

TUC

Changing the world
of work for good

A stronger voice for workers

**How collective bargaining can deliver a better
deal at work**

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Summary

For the average worker, their experience of work has got worse, not better, over the last decade. There are few decades in the last century of which this is true. But over the last ten years, the world of work has become a harsher place, with less pay and less security. A key reason for this is that working people don't have enough say in the conditions that shape their working lives.

Average wages are still lower than they were before the financial crisis. Insecurity has risen sharply, with at least 3.7 million workers, around one in nine of the workforce, are now in insecure work¹, including those on zero-hours and short-hours contracts, bogus self-employment and agency workers.

Practices associated with Victorian times and the Great Depression have made an unwelcome return, with employers able to pick and choose workers on a daily basis, allocating and cancelling shifts with no notice. For too many, work is unpredictable, insecure and doesn't pay, forcing increasing numbers to take multiple jobs to try and make ends meet.

These developments are changing the nature of the society we live in. Parents and grandparents know that their children are likely to have a worse experience of working life than theirs. The gap between average wages and house prices has widened, fracturing the link between work and home ownership. Inequality has widened.

Why has this happened? Economic developments have contributed. But at the heart of these problems is the fact that most people have little influence over the decisions that affect them at work. Just 35% of UK employees said that managers were good at allowing them to influence decisions, while less than half thought managers were good at responding to suggestions from the workforce². In a European league table of workforce participation, the UK comes sixth from bottom, with only Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Estonia performing worse³.

So how can this change?

We need a higher minimum wage and laws to ban zero hours contracts. But we also need to give working people much stronger rights to influence their working lives. Not just a voice at work – but a voice to which their employer must listen and respond.

It is hard for someone who needs work to challenge their employer on the terms they are offered. But when workers come together to speak with one voice, it is harder for their employer to turn them away or end their contract. When workers come together to

¹ [TUC, Insecure work Why the new PM must put decent work at the top of his to-do list, July 2019](#)

² The 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study FIRST FINDINGS
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336651/bis-14-1008-WERS-first-findings-report-fourth-edition-july-2014.pdf

³ ETUI, Benchmarking Working Europe 2019 <https://www.etui.org/Publications2/Books/Benchmarking-Working-Europe-2019>

negotiate with their employer, it changes the balance of power in those discussions. This is known as collective bargaining. And it works.

This report sets out why we need to give workers greater rights to collective bargaining and the policies we need to make this happen.

The report sets out research showing that workplaces with collective bargaining have higher pay, more training days, more equal opportunities practices, better holiday and sick pay provision, more family-friendly measures, less long-hours working and better health and safety. Staff are much less likely to express job-related anxiety in unionised workplaces than comparable non-unionised workplaces; the difference is particularly striking for women with caring responsibilities.

Employers benefit too. Collective bargaining is linked to lower staff turnover, higher innovation, reduced staff anxiety relating to the management of change and a greater likelihood of high-performance working practices.

And society benefits. Influential organisations from the IMF to the OECD have recognised the role of collective bargaining in reducing inequality, with the OECD calling on government to “put in place a legal framework that promotes social dialogue in large and small firms alike and allows labour relations to adapt to new emerging challenges”⁴.

But despite these clear benefits to workers, employers and society, collective bargaining coverage has declined over recent decades, falling from over 80 per cent in 1979 to 26 per cent today.

Why has this happened? Industrial changes have combined with anti-union legislation to make it much harder for people to come together in trade unions to speak up together at work. That’s why we need new rights for workers to benefit from the protection that collective bargaining brings.

Our proposals for reform include:

- **Unions to have access to workplaces** to tell workers about the benefits of union membership and collective bargaining (following the system in place in New Zealand).
- **New rights to make it easier for working people to negotiate collectively with their employer**, including simplifying the process that workers must follow to have their union recognised by their employer for collective bargaining and enabling unions to scale up bargaining rights in large, multi-site organisations.
- **Broadening the scope of collective bargaining rights to include all pay and conditions**, including pay and pensions, working time and holidays, equality issues (including maternity and paternity rights), health and safety, grievance and disciplinary processes, training and development, work organisation, including the introduction of new technologies, and the nature and level of staffing.
- **The establishment of new bodies for unions and employers to negotiate across sectors**, starting with hospitality and social care.

⁴ OECD (2018) Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work, The OECD Jobs Strategy, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264308817-en>

Collective bargaining is a public good that promotes higher pay, better training, safer and more flexible workplaces and greater equality.

It's what Working Britain deserves. The TUC is committed to making it happen.

1. Introduction – the case for change

Over recent years, the UK has become increasingly unequal in terms of both wealth and power. The failure of government to address the social and economic challenges this has created has contributed to the political crisis that the UK faces today.

The world of work is at the heart of addressing this crisis. Economic inequality cannot be addressed without tackling the inequality of power within the workplace. This requires a revival of trade unions and collective bargaining and voice at work.

Union coverage in the UK has declined significantly from its peak 40 years ago. In 1979 union density was 54 per cent and collective bargaining coverage was over 70 per cent; in 2018, they were 23.4 per cent and 26 percent respectively, with just 14.7 per cent of the private sector protected by a collective agreement⁵. Over this period the scope of the bargaining agenda has narrowed significantly - by 2011 pay was the only issue still covered in a majority of collective agreements.

This decline of union influence has directly harmed the interests of working people and their communities. The share of GDP going to wages has shrunk from an average of 57 per cent between 1945 and 1975 to 49 per cent in 2018. This shrinking wage share is also divided increasingly unequally, with a higher proportion now going to the top earners. Average wages are still lower in real terms than before the financial crisis.

There has also been a sharp rise in precarious work, with the numbers of people in insecure work growing significantly since 2010, alongside a proliferation of precarious employment models. Recent TUC analysis found that at least 3.7 million UK workers, around one in nine of the workforce, are in insecure work, comprising at least ten per cent of the workforce across every region of England, Scotland and Wales⁶. This includes people employed on zero-hours and short-hours contracts, who often experience both unpredictability of working hours and a complete lack of employment security. The number of people working as self-employed has also risen sharply, boosted in part by employers using bogus self-employment as a means to avoid responsibilities in terms of both tax and employment. And there has been a significant increase in the use of employment intermediaries, allowing end employers to outsource their employment responsibilities, frequently leaving those whose work contributes to their profits with minimal rights and security.

⁵ National Statistics, [Trade union statistics 2018](#), Trade union membership statistics 2018: tables, 30 May 2019

⁶ [TUC, Insecure work Why the new PM must put decent work at the top of his to-do list, July 2019](#)

This scourge of insecurity and low and stagnating pay has been made possible by the decline of union coverage, and unions' ability to negotiate and bargain collectively.

