



TUC

Changing the world
of work for good

Getting by and getting on

**A guide for reps about issues
affecting young workers**

Everyone should have the chance of a decent job and career, no matter what their age. But young people are most likely to experience unemployment, underemployment, low wages, casual and temporary work, zero-hours contracts and workplace exploitation.

They are also least likely to be in a trade union, know their rights or have the skills or the knowledge to demand more from their employers.

Did you know?

A third of people on zero-hours contracts are aged 16–24.¹

Workers in their 20s are earning less than the previous generation did at their age: the first time that a whole generation has fallen behind another since records began.²

Just eight per cent of young workers are in a union.³

As unions we want to engage and recruit all young workers. Given they are most likely to work at the sharp end of the economy, they stand to benefit most from membership. And because union members tend to be older than employees across the economy, it's important for the survival of the movement that we recruit and organise young workers, and develop the next generation of trade unionists.

Young people deserve a great job like anyone else, where they are paid and treated fairly, where they get an opportunity to progress, have their voices heard and their rights upheld.

We have produced this briefing for reps and officers to help them bargain and create campaigns on issues that young workers care and are concerned about, so that no young person is left behind, and the union movement thrives.



Britain's young core workers

The TUC has identified the group of young workers who are most missing out on trade unions. We call them Britain's 'young core workers' because they form the backbone of our economy.

They are:

- aged 21–30
- not in full-time education
- working predominantly in the private sector: in our shops, warehouses, care homes, cafes, pubs, restaurants and hotels.

Young people speak out about work

The TUC has been conducting in-depth research with young people about their experiences of work. We've included their voices throughout this guide. When we asked them to tell us about their ideal job they told us:

I want to be judged by my own effort... and really see a difference at the end of the job I do. Most importantly, [I] want a job that feels worthy.

Characteristics of ideal job: great boss, growth opportunities, good work environment.

Ideal job: flexibility (employer understands having kids)... training and development... progression recognition for hard work... team spirit and support.



A photograph of two young men in a factory. They are both wearing blue work overalls. The man on the left has safety glasses on his head and is laughing. The man on the right has his arm around the first man's shoulder and is smiling. The background shows industrial machinery and a large factory interior.

Getting a great job

Making sure great work is accessible to young workers is the first step if we are to improve the working lives of young people. We need an economy that provides great jobs, with access to skills development and learning opportunities needed for young people to get them. That's why all young people should have the opportunities to learn new skills, access further education, get on-the-job experience and access quality, well-paid apprenticeships and internships.

Sadly there are currently too many barriers for young people. We are concerned that the scrapping of the educational maintenance allowance, cuts to further education and skills funding and the removal of nursing bursaries means that young people – particularly from lower income families – face discriminatory economic barriers to getting a great job.

Young people speak out about work

Many young people told us they were in jobs where their skills were not being used fully:

I want to do something I'm passionate about. I did a sociology degree and I've never used it. I would love to work with children with special needs. I want to develop... to general manager level.

I want a job where I can see myself developing more in the company.

I'm upset that I've been there for 11 years and am still on the minimum wage.

Workers on internships should be paid the national minimum wage – but we know that bogus, unpaid internships are still far too common.⁴ And while the TUC strongly supports the creation of quality apprenticeships, we also know that some apprentices are used by some bosses to hire on the cheap: almost 1 in 5⁵ (18 per cent) are paid below the statutory minimum. Young people are particularly at risk from these sorts of exploitative practices.

What you can ask for in your workplace

- the national minimum wage, at least, for all interns.
- fairly paid, good quality apprenticeships accessible to all – with a proper contract of employment for at least the duration of the training period.

What you can campaign on with your union

- wages above the national minimum, ending age-related pay and better enforcement of the national minimum wage
- learning and development grants for workers aged over 19
- re-instatement of the educational maintenance allowance and nursing bursaries
- re-establishment of a universal national careers service and an entitlement to face-to-face careers guidance with links to future high-quality jobs.





Photo: Charlotte Graham/Guzellian

A photograph of two women in maroon shirts standing at what appears to be a workplace event. The woman in the foreground has blonde hair with bangs and is looking back over her shoulder. The woman behind her has dark hair and glasses. A large yellow arrow graphic points to the right, containing the text 'Getting by in the workplace'.

Getting by in the workplace

The TUC is concerned that for too many young workers, their experience of the workplace is not the rewarding and positive experience that it could be. Through our research with young core workers⁶ we found that key issues in the workplace were underemployment, juggling work and family life, insecurity such as zero-hours contracts or agency work and low pay.

