

Information for employees on skills, trade unions and advice

Employees:

This document provides you with information about skills, trade unions and where to go for advice. It is designed to help you in your life at work.

Employers/ Service providers:

The information in this document should be given to employees. It is part of a Joint Statement on Access to Skills, Trade Unions and Advice in Government Contracting that has been developed and agreed by Government in collaboration with key partners from the trade union, private and voluntary sectors.

Information about trade unions

A trade union is an organisation of workers that aims to protect its members and represent their interests. Trade unions provide a range of services and advice to their members that can include legal advice, financial assistance, sickness benefits and education facilities. The services offered by a union vary depending on the organisation and workplace. A trade union can, for example, give expert advice about skills and learning, including what training members may need, or how to access it. Sometimes that advice is provided at the workplace where there are Union Learning Representatives.

Union members have a right to access and make use of the services offered by their union at an appropriate time. An “appropriate

time” includes both their own time outside work and any work time agreed between the employer and the union. Members cannot be penalised or treated unfairly by their employer for taking part in union activities at an appropriate time by, say, attending union meetings.

Union members facing a disciplinary or grievance hearing have a right to be accompanied by a union rep or official, provided that they make a reasonable request to their employer to be accompanied and provided the union agrees to help them. It has always been good employment relations practice to allow a worker to be accompanied. Further information is available from Acas, see below.

Joining a union is not compulsory; it is the free choice of the worker. Members usually pay a weekly or monthly subscription. Employees

should be told that they will not be penalised for joining a union; their legal rights include the right not to be dismissed, selected for redundancy, penalised or treated unfairly by their employer on the basis that they do – or don't – belong to, or are thinking of joining, a trade union.

Employees are of course free to attend union meetings or have other face-to-face engagement with trade unions in their own time. Good employers respect these rights and some welcome unions on to their premises at agreed times.

Further information is available from **www.TUC.org.uk** or **www.acas.org.uk**

Advice on life at work and skills

It is important for everyone at work to be given access to advice and information about their job, or to know where to go for further help. This section gives some basic information and advice about life at work and where to go for further help.

There are many sources of advice and support available to staff, including employees' line managers, HR, unions and staff council representatives. Impartial advice is also available outside of the workplace through agencies such as Acas, the **www.direct.gov.uk** website and Citizen's Advice Bureaux – see list of contacts below.

If employees want to speak to someone about their job, or any aspect of their working life, it is important to speak to someone who is informed, and receive accurate and relevant advice. In the workplace, the following people may be able to help and give advice:

- Their line manager
- A member of staff in the Human Resources or Personnel Department
- A trade union rep or official
- A representative of a staff council or a staff group, where these exist.

If employees would rather speak to someone outside of the workplace, or would just like to read some general background information,

there are also other trusted sources of advice available free of charge, including:

Advisory, Conciliation & Arbitration Service (Acas)

Acas provides free, confidential and impartial advice on a wide range of employment and industrial relations matters to individuals, employees and employers.

Information line: 08457 474747

www.acas.org.uk

Working Families

Working Families provides information and advice on employment rights, childcare and flexible working.

Information line: 0800 013 0313

www.workingfamilies.org.uk

National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB)

Citizens and Advice Bureaux provide advice and information on a whole range of rights from debt or immigration issues to consumer and employment problems. They provide free information and advice from over 3,000 locations in the UK.

www.nacab.org.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Equality and Human Rights Commission enforces equality legislation on age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender status.

Main Helpline: 0845 604 6610

www.equalityhumanrights.com

DirectGov

DirectGov provides information on topics ranging from parental leave to local NHS services. The employee pages provide information about employment rights and responsibilities. Home page:

www.direct.gov.uk

Employee pages:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment

Worksmart

Worksmart is a website run by the Trades Union Congress which provides help and information on workplace issues for union and non-union members.

It is an easy to use, comprehensive guide to employment rights and to keeping well at work.

www.worksmart.org.uk

Developing your skills

If you have been handed this document, your employer will be working in partnership with Government to ensure you have access to the basic skills you need to do your job. In addition to the opportunities offered to you by your employer, the following specialist organisations may also be useful in providing information about training and learning opportunities to help develop new or improve existing skills:

Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

The LSC is the government agency responsible for co-ordinating adult learning activities nationally and locally in England.

Information line: 0870 900 6800

www.lsc.gov.uk

unionlearn

unionlearn is run by the Trades Union Congress to promote learning opportunities for union members.

Information line: 020 7079 6920

www.unionlearn.org.uk

Minimum wage

Almost all UK workers have a legal right to a minimum level of pay, called the National Minimum Wage. The level is set by the Government each year. For more information, you can call the **National Minimum Wage Helpline on 0845 6000 678**.

Income tax and National Insurance

You do not pay tax on all of your income. The amount of income tax you pay depends on how much you earn and your taxable allowances. You may also be liable to pay national insurance contributions to the Government. Again, how much you pay will depend on how much you earn and your employment status (e.g. if you are self-employed). You may also be eligible for tax credits if you are on a low income or have dependent children. If you would like to find out more, speak to Citizens' Advice or look at the Worksmart website listed above.

Your job

Your employer will provide you with information about your job and the terms of your employment e.g. how many paid holidays you are entitled to and what you earn. You can speak to any of the sources of advice listed above if you need further help or advice about this, including what information you should have about your job, and who can give it to you if you don't have it already.

For example, you may wish to find out about:

- How to join a trade union;
- What your rights are if you are, or are about to become, a parent, including your right to maternity, paternity and adoption leave;
- The right to be accompanied

if you are facing disciplinary proceedings;

- What support and advice is available if you feel you are being discriminated against, or if you are being bullied.

Health and safety at work

Your employer must ensure that your workplace is safe and healthy. As an employee you have rights and responsibilities for your own wellbeing and that of your colleagues. Many organisations, including unions, will provide further advice if needed and The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is the official body which provides information and advice on all aspects of health and safety at work. Call **HSE's information line: 0845 3450055** or see **www.hse.gov.uk**

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