And more broadly, the majority of working people lack effective means to influence decisions at work, creating a democratic deficit in the workplace. Despite the fact that people spend a significant proportion of their adult waking lives working, we have no automatic right to be informed, let alone consulted or negotiate on decisions that affect us at work. This leaves our democracy incomplete and feeds into wider feelings of frustration and powerlessness.

From Thatcherism to the Trade Union Act, there have been politicians who depict trade unions as a destabilising force in society and have sought to curb their ability to organise and represent their members. Yet political democracy and democracy at work are mutually reinforcing: this is common sense, but also borne out by research. The European Social Survey found that people with a high degree of democracy at work were significantly more likely to vote, to consider themselves able to influence politics and to say they were interested in politics, than those faced with low democracy at work⁷. This suggests that those who have sought to curb people's voice and power at work carry responsibility for creating the conditions in which instability and polarisation can thrive. People's rights to a voice at work are an integral part of democracy, strengthening political and social, as well as economic, outcomes.

In the last few years there has been a shift in thinking from some influential institutions, and increasing recognition of the role of unions in preventing a race to the bottom. The IMF in 2015 published research showing the role of trade unions in tackling inequality, with "strong evidence that lower unionisation is associated with an increase in top income shares in advanced economies during the period 1980–2010"⁸, also noting that previous research had demonstrated the link between higher inequality and lower and less sustainable growth. And the OECD's 2018 Jobs Strategy argues that collective bargaining can "foster skills development and skills use in the workplace, and allow for the effective dissemination of good working practices", while helping to "promote a broad sharing of productivity gains"⁹. It recommends that governments "put in place a legal framework that promotes social dialogue in large and small firms alike and allows labour relations to adapt to new emerging challenges"¹⁰. This is a welcome change of tune from organisations that have previously promoted labour market flexibility at the expense of employment security, rights and voice.

Representation and voice at work is a fundamental right, which also delivers higher wages, lower inequality, greater equality in the workplace and higher productivity. The union movement is committed to the aim of increasing collective bargaining across the economy. We will work with all those who support this aim to put in place the institutional framework to enable this to happen.

⁷ European Social Survey, in *Benchmarking Working Europe 2018*, ETUI 2019

⁸ Florence Jaumotte and Carolina Osorio Buitron, [Power from the People](#), Finance & Development, IMF March 2015, Vol. 52, No. 1

⁹ OECD (2018) *Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work*, The OECD Jobs Strategy, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264308817-en>

¹⁰ Ibid

2. Why we need collective bargaining and workforce voice

Why do we need collective bargaining and the ability to speak up together at work? The relationship between employer and worker is fundamentally unequal, giving the employer considerable power over the individual worker. It is only through coming together and speaking and acting as one that workers can reduce, if not completely remove, this imbalance of power. Working together, workers can secure higher pay, better working conditions and more control in the workplace, gaining a fairer share of the fruits of their labour. From this simple principle, the need for collective bargaining and thus for trade unions is born.

What is collective bargaining?

Collective bargaining takes place when the workforce speak together, through their trade union representatives, and negotiate with their employer on pay, working conditions and other issues that affect them at work. It is a process that varies from workplace to workplace and organisation to organisation, but has three core elements:

- The workforce comes together to discuss issues at work without management being present and develops a joint position on issues where they would like to influence their employer. This may be decided by consensus or may involve voting if there are different views expressed.
- Elected representatives of the workforce put this agreed position to the employer or management at meetings convened for this purpose. The workforce representatives will sometimes be members of staff from the workplace concerned, or the discussions be led by full-time union officers.
- There may be a process of back and forth, with the workforce representatives holding discussions with the employer or management and then taking their proposals back to the workforce, and vice versa, until agreement is reached. This process, whereby workplace representatives negotiate on behalf of the workforce with the employer, is collective bargaining. The agreement reached at the end of this process is known as a collective agreement.

To summarise, collective bargaining involves the workforce coming together independently of management to speak collectively in negotiations with their employer on issues that affect them at work. This is the fundamental role of trade unions.

Union 'recognition' means that an employer 'recognises' a union or unions for collective bargaining. In other words, the union and the employer have agreed to engage in the process set out above. Agreement about how this will work – for example, the frequency of meetings, who will attend, what will be included on the bargaining agenda and so on – is

often set out in writing, known as a 'recognition agreement'. This is what is meant by a 'recognised union'.

Delivering higher wages and better working conditions

Collective bargaining delivers strong benefits for working people. The findings below are from research on UK workplaces that took account of the characteristics of the workplace and the workforce, comparing like for like to isolate the impact of unions and collective bargaining on what happens at work^{11 12} (if from other sources, additional references are given).

- **Pay:** staff at workplaces where unions were recognised for collective bargaining were paid 5.3% more than staff at comparable workplaces without collective bargaining.
- **Training:** union representation delivered up to 5 days more off-the-job training for those covered by collective agreements than at comparable non-unionised workplaces.
- **Other working conditions**¹³: unionised workplaces were more likely to have additional benefits, such as more holiday and sick pay above the statutory minimum, than similar, but non-unionised, workplaces. The impact of unions on these non-pay benefits has increased over time and is particularly strong in the private sector.
- **Equal opportunities:** collective bargaining on equal opportunities increases the likelihood of workplaces having equal opportunities practices in place¹⁴.
- **Family-friendly measures:** unionised workplaces have more work-life balance measures in place than comparable non-unionised workplaces. The stronger the union presence in a workplace, the more work-life balance practices it is likely to have - on average, unionised workplaces have one more work-life balance measure in place than comparable non-unionised workplaces.
- **Employer attitudes to work-life balance:** employers are more likely to recognise their responsibility for addressing the work-life balance of their staff, and less likely to say it is the responsibility of the individual staff member, in workplaces with unions and collective bargaining than in similar but non-unionised workplaces.
- **Long-hours working:** the workforce in a unionised workplace is significantly less likely to work long hours (over 48 hours per week) than in a non-unionised, but otherwise

¹¹ Professor Alex Bryson (UCL) and John Forth (NIESR), [The added value of trade unions New analyses for the TUC of the Workplace Employment Relations Surveys 2004 and 2011](#), TUC 2017

¹² Professor Alex Bryson (UCL) and John Forth (NIESR), [Work/life balance and trade unions Evidence from the Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2011](#), TUC 2017

¹³ The researchers looked at: employer contributions to a pension scheme; company vehicle or vehicle allowance; private health insurance; more than 28 days of paid annual leave (including public holidays); and sick pay in excess of statutory requirements.

