TUC

The Union Advantage

The positive impact of trade unions on the economy and British Society

Introduction

Taken together, unions are the largest voluntary organisations in the UK - with nearly seven million members and over 200,000 workplace representatives and activists. Union members are present in every sector of the economy: they include computer programmers and shop assistants; factory workers and footballers; bus drivers and airline pilots, teachers and soap stars; musicians and motor mechanics. Representing over a quarter of the UK's workforce, unions are the only workplace organisations able to present a cohesive voice on the concerns of working people and their families to employers, government and society in general. This report sets out the scale of the 'union advantage' – the positive benefits that unions bring to individual workers; the organisations that employ them; and the broader community.

TUC

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1 The union wage premium

1.1 On average, union members receive higher pay, better sickness and pension benefits, more holiday and more flexible working hours than non-members. Union members earn more than 12.5% more per hour than non-union members (with average hourly earnings £13.07 for members and £11.62 for non-members).[1]

1.2 Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation showed that unions play a significant role in the private sector in enhancing pay and fringe benefits, concluding that "trade unions continued to raise pay in the private sector … keeping it above the levels in comparable non-union workplaces". The research also found that about 3 million employees in the private sector (a fifth of all employees) enjoy a pay premium of around 10 per cent directly as a result of strong collective bargaining.[2]

1.3 In addition to the broad union wage premium it is clear that unions can also play a key role in reducing pay inequality. Research by Professor David Metcalf suggests that there continues to be a clear union pay premium for workers that tend to face pay discrimination: - women (9 per cent improvement); black & Asian employees (8 per cent) and manual workers (13 per cent) – trade unions clearly play a highly significant role in combating pay inequality.[3]

2 Access to learning and skills

2.1 Helping members access education and training is a key priority for unions. Each year the TUC (through its learning organisation, unionlearn) helps unions to get members access learning opportunities. In 2008 over 230,000 union members were helped into learning. These programmes cover everything from supporting workers who want to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills to continuing professional development. In the last ten years over 400,000 trade union reps have been trained in the key skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to make a difference in the workplace.[4]

2.2 In 2009, a year ahead of its 22,000 target, unionlearn has trained over 24,000 Union Learning Reps. Over 400 learning centres have been established. Courses range from short, taster courses to longer programmes, skills for life, ICT and NVQ's. Here are two examples of how unionlearn and learning centres have worked for people:

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[1] *Trades Union Membership2008*, BERR/National Statistics, 2009

[2] *The impact of trades unions on jobs and pay*. Millward N, Forth J and Bryson A. June 2001. Joseph Rowntree Foundation Report

[3] *British Unions: Dissolution or Resurgence Revisited*. Prof Metcalf D. April 2001. Centre for Economic Performance project Future of Trades Unions in Modern Britain

[4] Unionlearn with TUC Education, TUC Education, pp1, 3. March 2009

Newcastle
Natalie Wood works for Newcastle City Council, where her current job is under threat from funding cuts. The Newcastle College Trade Union Education Centre has helped Natalie update her skills to enable her to secure redeployment. Newcastle City Council had agreed to give her day-release, but until going down the trade union route Natalie had struggled to find a provider who could combine the courses she wanted (at a reasonable cost) with the flexibility she required.
Natalie doesn't have formal qualifications in Maths or English, but her experiences at the learning centre mean she is now ready to attempt recognised national Numeracy and Literacy qualifications. This has enabled her to enter the redeployment process with renewed confidence.
Merseyside
Alan Jones was introduced to the Knowsley College Trade Union Education Centre, Merseyside, by a friend after he left work due to ill health. No longer able to do manual work, Alan realised that his best chance of future employment was to learn how to use a computer.
Alan's most recent achievement was gaining an ITQ Level 2 earlier this year, but the impact of his learning continues. After a short time volunteering for the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Alan has finally achieved his goal and gained a permanent position in administration at the Ministry of Defence. He plans to encourage his friends and family to take advantage of the same opportunities he has enjoyed.

