

Extended Module: Workplace Rights and the Role of Unions

Student resource

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Introduction

[UNISON](#) states that a trade union is a group of employees who join together to maintain and improve their conditions of employment. Nearly seven million people in the UK belong to a trade union. The typical activities of trade unions include providing assistance and services to their members, collectively bargaining for better pay and conditions for all workers, working to improve the quality of public services, political campaigning and industrial action.

In completing this module you will:

- Understand what a union is, the different types of unions, what they do, and how they can support you within your employment
- Understand what your workplace rights are when in employment

Activity 1 (15 minutes)

Unions are able to collectively influence policies and conditions in specific workplaces, across sectors or at a national level as well as support individual staff members. The video resource highlights examples of what unions have achieved through collective bargaining.

Watch the Trade Union Congress (TUC) video below that discusses “What trade unions have done for us” and identify as many staff entitlements and benefits as possible, that unions have helped to introduce in the workplace.

- [What have Trade unions done for us?](#) (🕒 4 minutes watch)

Use this space to answer:

Activity 2 (15 minutes)

Unions can either be specific to one sector and provide specialised advice and services to workers within that sector or can provide services across multiple sectors and industries.

Can you research and identify as many unions as possible and state whether they act in the interest of one or more industry/ sector?



TOP TIP

You may find this [Union Listing](#) from the TUC a useful starting resource.

Union name

Example - UNISON

Name of specific/multiple sector

Public Sector Wide e.g. Education, Health Care, Government etc.

Activity 3 (30 minutes)

Trade Unions train and organise workplace representatives to help workers who are union members with problems they may face at work. Representatives provide support and advice and often campaign for better workplace conditions and pay. As you start employment, you may have the opportunity to speak to the workplace union representatives in your workplace. Representatives will give an overview of the role they play and how they can support you throughout your employment.

As part of every union, there are a number of key roles that form the collective union structure. Using one of the unions you have researched in Activity 2, identify three different roles within the union structure and give a brief overview of their responsibilities.

Structural information about unions, can normally be found in the 'About Us' section on the Union's website. However, you may find it easier to conduct an advanced search for 'Structure' on the Union's website.

Union role

Example - Union Full Time Officer
TUC - [The role of the union representative](#)

Role responsibilities

Can be elected or appointed according to the union rule book. This Officer works full-time for the union and supports all regional union activities and representatives. Their main function is to become involved in members' cases when they reach a higher level with management. Some unions also employ full-time organisers to support branches.

Union role	Role responsibilities

Activity 4 (15 minutes)

Scenario

Two months ago, you started the first year of your full-time apprenticeship at a Construction company and have just turned 18.

Use the 'Know your rights as an Apprentice' TUC resource to research and answer the following questions relative to your scenario.

- 1 Do you have a legal right to join a union?
- 2 How much should you be paid on an hourly basis?
- 3 If you are working an eight-hour day, what breaks are you legally entitled to?
- 4 What is your statutory holiday entitlement?
- 5 What notice period does your employer need to give you if they want to dismiss you from your role?
- 6 You are asked to do a job that puts your Health and Safety at risk, do you have the right to refuse?

Your Rights as an Apprentice



As an apprentice you are an employee.
Understand your basic rights [here](#).

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.

Activity 5 (5 minutes)

Across different sectors and industries, there are different types of employment contracts you may find yourself employed on. Each different contract type can impact your employment terms, conditions, work patterns and entitlements.

Match each contract type below to the corresponding descriptive statement.

Contract types: **Zero-hour contract** | **Part-time contract** | **Full-time contract** | **Fixed Term contract** | **Permanent contract**

A term used to describe a type of employment contract where a member of staff will work 35 hours or more per week. The agreed amount of hours required to work each week needs to be visible in the contract.

These contracts last for a certain length of time, are set in advance and often end when a specific task, programme or event has been completed.

This contract applies to staff who work regular hours and are paid a salary or hourly rate. The contracts are ongoing until terminated by either the employer or staff member and may be for full or part-time work. Workers on these contracts are entitled to the full range of statutory employment rights.

A term used to describe a type of employment contract where a staff member will work less than 35 hours per week. The agreed amount of hours required to work each week needs to be visible in the contract.

A term used to describe a type of employment contract between an employer and a staff member whereby the employer is not obliged to provide a minimum number of working hours to the staff member.

Additional Resources

Introduction - [UNISON](#)

Activity 1: Video - [TUC Why join a union?](#)

Activity 2: You may find this [Union Listing](#) from the TUC a useful starting resource (p.38 particularly)

Activity 3: Unions roles and responsibilities link - [TUC - The role of the union representative](#)

Activity 4: Access to updated information can be found online [here](#)

Extended Resource: - [HM Government National Living Wage Apprentice Pay Calculator](#)