¹⁴ Hoque K and Bacon N (2014) "Unions, joint regulation and workplace equality policy and practice in Britain: evidence from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey", *Work, Employment and Society*, 28, 2: 265-284 in Alex Bryson and John Forth, [The added value of trade unions A review for the TUC of existing research](#), TUC 2017

similar, workplace. The difference was particularly strong for men with caring responsibilities.

- **Long-hours culture:** in unionised workplaces, staff were significantly less likely to agree with the statement “People in this workplace who want to progress usually have to put in long hours” than those in similar, but non-unionised, workplaces.
- **Job-related anxiety:** staff are less likely to express job-related anxiety in unionised workplaces. This is especially true for women in the private sector, whether or not they have caring responsibilities. While caring for ill, disabled or aged people is strongly linked to higher job-related anxiety in the non-unionised sector, this is much less true in unionised workplaces, especially for women, for whom the link between caring responsibilities and anxiety disappears completely when their workplaces is unionised.
- **Disputes and grievances:** disciplinary procedures are more systematic in workplaces with recognised unions and more likely to follow the three steps recommended by Acas¹⁵ (i.e. setting out the issue in writing, holding a meeting to discuss the issue, and giving the employee the right of appeal). There is also evidence from case studies of the role that union representatives play helping to resolve disciplinary and grievance issues¹⁶.
- **Health and safety:** having designated workforce health and safety representatives leads to lower health and safety risks for workers compared with comparable workplaces without health and safety representatives¹⁷.

These findings, based on research into UK workplaces, are supported by international evidence. Recent OECD research points to the positive contribution of firm-level worker representation to a quality work environment, including limiting long working hours and improving access to training and the career-advancement of workers¹⁸.

Collective bargaining creates more innovative, flexible and stable workplaces

Higher wages, better family-friendly policies, more training and longer holidays are clearly in the interests of working people, and it is hardly surprising that research shows people working at unionised workplaces are more satisfied with their pay and hours of work than

¹⁵ [Acas](#) (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) is a government-funded body that provides free information and advice to employers and workers on workplace relations and employment law. Its governing Council includes representatives of employer and employee organisations and employment experts.

¹⁶ Wood S, Saundry R and Latreille P (2014) “Analysis of the nature, extent and impact of grievance and disciplinary procedures and workplace mediation using WERS 2011”, Acas Research Report 10/14, London: Acas in Bryson and Forth 2017, op cit

¹⁷ Bryson, A. (2016) “Health and Safety Risks in Britain’s Workplaces: Where are they and who controls them?”, UCL mimeo in Byron and Forth 2017, op cit

¹⁸ [OECD Employment Outlook 2018](#) (page 100)

at non-unionised workplaces¹⁹. What is not always recognised, however, is that collective bargaining delivers significant benefits for employers too.

Some of this is a direct result of the improvement in working conditions that collective bargaining delivers for the workforce. The greater satisfaction that people at unionised workplaces feel with their pay and hours is bound to be feed into, for example, the lower rate of staff turnover at unionised workplaces and lead to higher levels of morale and motivation.

- **Staff turnover:** unionised workplaces with an on-site representative have lower rates of staff turnover (measured by looking at the number of people who voluntarily leave an employer).

However, other employer impacts go beyond this and reflect the fact that collective bargaining creates a process through which the employer and the workforce are able to recognise both each other's distinct interests and their shared interests. This creates organisations that are more resilient, more innovative and more flexible than those without collective bargaining.

Research shows that by giving staff an effective voice in the process reduces anxiety relating to organisational change. This will also reduce resistance to change and enable employers that manage change through the collective bargaining process to be more resilient and flexible than those that try to impose change from above.

- **Management of change:** job-related anxiety accompanying organisational change at work is significantly reduced when unions are involved in discussions on the introduction of the changes.

It is likely that the greater success at managing change effectively also feeds into the higher rates of innovation found at unionised companies by enabling innovation to be more easily introduced and managed. But higher rates of innovation may also reflect the emphasis on shared interests (alongside distinct interests) that collective bargaining engenders. And if the workforce feels that its views and interests are taken seriously, it is more likely that it will have the motivation and confidence to offer its own suggestions and ideas.

- **Innovation:** workplaces with collective bargaining are more innovative, with higher rates of product innovation.
- **High-performances workplaces:** unionised workplaces are more likely to employ 'high performance' methods of work organisation, such as team-working and problem-solving groups, than non-union workplaces²⁰.

¹⁹ Bryson, A. and White, M. (2016) "Not So Dissatisfied After All? The Impact of Union Coverage on Job Satisfaction", UCL mimeo in Bryson and Forth, 2017 op cit

²⁰ Askenazy P and Forth J (2016) "Work organisation and HRM – does context matter?", in T Amossé, A Bryson, J Forth and H Petit (eds) Comparative Workplace Employment Relations: An Analysis of Britain and France, Basingstove: Palgrave Macmillan in Bryson and Forth, 2017, op cit

Democracy in the workplace is a fundamental right

Collective bargaining generates improved pay and conditions for workers and more stable and innovative workplaces by giving people a voice in their workplace that must be listened to by their employer. The right to influence decisions at work should be an integral part of our democratic system.

A fundamental principle of democracy is that people affected by decisions should have some input or influence over them. But all too often this democratic principle is left at the door when you enter the workplace. Despite the fact that those in employment spend a large proportion of their waking hours at work, in the UK we have no automatic right to be informed, consulted or negotiate on decisions that affect us at work. This is a significant democratic deficit, and leaves our democratic system incomplete.

While there is a role for individual consultation and negotiation, there are limits to what it can achieve. For the workforce, the process of meeting without management and views being fed back through representatives allows people to discuss issues and priorities fully without fear of sanction, in the knowledge that their views will be fed back anonymously. Collective consultation and negotiation will therefore generate a more accurate picture of workforce views, which is beneficial for both the workforce and the employer. For employers, consulting and negotiating collectively with the workforce is far more efficient and practical than trying to gather and process multiple individual views. But most importantly, a collective approach gives the workforce much more power and legitimacy than any individual could have alone.

The right to engage in collective bargaining is recognised in international law as a fundamental right, recognised by ILO Convention 98²¹. Article 4 says that

Measures appropriate to national conditions shall be taken, where necessary, to encourage and promote the full development and utilisation of machinery for voluntary negotiation between employers or employers' organisations and workers' organisations, with a view to the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by means of collective agreements.

Although the UK has signed up to this Convention, there are gaping holes in our "machinery for voluntary negotiation between employers...and workers' organisations", which mean that only 26% of the workforce have their terms and conditions set by a collective agreement²². That is why we are proposing reforms to put in place the machinery we need to bring about a step-change in collective bargaining.

