

The Great Jobs Agenda – Healthy Workplaces

A TUC guide for trade union activists

The Great Jobs Agenda

Introduction

Work is an important part of our lives for most of us. On average we spend around one-third of our waking hours working, although some of us spend a lot more.

That is why people want to work in good jobs that they feel are rewarding. They want respect, decent pay, secure employment, hours that suit them, a safe workplace, basic standards of employment, job satisfaction and the ability to achieve their potential. They also want a voice in their workplace.

Yet millions of us work in jobs that are the exact opposite of that. Bad jobs lead to ill-health, depression and anxiety, low self-esteem, and can leave people exhausted and unmotivated.

Bad jobs also effect not only the worker but their family. Millions of children live in poverty because of their parent's low pay, or rarely see a parent because of the hours they are forced to work.

That is why the TUC wants to end these bad jobs and instead promote "Great Jobs" - ones that promote good physical and mental health, and where workers feel listened to and valued.

The TUC wants the Government to pass a "Great Jobs Act" that gives all workers:

- A voice at work
- Fair and decent pay
- Regular hours

- Fair treatment and respect
- A healthy workplace
- Access to learning and progression.

But while we want action from the Government on these issues, there is also a lot that union workplace representatives can do to try to ensure that their employer takes action to support the TUC [Great Jobs Agenda](#).

This guide suggests a few actions that you can take in your workplace to help achieve one of these important issues that the TUC wants to achieve - a healthy workplace.

Everyone at work deserves a great job. A great job is one where the worker is paid and treated fairly. And it's one where workers get opportunities to progress, to learn and to have a voice on what matters.

That's why we've created the Great Jobs Agenda. The agenda will give the trade union movement a common set of bargaining asks in workplaces. And it sets out what we want the government to do to ensure that every worker has a great job with fair pay, regular hours and the opportunity to progress.

Frances O'Grady, TUC General Secretary

Healthy Workplaces

Introduction

Being in work could make people healthier and happier, if it's good work. But instead, millions of people every year are injured or made ill because of their work.

According to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), 600,000 people were injured at work last, and 1,300,000 workers were suffering from an illness or disease caused by their work. 12,000 people died because of a cancer or lung-disease that they got because of their work, over 5,000 of those were because of asbestos exposure.

One of the biggest causes of ill-health is workplace stress which effects over half a million people.

Our Great Jobs Agenda has identified three things that employers can do to help reduce the number of people injured or made ill through work these are:

- Ensure there is an active joint health and safety committee and trade union health and safety representatives.
- Implement the HSE stress management standards and set out a policy for workplace wellbeing.
- Agree a timetable for the removal of asbestos from workplaces.

1. Safety committees and safety representatives

The biggest factor in preventing injury and ill-health is whether the employer involves their workers in matters around health and safety. Workplaces with joint safety committees and trade union health and safety representatives have half the serious injuries as those without. They also have lower levels of ill-health.

Yet many employers treat health and safety representatives with suspicion or even hostility. If employers gave more encouragement and support to union health and safety representatives then they could be even more effective. They could also make safety committees work better by listening to what the safety representatives say and working jointly to reduce injuries and illnesses.

What you can do

- ☒ Ask for a statement from your employer valuing the work that union health and safety representatives do and get it circulated to every employee.
- ☒ Make sure that your employer is giving all safety representatives time off to carry out inspections, talk to their members, attend meetings and get training.
- ☒ If you have not got a joint health and safety committee in your workplace, if

your employer recognises the union, any two health and safety representatives can call for one to be set up.

- ☑ Make sure that the safety committee is working effectively. That means ensuring that it meets regularly, that the health and safety representatives are given information in advance and that decisions are actioned.

For more guidance on how you can make health and safety representatives and health and safety committees more effective see the TUC [guide](#) to organising and health and safety.

2. Implement the stress management standards.

Workplace stress is the biggest cause of sickness absence yet it can be prevented simply by removing or managing the causes of the stress.

The HSE has developed detailed guidance to help employers do that by changing the workplace. When employers have used the HSE guidance they have managed to reduce levels of stress.

Yet, instead of using it, many employers refuse to take stress seriously or else try to change the worker instead of the workplace by seeking to make employees more “resilient” or only having programmes to help workers after they have become ill, rather than preventing the illness.

Many employers try to tackle stress as part of a “well-being programme”. Sometimes this can be a positive attempt to make the workplace healthier, but too often these programmes simply put responsibility on to the worker to alter their lifestyle without the employer making any real changes such as

tackling a long hours culture, or job-insecurity.

We believe that you can only make the workplace healthier by making workers healthier. That means tackling the causes of stress, and addressing issues around working hours, bullying and harassment, low morale, a lack of work-life balance and poor pay.

What you can do:

- ☑ Survey your members to find out how much stress is an issue and which groups are most effected.
- ☑ Check existing risk assessments to see if they have adequately considered the problem of stress.
- ☑ Ask your employer to use the HSE stress management standards to assess and manage stress.
- ☑ Encourage your employer to have a well-being policy that focuses on making the workplace healthier rather than just focusing on what the staff can do.

The TUC and HSE have produced a [joint guide](#) to using the HSE stress management standards.

There is detailed [guidance](#) on well-being policies on the TUC website.

3. Remove asbestos.

Asbestos is the biggest cause of workplace deaths. This year 5,000 people are likely to die prematurely as a result of asbestos exposure. This is around three times the number of road accident deaths.

Despite asbestos having been banned for almost twenty years, hundreds of thousands of workers are still exposed to it today. Over six million tonnes of asbestos fibres were imported into Britain during the last century. Most of this asbestos is still there and it is likely that at least half a million commercial properties contain some form of the asbestos containing material.

So long as this asbestos is in place workers will continue to be exposed and thousands more will die as a result of exposure.

There is no legal requirement for employers to remove asbestos, just to survey it and "manage" it, but until it is removed and disposed of safely, it will continue to be our biggest killer.

What you can do.

- ☒ Check whether there is any asbestos in your workplace. Ask your employer to show you the results of any asbestos survey.
- ☒ If there is asbestos, check that it is properly labelled, regularly inspected and all staff are trained on the dangers of asbestos.
- ☒ Ensure that all contractors are properly informed about the presence of asbestos and that steps are in place to prevent any exposure.
- ☒ Negotiate with your employer an agreement that all asbestos will be safely removed by an agreed date.

The TUC has produced [negotiating guidance](#) on how to get asbestos removed.

Summary

These are only three of the many issues that union representatives can tackle to try to ensure that your workplace is safer and healthier. You will find advice and guidance on many other issues such as bullying, temperature, musculoskeletal disorders, and workplace cancers on the [TUC website](#).

Our Great Jobs Agenda is based on making a practical difference that will transform the working lives of millions of people. You can play your part by trying to get change in your workplace. Details of the campaign, and the other issues that are covered in the Great Jobs Agenda are on the **Great Jobs** website.

Find out more

For more information about the campaign, go to:

<https://www.tuc.org.uk/lets-secure-great-jobs-everyone>

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