Positive impact of ULRs

2.3 Research, commissioned by unionlearn, shows that 73 per cent of ULRs and one-half of managers reported that ULRs have had a positive impact on either employer-funded or non-employer-funded training. Three out of the five managers responding stated that ULRs help to address employee skills gaps. Both ULRs and managers report that ULRs are more likely to have had a positive influence in increasing employee participation in training where ULRs are active, where managers value their activities, and where managers negotiate with union representatives when deciding training matters[5] (Bacon and Hoque, 2009).

Due to the strong partnership built up over a number of years between the CWU, Unite and Stoke-on-Trent College, unionlearn was able to deliver a free Adult Learner Support course to ULRs in the Midlands and the North West. This was taken up by over 30 ULRs who are now qualified to support learners in a learning environment with ULRs, specialising in either ESOL, or Literacy or Numeracy.

[5] Paper No 9 *The impact of the union learning representative: A survey of ULRs and their employers*. Bacon N, Hoque K. Nottingham University Business School. April 2009

2.4 Research, commissioned by unionlearn, shows that union recognition has a consistently positive effect, not only to the extent to which employees are provided with training, but also on the amount of training (Stuart and Robinson, 2008). Drawing from the WERS survey, the research found that where unions are recognised and negotiate over training, employees are 23.9 per cent more likely to report having received some training[6].

2.5 Where there is a ULR present in a recognised workplace, employees are 8 per cent more likely to report having received 2-5 days training. Where a workplace has ULRs, recognition and a representative structure that includes employee representatives, employees are 14.9 per cent more likely to report receiving training, and are 6.7 per cent more likely to report receiving 10 or more days training[7].

3 Health & Safety

3.1 There are more than 150,000 union safety representatives in the UK, trained to internationally recognised standards. These reps lower the accident rate by ensuring safe working practises, and reduce ill-health caused by the stress of working long hours, of being bullied, and of working in environments with poor lighting and ventilation.

3.2 Trade unions are the most effective tool for ensuring good health and safety at work - put simply unionised workplaces are safer workplaces. That is one of the main reasons that people join and stay in a union. When asked, 70% of new trade union members considered health and safety a 'very important' union issue - more even than for pay[8].

3.3 In 1997, a survey for the Health and Safety Executive into the control of chemical substances regulations found that safety representatives were far more knowledgeable than their managers. 90% of safety representatives were aware of the main principles of the main chemical safety regulations. Over a third of managers had not even heard of the regulations. The survey also found that over 80% of safety representatives had received training in health and safety in the last two years, compared to 44% of manager[9]s.

3.4 Every year the TUC provides high quality training for around 10,000 safety representatives. Many more are trained through their unions. In total there are an estimated 150,000 union safety reps and who play a vital role in workplaces, helping to:

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[6] *Training, Union Recognition and Collective Bargaining* Stuart M, Robinson A. Centre for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change (CERIC), University of Leeds. June 2007

[7] Ditto

[8] *The Union Effect – how unions make a difference to health and safety.* August 2004. Trades Union Congress

[9] www.hse.gov.uk/research/crr_pdf/1997/CRR97144.pdf

- Reduce injuries at work
- Reduce the levels of ill-health caused by work
- Encourage greater reporting of injuries and near-misses
- Makes workers more confident, which helps develop a more positive safety culture in the organisation[10].

3.8 In 2003 the HSE ran a number of pilots where trade union appointed 'Worker Safety Advisors' went in to non-unionised organisations. The report into the pilot showed that over 75% of employers said they had made changes as a result and almost 70% of workers had seen an increase in the awareness of health & safety[11].

3.9 There is a wealth of evidence that has been produced over the past 10 years or so, both in the UK and abroad. In 1995 a group of researchers analysed the relationship between worker representation and industrial injuries in British Manufacturing. It found that those employers who had trade union health and safety committees had half the injury rate of those employers who managed safety without unions or had some other process to involve staff.

