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Front cover picture: Getty Images

for advice during the coronavirus crisis
go to unitetheunion.org/coronavirus

At this difficult time I hope that you and your family are safe and well.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a terrible shadow over the entire country. In recent months the efforts of everyone at Unite have been concentrated on keeping members safe.

The vast majority of construction work has continued throughout successive lockdowns. As a result Unite launched its own Covid construction advice which is far more comprehensive than advice from industry bodies (see page 4).

It has not just been on construction sites where Unite has intervened, housing maintenance workers have expressed severe concern that in many cases workers have been expected to continue undertaking routine maintenance in tenants homes. As a result, Unite has released clear guidance for housing maintenance workers (page 15) and has secured some notable victories forcing employers to adopt safer policies.

Thanks to the development of a vaccine we seem to be finally emerging from the worst of the pandemic, although vigilance is still vital, now we need to be looking ahead and learning the lessons COVID-19 has taught us.

It is clear that many construction workers are going to bear the scars of the pandemic for some time. Not all scars are visible, workers' mental health has taken a huge beating in the past year. It is an issue that leading Scottish activist Paul Mooney discusses on page 10-11.

I would also request that you place the mental health poster on page 12-13 on your workplace noticeboard. It is essential that all workers know that help is available.

In order to improve conditions and standards in construction good practice must be built on. This is why Unite is committed to ensure that the HS2 rail project reaches the very highest employment standards (page 16-17).

The other lesson that the pandemic has taught us is that those employers prepared to work with Unite and who recognise industrial agreements, invariably were far superior at maintaining Covid security and reducing the threat of transmitting Covid. The simple message, that Unite sites are safer, has never been clearer and it is why it is essential that we work together to increase the union's presence and ensure that companies recognise Unite and adhere to the appropriate construction agreement.

Finally, I would like to remind everyone that Wednesday 28 April is International Workers' Memorial Day. Given that we will still be under severe restrictions due to the pandemic, this year's IWMD will look somewhat different, yet it is absolutely essential that this day is properly marked. Remember the dead, fight for the living.



Gail Cartmail, assistant general secretary



Comprehensive Construction Covid Guide

Unite has launched a fully comprehensive guide to help prevent construction workers being exposed to COVID-19.

Since the pandemic began construction sites have generally remained open and most construction workers have continued to work.

Throughout the winter there were increased concerns that during the poorer weather, infection rates of construction workers have increased where social distancing has become more difficult, which has also coincided with the emergence of the new variant which is more transmissible.

The Unite guide is far more comprehensive and stringent than the industry's Site Operating Procedures which have

failed to make the wearing of masks compulsory when social distancing can't be maintained.

Crucially the guide not only covers how workers need to protect themselves at work, including issues such as the importance of ventilation but also provides information on how workers need to be able to socially distance when travelling to and from sites.

Another important section covers the mental health effects that COVID-19 has had on workers and recognises it has affected different workers in different ways.

■ The Construction Sector: COVID-19 Guide can be found at <https://unitetheunion.org/media/3530/212-constructionsectorcovid19guide-2020-11-30-v02g-toc.pdf>

Social distancing helmets must not be linked to disciplining workers

Unite has warned that hi-tech hard hats that sound a warning when workers get too close and break social distancing rules, must not be used to discipline or victimise workers.

Unite raised its concerns after the joint venture company Eiffage Kier Ferroviar Bam, who are responsible for the central section of phase one of the HS2 development purchased 1,500 of the helmets.

As a consequence Unite sought a meeting with the joint venture company to receive reassurances the helmets were not being used for disciplinary purposes and that workers' personal information was being protected. This is of a particular concern as the helmets could potentially provide information when workers were off site.

Unite national construction officer **Jerry Swain** said: "Ensuring social distancing on site is absolutely vital to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 and Unite welcomes the introduction of these hard hats provided strict rules about how the information they generate is followed.

"It would be entirely counterproductive if workers feared being disciplined or dismissed if the alarm was triggered particularly as it would be impossible to find out exactly which worker had inadvertently strayed too close to someone else."

hi-tech hard hats will ensure social distancing



Getty Images

Unite will prevent deskilling of electricians

Unite's general secretary **Len McCluskey** has committed the union to prevent all plans to deskill the electrical trade.

Early in 2020 it emerged that the Engineering Construction Training Industry Board (ECITB) had designed two new training standards, with the intention of utilising them when training apprentices at Hinkley Point.

The concern about the highly defective training standards, related to the training of workers on cable and containment work, which is the bread and butter work of electricians on such new build projects.

The attempt to deskill electricians, had strong echoes of the Building Engineering Services National Agreement (BESNA) dispute which occurred in 2011/12.

Unite officers became aware of the deskilling training standards at an early stage and raised their concerns directly with EDF the client at Hinkley Point.



Getty Images

Unite will not allow the deskilling of electricians at Hinkley Point or anywhere else

As a result no one will be trained on the defective standard.

No worker at Hinkley Point has been affected by the dispute as there are no electricians currently undertaking cable and containment work, this work has not yet begun on the project.

Unite general secretary Len McCluskey said: "Unite defeated the BESNA agreement then and we will defeat this latest attempt to deskill electricians.

