottom of the sheet of what students tell them in answer to their question.
- After about 20 minutes stop the activity and ask students to go into five groups, with all the students who asked the same question joining the same group.
- Allow the groups fifteen minutes to summarise what they found from their investigations and ask them to appoint a spokesperson for each group.
- Ask the spokesperson from each group to report back the findings on each question.
- Put students into pairs and give out the information sheet *What Do Unions Do?* Ask students to discuss reasons for and against joining a trade union.
- Place two large sheets of flip-chart paper on the wall and ask pairs to write up their reasons for and against joining a trade union. Allow the class some time to read the wall posters.

What's Your Opinion?

Below are five questions. One of them has been circled. You should ask at least six people in the class the question circled. Do not ask the other questions. You will be asked them by other people.

Keep a note of people's replies to your question at the bottom of the page.

1. Do you know anyone who belongs to a trade union? Who? Which trade union?
2. What do you think trade unions do for their members?
3. What reasons do you think people have for joining a trade union?
4. Do you intend to join a trade union when you go to work? Why or why not?
5. What is your general opinion of trade unions? Where does this opinion come from?

Responses to question:

What Do Unions Do?

Representation

Trade unions help people at work with problems like redundancy, grievance, disciplinary procedures and legal action. They provide information, advice and support to people who belong to trade unions. Since 2000, employees have been able to gain recognition for a trade union from their employers through a ballot of members or at least 50% of the workforce being members. The proportion of workplaces that employ more than 25 people that recognise trade unions now stands at 32%.

They also represent members in negotiations over pay and conditions with employers. This is known as 'collective bargaining', and benefits both workers and employers. People in workplaces where there are trade unions generally have better wages and conditions than those in non-unionised workplaces.

There are new rights to information and consultation for employees that have been introduced through European Union Directives. These include European Works Councils for companies operating in more than one country.

Health and safety

Another important function of trade unions is improving health and safety at work. Unions have a network of health and safety representatives who work with employers to develop employment practices that protect employees. Good health and safety practices also prevent major losses for employers through sick leave, lost work and claims for compensation. Unions are playing a growing and important role in encouraging employers to take action to reduce the growing problem of stress at work.

Health and safety representatives are trained either by their own union or by the TUC. Since 1978, over 100,000 safety reps have been trained.

Health and safety covers a very wide range of issues from noise to use of chemicals, from sick building syndrome to using regulation safety wear. In most cases employers and union health and safety representatives work together for the good of the workforce. The representatives are trained to handle grievances and disputes, and they can advise workers on compensation rights.

Equal opportunities

Trade unions take a particularly keen interest in the rights of their members who are likely to suffer from direct or indirect discrimination.

Since 1975 it has been illegal for people to be discriminated against on the grounds of their sex, and since 1976 on the grounds of their colour, race, nationality or ethnic origin. Regulations introduced in 2003 protected workers against discrimination based upon religious beliefs and sexual orientation. Age discrimination became illegal in October 2006.

Trade unions support equal rights by:

- providing legal advice on issues covered by these laws
- working to ensure that employers are not breaking the laws on equal rights
- representing members who are discriminated against at work
- campaigning for better legal rights for different groups of workers (e.g. people with disabilities)
- campaigning for better conditions for part-time workers, many of whom are women
- running training programmes for their own members in order to reduce discrimination and harassment at work.

Learning at work

There are more than 7,500 trained union learning representatives and the TUC estimates that by 2010 there will be about 22,000. Since 2002 they have had the right to paid time off to carry out their duties which include providing information, advice and guidance on learning and training. They also organise training or learning and promote the value of learning to co-workers. This is an important role for improving the skills of the workforce especially people traditionally excluded from learning in low-paid and low-skill jobs,

Trade union members' services

Recently, trade unions have increased the range of services they offer their members. These services meet the needs of members and make membership more attractive. The services include:

- accident and sickness insurance cover
- legal advice on non-workplace issues
- financial services and discounts (e.g. on loans and mortgages)
- education and training.

(For further information visit www.tuc.org.uk)

Union News

Description

This activity introduces students to the wide range of issues tackled by trade unions. Young people are asked what they believe trade unions do and are then given extracts from trade union newsletters and journals. Working in small groups, they draw up lists of some of the issues of interest to trade unions and compare these lists with their initial thoughts.

Learning outcomes

- Young people find out what sorts of issues trade unions are involved in.
- They examine their own preconceptions of trade unions and discuss these with a trade unionist.

Method

- Invite a trade unionist to join the class for this activity. Contact the regional TUC office for suggestions, or invite a union member from within the staff of the school or youth club (teaching staff, youth workers, caretakers, secretaries, or staff involved with school meals).
- If the group has not already examined the role of trade unions in Activity One, ask them to brainstorm what they believe to be the areas of interest to a trade union. Do not comment on these opinions and do not ask the visitor to comment at this stage.
- Put young people in pairs or small groups and give each group the handout *Union News*. Ask them to identify the different work-related issues mentioned in the edited news extracts from trade union newspapers and journals.
- After 20 minutes, bring the whole group back together and ask for contributions from each group.
- Discuss whether the new list resembles the first brainstorm and ask the trade unionist to add other topics to the list. The trade unionist should also comment on where any misconceptions about trade unions have arisen.
- If there is time, ask the young people to make some suggestions for ways in which trade unions could promote a more realistic view of their work.
- As an additional discussion topic, ask students to discuss the arguments they would put ‘for’ and ‘against’ a worker joining a trade union.

