



W/AGE RAGE

The Minimum Wage & Young Workers

**STUC Youth
Committee
2019**



W/Age Rage

The UK's Minimum Wage laws allow workers to be paid less based on their age, even if their job, skills, and experience match those of colleagues. The law devalues young workers and allows employers to exploit their labour on the cheap. Young workers in Scotland frequently contact the Better Than Zero campaign and the STUC Youth Committee to express their anger about this lawfully permitted 'discriminatory' pay.

Rising anger, both at employers and the Government, is registered in the increasing numbers of young people joining trade unions. Through Better than Zero, they are developing new ways to take collective action against those employers who use the bare legal minimums to keep labour costs low. To support these initiatives, the Youth Committee decided to investigate the reality.

The STUC's youth committee recently surveyed 100 people working in care homes, bars and restaurants, retail, the postal service, local authorities, fast food outlets, call centres and cinemas in order to find out the sectors of the Scottish economy in which wages vary based purely on age.

FINDINGS

Many employers consider it to be in their interest to limit wages for young workers to the minimum legal amount. **55% of respondents said that their employer does this.**

So, the government are legally allowing young workers to be paid less than their counterparts, and many employers think it is ok to use this unethical law to their advantage, despite the fact that these minimum pay levels negatively affect young workers' ability to live.

Over a third of respondents live outside the family home and have to pay their own housing costs. **58% said they find it difficult to afford the basics in life, such as food, transport and bills.**

A number of respondents mentioned that they had debt, ranging from £450 to £26,000.

A young waiter working in Dundee is paid £4.20 an hour as they are under 18. The waiter said that they sometimes can't afford the basics in life.

A third do not get paid holidays; two-fifths do not get paid for staff training.

A young worker at a popular restaurant chain said they are required to put money in to cover a float every shift.

A third have to pay for their work uniform, and 5% are required to cover the costs of mistakes they make at work, such as broken equipment, customer complaints, or till shortages.

At a Kirkcaldy hotel a waiter under the age of 18 is paid £4.20 per hour and has to pay for their uniform as well as any till shortages or mistakes, which are deducted from their pay.

Another waiter at a top restaurant in Glasgow is paid less than her counterparts because of her age. She also must pay for her uniform and for transport home at night. She says that she sometimes can't afford the basics in life.

Half of respondents are not in a union. Of those who are in a union, only 6% said that their employer pays the youth differential wages in a unionised working environment. For other respondents youth differentials and poverty pay represented the reality of their working life. This shows not just the importance of young people joining unions, but the need for young people to act collectively to secure better terms and conditions.

GETTING ACTIVE IN YOUR UNION

Notably, young people working in supermarkets, such as Morrisons, Sainsbury's, the Co-op and Tesco, do not receive a 'youth rate'. This is because a lot of people working in these supermarkets are members of their union, USDAW. Through their union, the staff have collectively bargained with their employer to abolish these lower youth rates and to give all workers a fair rate of pay.

The survey confirms the reasons why young workers are organising with unions. Too often young workers are shouldering the burden of rising living costs whilst employers, facilitated by the Government, get away with poverty pay to maintain their profits.

But two trends suggest a more positive future. First, youth membership of trade unions has risen for the first time in a generation. Second, wages have started to rise in lower-paid sectors of the economy. Combined, these factors put young workers in a stronger place to win better pay, rights, and respect.

Wage Rage will continue to grow, and above all, these results demonstrate that when young workers join and take part in a union, they can buck the trend of unfair pay. Just look what the women of Glasgow did last year to secure their equal pay...

Get involved!

Sign up for training to take control in:

Stirling: 29th April at the Stirling Hotel, 10am - 4pm

Dundee: 14th May at Abertay University, 10am - 3pm

Glasgow: 16th May at the STUC 10am - 4pm

For more information visit betterthanzero.scot or email cpeden@stuc.org.uk

