

Communicate with your staff

It's not always easy communicating with your staff, especially when faced with difficult decisions. Working with a union means your staff are not relying on rumour and speculation. As employment law becomes more complex, a union can help businesses comply with new legislation covering areas such as age discrimination, flexible working, or religious belief. And more new laws mean that providing information to staff and consulting with them will be obligatory. For example, by 2008:

- Those employing at least 50 people will have to introduce a policy and structure for informing and consulting with their employees on the terms and conditions of their employment.
- Employees will have the right to elect a representative(s) to act on their behalf.
- Employers will be required to ensure that there are suitable resources and training to support the reps and the staff in this process.
- For larger firms the law already applies.

Then there are the Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations that came into force on 1 October 2004. They impact on both employers and employees.

- All employers must have minimum statutory procedures for dealing with dismissal, disciplinary action and grievances.
- Staff must be informed of the procedures.
- Employees have a right to have their grievances answered and be represented by their union at meetings or a tribunal.

All this is so much easier for those organisations with a union in place. Unions have a great deal of experience resolving such challenging employment issues. The DTI consultation document referred to earlier* estimates that workplace reps save the UK some £22m–£43m in tribunal costs as a result of fewer applications.

Join a growing band

Over 2,500 companies with over one million workers between them have signed recognition agreements in the past ten years, most of them voluntary. By respecting the rights of your staff to join a union and by working positively with them, you can help your business become more effective.

The union effect means healthier, safer, and more efficient workplaces, with well-trained staff. All you need to do is ensure that staff and their representative(s) have the time and suitable facilities to enable them to participate fully.

Find out today what a union can do for your business. Be recognised as a good employer – recognise a union.

For further information about unions and what we can do for you, email info@tuc.org.uk or contact your regional TUC office, whose details are on the TUC web page www.tuc.org.uk/regions

Further advice on unions and your business can be found at www.businesslink.gov.uk or call 08456 009006

Advice, information and guidance is also available from the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) at www.acas.org.uk or ring 08457 474747 Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 6.00pm.

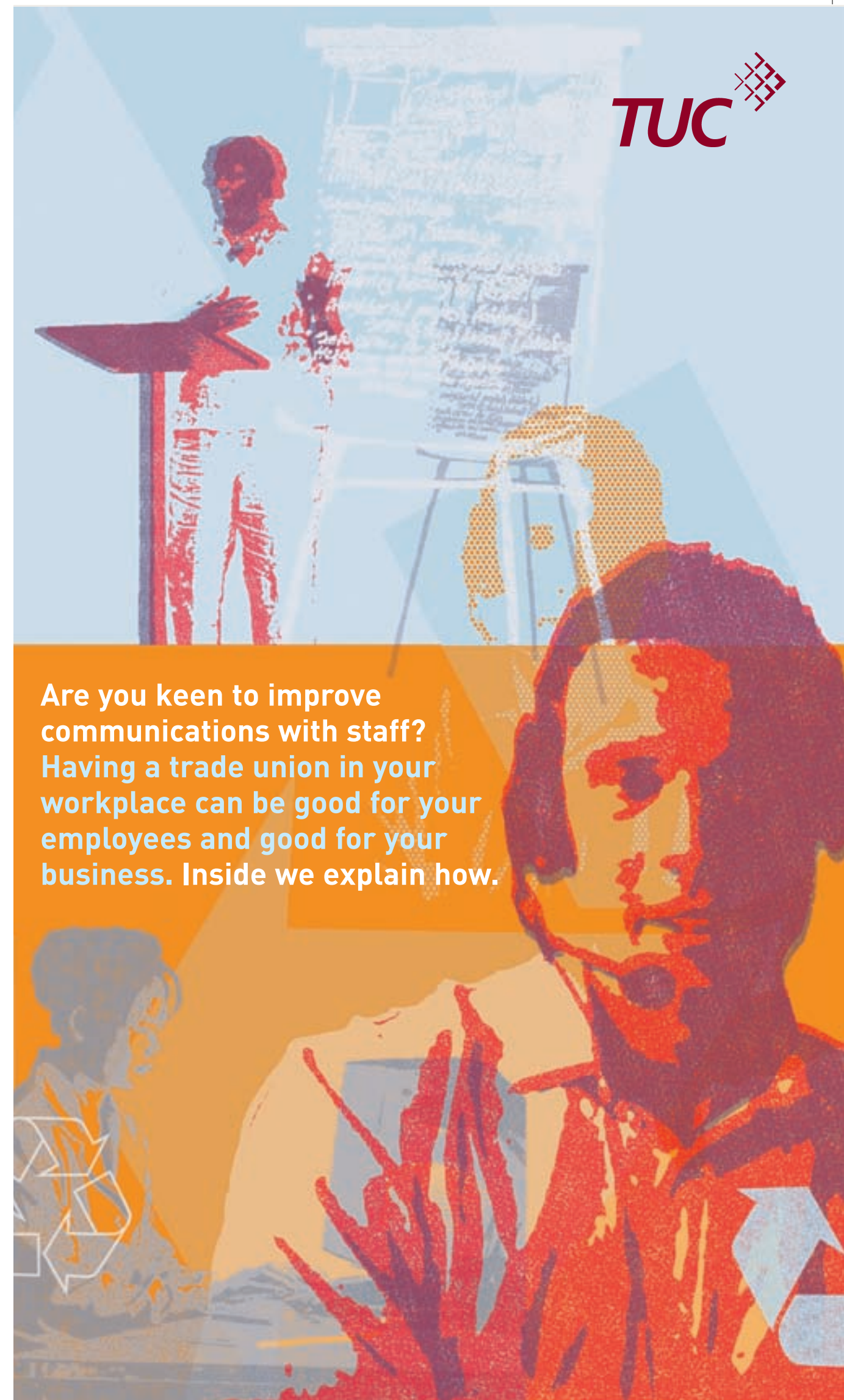
The TUC is the voice of Britain at work, with 62 affiliated unions representing nearly 6.5m working people from all walks of life. We campaign for a fair deal at work and for social justice at home and abroad.

