

UNITE

tackling the challenges



Unite fighting for workers' rights



Unite apprentice award winner



Unite tackling mental health

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Dear Colleagues,

I want to begin by wishing all construction workers a happy New Year.

By the time you receive this members are likely to be coping with the challenges faced by the winter months, with bad weather and the lack of daylight making work challenging.

This year we also have the additional headache created by a very disappointing general election result to contend with. Clearly the Conservative government has no interest in tackling the challenges that our industry faces such as bogus self-employment, a lack of apprenticeships, and a short term hire and fire culture, to name but three.

It is why it is vitally important that we redouble our efforts to ensure that all the sections that comprise Unite construction sector from workers in new build construction, housing maintenance workers, highway operatives, building materials workers and those in open cast coal mining, are properly represented and new members recruited.

In the last three years since we became one single construction union, there has been a huge number of new members join our union. Although it needs to be recognised, that with companies collapsing and workers frequently moving jobs and even leaving the industry, growth is not always straightforward.

It is why it is the responsibility of everyone to ensure that we recruit as many members as possible. Don't be afraid to ask your fellow colleagues to join, the worse they can say is no. The stronger Unite is in your workplace, the higher the level of pay, the better the conditions and the safer the site.

Increasing our membership puts us in a far stronger position, to challenge employers to improve their practices nationally, to seek improvements to our national agreements and to lobby the government (however unfriendly) to bring in policies which will improve the working lives of construction workers.

The trade union movement was built on collectivism and unity and those merits will continue to underpin our success, who ever you voted for Unite your union will be standing up for you wherever you work and live?"

Gail Cartmail,
assistant general secretary

Construction workers have a high risk of suicide

- Make sure your friends and workmates are OK
- Don't be afraid to ask how someone really is
- A short conversation could save someone's life

For more information go to www.zerosuicidealliance.com/

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Back cover: buildingWORKER opt in



Anti-choking dust campaign launched

Unite has given its backing to a new campaign launched by health and safety activists *Hazards*, the magazine for health and safety activists, to halve the legally permissible exposure level to silica dust. Which could save 40,000 lives a year.

The campaign titled 'choked' argues that the current legal exposure limit of 0.1 mg/m³ should be at least halved to 0.05 mg/m³. The current legal level in the UK is double the limit in the United States and many other European countries have a lower exposure limit.

Over 600,000 workers are regularly exposed to silica at work which is created when cutting, grinding and drilling substances such as rocks and sand. Silica is a major constituent in bricks,

tiles, concrete and materials. Construction workers are particularly at risk of being exposed to high levels of silica. The campaign is in the form of an online postcard campaign which are sent to Sarah Albon the new chief executive of

the Health and Safety Executive and can be found at <http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/silica>.

As there is a long latency period between being exposed to silica and developing a potentially fatal disease. Unite has launched a silica register which can be found at <https://www.unitelegalservices.org/services/silica-dust>.

Workers who are exposed to silica should record their exposure. If they then develop a silica-related illness later in life, the register will assist in helping the worker make a claim for damages.



Mark Thomas

Unite calls for action to preserve nuclear skills

Following news that the Hinkley Point C development of a new nuclear power station will cost an additional £2.9 billion, Unite has called for urgent reforms and the government to learn the lessons of the challenges faced by the client EDF in developing the project.

The government needs to radically revise the *laissez-faire* policy of simply hoping that private companies will come forward and build incredibly complicated strategic infrastructure projects. This is simply not an adequate strategy to keep the lights on.

The government's failure to involve itself in the planning of nuclear power stations has resulted in private companies pulling out of building new

facilities in Cumbria and Anglesey.

The only new nuclear power station in the pipeline is Sizewell C. Unite believes it is essential that there is no delay between the completion of Hinkley and Sizewell beginning to ensure that specialist skills are not lost.

Unite assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail said: "The challenges faced by EDF demonstrate why the government must introduce a proactive industrial strategy which will allow the government to work in partnership



Hydrock

Government must learn lessons from Hinkley Point development

with the private sector to develop future infrastructure projects that are desperately needed."

HS2 anti-union busting campaign stepped up

Unite has stepped up its campaign to end union busting on the HS2 development.

Since the beginning of the year Unite has been in dispute with the Costain and Skanska Joint Venture (CSJV) at Euston station as the union has been barred from the normal practice of speaking to workers in workplace canteens during their breaks.

The union busting activities of CSJV, has occurred despite the relevant unions signing a framework agreement with the client HS2, which sought to ensure good industrial relations.

Despite negotiations continuing throughout the summer no progress

has been made and as a result protests have been stepped up.

A major demonstration was held at the Euston site in October. There were sufficient numbers of protesters to close all the gates at the site, which caused considerable disruption.

The action at Euston was followed up by protests at the HS2 headquarters in central Birmingham and the Costain headquarters in Maidenhead, Berkshire. A further large demo was held at Euston in November.

Unite national officer Jerry Swain said "Costain and Skanska are guilty



Unite has stepped up its anti-union busting campaign on HS2

of union busting and HS2 has acted as their conduit.

"Unite is not seeking special favours it is simply looking to ensure that normal practices are applied on all HS2 sites".

Construction injuries rise and prosecutions fall

Unite has raised concerns that construction injuries have risen for the first time in five years.

The number of non-fatal construction injuries per 100,000 rose from 359 in 2017/18 to 366 in 2018/19.

During the same timeframe there was also a 22 per cent decrease in the number of construction prosecutions being undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) which fell from 202 to an all time low of just 158.

The increase in injuries and decrease in prosecutions risks reversing the steady progress in construction safety. In 2018/19 construction fatalities fell to a record low for the industry of 30.

Unite national officer Jerry Swain said: "These figures are deeply worrying. While of course we welcome that the number of deaths has decreased, this has to be tempered with the fact that construction injuries have gone up.

"The increase in injuries is likely to in part be a result of employers failing to comply with safety laws."

Workers need to be extra vigilant as accidents increase on sites



New report reveals asbestos failings

A report by the think tank ResPublica has found that children in the UK are legally allowed to be exposed to 10 times as much asbestos, then in other European countries such as France and Germany.

Research has found that 94 per cent of NHS buildings and 80 per cent of schools contain asbestos.

The report called for a phased removal of asbestos from public buildings, for UK asbestos regulations to be brought up to the strictest European standards and for a registry of public buildings that contain asbestos.

