

# WHAT IS A TRADE UNION?

A trade union is a group of working people who have joined together to achieve better pay and working conditions 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 like you – 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 represents people 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.

## Why join a trade union?

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

In UNISON, as well as getting support when you need it at work you will have access to a wide range of help and benefits including:

- legal services for you at work and your family at home\*
- financial assistance and debt advice in times of need
- our helpline open until midnight
- compensation for accidents and injuries at work
- member discounts on things like insurance and new cars – including up to 50% off holidays
- education, training and support.

Unions also campaign and lobby to persuade the public or government of their point of view.

\*qualifying period and exclusions apply

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## 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.

## Find out more at [unison.org.uk](http://unison.org.uk)

**In UNISON** – the trade union for all public service workers even if they work in private companies – 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.

## Three simple ways to join UNISON today and get essential cover wherever you work



Join online at  
[joinunison.org](http://joinunison.org)



Call us on  
0800 171 2193



Ask your UNISON rep  
for an application form