Union News

Accidents cut after training

Accidents have dropped by 15 per cent at a chain of 16 factories since a joint health and safety training course has been run by the T&G and management.

“It just goes to show what can be achieved by genuine partnership”, said T&G regional education officer Ann McCall, pointing to the success at the Coats Viyella Home Furnishings chain across the north west and in Northern Ireland. “One of the biggest problems in the past was that managers, who were responsible for putting safety measures into operation, had less training than union safety reps. These courses have taken that on board and resulted in a considerable improvement in the company’s safety record.”

(Adapted from *T&G Organising Record* – Transport and General Workers’ Union)

HARASSMENT? LEAVE IT OUT!

If you’re having trouble fending off unwanted advances at work, the CWU is here to help.

The joke is the same in most workplaces around Britain and even the world. Sexual harassment – and how to get it.

The trouble is sexual harassment is no joke for thousands of women at work every day. And yes, it can happen to men too.

The CWU recognises that branch officials have an important role in providing support for those suffering harassment at work. Our education service can play a vital part in creating a culture which helps prevent harassment in the first place.

(Adapted from *CWU Voice* – Communication Workers’ Union)

World Cup Fever

Leading trade union, Amicus, said its advice on how to avoid taking a sickie to watch England’s World Cup matches has prompted a surge of visits to its website. Amicus’ World Cup Fever Guide explains to people how they should negotiate with their employer flexible working arrangements and the serious consequences that taking a sickie might entail. It also suggests that union negotiators can help persuade employers to find ways to let people watch the World Cup – for example allowing people to watch it together at work on a big screen. The union advice warns people that taking time off work without permission can lead to dismissal for ‘gross misconduct’.

(Adapted from *T&G Organising Record* – Transport and General Workers’ Union)

Victimised RMT activist re-instated to driving duties

RMT Activist Glenroy Watson has been reinstated to his job as a London Underground driver after winning an appeal against demotion to station assistant and a reduction in salary of £10,000. Glenroy, a long-standing union rep, had been charged with gross misconduct for allegedly ‘overcarrying’, that is driving a cleaner into a siding.

“It was clear that Glenroy had been singled out for his union activities”, said RMT general secretary Bob Crow, who represented Glenroy at his appeal.

“We were able to show that others found guilty of the same offence have never faced such drastic disciplinary action, yet London Underground had failed to prove that Glenroy was guilty at all”, he said.

(Adapted from *RMT News* – National Union of Rail, Maritime & Transport)

Union News

CARECONNECT LEARNING

An estimated 96% of care workers are unqualified and significant numbers of health workers in ancillary and support roles have no basic qualifications. Many workers doing vital jobs need to improve their communication, writing and numeracy skills – this is essential as the requirements of their jobs change.

Careconnect Learning is a UNISON learning initiative. It offers courses to people who work in hospitals, care homes and other social care workplaces. It uses innovative, new and exciting courses from learndirect, which can be delivered either online, or by CD Rom and workbook.

(Adapted from UNISON – public service workers’ union
www.unison.org.uk)

‘Too old at 51’

Two long-serving reporters, sacked by the Press Association, have won payments thanks to the support of the NUJ. Dave Fothergill and Mervyn Tonbridge were both suddenly sacked by the editor when they turned 51. With union backing they brought cases for unfair dismissal, claiming they had been unfairly picked on because of their age. They were awarded £20,000 each.

(Adapted from *Journalist* – National Union of Journalists)

Low pay and no pay in films

Many actors, especially those in the early stages of their career, feel forced to accept low or no pay in order to build a professional portfolio. Equity is considering taking legal advice on how the National Minimum Wage might apply to low budget (under £1 million) films that offer low pay/no pay. The union may also look into some casting websites which advertise work on low pay/no pay.

(Adapted from *Equity* online magazine – actors’ union, summer 2006)

Working on the front line

The customer is always right – except when they are abusive. It was 5pm when the customer called to say that if his phone was not connected by 5.25pm he would be coming into the BT shop at Harrow with a sawn-off shotgun, looking for hostages. The customer who made the threat had been in

prison for GBH and they knew he was serious.

The CWU has recently been discussing with management the issue of violence to staff. The union has been concerned about the under-reporting of incidents and would like to stress the need for all members to report any such cases.

(Adapted from *CWU Voice* – Communication Workers’ Union)

Interviewing Skills

Description

Students are often required to find out about the world of work on work experience by interviewing people at the workplace. Interviewing is not an easy task, and in this activity students gain confidence by practising with classmates and visitors. It is preferable for students to interview strangers because this helps increase their confidence, but the activity could be run using volunteers from among the teaching and non-teaching staff in the school.

Learning outcomes

- Young people gain confidence in their ability to interview a stranger.
- They learn interview techniques which can be used in a variety of coursework.
- They recognise some of the problems involved in interviewing people about their work.
- They learn about work practices through the experience of someone from the world of work.