3.10 Unions were the first to raise major concerns over levels of violence in the workplace, and RSI, and the effects of passive smoking. When unions first raised the issue of stress, employers and the media argued it was nonsense. It is now recognised that workplace stress affects half a million people. Even today it is unions and groups of safety representatives that are highlighting the potential risks within the semi-conductor industry or from nano-technology

[10] Reilly, Paci and Holl 'unions, safety committees and workplace injuries' BJIR Vol.33, 1995. Beaumont and Harris, Occupational Health and Safety, 23, 1993, Millward et al, Workplace Industrial relations in transition, 1992. Nichols, Walters and Tasiran, Working Paper series No 48, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff, 2004, and Litein, Trade Unions and Industrial Injury in GB, LSE 2000

[11] www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr144.htm.

The Union Safety Effect

Following a fire at Hickson and Welch, a chemical plant in Yorkshire, the union and management set up safety committees, involved safety reps in all safety procedures site and asked the union to provide joint training. Injuries have fallen by 70% and the company and union won a European safety award.

NHS unions have slashed the number of needle stick injuries by getting management to change to safer needles, and greatly reduced the number of staff getting latex allergies by ensuring workers are provided with safer gloves.

At a Somerfield Scottish distribution centre, the union safety rep surveyed musculo-skeletal disorders. The action plan then developed by the joint union/management safety committee led to a reduction of 50% in manual handling injuries over 2 years.

4 Legal representation

4.1 As a result of unfair treatment by employers, unions, in 2004, won an estimated £16.2 million in compensation for their members at Employment Appeal Tribunals. Unfair dismissal awards won by trade unions are over three times higher than the average in a non-union backed unfair dismissal case[12]. In 2007 unions won a record £330m in compensation for members through legal action. They also won £1m in equal pay claims - an average of £15,000 per member affected[13].

A Unite-TGWU member suffered a severe head injury while at work when he was struck by a forklift truck. Unfortunately his condition deteriorated and medical evidence was produced to show that he had suffered a severe personality change resulting from brain injury. The condition was permanent. He had previously been described as an intelligent man with a degree and there was high expectation that, for a person aged 26 at the time of the unfortunate accident, he would have been able to progress through promotion to more highly paid employment.
The employers at first rejected the claim. Then, after correspondence, they paid into court £400,000. On legal advice the union pressed on with the case and, after three days of trial, *the judge found in favour of the member and awarded him £1,408,201*. The Compensation Recovery Unit deduction was £53,667.70, leaving £1,354,533.30 paid to the union member.

[12] *Trade Union Trends*. July 2004. Labour Research Department

[13] Ditto

4.2 Through the union's own legal officers or through specialist solicitors, union full time officers and representatives have access to advice on legal aspects of working life from employment contracts, harassment, redundancy, pensions or equalities issues. Through the union, members have an access to justice which may otherwise have been denied to them either because of a lack of knowledge of their legal rights or because they may not have the financial where-with-all to afford.

5 Working for equality

5.1 Unions actively fight discrimination and help promote equal opportunities at work. Unions believe in diversity at work and campaign to remove bias and discrimination in the workplace. Unions actively campaign against the British National Party in local elections and develop strong links with local communities.

5.2 In addition to the courses on equalities provided by the TUC, the majority of unions provide training for their lay representatives and national officials. This varies from general courses on dealing with inequalities to specific courses such as dealing with dignity at work, which covers harassment and bullying, gender issues, sexual orientation, BME or migrant workers.