Workforce involvement in decision-making is currently a serious weakness of workplace culture and practice in the UK. Research in 2011 found that less than half (47%) of employees thought that managers were good at responding to suggestions from employees and just over one in three (35%) said that managers were good at allowing

²¹ [Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 98](#) is one of eight fundamental ILO Conventions

²² National Statistics, [Trade union statistics 2018](#), Trade union membership statistics 2018: tables, 30 May 2019

employees to influence decisions²³. And a 2016 survey of nearly 7,500 workers found that while 87% agreed with the statement “I am keen to embrace technology and maximise its benefits”, and 73% agreed that technology would improve productivity, less than one in four (24%) said that their employer gave them a say in how technology affects their work²⁴. This is a relative, as well as absolute, weakness: in a league table of workforce participation across Europe, the UK comes sixth from bottom, with only Cyprus, Lithuania, Latvia, Bulgaria and Estonia performing worse²⁵.

So there is an urgent need to improve the situation, and to give UK workers the right to speak up together at work and be listened to by their employer through collective bargaining.

Creating a stronger economy and fairer society

The social and economic benefits of collective bargaining are increasingly widely recognised, including by influential international organisations that have in the past promoted labour market flexibility.

The IMF in 2015 published research showing “strong evidence that lower unionization is associated with an increase in top income shares in advanced economies during the period 1980–2010”²⁶. The researchers noted that previous research had demonstrated the link between higher inequality and lower and less sustainable growth.

Similarly, research by the OECD found that “strengthening the bargaining power of low-wage workers is one of the core missions of collective bargaining, so it is not surprising that, empirically, collective bargaining is associated with lower levels of inequality”²⁷.

The OECD’s 2018 Jobs Strategy argues that collective bargaining can “foster skills development and skills use in the workplace, and allow for the effective dissemination of good working practices”, while helping to “promote a broad sharing of productivity gains”²⁸. It recommends that governments “put in place a legal framework that promotes social dialogue in large and small firms alike and allows labour relations to adapt to new emerging challenges”²⁹. This is a welcome change of tune from organisations that have

²³ The 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study FIRST FINDINGS

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/336651/bis-14-1008-WERS-first-findings-report-fourth-edition-july-2014.pdf

²⁴ The productivity puzzle’ A view from employees, A Smith Institute survey supported by Prospect, BECTU, USDAW, Community, the FDA, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, and the Society of Radiographers March 2016

²⁵ ETUI, Benchmarking Working Europe 2019 <https://www.etui.org/Publications2/Books/Benchmarking-Working-Europe-2019>

²⁶ Florence Jaumotte and Carolina Osorio Buitron, *Power from the People*, Finance & Development, IMF March 2015, Vol. 52, No. 1

²⁷ *OECD Employment Outlook 2018* (page 83)

²⁸ OECD (2018) Good Jobs for All in a Changing World of Work, The OECD Jobs Strategy, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264308817-en>

²⁹ Ibid

previously promoted labour market flexibility at the expense of employment security, rights and voice.

A comparison of European countries shows that those with strong rights for workforce voice do better on a wide range of social and economic measures³⁰. In comparison with countries with poor rights for workforce voice, those with strong rights for workforce voice have³¹:

- Higher productivity (measured by Eurostat)
- Higher rates of employment
- More innovation (measured by the Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index)
- Greater equality (mirroring the findings of the IMF)
- Significantly lower percentage of the population at risk poverty and exclusion (18.7% compared with 29.8%³²)
- Higher average wages
- Better rates of 'life satisfaction' (perhaps reflecting the UK findings on the impact of unions on work-life balance set out above)
- A higher proportion of companies with good health and safety protection and
- Double the rate of domestic expenditure on research and development³³.

Workplace democracy also strengthens our political system. The European Social Survey found that people with a high degree of democracy at work were significantly more politically engaged than those faced with a low level of democracy at work. 79% of people with high workplace democracy voted in the last national election, compared with 68% of people experiencing low workplace democracy. 39% described themselves as interested in politics compared with 21% of people with low workplace democracy; and 49% considered themselves able to influence politics, compared with 35% of people with low workplace democracy³⁴.

It is not surprising that experiencing the ability to influence decisions at work would foster greater faith and engagement in our wider democratic system, and these findings clearly support this. Democracy in the workplace thus reinforces our broader political democracy.

³⁰ ETUI, Benchmarking Working Europe 2019 <https://www.etui.org/Publications2/Books/Benchmarking-Working-Europe-2019>

³¹ Unless otherwise stated, all findings are from Benchmarking Working Europe 2019, ETUI 2019

³² Benchmarking Working Europe 2016, ETUI 2016

³³ *ibid*

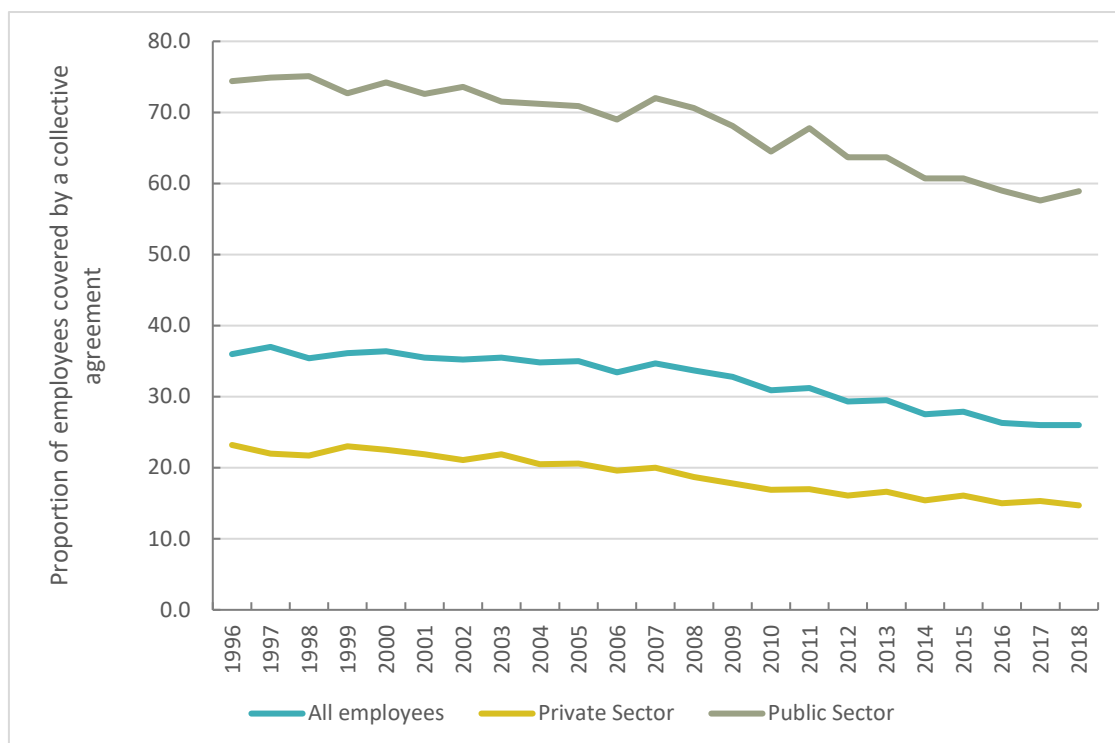
³⁴ European Social Survey, in Benchmarking Working Europe 2018, ETUI 2019

