



Wales
TUC
Cymru

Trade unions: There's a place for you

A guide for young workers

“There’s a place for you”

About this guide

We know some of you are having a tough time in work at the moment, but together we can do something about that. As a younger worker you might be looking for more stability in your contract, a higher hourly wage, or just to be treated with respect at work. That’s what unions do, we make those things happen by joining together and fighting with our collective strength. It can be very hard to change things alone, but we have a long and proud history of winning things in the workplace.

Things don’t have to stay the same. Together we can change things for the better.

[Join us](#)

About the Wales TUC

The Wales TUC exists to make the working world a better place for everyone. We want Wales to become a fair work nation. With 49 member unions and over 400,000 members in Wales, the Wales TUC has a key role in raising issues that affect workers in Wales. We support unions to grow and thrive, and we stand up for everyone who works for a living. Join us.

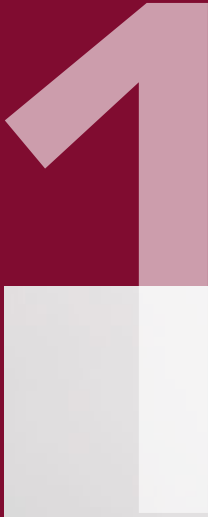
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Section 1

What is a trade union?

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What is a trade union?

A trade union is a group of employees who join together to maintain and improve their conditions of employment.

The typical activities of trade unions include helping their members with individual issues or grievances, negotiating together for better pay and conditions for all workers and providing learning opportunities to members.

Nearly seven million people in the UK belong to a trade union. Union members include health workers, teachers, school meals staff, care workers, professional footballers, retail and hospitality workers, warehouse staff, engineers and apprentices.

Trade unions are independent of employers but have close working relationships with them.

What trade unions do

Unions train and organise workplace representatives (reps) who help union members with the problems they face at work. Reps provide support and advice and campaign for better conditions and pay.

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

Union reps:

- negotiate agreements with employers on pay and conditions;
- discuss major changes such as redundancy;
- discuss members' concerns with employers;

- accompany members to disciplinary and grievance meetings;
- help members with legal and financial problems.

Unions decide what to fight and campaign on by votes at conferences and meetings. This makes sure that the union is focussed on what the members are asking for and is representative of the needs of the members.

Trade unions in Law

In the UK trade unions have a special status in law which gives them special rights that professional associations don't have.

Employers are required to work with recognised unions to:

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

Union reps have the right to consult their members and employers. This means that, as a worker, you can have your say about workplace issues.

You cannot be punished by your employer if you join – or don't join – a trade union.

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Section 2

Campaigns

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Campaigns

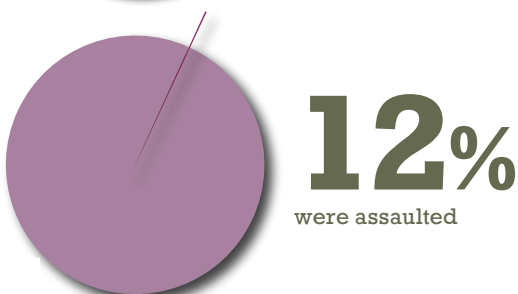
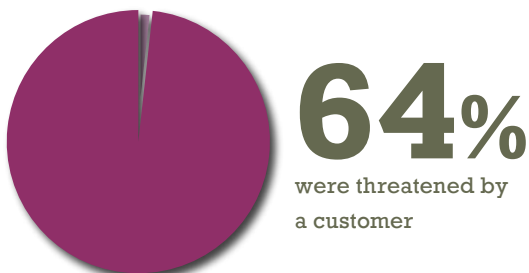
Trades unions are best when we fight for our members. Unions recognise that young front line workers sometimes have to put up with a lot in the course of their job. Here are just a few examples of campaigns that some unions are doing. If there is a union in your workplace, check out their website or speak to a rep to see what they are doing for you.

USDAW - Freedom from fear

USDAW represent workers in the retail, distributive, manufacturing and service sectors. Their "Freedom From Fear" Campaign works to prevent violence, threats and abuse against workers.

They do this by engaging the public, shopworkers and the Government.

Results of last year's Usdaw's Freedom From Fear Survey show that



61% said they were not confident that reporting abuse, threats and violence would make a difference.