5.3 The TUC argued for trade union equality representatives (reps) to be given statutory rights in its submission to the Women and Work Commission in 2005. The WWC did not recommend this but it did recommend additional funding be made available, through the Union Modernisation Fund, for the training and development of equality reps. The last three years have seen a range of capacity building projects, including the TUC's project to develop training for equality reps, which began in April 2008 and ran for one year. The project has been very successful and trained two hundred and twenty representatives, in Great Britain. Sixty of these were trained online. In addition, twenty one TUC trade union tutors have been trained, and two hundred and seven union officers attended regional briefings the project arranged on equality representatives and the new Equality Bill in autumn 2008.

5.4 An external evaluation was conducted with ninety seven reps which showed that the training gave the participants the knowledge, skills and confidence to take on the new role and increase activity on equalities in the workplace. In addition, it showed that most of the equality reps could report some success at work following the training but were limited by the lack of statutory rights for equality reps[14].

5.5 The TUC is continuing to press for statutory rights for union equality representatives through its lobbying and campaigning work around the Equality Bill. The Government Equalities Office has agreed to provide the TUC with funding so that a full evaluation of equality reps can be carried out by the end of 2009[15].

5.6 A survey of workplace union negotiators carried out in 2005 for the biennial TUC Equality Audit (by the Labour Research Department on behalf of the TUC) found some had participated in developing comprehensive policies on flexible working with their employers. While this was a minority – in most cases the issue

[14] *TUC Equality Reps Project Report* – Gowan D, Open learning Partnership. June 2009

[15] Ditto

The union Prospect's agreement with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council offers a number of flexible working schemes, and they are open to a wider range of applicants than the minimum legal requirements. The clause on part-time working and job sharing, for example, states "Employees may seek part-time work for a number of reasons, including: Childcare responsibilities or caring for sick or elderly relatives; Health problems or disabilities; Easing down to retirement; Further Education or training; and, Pursuing other activities or interests."

either had not been discussed or it was assumed that the minimum requirements of the law applied – there were a significant number of policies or agreements where progress had been made. These either extended eligibility beyond employees with young or disabled children or presented flexible working options in a particularly positive and welcoming way[16].

At Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust, for example, the flexible working policy agreed between management and health service unions "acknowledges that individuals at all stages of their working lives work best when they are able to achieve an appropriate balance between work and all other aspects of their lives". It goes on to say that "managers should give reasonable consideration to any request from employees to work flexibly in line with service requirements."
At Organon Laboratories (Amicus), applications to work flexibly can be made by any staff, not just those covered in the legislation, while at Lever Fabergé (USDAW), part of Unilever, all permanent employees can apply to work flexibly and for any reason, including "to suit their personal energy levels".

6 Protecting vulnerable workers at home and abroad

6.1 UK unions, through the TUC, have been at the forefront of ensuring better treatment for Britain's 1.3 million agency workers. An agreement last year between the TUC, the employers' organisation the CBI and the UK government secured UK agreement to the European Agency Workers Directive the implementation of which is being consulted on in 2009. Trade unions were instrumental to the introduction of the European Agency Workers Directive which builds on existing protection of agency workers rights campaigned for by UK trade unions.

6.2 The TUC's Commission on Vulnerable Employment found that more than five million workers in the UK – one in every five employees - are being ripped off by rogue bosses. Some employers break laws by paying cash in hand below the minimum wage or forcing staff to work unpaid overtime. Other bad bosses were taking advantage of legal loopholes to sack staff, cheat them out of cash and paid holidays

[16] *TUC Equality Audit 2005*. Labour Research Department. August 2005

and force them to work in unsafe conditions. Official statistics to show that around 5.3 million workers earn below one third of the median hourly wage and do not have a trade union to negotiate their terms and conditions, so are vulnerable to exploitation . The Commission's recommendations have helped influence government policy – including recent moves to establish a Fair Employment Enforcement Board and a new 'Pay and Work Rights' helpline[17]. Information on the helpline is available at www.direct.govt.uk/en/Dl1/DG_177940