Unite national officer for local authorities Jim Kennedy said: "This report is a damning indictment of the government's utter disregard of the very real risks asbestos poses not just to hundreds of thousands of public sector workers, but children, patients and the millions of other people who use public buildings."

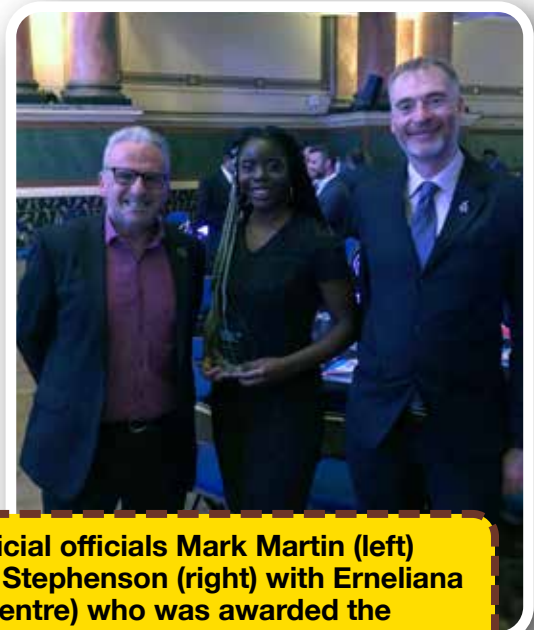
Unite sponsors apprentice awards

Unite was the principal sponsor for Leeds college's annual Building Industry Greats (BIG) awards, which celebrates and recognises the achievements of apprentices in the construction industry.

Notable winners at this year's awards held in the autumn included Unite member **Erneliana Daniel**, who was awarded the prestigious Governor's award. Unite regional secretary for the North East, Yorkshire and Humber

region **Karen Reay** said: "Unite has long been a champion of construction apprentices.

"By sponsoring the BIG awards Unite is in a small way demonstrating our commitment to young people seeking to enter the construction industry."



Unite official officials Mark Martin (left) and Karl Stephenson (right) with Erneliana Daniel (centre) who was awarded the governor's apprentice award

Glasgow addresses period poverty

Unite members at Glasgow City Building, which undertakes maintenance and repair work on the city's social housing, have ensured that management have introduced systems to ensure that female staff members do not experience period poverty.

The organisation's female staff members can now access sanitary

products if they require them.

In a separate initiative City Building has also introduced a system to supply apprentices with free condoms. Every year City Building recruits a large number of apprentices including female apprentices.

Unite convenor **Darren Burrows** said: "Unite negotiated with

management to ensure that sanitary products should be made freely available to all our female staff if needed. This is a simple case of human dignity.

"The free condoms help to ensure safe sex and that our apprentices take a responsible attitude to sex."

Crossrail Bond Street health fears

Unite has been at the forefront of reassuring worried construction workers following a series of unexpected deaths at the Crossrail Bond Street development being built by the Costain and Skanska Joint Venture (CSJV).

Four workers have died in their sleep while working at the site last year, including two in close proximity to each other in the autumn.

As a consequence concerns were raised that there was a problem with the quality of the air on the project.

In order to reassure the workers Unite helped to organise independent air

quality testing at the site and the result showed that there was nothing untoward.

However, the union's efforts were hampered by the attitude of the CSJV management which upbraided Unite regional officer **Guy Langston** for failing to jump through the necessary huge number of hoops that had been set up for union officials visiting the site.

CSJV initially implied that Mr Langston would also not be allowed to be present when the independent air quality monitoring results were made known.

Unite has been tackling union busting and concerns about safety at Bond Street



However, once Unite publicised this latest example of union busting by CSJV, they were forced to relent and allow Mr Langston to attend.

Glasgow Multiplex tackling mental ill health

As part of last years World Mental Health day on Thursday 10 October, Unite convenor **Paul Mooney** helped to organise an event to highlight mental health at the Multiplex development at Glasgow University.

Mental health first aiders were on hand to give advice and assistance at the event which was held in the site's canteen.

Multiplex supplied breakfast rolls, teas and coffees and workers were supplied with information and given talks

about how everyone can play a role in improving workplace mental health.

Such events are particularly important as construction workers admit they suffer from high levels of mental ill health and some construction professions have suicide rates three times the national average.

• *Suicide prevention article on page 10-11*



Workers at the Multiplex site at Glasgow University received information and advice on World Mental Health Day

Colchester memorial for construction worker held

Colchester Trades Council held a memorial meeting in October to make the 25 anniversary of the death of Dutch construction worker **Joop Vanbergh**.

Mr Vanbergh was killed while building the Hythe Bridge bypass in the town.

The memorial anniversary coincided with the beginning of European Health and Safety Week in October.

Speakers at the event included **Kitty Jong** the vice president of Dutch construction union FNV and Unite regional officer **Guy Langston**.

Members of Mr Vanbergh's family were also present.

Mr Langston said: "Each and every construction death should be marked and remembered. Twenty five years after Joop Vanbergh was killed his family still feel that loss."

Assurances given on Lincolnshire power station jobs

Unite has secured assurances that local workers will be used in a high profile power station in north Lincolnshire.

A protest was held at the Keadby site near Scunthorpe in November which is being built by Seimens on behalf of energy firm SSE, as there were fears that an agreement to recruit local labour was being flouted.

The fears about local labour arose after Spanish firm Babcock Montajes

secured the contract to build the boiler and indicated they would use Spanish labour.

Following negotiations held by Unite regional official **John McIntyre**, agreement was secured that local labour will be used on the site and a recruitment process was imminent.

John McIntyre said: "Unite has secured assurances that the promises to use local labour on the Keadby 2 project will be kept. The local area

has its own supply of highly skilled and hard working trades people, so there is no reason why they shouldn't be used.

"At present, there is no reason to believe that the pledges we have received from Seimens and Babcock Montajes will not be honoured.

"Should the situation change, however, Unite will do everything in its power to ensure these commitments are upheld."

PAY AND BARGAINING

Craftworkers waiting for pay claim response

A pay claim has been submitted for construction maintenance workers employed in local authorities and covered by the “red book” agreement.

In response to the real terms pay cut of 22 per cent that workers on the agreement have suffered in the last decade, the claim is for a 10 per cent increase for all workers covered by the agreement, whose pay

rates are above those covered in the agreement.

For workers who are paid on the existing red book rates the claim demands that these rates are benchmarked and paid in line with the average pay rates for local authority craft workers.