"Our message to the industry is clear. Unite and its electrical membership will oppose any and all efforts to weaken the skill set of the trade which will undermine the industry by introducing non-skilled operatives.

"Any deskilling of electricians would result in a race to the bottom and would be highly damaging to industrial relations across the sector."

Direct employment report welcomed

Unite has given its backing to a new report which highlights the need to increase levels of direct employment in the electrical contracting sector in particular and the entire construction industry in general.

The report: *Direct Employment a Study of Economic Business and Social Outcomes* was written by professor **Howard Gospel** of King's College London.

The report found that direct employment levels in electrical contracting work in the UK had declined more sharply than in any other country.

Gospel found that the decline was due to specific actions and decisions of clients and contractors and government policies, in areas of procurement, tax, social security and employment law.

The report highlights that a lack of direct employment has a hugely negative effect on skills training, innovation and apprentice numbers. As well as undermining safety, industry regulations, productivity and it reduces tax receipts.

The report recommends that to increase direct employment, clients and contractors have a responsibility to companies that employ workers directly, while the government must act to remove incentives for bogus self-employment from the tax system.

Unite assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail said: "Rather than sweep the findings of this report under the carpet, clients, large contractors and the government need to accept its findings, adopt its recommendations and lobby others to follow suit."

Open Cast Mining decision results in job losses

A recent decision by Newcastle City Council's planning committee to reject permission for a new open cast coal mine at Dewley Hill, has resulted in the loss of around 130 jobs.

Banks Group had made the application but due to the refusal the company has been forced to make 30 workers redundant and a further 100 jobs are expected to be lost in the supply chain.

Banks Group fully recognises Unite and the union has a shop steward. The new open cast mine was rejected

on environmental grounds but by rejecting the mine the environment is not being protected.

Coal will still be required for industrial processes such as the production of steel and cement. The demand will not change but what will happen is that the coal will have to be imported from countries such as Russia, Colombia and Australia. The level of pollution will be increased as the coal has to be shipped to the UK.

The countries where the coal is imported from have weaker laws on

the requirement to restore the land once the coal has been extracted.

Unite national officer Jerry Swain said: "This is a deeply regrettable decision which has resulted in members of Unite losing their jobs.

"This decision is not environmentally friendly and will just result in coal being imported from overseas.

"This is a classic case of nimbyism which has resulted in the exporting of jobs and the importing of pollution."

Unite raises HS2 wage abuses concerns

At the end of 2020 Unite discovered that workers on HS2's Old Oak Common site in Ealing West London were being systematically underpaid. The Old Oak Common project is being undertaken by a joint venture company comprising Balfour Beatty – Vinci – Systra (BBVS).

The problem concerned workers who have been recruited to the project by logistics contractor Munnely.

The workers have been provided with contracts which require them to undertake 55 hours of work, before overtime rates are applicable.

However, under a framework agreement between Unite, the TUC and HS2, contractors are required to follow the relevant construction industry agreement.

In this case that is the Construction Industry Joint Council (CIJC) agreement which states that after a 39 hour week, enhanced overtime rates should apply.

When Unite raised the issue with the joint venture company, it wrongly



Getty Images

claimed that as Munnely paid above the London Living Wage and above the minimum rates stated in the CIJC agreement, than the overtime rules did not apply.

Unite is putting pressure on HS2 to force its contractor to resolve the matter, it will lodge a formal complaint with the CIJC and is also considering potential legal avenues.

Unite regional officer Paul Lomax who is responsible for the Old Oak Common site said: "Unite is committed to ensure that our members

employed by Munnely at Old Oak Common are treated fairly, we will use all our influence politically, legally and industrially to resolve this injustice.

"It is to be hoped that Balfour Beatty – Vinci – Systra (BBVS) realise that workers need to be treated fairly and receive the full benefits of the CIJC agreement and work with Unite to ensure that these initial problems are quickly resolved."

■ For more details on HS2 see page 16-17

Dundee council back down on essential work

Unite secured a significant victory in late January after Dundee council agreed to re-categorise a large number of work tasks as non-essential.

Unite members at the council had become alarmed that despite the lockdown the council had continued to expect them to undertake work that they deemed as essential, but members believed wasn't.

This included tasks such as repairing extractor fans, covering graffiti, renewing timber posts and replacing light pendants.

The membership also argued that if genuine emergency work was required to be undertaken then there needed to be a limit to how many properties a worker should enter in a day, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

After receiving a negative response from the management at Dundee council, Unite's 300 members took part in a consultative ballot which resulted in a 95 per cent vote in favour of taking industrial action over the matter.

In response and following further negotiations the council re-categorised 22 tasks as non-essential, which means that they won't be undertaken during the current lockdown. A rota will also be introduced for workers undertaking emergency work.

Unite regional co-ordinating officer **Dougie Maguire** said: "This is a significant victory. The reality was that



Getty Images

Unite has ensured that maintenance workers in Dundee risk of catching Covid has been greatly reduced

our members were genuinely fearful about catching or transmitting the virus to tenants, work colleagues or family members while conducting non-essential work.

■ For further information on the advice that Unite has issued to workers undertaking housing repairs and maintenance see page 15.

Scunthorpe scaffolders take strike action

Scaffolders employed by Brand Energy on the British Steel site in Scunthorpe took 10 days of strike action in January and February in a dispute over pay.

