

Trade Union factsheet – know your rights!

UNISON University of Birmingham branch

What is a Trade Union?

Trade unions are groups of employees and casual workers who join together to maintain and improve their conditions of employment. The typical activities of a trade union include providing assistance and services to their members, campaigning for improved conditions of work and living, collectively bargaining for better pay and conditions for all workers, working to improve the quality of public services, and industrial action.

What do unions do?

Unions undertake various activities, some of which are:

- Supporting individual members through 1-2-1 advice, and accompanying them in meetings - for instance, when members make requests for flexible working, reasonable adjustments, parental leave, grievances, or any other matters need to be discussed with management and the member.
- Supporting members collectively when faced with departmental restructures and potential redundancies.
- Campaigning on issues related to the workplace, but also beyond – for instance, campaigning against discrimination, raising awareness of unjust practices on campus and beyond, supporting other (trade and student) unions' campaigns, and strike action.
- Negotiating with the university on pay, health and safety, wellbeing, and many other matters. We hold regular meetings with management as part of joint negotiating committees.

The relationship between trade unions and the Guild of Students

Simply put, there are two types of relationships that exist between the Guild of Students and the trade unions on campus:

1. The Guild **as an employer** of hundreds of staff and casual workers < -- > trade unions represent staff's working rights individually and collectively.
2. The Guild **as a union representing and campaigning for students' rights** < -- > trade unions and Student Unions uphold similar values, and operate similarly. Historically, there have been numerous instances where the unions have worked together to improve the conditions of study and work for students and staff. Staff's working conditions are students' learning conditions.

The Guild of Students' Beliefs and Commitments state:

'23. University Industrial Relations

The Guild of Students believes that the University has a responsibility to maintain good industrial relations on campus and ensure that the education of students is not negatively affected by strike action. Where it cannot meet this responsibility the University should compensate students accordingly. The Guild of Students believes in the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with campus unions and believes that the mistreatment of staff by the university management damages the interests of its members. The Guild will support staff strikes unless otherwise instructed by Guild Council or referendum, shall offer a room for staff to use as a base whilst taking industrial action, and shall support and mobilise students in taking supplementary action to support staff'.

<https://www.guildofstudents.com/pageassets/representation/campaigns/useful-documents/Beliefs-and-Commitments.pdf>

1. The Guild as a members' Union representing its members' rights

Campaigns and negotiations that we can work together on (these are just a few examples):

- ❖ Improving the provision of welfare on campus.
- ❖ Demanding that the University offers more student bursaries (both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels), and increased hardship funds. The university profits from the fact that students cannot make ends meet, and are therefore often forced into working long hours (often through Worklink, on campus), while also studying and being involved in societies. We are concerned about this and would like students to be offered adequate financial support by the university as well as by the government. We have fiercely opposed the trebling of tuition fees and scrapping of maintenance loans (and other benefits) and are prepared to continue this battle, together with Guild Officers and others.
- ❖ Guild Officers sit on various university committees together with the unions. We can work together to support one another's initiatives, especially when the matters affect student workers, students (as students), and staff in general. We have common interests in making the campus safer for staff and students (and as such we are working on an anti-stalking and domestic violence policy); accessible to staff and students with varying abilities; fair in terms of the rates of pay for similar work, and access to training and development.

2. The Guild as an Employer

Students can influence Guild policy through the Ideas System and through other means. How can Guild employees and casual workers influence Guild policy and practice relating to staff working conditions, workloads, bullying, harassment, redundancies and unfair pay? It is through trade unions!

Who can join UNISON University of Birmingham branch?

Anyone can be a member of any trade union (there are even trade union branches for volunteers and individuals who are unemployed!). You can join a trade union on campus if you are either:

- employed by the University of Birmingham or the Guild of Students
- working through Worklink as a casual worker
- working through agencies such as Pertemps

Anyone who does not undertake academic work (teaching, researching) can be a member of UNISON. For example, some of our members are administrators; student staff; cleaners; welfare officers; catering staff; security staff; welfare tutors; library staff; Guild of Students staff from various departments, and more. Academic staff (including teaching staff, postgraduate researchers, postgraduate demonstrators) join UCU (University and College Union) with whom we work closely.