The claim is also seeking:

- An additional one day increase in annual leave

- A two hour reduction in the working week
- A comprehensive joint national review of the workplace causes of stress and mental ill health
- A significant increase in tool allowance and insurance payments
- A commitment to the continuation of the red book agreement.

The employers have delayed giving a formal response to the pay claim until the new year.

Salford housing maintenance workers secure pay deal

This deal was especially attractive to the workers on the legacy contracts as they maintain a final salary pension scheme, sick pay of six months full pay and six months half pay and 33 days of holiday.

resolution will herald a new era of better employment relations with the royal borough of Greenwich management.”



Salford housing workers agreed a pay deal

Over 100 workers employed by Liberty Group on the Forviva housing contract on Salford council housing, have secured a three year pay deal and preserved their terms and conditions. The workers overwhelmingly voted for industrial action in the dispute over pay and conditions.

Following the vote Unite regional officer **Colin Carr**, returned to the negotiating table.

Management then offered a three year pay deal of pay increases tied to the consumer price index (CPI) and the guarantee that workers on legacy contracts would preserve their terms and conditions.

Greenwich housing workers strike resolved

Over 120 housing repair workers at Greenwich council suspended strike action in October following last ditch negotiations.

The dispute was about a new pay structure, which would have resulted in the workforce facing a serious loss of pay.

As part of the agreement which was led by Unite regional officer **Onay Kasab**, any reduction in pay will be minimised, pay protection will be introduced and no changes will be implemented while talks continue. The talks will also include bringing back more council work in-house.

Onay Kasab said: We hope this

Negotiations set for 2020

The coming year will be a key time for Unite’s industrial agreements, with pay and conditions negotiations set for many agreements. This includes the National Agreement for Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI), the Joint Industry Board (JIB) for electricians, the civils agreement the CIJC and the heating and ventilation agreement (HVCA/BEIS).

For the first time Unite’s pay and conditions claims will also address mental health concerns. The already tabled NAECI claim includes a call for mental health awareness training for Unite reps.



Solidarity in Greenwich has preserved pay rates

Unions key to ending kafala system in Qatar

tai-mab



Trade unions are significantly improving working conditions in Qatar

The Building and Woodworkers International (BWI), the global federation of construction unions, has secured a significant victory in its battle for trade union rights and decent treatment of construction workers in Qatar.

As part of the BWI's lobbying, which is linked to Qatar hosting the 2022 football World Cup, it was

recently agreed that the *kafala* system, which bound migrant construction workers to their employer and prevented them leaving the country without the employer's permission will no longer apply.

In future, workers covered by the labour code will no longer require an exit permit to leave the country.

In a further positive advance, a Labour dispute resolution committee has been established which will examine employment issues and should provide a response within three weeks. However as the BWI is aware this will still result in backlogs, it is also seeking the establishment of a 'quick justice' system to ensure these matters are dealt with promptly.

As a further positive from early 2019, a workers' support and insurance fund

will come into effect. When a ruling is made by the labour dispute resolution committee, the unpaid wages will be paid from the funds and then the money will be later secured from the employer, ensuring workers are paid more quickly.

The BWI, with support from Unite, has been undertaking extensive work and support in Qatar for many years, since the high death rates and the shocking conditions that migrant workers were enduring in the country emerged.

Through the BWI's actions site safety has improved, living conditions have got better and some rudimentary workers' committees have been established in a country where trade unions are still in theory illegal.

Trade unions are significantly improving working conditions in Qatar.

Unite assists in Paris Olympics

Unite has been assisting sister unions in France prepare for the Paris Olympics in 2024 to ensure that workers are fairly treated and that lessons learned from the London Games in 2012 are not lost.

Last autumn Unite development officer **Steve Craig** made a presentation to the French construction unions.

The presentation focused on the joint working between UK unions and the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) which led to the signing of the memorandum of understanding and other agreements which framed the industrial relations on the London games.

The presentation highlighted Unite's approach to industrial relations, which included the need for direct employment, health and safety and protection for migrant workers.

Partly as a result of the positive role played by the unions the London Olympics were the safest on record.

Steve Craig said: "Unite's presentation drew on our experience and lessons we have learnt during the London Olympics. Unite's approach will help inform the approach of the French unions and provided demonstrable evidence of the 'added value' unions bring to the development of global mega sporting events."

Unite's presentation was part of a wider Building and Woodworkers International initiative to ensure that workers building the facilities for mega sporting events (World Cups, Olympics etc) are well paid with proper union recognition.



Ach45an

Unite is providing assistance to ensure that workers on the forthcoming Paris Olympics are well treated

Isles Yacht Club

Tackling suicide

Have you ever wondered what the biggest cause of death in men is?

It's not heart disease, cancer or even road traffic accidents, but suicide - over 6,000 people took their own life last year and 75 per cent were male.

Men under 50 are particularly vulnerable and if they work in the construction industry they are three times more likely to die from suicide than the average male in the UK.

So why is this happening?

It's an industry dominated by men, shift work and working away from home and perhaps the culture is not to discuss emotions.

How many times have you met a friend or workmate and asked, or been asked: "Alright mate, haven't seen you for ages, how are you doing?"

Usually the reply is: "I'm fine"
What if the answer was: "Mate, I'm feeling really down. My wife is constantly on at me to get these jobs done in the house, and I'm absolutely shattered. I just can't cope with it any more and I just need a way out."

Would you know what to say?

Suicide is often seen as a problem that affects only people with mental health problems, specifically depression. Yet

only around a third of suicides have had contact with mental health services in the year before their death.

Suicide is a hidden concern, as over half of people who die by suicide are unknown to health services. There is a need to educate people into identifying the signs and signpost of those at risk to appropriate services.

To achieve this there is a need for a cultural change, and we need to get people talking again about how they are feeling – never more so than in industries like construction which is male dominated and often populated by those in middle age.

Getting people to talk to each other

The Zero Suicide Alliance (ZSA) believes a key part of tackling this problem is getting everyone to talk to each other. They believe:

- As work colleagues you generally have a better understanding of how the pressures of the job can affect you, and the people you work with
- In the skilled labour industry the rates of suicide are high due to the pressures of the job, but also the free access to the means via materials, heavy machinery or high open areas.