Method

- Invite three working adults to visit the class to be interviewed by some of the students.
- Put students into groups of three. Tell groups what job one of the visitors does and ask the students to write about ten questions that they would like to ask the visitor about that job.
- Tell them to try their questionnaires out on each other, each student having a turn at being interviewed. Ask them to improve and refine the questionnaire.
- Put small groups of students together into three large groups and ask a visitor to join each group. Ask for volunteer students to interview the visitor using the questionnaires they have written. Other students in the group should observe the interviews and feedback constructive comments at the end of each interview.
- Ask the visitor to feedback any general comments on the students' interviewing techniques and then ask for a volunteer student to practise interviewing the visitor in front of the whole group.
- Give out the sheet *Tips on Interviewing Technique*. Read it through with the whole class and ask if they would like to add any tips from their own experience of interviewing each other.

Tips on Interviewing Technique

- Get permission to interview another worker from your supervisor.
- If your respondent* agrees to be interviewed, arrange a time which is convenient. Don't expect the person to stop whatever he/she is doing and be interviewed straight away.
- Do not put pressure on someone who is really unwilling to be interviewed. It may be that the person is very busy, very shy, or worried about what the supervisor will think.
- Tell the respondent roughly how long the interview will take and the topic you will be asking about.
- Try to keep the interview fairly short – no more than 20 minutes.
- Make sure you have the questionnaire, some paper, a pen and a clipboard (unless a table is available) when you carry out the interview.
- Ask the questions clearly and slowly.
- Don't rush from one question to the next. Allow the respondent to think and say everything they want to.
- Sometimes a respondent gives a very short answer and you need to probe for more information. Do this by saying things like: "What other reasons do you have?" or "Why do you think that?" Make sure that the probes are open-ended, so that you don't bias the answer you get.
- Never sound critical of an answer or suggest that you disagree with it. When you are an interviewer, your own opinions do not count.
- If you are not sure what your respondent means, ask him/her to explain.
- Let the respondent see what you have written if he/she wants to.
- Assure the respondent that the answers are in confidence. Never repeat what someone tells you in an interview at the workplace, and do not use the respondent's real name in any report that you may write.
- Thank the respondent for his/her time.

*respondent: a person being interviewed

Call Centres

Description

Trade unions have always existed to protect workers' pay and conditions at work. However, despite more than 100 years of trade union activism and far-reaching employment legislation in this country, there are still workplaces which are unsatisfactory. This case study describes some of the problems at call centres.

Learning outcomes

- Young people find out about the pay and conditions in call centres and consider what can be done to improve them.
- They learn about the support available from trade unions.

Methods

- Ask students to work in groups of two or three and give out copies of the case study. They should read through the case study and discuss some or all of the following questions. Additional discussion questions can be added depending on the exact focus of the session.
 - *What are the main problems about working in call centres, as described in the case study?*
 - *How could employers improve the conditions of work?*
 - *Would you like to work in a call centre? Why or why not?*
- Ask each group to appoint a scribe to record the views of the group. Discuss each question in turn by asking a group to report back on its views and then opening up the discussion on that question to other groups.
- Invite any visitor who is present to comment on the views expressed.

Call centres



Call centres in the UK employ more than 400,000 people. But not everyone is happy with this booming sector. The TUC says the industry has a 'sweatshop image'.

Michael (not his real name) has worked in call centres for five years, first manning the phones and now as a manager. Are call centres really that bad?

'Sweatshops. It's a nice metaphor. The work is difficult and to keep costs down you have to get through as many calls as possible. So you take call, after call, after call for seven hours or more. That's where the sweatshop comparison comes in. You can get very tired at the end of the shift, uncomfortably tired. But you've got to remember that the working conditions aren't that bad and there's a strong union presence.

I don't think it's that call centres themselves are bad; it's the nature of the work. It can be very stressful dealing with customers who aren't

very happy. I don't know if I've ever had death threats, but I have been threatened with violence by people who assume you are in the same city as them. I get sworn at a lot. But you have to remember the abuse is usually in the heat of the moment; it's nothing personal, and the person wouldn't know you if they fell over you in the street. Some workers find they can deal with angry callers better than others. If you find it difficult to apologise for something which isn't your fault or the fault of the company, then a call centre isn't the place for you.

I'm not sure if it's a low prestige job. Maybe it attracts people who don't want to commit to a career for a great length of time – hence the high turnover.

Though short breaks are worked into the daily pattern, talking to colleagues is frowned upon. You can't stop workers talking – you'd never keep them if you did – but it's not the sort of job where you can chat all day.

There's been a lot of talk about acoustic shock (damage to hearing caused by sudden loud noises during phone calls). Everyone's been made aware of it, but I've never heard of anyone suffering from it. I'm sure it exists.

Companies should spend as much as they can to make sure they have happy, productive call centre staff. Are call centres 'sweatshops'? It's indoors work and there's no heavy lifting, which is always a good thing.'