The dispute began in 2019 when Unite first issued a claim that the workers should be paid in line with the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI), the appropriate agreement for the work they are undertaking.

There is a difference of £2 an hour between the rates the workers are receiving and the NAECI pay rate.

Brand Energy has refused to enter into negotiations with Unite about the dispute. The dispute was made more complex as Brand Energy was due to lose the

scaffolding contract at the end of February, when it transferred to Activo, with the workers being TUPEd, to the new company.

Unite regional officer **John McIntyre** said: Our members have been left with

no choice but to take strike action due to the refusal of Brand Energy to even engage with Unite on pay.

"There are clear pay rates for this type of highly skilled work and Brand Energy are deliberately undermining them."



Getty Images

Scaffolders have taken 10 days of strike action at the British Steel site in Scunthorpe

BWI demands justice for Cambodian construction workers

The Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) has renewed its demand for justice for the 36 Cambodian construction workers who were killed when a building collapsed in the town of Kep in 2020.

A year on from the tragedy there has been no justice and no company has been forced to take responsibility for the disaster.

Together with other interested parties they are demanding that the Cambodian government:

- Exact accountability from those responsible
- Compensate families of victims
- Improve building construction safety standards
- Recognise and respect workers' rights.

United States: Low paid workers at greatest risk of Covid

Research by the University of California has found that low paid workers in the state are at greatest risk of dying of COVID-19.

The research found that the following professions were at greatest risk of dying: Cooks, packaging machine operators, agricultural workers, bakers and construction workers.

The research recommended that workers at greatest risk of dying should be moved up the list to receive the vaccine.

The research identified that the occupations with the highest death rates shared the following characteristics, workers are generally low income, workers can't work from home and are often forced to work in close proximity to co-workers.

Biden takes action on workplace Covid deaths



Getty Images

On his first day in office Joe Biden began taking action to prevent workplace Covid deaths

On his first day in office President Biden issued an executive order requiring swift action to address workplace risks.

Deaths and infections from COVID-19 in the USA are among the highest in the world and this has been blamed on a lack of co-ordinated action by the previous administration.

As part of the executive order President Biden is ensuring increased enforcement, working with unions and consideration of an emergency safety standard.

The Executive Order was welcomed by unions. Richard Trumka the president of the union federation AFL-CIO said: "President Biden is clearly prioritising strong COVID-19 protections for working people. We applaud this swift action which will save lives and protect workers who face dangerous conditions daily.

"Strong enforceable standards would require employers to develop workplace safety plans, implement science-based protection measures, train workers and report outbreaks."

Health and Safety a fundamental right

Unions have secured an agreement at the International Labour Conference that occupational health and safety should be recognised as an International Labour Organisation (ILO) fundamental right at work.

While millions of workers were denied even basic health and safety rights at work before the pandemic, it is COVID-19 and the need

to ensure Covid security in the workplace which has focussed minds and ensured the new fundamental right was agreed.

As part of the campaign the International TUC has agreed that on International Workers' Memorial Day, workers should be campaigning around the theme that health and safety protection at work must be recognised as a right for all.

Japanese construction workers in asbestos victory

Japan's Supreme Court has ordered the government to pay more than £16 million in compensation to former construction workers who developed lung diseases after being exposed to asbestos.

The legal case was taken by around 350 workers including bereaved families.

The case against the government and asbestos manufacturers was first made two years ago. The Supreme Court rejected the government's appeal in December and acknowledged the government also has a responsibility to compensate self-employed construction workers.

PAY AND BARGAINING

Taxpayers' money misused as Crossrail rules ignored

Unite has raised serious concerns about how workers are being employed on the heavily delayed Crossrail project.

Under the rules governing the project all construction workers should be directly employed and paid according to the relevant industrial construction agreement.

However, Unite has learned that the new Bond Street station, principal contractor Engie and sub-contractor NCCI are allowing bogusly self-employed electricians onto the project and are making directly employed workers redundant.

As the project is tendered on a directly employed basis, Unite has questioned both Crossrail and Mayor of London **Sadiq Khan**, about who is benefiting by contractors avoiding paying employers' national insurance contributions, holiday pay and sick pay for the bogusly self-employed workers.

Unite national officer for construction **Jerry Swain** said: "Unite has had reassurances from Crossrail that the rules on



Getty Images

direct employment remain in place. It is now essential that Crossrail takes decisive action to ensure its rules are upheld and this misuse of taxpayers' money is immediately ended.

"It is highly disturbing that the direct employment rules appear to be being ignored and it is essential to ascertain if any company on Crossrail is boosting its profits by not employing workers correctly.

Pay Deal Progress in Aggregates

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, Unite national officer **Ian Woodland** has been able to make progress in securing pay deals for workers.

Workers operating at Tarmac Cement and Lime have accepted a pay increase of 2.75 per cent for 2021.

Workers at Hanson's have also accepted a pay increase. Workers in Hanson's quarry division have accepted a one per cent pay increase for 2021.

Meanwhile the workers in Hanson's cement and lime division have also accepted a one per cent pay increase as well as an improvement in their site bonus.

Pay talks at Lafargeholcim Ltd have been adjourned in order to allow the employer to return to the negotiating table with an improved offer.