Guild Officers, and anyone who works in the Guild permanently or on a casual basis, can join UNISON and can also be elected for officer or steward/rep positions within the branch. This is a right that nobody can take away from you. We strongly encourage you to join and be actively involved!

Your right to join a Trade Union

What the law says

The following text is taken from the Government's website: <https://www.gov.uk/join-trade-union/trade-union-membership-your-employment-rights>

'You have the right to:

- choose to join or not join a union
- decide to leave or remain a member of a union
- belong to the union you choose, even if it's not the one your employer negotiates with on pay, terms and conditions
- belong to more than one union

Your employer isn't allowed to:

- offer you a benefit to leave a trade union
- threaten to treat you unfairly if you don't leave a union

Refusing to employ you for trade union membership reasons. An employer or employment agency isn't allowed to insist that you:

- join or leave a trade union
- leave one union for another

Dismissal for trade union membership reasons - your employer isn't allowed to dismiss you or choose you for redundancy because you:

- are or want to be a union member
- aren't or don't want to be a union member
- took part or wanted to take part in union activities

Other unfavourable treatment - your employer mustn't treat you unfavourably (for example refusing you promotion or training opportunities) if you:

- join a union
- take part in its meetings
- leave a union'

It is therefore illegal to be deterred from being a member and from engaging in trade union activities.



UNISON FAQs

How does UNISON operate?

Nationally: UNISON is one of UK's largest trade unions, with more than 1.3 million members; it is also the largest public sector union in Europe! The union is organised into seven service groups/sectors:

- health,
- local government (it includes FE colleges),
- higher education,
- police and justice,
- community,
- water, environment and transport,
- energy.

Within higher education: in the HE sector, UNISON represents more than 50,000 workers; within the Education sector more generally, UNISON has more than 350,000 members. Almost every campus in the UK has a UNISON branch. Every year, we attend national UNISON 'Seminars' where we discuss strategies for organising, and ways of supporting members. We also hold an annual Higher Education Conference where we pass motions relevant to our members in HE. And finally, we attend and submit motions to the National Delegate Conference where more than 2,000 delegates from across the country and all the seven service groups debate and make decisions on various matters; this is the 'Parliament' of UNISON. To read the motions passed at this year's conference, please visit the following page: <https://www.unison.org.uk/events/2018-national-delegate-conference/>

On the UoB campus: on the UoB campus, our branch covers two employers: The University of Birmingham and the Guild of Students, and overall we have more than 650 members from across the two employers. All the officers, stewards and workplace contacts of the branch are employees or casual workers on campus.

Similarities with student societies and associations, in the way trade union branches operate:

There are many similarities between how trade union branches and student societies & associations operate. Members fund the branch through subscription fees, and the elected officers are held to account by members. **Branch officers** are elected from among the members who work on campus, at the Annual General Meeting. The branch also has **workplace contacts** for various departments, and **stewards/ reps** who support members in their own department, often through casework. Reps are entitled to half-day/week to undertake union duties.

Throughout the year, we organise members' meetings for which we prepare an agenda for discussion, and debate and pass motions put forward by members. We also hold regular committee meetings, where active members and officers come together to discuss and make decisions on our approach to matters that arise on campus.

Matters that arise at committee meetings (a few examples):

- discussing our position in response to the employer’s decision to implement changes to contractual terms and conditions;
- proposing policies for the university to adopt – such as an anti-domestic violence and abuse policy (for instance);
- documenting the issues that are related to the lack provision of welfare on campus, and how to make the case for increasing the number of counsellors and welfare staff in general, for the benefit of students and staff who are currently under pressure and face high levels of stress due to high workload and lack of adequate support;
- campaigning for the employers to become a Living Wage Accredited, so that everyone who works on campus is paid at least the living wage;
- discussing ways to counteract the university’s argument that bank holidays and closed days should not be paid at an enhanced rate, and reporting back after negotiation meetings with management.

These are just a few examples, but if you’re interested in finding out more about what we do and what our priorities are, please get in touch!

What is the membership fee?

As a member-led organisation, we are funded by members (similarly to how student societies are funded). **Students who do casual work would be paying £1.30/month.** Employees who are on any other contracts pay the rate that is in line with their income (as seen in the table below).

