

UNIONS AT WORK IN THE SOUTH WEST



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THE TUC ESTIMATES WORKPLACE REPS
SAVE THE UK ECONOMY AS MUCH AS
£2M A DAY AS A RESULT OF MORE
PRODUCTIVE, AND BETTER TRAINED,
WORKFORCES, SAFER WORKPLACES
AND FEWER CASES TAKEN TO
EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL



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Union members in the UK



Union members worldwide



WHAT UNIONS DO

Some in the media would have us believe that unions only organise strikes and protest marches. Of course that's when union hit the headlines but few of the 6.4 million members have been on strike, and industrial action remains at historically low levels, with nearly four times more days lost to back pain than strikes!

Joining together for common purpose is an obvious way to speak with a louder voice, to provide mutual support and protection but unions are much more than that. Workplaces are also communities of people who share a trade, occupation or employer. The most successful organisations involve and engage everyone in the enterprise, and unions help. People need an independent body to represent them. Good managers listen and take notice of what staff have to say. Unions provide the forum for debate, discussion and even argument over the way change is implemented and they are the way collective views are expressed.

Modern trade unions also provide a sophisticated range of services and legal back-up. Few of us will be lucky enough to go through our working lives without incident or accident and when things go wrong we need help, advice and support.

Of course unions are controversial. They have a duty to press for progressive social change. The people who brought us the weekend still have campaigns to lead. Unions have wider aims to make society less brutal and more equal. Unions fight to protect our valuable public services and defend the vulnerable. The lowest paid deserve to work without the need for welfare and the economy needs a boost from higher earnings.

Unions are the most democratic institutions in society and make up the largest voluntary membership organisation in the country. That's what keeps them relevant and gives them credibility. We need to shout about what unions do because we have a remarkable story to tell.



THE PEOPLE WHO BROUGHT US THE WEEKEND STILL HAVE CAMPAIGNS TO LEAD. UNIONS HAVE WIDER AIMS TO MAKE SOCIETY LESS BRUTAL AND UNEQUAL



Nigel Costley
South West TUC
regional secretary



53 unions
in the TUC
representing workers
in all types of work

GIVING MEMBERS A VOICE AT WORK

The key person in any union is the workplace rep. These volunteers deal with the day-to-day business of representing their members in the workplace, whether that's bargaining on pay, negotiating changes in terms and conditions or accompanying colleagues to disciplinary or grievance hearings. **Tim Lezard** chats to three reps to find out the difference they have made in their workplaces.

Young teacher **Claire Nicholls** took it upon herself to stand up for her co-workers at a Bristol academy.

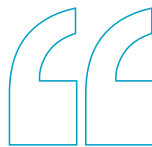
The 28-year-old stepped up to the plate at the Bridge Learning Campus, becoming the rep for the National Union of Teachers, quickly winning the trust of her colleagues and earning a reputation as a tough negotiator.

Claire said: "When I started at the school there wasn't any representation on campus, which was shocking, so I thought I'd better get involved and stand up for teachers' rights.

"It was very daunting to begin with because I would be negotiating with the chief executive and I had to remind myself I wasn't going in as a member of staff, but as an equal, representing all my members.

"Other reps in Bristol and officers in the region have been very helpful, always willing to offer advice, so I haven't been totally on my own."

NUT regional secretary Andy Woolley said: "Claire has quickly established herself as an effective rep, energetically and vocally defending the interests of her members. She inspires hope at a time when despair is all too easy."



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Claire Nicholls at work in the classroom

WHAT UNION REPS DO

Union reps are volunteers elected by the members and trained by their union. Percentage of time reps spent on selected issues...

77%

discipline or grievances

66%

health and safety

62%

pay

54%

staffing levels

54%

hours

43%

equal opportunities

CAMPAIGNING ON PAY



Fees and funding officer Andy Holcome led a successful year-long union campaign against the introduction of local pay at Exeter University.

The Unison member, who works in the university’s admissions office, liaised closely with the two other unions on campus – UCU and Unite – to present a united front to management.

Together the unions saw off a bid by managers to scrap a national pay agreement in favour of local bargaining – a move unions feared may have led to a worsening of their working conditions.

“The plans were announced without any prior consultation with unions,” Andy said, “so I co-ordinated the consulting myself, organising meetings for staff to discuss the proposals.

“We held a vote, and the proposals were rejected by majority of members. The ballot provided a platform for us to successfully renegotiate recognition agreements on more

favourable terms. Not only did the university remain in national pay bargaining, but we also significantly increased facility time for our activists – a double win for unions!”

Unison office Fiona Bentley said: “Andy has been a loyal rep for many years, brilliant at supporting our members and becoming an excellent case worker, trusted by the members and respected by the university senior management team.

“Andy was pivotal in ensuring plans to introduce local pay bargaining were abandoned. He did this by providing leadership for our members, arguing cogently and sensibly about leaving the security of the national pay bargaining and the dangers of pay and conditions being eroded if local pay was adopted.

“He steered the branch through a very difficult and challenging year and successfully managed to repel local pay at one of the South West’s largest employers.”

SOUTH WEST NEEDS A PAY RISE

The TUC is leading the fight to change the South West from a low pay economy to a fair pay economy.

With the value of the region’s overall pay packet having fallen by 10% since 2007, the South West TUC says getting money back into people’s pockets is essential to securing a strong economic recovery.

Unions are calling for a properly enforced minimum wage, higher minimum wages for employers who can afford to pay more, an increased commitment to the living wage and a crackdown on excessive executive pay.



UNION PREMIUM

How much more workers earn if they are in a trade union



SAVING JOBS AND SERVICES



IT worker Gill Allen led a campaign against attempts to privatise council services, saving up to 800 jobs.