3. What's holding back collective bargaining?

Despite the social, economic and political benefits it delivers, the trend of collective bargaining coverage and union membership has been downwards in the UK for roughly the past four decades.

Immediately after the second world war, collective bargaining coverage in the UK stood at 85 per cent. In 1979, before the election of the Thatcher government, 82 per cent of UK workforce had their pay and conditions determined by collective agreements or wage council orders. By 1996 (when currently comparable statistics start), coverage had fallen to around 35 per cent, falling further to stand at 26 per cent today.

Chart 1: Proportion of employees covered by a collective agreement



Source: BEIS (2019) 'Trade Union Statistics 2018' available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/trade-union-statistics-2018>

The reasons for this decline are both political and industrial. The Conservative governments of the 1980s and early 90s dismantled much of the national and sectoral collective bargaining machinery that had been in place throughout the post-war period and in some

cases since the late nineteenth century. At the same time, attacks on trade union rights made it harder for unions to recruit and represent their members at workplace level.

Added to this more challenging legal landscape are the significant industrial changes that have taken place since the 1980s, and in particular the relative decline of the traditionally unionised manufacturing sector and the growth of the private services sector. This shift has significantly reduced the extent to which people are exposed to trade unionism simply through being in work. Other changes, including the increasing proportion of people working in smaller workplaces and the sharp rise in people in insecure work and employed via agencies, have created significant practical barriers for grassroots union organisation.

Taken together, these changes have made it harder for unions to grow and thrive and have deprived an increasing number of people of the protection of collective bargaining and representation.

Since 2015, unions have faced an even more difficult legal environment, with further restrictions put in place by the Trade Union Act. On the industrial front, public sector outsourcing, high staff turnover in high-employment sectors such as retail and hospitality, company failures and restructuring and the continued rise in precarious work continue to create challenges for working people to come together in trade unions for their mutual protection and support.

Despite these challenges, union membership has in fact grown slightly over the last two years, both in terms of absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total workforce. This represents a significant achievement in terms of union organising and recruitment strategies; it is often not appreciated how much organising and recruitment unions need to do just to stand still, with some unions in high turnover sectors recruiting around one third of their membership each year.

Nonetheless, union density and collective bargaining coverage has reached a level where creating a substantial upturn cannot be left to business as usual, especially in the private sector, where both union density and collective bargaining coverage are significantly lower than in the public sector. It is necessary to roll back the restrictive provisions put in place by previous governments and to give unions and working people the tools they need to make the right to collective bargaining, enshrined in international law, a practical reality.

The changing world of work has already led to significant developments in how unions operate, with new models of organising and recruitment, a spate of mergers reducing the overall number of unions and the birth of new unions too. The proposals set out below will involve further changes and challenges for unions, requiring us to work together to create an environment of union renewal throughout the world of work. The TUC and its affiliated unions are united in our belief that collective bargaining is the best and the only sustainable way of protecting workforce interests. We have agreed to campaign for the policies below and to work together to make the most of the opportunities they create to build a better and stronger working lives for all.

4. Our proposals to strengthen collective bargaining and workplace democracy

Although many of the UK's most successful companies have built their success working with their workforce through constructive union relationships, this is, as the statistics above illustrate, by no means the norm.

At the moment, it is too easy for hostile employers to rebuff the efforts of unions and workers to organise and speak up at work. Union representatives are refused access to workplaces and ordered away from public spaces outside workplaces if they try to leaflet at the end of the working day. Workers are threatened for simply taking a union leaflet, refused shifts if they speak up for their rights to a manager and illegally sacked for taking a stand against poor health and safety or the illegal docking of already meagre wages.

Even where a clear majority of people support union recognition and want to engage in collective bargaining through their union, employers, if hostile, can refuse to meet with workforce representatives and refuse to give them the information they need to do their job.

The refusal of employers to listen to their workforce perpetuates injustice in the workplace and contributes directly to strikes. Union recognition, along with higher pay and end to zero hours contracts, was one of the demands of low-paid McDonalds workers who went on strike in September 2017 in the first company's first UK strike³⁵. Despite widespread public sympathy with the workers' plight, their full demands have still not been met.

The Living Staff Living Wage campaign at the Ritzy Cinema in South London began in 2014 when union members won a 26% pay rise and an agreement to negotiate towards the paying the Living Wage in 2016. The Ritzy's owners, Cineworld, then back-tracked, refused to negotiate and sacked a number of union activists, leading to a series of strikes in 2017. Several sacked workers have now won employment tribunal claims for unfair dismissal, with a July 2018 judgement highlighting "failures at all stages of the process...to properly engage with the nature of the claimants defence"³⁶ and a subsequent hearing taking the rare step of ordering their reinstatement³⁷. However, Cineworld still refuses to pay its staff the London Living Wage³⁸.

Currently, there is not a neutral environment for unions to recruit and organise and for workers to come together to speak and negotiate with one voice at work. There is, if employers wish to create it, a hostile environment, in which obsolete ideology and

³⁵ <https://www.bfawu.org/mcstrike>

³⁶ <https://www.thompsonstradeunion.law/news/news-releases/employment-matters/bectu-and-thompsons-solicitors-secure-unfair-dismissal-finding-for-employees>

³⁷ <https://www.bectu.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/picturehouse/news/2916>

³⁸ <https://www.bectu.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/picturehouse>

prejudice trump human rights and pragmatism to deprive people of the basic right to speak up, and be listened to, at work.

Even where union recognition is in place, there has been a substantial reduction in the scope of collective bargaining, with a shrinking number of topics regularly included in collective agreements. In 1990, aspects of managerial relations such as staffing levels and redeployment were subject to negotiation in over half of workplaces recognising unions. By 1998, this was the case in only around 10% workplaces recognising unions and by 2011 pay was the only issue still covered in a majority of collective agreements³⁹. This reduces the influence of collective representation on the quality of working life.

