

Wh Rehab a W e Sh d J U

I d c ab ea e ,T a DeC a

I am a Senior Social Worker in Hammersmith and Fulham Social Services in the Physical Disability, Sensory Impairment and Community Health Team. Also at present I work 3 days a week as a Unison Convenor and represent members in Adult Social Services.

I am from a Branch in London, rather than Unison's Regional Office today, which means I may not be in a position to answer all the questions you raise today. But if I cannot answer your questions then I would suggest after the meeting you find out where your local Branch is and arrange to speak to a Branch Officer.

I joined Unison, as a kind of insurance policy. I considered that if I experienced any employment problems, I would have someone to support me. As a black working class woman you can feel more vulnerable in the workplace, which is the reason 70 per cent of Unison members are women.

The Rea G e B W e F J g A U

There are a number of reasons often identified by workers of why they do consider it necessary to join a union.

1. Some people view joining a union as an insurance policy just like me, in case, something goes wrong at work and they need support.
2. Some people join because they believe in the principle of collective bargaining and worker's organisation to protect and improve their terms and conditions.
3. Some people join only when they face redundancy or are worried about issues related to their employment at work and need advice and support and do not have anywhere else to turn.

Rea F N J g A U

1. Some workers are prohibited from joining a union, because of the financial cost.
2. Some workers do not join because they fear the reaction of their managers and/or they work in an environment that has an anti-trade union culture.
3. Some workers do not join, because they consider they are able to negotiate and represent their own interests without the support of a union.
4. Some workers are anti union and also have negative perceptions of unions as undemocratic organisations that are always demanding that worker's go on

strike. However, Unison always considers strike action is a last resort if negotiations with the government or the boss fail.

5. Some workers do not join, because they are agency workers and do not find it relevant to join a union especially because they are not planning to work in one place for long.

What are the benefits of being a member of Unison?

1. **Y** **e** **a** **r** **e**, **Y** **e** **a** **r** **e**, Unison wins pay rises for its members. Average earnings are around 8 per cent higher in unionised workplace.
2. **Y** **e** **e** **e** **g** **e** **a** **a**, Unison is campaigning to bring women's pay into line with men's. Workplace with union recognition is 20 per cent more likely to have an equal opportunities policy.
3. **Y** **g** **e** **e** **h** **d** **a**, Unison has won increased leave for many of its members wherever they work.
4. **Y** **g** **e** **e** **a** **d** **b** **e** **e** **a** **g**, Unison provides courses to help you learn new skills improve existing ones and develop your career. Since 1994 Unison has won agreements with employers to pay for courses and provide time off for employees to attend them.
5. **Y** **g** **e** **e** **a** **e** **e** **a** **e** **a** **e** **a** **e**, If you belong to Unison, your employer is more likely to have parental leave policies which are more generous than the statutory minimum wage.

Background to Unison

Unison was established in 1993. It was formed as a result of a merger between public and health sector unions including CHOSE and NALGO.

Since 2005, Unison membership has been rising and is now nearly 1.5 million. For 2005, recruitment figures show that Unison recruited 162,000 new members with a net gain of 32,000 members. With the exception of 2002, this is the highest number of members recruited in any year since 2004.

All members belong to a branch dependent upon the employer they work for and the geographical area in which they work.

When you join Unison it is important to find out your branch and who would represent you if you experience problems in your workplace.

The Union branch plays a number of key roles, including:

1. Ensuring effective negotiations take place with the employers it covers.
2. Ensuring that its members are given effective advice and representation.
3. Providing effective support for stewards, safety representatives and workplace contacts;

4. Being the main vehicle by which members participate in developing Unison Policy and objectives.

Ma g P c

Unison's policy and general objectives are decided at the National Delegate Conference, which takes place in June each year. All branches are allowed to send delegates to the conference in proportion to the size of their membership. National Delegate conference makes policy on a wider range of issues.

Members, stewards and branch officers can all contribute towards the development of policy. Also, Branches can submit their own motions and amendments to conference, and branch delegates can speak in debates and vote.

A a d Ob ec e Of U

Unison's aims and objectives are about organising workers and extending and promoting the employment rights and economic interests of workers, but they also are concerned about combating discrimination and promoting fairness and equality in wider society.

Today many unions and especially Unison are similar to political pressure groups, which seek to influence government and especially Labour Party Policy so it supports the interests of workers and challenges wider inequality and discrimination in society.

Some traditional Labour Party members in the union support affiliation with the Labour Party, but also there are sections of the Left in the union who are strongly opposed to this link, because they consider that the union should withdraw support from the Labour Party and Labour MP's if they pursue policies that attack worker's and service user's interests.

This is important issue, because when you join Unison you have to make a decision about how you wish your subscription fees to be used in Unison's political campaigning work.

D Y Q a f J U ?

Membership is open to any person employed in the provision of public services and any other such employment provision such as an 'authority or corporation which has a public, charitable, educational or statutory function, including those employed in the local government service, the health service, the electricity supply industry, the gas, transport and water industries, the educational services and the voluntary community sector'. (U R e B , R e C1).

Unison has members from a variety of occupations and service groups who work part-time or full-time, who also have different levels of skills and qualifications. These include:

Nurses, District Nurses, Community Health Workers, Occupational Therapists, Police support staff, Assistant Teachers, Lecturers, Social Workers, Care Workers, Administrators, Drivers and Transport workers.

H Y J U

Those who wish to Unison have to complete a membership form. Unison's subscriptions are banded according to member's income. Those on lower wages pay less than their paid colleagues, but services are provided to all members regardless of wealth.

What is the Difference Between General Political Campaign Fund and Affiliated?

Also when you join Unison you are asked if you wish to pay into either the General Political Fund (GPF) or the Affiliated Political Fund (APF), both or neither.