Gillian, who works for Information Services at Cornwall Council, is a joint branch secretary and membership officer of the Unison Cornwall Local Government Branch.

In January 2012, Cornwall Council and local NHS trusts announced plans for a mega deal to transfer 1,000 jobs to the private sector. In September, the cabinet decided to press ahead with the plans regardless of opposition from most councillors causing a political storm within the council. A few days later, the councillors passed a motion of no confidence in the council leader, who was ousted and replaced by the deputy.

In December, the council voted for a scaled-down version of the sell-off deal, which would outsource 300 council staff to BT. The local health trust announced it was pulling out of the deal “after taking legal advice”.

Just weeks later, the council chief executive Kevin Lavery announced that he was moving to New Zealand, while the Conservative group leader resigned.

During the campaign, Gillian informed her members about the impact of the proposed

changes, organising meetings with councillors and meetings/video conferences with union reps from elsewhere in the country.

Unison members potentially affected by the plans were invited to attend road show meetings to keep them informed and, more importantly, gather their views. These views, collated with the help of a locally-based survey company, were then presented to councillors before they voted on whether to accept or reject the privatisation deal.

“We were delighted that the original proposal was rejected, rescuing 800+ jobs from being outsourced,” said Gillian “It is disappointing that the council opted for a scaled down version but we have maintained a working relationship throughout the campaign with both council and BT management continuing to work hard to protect our members at the point of transfer and beyond.”

Perhaps the key to Gillian’s success as a rep is her determination to communicate with her several thousand members, setting up email groups to inform people of local and national campaigns, membership benefits, together with news on pay, terms and conditions.

Fellow Unison member Debbie Watkins said: “Gillian consistently keeps me informed of all activities, news and relevant information.”

Another colleague, Dave Simpson, said: “I’ve been a member of the union since 1974 but have never been as well informed as I am now”, while Robert Goodall added: “Gill works tirelessly to ensure members are kept informed and supported regarding employment issues which affect our daily lives.”



PERHAPS THE KEY TO GILLIAN’S SUCCESS AS A REP IS HER DETERMINATION TO COMMUNICATE WITH HER SEVERAL THOUSAND MEMBERS.

RUBBISH PAY OFFER

Refuse workers in Wiltshire and members of the GMB union have been fighting for a decent pay rise. Their employer, FCC Environment Services UK Ltd has a £2.2m per annum contract to operate the waste and recycling service in West Wiltshire. It recently paid out £8 million to shareholders but refused a wage increase to staff that kept up with inflation. By sticking together in a union the workers have a chance to win fair terms with their management.



NOTHING TO LOSE BUT THEIR CHAINS – REPS TAKE UP CYCLE CHALLENGE

Teams of train crews and postal workers went head-to-head in a cycle challenge to promote health and well-being at work writes Keith Hatch.

Organised as part of Adult Learners' Week, the teams of four cycled 5km on a stationary bike as fast as they could, with their individual times being added together.

Despite the posties' team being confident of victory, the train crew cyclists came out on top, with driver Brian Phipps being the fastest man on the day covering his 5k in a time of 5.19 minutes. Fellow driver Rob Matty was a close runner up, finishing just two seconds behind!

The winning team also included driver Jerry Hatcher and train manager Steve Stoke. Each



team member went home with a £20 Halfords voucher, whilst Brian won a spa day at the local leisure centre plus three sessions with personal trainer, Sam Ballinger, who was there on the day to give advice and fitness tips.

First Great Western donated two train tickets and handed out goody bags containing healthy snacks and advice on health staff benefits as crew came to work.

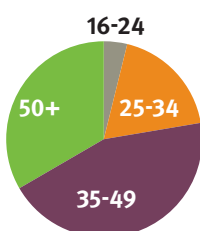
Union learning rep Nicki Sysyum said: "It made sense to get the company involved because there are so many benefits that as employees we're missing out on because we don't realise what's available to us!"



FIRST GREAT WESTERN DONATED TWO TRAIN TICKETS AND HANDED OUT GOODY BAGS CONTAINING HEALTHY SNACKS AS CREW CAME TO WORK



AGE
of union members



STARTING WORK ON THE RIGHT FOOT

Trade union members in Dorchester stepped out of work in June to receive free advice on keeping their feet healthy writes Keith Hatch.

As part of Feet for Life month, the Society of Chiropodists and Podiatrists and South West Unionlearn linked up to pass on tips about general foot healthcare and specific advice for those rushed off their feet at work or who spend the day standing up.

Karen Reed, Union Learning Rep and Union Learning Fund Project Worker for SOCP, covered a number of areas including an introduction to the health and well-being agenda, an overview

to-day life, let alone think about the impact that their working routine can have on their feet.

“It was also a fantastic way to develop relationships across unions. We all have expertise in our own areas, so why not share?”

As well as advice there was a range of free samples to make your feet feel fresh and ready for the summer, and despite a few slides of various ailments that may have put some participants off their lunch, the session was really well received.

Pat Storey, a Unison member from Dorset County Council, found the event very useful. She said: “Informative sessions offered at lunch



of health issues which can have direct impact on feet, a look at foot problems which cause discomfort at work and self-help measures to improve foot health.

Karen said: “This was a great opportunity to push the foot health message to people who may not access this sort of advice in their day-

time are great. It makes you take a break away from work, and a chance to meet colleagues from other areas of work – a rare treat!

“The session confirmed the benefits of making time to look after yourself, your feet in particular. I am enjoying the free products.”