To find out more view their 2021 Survey Results [here](#).

The campaign has made huge strides in 2021. In August, as a result of their campaigning a new ground-breaking law to protect shopworkers from violence, threats and abuse was introduced in Scotland.

They continue to fight for equivalent legislation in the UK Parliament and have been successful in progressing amendments to the Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill to include protections for shopworkers. Usdaw will continue to campaign until shopworkers have the protection they deserve.

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Unite the union- Get me home safely campaign

Get ME Home Safely is Unite’s campaign to make our communities and workplaces safer places for our members. Employers and governments across the UK must play their part too. Their calls include:

For employers to adopt risk assessments that include an individual’s journey times and potential hazards once they’ve left the workplace	Make free transport home for staff a prerequisite for all new liquor licenses
Legislative change to address the weakness in enforcement of the law against sexual assault and harassment on public transport	Lobby government for municipal ownership of buses as a way to tackle the chronic shortage of night services
Lobby for national minimum standards for taxi and private hire vehicles	Campaign for clear and operational CCTV on all forms of public transport

Women workers do not feel safe going to and from work.

“Last year I was assaulted after my employer refused to provide me with a taxi after transport times. This happens all too often to workers.” - Carrie

“I’ve worked in the hospitality industry now for just short of a decade. Nearly every single late-night shift begins with worrying about making arrangements at home. Will I make enough in tips to afford a taxi? Will I have to walk home alone in the dark? If I walk home will that guy that threatened me for cutting him off still be hanging around?” - Angela

Members from across the hospitality and passenger transport sectors, working with Unite’s equalities sector, are calling for immediate changes to protect women workers. They’ve come up with a plan to deliver real change.

You can read more detail about these plans [here](#) and you can [download](#) a toolkit to get involved.

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GMB - winning for Uber drivers

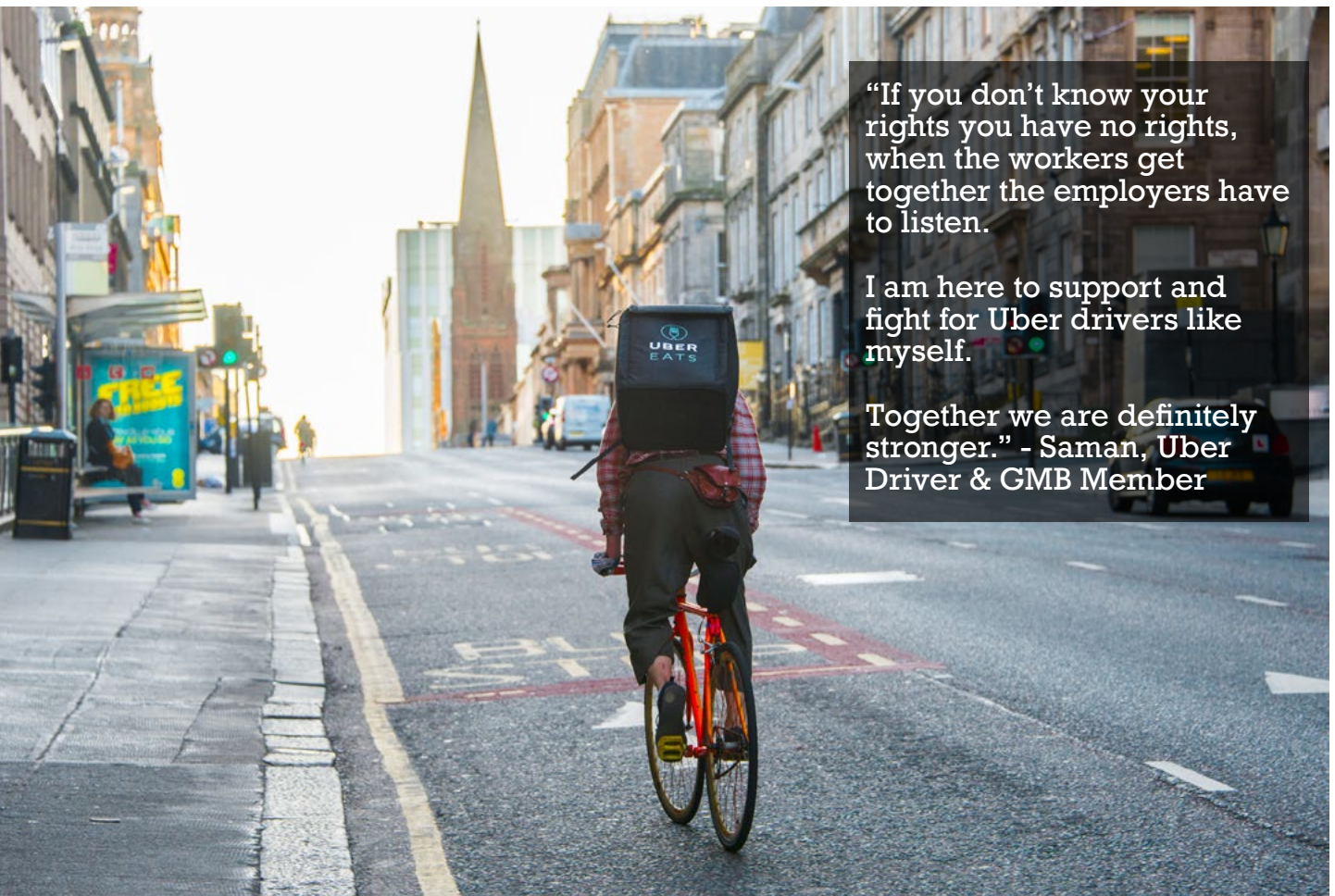
The GMB have over 500,000 members who work in every type of job imaginable across public services and in private companies.