Adapted from *Call Centre Confidential* BBC News: news.bbc.co.uk – 21st February 2001

CALL CENTRE HOTLINE SUPPORTS UNION INITIATIVE

Four hundred people a week called the TUC's call centre hotline to complain about bullying, impossible sales targets, delayed wages and hostility to trade unions.

Complaints from the 21st century sweatshops included charges that the bosses made workers put their hands up if they wanted to go to the toilet, and then monitored how long they spent there. Many workers are allowed only a three-second break between calls, and one man was disciplined after he left a six-second gap between calls.

One clever call centre manager brought disposable nappies to work, threatening that staff who used the toilet most would be forced to wear one. The call centre also had a so-called shame board to monitor staff progress, and anyone on the board for more than three weeks faced dismissal.

'It is incredible to think that any management in this day and age would attempt such degrading and infantile behaviour towards staff', says CWU general secretary Derek Hodgson. 'But these industrial slums do exist, and the TUC campaign which we initiated is doing a valuable job in exposing them. Civilised employers will want to join with workers and their unions to force all call centres to adopt proper standards of behaviour and treatment of their employees.'

Communication Workers Union Homepage: www.cwu.org – 6th March 2001.

Safe With Us

Description

Only occasionally do issues involving trade unions hit the headlines. One controversial area is when journalists refuse to divulge the names of people who have provided them with information in confidence for their stories. These case studies give some examples where journalists have fallen foul of the law and raise issues for young people to debate. Further information can be found on the NUJ website (www.nuj.org.uk).

Learning outcomes

- Young people will consider the ethical issues concerned with the journalists protecting their sources of information.
- They learn about the support available from trade unions.

Methods

- Ask students to work in groups of two or three and give out copies of the case studies. They should read through the case studies and discuss some or all of the following questions. Additional discussion questions can be added depending on the exact focus of the session.
 - *Should journalists always be able to protect their sources no matter what the circumstances?*
 - *How does the National Union of Journalists support their members who are asked to divulge the name of their source by the Police or the Courts?*
 - *Was the NUJ right to bar the journalist in Case 4 from joining the union for what he did?*
 - *Do you think the law should be changed to give greater protection to journalists and their sources?*
- Ask each group to appoint a scribe to record the views of the group. Discuss each question in turn by asking a group to report back on its views and then opening up the discussion on that question to other groups.
- Invite any visitor who is present to comment on the views expressed.

Safe With Us

An important role of trade unions is to defend their members' interests in the case of legal action. Many TV and newspaper journalists belong to the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). Clause 7 of the NUJ Code of Conduct states that 'a journalist shall protect confidential sources of information'. The NUJ argues that it is the right of a free press in a democratic society for journalists to expose corruption and bad practice. They can only do this if people who give them inside stories (sources) are guaranteed confidentiality that their names will not be revealed. The law provides

some protection for journalists. The Contempt of Court Act 1981 says that journalists cannot be forced to name their source except for three reasons:

- the protection of national security
- the detection or prevention of crime
- the interests of justice.

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 states that police must have a Crown Court order to seize journalists' material.

CASE 1

Bill Goodwin was a reporter on the *Engineer* who received a leak of a financial report on Tetra, a computer software company. When he made enquiries of the company, they obtained a court injunction to stop publication and to name the source of the leak. The case went to the House of Lords with Bill Goodwin losing at every stage. He was fined £5,000. The company claimed the leak was theft and in the interests of justice they needed the name. In fact it was not theft as the source was an employee authorised to hold the document, but Bill Goodwin could not reveal that.

CASE 2

Martin Bright was home affairs editor with the *Observer* newspaper. The newspaper had contact with David Shayler, the former MI5 officer, who discussed his secret work. The police applied to the courts for the *Observer* to hand over their material on the Shayler case because they wanted to prosecute him under the Official Secrets Act. The NUJ supported Martin Bright and the application was thrown out by the High Court.

CASE 3

Robin Ackroyd, a freelance investigative journalist, won the right to defend himself in the face of a High Court order to betray a confidential source. He received information about the treatment of Moors murderer Ian Brady in Ashworth Hospital Merseyside. Robin Ackroyd has often exposed scandals in top security mental hospitals. The Appeal Court overturned the High Court ruling that he should be ordered to identify his source.

CASE 4

The NUJ declared one journalist 'not a fit and proper person' to be a member of the union. The journalist had posed as a Parliamentary researcher to gain access to a loyalist paramilitary in a Northern Ireland jail. During the interview the man confessed to the murder of a Catholic taxi driver. When he was brought to trial the journalist gave evidence against him despite having promised confidentiality, because the man had broken off contact and he argued that this meant their deal was off. The paramilitary denied the confession and the murder. Other Northern Ireland journalists were worried by the journalist's action feeling that it could jeopardise their lives in future. The NUJ view was that the promise to protect sources was more important in this case than the public interest in informing on a notorious killer.

Adapted with permission from *Safe With Us*, Journalist – July 2003

Campaign

Description

Campaigning is an important function of trade unions today. Every union runs campaigns on current issues and visiting their websites is a good way of finding out about these. It is part of the wider social and political role of unions in our democratic society. The case study is drawn from the *Good Work: Agenda for Better Jobs* campaign run by Amicus (see their website on www.amicustheunion.org). However, the TUC and most member unions run various campaigns throughout the year. Investigating union campaigns is a good way of finding out about active citizenship issues and the methods used to bring about desirable change.