6.3 The TUC has highlighted the risks to the UK's 1.2 million temporary workers, including 226,000 agency employees, and to migrant workers and workers in the informal sector. Studies have shown insecure workers face a substantially increased health and safety risk at work (TUC's Risks 260). Unions have been active on behalf of vulnerable workers. Examples include: a CWU agreement with Manpower; work by the TGWU, UNISON and UCATT with migrant workers including the Justice for Cleaners campaign and the Overseas Nurses Network; work by the Community union in Leicester with workers in the informal economy; and union co-operation with the National Group on Homeworking; and PC's work representing agency workers[18]

6.4 The TUC is building its capacity to raise awareness about workers in the Olympics merchandising and sponsorship supply chain in the run up to and during the 2012 London Olympics. The TUC and affiliated unions campaign to stop the exploitation of children and other vulnerable workers in companies that supply goods and services to the Olympics.

> *"Children as young as 12 years old working 15 hours a day – workers cheated of more than half their legal wages – all working until they drop making Beijing Olympics related products. This isn't sport! It begs the question; does IOC actually mean 'Ignoring Outrageous Conditions' rather than International Olympic Committee'?"*
> Neil Kearney, ITGLWF General Secretary

6.5 The trade union-backed Playfair campaign asks both Olympic organisers and brand owners to recognise their responsibility and change the practices of their suppliers for the better. The idea is not to boycott events or put people out of work. It is about seeking to ensure that the fair play that is trumpeted in the name of international games is practised in work carried out in their name. Trade unionists in the UK are well placed to help build the pressure on organisers and brand owners to do that. With growing excitement building for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa, the ever increasing focus on the 2012 London Olympics, the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and a general love of sportswear, this is a great opportunity to let the events organisers and branded goods producers know that it is time they cleaned up their game.

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[17] *Hard Work, Hidden Lives'*, TUC Commission on Vulnerable Employment, 2008

[18] *'The Hidden One in Five – winning a fair deal for Britain's vulnerable workers'*. Policy Studies Institute/TUC, 2007

6.6 Because of pressure from trade unions around the world, and the Playfair campaign, Adidas, Nike and Puma have joined the Fair Labour Association (FLA), a forum for companies and labour rights groups to work together. Puma and Nike have made their factory lists public – an important step in transparency and pressing for accountability. The big brands have established codes of conduct for their suppliers, and some have 'compliance' units. Kappa has finally entered into discussions with trade unions. The TUC and British trade unions will continue to campaign for an exploitation-free 2012 Olympic games[19].

7 Building greener workplaces

7.1 Trade unions have a critical role to play in helping to change employer attitudes and 'greening' workplaces, reducing costs for employers, and making appositive contribution toward challenging climate change.

7.2 A survey of over 1300 union reps carried out by the Labour Research Department in 2009 found extensive evidence of union involvement in climate change measures in the workplace. Across the private and public sectors negotiated agreements, climate committees, audits and inspections, and training are all ways in which union environmental reps can act as catalysts for climate action at work. The survey found examples of over 200 joint management-union committees discussing climate related issues, over 150 working parties covering environment/climate change issues and over 80 examples of joint management-unions environment committees[20].

7.3 In 2006-07, the TUC's 'Green Workplaces' project supported trade union initiatives to make six demonstration workplaces 'greener'. These were at the steelmakers Corus, Friends Provident, DEFRA (the Government's environment department), Scottish Power, the British Museum and the TUC. The project focused on energy saving and was funded by the Carbon Trust.

7.4 During 2007–8 the TUC helped unions learn how they can 'green' their work as employers themselves, and in pursuing a greener bargaining agenda with employers. The TUC offered support to all levels of the union – for executive officers and lay leaders, who were invited to become Union Green Leaders, there were breakfast meetings, written briefings and shared best practice. For officers and reps there were seminars and online training. The Carbon Partnerships project was funded by the Carbon Trust.