The contribution to the fund you choose is then deducted from your normal subscription payments so you do not have to pay anything extra and you choose how your money is spent.

The General Political Campaign Fund L

The General Political Fund was set-up to specifically fund political campaigns. The money in the fund is used to support local campaigns and pay for political advertising and not affiliated to any political party.

For example.

1. Positively public campaign to challenge the view private good and public bad. Unison is opposed to privatisation of services, because it costs more and services are less accountable to the public.
2. Used funding to organise campaigns against BNP during national and local elections.
3. To pursue international solidarity work with other organisations and unions in different countries who have limited resources and fighting for the principles and values that Unison believes in.

The Affiliated Political Campaign Fund.

The Affiliated Political fund is to facilitate Unison's lobby within the Labour Party. This is known as the Labour Link. The purpose of the Labour Link is to use it to push member's views and argue Unison's case on policies and practices, which will help improve working terms and conditions and protect services. As a result of the APF and Unison's lobbying, labour has implemented some positive areas of policy.

However, there are times when the Unison Leadership are opposed to government policy. For example, the support by government of the Public Finance Initiative (PFI), the contracting of services through Best Value and under funding of services. When these disagreements occur, Local Unison members raise the issue in the local constituency and lobby MP's. They argue the case at Regional and National Forum and at conference winning the support of party members. Also, MP's are given the facts with which to take forward policies in committees in debates and in lobbying ministers.

The D ffe e Se ce Y A e Offe ed A A Me be f U

Once you become a Unison member you have right to be represented by a Unison Representative in the workplace in grievances, disciplinary, sickness hearing.

I will give you a few examples of my own experience of representing members, which highlight the sort of services you can expect from Unison.

D ec I d d a Re e e a L L L

I have represented members who face dismissal due to long term ill health and disability.

I have represented members who face dismissal due to disciplinary action taken against them. This has involved presenting mitigating evidence to counteract management allegations and using the law to challenge any possibility of dismissal.

I have represented members who have initiated Grievance and Harassment Procedures, because they have felt unfairly treated and oppressed by their manager's behaviour.

Sometimes a grievance issue might not just apply to one individual member, but could be a tip of the iceberg of a wider issue affecting other staff in the same place of work place. This is the reason Unison consider it is important to keep in touch with members in the workplace and listen to their views.

Also sometimes I undertake mediation work between management and members where communication has broken down, but it not about counselling but ensuring members are treated fairly and management are following proper procedures.

C ec e Ba ga g

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de f d g f e ce .

I have negotiated on behalf of different groups in Social Services, regarding their jobs, pay and service conditions.

During reorganisations of services I have represented the interests of members, and argued against downgrading of staff, job cuts and reduction of funding

3. Holiday clubs – Unison own holiday destinations offering fantastic holidays for people of all ages in Croyde Bye Oasis Leisure Complex.
4. Co-operative Funeral Care have arranged concessions for Unison Members and their families who are able to receive savings of 10 per cent.

Ob ga A A Me be Of U

1. As a member of Unison you have an obligation to maintain your subscription fee. If you do not pay for subscription for 3 months you cease to be a member and are no longer entitled to benefit from services of Unison.
2. A union may not refuse to accept into membership or expel anyone except on the grounds of individuals conduct. This can include their conduct as a member of political party.
3. Disciplinary action can be taken against members on the grounds of misconduct. If they commit acts of discrimination or harassment on grounds of race, gender, identity, disability, age, religion or social class. Also, is prejudicial to the aims and objectives of the union.

However, the union cannot 'unjustifiably discipline' a member on the following grounds:

1. Fails to participate in or support industrial action;
2. Seeks to take legal action against the union;
3. Works with non-union member or non union employer.

F a Q e H W d U Ra e he P f e f Rehab a W e ?

1. As Unison has been formed from a health union it does often appear that the profile of NHS workers is higher in Unison compared to other social care professionals.

It seems easier to raise the profile of an occupational group the more union members there are in a section. For instance, Occupational Therapists automatically become members when they qualify. Due to the potential high membership of Occupational Therapists in Unison, the Greater London Region have set-up Occupational Therapy Forums where Unison Representative from Occupational Therapy Service in health and local government meet regularly and share experiences of practice and policies. .

2. However, the experience of Social Worker's shows that it has not been easy to raise their profile in Unison. It has taken many years of active Trade Unionists and Convenors in Social Services putting pressure on paid regional officers and members of the National Executive Committee to organise campaigns, conferences in order that Social Workers in Scotland and England can network and share experiences and in turn influence Unison's national policy.

3. Eventually last year Unison organised a two day conference in Croyde Bay and forum for social care professionals from London and Scotland to exchange views and experiences. It was very well attended and a number of issues were discussed about the changing face of welfare services and how the neo-liberal policies of the government are impacting on social care policies and the way services were developing.

4. In my view to raise the profile of Rehabilitation Workers you need to join Unison and get involved and raise the concerns that your profession face to influence policy, and this seems to be happening already. . .

5. This year at Unison's National Conference, Voluntary Organisations have put in a motion on Rehabilitation Services to raise concern about the lack of dedicated rehabilitation provision for users who are blind or partially sighted in the UK.

The motion goes onto state that it 'Welcomes the Government commitment to reform of adult social care in England to create services that are person centred which promote independence and safe lives for all disabled people'. However, they request an urgent scoping review of all rehabilitation services followed by better funded services by local authorities.

7. They also call on the local Government Service Group Executive to set up a campaign from these objectives following full consultation with the National Disabled Members Committee. In addition, they ask the SGE to seek support from Labour Link National Committee and Unison Parliamentary Group.

C c

I would urge you to join Unison, not only because it is the only organisation that can respond at times when you are facing difficulties in the workplace, but also will raise concerns on issues that affect your profession.