

TRADE UNIONS:
Know your
FACTS
from the
FICTION!



Fiction: Trade Unions aren't for people like me

FACT: Unless you win the lottery or have millions in the bank, the chances are you'll spend roughly a quarter of your life at work because that is the only – legal – way to earn money.

Anyone that goes to work and who cares about their pay and conditions – holiday entitlement, pension and so on – equal rights, safety and training needs a trade union.

Young workers are most likely to be vulnerable to exploitation as some unscrupulous employers will assume that they are less likely to know their rights.

One in four young workers has experienced bullying and 53 per cent fear they can't support a family on their wages.

Fiction: Trade unions are only for people in particular types of work, working full time all year round

FACT: Around half of young workers work to pay for their education.

Research shows that between 1996 and 2006 the number of full time students with a part-time job grew by more than 50 per cent, with this figure

set to only increase alongside the cost of higher education.

Union membership is more diverse than perhaps you would imagine and includes full time, part time, agency and seasonal workers.

Fiction: Trade Union membership wouldn't have any benefits for me

FACT: Time and time again it has been proven that workers in unionised workplaces get far better pay and terms and conditions than those that aren't in a union.

As a member of a union you are entitled to free representation and legal advice should you ever need it.

This applies to both within and outside the workplace and can include help with employment matters, personal injury, wills, conveyancing and more.

Many unions also have agreements with third parties for additional benefits, such as cheaper insurance and discounts.

Fiction: Trade Unions are just about workplace disputes and strikes

FACT: Despite what the right wing media and politicians will have you believe, going on strike in the UK is very difficult and is always the last resort for workers and trade unions. But the right to withdraw labour is and should stay a human right. Going on strike remains rare here and is a tough call for those taking strike action, not least because you don't get paid when you're on strike.

Whilst a trade union's primary role is to represent their members on employment issues, trade unions have a much bigger part to play in civil society. Trade unions offer educational, lifelong learning and training opportunities to their members, many of whom would have not had this chance had it not been for their union.

Historically, trade unions have not only negotiated for and championed better workplace rights with employers but for a better deal for working

people in the wider world. Having battled to extend the right to vote, it was the unions that created a political party that working people could vote for – the Labour Party.

Just over 100 years ago unions came together to establish the Labour Party in order to give a political voice to the values and aspirations of trade union members.

Today that link remains strong with fifteen trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party. Labour's key achievements in government – the welfare state, the NHS, the minimum wage, the right to union recognition to name but a few – have made a real difference to the lives of union members and the Labour Party benefits from having a direct connection to working people through the trade unions.

Fiction: Unions aren't formally recognised in my workplace so I can't join

FACT: Anybody has the right to join a union regardless of whether their employer formally recognises trade unions or a union organises within their workplace.

When you sign up you should be given information about which branch you belong to (this could be for a local

area if there's not one in your workplace). Unions also have contact numbers and/or helplines for members to access legal advice.

You can also get more active in your union by getting involved with campaigns and other activity/events.

Fiction: I don't work so there is no point in me being in a union

FACT: Unite's new reduced rate 'Community Membership' will open up union membership outside of the workplace to members of the community who may not currently be in work and other people who may not traditionally feel a union is for them.

People who sign up to this new membership will gain access to a number of benefits but, more

importantly will get the opportunity to be in the fabric of a union and have a voice – to form policy, participate in campaigns and create an active branch.

Being part of a trade union is not simply about ensuring you have representation in the workplace but also about being part of a wider movement to create a better society.

About Unite the union

Unite is the largest trade union in the UK and Ireland with around 1.5 million members across twenty three different areas – ranging from manufacturing and transport to finance and the voluntary sector.

www.unitetheunion.org/join