Talking about suicide is difficult, but here's some guidance to approaching that conversation:



Talking about feelings is difficult but it may save someone's life

- By asking someone how they are it gives that person permission to talk about how they are feeling
- Asking someone about suicide will not make them think, or act on it. In general terms they have already contemplated that, but having a friend expressing concern may be the thing that shows people do care and life is worth living.

The best teams in sport communicate during the match (their working day) to know where they are and what's going on around them.

Are you able to 'SEE' the signs your mate is giving out?

Do you understand what he's trying to 'SAY' and can you 'SIGNPOST' that pass to bring him the greatest glory in winning the game?

Or do you think that pass (conversation) is too difficult to make and you let him run alone and offside?

suicide on sites



Talking and listening to what people say can reveal if they have a problem

What are the signs?

Seeing the signs that someone is potentially becoming a greater risk of suicide, can be obvious, like:

- Turning up for work late, regularly
- Being off sick, on more occasions than before
- Not getting involved in the banter
- Isolating themselves from the group.

Just because some, or all, of these signs are present it doesn't mean that person is suicidal. There may be other things going on in their life that you don't know about, unless you ask.

If you do notice any of these or other behaviours that may be considered unusual, there are a few things you could do:

- Find a good time and place to talk, like in the van or on a tea break
- Try not to talk about yourself

- Allow for periods of silence, it maybe that the person is gathering their thoughts
- Don't judge that person's thoughts, feelings or emotions
- Try to avoid asking questions with a 'Yes/No' answer
- Clarify you have understood what's been said, but don't interrupt.

How can you help?

If you do find time to talk, and there are issues raised that cause concern, there are things you can still do that could help that person, such as:

- Asking if they have a plan will indicate how serious the likelihood of suicide is
- If there is no plan for how they intend to take their life and they just have had thoughts you can signpost them to local support
- This could be by getting them to contact their GP for an appointment

- You could support them in either of these options by attending and helping to explain what is happening.

If the person has a plan then the concern does become greater and you will need to alert professional staff. You will need to direct the person to the local accident and emergency A&E department and accompanying them will ensure professional help is delivered appropriately, and the professionals understand what is happening.

Not everyone will be suicidal, even if they do show some of the signs mentioned above, but having that talk may contribute to their safety.

You may never know that you have saved someone's life, but it's far better not to know if you did, than to not know them ever again.

For further information go to [is https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/](https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/)

Construction a high risk of



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workers have suicide

- Make sure your friends and workmates are OK
- Don't be afraid to ask how someone really is
- A short conversation could save someone's life

For more information go to
www.zerosuicidealliance.com/

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Skanska's tainted heart

Skanska is one of the best known names in the UK construction industry.

The multinational, company whose headquarters are in Sweden presents itself as a progressive, green and ethical company.

Skanska's mission statement claims that its standards are based on United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights, the conventions of the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

Skanska claims: "We are proud of the ethical business practices that we have established ... We cannot accept unethical behaviour."



Members of the international delegation who sought access to Skanska's Nashville site

As part of its shiny exterior Skanska, signed a global framework agreement with the Building and Woodworkers International (BWI), which should ensure fair treatment of workers and recognition of unions around the world. However, like many of Skanska's commitments, outside of its native Sweden, what the company says and what it does are entirely different.

The charge sheet against Skanska in the UK is very long. It was discovered in 2009 that Skanska was a leading member of the Consulting Association, which blacklisted over 3,000 construction workers.

It was later discovered that Skanska was making more blacklisting checks than any other blacklister and between 1996 and 2009 the company spent £216,000 on ruining the lives of construction workers.

Skanska claimed that it had learnt its lesson and cleaned up its act but a leopard does not easily change its spots. On the Crossrail project it has become increasingly evident that at the very least Skanska was guilty of extreme vetting to prevent trade unionists who had raised legitimate safety concerns from being re-employed on the project.

While currently on HS2 Skanska together with the joint venture partner Costain are guilty of union busting. They are defying clear agreements made by HS2 to allow union's access to their site at Euston.

It is not just in the UK that Skanska is guilty of poor behaviour.

Skanska is a major player in the United States and the construction unions there are stepping up their campaign against Skanska.

Last autumn a delegation of international trade unionists visited Skanska's Fifth and Broadway project in Nashville Tennessee, to investigate



Skanska is guilty of union busting on its HS2 site at Euston in London

concerns including: wages, undeclared (illegal) labour and health and safety after several deaths on its sites.

This followed earlier protests by the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades of North America (IUPAT), who protested over £2 million in unpaid wages.

The union delegation included members of Byggnads the Swedish construction union. The delegation who had a copy of Skanska's BWI framework agreement with them, were initially granted access to the site before them being forced to leave. The union delegation were locked out and the workforce locked in.

Further investigations revealed that while Skanska were happy to allow undocumented workers on its site to work, if one of these workers experienced a workplace accident, the company then washed their hands of them and refused to even pay their medical expenses.

Going forward Unite is looking to expand the co-ordinated global campaign, especially in Sweden to put pressure on Skanska to abide by its own rules.

BUILDERS LET DOWN ON PENSIONS

One of the major failings of the construction industry is after a lifetime of physical work, many construction workers are left in poverty in retirement due to a lack of a pension.

Like many problems in construction it is one the industry has failed to resolve.

Which is why Unite welcomed the introduction of the auto-enrolment pensions regime.

For the first time, unless a worker chooses to 'opt out' they were obliged to have a workplace pension and their employer had to make set contributions.

However like most things in construction the solution to construction worker poverty in retirement, has not been easily resolved.

Figures obtained by Unite, from a Freedom of Information request to the Department of Work and Pensions, has revealed that just 23 per cent of blue collar construction workers are paying into a workplace pension.

There are 1.5 million construction workers in manual trades and just 349,000 are paying into a pension. While, the number of workers making pension contributions has increased the vast majority are still making no provision for their retirement.

The reasons for the poor take up is clear. The auto-enrolment regime only applies to workers, the self-employed are excluded.

With rampant bogus self-employment, these workers are instantly denied access to auto-enrolment and yet again employers' evade their responsibilities.

Even worse many self-employed construction workers and particularly those who have been paid cash in hand or had spells working abroad may have holes in their national insurance contributions (NICS), which could affect their entitlement to a state pension. You currently need to have made NICS for 35 years in order to receive the full state pension.

A further problem with take up affects workers who are forced to work under an umbrella company. One of the perversities of an umbrella company is that for national insurance purposes the worker is treated as both the employer and the employee.