Learning outcomes

- Young people learn about a range of citizenship issues especially those relating to working lives.
- Young people learn about how trade unions play a wider social and political role in trying to bring about change through campaigns.

Method

- Put the class into groups of four or five and ask each group to make a list of the things that would make for a ‘bad job’ based on their experience (i.e. their own, family or friends).
- Ask each group to give you one item from their list and to explain the thinking or experience behind it. Record these on the board/flipchart.
- Distribute copies of the *Campaign* case study. Explain that trade unions aim to improve working conditions and working lives. The Amicus union is currently running a campaign focusing on what ‘good work’ or ‘good jobs’ would be like. The case study explains the thinking behind the campaign. Give students a few minutes to read through and discuss the case study.
 - *How important is job satisfaction to them in taking on a job?*
 - *Is pay more important than the quality of the job?*
 - *What is the ‘bad factor’ that they would find most difficult to accept in a job?*
 - *Can they put the good factors in order of priority to them as young people?*
 - *How would the good factors change if they were married with a family?*
- Ask students to think about running an active campaign to influence employers in their area to improve the quality of jobs. Ask them to create a ‘long list’ of ideas on what they could do to gain publicity to highlight the issue. Then ask them to choose one or more of those ideas for a three-month local campaign focusing on getting the ‘good jobs’ message across (assuming there was no problem with the budget).
- Ask each group to choose a spokesperson to feedback their ideas. If a trade unionist is present, then ask them to comment on the ideas and to talk about campaigns in which they have been involved.

- As a follow-up activity, ask each group to visit union websites (www.tuc.org.uk and click on 'Unions' for an A–Z list of TUC affiliated unions). These could be divided according to the alphabet depending on the number of groups, e.g. Group 1 A–E, Group 2 F–J, etc. Ask them to research current campaigns that are running including what the issue is, why the union has taken up the issue and how the campaign is being organised.

Campaign

Trade unions have an important campaigning role. They take up issues and causes and try to gain publicity so that government and employers take action to improve people's lives at work. An example is the Amicus union's Agenda for Better Jobs. With the British economy doing well in recent years with high levels of employment, the union has focused attention on the quality of work. The following is adapted from the Amicus campaign booklet *Good Work: An Amicus Agenda for Better Jobs*.

Work matters. And the importance of work is not just about having a job. Dissatisfaction with the work we do affects people's well-being. Furthermore, it affects productivity through higher rates of absence and turnover and low motivation in the workplace. Evidence from the Working in Britain survey suggests the levels of job satisfaction are declining with workers less satisfied with work today than ten years ago. Some clear themes stand out when considering workers' dissatisfaction with their jobs. Firstly, they feel that they have less control over their working experience. Secondly, workers say that they are having to work harder. Finally, large numbers of workers also feel insecure in their jobs.

It doesn't take long to identify things that might make for a 'bad job': unsafe working conditions, poverty pay, bullying and harassment, no training, lack of respect, monotonous and repetitive work to name but a few. There is also little disagreement about the effects of 'bad jobs' on people's health. Workers in 'bad jobs' are more likely to suffer from mental and physical illness.

'Good work' is rewarding, fulfilling and in balance with the rest of our lives. For employees it can improve overall well-being and performance. For employers it can increase productivity and attract and retain talent.

The Amicus Agenda for better Jobs has five key elements:

1. **A safe and healthy workplace.** Workplace safety, sickness absence and health promotion are important issues. There is a social gradient in health whereby workers in lower status jobs experience worse health and lower life expectancy than workers in higher status jobs. Consideration of work and health should look at work organisation, job design and management standards.
2. **Control over the working environment.** People feel that they are losing control over their working experience. A recent survey showed that only 38% of employees were satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in decision making. Giving employees autonomy and influence over their work reduces stress. One key area of concern is working time. Apart from Latvia, UK full-time employees work the longest weekly hours in the EU.
3. **Secure and interesting work.** A recent survey showed that 41% of UK workers said they were unsure about the future of their job even if they performed well. Insecurity adds to feelings of stress, anxiety and detracts from organisational commitment. Making work more interesting is a key factor in improving the quality of work. This can be done by organising work so people can use their initiative and work with others. Access to training so people are equipped with the necessary skills to do their jobs reduces stress and increases their feeling of security in coping with rapid economic changes.
4. **Fairness and dignity at work.** An essential element in feeling valued at work is being treated with respect. People should not be discriminated against on account of their gender, race, sexuality, disability or age. Workplaces should be free from bullying, harassment and intimidation, which cannot only have a devastating effect on individuals, but is bad for business. Pay is one of the things that employees are least satisfied with in their job. Many years after the 1970 Equal Pay Act the gender pay gap persists with women still earning less than men. In addition, pay inequality between the highest and lowest earners has grown.
5. **A trade union voice for workers.** Positive social relations can help protect people from crises, uncertainty and low status. In the workplace trade unions give workers a 'collective voice'. Trade unions reduce the gender pay gap, cut industrial accidents and are more likely to be associated with equal opportunity policies and family-friendly policies in the workplace. People are more likely to feel a greater sense of control, confidence and motivation where there are high trust relationships between employers, workers and their trade union representatives.