7.5 In the course of 2008-9, the TUC is supporting 10-15 "transformational" projects with unions who would like support to develop their own Green Workplace projects in specific workplaces where they are recognised. This is the result of a successful bid by the TUC to the Union Modernisation Fund bid.

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[19] *FAIR PLAY? The global sporting goods industry and workers' rights: A TUC fact file and activities pack for trade union tutors.* June 2008. TUC Publications

[20] *Unions and climate change: a guide for union reps.* Labour Research Department. June 2009. ISBN 190532247X

8 Working with Employers

8.1 Unions not only make a difference to workers, they can also bring benefits to employers and the wider community. The Department for Trade & Industry (now BIS) published a report in 2007 which assessed the benefits of trade union involvement and representation in the workplace drawing on a wide range of research by a large and diverse number of organisations in the UK.

8.2 By giving employees a voice, rather than simply leaving a firm when they are unhappy at work, union reps significantly reduced the number of 'exists', improving labour retention and reducing absenteeism. The DTI estimated that this could result in savings to employers of between £72 and £143 million.

8.3 Drawing on Health and Safety Executive research, BERR estimated that 161,000to 241,000 fewer working days were lost because of accidents at work due to the presence of union safety reps and estimated the potential range of benefits in this instance from £136m to £371m. DTI also estimated that 125,000-375,000 fewer working days were lost due to work related ill-health because of the work of union safety reps with a potential range of benefits of £45m to £207m.

8.4 Employee involvement - through their union membership, workers are more able to participate in the decision making of a company and feel they have a little more control over their working lives. This is in addition to union members having a voice and able to have their grievances answered by management. Employees that are listened-to have more commitment to the company and are more productive. The DTI estimates this greater productivity to be worth between £3.4 and £10.2 billion to the economy.

9 Working in Communities

9.1 According to 'Unions in the Community: A survey of union reps' union reps are heavily involved in campaigning and activities outside of work. Trade union reps are eight times more likely than the general population to engage in voluntary work and give more of their time to community organisations[21].

9.2 The research, found that:

- 8 per cent of reps are school governors;
- 5 per cent are trustees or sit on the governing bodies of local organisations;
- 19 per cent are volunteers in local community organisations like sports or social clubs; and
- 20 per cent of reps spend up to five hours a week on community activities

9.3 Asked about their faith, of the 27 per cent who described themselves as religious, 84 per cent said that there was a definite link between their religious faith and their union activities, citing shared values such as compassion, justice and respect. This report clearly shows that union members and their representatives are at the heart of civil society and are active in their local communities.

[21] May 2009. Gregor Gall, Professor of Industrial relations, University of Hertforshire

10 Responding to the Recession

10.1 The current recession looks likely to be the worst since the 1930s with the economy shrinking by nearly 4% in 2009-2010 according to forecasts by the International Monetary Fund and the Confederation of British Industry. Not only is this recession likely to be deep but it has arrived very swiftly following the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank in September 2008 exposing the fragile nature of the banking system in the UK and around the world.

10.1 According to the Centre for Cities study 'Sticking Plaster or Stepping Stone? Tackling urban youth unemployment' "Since the recession began, national youth unemployment has risen from 700,000 (13.8%) to 900,000 (18.4%). In contrast, the adult unemployment rate has risen from 3.6% to 5.2% over the same time period"[22].

10.2 A 2009 survey by High Flyers Research established that the UK's top graduate employers have reduced their recruitment targets for 2009 by 28% since the graduate recruitment round began in September 2008. The hardest sectors hit include investment banking where entry level vacancies have been cut by 56%, IT and telecommunications where vacancies have dropped by 51% and engineering and industrial employers where graduate vacancies have reduced by 41%[23]. UK unemployment is increasing by around 100,000 a month. Add to this the 300,000 graduates and 400,000 school leavers joining the jobs market this summer and the number of unemployed is likely to increase to 3 million[24], or approximately one in ten of the working population.