Research presented above showed that where unions were involved in discussions on equal opportunities, workplaces were more likely to have equal opportunities practices in place. If, however, there was a workplace union but it was not consulted about equal opportunities issues, this benefit was not found⁴⁰. This shows the importance of extending the scope of collective agreements and making sure that all the issues that are important to the workforce can be discussed.

We need a new framework to give unions stronger rights to access workplaces and tell people about the benefits of unions. Working people need stronger rights to come together to speak and negotiate with one voice at work and we need stronger requirements on employers to listen and to engage in collective bargaining when that is the democratic will of their workforce. And we need new mechanisms for employers and unions to come together at a sectoral level to put a floor under wages and conditions to prevent a race to the bottom and the under-cutting of good employers by bad.

The policies that follow fall into five sections:

- organising and access rights;
- individual rights to union representation;
- the right to bargain at enterprise and workplace level;
- re-establishing sectoral bargaining; and
- promoting collective bargaining in public policy.

Running throughout is a substantial broadening of the scope of workplace representation and collective bargaining. We are proposing that people should have the right to be represented by a union on any aspect of their employment, including pay and pensions, working time and holidays, equality issues (including maternity and paternity rights), health and safety, grievance and disciplinary processes, training and development, work organisation, including the introduction of new technologies and staffing/job related proposals that could significantly change or threaten people's job/s.

³⁹ Based on analysis of the WERS Surveys 1990, 1998, 2004 and 2011 presented by Paul Marginson, Manchester IR Society 50th Anniversary Conference, 21 November 2014, available at https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/irru/publications/recentconf/pm_-_changing_collective_er_-_mirs.pdf

⁴⁰ Hoque and Bacon, 2014, op cit

The proposals that follow are mutually reinforcing and the adoption of every part of this agenda will have the greatest impact in terms of extending collective bargaining and voice at work. While the adoption of selected parts of the agenda below would still generate improvements on the status quo, it is as a comprehensive package that they have the potential to create a 'new normal' for workplace voice, in which representation and bargaining become the norm.

1. Organising and access rights for unions and workers

All forms of collective bargaining depend on strong unions and strong unions are built on their members. So the ability of unions to recruit, organise and grow is at the heart of the collective bargaining agenda. As well as the proposals that follow, this requires the abolition of the Trade Union Act.

As set out above, it is currently too easy for employers to frustrate the right of their workforce to establish the protection of collective bargaining by refusing to allow union representatives onto their premises and penalising their workforce for engaging with unions. To change this, we propose:

- Where a union member requests the support of their union on an employment-related matter, the union representative should have an automatic right to access the workplace (following the legislation currently in place in New Zealand).
- Independent unions should have the right to access workplaces during working hours to tell people about the benefits of union membership and ensure compliance with employment legislation. This should include offshore workplaces and other atypical workplaces.
- Union access to workplaces where they currently have no members would require seeking employer consent, which could not be unreasonably withheld. A failure to respond within two days would be treated as consent (again following the New Zealand model).
- There would be a role for the TUC in ensuring fair access among unions, rooted in the TUC Disputes Principles and Procedures (henceforth TUC Principles).
- The right to paid time off for union duties, including for organising, should be extended to all workers (not just employees).
- Where organisations are broken up and services outsourced, union representatives should have the right to represent workers and access workplaces across the new structures, working and engaging with other unions as set out in the TUC Principles⁴¹.

Digital access and organising rights

It is increasingly common for people to work remotely, or across multiple workplaces, rather than being based in a single workplace. This means that unions need new rights to access

⁴¹ See Principle 3 in TUC Disputes Principles and Procedures 2019 Edition

workers digitally – otherwise there is a danger that these workers will lose out on the protection of union membership and collective bargaining.

- New rights should be created that protect the ability of unions, members and working people to use social media, digital and other tools as part of workplace campaigns. This must include a “digital right of access”.
- A digital right of access would give unions the right to reasonable electronic communication with workers. Employers would be required to forward union communications to the workforce, but would not pass workers’ contact details to the union without their permission.
- All employers should be required to provide a physical and/or digital notice board where union materials can be displayed that can be accessed by all workers.

2. Individual rights to union representation

At present, the rights of individual workers to the support of their union in meetings with their employer are limited.

- All workers should have a right to be accompanied and represented by an independent union representative in meetings with their employer, including on:
 - pay and pensions
 - working time and holidays
 - equality issues (including maternity and paternity rights)
 - health and safety
 - grievance and disciplinary processes
 - training and development
 - work organisation, including the introduction of new technologies; and
 - proposals that could significantly change or threaten the individual worker’s job.
- All workers should have the right to reasonable paid time off during working time to meet with a union official or workplace representative on the employer’s premises to prepare for a meeting on employment issues (including on the topics set out above).
- Discriminating against workers on the basis of their union membership or activities (blacklisting) should be made a criminal offence.
- Union representatives should have the right to paid time off (facility time) for their work organising and recruiting members, as well as representing them.

3. The right to bargain at your workplace and enterprise

Collective bargaining and representation at firm and workplace level is at the heart of union activity. In the UK, while national pay bargaining in some areas and national wage-setting bodies in others still play an important role within public services, in the private sector the absence of sector level arrangements means the vast majority of collective bargaining takes place at firm-level.

There are significant elements of workforce voice, negotiation and influence that can only be realised at the workplace and firm level. Decisions about how work is organised and other day to day practices are likely to be determined within the workplace. Many contractual terms and conditions will be determined within the firm. Workers need the ability to influence both, and without strong mechanisms for workplace voice and firm-level collective bargaining, the democratic deficit currently experienced by millions of UK workers will remain in place.

Over time, a number of industrial and regulatory changes have made it harder for unions to organise and grow in the private sector. Along with the rights to access set out above, the proposals below aim to turn that around and make it easier for unions to gain recognition for collective bargaining. The proposals preserve a bottom-up model of union organising for recognition, but aim to remove barriers to help unionisation become the 'new normal' in the UK.

As well as removing barriers to the complex recognition process, the proposals would give unions that have gained a foothold within an organisation the right to 'scale up' and offer the benefits of collective bargaining to a wider group of workers. The role of the Central Arbitration Committee would shift from the implementation of complex and at times inflexible rules to a presumption of support for collective bargaining where that was the democratic will of the workforce.