The Union Representative

The research for the following assignment can be carried out either during your work experience or during a workplace visit. You could collect your information at your part-time job, if you get permission from your supervisor.

The evidence from this assignment can be used to illustrate your use of the Key Skills listed in the box and could form part of your portfolio of evidence for a qualification.

Key Skills – levels 1 and 2

Communication: Take part in/contribute to discussions

Communication: Write different types of documents

Communication: Read, obtain and summarise information

Information Technology: Present information

Improving Own Learning and Performance: Set and understand targets

Improving Own Learning and Performance: Follow a plan to meet targets

All trade unions have representatives at the workplace. There are two kinds of representatives: the shop steward and the health and safety representative. The shop steward is sometimes known as the union workplace representative. Often one person does both jobs. The larger the workplace, the more representatives there will be.

The union representative is not paid by the union. He/she is an ordinary employee who is interested in union issues and wants to help other employees to be kept informed. In companies where the trade union is recognised, the representative is allowed some time during the working shift to carry out union business.

In this assignment, you will investigate the work done by a union representative.

The Union Representative

TASK ONE

Interview one trade union representative about the work they carry out for the union. Tape record the interview, if possible. You will need to reassure the person you are interviewing that the material will not be published as it is for use in your coursework. Remember to ask about the following topics:

- how the representative was chosen
- examples of the kinds of work they do for the union
- examples of problems they have solved
- information about training they have been given by the union
- what help they get from the local union official.

TASK TWO

Trade unions often produce leaflets giving members information about becoming a trade union representative. These leaflets need to be lively, interesting and persuasive.

Using the information you obtained from the interview in Task One, design a lively leaflet which answers the following questions aimed at people thinking about becoming a union representative:

What would I have to do?

Where do I start?

Am I on my own?

How much time will it take up?

Do I have to work full-time?

You could use your own artwork and/or clip-art from a computer.

TASK THREE

Show a draft of your leaflet to a trade unionist and ask for his/her opinion. Make any suggested improvements. If several of your group have designed leaflets, you could ask a trade unionist to judge them according to the following criteria:

accuracy, persuasiveness, attractiveness.

TASK FOUR

Visit the websites of four trade unions (www.tuc.org.uk/tuc/unions has all the union websites) or write to them to find leaflets about being a union representative. Collect samples from these unions and compare them to yours. Write a short evaluation of your leaflet in the light of the ones you have seen.

Trade Unions at Work:

Briefing Notes for Trade Unionists and Other Visitors

This unit of work is part of a set of materials developed by the TUC for use with young people in schools and youth centres. The materials aim to help young people acquire knowledge and understanding about the changing nature of work and careers, employment rights and the role of trade unions, and to develop skills to manage their own careers and negotiate decisions throughout their working lives.

The specific aims of the unit on trade unions at work are to:

- provide examples of what trade unions do for their members at work
- encourage young people to consider how trade unions help build positive relationships at work
- introduce young people to the changing role of trade unions.

The unit consists of eight activities. The following brief notes give suggestions about the role of trade unionists and other visitors in supporting each of these activities.

What's Your Opinion?

This activity is designed to elicit students' honest views about trade unions. They may have absorbed prejudices from the mass media and it is important that they feel they can say what they believe. The role of the visitor in this activity is not to win arguments, but to listen to their views and to discuss with them how they came to their opinions. The group leader will ask visitors to contribute to the final discussion when students consider arguments for and against joining a union.

Union News

In this activity, students find out what kinds of issues unions get involved in by reading extracts from union newsletters and journals. The role of the visitor in this activity is to contribute to the final discussion. It would be helpful if the visitor came prepared to add to the issues identified by talking about additional examples. Bring along copies of your own union newsletter to leave with the teacher.

Interviewing a Trade Unionist

The aim of this exercise is to increase students' confidence prior to their work experience. They will probably be required to interview various work colleagues on work experience and they may find the task daunting. In this activity, they practise interviewing their classmates and then you, the visitor. Constructive comments on their interview technique will help them to learn the skills required in interviewing.

Call Centres

This case study describes working conditions in a call centre and raises some of the problems about call centres reported to the TUC. It illustrates some of the disadvantages of a fast-growing area of work. It would be helpful to the group leader if the visitor had given some thought to the questions and could provide other examples from his/her own knowledge or experience. You may want to widen the discussion to include the issue of the outsourcing of call centre jobs to India and the problem of acoustic shock damaging hearing. The group leader will ask for the visitor to sit in on some of the discussions and to add his/her own comments at the end.

Safe With Us

These case studies deal with the question of the journalists' 'right' to protect their sources of information. Ethical and legal questions are raised. It would be an ideal activity in which to involve a journalist from a local newspaper.

