

20 reasons to join the CWU

1. Union members get paid more (TUC figures show this can be by around 17%)
2. Health & Safety at union workplaces is better (there are 50% less accidents in union workplaces)
3. Redundancies happen less in unionised workplaces; payoffs are negotiated and usually higher than where there is no union.
4. CWU members are covered by 24 hour accident insurance
5. CWU members can be accompanied by their union representatives to grievance meetings
6. CWU members can be accompanied by their union representatives to disciplinary meetings
7. CWU members have access to union training and a variety of courses at Union learning centres (from computer courses to languages and vocational training)
8. CWU member's next of kin receive funeral benefit should the worst happen.
9. CWU members win millions of pounds a year in compensation claims backed by our legal team
10. CWU members have access to advice, support and legal back up on work related issues
11. CWU members can access legal advice on non work related issues
12. The CWU campaigns nationally amongst employers, politicians and industry groups to improve working rights and legislation
13. All CWU members have a voice in our democratic union and all can get involved in their branch and stand for union elections.
14. The CWU has thousands of trained reps who ensure that employers keep to the law at work and stick to agreements made with the company
15. The CWU fights for the rights of all workers and is opposed to all forms of discrimination in and out of work
16. CWU members get discounts on a range of financial services including cheap health insurance through the Communication Workers Friendly Society.
17. Many CWU branches offer a discounted Will making service for members.
18. CWU members are covered by our motor breakdown cover scheme.
19. The CWU backs equal treatment for part time and temporary workers
20. Joining the CWU lets you join forces with hundreds of thousands of other workers and be able to speak with a stronger voice for a better working life.

A brief guide to the CWU

Our History

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) was formed on 26 January 1995 as a result of a merger between the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) - a mostly postal union with some telecommunications members - and the National Communications Union (NCU) - a mainly telecommunications union with some postal members.

The UCW was previously called the Union of Postal Workers (UPW), but changed its name in 1980. For its part, the NCU was a relatively recent creation when, in 1985, the Post Office Engineering Union (POEU) merged with the Civil & Public Services Association Post & Telecoms Group (CPSA P&T Group).

Our Membership

The CWU is the main communications union in the UK, representing almost 255,000 members employed in the postal, telecommunications, cable, financial services, information technology and related industries.

In Royal Mail and BT we represent all the non-management grades. In the former, the management grades are represented by the CMA (part of Amicus) and, in the latter; the management grades are represented by Connect. In Telewest, T-Mobile, Orange, Cable & Wireless, NTL we represent mainly engineers, clerical employees and call centre workers but also some management grades.

The CWU also has a growing Retired Members group, which currently has around 22,000 members.

The main groups of CWU members are:

<i>Postal</i>	<i>150,000</i>
<i>Telecom</i>	<i>65,000</i>
<i>Financial</i>	<i>3,000</i>
<i>Retired</i>	<i>22,000</i>

The CWU is the seventh largest union in Britain and it is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC). It is the second largest communication union in Europe (the largest being the German union ver.di) and it is affiliated to the relevant international trade secretariat that is called Union Network International (UNI).

Our Objectives

The main objectives of the CWU are to protect and promote the interests of members and improve their working lives. As an industry-wide union, the CWU is committed to achieving the highest possible membership levels in all communications companies, since this is the best way to protect individual employees, improve general working conditions, and increase the influence of the Union, both with employers and with other bodies such as the Government, industry regulators and the European Commission.

Why People join Trade Unions

Bill Morris – former General Secretary of the Transport & General Workers Union, once said, “if trades unions did not exist in today’s world then someone would invent them”.

This statement is certainly very true. Despite the fact that the introduction of new technology has resulted in more sophisticated ways of working, it has not eradicated the poor working conditions that many workers still face.

Today’s workers continue to experience bullying, harassment and discrimination at work. They continue to work excessive hours, and their jobs have become more stressful. More importantly workers today continue to be underpaid for the work that they carry out.

The type of work that is performed may have changed but the fact remains. Where there are bosses that are driven by the desire to achieve higher profit margins and increased productivity – there are workers that are being treated unfairly. Quite simply trade unions are just as necessary in today’s employment world as they were in Victorian times.

Every worker deserves to be treated with respect at work and deserves to be reasonably paid for their labour. Every worker deserves to have a Voice at work and they deserve to have their views listened to. Every worker deserves to have a safe environment to work in that is free from hazards. Every worker deserves to be able to turn to someone for advice, guidance and, if they require it, representation and every worker deserves to be treated equally where they can work in an environment that is free from bullying, harassment and discrimination.

These are the reasons why people join trade unions and until we have a society that has eliminated these problems from every workplace then trade unions will always be needed.

The trade union movement continues to campaign for better working conditions and more rights for its members. We believe that this will be easier to achieve if we are bigger - ***the bigger our membership – the stronger we become.***

If we are stronger and we unite workers from across the country then we can improve the lives of our members - ***UNITY IS STRENGTH.***

Also listed below are some interesting facts and figures about why people join trade unions and the type of support they need when they join.

This information has been extracted from a survey of new trade union members carried out by the Industrial Relations Unit at Warwick University.

Why new members joined trade unions

- 81% of new members say they joined because they wanted support with a problem at work.
- 42% join because they want better pay & conditions and they believe trade unions can achieve this.