Strengthening union recognition - simplifying the statutory process

In most cases, employers reach voluntary agreements with their workforce to recognise a union for collective bargaining. However, when employers will not recognise a union voluntarily, there is a legal (or statutory) process that workers must follow in order to have a union recognised for collective bargaining at their workplace. This is a complex process adjudicated by the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC), which can only be initiated if ten per cent of the workers in the proposed 'bargaining unit' are union members and there is a likelihood of the union attracting majority support in a ballot. The bargaining unit refers to the group of workers who would be covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

- The threshold for triggering the statutory recognition scheme should be reduced to 2% of the members of a bargaining unit. This would bring it into line with the threshold for rights to collective consultation, which was recently reduced from 10% to 2%⁴².

⁴² The Employment Rights (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2019
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2019/731/contents/made> - legislation will come into force in April 2020

- Unions should automatically be entitled to statutory recognition where 50% or more of workers in a bargaining unit are members, with no requirement to ballot.
- Employers should be under a duty to give unions access to workers in the bargaining unit during working hours in the run up to any ballot.
- Recognition should be awarded if unions win a simple majority in a ballot. The requirement that 40% of the workers in a bargaining union must vote in favour should be removed.

Strengthening union recognition – ensuring organisational size and structure are not a barrier to recognition

Organisational size and structure should not prevent workers from having a voice at work. At present, organisations of 21 or fewer are exempted from the statutory recognition process. Conversely, in large organisations with complex structures, it can be very difficult to establish collective bargaining across the organisation as a whole, which can hamper the ability of the workforce to negotiate effectively with their employer.

- The current 21-worker threshold should be removed.
- Unions should have the right to relevant information from the employer in order to determine an appropriate bargaining unit.
- Unions / both sides should have the right to propose reasonable adjustments to the bargaining unit during the recognition process.
- In addition, unions should be able to scale up bargaining rights:
 - In large, multi-site organisations, unions that have recognition within one bargaining unit should have the ability to scale up their bargaining rights across the organisation without reaching the 2% membership threshold within the additional unit or workforce group. For example, if a union was recognised at one workplace within a multi-site organisation, it would have the right to contact workers at another site, to promote union membership and with a view to including them in the collective bargaining agreement.
 - Where unions have a recognition agreement with one bargaining unit, they should have the right to ballot a wider group of workers within the organisation, defined on the basis of geographic, occupational or organisational factors.
 - In companies in which more than one union has an interest, the TUC will coordinate approaches under the TUC Principles.

Reform of the Central Arbitration Committee (CAC)

Currently, the CAC is required to “have regard to the object of encouraging and promoting fair and efficient practices and arrangements in the workplace”⁴³.

- This should be reformed so that the CAC is required to: “promote collective bargaining in the workplace, while having regard to the object of encouraging and promoting fair and efficient practices and arrangements in the workplace”⁴⁴.
- In judging a proposed bargaining unit, the CAC should be required to take account of “the fact that workers having a collective voice in the workplace is desirable”.
- In addition, the membership process should ensure that the number of CAC members with experience as representatives of employers and workers is the same (currently, there are 16 members with experience of representing employers and eight members with experience of representing workers).

Strengthening union recognition – reform of unfair labour practices

An unfair labour practice constitutes a practice used during a union recognition ballot that would unfairly influence the result of the ballot (for example, offering workers more money if they vote a particular way)⁴⁵. These rules should be substantially reformed and:

- should apply wherever unions are organising in a workplace
- should apply only to employers and not trade unions (in line with other countries) and
- the current requirement on unions to demonstrate a causal link between unfair labour practices and workers’ decisions on how to vote should be removed.

Broadening the scope of collective agreements

As noted above, the scope of collective bargaining has narrowed significantly over time, meaning that even where workers still benefit from collective agreements, they have less influence over their working lives than in the past and in comparison to other countries.

Widening the scope of collective bargaining is essential to ensure that workers are able to influence all parts of the decision-making process that affect their interests and working lives. This list below is an indicative, rather than an exhaustive list, and mirrors the list of issues on which individual workers have the right to be represented by a union, with a modification in relation to jobs/staffing issues.

⁴³ paragraph 171 of Schedule A1 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992

⁴⁴ The ILO Committee on Freedom of Association states that: ‘Measures should be taken to encourage and promote the full development and utilization of machinery for voluntary negotiation between employers or employers’ organizations and workers’ organizations, with a view to the regulation of terms and conditions of employment by means of collective agreements.’ (Paragraph 1231 of the Compilation of Decisions of the Committee on Freedom of Association under the heading General Principles)

https://www.ilo.org/global/standards/subjects-covered-by-international-labour-standards/freedom-of-association/WCMS_632659/lang--en/index.htm

⁴⁵ See DTI, [Code of Practice: Access and Unfair Practices During Recognition and Derecognition Ballots](#), 2005

- All workers should have the right to have a union recognised for the purposes of collective bargaining on all pay and conditions, including:
 - pay and pensions
 - working time and holidays
 - equality issues (including maternity and paternity rights)
 - health and safety
 - grievance and disciplinary processes
 - training and development
 - work organisation, including the introduction of new technologies; and
 - the nature and level of staffing.

Tools to make bargaining more effective

Where unions are recognised, rights to information – for example on the financial position of a company/undertaking or plans for restructuring - can be very useful to unions and inform the collective bargaining process. Collective information and consultation rights that can help unions to bargain should be strengthened. This would involve reform of the Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations 2005 (the ICE regulations).

- Collective rights to information and consultation under the ICE regulations should be based on establishments, rather than undertakings. This would mean that employees could trigger collective consultation rights where they met the qualifying criteria in a part of a business, rather than having to meet the criteria across the business as a whole. This would make it easier to trigger the rights than is currently the case, especially in large organisations with complex structures.
- Information covering the undertaking or company as a whole must be provided, regardless of the level at which the rights are triggered.
- The stronger rights available under the Transnational Information and Consultation of Employees regulations (TICE) should be incorporated under ICE. This would create stronger rights in terms of time off for worker representatives, the right to use experts, the number of meetings and the scope of the agreement.
- A process should be developed whereby ICE agreements covering part of an organisation can be scaled up to cover the organisation or company as a whole. undertaking or company-wide agreements (mirroring the proposal above to scale-up bargaining rights).

4. Re-establishing sectoral bargaining

Sectoral bargaining was once common in the UK across both the public and private sectors. Within the private sector it has now all but disappeared, with the regulations and machinery that supported it systematically dismantled by the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Within the public services a significant proportion of the workforce continue to

have their pay and some conditions determined by national or sectoral agreements. This creates a distinction between the way that collective bargaining works within the public and private sectors, with sectoral bargaining and pay-setting bodies playing a significant role within the public sector and firm-level bargaining the predominant form within the private sector.