Getty Images

Pay rise for small site workers

Unite has secured a 1.5 per cent pay increase for workers covered by the Building and Allied Trade Joint Industrial Council (BATJIC) agreement.

The BATJIC agreement is negotiated between Unite and the Federation of Master Builders, the agreement is

primarily used on smaller sites and by smaller operators.

The pay increase will come into effect in June this year.

Refractory workers secure pay rise

Unite regional officer **John McIntyre** has secured a pay increase for Refractory workers. The Refractory

Workers Federation (RUF) agreement covers the workers who undertake the maintenance of the brickwork in blast furnaces, for example in steel works.

The workers received a 1.25 per cent increase which came into effect in January 2021.

The accommodation/lodging allowance will increase by 0.7 per cent which is in line with inflation.

THE HEALTH CHAMPION



There are few greater accolades than to have your hard work and dedication recognised by your peers.

Unite's **Paul Mooney** achieved that honour last year when he was awarded the Scottish TUC's **Frank Maguire** award for his contribution to health and safety. Mooney was nominated by Unite Scotland, principally for his work "taking mental health matters into construction and helping to erase the stigma about it".

He is a joiner by trade and has been in the industry for over 30 years. He has been a trade unionist since joining as an apprentice at 16. For the last nine years he has worked for Multiplex and is currently the lead Unite steward on the University of Glasgow western campus site, representing 600 workers across all trades.

Mooney's approach to challenging the taboos in the industry about mental health is straightforward: "We have open days on mental health and get people talking.

"We run a toolbox talk called 'start the conversation' it is a 15 minutes talk to try to get people to begin to open up in the group. When they leave that group we hope workers start to talk to each other.

"It is having the time to say, to the guy in the morning how are you feeling. Sometimes the guy who works with someone has a better idea of what is wrong. It is about being there and listening to each other."



Mooney believes there is a clear link between gambling and mental health issues.

Given the high levels of mental health issues in construction what factors has he identified that are causing problems.

“There are huge gambling issues in construction. Alcohol is still there but it effects a smaller minority but certainly gambling is a big thing. Especially electronic gambling. People can go on their breaks and open up their phones and gamble.

“Gambling leads to a lot of relationships splitting up, gambling can be the root cause of a problem and it can escalate into other factors as it moves on.

“A lot of people don’t think that gambling affects their mental health. But if you talk to people you find that it affects how they think and it affects their mood swings. If they have just lost money their mood can vary widely at work.”

So what advice would Mooney give to other Unite activists who want to start to tackle mental health issues?

“The best way to develop it is to take it to the canteens. Get people to recognise that mental health isn’t a taboo issue. It is very hard and it has taken me a long time to get where I am.

“It hasn’t been an easy road. There are still a lot of people who have a very negative view of mental health issues.

“But by opening it up and getting people not to hide from it, we make it a bit of fun.”

What is beyond doubt is that mental health issues aren’t going away for construction workers and Unite will need to be at the forefront of challenging and resolving these issues. To do that it is essential that more activists like Mooney step up to the plate and start tackling these challenges in the workplace.

Mooney has been attempting to tackle the mental health challenges of construction workers on sites for a decade. Does he believe that mental health is becoming a bigger issue than previously?

“There is more awareness and people are opening up more than they used to. It is probably not any worse than it ever was but we are certainly seeing it as a lot worse now.

“People are coming to us and admitting, which is a horrible word, that there are issues. “Previously they would never have discussed anything like this. It is a step in the right direction.”

So what was the reason that Mooney first started trying to tackle mental health issues?

“The suicide rates in construction were getting higher and higher. A lot of construction workers are under big pressure if they don’t do certain things, they are threatened with their jobs.

“It is about bringing the health back into health and safety. Health has got a big, big part to play in health and safety and that was getting side-tracked.”

Given the work Mooney has been doing, how frequently do people contact him about workplace mental health issues?

“I probably have at least one person a day talk to me. It might just be an update, it might be someone asking for a bit of advice but I deal with mental health issues on a daily basis.

“That is right across all levels of work. Some are very minor but others you have to signpost people onto other things such as counsellors.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the Covid pandemic has greatly affected workers’ mental health, with individuals being affected in many different ways.

“People have got to adapt and some people struggle to adapt.

“That could be working from home from a management point of view. But from an operative point of view there is a fear that they could be put back on furlough, there are loads of redundancies and a lot of workers fear they could be taking the pandemic back into their own house from work.

“Covid is also a trigger that has brought people to seek help. I have a case now which is not directly related to Covid but because of Covid the issue is becoming apparent.”

Mooney is keen to stress is that he is not a mental health professional.

“I have never professed to be a professional counsellor, through various training regimes we are more aware of people’s conditions and we help signpost them in the right direction to get professional help.

“Sometimes people don’t need professional help they need someone to talk to and empathise with them and help them to focus.”

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WORK CAN AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

Speak to someone
before you unravel



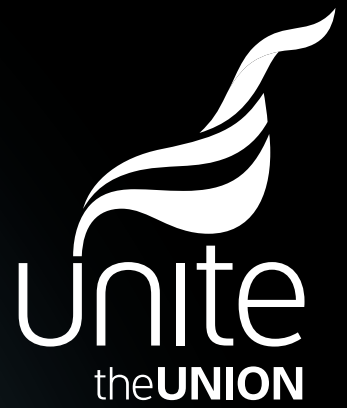
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Protecting housing maintenance workers

Following the announcement of the latest lockdown in January, Unite was alarmed that government advice allowed trades people to continue work in people's homes.

