

Extended Module: Workplace Rights and the Role of Unions

Student resource

To use this resource digitally, you must download a copy to your own area before making any changes to the resource.

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 [Directory resource](#) from the TUC a useful starting resource (p.38 particularly).

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?

Know Your Rights as an Apprentice

www.unionlearn.org.uk/myrights

TUC Northern **unionlearn**
from the TUC

SICK PAY

You are eligible to claim for sick pay if you earn an average of £116 per week (before tax). If eligible and after 4 days sick, you have a right to £92.05 per week Statutory Sick Pay for up to 28 weeks, provided you evidence your sickness.

HOLIDAYS

You have a right to at least 28 days paid annual leave per year, this is equivalent to 5.6 weeks holiday. If you work part time you are entitled to a proportion of that. To calculate your entitlement multiply days worked per week by 5.6 (e.g. 3x5.6 = 16.8 days a year).

TUC Northern

www.unionlearn.org.uk/myrights

Contact us if you are
having issues at work:

0191 227 5550

APPRENTICESHIP AGREEMENT (YOUR CONTRACT)

This is equivalent to a standard contract of employment, meaning you have the same legal rights as an employee (e.g. wage, holiday, sick pay, etc). It must state all the terms of your apprenticeship, including: how long you'll be employed; the training you'll receive; your working conditions; and the qualification you are being trained for.

COMMITMENT STATEMENT

This must include: the planned content and schedule for training; what is expected and offered by the employer, the training organisation and the apprentice; and how to resolve complaints.

BREAKS AND REST

- 1) You have the right to one 20 minute break after 6 hours.
(If you are under 18 you have a right to 30min every 4.5hrs)

HEALTH AND SAFETY

All employers have a legal responsibility to maintain health and safety, including first aid equipment, adequate means of fire escape, protective clothing and equipment (PPE), safe machinery and a safe workplace. You have a right to refuse to do a specific job if it breaches the health and safety policy or puts you in unnecessary danger.

SURVEILLANCE

Employers have the right to monitor employees' business related communication, provided they give you warning. This can include work emails, internet use and phone.

DISMISSAL

You have the right to 1 weeks notice if you've worked for 1 month; 2 weeks notice if you've been employed for 2 years; and an additional week for every year thereafter.

- 2) You have a right to 11 hours rest between working days.
(If you are under 18 you have a right 12 hours)
- 3) You have a right to an uninterrupted 24 hour break each week, or 48hrs each fortnight.
(If you are under 18 you have a right to 48hrs each week)

APPRENTICE PAY

You are entitled to the Apprentice National Minimum Wage (check the following link for current apprentice and age rate pay: www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates). If you are aged 19+ and have completed the first year of your apprenticeship you are entitled to the National Minimum Wage.

OFF-THE-JOB TRAINING

Apprenticeships must last a minimum of 12 months and involve at least 20% off-the-job training. The 20% off-the-job training must be done during contracted hours (i.e. paid).

TRAINING

Employers must provide clear instructions, information and adequate training for you to be able to do your job.

BULLYING

Employers should protect you from bullying. You have the right not be harassed or discriminated against on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity.

TRADE UNIONS

You have the right to join a trade union. It is illegal for an employer to discriminate, dismiss, or harass you for being a member or wanting to join a union.

Find a union here: www.tuc.org.uk/join-union.

All information included in this resource is correct as of August 2021 and has been provided by the TUC. It is important to note that some detail may change over time as a result of changes in worker rights and entitlements. Access to updated information can be found [here](#)



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 [Directory resource](#) 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](#)