Campaign

This case study features the Amicus campaign *Good Work: Agenda for Better Jobs* which focuses on the characteristics of 'bad' and 'good' jobs. The activity highlights the campaigning role of trade unions in the wider social and political context. As well as describing the role of your own trade union in improving the quality of working lives, it would be helpful for a trade union visitor to discuss the role of unions in campaigning using a range of examples.

The Union Representative

This assignment requires students to find out at first hand about the role of the trade union representative or shop steward. It would be helpful to the students if shop stewards at their work experience placements could be identified for them and persuaded to be interviewed.

Living Wage

This is a simulation in which groups involved in contracting out cleaning and security services discuss the issue of a living wage for low-paid workers. A trade union is involved in trying to bring about recognition of the union and in campaigning for the living wage. It is based on the campaign for a living wage in East London supported by UNISON and other unions.

Living Wage

Written by Andrew Miller

Description

Living Wage is a simulation based on the recent campaigns for a ‘living wage’ (that is about £7 in autumn 2006) rather than the National Minimum Wage (£5.35) in London’s Docklands. The purpose of the exercise is to engage students in a live issue and to encourage them to communicate with other groups about the issue. Students take on one of 10 roles and each group can send messages to the others to try to influence things in their favour. The activity works with numbers from 20 upwards, but four in each group is a maximum. It raises issues about low pay, inequality, union recognition, benefits of unionisation, contracting out and campaigning. The activity can be run in one hour and would benefit from the involvement of a trade union visitor.

Learning outcomes

- Students learn about some of the issues in the low-skill, low-wage part of the economy.
- Students understand the role that trade unions can play in organising workers and in improving wages and conditions.
- Students consider the role of publicity and pressure in bringing about change and social justice.

Method

- The simulation would benefit from some preliminary work about the level of the Minimum Wage and to whom it applies. For background on the living wage campaign in East London, see the UNISON website (www.unison.org.uk).
- Prepare for the lesson by copying and cutting up the role cards one for each group. You may also want to prepare small table-top signs for each role group. Reproduce enough copies of the student briefing for each role group. Make multiple copies of the Message and Reply Forms. You may want to copy these forms in different colours to distinguish between messages and replies.
- Arrange the room so that groups can see each other, preferably in a large circle (although this is not essential). If you have not made table-top signs, then ask students to write these in large letters and stick them to the desks where others can read them.
- The easiest way to get students into their role groups is ‘randomly’, e.g. according to the table they sit at on entering the room. Alternatively you may want to read out the role groups and ask students sitting around particular tables to choose their role. Read through the brief that explains the scenario they want to influence. Ask them to study their role cards and to start thinking about which other groups they want to influence. In order for all groups to gain an understanding of whom the other groups are, you can ask a spokesperson for each group to stand up, briefly introduce themselves and make any short statement of intent.
- Distribute the Message Forms (three for each group) and Reply Forms (several) and ask them to start preparing their first messages. You may want to appoint two students to act as post persons – collecting messages and replies when they are waved in the air and then delivering them to the relevant group. If you do not have a trade union visitor, then you may want to read some of the messages so you understand some of the debates

taking place. Once they have received a message from another group, they can send as many replies as they like. They may want to leave their tables to have a meeting with another group, but it is best in the first instance to restrict all communication to written messages and replies.

- After about half an hour, or earlier if the pace slackens, move into the debriefing stage. You can ask groups to respond to the following questions.
 - *Who did you decide to write to and why?*
 - *What replies did you get?*
 - *Did you manage to achieve what you wanted?*
 - *What was likely to happen to the workers in this situation?*
 - *Ideally what do you think should happen?*
 - *How did the trade union help them?*
 - *Do you think all companies should pay a living wage?*
 - *Do you think it is right that companies should always award contracts to the lowest bid? What other things might they take into account?*
- If you have a trade union visitor, then brief them to read through the messages as they are collected by the ‘postie’ before they are delivered. They should make a note of particular arguments, themes and issues that emerge. In the debriefing they should draw on their own experience to make some observations about the issues raised in the simulation including: low pay, Minimum Wage vs. a ‘living’ wage, contracted out services, unsocial working hours, union recognition, and applying pressure to employers.

Student Briefing: Living Wage

The setting is a business complex in the Docklands area of a major city. It is filled with skyscrapers and many leading financial companies have head offices there. The bankers and brokers that work here are among the highest paid people in the country. At night another army of workers takes over – security staff and cleaners. Security staff are mainly male and cleaning staff are mostly female; many are from ethnic minorities. They are employed by private contractors and they have low pay and poor working conditions. Most earn the Minimum Wage. There is a gap between the National Minimum Wage (from October 2005 £5.05 for workers over 22 years of age) and the wage necessary to lead a ‘socially included’ life in London (£6.70 in 2006), the so-called London living wage.

Problems they face include:

- No additional pay for working anti-social hours
- Having to have more than one job. In one example one man had two jobs (one for 7.5 hours and another for 4 hours) to make just £51.25 per day
- No lockers to store their belongings
- No rest rooms or leisure facilities for breaks
- Not being allowed to talk to fellow workers during working hours.

In a small group of two or three you will take on a role of someone in Docklands. The question is: ‘*Should all cleaners and security guards get pay increases to bring them up to a living wage of £6.70 an hour?*’ You must decide where you stand on the question, given the information on your role brief.