Recently GMB have been campaigning and winning for Uber drivers.

GMB members fought for Uber drivers rights. GMB union took companies who were exploiting drivers to court and won because of union power.

GMB union have years of experience of dealing with local licensing officers and local licensing committees.

To learn more about the GMB's support for Uber drivers click [here](#).



“If you don't know your rights you have no rights, when the workers get together the employers have to listen.

I am here to support and fight for Uber drivers like myself.

Together we are definitely stronger.” - Saman, Uber Driver & GMB Member

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Unison- the public services union

#Ustoo campaign

Sexual harassment isn't just a problem for celebrities. It's rife in ordinary workplaces everywhere. It affects us too.

Sexual harassment can have devastating effects, often leading to ill-health and work-related stress, affecting work performance and a survivor's personal life.

Half of women have been sexually harassed at work. Two thirds of LGBT+ people have experienced it too. And what's really shocking is that 4 out of 5 people don't feel able to report it to their employer.

So after months of campaigning, Unison welcome the government's recent announcement that it finally plans to change the law and introduce a mandatory duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment, including third-party harassment.

It's an important victory for UNISON and the whole coalition of unions, women's rights bodies and business organisations working together in the #ThisIsNotWorking alliance. But most importantly, for UNISON members delivering public services, this represents a positive practical step towards stamping out harassment at work from clients, patients and contractors as well as from colleagues.

The government has stated that it will introduce legislation "as soon as parliamentary time allows". For workers who continue to suffer, and who currently feel that nothing will be done if they report harassment, it's action, not words, that will make a difference.

UNISON will keep a close eye on the government and press for it to introduce a properly enforceable law so that all employers make prevention a priority and are held severely to account when they let their workers down. We will be watching – and we stand ready to act if we don't see the urgent change we need.

For more information on UNISON and their #Ustoo campaign click [here](#).

What to do if you are being sexually harassed at work

- Speak to a trusted friend or family member.
- Speak to your union rep.
- Keep a record of what has happened to you (including time, date, location and any witnesses or evidence such as copies of letters, text messages, emails, etc, as well as details of any medical help sought).
- If you feel sufficiently safe, tell the harasser to stop. You could ask them in writing. Your union rep should be able to support you. Keep a record of any steps you have taken to stop the sexual harassment and of any response from the harasser.
- Speak to your line manager or, if they are the harasser, to a more senior manager or to the HR department.
- If the problem is not resolved, make a formal complaint using your workplace grievance procedure or the reporting procedure within your workplace anti-harassment policy (if there is one). Your union rep should be able to support you.
- If the issue is still not resolved, you may be able to take it to an employment tribunal. Your union rep should be able to support you.



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Section 3

Challenges facing younger workers



Challenges facing young workers

Whilst people's experiences of work may differ, there are often commonalities that younger workers face. Below are a few of the major ones and how unions are in a position to help.