10.3 Unions can play a key role in supporting both workers and employers in these difficult times. Where companies are in difficulties, unions have been able to put together alternative business plans which show not only alternative cost savings but also show how the employer's proposals would have a negative effect on future growth and development with the loss of skills and know-how which go with the loss of staff through redundancy.

10.4 An example of unions working to secure jobs is at the car manufacturers Toyota where, as Unite union representative Peter Tsouvallaris says "members are reminded daily of the tremendous insecurity the recession has brought to our industry". After negotiations with management at Toyota, and faced with cuts in jobs and wages, the union has been able to recommend measures that as Peter says "will present a real opportunity to restore some measure of stability to Toyota in the coming months".

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[22] Sticking plaster of stepping stone? Tackling urban youth unemployment. Faiza Shaheen. Surviving recession. June 2009

[23] '*The Graduate market in 2009*'. High Flyers Research. July 2009

[24] Danny Blanchflower, former member of the Monetary Policy Committee, interviewed by BBC Business News, 15th July 2009

The British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA) has devised a four-phase strategy to challenge airlines on the need for job cuts and to seek alternatives to redundancies where cut backs need to be made. The four phases are 10 pressure testing the employer's case by analysing the financial situation; 2) focus on saving jobs by suggesting alternative savings; 3) managing the process including defending "last in, first out" approach to redundancy that the union believes is right for their safety critical sector, and 4) supporting pilots facing redundancy and providing welfare assistance.

In a deal with Thomson Airlines, pilots agreed to take an average 5% pay cut in order to continue supporting almost 100 surplus pilots and the newly merged airline, with the company shouldering half the costs and the pilot body the other half, alongside a voluntary redundancy package. Balpa has shared the success of this deal with other airlines, including a helicopter company where members planned to defer a pay rise in order to pay to retrain pilots on other aircraft rather than make them redundant. Business improvement has since removed the threat of redundancy for the time being.

10.5 The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) at Archant, a family owned independent regional newspaper group, is in negotiations over proposed 34 redundancies. Industrial action has been ruled out as a strategy and the union decided to "go big" on community campaigning using email, radio interviews, a Downing Street petition, Twitter, the NUJ website, a Facebook Group and local leafleting and petition signing. The union reports that the strategy elicited a "huge response from the community including MPs" and as a result an initial proposal of 54 redundancies was reduced to 34.

10.6 The union also reports that alongside the above they have engaged management in "tireless, detailed, carefully researched questioning, taking full advantage of the 30 day consultation process" and have presented the company with detailed research on why "the proposal from 34 job losses is at least 12 jobs too high".

10.7 At a strategic level, unions, and regional offices of the TUC and the Wales TUC, are working with Regional Development Agencies and the Learning Skills Council to give regional level support to businesses facing difficulties as a result of the recession.

11 Conclusion

11.1 This report underlines the vital role that unions continue to play in British society. Trade unions are as relevant today to the needs of working people and their families as they were when the TUC was formed in 1868. The need for a coherent and cohesive voice for working people and their families in today's fast changing world is as vital as it ever was.

11.2 Trade union members contribute to the wealth, health and productivity of the UK. But not only are they effective contributors to the wealth of individual companies or industries but the evidence gathered in this report shows that they are also are more likely to contribute to the social fabric of their community, participating in the many voluntary roles which help create cohesive communities.

11.3 Unions also assist their members and their work colleagues in developing their skills for the benefit of their employer, their community as well as themselves. For many the union provides a way of obtaining that learning and those qualifications that they missed out on when they were younger. Unions are also at the forefront of developing greener workplaces, working in co-operation with employers who want to make their enterprise environmentally and energy effective.

11.4 This report shows that not only are trade unions good for their union members and their families but are also vital in ensuring a stable and productive workforce which is involved, trained and committed. Unions are well placed to support employers to come through the worse effects of the recession, and to support efforts to build a strong, sustainable economy into the future.

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