The same applies to auto-enrolment. A worker signed up to auto-enrolment has to pay eight per cent of their eligible earnings (five per cent employees contributions and three per cent employers contributions). Given the other excessive deductions they face, pension contributions become unaffordable to many umbrella company victims.

The final problem is that under the auto-enrolment rules an employer

can legally delay a worker paying into a pension scheme for the first three months of employment.

With many engagements being short, this means it is simply not worth opting into a scheme as once contributions start to be made the worker moves jobs and the whole qualifying period is restarted. Unite assistant general secretary **Gail Cartmail** said: "These figures show the government's auto enrolment pension policies are failing construction workers. Resulting in hundreds of thousands facing poverty in retirement.

"Rather than tackle the factors which make it difficult or impossible for construction workers to save for a pension, successive Conservative governments ignored the problem.

"Until rampant casualisation and bogus self-employment are tackled, workers are not going to be eligible or prepared to register for a workplace pension."

Construction workers are facing many obstacles in saving for retirement



Looking after

TEN TIPS FOR A HEALTHY HEART

1 FIND OUT YOUR HEART AGE

The British Heart Foundation (BHF) have partnered with NHS Choices to help you find out your heart age, so help you understand your risk of having a heart attack or stroke. This tool works if you're over 40, and will give you an idea of your heart health and what you can do to improve it. We would recommend that anyone over 40 attends an NHS Health Check at their GP. For the best advice on how to look after your heart visit.

<https://tinyurl.com/vuzczpg>

2 KNOW YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure is known as the 'silent killer' – although it doesn't have many symptoms, it causes thousands of heart attacks and strokes every year. It's a good idea to know your blood pressure level, so speak to your GP or pharmacy, who should be able to measure it and offer advice.

3 STOP SMOKING

Our hearts and blood vessels are the hidden victims of smoking. Stopping smoking is the single best thing you can do for your heart health. If you want to quit, get in touch with local stop smoking services. They'll provide support and advice, boosting your chances of success. You can also ask your doctor or pharmacist about nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) or medicines that can help you quit. E-cigarettes can be also be used in the short term, as a step-down tool to help you quit.

4 TACKLE LONELINESS

Social isolation affects many thousands of people across the UK. It can be hard to avoid when you



Your heart health is in your own hands

Getty Images

work away from home, or have long commutes which leave you feeling exhausted. Loneliness can encourage unhealthy habits like eating fast food and smoking, all which contribute to heart disease and stroke risk. If you're feeling lonely or isolated, your GP can help. It might help to join a local community group or volunteer in your free time.

5 KEEP CALM

Feeling stressed all the time can put you at greater risk of a heart attack. Stress makes you more likely to turn to unhealthy habits which make you feel better in the short term, such as smoking, eating food that's high in fat and sugar, drinking alcohol and avoiding exercise. If you suffer with stress, try to find activities that calm you down. This could include going for a walk and getting fresh air, listening to music, practising mindfulness or meditation, speaking to friends or family. You can also speak to your GP about strategies to help.

6 KNOW YOUR FAMILY HISTORY

A family history of heart disease and stroke can put you at greater risk of developing these conditions. Many people who go to hospital with heart attack and stroke, say they never thought they were at risk despite having close relatives affected by the conditions. If you have a family history of heart and circulatory diseases, speak to your GP. If these conditions run in your family, it's even more important that you lead a healthy lifestyle to lower your risk of heart disease.

7 KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF A HEART ATTACK

Some people who have a heart attack say it came out of the blue. That's why it's critical to know the symptoms so that you can act quickly if one happens.

The most common signs of a heart attack are chest pain or discomfort that suddenly occurs and doesn't go away.

r your heart

It might feel like pressure, squeezing or heaviness in your chest. Or you may have pain spread to your left and right arm or to your neck, jaw, back or stomach.

Feeling sick, sweaty, light-headed or short of breath can be common symptoms. Less common symptoms include a sudden feeling of anxiety, similar to a panic attack, or excessive coughing.

Pain levels will vary from person to person, last for different amounts of time and may appear gradually or suddenly. The worst thing you can do is to ignore the pain and try to 'walk it off'. If you think you could be having a heart attack, call 999 immediately. It is a medical emergency so it is essential you get seen by doctor or paramedic quickly.

8 SWAP SUPPLEMENTS FOR A HEALTHY DIET

Supplements are no replacement for a healthy diet. Rather than taking supplements to reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke, try focussing on eating a healthy, balanced, Mediterranean-style diet. This includes white and oily fish, along with plenty of fruit, vegetables and pulses, lentils, nuts, seeds, unsaturated oils and wholegrains.

9 GET MOVING

Many people think the only exercise worth doing is spending hours in the gym. But research shows even small things count, and as little as 10 minutes extra exercise each day carries benefits. That makes it important to weave in physical activity wherever you can. Take the stairs instead of the escalator, park a few streets away from work, or get off the bus a few stops early.

10 EAT THE RAINBOW

Studies show the chemicals which give fruit and vegetables their colour may be beneficial to heart

health. Phytochemicals are antioxidants (natural chemicals that are thought to protect against harmful substances called free radicals), and diets rich in foods that contain these, such as fruits and vegetables, are associated with lower levels of heart disease.

Your heart health is in your own hands.

Aortic aneurysms and screening

An aneurysm is when a blood vessel swells to an abnormal size, just like a balloon blowing up. If this swelling bursts, it can be fatal – especially if the aneurysm is in the aorta – the main artery that sends blood from your heart to the rest of your body.

Usually, aneurysms grow slowly, at around 1-2mm per year. If an aneurysm grows too large, the risk of bursting increases.

These swellings can usually be treated with surgery or a stent, but only if they are found. Most aneurysms do not cause obvious symptoms, which makes it hard

to know you are at risk. If an aneurysm becomes large, it can sometimes cause a pulsating feeling in your abdomen, or persistent back pain.

Symptoms can include:

- A sudden onset of severe pain across the chest, often felt in the back or between the shoulder blades
- Pain in the jaw, face, abdomen, back or lower extremities
- Feeling cold, clammy and sweaty
- Fainting and shortness of breath.

The main risk factors for developing an aortic aneurysm are smoking, a family history of aneurysms, high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Men over the age of 65 are most at risk, and that's why all men are invited for screening during the year they turn 65. The screening involves a quick, harmless ultrasound and helps those with an aneurysm get the earliest possible treatment.