Challenges	Things unions can do to help with this
<p>It is understandable that you might not have a great understanding of employment law when entering the job market. This is particularly true in your first job. It's not uncommon for younger workers to think "this is just the way things are" when in reality we can change things, regardless of how big or small they those issues are. Unscrupulous employers can take advantage of this lack of knowledge so please do read the "your rights at work" section later on.</p>	<p>Unions can help you address your entitlement to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Breaks→ Lunch→ Annual leave→ Sick leave→ Access training opportunities→ A proper contract <p>There are rules around how these things work. Unions can help hold your employer to account on this.</p> <p>We have heard that some young workers being asked to come in early or stay late without pay, or regularly work through lunch breaks. This can be put right.</p>

<p>Young workers are often the lowest paid and worse treated</p>	<p>On average, union members get higher pay than non-members. They are also likely to get better sickness and pension benefits, more paid holiday and more control over things like shifts and working hours. This is because workers join together to negotiate pay and conditions rather than leaving them up to managers. Unions make sure working people are treated with respect – for example, opposing managers closing pensions schemes and stopping new workers being employed on worse terms and conditions.</p> <p>Unions push managers to make workplaces more inclusive for women, LGBT workers, Black and minority ethnic workers, older workers and disabled workers. When there's a strong trade union, women are far less likely to face problems at work while pregnant, on maternity leave or when they return to work.</p>
<p>Many young workers don't believe in 'jobs for life', so why bother with the union?</p>	<p>Our movement might not be able to guarantee jobs for life, but we can teach people the skills they need to be employed for life. Your Union Learning Rep can get you training and learning opportunities you deserve, not just in your current role, but also whatever you go on to do next. See the skills section for more info.</p> <p>Union membership can and should be with us throughout our working lives. Signing up for the union on day one should be as natural as finding out where the toilets are.</p>
<p>Young workers are often working parents.</p>	<p>We can help you negotiate with the employer over your working hours or shift patterns.</p> <p>We can also make sure you know your legal rights and details of your employer scheme to support working parents; carers leave, creche or childcare facilities, shared parental leave and the right to request flexible working.</p>

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Case study: One young worker's experience of unions

With young workers feeling the hardest impacts of this pandemic at work, there hasn't been a better time to join your union. Here's how a young activist fell into the world of trade unions at the age of 18.

I entered the workplace not having a clue what a union was.

By the time I finally landed myself a part time job in a local supermarket in East London, I was a shy and nervous 18-year-old. The supermarket recognised a union, however didn't mention this on my induction and so for my first 6 months I had no clue.

Building up to Easter, I had an operation which meant I couldn't walk for 10 weeks. I provided my manager with a surgeon's certificate, doctor's notes - the lot.

Still receiving daily texts, I was pressured back to work earlier than scheduled and on my first shift back, 5 minutes before my shift was up, I was told to go to the manager's office where to my surprise I entered my first ever disciplinary.

She asked if I was a member of a union and I remember saying "I don't know what that is."

They then asked if I was a member of a union – I responded: "I don't think so". "Well, you can't have a union rep then", and so the meeting went on.

Despite my shyness, I stood my ground and questioned why I was in a disciplinary when I received no indication that my operation would be a problem.

Management told me that they didn't know I was ill and would have to provide evidence.

It felt cynical as I personally handed in a letter from the doctor before the surgery and my mum had hand-delivered every doctor's note since.

The meeting was eventually adjourned at 11pm, an hour after my shift had actually finished. I got home that night feeling I was about to lose my sole source of income.

I warmed up some leftover pasta and quickly went to bed, as my next shift started at 8am. I was deeply upset.

After a restless and anxious night, I woke up and went downstairs for breakfast. My mum asked how I was, and I said I was fine but - a mother knows.

She asked if I was a member of a union and I remember saying "I don't know what that is".

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“I’m also now a lot braver when taking on management.”

She told me about my granddad, a committed trade unionist and a member of what is now Unite.

With the knowledge that someone can stand by me and protect me in this meeting, I turned up to the work cafeteria early and asked an experienced colleague for info about the union.

Our meeting resumed and when I was asked “do you want a union rep?”, I said ‘yes’.

The look on management’s faces was priceless and in walked my rep who demanded they find my doctor’s notes. After one of them went to have “another look” surprise, surprise, they found all of them.