- 18% join because they believe in trade unions and 14% join because everyone else at their workplace is a member.
- 7% say they joined because of the industrial benefits/services that come with trade union membership and 3% say they joined because of the financial benefits that are available to trade union members.

What support new members require from trade unions

- 73% require advice and representation on discipline matters
- 70% require advice and representation on grievances
- 61% require advice on Health & Safety issues
- 54% require legal assistance on accidents at work
- 45% require free legal advice on problems at work
- 30% require advice on equality issues

Some other interesting facts about trade union membership

- 7.4 million people are members of a Trade Union.
- Only 1 in 5 under 25-year olds are members of trade unions.
- Surprisingly 86% of young people say they know nothing about trade unions.
- Over 5 million non-union members positively want a trade union to negotiate on their behalf and would be happy to join if they were asked.

Frequently Asked Questions

Please find below some frequently asked questions about joining trade unions

Question. ***Can I be sacked for joining the union?***

Answer. Under UK law every worker has a right to join a trade union and it is illegal to discriminate against someone on the grounds of their trade union membership or their trade union activities.

Question. ***Will I get into trouble for joining the union?***

Answer. For a start union membership is confidential and we would never divulge member's details to the company they worked for without their permission. Good employers positively encourage their employees to join trade unions because they recognise the value that trade unions bring to their company. They are happy to work with trade unions for the benefit of everyone. Bad employers may attempt to intimidate their employees and discourage them from joining. Remember - everyone has a legal right to join a trade union and the right not to be discriminated against.

Question. ***Can belonging to the union stop me being promoted?***

Answer. Trade unions believe in fairness and transparency not favour when it comes to promotion. We are committed to equality and we oppose discrimination. We ensure that companies do not operate a "blue eyed boy or girl" promotion system and if our members have been denied promotion due to their trade union membership we will use the law to protect our members rights.

Question. ***Will I have to go on Strike?***

Answer. Trade Unions are about negotiating the best deal for members through constructive dialogue and partnership with employers. Strikes are always the last resort and are actually very rare despite gaining a disproportionate amount of hostile press coverage. Furthermore, Trade unions operate in line with the relevant Employment legislation covering the UK. This legislation sets out the legal requirements that trade unions have to comply with before strike action is considered. The main requirement of the law is that all members concerned in a potential trade dispute are consulted prior to any action being taken. This is done through an individual member ballot (sometimes referred to as a secret ballot), in which every member is given the opportunity to exercise his or her democratic right to vote on the issue.

Question. ***The union will not do anything?***

Answer. The facts speak for themselves. Both at BT & Royal Mail not only has the CWU negotiated annual pay rises year in, year out we have also made agreements avoiding any compulsory redundancies. We have health & safety officers across our sites and represent scores of workers to grievance and disciplinary hearings on a daily basis.

Other points to consider include

- Workers in union organised companies are paid on average 17% more.
- Accidents at work are 50% lower
- Productivity is higher
- Redundancies are lower and pay out higher

Most importantly unions are democratic and accountable organisations (unlike the employers) and they only exist to serve their members. There are

around 230,000 —elected - union representative in the UK and where they are not doing anything for their members; procedures exist for their democratic removal. Also it is trade union members who collectively decide upon the issues that are most important to them and they also decide which issues they would like to be pursued by their representatives.

Question. *Unions have never achieved anything. I work for a good employer.*

Answer. Amongst the list of achievements which trade unions have campaigned for are – *national minimum wage, improvements to Health & Safety laws, Pension protection rights – Access to training – Rights at Work – Information and Consultation rights – Equal pay, Maternity & Paternity leave – Reduced hours through the working time directive & an entitlement to holidays.*

These are just a few of the many issues that trade unions have campaigned for. In reality they could have, and some would say, should have been provided by employers but despite the fact that there are some good employers, without the protection and of course the influence of trade unions, most employers will only provide their workers with the absolute minimum entitlement.

If your employer is a good employer then they have nothing to fear from trade unions. As we have previously said good employers want to work with trade unions for the benefit of the company and the workers that they employ. In fact, 42 out of the top 50 FTSE listed companies negotiate with Trade Unions. You will find that many household name companies have worked with unions for years.

Question. *My boss says that if a union gets in here he will close down and move elsewhere?*

Answer. It would be economic madness for an employer to move their business just because their employees wanted to join a trade union. Some companies use this as a threat but unless the company was acting in a suicidal and irresponsible manner, then it would only be a threat.

It is only companies that do not want to listen to the voice of their employees that use this type of threat. If they really want to protect their employee's interest then surely it would be better for them to work with trade union and not try to frighten and intimidate anyone who wishes to join.

Remember that scare tactics are used to try and prevent you securing proper rights. They are the tactics of the bully and are rarely translated into reality.

Question. *My employer does not recognise the union so why should I join?*

Answer. The CWU fights for union recognition rights for all its members. We have a number of high profile campaigns to gain proper negotiation rights in a number of large companies; Telewest, T-Mobile, Orange, Cable & Wireless, NTL, Business Post, COLT and TSC. The CWU has and will continue to make full recognition the priority in these areas. Our branches, officers and regionally based organisers also run and back a number of campaigns in smaller companies. We are always happy to support members who want to campaign for a voice at work.

This may take time but the easiest way to achieve this is by recruiting enough members to gain automatic recognition. So the more workers that join the quicker this will be achieved.