Unite believes this is dangerous and risks the health of the worker and the tenant(s) having work undertaken.

In response the union issued advice to members undertaking construction maintenance roles and has been working with its reps to ensure that employers accept the policy and fully implement it.

The bottom line is that if a property is occupied then only emergency work or essential maintenance should be performed.

If a property is vacant (void) Unite supports work being undertaken provided rigorous risk assessments are embarked on and social distancing is fully maintained at all times.

Additionally Unite is demanding:

- Workers must be supplied with all necessary PPE before undertaking work
- Unite representatives should be consulted when developing a risk assessment and these should be shared with employees
- All existing risk assessments and safe systems of work should be reviewed and updated in light of the increased transmissibility of the new variant of Covid-19
- Unite stewards and health and safety reps to be fully involved in all workplace safety discussions
- An employee must be able to stop work if they believe their health and safety is at risk and should not resume work until the problem is resolved. This includes the right to decline work if social distancing is not being adhered to.



Getty Images

Housing maintenance workers should only undertake emergency work during lockdowns and when people are not allowed to mix indoors.

While most local authorities have restricted work to emergency repairs and void properties this health conscious approach has not been so widely repeated in outsourced housing maintenance or housing associations.

Clarion Housing one of the largest housing associations in London, was guilty of continuing to demand that workers undertake routine maintenance of properties, despite some residents being Covid positive.

Members reported that they have been threatened with disciplinary action when they refused to do work if tenants were unwilling or unable to maintain social distancing.

Unite secured agreement that members will not be disciplined if they refuse to undertake work due to safety concerns.

However, serious safety concerns remain, Unite officer **Matt Freeman** said: "We believe the safest option is to stop routine repairs."

Similar problems have been identified in Portsmouth across much of Kent

and in Rotherham. In all of these areas Unite applied pressure to local councils to take action and protect workers.

A fair better picture can be seen at Fife council where **John Gillespie** is the union's senior steward. Strict rules were introduced ensuring that only "essential maintenance" such as gas safe testing and emergency work is undertaken in occupied properties. Routine maintenance can be undertaken on vacant properties provided "rigorous risk assessments are undertaken and planned".

Gillespie recognises that a major challenge is that the advice from the Scottish government is "far more woolly" than during the first lockdown, allowing unscrupulous employers to force workers, lacking strong unionisation, to undertake potentially dangerous work.

- If you believe that you are being placed in an unsafe situation you should immediately contact your Unite representative or regional officer.

HS2: A first class



Getty Images

Giant tunnelling machines will be used to construct 32 miles of tunnelling on phase one of HS2

This year construction work on the ambitious High Speed 2 (HS2) project finally gets fully underway.

There has already been a great deal of enabling work undertaken but it is in 2021, that will see construction of this massive project properly begin.

HS2 is set to become the largest construction project in Europe, Unite believes it should not only be the biggest but also the safest, the best paid and most productive. This can only be achieved through partnership which will mean the client, contractors and unions working together.

Phase one of the project comprises 140 miles of high speed rail line built between London and Birmingham. It is due to be completed between 2029 and 2031, after which there are further phases that will see HS2 directly extended to Manchester and Leeds. In addition there will be work to integrate the existing network into the HS2 lines,

so that journey times to many other cities including Glasgow, Newcastle and Liverpool are dramatically reduced.

Phase one alone is expected to cost between £38 billion and £45 billion. This year will see tunnelling work getting underway, in total there will be a massive 32 miles of tunnelling on phase one, including the Chiltern tunnel which is 10 miles long and 13 miles of tunnelling in London.

There will be a total of 500 bridges built on phase one, which includes what will be the UK's longest viaduct. The approach of the HS2 line into Birmingham will see the creation of the Delta Junction. This 5.9 mile length of track will comprise seven bridges and viaducts. There will be four new stations on phase one: Curzon Street in central Birmingham, Birmingham Interchange, Old Oak Common at Ealing in west London which will link HS2 into Crossrail and a remodelled London Euston station.

Initially construction will be concentrating on the major parts of the projects, the tunnelling and the stations, resulting in a rapid increase in the number of construction workers during the coming 12 months. At its peak there will be 22,000 construction workers working on phase one.

In order to attract such large numbers of workers it is imperative they are well treated and that victimisation and exploitation is prevented. This is a once in a generation project for which workers must be fairly rewarded.

Unite is keen to ensure that the mistakes that have blighted Crossrail, resulting in the mistreatment of workers, low productivity, increased costs and substantial delays, are avoided.

At an early stage Unite signed a framework agreement with both HS2 and the TUC, the agreement is designed to ensure a level playing field on all employment contracts on the

s development

project. The framework agreement sets out the minimum requirement for all contractors, all workers on HS2 must be directly employed with bogus self-employment and exploitative payroll companies banned.