The meeting concluded pretty much at that point.

Since that moment, no matter the workplace, I always have and always will join my union.

I’m now a proud member of Unite and have delivered the ‘Unite in Schools’ programme to the next generation of workers.

I’m also now a lot braver when taking on management.

And one of my ambitions over the next few years is to become a rep so that I can stand up for workers in the same way my reps have always done for me.

Unfortunately, stories like mine are rare.

Trade union density is low amongst young workers.

This is why employers find us easy prey when making redundancies or exploiting our naivety around our rights at work.

This is why it’s so important as a movement we devote time and energy to unionising the next generation of workers, reps and activists.

I love my union and I love this movement.

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Section 4

Your rights at work



Your rights at work

Younger workers often get a raw deal at work through no fault of their own. This is often as they are in industries with lower paid work or more precarious contracts. Another issue is younger workers are less likely to know their workplace rights than other workers, especially if it's their first job. We want to you be clued up on the rules of the game, how can we possibly be treated fair otherwise? Below are some of the most common issues that you might come across at work. Being a union member will help you enforce these rules and also argue for better ones.

What are my working hours rights in a nutshell?

Most adult workers have a right to:

- a 20-minute uninterrupted break (unpaid) away from the workstation where the working day is longer than six hours. The break must be taken during working time (i.e., not at the start or the end of your shift);
- a guaranteed daily rest period of 11 hours every working day (though, exceptionally, part of this can be deferred to be taken at the next available opportunity);
- a guaranteed weekly rest period of 24 hours once in every seven days (or 48 hours in every 14 days);
- a ceiling of 48 hours on the maximum average working week;
- a ceiling on night work of an average of eight hours work in every 24 (where work involves 'special hazards or heavy physical or mental strain', no averaging is allowed);
- a free health assessment for all night workers with a possibility to transfer to day

work (where it is available) if working at night is damaging a worker's health; and

- the right to 5.6 weeks' annual leave (four weeks of which must be taken and cannot normally be carried over into the following year).

However, the law is unduly complicated and there are quite a few variations, including the following:

- The weekly limit on working time is an average. You can work more than 48 hours in a week as long as your average hours don't exceed 48. The average is worked out in different ways for different groups of workers, and the workforce as a whole can agree to change the way it's worked out.
- You can sign an individual opt-out and lose the protection of the weekly limit, but you can reverse your opt-out at any time and regain your rights. The notice period for this cannot be more than three months. There is no opt-out from the 48-hour maximum average weekly limit on nightwork or any of the other provisions.

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What hours should I work as a nightshift worker?

[Workers](#) who normally work at night (including those on regular rotating shifts, but excluding those who only occasionally work nights) are protected under the [Working Time Regulations](#) 1998 (WTR).

Nightwork is defined as at least three hours of work taking place between the hours of 11pm and 6am. Over a [reference](#) period of 17 weeks, workers cannot be required to work more than an average of eight hours on nightwork in every 24 hours.

As workers must take at least two days off in every fortnight, this means that the average weekly limit for nightwork is 48 hours per week (six days multiplied by eight hours). No opt-out from this limit is allowed.

An exception to the average is where nightwork involves special hazards, or heavy physical or mental strain. In these cases, there is an absolute daily limit – work cannot be continued beyond eight hours in any 24.

For some workers (for example, security guards, caretakers, and those doing certain jobs which cannot be interrupted), the regulations restricting the length of nightwork to eight hours do not apply.

As with dayworkers, nightworkers are entitled to at least 20 minutes rest during any period of work lasting more than six hours.

Note that there is no provision to opt-out from the limits on nightwork.

There are special rules for young workers aged 16 and 17. Young workers may not ordinarily work at night between 10pm and 6am, or between 11pm and 7am if the [contract of employment](#) provides for work after 10pm. However, exceptions apply in particular circumstances in the case of certain kinds of employment. See our [Young Workers](#) section for more information.

There are also special rules for pregnant workers. Where a woman works nights and has a certificate from her GP or a midwife showing that it is necessary for her health





and safety not to work nights, the employer should suspend her from working nights for the period stated in the certificate and offer suitable alternative day time work on the same terms and conditions. If there is no suitable alternative day work, she should be suspended on full pay for as long as needed for her health and safety.