We believe young workers deserve the chance to live independently and to support themselves and those who rely on them. This means tackling low pay and insecurity in the workplace.

Young people speak out about work

Issues with retail: long tiring hours for very little money – absolute minimum wage... shift patterns [are] hard – one day early shift, one day late... that makes it hard to see family and do things out of work.

Only [have] three hours between leaving work...and getting up to look after [my] son... [we need] more compensation for the hours that we do.

Don't open until 12pm and close at 10pm... tried different shift patterns... now [do] three long days which works better, but... missing too much time with little girl... tried to talk to bosses but they won't listen.

On issues at work: Not having time at work to have lunch... working seven days in a row without a day off... last-minute rotas... rotas coming late.

The TUC has developed the Great Jobs Agenda⁷: a series of actions that can be made by employers and politicians to make sure everyone can have a great job.

What you can ask for in your workplace

- recognition of rights for union learning reps
- time off for employees to peruse union-led learning
- an end to the use of zero-hours contracts, giving staff who want them contracts with guaranteed hours that reflect normal working patterns
- a minimum notice period for allocating and changing shifts
- employers to pay at least the real living wage and preferably higher rates of pay.

What you can campaign on with your union

- an increase in the national minimum wage to £10 as quickly as possible, making sure younger workers benefit too
- a ban on the regular use of zero-hours contracts
- a national industrial strategy that puts great jobs and worker voice at the centre.

Almost a third of young core workers are parents, and over 415,000 young parents are union members.

What recent TUC research on young mums and dads tells us

- Parental leave is unpaid, so many young workers can't afford to take it.
- It is common for employers to give short notice of shifts and variable working hours, making childcare even more difficult.
- Young parents too often resort to annual or unpaid leave to look after children if they are sick, leaving them short on time and money.

Family-friendly policies you can ask for in the workplace

- decent parental leave pay for mothers and fathers
- flexibility in when and how leave can be taken without qualifying periods or notice requirements
- family-flexible working and phased returns.

What you can campaign on with your union

- parental leave to be paid, at least at the rate of the national living wage
- workers to be given notice of their shifts at least a month in advance
- moving to a starting point that all jobs can be done flexibly unless there is a business reason not to – and advertising jobs as flexible from day one
- employers to justify when it's not possible to advertise a job as flexible
- a day-one right to a written statement setting out pay, conditions, and expected hours of work – for young parents this should include information about workplace rights that support them and manage childcare.



Getting on in the workplace

From our research we know that learning and progression opportunities are a key issue for young workers. There is a strong desire for in-work training, opportunities to progress and move up in the workplace. But shift work, low pay and bad bosses too often get in the way.

Young people speak out about work

Hours can stop you from progressing in other areas of your life.

Never thought about taking action – managers oversee everything so can just ignore ideas.

Vocational training would help – but that requires time and financial commitment which is hard because of work and other commitments.

We have a strong need to be valued and listened to in the workplace, but aren't always sure how a union can make a difference to our lives.

What you can ask for in your workplace

- Employers should offer meaningful consultation with a trade union on changes in workplace, and offer – where possible – worker representation on company boards.
- There should be an independent trade union voice at work, recognised by your employer.
- Employers should make all employees aware of their training and development rights, including the right to ask for time-off for training or study.

As a movement, together we can increase trade union membership among young people

- We listen to what young workers need and adapt what we offer to help.
- We must improve awareness and understanding about unions amongst young workers.
- We must campaign for the rights of unions to access workplaces to tell individuals about the benefits of joining a union.
- We must improve the confidence of young workers to speak up for fair treatment.

For more information about the TUC's work in any of these areas see www.tuc.org.uk

References:

- 1 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/contractsthatdonotguaranteeaminimumnumberofhours/mar2017#what-are-the-characteristics-of-people-employed-on-zero-hours-contracts>
- 2 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/ifeellikcantchangeanythingreport.pdf>
- 3 ONS Labour Force Survey, May 2017. Figures for 2016.
- 4 <https://www.recruitment-international.co.uk/blog/2017/07/48-percent-of-young-people-have-undertaken-unpaid-internships-in-the-uk-survey-reveals>
- 5 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/630070/apprenticeship-pay-survey-2016-report-gb.pdf
- 6 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/ifeellikcantchangeanythingreport.pdf>
- 7 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/great-jobs-agenda.pdf>



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