THIS WAS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO PUSH THE FOOT HEALTH MESSAGE TO PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT ACCESS THIS SORT OF ADVICE IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE



REDUCING STRESS IN TAXING JOB



Hard-pressed workers at Bournemouth's HMRC office benefited from a stress-busting event organised by PCS Union Learning Rep Steph Wildman, with support from Dorset's unionlearn Support Officer Keith Hatch.

As part of a Learning Lunches initiative that included taster sessions in community singing, holiday Italian taster, herbs and herbal medicines and flower arranging, one of the more popular sessions – not surprising given the current workload being experienced by civil servants – was on relaxation.

Teresa Barton from Skills and Learning – Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole taught people how to find out what caused stress in a person's life. While the main reasons were linked to personal events such as the death of a close relative or divorce, it was interesting to see how many related to work.

Changes in the type of work, individual responsibilities, work hours and conditions as well as trouble with employers can all increase peoples health damaging levels of stress, and are all areas where unions can support workers.



CHANGES IN THE TYPE OF WORK, INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITIES, WORK HOURS AND CONDITIONS AS WELL AS TROUBLE WITH EMPLOYERS CAN ALL INCREASE PEOPLES HEALTH DAMAGING LEVELS OF STRESS

REMEMBER THE DEAD, FIGHT FOR THE LIVING

Ensuring members are safe at work is a vital part of a rep's role



Dave Moscrop (Snr)

Dave Moscrop is still angry that his father was robbed of 15 years of his life, writes **Tim Lezard**.

His father – also called Dave – died in Bristol ten weeks after being diagnosed with mesothelioma, a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos that affects the skin cells covering the outer surface of the body's internal organs.

“He was a chap who always looked after himself,” Dave junior says. “He ran, he kept himself fit, he ate the right foods, he didn't drink much... he had at least 15 years left in him.”

Dave senior contracted the disease in the late 1960s when he worked in a Bolton factory, manufacturing wooden cabinets for science laboratories.

“It was an open plan office, so Dad worked in one corner while people cut up asbestos sheets to line the cabinets in another – there was asbestos flying all over the place,” explains his son.

“I've since read that employers have known about asbestos not just for decades, but for over a hundred years. Tens of thousands of workers have died as a result of employers not giving a damn about their lives. They just want to make money.”

With the help of Thompsons' Solicitors, Dave is suing his father's former employer. “I'm angry about it, and my dad was too,” he says.

“Pursuing justice is quite difficult because it's a small firm and it was a long time ago but I'm interested in compensation only because if they have to cough up some money, they'll think twice about doing it again in the future.

“My father worked all his life, but suffered and died because some two-bit money-grabbing git

wanted to make money and didn't give two hoots about the people who worked for him.

“This will only change from pressure from unions. It's never going to change through the benevolence of employers. They'll never do it off their own back. It's only through the strength of the labour movement that it'll ever change.”

A recent TUC survey showed health and safety reps:

- help reduce injuries at work
- lead to reductions of ill-health levels caused by work
- encourage greater reporting of injuries and near-misses
- make workers more confident
- help develop a more positive safety culture in the organisation.
- save the economy many millions of pounds.



Workplaces with union safety reps are

50%

safer than those without



Retired environment manager Pete Fryer campaigned tirelessly for health and safety to remain a priority at his workplace, Bristol City Council.

He said: “It is so easy to forget that the rights we have today were won by years of struggle. We must not let this government take away rights from future generations so hard won by our predecessors!”



More than 150 people attended a Workers' Memorial Day event in Bristol Cathedral in April. The event, organised by the South West TUC, remembered those who lost their lives because of their work, and reminded us of the need to campaign for the living.

Nigel Costley, regional secretary of the South West TUC, said a worker died every 15 seconds in the world, and that unions had a key part to play in worker safety, explaining that unionised workplaces were twice as safe as non-unionised ones.

Image: Tim Lezard

MANDA ENCOURAGES HER COLLEAGUES TO GO 'BACK TO SCHOOL'

Unions work with employers to teach members new skills that will benefit them inside and outside of work

The thought of learning new skills – or going back to school, as is frequently referred to – is often enough to deter people from returning to education writes Time Lezard.

But having overcome this challenge herself, Unison member Manda Brown became positively evangelical about learning, wanting to pass on her new passion to her colleagues at Dorset County Council.

“Like many other women, ‘education’ was a scary word to me because I had little confidence in my ability,” she said. “I was always told at school that I could do well if I put my mind to it but living in South Africa with a punishing style of teaching put me off learning in formal settings.

“Unison and the TUC have changed that for me and I want others to know that learning does not need to be academic and that it can be tailored

to individual’s needs and can be supported all the way.”

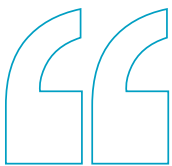
Having shied away from formal education, Manda became a union learning rep, then a lay tutor and is currently attending a return to learn course. She has also organised special learning days at work for her colleagues.

Manda said: “They knew nothing about trade unions and thought trade unions were only about strike action. They were amazed at what trade unions did and could do for them as members and non members within the project.

“They were bowled over by the different opportunities available to them free of charge and the message is spreading like wildfire.

“Their pay and conditions are invariably low and poor but this is one avenue they can use to upgrade their skills and experience to further their careers and personal development.

“I have seen women in particular blossom in confidence and self esteem. The employers are keen to work alongside us as they are already seeing the benefits of a staff group who have a boost to their morale and that they feel more valued by the employer especially when they are given paid time to attend the ULR training.”