At 65 all men should be screened to rule out an aortic aneurysm



Getty Images

SETTING

Unite held its sector conferences in Brighton in November. The biennial event is important as it establishes the policies that the sector will follow for the next two years. Motions discussed at the conference included:

Campaign for fair work

The motion raised the ongoing problems at Euston where the Costain/Skanska Joint Venture (CSJV) is engaged in union busting by preventing Unite's officials accessing the site and speaking to workers. Despite the client HS2, agreeing an initial framework agreement (IFA) with unions, giving the right of access. The motion set out the union's stall across the multi-billion pound project.

The motion was overwhelmingly carried and committed the Unite construction sector to campaign to use all means necessary to:

- Ensure full compliance with the HS2 IFA
- Establish enhanced agreements on all projects
- Ensure all workers are directly employed on a PAYE basis
- Require all agreements to have an anti-blacklisting clause
- Ensure that appropriate facilities are provided to Unite reps
- Guarantee Unite officers access to workers during their break time.

Moving the motion a delegate from London and Eastern said: "Skanska was one of the companies involved in blacklisting they are probably doing it again and that is why they don't want us on their site".

Seconding the motion another delegate added: "We can't afford to lose this battle" and he sent a message to Costain and Skanska. "You think you are big and powerful but you are not as big as Unite."

Site access

Following the CSJV controversy the motion set out that all construction agreements must ensure officials are guaranteed access to sites and this must specify access to canteens and welfare facilities during workers' break time. There should be no compromise on this matter.

Construction charter

The conference agreed a motion which called for better understanding of construction charters. Regional secretaries will arrange briefings between regional officers and the construction regional industrial sector committee (RISC) to ensure the charters are complied with.

National Job evaluation

The North East, Yorkshire and Humberside region brought forward a motion to derecognise the national job evaluation scheme.

Moving the motion Steve Conwell Unite's convenor at Newcastle City Council explained how the "job evaluation process was forced upon us and it is not fit for purpose."

It has graded time serviced skilled craft workers on the same pay rates as workers who have not completed an apprenticeship and undertake craft assistant roles.

Conwell warned that if implemented 45 per cent of workers at the council would lose pay. In a consultative ballot 94 per cent of members had rejected the proposals.

Seconding the motion, Lewis Phillipson who also works at Newcastle council, said: "Apprentices don't have the easiest lives and a plumber is a four year apprenticeship. "At the end of your time you would be on the same rate as a craft assistant."

Social housing organisation accountability

The North West brought forward a motion about the lack of democratic involvement on the board of social housing organisations.

Where the people taking decisions are not connected with the local community and chief executives can receive salaries up to £500,000.

The motion which was carried, called on the sector to mount a campaign to have real accountability reinstated through having elected representatives on boards.

OUR PATH



Construction delegates at sector conference

Moving the motion Ged Cooney reminded the conference that at “Grenfell there was little or no democratic involvement” and by bringing back democratic accountability it would give residents “some form of protection”.

Highways maintenance

The conference carried a motion which recognised that in some areas Unite was well organised in highways maintenance contracts while in others this was not the case.

The motion called for a joined up network so that workers in these sectors can organise to increase pay and conditions.

Lee Hughes from the North West said: “Workers are suffering on a daily basis, I know of a highway operative who worked 14 days straight.”

Delegates called on a combine to cherry pick the best bits of all the existing agreements to create a model agreement. Unite Executive council member Jamie Bramwell said: “We need to tackle all the employers in one hit.”

Agreement on climate change

The liveliest debate was on a motion about the Construction Industry Joint Council (CIJC) agreement to make it fit for the 21st century. The motion called for an agreed hourly rate for working in the rain, extra breaks for extreme weather and better quality PPE.

Moving the motion John Dodds from the South West explained that he had worked for 28 years as a steel fixer and was regularly forced to work in the rain, within an hour he will be soaked through and that despite not working in the same weather “company managers have better personal protective equipment(PPE)”. He added that it was essential “workers are not compromised at the workplace.”

While all delegates were supportive of the intention behind the motion some including scaffolders and bricklayers pointed out that to require them to work in the rain would compromise their safety or the quality of their work. Tracey Whittle from the

South East, said: “I am a painter and I can’t work in those conditions as my products don’t work.” The motion was narrowly defeated

Guest speakers

Delegates received several contributions from guest speakers. Coen Van Der Veer gave fraternal greetings and provided an update on the work of the global federation of construction unions the Building and Woodworkers International (BWI).

Unite national health and safety advisor Rob Miguel spoke about exposure to asbestos and prostate cancer.

The star of the show was veteran Left-wing professor of accounting Prem Sikka who used the examples of the collapse of Carillion and Interserve’s recent fall into administration to show all that was wrong with the UK’s financial system and then described policies to promote a radical overhaul of existing laws to better protect workers from corporate greed which could cost jobs.

RIFT Resolutions:

Beat the New Year Blues with a Tax Refund

New Year's resolutions: we all break them - and it hardly ever matters. After all, you are only cheating yourself. If there is one type of resolution that can make a real-world difference, though, it's the financial kind. Here are a few simple commitments that can make for a much happier, more prosperous 2020.

Set realistic saving goals and stick to them

It doesn't have to be a lot. Just saving £50 a month can be a real boost to your finances. Knowing what you can reasonably save on a regular basis is half the battle. You can even make things easier by setting up an automatic monthly transfer into your savings account, or using a savings goals app.

Ease up on the plastic

Credit cards are some of the most expensive debts you can run up so make sure you are clearing them each month if you can.

Keep your receipts

If you are buying anything work related – public transport tickets, food, tools, personal protective equipment (PPE), etc make sure you keep your receipts so you've got the evidence to claim your expenses back.

Think twice about unexpected bonuses. When you've got unexpected extra cash, save a chunk of it and enjoy the rest. You'll be better off for it and you won't be depriving yourself.

If you suddenly start getting more in your take home pay than you're expecting, check your tax code, or even better give us a call and we'll do it for you. If your tax code has been mistakenly changed by an employer or HMRC you will be paying the wrong amount of tax



Now is the time for construction workers to make a resolution to claim your tax refund in 2020

Getty Images

and could end up with an unexpected bill at the end of the tax year.

Consider your impulse buys

No one is saying you can't buy that sudden "must-have" treat. Just take a moment to think about whether this is the best deal. Shop around a bit first. That goes for energy providers, too. Switch when the deals are better elsewhere.