Annual salary	Monthly cost
Students on vocational courses (i.e. social work, education)	83p (£10 for a year)
Up to £2,000	£1.30
£2,001-£5,000	£3.50
£5,001-£8,000	£5.30
£8,001-£11,000	£6.60
£11,001-£14,000	£7.85
£14,001-£17,000	£9.70
£17,001-£20,000	£11.50
£20,001-£25,000	£14.00
£25,001-£30,000	£17.25
£30,001-£35,000	£20.30
over £35,000	£22.50

Student Workers

We encourage students who work for the University of Birmingham or the Guild of Students and are paid through Worklink to join UNISON. They can **join UNISON** for £1.30/month. Membership gives student workers a voice and a say in how their trade union, The Guild and the University are run, as well as access to free support, representation, training and social events. We defend members' rights at work, ensure that we are all treated fairly, and campaign to improve pay and working conditions.

We oppose privatisation and campaign for increased public funding to build an education system that is free, accessible and beneficial to all. We also campaign for:

- an end to mass youth unemployment
- age equality
- a real Living Wage
- properly paid apprenticeships that lead to real jobs
- affordable housing
- the right to vote at age 16

Did you know that on average young people in trade unions earn nearly 43% more than young people who aren't?

(Source: Department of Business, Innovation, and Skills, May 2016).

Young UNISON members get the same support and services as other members, which includes negotiating on pay, terms and conditions, representation when things go wrong, and access to education and training opportunities. Young people are being hit hard as the government's austerity programme continues to force cuts in jobs and vital support services. They are facing:

- ❖ unemployment and workfare
- ❖ sky-high tuition fees
- ❖ axed maintenance grants and having to take on loans instead
- ❖ under-25s are excluded from the government's so-called 'national living wage'
- ❖ more cuts to housing benefits, and rising rents

The situation is not much better for young people who do have work. Too many are in low-paid jobs with little or no security. And young people face higher levels of bullying and harassment than many other workers. We believe that decent jobs and high-quality public service providing support for young people are essential elements to a sustainable economic recovery.

2019 – the year for Young Workers in UNISON!

We are pleased that at the 2018 National Delegate Conference, UNISON delegates voted unanimously in favour of making 2019 the year for young workers. More details here: <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2018/06/making-2018-year-young-workers/>

Please note that the Young Members' Officer role has become vacant (as of July 2018). If you are interested in undertaking the role, please join and contact us at unisonbham@adf.bham.ac.uk

* to be eligible for this position, you must be under the age of 27.

Contact details for the 2019/2020 committee:

Our current officer committee is as follows:

Membership Officers: Ioana Cerasella ioana.unison@gmail.com and Jasmine Hide jasminehide.unison@gmail.com	Joint Branch Secretary: Lee Crutchley l.crutchley@bham.ac.uk	Joint Branch Secretary & Health & Safety Officer: Michael Moore m.moore.1@bham.ac.uk
Co-Equalities Officer and Black Members' Officer: Paula Douglas paulauobunison@gmail.com	Disabled Members' Officer: Rai Furniss-Greasley dmo.uobunison@gmail.com	Joint Women's Officers: Alison Dingle A.Dingle@bham.ac.uk and Emma Green E.Green@bham.ac.uk
Education and Communications Officer: Jodie Hopewell j.hopewell@bham.ac.uk	International Officer: Samina Kurd kurdsamina@yahoo.co.uk	Co-Equalities Officer and Treasurer: Vicky Upton v.upton@bham.ac.uk
Labour Link Officer: Rory Shannon roryshannon@live.co.uk	Stewards/ reps and workplace contacts (in various departments) – visit uobunison.org.uk/committee	

Vacant officer roles:

Check this page uobunison.org.uk/committee

Vacant workplace contact and steward/rep roles:

In the Guild of Students

For Worklink students

Are you interested in being a committee officer, workplace contact or steward/rep within the Guild?

Please get in touch!

Our contact details:

Website: uobunison.org.uk

Twitter: @BhamUniUnison

Email address: unisonbham@adf.bham.ac.uk

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/UNISONBhamUni>

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