THEY WERE BOWLED OVER BY THE DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO THEM FREE OF CHARGE AND THE MESSAGE IS SPREADING LIKE WILDFIRE



Manda Brown (in white blouse) at a learning event in Dorchester

221,000

people gained new skills in 2012 thanks to union learning

10

years of learning in the South West

40 union learning centres

352 Union Learning Reps trained

700 Union Learning Reps

2,044

union reps were trained in 2012 through South West TUC Education

10

years of learning in Cornwall

350 Union Learning Reps

£2.7m EU funding for union-led learning

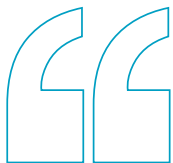
GREAT DAY FOR CHRISTINE AS UNISON ORGANISER SCOOPS AWARD



Union learning took centre stage at the recent WISE Awards to celebrate excellence in employment and skills activity in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, writes Keith Hatch.

Unison regional organiser Christine Dayus joined other winners to highlight the important role that the European Social Fund is playing in the county.

Christine had been nominated for the Individual Award for Skills by South West unionlearn's Carrie Mann.



IN ANY RECESSION UNION OFFICERS ARE AT THEIR BUSIEST – NEGOTIATING TO SAVE JOBS AND LESSEN THE IMPACT THAT CUTS HAVE ON WORKING PEOPLE.

Carrie told the panel: “In any recession union officers are at their busiest – negotiating to save jobs and lessen the impact that cuts have on working people. This extra workload piles up on top of regular duties of a union official – campaigning for fair terms and conditions and supporting members in times of need. Nevertheless Christine has ensured that skills have remained central issue and has worked both within her union and with other trades unions.”

Some of the work that Christine has been doing in Cornwall includes investing in skills for workers in low paid jobs and encouraging people to complete short degree-level courses with paid time off for study. Since May 2012, she has used ESF Convergence to help more than 120 workers, with over half already registered for university level courses.

Union skills. Proportion of workers with higher education qualifications. Union members are more likely to receive training and to a higher standard.



Unison members at Treliske Hospital
Image: Paul Glendell www.glendell.co.uk

Employers and employees alike benefit from having a trained union rep in the workplace.

TUC Education South West last year provided high quality training for more than 2,000 reps in the region, helping employers significantly improve labour retention and reducing absenteeism.

A 2007 report showed how, nationally, union reps saved employers between £72 and £143 million.

The education is provided through a network of TUC-approved providers across the South West. Learners achieve nationally recognised educational credits and

Notes
FOR UNION REPS

qualifications and courses are offered flexibly to suit the needs to union reps and through the traditional day release model.

And to help reps continue their development, TUC Education has introduced eNotes to help reps keep up to speed with workplace issues, covering topics such as universal credit, facility time, equality law and bargaining for skills.

COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION HELPS FULFIL ELLIE'S DRIVING AMBITION

“Driving trucks is an adventure,” says a beaming Ellie Freeman. “I’ve worked here for 23 years and the moment I got a chance to drive one, I went for it. I’ve been doing it for six years now and it’s still an adventure, especially being a woman of my age – girls didn’t drive lorries!”

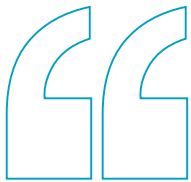
CWU member Ellie works as a driver for Royal Mail, operating out of its Swindon depot, driving her 7.5 ton truck around the Wiltshire and Oxfordshire countryside, collecting mail and dropping it back to Swindon for it to be sorted.

Through the union she is learning to drive a 17 ton truck and then, if she passes her exam, her eyes are set on the ultimate – an articulated lorry.

“I want to drive a bigger one and a bigger one... because I can,” she grins. “The union has got this deal which means it’s not going to cost me nearly as much as if I went out privately and did it on my own.”

Ellie is one of more than 50 workers in Swindon to attend the CWU-organised courses, overseen by the site’s lead union learning rep Sandra Absalom.

“We’re giving our members an opportunity to enhance their careers,” Sandra explains. “We’ve got lots of members who work on machines in the sorting office, or work part-time at the weekend, so thought if we offered the course, they would be able to apply for new jobs when they came up.



WE’VE DONE LOTS OF DIFFERENT COURSES HERE, BUT WANTED TO DO HGV ONES TO OFFER THE OPPORTUNITIES TO ALL OUR MEMBERS, WOMEN AS WELL AS MEN

UNION DENSITY BY SECTOR

Source: Trade Union Membership in 2013 BIS Data taken from the Labour Force Survey, Office of National Statistics

