

## What is a trade union?

A trade union is an organisation made of members who are all in a workplace of some kind, and who want to protect their working rights. They are independent of employers, but will work with employers to

- negotiate agreements on pay and conditions
- tackle major changes to the workplace such as large scale redundancy
- raise members' concerns with employers
- accompany members in disciplinary and grievance meetings
- provide members with legal and financial advice

Most employers will have a particular trade union that they 'recognise' for negotiating with.

## Can I join?

Anyone has the right to join a trade union, and should not be disadvantaged at work in any way if they are a member. At the same time, you also have the right not to join, and shouldn't be disadvantaged for not joining either.

## What do I do in a union?

You don't have to actually do very much if you don't want to (other than pay your membership fee). As a member of a trade union, you have the *right* to take part in trade union activities (that can be things like recruiting members or attending meetings) but you are not obliged to. In the same way, being part of a union does *not* mean you have to take part in strike action.

## Do I get paid for this?

We're afraid not: trade union activities must take place either outside the employee's normal working hours or at a time agreed with the employer. An employee has no right to be paid for this time off work unless their contract allows for this.

## How much does it cost?

To be honest, it varies a lot. Different unions have different fee structures, and many cost more or less depending on how much you earn yourself. Generally, the lower your salary the lower the membership fees: in fact they can start from as little as £1 a month but can go up to around £20 per month if you earn a higher wage.

## So why should I join?

Unions generally offer the following features:

- They support you if you have an issue with your employer, be that a grievance or a disciplinary
- They can offer legal support for you and your family. This can even extend to things like free will-writing services.
- They can help you with getting compensation for accidents at work
- They can provide support or guidance if you are at risk of redundancy
- You can also access a wide range of discounts by being a member

Contact details for the Welsh Trade Union Congress are as follows:

Trades Union Congress  
Congress House, Great Russell Street  
London, WC1B 3LS  
Tel: 020 7636 4030  
E-mail: [info@tuc.org.uk](mailto:info@tuc.org.uk)

Contact details for the Welsh Trade Union Congress are as follows:

Wales TUC  
Transport House, 1 Cathedral Road  
Cardiff. CF11 9SD  
Tel: 029 2034 7010  
E-mail: [wtuc@tuc.org.uk](mailto:wtuc@tuc.org.uk)

They have over fifty affiliated trade unions, and can offer information on how to find and join a suitable union for you.