We negotiate in Europe, and at home build links with political parties, business, local communities and wider society.

TUC

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An employers' introduction to trade unions



Are you keen to improve communications with staff? Having a trade union in your workplace can be good for your employees and good for your business. Inside we explain how.

What is a trade union?

Trade unions want to see businesses do well. A thriving, well-run business is good for the workforce too.

Some six and half million people are members of TUC-affiliated unions. Unions represent the interests of their members and negotiate with employers on pay and other conditions of work. Unions may also provide legal advice, financial assistance, sickness benefits and education and training opportunities for their members.

As well as the obvious advantages for employees, there can be also advantages to employers if their staff are in a union:

- Unions can help employers better communicate, consult and negotiate with their employees.
- Unions can help with safety issues in the workplace.
- They can help to organise training and development.
- They can help to improve staff morale and commitment.

What does recognising a union mean?

A trade union is said to be 'recognised' when an employer agrees to negotiate with it on pay and working conditions.

The most common form of trade union recognition is through voluntary agreement without the use of statutory legal procedures. New agreements are being signed every day and the vast majority have been agreed on a voluntary basis.

If the voluntary approach does not work then there are rules about statutory recognition. More information about statutory recognition can be found at www.businesslink.gov.uk, which is sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

'A thriving, well-run business is good for the workforce too'

What practical help do unions provide in the workplace?

Union reps (sometimes called stewards) play a key role in building a positive working relationship between the employer and unionised staff members. Each year the TUC trains over 46,000 union representatives, giving them professional skills and knowledge. The DTI, in its 2007 consultation document on the future of workplace representation*, estimated these workplace reps have a potential productivity impact of somewhere between £3.5bn and £10bn on the economy. They are entitled to paid time off to be trained and to carry out their duties. You can find out more about these rights, and your responsibilities as an employer, at www.acas.org.uk

Reps can:

- involve staff in improving working conditions and practices
- assist employers in complying with employment and health and safety legislation
- call upon a national network of union expertise across a range of employment issues
- engage with employers and members over working arrangements that meet staff and organisational needs (labour turnover is greatly reduced in unionised workplaces).

Train your staff – the union way

Finding money for staff development can be a challenge for small to medium-sized enterprises. That's why many unions and employers are developing new learning-focused partnerships aimed at helping staff access new training and educational opportunities. Hundreds of new union-led projects to improve workplace skills have been supported by the Government's Union Learning Fund £15m annual budget.

- More than 450 Union Learning Fund projects have been run, covering over 3,000 workplaces.
- More than 67,000 learners access courses each year through union-led projects.

In 2004/2005 the TUC and its unions helped individuals gain more than 3,500 Skills for Life qualifications and 4,500 NVQ achievements at levels 1-3.

In the UK nearly 40 per cent of union members have had job-related training in the last three months, compared to just over a quarter of non-members.

Having a union at your workplace will give your employees a better chance to improve the skills needed to grow your business.

According to the DTI's consultation document on workplace representatives*, union learning reps (who help broker deals between staff, employers and learning providers) are worth £94m–£146m in increased productivity.

Richard Lygo, Dairy Crest's HR manager says: *'The learning initiatives have helped engage all staff at the workplace and we're really pleased at the way they will also bring benefits to the wider community'*.

* Workplace Representatives: a Review of their Facilities and Facility Time, January 2007, DTI

It's a hazard without a union

Years of trade union experience have built an extensive understanding of workplace hazards. Reducing accidents and ill health at work saves money for your business and keeps a workforce healthy and motivated. That's why it pays to have a union health and safety rep on site. The DTI's consultation document* concludes that safety reps at 2004 prices save society between £181m and £578m each year as a result of lost time reduction from occupational injuries and work-related illnesses.

There are over 150,000 union safety reps in the UK, trained by their union or the TUC to national and internationally recognised standards.

Many employers can't do without them. Ian Wylie, Deputy Chairman of management and construction company Mace, says: *'Our co-operation with the trade unions promoting a continual health and safety training agenda is fundamental to the core of our business.'*

Unions can help you green the workplace

Being green is not just about being a responsible member of your community. Better use of resources, cutting back energy usage or recycling material wherever possible are all ways of making a business more cost-efficient.

Each year UK workplaces generate over 66 million tonnes of carbon emissions from the energy and resources they consume, and waste, on average, 30 per cent of the energy they buy.

For many organisations, a 20 per cent cut in energy costs would be the same as a 5 per cent increase in sales.

If green worries are giving you a headache then involve unions in the process. Unions are embarking on a massive green education programme to help members and reps work with their employer to introduce green workplace policies.

At Legal and General regular union-run audits give essential feedback on the success of waste minimisation programmes. *'One of the most difficult areas in implementing any programme is engaging employees: without the active support and participation of the union across the Group we would find this much harder to achieve'*, says Mark Gregory, L&G resources director.

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