A pregnant woman should not be routinely forced to leave her night shift where there is no medical evidence from a doctor or midwife that this is necessary.

The minimum wage

The national minimum wage for young people varies according to age.

Minimum wage rates usually increase each year in October. For the latest rates visit www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates

Apprentices

For the current minimum wage rate for an apprentice can be found at www.gov.uk/apprenticeships-guide/payand-conditions

This rate applies to apprentices under 19 and those aged 19 or over who are in their first year.

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Safety at Work

If you are doing work experience or work-based learning this may well be the first time you have worked, so special care needs to be taken. Also, in the first six months of a job all people are at particular risk of injury. Many young people will be in this category.

The law says that employers must be extra careful with young workers.

Before taking on any young worker, employers have to assess the risks to health and the suitability of the proposed work. They should take into account a young person's relative lack of experience in the workplace.

Employers have to comply with health and safety rules. They are there to protect you, your colleagues and visitors to your employer's

premises. As well as rights, they give you, as an [employee](#), certain responsibilities too. For example, if you interfere with anything provided for health and safety purposes, you could be prosecuted.

Health and safety rules cover issues such as:

- ventilation;
- temperature;
- lighting;
- cleanliness and waste materials;
- floor space;
- seating;
- sanitation;



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- washing facilities;
- smoking;
- Visual Display Units (VDUs);
- exposure to chemicals and other hazardous substances;
- noise;
- vibration;
- working with equipment and machinery; and
- lifting and moving loads (including people).

The employer must ensure, 'so far as is reasonably practicable' the health, safety and welfare of workers – which includes minimising the risk of suffering stress at work. This has to be done by carrying out a [risk assessment](#), consulting [safety representatives](#) and safety committees, and supplying information, instruction and training to workers and others who are in a contractual relationship.

If you work in a unionised workplace (that is, one where a union is active) then there should be a union [Health and Safety rep](#) present who you can approach if you have any concerns.

Unionised workplaces are [safer workplaces](#) so, if you have safety concerns at work, tackling them with a union is a great place to start.

Skills

We know you want to get on in life and being part of a union can make that happen. Being part of a union can help you get the skills you need to progress in your career or change jobs to the one you really want.

WULF

The [Wales Union Learning Fund](#), or WULF for short, is a pot of money that is held by a union specifically to help workers upskill. Whether it's management courses, digital skills or industry specific qualifications WULF is there to support you.



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Case study: Louise

Louise is from Swansea and was a young new entrant to Wales' TV industry when she started working as a camera assistant.

She was supported by CULT Cymru's Welsh Government funded Wales Union Learning Fund (WULF) project and the broadcasting union BECTU after experiencing difficulties securing paid work.

"I was offered a work experience placement covering rugby matches and was really pleased to be getting the experience. But as time went on, I was doing more and more, operating cameras on my own – basically doing the job of a skilled operator, but without pay.

"It reached the point where it wasn't work experience anymore. I knew that I should be paid for what I was doing but I wasn't sure how to approach it. It was pretty much my first experience of the industry and I felt nervous about raising the issue with my boss."

"The industry has changed drastically over the last 20 years" says Siân Gale, CULT Cymru's Project Manager, "with a move from permanent, secure jobs in large organisations such as the BBC and ITV, to less secure fixed term contracts or freelance work.



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“New entrants are particularly vulnerable as recruitment practices are largely informal and dependent on who rather than what you know. As a union BECTU is keen to ensure that new entrants, regardless of their background, have an opportunity to develop sustainable careers and to receive fair treatment at work.”

“A friend thought joining a union might help” explains Louise, “That is how I first met Siân. She helped me to write a letter to the manager of the company explaining why I felt I should be paid for what I was doing– she helped me word it properly. I got a really good outcome from it as they agreed to pay me!

“Later on I found myself out of work when the company folded its business in Wales. Siân encouraged me to do some of the courses offered by CULT Cymru and also helped me with my CV. When you don’t have work coming in you feel a bit low, like you’re not worth anything, but doing the courses made me feel better about myself and more confident about getting work”.

“I did BECTU’s Creative Industries Safety Passport course. This was really worth doing because it shows you understand the health and safety requirements of the industry. The courses were highly subsidised which made them affordable for me, as I wouldn’t have been able to do them otherwise.