Make sure you claim your tax refund every year

Whatever other resolutions you make for 2020, always check if you are due a tax refund. We are finding too many people are still leaving their cash sitting at HMRC because they either don't know they can claim every year or assume they won't be eligible again. When we have checked for

them it turns out they were owed money.

Always check. It only takes a few minutes and with average annual refunds in the building game come to £953 if you are on the books or over £2,000 if you are paid via the Construction Industry Scheme (CIS), it is money you want back in your wallet.

If you haven't claimed before we can help you claim for the past four years at once. Talk to us and we will help you get what is yours. Remember, you are always better off with RIFT.

Contact us on 01233 653974 and remember to quote your UNITE membership number for our discounted rates or visit RIFTrefunds.co.uk/UNITE

WINNING JUSTICE for accident victims

A great deal of progress has been made in reducing fatalities in the construction industry but dangers still remain.

Recent figures have shown that accidents actually increased last year and the true figures will be far higher than official figures as it is a sector where many accidents are unreported, especially those involving the falsely self-employed, who fear that pursuing a legal claim will result in dismissal.

It is vital that everyone who does suffer an injury makes sure it is recorded and if possible a legal case for compensation is taken. Often the only way to ensure contractors improve safety is to hit them in the pocket financially.

If you pursue a personal injury claim for an accident inside or outside of work through Unite Legal Services you receive free representations and 100 per cent of the compensation awarded. A high street solicitor will charge a fee and/or take a cut of your compensation.

In 2019 Unite Legal Services secured hundreds of thousands of pounds compensation for a large number of members in the construction sector who had suffered injury inside and outside of the workplace.

Pipe fitter suffers knee injury

A pipe fitter in the North West suffered a serious injury when they were leaning through an access hatch and a stack of unsecured plasterboards fell on them trapping their leg.

The member required surgery on their left knee and was left with permanent instability and discomfort.



The case was complex as it involved three companies being potentially at fault, the member's employer, the plasterboard contractor and the company responsible for site safety.

All of the companies blamed each other as well as blaming the member.

After the member contacted Unite Legal Services, detailed investigations were pursued. The defendants made an initial offer of £75,000 which was rejected and following the submission of supportive expert medical evidence the member received compensation of £120,000.

White finger victim wins compensation

A member in Wales had worked for the same engineering and welding company since 1992. They regularly used vibrating tools and equipment. From 2013 they started to develop symptoms affecting their hands, fingers and thumbs which was thought to be a result of hand Arm Vibration Syndrome (known as HAVS or 'white finger').

The member eventually contacted Unite Legal Services and expert medical

evidence demonstrated the symptoms were partially as a result of using vibrating tools but there were other possible factors. Despite the medical evidence not being straightforward a claim was made and compensation of £5,000 was secured.

Scaffolder's site injury

A member from the North West was employed as a scaffolder. Whilst dismantling scaffolding on site a 13 foot section fell on him, striking the side of his face and knocking him to the ground.

He sustained cuts, bruising and swelling to his face, concussions and headaches.

It was discovered that the scaffolding had been inadequately secured.

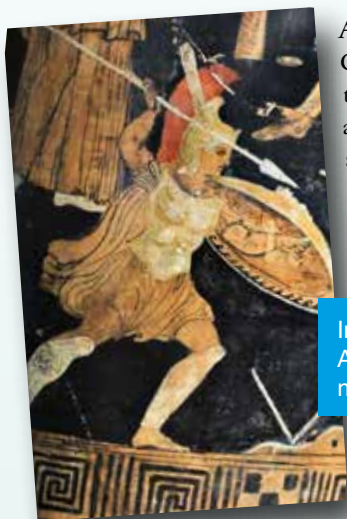
The member contacted Unite Legal Services and the employer admitted liability. An initial offer of compensation was rejected but the case was successfully completed in less than 12 months with the member being awarded £5,500.

If you have suffered a workplace injury or illness call Unite Legal Services for free on 0800 709 007.

This page is a counterpoint to the mainstream media and reviews important pieces of work for Unite members.

Books

The Silence of the Girls by Pat Barker



As a child I was fascinated by the Greek myths and in particular the tales about the siege of Troy and the infamous horse. They are stories I still find bewitching. It is probably why I found Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* so compelling.

In the *Silence of the Girls* Achilles is a ruthless killing machine not a hero

In a nutshell it is a partial retelling of the siege from the perspective of Briseis, who begins the story as a queen of

Lyrnessus a city allied to Troy. After it is sacked by the Greeks she becomes the sex slave to Achilles, the mightiest of the Greek warriors.

The opening sequence as Lyrnessus is stomped by the Greeks is an incredible piece of evocative writing. Those high standards are maintained throughout the novel as Briseis, rails against her slavery but also ensures she does what is necessary to survive.

The recasting of Achilles from the traditional role of a heroic figure to a vicious unrelenting killing machine, who misses his mother, is one of the most interesting twists in the book.

This is an absolute first class book, which really makes you think about the forgotten victims of war, who are usually women.

Stephen James

Your Recommendations

Unite members are encouraged to send ideas for future recommendations. We will cover film, television, DVDs and books. The only stipulation is a recommendation needs to be easily available. If you would like to write your own reviews please do but keep your contributions to 250 words. Send recommendations and reviews to barckley.sumner@uniteunion.org

Film

Sorry We Missed You

Ken Loach's new film *Sorry We Missed You* confronts the viewer with the depressing reality of being caught in the grinding poverty of low paid insecure work.

The facts and figures – zero hours contracts quintupling since 2010, the gig economy doubling in five years to five million, more than a fifth of working households in poverty – are shocking.

But *Sorry We Missed You* smashes through the numbers like a gut punch by providing a first person view of what it is like to exist in a world devoid of employment security, working rights or a guaranteed wage.

The film follows Newcastle delivery driver Ricky, who is supposedly self-employed, Ricky does not have time to stop driving to eat or use the toilet – forcing him to carry an empty water bottle for emergencies – because he is being tracked by a handheld scanner and will be fined if he doesn't make the deliveries in time.

If Ricky gets sick, he has to find someone else to drive his round or his wages will be docked by £200.



Sorry We Missed You strikes at the heart of the gig economy

The painful closeup shots of Ricky desperately trying to fulfil his work commitments

are accompanied by equally disturbing footage of the daily toils Ricky's wife Abby goes through as a home care worker.