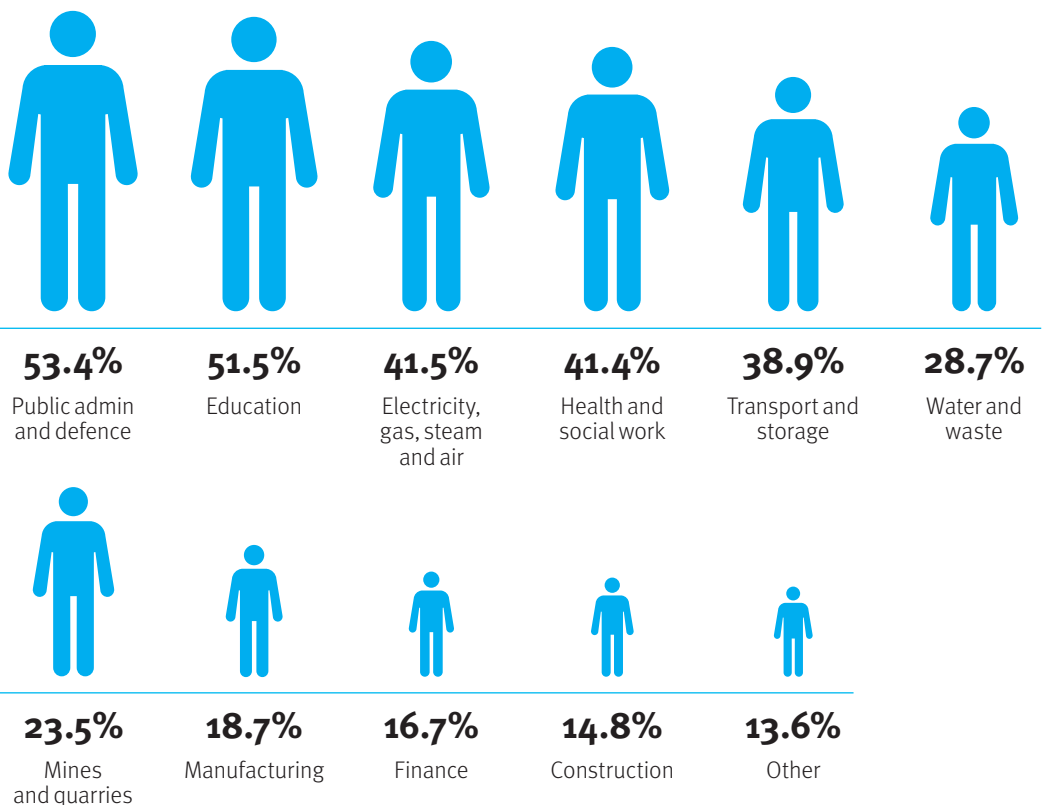




Image: David Morrison www.dmpphotographyltd.com



A FEW WOMEN HAVE COME FORWARD TO DO THE COURSE. ORDINARILY IT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN SOMETHING THEY WOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF DOING, BUT THEY SAW THE POSTERS AND WE ENCOURAGED THEM.

“It’s very important to treat people equally and fairly. This is a very inclusive place. We’ve done lots of different courses here, but wanted to do HGV ones to offer the opportunities to all our members, women as well as men.

“A few women have come forward to do the course. Ordinarily it might not have been something they would have thought of doing, but they saw the posters and we encouraged them.”

Ellie is someone who needed little encouragement, saying: “I have no idea what excites me about driving trucks – I just love it,” she says. “Maybe it’s a sort of power thing, but I couldn’t tell you for certain.”

And with that, she climbs into her cab and drives happily off to work.

ALL WE'RE TRYING TO DO IS CREATE A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD AT WORK



Image: Clint Randal
www.pixelprphotography.co.uk

Maureen Loxley describes herself as a pain in the butt.

“Some union reps take the softly, softly approach when it comes to dealing with managers,” says the Usdaw rep, “but although I try to nip any problems in the bud before they escalate, I’m not afraid to be a pain in the butt when needs be.

“Sometimes if it’s not too drastic, you can speak to the boss and get them to rectify it before it gets too big. If they don’t, then that’s when we put in a grievance.

Maureen works for Tesco in a store on the outskirts of Gloucester, and puts equality at the heart of everything she does.

“Sometimes discrimination is blatant. Other times it’s more subtle, such as you’d find managers giving overtime to whites, not to black or Asian members.

“The important thing in these, and any cases, is that when you have strong union backing, you can fight it, and that’s exactly what I do.”



Sue Bickle’s experience in equality is invaluable to her role in trying to win the trust of minority groups.

The Unison member works for newly-elected Police and Crime Commissioner for Dorset Martyn Underhill, and part of her job is to set up meetings with local communities, despite the fact not everyone feels comfortable talking to the police.

“I don’t see equality and diversity and the community as being two separate things,” she says, explaining it is unlawful to discriminate against people with a ‘protected characteristic’ such as age, gender or disability.

“Every single person has a protected characteristic. We all have a sex, we all have an age, we may not have a disability but we all have a sexual orientation, we all have a religion or non-belief, so equality is at the very heart of the community because it affects everybody in it.

“There are certain protected characteristics that may be harder to hear from because of barriers they may face in access, and the way we’re approaching that is to advertise widely in the localities but also make contact through groups that are already established in the community.”



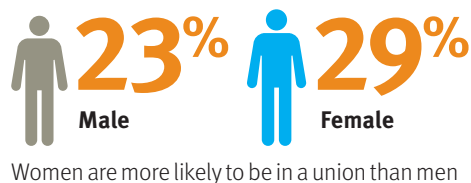
Rita Joyner, chair of joint unions at University Hospitals Trust in Bristol, believes equality should be at the heart of the trade union movement.

“If you look at the economic climate at the moment, you’ll see how the consequences of the recession are affecting different people differently,” she says.

“For example, people from black, minority, ethnic backgrounds, especially those from Bangladeshi communities, are more likely to be unemployed and the first to be made redundant.

“Black males are also highly likely to be unemployed, and a lot of those young men have grown up in England, so you have to ask the question: ‘Why aren’t they being employed?’

“Within the union and the workplace we should be looking to answer that question. “I think the solution is for all employers to embrace equality. All we’re trying to do is create a level playing field because employers have a duty of care to each member of staff, including their black staff.”



POWER IN A UNION! SAVING CASH AND ENERGY AT HOME

Union members have been helped to save money on their energy bills after linking with Citizens Advice, writes Keith Hatch.

Support officers from South West Unionlearn joined the Energy Best Deal scheme to cut household bills by switching energy providers and saving energy at home.

Citizens Advice has been supported by energy regulator Ofgem and major energy companies since 2008 with the programme delivering one-hour training sessions which highlight the savings that can be made by switching provider and becoming more energy aware.

Sessions are aimed at low income consumers and front-line staff who work with people at risk of fuel poverty. They can be signposted to a range of further help with issues such as fuel debt, benefits entitlement and energy efficiency.