“After that I did a Speed Networking course and one called Marketing and Promoting Yourself. These were both really useful at building my confidence around how to talk to people I don’t know, and how to talk about myself positively.

“I also did a course on Employment for Freelancers that was really useful – because I’d been paid on a freelance basis I had to do a tax return which I’d never done before.”

Since doing the courses through WULF, Louise has continued to develop her career and has secured work on series such as The Collection, Hinterland and Doctor Who.

“Now I’m back in work I’ve been telling others about the courses. Having these training opportunities is really important to us freelancers and new entrants working in the industry.

“Without the union the training opportunities wouldn’t be there - if the union weren’t doing it, I don’t think it would happen at all. It is really important to be able to have the chance to develop and become better at the job.”



Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are a great way to make a start in a wide range of professions, such as engineering, accounting, construction and floristry. They let you study, develop practical skills and earn while you learn.

An apprenticeship is a three-way arrangement between an employer, an apprentice and a training provider. It combines formal study with on-the-job training. At the end of your apprenticeship, you'll get a vocational qualification.

[Apprenticeships](#) in Wales are open to anyone over the age of 16. They combine practical training in a job with study. You will gain hands-on work experience, learn new skills and gain a nationally recognised qualification. Apprenticeships allow you to earn while you learn. As an apprentice you'll:

- work alongside experienced staff
- develop job specific skills
- earn a wage and get holiday pay
- get time to study (usually one day a week)
- boost your earning potential
- get a full package of support, whatever your needs
- have the opportunity for clear progression through the apprenticeship levels

Unfortunately, some employers have been known to use apprenticeships as a form of cheap labour. Being a union member will offer you protection from these sort of shoddy practices. To know more about your rights as an apprentice visit our [work smart website](#).





5



Section 5

Joining a union

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Unionised workplace

Some workplaces will already have a union present. This is most likely to be true if you are working in the public sector. You'll know this by seeing union posters on a noticeboard or by seeing colleagues with union lanyards or union branded pens and mugs around the place. You should join the same union that your workplace recognises. If you are still in doubt, ask your colleagues or look at your work intranet to check for union recognition – you're much stronger together!

Whilst it's perfectly fine to join us alone, it might also be worth thinking of joining with a group of friends, the unions power comes from its strength in numbers.

You can find out what union is best for you by using the TUC's [union finder tool](#).



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Un-unionised workplace

Everyone has the right to join a union – it costs less than you think.

There are no real drawbacks to joining a union. The membership fee is usually small, and your union is there to support and represent you. Over 6 million workers are part of a union.

If you ever have cause to seek support from a union because you feel you are being treated unfairly by your employer, you'll have someone in your corner to help you fight and give you advice. Unions push for better pay and conditions for workers. The more people who join a recognised union in your workplace, the more you and your colleagues will benefit. If your workplace doesn't have a union then it makes sense to try and get as many people as possible to join up together, your strength comes from having those numbers. You can speak to a union about how they can support you in getting other people on board when you join up yourself.

To find out more about how to join a union and which union is the right one for you, visit: www.tuc.org.uk/join-a-union

www.worksmart.org.uk

WorkSmart is a one-stop site for everyone at work. It gives a range of information about working life and your rights at work – whether you are a union member or not.





Useful links & bibliography

Acas helpline - 08457 47 47 47

www.acas.org.uk

Acas is a public body that promotes good workplace relations. Its national helpline can provide general advice on rights at work for employees and employers.

Citizens Advice

Your local CAB office will be listed in your telephone directory. You can also visit www.citizensadvice.org.uk to find advice and information online.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Rights, responsibilities and good practice, based on equality law and human rights.

Health and Safety Executive

www.hse.gov.uk

Has information on health and safety at work issues, and rest breaks and working time.

Pay and Work Rights Helpline - 0800 917 2368

This government-funded service provides advice on the minimum wage and working time issues.

Direct.gov

www.direct.gov.uk

This government site has pages on employment rights for young people.

Note: This content is provided as general background information and should not be taken as legal advice or financial advice for your particular situation. Make sure to get individual advice on your case from your union, a source on our free help page or an independent financial advisor before taking any action.

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This toolkit will be regularly updated, so we would welcome any comments or suggestions on how it could be improved. Please let us know if you notice anything that is out of date, unclear, or that you think may need correcting or updating.

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