Across much of the rest of Europe, sectoral and firm-level collective bargaining go together, operating side by side and often intricately entwined. In some countries, broad standards are set at sectoral level, with the detail determined at firm level. In others, mechanisms exist that allow firm-level agreements to be broadened into sectoral agreements in certain conditions, thus preventing a race to the bottom. And it is clear that where it is in place, sectoral bargaining has played an essential role in maintaining collective bargaining coverage. In a major study of collective bargaining, the OECD has concluded that “collective bargaining coverage is high and stable only in countries where multi-employer agreements (mainly sectoral or national) are negotiated”⁴⁶.

Research has also shown co-ordinated bargaining systems, in which sectoral bargaining is an important element, are particularly successful in generating wider economic and social benefits. OECD research has found that “co-ordinated [bargaining] systems are shown to be associated with higher employment, lower unemployment, a better integration of vulnerable groups and less wage inequality than fully decentralised systems”⁴⁷.

Some countries, such as France, combine high levels of collective bargaining coverage with low levels of union density. The experience of other countries, however, demonstrates that sectoral bargaining and high union density can go together. Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, Finland and Belgium all combine sectoral bargaining with union densities in the private sector of 50 per cent or more.

There is strong agreement among UK unions that creating sectoral bargaining and measures to boost union density and firm-level bargaining should go hand in hand. In sectors characterised low pay and precarious employment with low union density, sectoral bargaining provides the fastest route to creating a floor under wages and conditions to raise and protect standards. At the same time, sectoral bargaining arrangements that were not supported by strong union density could be more vulnerable to being dismantled by a hostile government.

The UK trade union movement is clear that sectoral bargaining will be most effective if supported by strong union density and firm/organisational level collective bargaining – and vice versa. We want a strong democratic movement, with the ability to negotiate at every level, including at the sectoral level to set minimum standards. This will deliver the best results for workers and safeguard these gains for the future.

⁴⁶ OECD Working Party on Employment Chapter 4: Collective Bargaining and Workers’ Voice in a Changing World of Work, March 2017

⁴⁷ [OECD Employment Outlook 2018](#) (page 83)

Establishing sectoral bargaining – the process

Sectoral bargaining would put in place a minimum platform for pay and conditions and is not a substitute for existing collective agreements.

- Sectoral bargaining should be established where the Secretary of State, having consulted and sought agreement with unions, determines that there is a need for sectoral bargaining to boost pay, working conditions, skills or productivity across the sector.
- Union seats at the table should reflect membership, organisation and bargaining coverage within the sector. There would be a role for the TUC in determining the allocation of seats in line with the TUC Principles.
- Sector councils should be formed with equal numbers of worker and employer representation and with an independent chair.
- The boundaries of the sector would be determined by the Secretary of State, in consultation with unions and employers.
- Unions should also be able to extend existing collective agreements across a sector when union coverage within it exceeds a certain threshold..

The scope of sectoral bargaining

This list below is an indicative, rather than an exhaustive list. It mirrors the list of issues on which individual workers have the right to be represented by a union and the proposed scope of firm-level bargaining, with the removal of staffing issues, which would be more appropriately determined at firm level.

- The scope for sectoral bargaining should include:
 - pay and pensions
 - working time and holidays
 - equality issues (including maternity and paternity rights)
 - health and safety
 - grievance and disciplinary processes
 - training and development, and
 - work organisation, including the introduction of new technologies.

Sectors that illustrate potential benefits of sectoral bargaining

The establishment of sectoral bargaining will require extensive discussions between workers and their unions, employers and the Secretary of State. But it is clear that there are some sectors that particularly need the support sectoral bargaining could provide to improve and protect terms and conditions. These sectors will provide a particular focus for unions as we take forward discussions on how a sectoral model could work.

Hospitality

The hospitality sector is characterised by low pay and poor working conditions. It has low union density and its structure – with large numbers of small outlets, high staff turnover and relatively high turnover of undertakings – makes it challenging to organise. The successful introduction of sectoral bargaining would improve pay and conditions for the sector’s predominantly young workforce, illustrating the value of sectoral bargaining to them and, given it is a highly visible sector, to the wider public.

Sectoral councils for social care

Social care is a sector characterised by high levels of female employment, low pay, insecure contracts, and non-compliance with basic employment rights, including the National Minimum Wage. Austerity policies imposed since 2010 have starved local government and the NHS of the funding needed to provide or commission decent care and decent employment in this vital sector. A strategy to improve employment in this sector must start with greater funding from central government.

Privatisation and outsourcing have also played a significant role in driving down terms and conditions, and a programme of in-sourcing, alongside the Fair Wages resolutions described below, will also be critical to improving social care for workers and those receiving care.

Where social care workers cannot be covered by existing national agreements (e.g. Agenda for Change or local government NJC), we believe that new sectoral bargaining machinery could play a key role in driving up standards in the sector, including improving pay, ensuring decent contracts and working conditions, and access to training.

The TUC is planning to start early conversations with unions about how sectoral bargaining could most effectively operate in the social care sector in England and work with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The new economy

We also need to ensure that expanding areas of the economy are covered by collective bargaining arrangements that encourage competition on the basis of innovation rather than on a race to the bottom in terms of workforce pay and conditions.

The TUC will also start discussions with unions about how new sectoral machinery could best deliver for workers in sectors which are experiencing rapid technological and organisational change.

5. Promoting and strengthening collective bargaining

Collective bargaining is a public good that contributes to fairness, wellbeing and social cohesion. This should be recognised by the actions of public bodies and public policy.

- Employers should be under a duty to bargain in good faith.

- Public procurement rules should require contractors to respect public sector collective agreements and agreed terms and conditions, alongside trade union recognition and collective rights to organise.
- Fair Wages Resolutions can play an important role in ensuring that public spending on goods and services is used strategically to support the development of decent work. Government should introduce a new Fair Wages Resolution that ensures that all public procurement respects 'the rate for the job', with this determined with reference to national collective agreements in the first instance. Where these are absent, local collective agreements or the real living wage should be the standard reference point.
- ACAS's statutory duty to promote collective bargaining should be restored.

Conclusion

Collective bargaining is recognised in international law as a fundamental right, recognised by ILO Convention 98⁴⁸. It is also a public good. Through enabling working people to keep a greater share of the profits created by their work, it promotes economic equality. Through giving people the democratic right to influence and negotiate on decisions at work, it promotes social cohesion and trust.

The proposals set out in this document aim to create a step-change in unionisation and workplace voice so that collective bargaining once again becomes the norm and the expectation for working people in the UK.

The TUC is committed to working with affiliated unions, employers, politicians and the public to make this happen.

⁴⁸ Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention 98 is one of eight fundamental ILO Conventions