Key Unite officers working on HS2

- **Vince McCoy** will be leading on construction work at Euston and in central London vince.mccoy@unitetheunion.org
- **Paul Lomax** is leading on work in west and north London including Old Oak Common paul.lomax@unitetheunion.org
- **Stuart Baker** is leading in the West Midlands in particular in Birmingham stuart.baker@unitetheunion.org

The terms and conditions of workers should be in line with the relevant construction industrial agreements and there is a requirement to engage and provide access to relevant unions. Unite believes access must mean; a union officer can enter and use the canteen area while it is being used by workers and discuss with them their concerns.

The framework agreement is significant as it should govern how work is undertaken but it is only relevant if it is properly enforced by the client.

Unite raised serious concerns regarding the enabling project at Euston where the principal contractor a joint venture company of Costain/Skanska and their labour supply sub-contractor Bowercross Construction systematically ignored many aspects of the agreement.

Unite was successful in forcing the companies to pay the correct number of holidays as workers were initially only

receiving 28 days, when the industry agreement stipulated 30 days of paid leave a year.

The biggest problem was that Bowercross failed to pay the correct overtime rates, resulting in workers being around £100 a week worse off. Unite also had the added difficulty that Costain/Skanska supported these abuses by refusing appropriate access to the site for union officers. What was especially disappointing was that HS2 appeared reluctant to enforce its own framework agreement. However, Unite has since been working with HS2 and the TUC to prevent similar problems.

Unite has already held meetings with many of the contractors who have been awarded major contracts and is seeking to implement agreements, based on the overall HS2 Framework Agreement ensuring workers are properly and fairly treated.

The majority of these meetings have been undertaken by national officer for construction **Jerry Swain** who is leading for Unite on HS2. Swain is being ably assisted by a cohort of regional officers who are responsible for different sections.

Jerry Swain said: "HS2 is an incredible project which will provide employment opportunities for many years. HS2 should also seek to raise the bar on how workers are treated and the pay they receive."

"Unite is determined to ensure that the industry learns from its previous mistakes which have been fundamental to the delays experienced on Crossrail.

A great deal of enabling work has already been undertaken including at the Curzon Street site in Birmingham



He added: "I have been working with EDF the client at Hinkley Point C who has ensured that its project is a beacon of how we can move this industry forward by working together. At HPC the client, the contractors and Unite have created a highly paid, highly productive and highly safe project. I would suggest all those involved in HS2 could do a lot worse than take a good look at how HPC operates."

"Unite will be recruiting and representing workers throughout the HS2 project. It is imperative that all construction workers on HS2 not only join Unite but join with us in helping to make it the highly paid, highly productive and highly safe project it should be."

If members already on HS2 have any workplace issues they should immediately contact their dedicated regional officer or their regional office.

HS2 Phase 1 the facts

- Completed between 2029-2031
- Cost between £38 billion - £45 billion
- 22,000 construction workers employed on phase 1
- Project will include 32 miles of tunnelling.

Building



Getty Images

Hinkley Point is showing how the decline in apprentices can be reversed

Apprentices are the life blood of construction, without highly skilled new blood there is no industry. Yet for decades the industry has been making a good impression of wishing to choke itself to death, as it has consistently failed to train anything like sufficient new starters.

One place which has attempted to reverse the pitiful number of apprentices is the Hinkley Point C project in Somerset where for the first time in a generation a new nuclear power station is being built. Already over 700 apprentices, have begun courses at Hinkley and the client EDF is targeting training 1,000 apprentices (two thirds of whom live within a 90 minute commute of the site) by the time the project is complete.

The traditional image of a construction apprentice is a male school or college leaver. Again Hinkley is trying to change that stereotype, 18 per cent of their apprentices are women.

Unite member **Stacey Sowden**, 33, is demonstrating— with a bit of hard work and determination, anyone can succeed.

Before starting her apprenticeship last year in steel fixing at Hinkley, which is Europe's largest construction site, Stacey had a full-fledged career in warehousing.

Several years ago, she completed a level 3 NVQ in management, which propelled her career as a warehouse manager for a catering suppliers firm, while also embracing her new role as mum. But after seven years in warehousing, Stacey wanted to try her talents elsewhere.

"I started to fall out of love with warehousing, I couldn't go any further. I was managing and I just wasn't very happy. A friend I went to school with who works at Hinkley shared an article about females in construction. I sent him a message asking if he thought it was something I could be good at. And he said, 'I think you'd be brilliant'. He sent me the link, and I applied for it, and here I am!"

Stacey is due to finish her Level 2 NVQ Steel Fixing apprenticeship later this year and said she couldn't be happier with all the skills she's learned so far.

"There's so much opportunity to learn," Stacey explained. "You don't just learn the trade, you get your working at heights ticket, your manual handling ticket, you get your CSCS card, you're trained to use power tools and so much more. It's more than what meets the eye. There's always more that you can progress to if you want."

"I'm hopefully going to do both first aid and mental health first aid as well. So it's not just the fact that you'll get an NVQ in Steel Fixing at the end of the apprenticeship. There's a lot of life skills you can get from it too."

Stacey's hard work and can-do attitude has earned her serious accolades after she won the Hinkley Point C Rising Star award in December.

"I was quite emotional at the acceptance ceremony," she said. "I nearly broke down just because I was so shocked to win it. I got nominated by a guy on my platform and then I got invited to the ceremony at Hinkley Campus. I was fortunate enough to win the award and

for our future



“Don’t be put out by the stereotype that construction is for men,” says Stacey Sowden

since then I’ve received quite a lot of recognition. It’s just really nice to know that even though I’m slightly older than the average apprentice, I can still work hard and that hard work pays off.”