Now prepare your first message. Your role card will tell you whom to send your first message to. You might:

- Ask them questions
- Tell them what they ought to do
- Plan to start a campaign
- Try to persuade, or challenge what they say, or provide information.

The example below shows you how a message should be set out.

You need to put the name of your group on any message you send and also whom your message is addressed to. One member of the class will deliver the messages by acting as the post person. Once you have received a message from a group, you can then send a reply. You can send a MAXIMUM of three messages altogether. There is no limit to the number of replies you can send.

Example message

Living Wage Campaign

MESSAGE FORM

Message From: UNISEC

To: WeClean workers

We would like to help you fight to improve your pay and working conditions. But you need to join UNISEC as members. You may be worried about being victimised, but we can arrange a meeting away from your workplace, so your employers do not need to know about it. We want to help you – you have a strong case for a living wage.

Signed: Jane Reilly

Living Wage Campaign**MESSAGE FORM****Message From:**
_____**To:**
_____**Signed:**
_____**Living Wage Campaign****REPLY FORM****Reply From:**
_____**To:**
_____**Signed:**

SKS Bank***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You are senior managers in this large bank, which employs 400 staff at its Head Office. Your security contract is with Jamison Security Services who put in the lowest bid for the contract. They do a satisfactory job of patrolling the premises and checking CCTV screens during the evenings and nights. WeClean have the cleaning contract and again there are no complaints. They are cheap and efficient. You are not too worried about what they pay their staff as long as your costs are kept down. But you are concerned about any bad publicity. Both contracts are up for renewal next month and you have to decide what to do. Do you put them out to tender to other companies? Or not?

Write your first message to: the Docklands Gazette

Jamison Security Services***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You are the board of Jamison Security Services. The contract with SKS Bank is worth £250,000 a year to your business in profits. Workers are paid above the Minimum Wage at £5.50 per hour. You do not recognise a trade union. Any bad publicity might affect the renewal of your contract, which runs out at the end of next month. There are rules about not talking on duty as security staff are paid to keep watch and not to be distracted. Any increase in wages would cut into your profits. How will you keep the contract?

Write your first message to: your workers in Jamison Security Services

WeClean***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You are a group of senior managers with WeClean, a large contract cleaning business. You employ a small army of mostly women workers many of whom are recent immigrants from West Africa. You pay them just above the Minimum Wage. Many of these staff work part-time and you are aware that many have other jobs. You do not recognise any trade union but you are aware that a trade union is trying to recruit your workers. You are keen to keep the contract, which earns you £300,000 per year. Any increase in pay will eat into the company's profits. The contract ends next month and you want it renewed. How can you make sure it is?

Write your first message to: your workers in WeClean

Justice Cleaning & Security***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You represent the management of a newly formed company that offers workers a share of the profits. You aim to pay cleaning and security workers a living wage and a share of any profits made. There will also be payments for anti-social hours. A trade union, UNISEC, has been recognised and you negotiate with their representatives to make sure working conditions are good. You want to compete with Jamison Security Services and WeClean for contracts at the SKS Bank. The contracts are up for renewal soon. How can you make sure the contracts are put to tender? How can you win the contract?

Write your first message to: SKS Bank

UNISEC***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You are the local officials of the UNISEC trade union. Your union is a general trade union for workers in a range of low-paid, unskilled jobs. There is a campaign against low-paid workers being employed to clean and provide security in wealthy businesses (as in the financial services sector). You are also not officially recognised by private contract companies. You are targeting WeClean and Jamison Security Services by giving leaflets to the workers urging them to join your union. How can you improve the life of these low-paid workers? How can you get them to join the union? What action could you take?

Write your first message to: WeClean

WeClean workers***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You are employed by WeClean, a contract cleaning company, which provides workers to clean the SKS Bank offices in Docklands. Your working hours are 7pm–11pm and 5am–7.30am on weekdays. You are paid £5.35 per hour and many of you have other jobs to make ends meet. Most of the time you are tired and you see little of your children. You are interested in the trade union leaflet from UNISEC that was given to you. But you are scared that you may lose your job if you ask for more money or join the union.

What can you do to improve your life? What action can you take?

Write your first message to: UNISEC

Jamison Security Services workers***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You are employed by the company to patrol the premises of SKS Bank, a large office block in Docklands. You are paid £5.50 per hour and you work from 6pm to 6am for four nights a week. The main problem of the job is the unsocial hours which stop you from seeing your young children. You are interested in what the UNISEC trade union and Justice Cleaning & Security might be able to do for you. There is a rule about not talking while on duty with other security staff, but you usually ignore this. What would you like to do to improve your working life? What action can you take?

Write your first message to: Justice Cleaning & Security

The Docklands Informer***Living Wage* ROLE CARD**

You are a group of journalists on the local newspaper. You are interested in supporting a campaign to contrast the very high salaries of people working at the SKS Bank and other Docklands companies and low-paid night workers. Local churches say unsocial working conditions and low pay lead to family breakdown and domestic violence. How will you gather information and support for your campaign? How will you apply pressure?

Write your first message to: Jamison Security Services