Rob Garrett, Senior Union Support Officer, contacted Citizens Advice in the South West to explore ways of becoming involved with the scheme and delivering sessions to workplaces. This resulted in two sessions being delivered to workers at Babcock in Appledore, Devon.

Rob said: “Energy Best Deal is a good way to increase awareness of saving energy costs. With potential savings of £500 per household it is like a pay rise and something that unions and members were keen to get involved with. We made sure we held the Babcock sessions in the union’s learning centre, which had the added bonus of bringing workers into the centre who hadn’t used it before and promoting the other learning opportunities on offer there.”

Darren Cloke is a Union Learning Rep at Babcock and said about the sessions. “There has been a lot of good feedback. The guys are all talking about it, and when that happens you know it’s been worthwhile!”

Union Support Officer Keith Hatch has delivered sessions at Dorset Healthcare as part of Climate Week and for Yeovil Colleges Fresh Start project. There are also future sessions in the pipeline with Unison Care Workers in Dorset and CWU members in Swindon.



THE ENERGY BEST DEAL SESSIONS ARE IDEAL FOR UNION LEARNING REPS AS THEY ARE SHORT AND CAN BE RUN IN A LUNCH BREAK. ALL THE MATERIALS ARE THERE AND READY TO USE

USDAW BRIEFS MEMBERS ON BENEFITS AND BEDROOM TAX

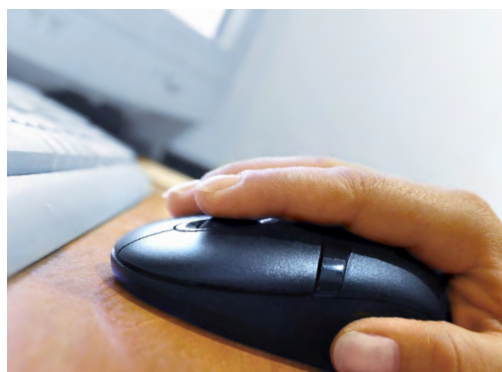
Usdaw is leading the way when it comes to helping members access the government’s new benefits system.

Universal credit, which replaces Job Seekers Allowance, income support, housing benefit and other benefits, is being phased in over two years.

Usdaw has briefed members on how the new system works, as well as publishing a briefing on the bedroom tax and how it affects households.

DIGITAL BY DEFAULT

The government wants all future benefit claimants including job seekers to apply on-line. The TUC is worried about the impact this will have on those without internet access. As well as speaking up for those at risk, unions are gearing up to help workers get access to the web and gain confidence in the digital world.



REDUNDANCY SUPPORT TAKES OFF AT FILTON AIRPORT

The decision by Airbus to close Bristol's Filton Airport by the end of 2012 was grim news for the 40 firefighters employed by Serco on site writes *Keith Hatch*.

Faced with redundancy, they called their union, Unite, for support. Unite officers Steve Preddy and Matt Tipper quickly asked Steph Wring and her Unite learning team to organise redundancy support.

Unite Union Learning Rep Matt Jackway explained: "Once the redundancies were confirmed Steph put us in touch with N-Gaged Training and Recruitment Ltd who were happy to run advice sessions on site for employees.

"This uncovered a demand for IT skills and a desire to upgrade our existing HGV Class Two driving licenses as there were job vacancies in the area for drivers with a Class One licence."

The firefighters operate on a 24-hour, seven-days a week basis which can be very difficult for providers but Michele Ford from N-Gaged was delighted with the help she received from Matt and the station management team.

Michelle said: "They turned up at a meeting to agree delivery times with all the details around shifts and learners already

worked out. The support we received from Unite throughout has meant that this has been the smoothest redundancy support delivery I have ever been involved with".

As well as IT skills and advice, N-Gaged Training and Recruitment Ltd hold a unionlearn Quality Award for their Driving Goods Vehicle apprenticeship. This meant they were ideally placed to help the firefighters upgrade their HGV skills.

Matt continued the story: "The training took place both on and off site and the company were very supportive. They not only paid the full training costs but also helped by rearranging people's shifts to accommodate the training".

In the end nine employees were successful in achieving the qualification.

Although some firefighters moved on before the closure date, there was good news for those who remained at the airport as a decision was made to keep them on to provide extra cover for the Airbus site.

Matt added: "The need for compulsory redundancies was avoided in the end but we would like to thank Unite and N-Gaged for the extra skills we gained while we were at risk".



AS WELL AS IT SKILLS AND ADVICE, N-GAGED TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT LTD HOLD A UNIONLEARN QUALITY AWARD FOR THEIR DRIVING GOODS VEHICLE APPRENTICESHIP.

UNIONS HAVE CHANGED THE MOOD IN TOWN



Civil servant Tim Nicholls knows only too well the importance of enlisting the support of the community to help trade union campaigns writes *Tim Lezard*.

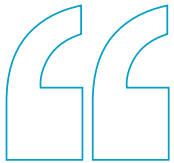
The PCS member, who voluntarily acts as secretary to Weymouth and Portland Trades Union Council, helped resurrect the annual May Day festival in Dorchester, and co-ordinated local union branches, linking with local community initiatives, opposing service and job

cuts and providing assistance to local anti-fascist and anti-racist groups.

Tim said: “When I first joined the trades council, it was moribund. We turned it outwards and made it so it actually mattered to people, supporting local union branches and taking up community issues, such as campaigns to maintain lollipop people and libraries.”

As well as bringing back to life the May Day event, he was also the driving force behind four big rallies in Dorchester over cuts, one of which was attended by nearly 2,000 people.

He said: “There were so many people I was worried they might not fit into the space available! We’ve been in the local paper a lot, thanks to a supportive journalist, and hope we’ve changed the mood in the town.”