Stacey urges others who might be thinking of taking on an apprenticeship to not let stereotypes hold them back.

“Don’t be put off by the stereotype that construction is for men,” she said. “Yes, stereotypically it is more of a male environment but if you work hard, it doesn’t matter who you are or where you’re from, you can achieve the same standards. I think that’s an important message for any female who wants to get into construction.

“Sometimes you may even have to work a little bit harder than the men. Other times, your knowledge and your expertise can help someone else out. But the opportunities are there – no matter

who you are. And they are all perfectly achievable.”

Stacey also encourages those who might be a bit older than the average apprentice to go for it.

“It’s never too late,” she noted. “That’s what I said to myself – it’s never too late to make a change. But you can’t expect that change to be handed to you on a platter. You’ve got to go out and get it, and you’ve got to work hard, whether that’s in construction or accounting or any other field.

“Obviously the older you are the harder it is to get up in the morning and things like that. You might have children or other obligations that you might not have had when you were younger.”

Stacey, a mother of two five-year-old twins and a nine-year-old daughter, added. “But you find a way to make it work – especially if that is your choice, if it’s something you’re passionate about doing.”

As ever, Stacey continues to set her sights high, hoping to qualify and get her white hat this year. Looking to the future, she also wants to become a supervisor in her trade.

“At present, there are no female supervisors who work in the trade. There are women supervisors in other areas, but there are no women out on the ground. That would be my target – to be one of the first female supervisors, if not the first female supervisor, actually out on the tools in a skilled trade environment.”

Whatever their goals may be, Stacey urges would-be apprentices to join a union.

“That sense of togetherness is so important,” she said “If you have a problem, there’s always somebody who’s got your back. It’s just nice to know that you’ve got a support network if there are questions that you don’t have the answers to, if there are situations where you’ll need some assistance, say if your pay is not right. If you’re in the union, all of us are together fighting for the same thing. You’re never on your own.”

RIFT Resolutions: Getting Financially Fit for 2021



Getty Images

Using cash and not plastic helps to ensure that you know how much you are spending

Does anyone still bother with New Year's resolutions? Haven't we all got enough on our plates?

If you're looking to make a real impact on your financial fitness, though, there are a few resolutions it really pays to respect. These simple commitments can slim down those nagging debts while you pack on the pounds in your wallet.

Know your limits

Figuring out what you can reliably and regularly put aside is really effective at cutting your financial problems down. Even just saving £50 a month can be a serious boost to your finances over time. Setting a reasonable target is half the battle; the rest is keeping your spending under control. An automatic monthly bank transfer to your savings account can help keep your plans on the rails. There are even mobile apps that can handle this kind of thing for you.

Taking an interest

If you find yourself leaning heavily on a credit card to get by, keep your debts on whichever card offers the best deal – and be prepared to swap. It means a little homework, but the alternative could be a lot more damaging. Wherever possible, stick to cash over plastic. It's all about being realistic, and working in cash means you always know what your spending is really costing you.

Spend in one hand, save in the other...

...and see which piles up higher. Interest on your debts almost always rises faster than on your savings. When you have a little extra cash on your hands, paying your debts down is usually a better bet than saving it. The maths don't lie.

You don't even have to dump every penny into your debts to make a real difference. Use a chunk to bring down what you owe and spend or save the rest. Remember this when your tax refund comes in.

Beware of 'must have buys'

Shopping smart is as much about bidding your time as choosing your seller. Check reviews, compare prices and make sure that an unmissable offer is as good as it seems. Not every deal is the 'real deal', after all.

Don't ditch your pension

It can be tempting to opt out of a workplace pension, but it's almost certainly a mistake. Those pension contributions you're making are worth a lot of tax relief, for one thing. Beyond that, you'll also be missing out on the contributions your employer makes. Being in a pension scheme is an easy way to invest in your financial health. It's handled automatically for you and it really mounts up over the years.

Settle up with the taxman

Whatever other resolutions you make, break or forget altogether in the coming year, always claim back the tax you're owed by HMRC. Average refunds in the building game can come to thousands of pounds. Get in touch with RIFT, get your claim rolling and get back what is yours in 2021.

Contact RIFT Legal Services: 01908 516016 or visit: <https://www.riftlegalservices.co.uk/>

CSCS cards take the online leap

Most people in construction are familiar with the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards. It's the card that provides proof that individuals working on construction sites have the appropriate training and qualifications for the job they do on site.

Following the introduction of an online application service last year, CSCS has now announced the launch of a new virtual card and app.

Alan O'Neile, head of communications at CSCS said: "A virtual CSCS card is the same as a plastic CSCS card but stored within the My CSCS app on a mobile phone or tablet, rather than in a construction worker's wallet or pocket.

"Virtual cards benefit the cardholder and their employer by providing both with instant access to the individual's training and qualification records and eliminating the need to carry a physical card on site."

Virtual cards also cut the delivery time of a CSCS card from a few days to just a few moments. While a traditional plastic card takes a few days to process and deliver, a virtual card can be downloaded to the My CSCS app as soon as an application is approved, and payment taken. The virtual card can then be used immediately on site before the plastic card has arrived in the post.

