

what is a trade union?

A trade union is an organised group of workers who have joined together to achieve common goals such as better working conditions, wages and a safer working environment.

Trade unions negotiate with employers on behalf of union members to agree wages, work rules, complaint procedures, rules governing hiring, firing and promotion of workers, benefits, workplace safety and other policies.

Who is in a trade union?

Ordinary working people – nearly seven million in the UK – are in a trade union, doing all sorts of jobs. They include nurses, school meals staff, hospital cleaners, actors, professional footballers, shop assistants, teaching assistants, bus drivers, engineers, social workers and apprentices.

UNISON is the UK's largest trade union, representing all those who work in our vital public services like health, education and local council services, keeping our children safe and caring for the vulnerable in society.



UNISON
the public service union

what is a trade union?

Why join a trade union?

Quite simply, you are better off in a trade union. For a start, in workplaces where there are unions, people earn around 12.5% more than non-unionised workplaces.

Unions also campaign and lobby to persuade the public or government that their cause is reasonable.

So members benefit from the strength and security that comes from people working together to tackle problems.

Trade union successes

In recent years, unions have campaigned for and won:

- a national minimum wage
- improved parental leave provisions
- equality legislation
- laws on reasonable working hours
- minimum holiday and sickness entitlements
- health and safety in the workplace
- pension provision

...as well as many thousands of local agreements on issues affecting particular workplaces.



How do trade unions work?

Union members agree a common aim of what they want to achieve. This might be about pay or bullying at work or challenging unfairness, for example. Representatives from the union gather evidence about the issue and present it to their employer. They discuss the matter with the employer to reach an agreement.

If the employer refuses to reach an agreement, union members can broaden their campaign to win wider support in the workplace. This may be with the public or at a national level with MPs and in government, or, as a last resort, taking strike action.

Trade unions also provide legal representation for workers, for example to win compensation in the event of an accident or injury at work. Many trade unions also provide other benefits and discounts on services for their members. You can think of trade unions as your insurance policy for work.

In UNISON – the trade union for all public service workers – we believe in

equality – we are all different, but we all deserve to be treated with respect and fairness. All of our voices should be heard

solidarity – we work to support each other at work and in society

democracy – our members have a right to make the decisions that shape their union

participation – we aim to share our skills, commitment and creativity to build a stronger union

Find out more at unison.org.uk

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