WHEN I FIRST JOINED THE TRADES COUNCIL, IT WAS MORIBUND. WE TURNED IT OUTWARDS AND MADE IT SO IT ACTUALLY MATTERED TO PEOPLE



CHARTING SUCCESS

TUC General Secretary Frances O’Grady visited the UK Hydrographic Office in Taunton. The public sector organisation leads the world in the production of marine charts and earns considerable revenue for the taxpayer. Part of Britain’s great naval heritage, the UKHO produces a global range of electronic and paper charts, publications and services for mariners.

Frances was keen to champion the wide range of essential jobs done by public sector workers such as the PCS and Prospect members she met.



Unions are not active solely in workplaces; they take their campaigns into communities to gain wider support from the population at large

The Communication Workers' Union (CWU) is leading the campaign against the privatisation of Royal Mail.

The union is concerned that if the Royal Mail is sold off prices will go up, businesses will be squeezed, the countryside will be isolated, post offices will close and free post for armed forces will be stopped.

The CWU says the Post Office is a vital and historic community asset and should be treated as such.



The campaign to protect postal services.



The BBC is one of the UK's most admired institutions, the quality of its broadcasts renowned the world over.



But a freeze in the licence fee has seen its budget cut by 20%, leading to 2,000 job losses on top of the 7,000 posts that have already gone since 2004.

The three unions representing members at the BBC – the National Union of Journalists, BECTU and Unite – are fighting the cuts because they believe everyone benefits from a well-funded BBC, providing not only high-quality TV and radio but also cultural and educational entitlement.



THE NATIONAL UNION OF JOURNALISTS, BECTU AND UNITE – ARE FIGHTING THE CUTS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE EVERYONE BENEFITS FROM A WELL-FUNDED BBC

The NUT and NASUWT have launched a historical joint campaign against Michael Gove's attacks on our education service; Protecting Teachers, Defending Education.

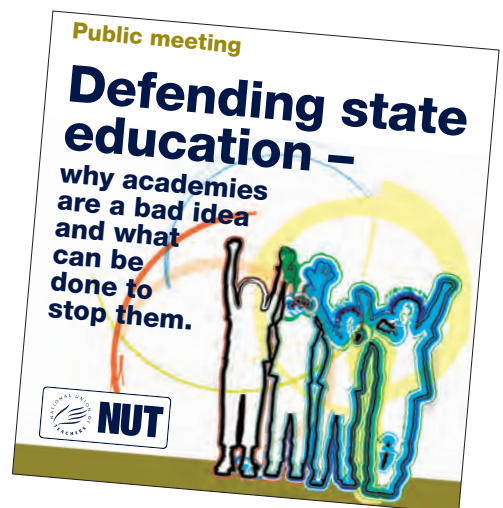


The two unions, who jointly represent nine out of ten teachers, are reaching out to parents, governors and public, to highlight Gove's

plan to atomise and ultimately privatise our state education.

The dismantling of state education with free schools and academies, alongside the attacks to teachers pay, pensions and working conditions are part of Gove's plan to open up education to private business. Michael Gove has stated he has "no ideological objection" to education being run for profit.

The NUT and NASUWT are running a series of Rallies for Education across the county. The campaign also includes a programme of action short of strike action, and unless Gove agrees to talks, the unions will reluctantly continue a programme of regional and national strike action.





Members of Weston Trades Union Council celebrated the 65th anniversary of the NHS in June. They also drew attention to the plight of Weston Hospital, which is under threat of being privatised. Trade unions believe the motivation of health workers should be to make people better, not to make money out of the sick.

Rail unions and the TUC have joined forces to campaign for the re-nationalisation of the railways.

Since privatisation, more than £11m of public funds has been misspent on the railways while

fares have risen faster than anywhere else in Europe at the same time as staff levels have been cut.

The TUC, along with ASLEF, RMT and TSSA, under the banner of Action For Rail, is calling for a railway that puts people before profit.

The TUC's austerity bus visited Swindon and Weston-super-Mare in June to hear from local people how the government's cuts are affecting them.

Prices are rising while wages are held back, public services are being cut and getting tough on cheats is used as an excuse to cut vital benefits and tax credits for millions across the UK who have played by the rules.

The Austerity Uncovered bus toured England for a fortnight, gathering evidence of spending cuts, changes to benefits and falling wages to convict government policies.

Kieran has been unemployed for six months and is desperate to find work. He has recently been put onto an eight week unpaid work placement and threatened with the removal of his job seekers' allowance if he doesn't attend. While he's happy to be gaining more experience, Kieran feels like he's being made to work for peanuts as punishment for not finding a job despite the lack of positions available to apply for. After paying his rent, he is left with just £25 a week to live off and has to make this stretch to cover his food bills and travel costs.



The TUC's Austerity Uncovered bus pictured on the CWU picket line in Bridgwater



Reps are the face of unions at work but, behind the scenes, they are supported by a network of full time officials and lawyers, ready to spring into action.



Nick Seymour is the team manager of the Thompsons' office in Plymouth, and the co-ordinator of the firm's personal injury cases in the South West. Thompsons are legal advisers to the trade union and labour movement, working with unions to ensure their members take advantage of their legal rights.



“One of the nice things about this job is how varied it is. No day is exactly the same. For example, the other week I was at a PCS conference in Exeter, telling people about the legal services they get for being a member, then I went down to Cornwall to visit a client who had an asbestos-related injury.

We do a lot of asbestos cases. Mesothelioma is a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos that affects the skin cells covering the outer surface of the body's internal organs.

It's a horrible disease. Its prognosis is fatal, so we also work very closely with members of the client's family to help and support them.