Just as distressing are the scenes of the couple's home life as they struggle to bring up their two kids while working every hour god sends to put food on the table.

What makes *Sorry We Missed You* so upsetting is the knowledge that many thousands of families are living similar stories to Ricky and Abby's everyday.

Ryan Fletcher

MEMBERSHIP FORM GB

Please use capitals – This address will be used for the purpose of ballots

Forename _____ Title _____
Surname _____ Gender _____
House No./Name _____
Street _____
City/Town _____
Postcode _____ Date of Birth _____
Home Tel _____ Mobile _____
Email _____

About Your Job

Employer/Company Name _____ Work Tel. _____
Job Title _____
Work Address _____
Postcode _____
Which membership do you require?
 Enhanced full time (more than 21 hours per week)
 Enhanced part time (up to 21 hours per week)
 Enhanced low pay
 Enhanced apprenticeship
Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Year 4
Date apprenticeship started _____
 Driver Care (a separate Driver Care application form will be sent to you.)
Date apprenticeship due to end _____
 Basic full time (more than 21 hours per week)
 Basic part time (up to 21 hours per week)
 Basic low pay
 Basic apprenticeship
Year 1 Year 2 Year 3 Year 4
Date apprenticeship started _____
Date apprenticeship due to end _____
 Other (eg Unemployed member of the community, under 18, full time student, retired members or permanently disabled members who are not in paid employment)

Authorisation of deduction of your trade union contribution from your pay (check-off)

Note: Not all employers operate check-off. I hereby authorise the deduction of Unite the Union subscriptions from my pay of such amounts as shall be notified to my employer on my behalf from time to time by Unite. I authorise my employer and Unite to share personal data necessary to operate check off and for my employer to inform Unite of any changes of address.

Are you paid? Weekly 2-weekly Payroll No. _____
 4-weekly Monthly

I agree to abide by the union's rules. (Rule Book is available online)

NI No. _____ Signature _____ Date _____

For Office use only

Mem. No. _____ Employer Code _____ Workplace Code _____

Political Campaigning

Unite fights for our members' interests through political and industrial campaigning on issues affecting you – from pay, pensions, and broader workplace rights to housing, equality issues and our NHS.
If you would like to be part of this, opt-in to our political fund for just 10p per week. (tick here)

Those who choose not to opt-in will not be disadvantaged in any way compared with members who do opt-in, except in relation to control of the political fund.

I support Unite in campaigning on our policies and members' priorities in the Labour Party and I would like to be a Labour Party Affiliate Supporter* (this is free for political fund payers). I authorise Unite to share my personal data with the Labour Party for this purpose. (tick here)

* I agree to the terms listed at <https://support.labour.org.uk>

Equal Opportunities

The provision of this information is to ensure equality for all and is not a requirement

Unite campaigns for equality for all and to ensure that women, black Asian ethnic minorities, disabled members, lesbian gay bisexual trans - LGBT+ and migrant workers are fully represented within the union. To find out more go to www.uniteunion.org/equalities. Confidentiality is protected. Please complete:

Please tick your ethnic origin: Black/Asian White Please tick if you are LGBT+
Please tick if you are a disabled person: Please tick if you consider yourself to be a migrant worker

Direct Debit Details – Instructions to your Bank or Building Society to pay by Direct Debit



Service User Number **9 7 1 4 6 7**

Name of bank/building society _____

Town of the Bank _____

Sort Code _____

On the selected day of the month:

7th 14th 21st 28th

Account Number _____

Name(s) of _____

Account Holder(s) _____

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society

Please pay Unite the union Direct Debit monthly from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Unite the union and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank Building Society.

I authorise the payment above. I agree to abide by the union's rules. (Rule Book is available online)

When you join Unite, you are also authorising the Union to deduct an additional amount for your subscription to your local branch fund.

Signature _____ Date _____

Branch No. _____ Job Code _____ Recruitment Code _____

Please send completed forms to: Freepost Plus RTZC-HKGG-RZBY, Unite the union, 2nd Floor, 160 Falcon Road, London SW11 2LN

Don't miss out!

Get Your *buildingWORKER* every quarter

buildingWORKER is the magazine for all Unite construction workers. In order to keep up to date with what is happening in your industry and your union you need to opt in to receive future editions.

Opting in to receive the *buildingWORKER* is quick and simple.

To receive *buildingWORKER* for free, four times a year. You just need to contact your regional office by email, phone or in writing.

Also by contacting the regional office you can update your address, notify a change of employer and request receiving free copies of *uniteWORKS* (Unite's award winning magazine) and *Landworker* (the magazine for rural workers).

East Midlands

Tel: 01332 548400
membership.eastmids@unitetheunion.org
Unite 2, Pride Point Drive, Pride Park,
Derby DE24 8BX

Scotland

Tel: 0141 404 5424
membership.scotland@unitetheunion.org
John Smith House,
145-165 West Regent Street,
Glasgow G2 4RZ

IRELAND

Dublin

Tel: 00 353 1 873 4577
membership.ireland@unitetheunion.org
Unite House, 55/56 Middle Abbey Street,
Dublin D01 200X
Republic of Ireland

Belfast

Tel: 02890 232381
membership.ireland@unitetheunion.org
26-34 Antrim Road,
Belfast BT15 2AA

South East

Tel: 01753 313 820
membership.southeast@unitetheunion.org
Unite House,
Chalvey Road East, Slough,
Berks SL1 2LS

South West

Tel: 0117 923 0555
membership.southwest@unitetheunion.org
Tony Benn House,
Victoria Street, Bristol BS1 6AY

London and Eastern

Tel: 020 8800 4281
membership.londoneastern@unitetheunion.org
33-37 Moreland Street,
London EC1V 8BB

Wales

Tel: 02920 394 521
membership.wales@unitetheunion.org
1 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9SD

North East, Yorkshire and Humberside

Tel: 0113 236 4830
membership.northeastyorks@unitetheunion.org
55 Call Lane,
Leeds LS1 7BW

West Midlands

Tel: 0121 553 6051
membership.westmids@unitetheunion.org
Unite House,
9-17 Victoria Street,
West Bromwich B70 8HX

North West

Tel: 0151 559 2004
membership.northwest@unitetheunion.org
Jack Jones House,
2 Churchill Way, Liverpool L3 8EF

GIBRALTAR

Tel: +350 200 74 185
Unite House,
43 Town Range,
Gibraltar