Similar ideas already exist in other aspects of life; you can board a plane using a virtual boarding pass or make a payment using a virtual, contactless version of your bank card.

Alan O'Neile continued: "Virtual cards are the next logical step in modernising the CSCS service. Virtual cards will improve safety and efficiency on construction sites by making it easier to

Mark Thomas



The new My CSCS app will make it quicker and easier to apply for and receive your CSCS card

check that workers hold the appropriate qualifications and training for the job they do on site."

CSCS is keen to highlight to employers that virtual cards are safe and secure but, just like the traditional plastic card, they should always be electronically checked using the free Go Smart software. This is to ensure the card is valid and to confirm that the holder has the appropriate training and qualifications for the job they are doing on site.

The virtual card is stored in the My CSCS app which is available on Android and Apple devices via Google Play and the Apple Store.

As well as storing the virtual card, the My CSCS app has many other benefits that

include enabling card holders to manage their personal details and the ability to get in touch with CSCS's Customer Service team.

The My CSCS app is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, providing card holders with access to the information they need when they need it.

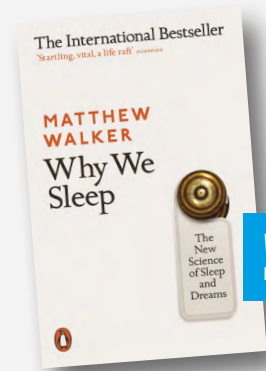
Both the My CSCS app and the virtual card are free to download and free to use, the cost of a CSCS card remains at £36.

If you wish to apply for a card, CSCS recommends using the online service. Applying online is more convenient and quicker than applying over the telephone. Visit www.cscs.uk.com/mycscs to find out more about virtual cards and the My CSCS app.

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

Books

Why We Sleep by Matthew Walker



Matthew Walker is a professor at Harvard and is an expert on sleep. What he doesn't know about how and why we sleep and how it affects our brains isn't worth knowing.

Why We Sleep is essential reading for all trade unionists

His book *Why We Sleep* should be a compulsory text for all union activists in any sector where workers undertake long hours or shift work.

In short a lack of sleep means that we can't concentrate at work and are far more likely to make mistakes or have accidents.

In one memorable section Walker argues that driving when suffering the effects of sleep deprivation is more dangerous than drink driving (not as though he is advocating the latter). When drunk your responses are slowed, while if you experience a micro sleep you have no control whatsoever. The book further describes how a lack of sleep impacts on both our physical and mental health.

In truth there is nothing in the book which most people did not already, know or suspect. The strength of the book is that it explains exactly how and why a lack of sleep impacts on our health from a scientific basis. Such information should be invaluable when arguing about excessive hours and oppressive shifts in the workplace.

Why We Sleep should be required reading in tackling ill health and long hours in the workplace.

Barckley Sumner

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@unitetheunion.org

Radio

The Archers Radio 4

Readers of *buildingWorker* may wonder if I've lost my senses in writing a review of *The Archers*. Yet the programme has a public service tradition. A recent and highly compelling story line involved modern slavery.



The scandal of Modern Day Slavery has hit Ambridge

The programme's producer worked closely with the advocacy team from Hope for Justice drawing from their experience supporting victims.

The 'Ambridge' slave master is builder **Philip Moss**, a mild mannered, middle aged bird-watcher. The slaves are three British vulnerable young men with learning or mental health disabilities. Blake, Jordon and Kenzie were homeless when Moss seized the opportunity to enslave them.

Referred to by the dehumanising term "the horses" Moss sold the men on to another trafficker, in Blake's case for £20 as "damaged goods" following a workplace accident.

According to the Global Slavery Index there are up to 136,000 modern slaves in the UK hidden in plain sight.

The Archer's producer is honing in on the Ambridge clients who benefited from 'mate's rates' and charitable pro-bono work. Most are anguished by their complicity yet my guess is we all know of undercutters and some of us are all too aware of those with a fondness for suspiciously cut-price labour.

Moss will be brought to justice as a slave master, yet from my own home I see 'home improvements' undertaken with no regard to safety by workers who by birth and employment status are almost certain to be vulnerable.

We all have a responsibility not to turn a blind eye whether within our own communities or at site level.

Concerns about modern slavery should be reported to a specialist helpline on 0800 121 700.

Gail Cartmail

MEMBERSHIP FORM GB

Please use capitals

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Forename _____ Title _____
Surname _____ Gender _____
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Home Tel _____ Mobile _____
Email _____

About Your Job

Employer/Company Name _____
Job Title _____
Work Address _____
Postcode _____ Work Tel. _____

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 _____
Date apprenticeship due to end _____
 Driver Care (a separate Driver Care application form will be sent to you.)
Date apprenticeship started _____
Date apprenticeship due to end _____

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 4-weekly Monthly
Payroll No. _____

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.unitetheunion.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 _____
Account Number _____
Name(s) of Account Holder(s) _____
On the selected day of the month: 7th 14th 21st 28th

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

28 April 2021

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' MEMORIAL DAY



**Remember the dead
fight for the living**

JOIN UNITE TODAY

Contact your Unite rep(s) or regional officer for events in your area