But it's not just the big cases we deal with. We're here for the little cases as well; the cases that sometimes people don't bother to contact us about because they think it's too small. They don't have to be high-value cases for us to take them on – any case is important.

For example, the other week I went to Paignton to see a client who had broken his finger. A damaged window in his workplace hadn't been replaced and the employer, despite many warnings, failed to replace it. It then fell down, onto the client, breaking his finger. It wasn't the end of the world for him, but it caused him a lot of inconvenience and he was off work for a while.

I also gave a talk to a Unite meeting in Exeter about what can be done as a health and safety rep in the workplace. I spoke to them about writing accident reports and witness statements, as well as carrying out risk assessments.

I also told them about the Thompsons Pledge, which is that we will work solely for the injured or mistreated, never for employers. As well as our commitment to trade unions, there's a new reason why it's worth joining a union: earlier this year the government removed the 'no win, no win' funding for people getting injured at work, which means the client has to pay back up to 25% of their compensation back to their lawyers.

However, if you take a case through the union you get to keep 100% of the damages.

My view is health and safety is the number one reason for joining a union. Once your workplace is safe, you can then worry about pay and conditions, but if the workplace isn't safe, none of the rest of it matters.

You'd be amazed how often reps tell us their boss has improved health and safety after we've taken a case against them. I get a bit of a buzz when I hear that because that's what Thompsons is all about – making the workplace safer.”



IF YOU TAKE A CASE THROUGH THE UNION YOU GET TO KEEP 100% OF THE DAMAGES.

504,000

union members in the South West

24% of the workforce





Chris Starling is a Unite regional officer based in Gloucester

My day starts early. I get up at 5.45am and take my three dogs for a walk then, when I get home, I have a cup of tea. Breakfast is my peaceful time when information sinks into my brain. I read through paperwork on members' issues or the law. It's important to keep up with the law because it changes so frequently.

Although I'm based in Gloucester, I'm rarely in the office. I go there maybe three times a week, just for a couple of hours to catch up on paperwork.

Most of my time is spent in workplaces, meeting reps where we discuss all manner of issues.

Any given day I might be negotiating their wages or terms and conditions, helping them in a disciplinary or a grievance or if they've had an accident at work.

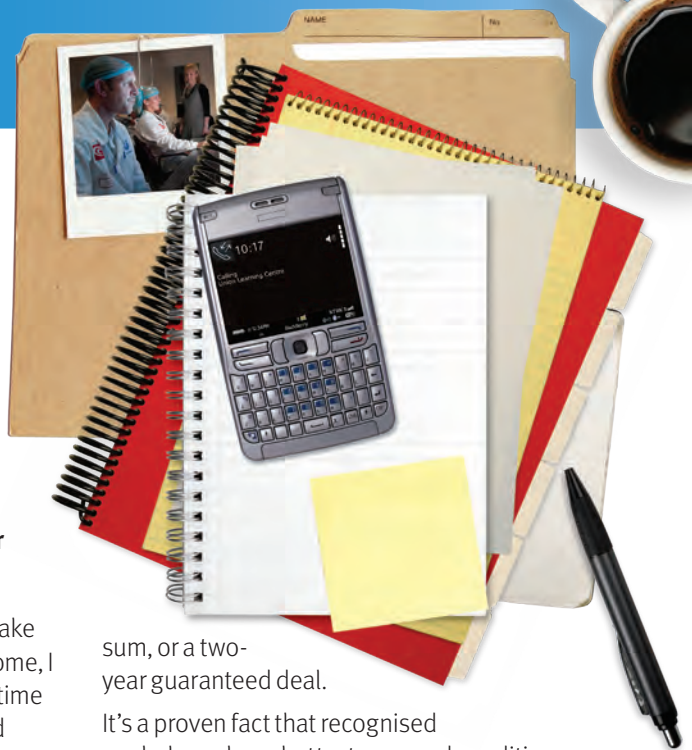
Unite is busy training reps to improve their negotiating skills so they can go back into the workplace and talk to the employer themselves but, if the employer won't move, I'll go in and help out.

One of the main advantages of being in a union is if you work in a recognised workplace, the employer has to talk to us.

If you're not in a union you have very little power when it comes to negotiating your own wages because if your boss says "No", what can you do, where can you go?

But if you're in a union we negotiate on your behalf. We have more experience in dealing in these situations than most individuals and we have more weight behind our argument because we're speaking on behalf of more workers.

For example, if the company says it cannot afford a pay rise, we might look at asking for extra days holiday instead, or a one-off lump



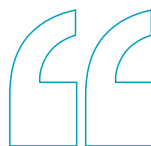
sum, or a two-year guaranteed deal.

It's a proven fact that recognised workplaces have better terms and conditions than non-recognised companies. The employer has to give us more because they know we'll jump on them if they don't.

I also help out when members are called into disciplinary hearings. You'd be amazed how often companies fail to follow proper procedure. Again, this is something an individual might not know about, but we do because it's part of our job as officials.

I'm often exhausted when I get home at the end of the day, but I don't mind because, although it's hard work, my job's very rewarding. There's nothing better than a member thanking you and telling you how pleased they are that you've helped them out.

It's nice to hear, but that's why they pay their money to us: to represent them and do a good job.



IT'S A PROVEN FACT THAT RECOGNISED WORKPLACES HAVE BETTER TERMS AND CONDITIONS THAN NON-RECOGNISED COMPANIES. THE EMPLOYER HAS TO GIVE US MORE BECAUSE THEY KNOW WE'LL JUMP ON THEM IF THEY DON'T.



45-50%

of South West employees have a union where they work



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