

# **Why Unions Work - A Summary**

**Unions Work Launch, April 19<sup>th</sup> 2004  
Why Unions Work ... the evidence**

There is no contradiction between strong active unions working in defence of their members and modern forward-looking unions expanding the services they offer. Whilst unions are protecting workers against unfair treatment, they also work to strengthen the Scottish economy. The majority of Scotland's top 25 listed companies recognise a trade union and Scottish unions top the list for partnership agreements in the UK.

Members continue to welcome and support union intervention in the wider economy. However, the first point of contact for potential new members will still be in the workplace on issues of importance to them as individuals or as groups of workers, which is why the Scottish trade union movement has been asking members why unions work for them.

### **Why members say that unions work for them**

Recruitment and retention of members in Scotland still centres on the traditional, 'bread and butter' trade union role. However, in recent years, new avenues have been opened as unions widen and deepen the scope of their operations. In particular, the new generation of lifelong learning and safety reps provide a hitherto unexplored vein of trade union activity.

### **Support at work**

- Union members say that their strongest reason for joining a union is "Support if I had a problem at work", 72% give this as a key reason for membership.
- Scottish trade unions have won a very significant sum for their members over the past year at court and tribunal. Many more cases have been won prior to the tribunal stage. The actual figure will be announced in the General Secretary's Speech to Congress on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> April.

## **Pay and conditions**

- Union workers receive between 7% and 10% better wages than non-members.
- Unionised workers receive, an average of 5½ days extra paid holiday entitlement per year
- Job security is higher for workers in trade unions
- Since 1997, trade union have helped to deliver 21 different new positive laws for working people

## **Equality bargaining**

- Women trade unionists, on average, earn £8.37 per hour whilst the mean hourly wage for female non-unionised members is £6.25
- The pay gap between white and non-white employees is narrowed by 9% when workers are union members
- Unionised workplaces have better family friendly policies in every category. A unionised workplace is twice as likely to have family friendly policies.
- A third of unionised workplaces monitor selection procedures to identify indirect discrimination, this drops to less than one in ten where there is no union.
- Among the five major reasons lesbian and gay workers gave for being able to be openly lesbian or gay at work was their unions ' commitment to lesbian and gay issues

## **Health and Safety**

- Workplaces with union safety reps are twice as safe as those where there is no employee consultation on safety.
- Every 20 minutes, an accident is prevented in a Scottish workplace through the work of union health and safety reps.
- 280,000 workplace injuries have been prevented in Scotland since Health and Safety reps were introduced 27 years ago.

## **Workplace Education**

- In Scotland there are now over 900 Union Learning Reps.
- In 2003, 3 out of every 10 new Union Learning Reps were being brought into trade union activity for the first time and the majority (59%) were women.
- Whilst only 8% of workers in workplaces with 25 or fewer employees are members of trade union, 16% of union learning reps work in companies of less than 50 employees and the number is growing
- In the first year alone (1999) the Scottish Union Learning Fund (SULF) funded 5358 training needs analyses. SULF has now provided £3m for 43 learning projects involving 25 unions.

A full version of research document: "Why Unions Work" is available on the Unions Work website, [www.unionswork.org](http://www.unionswork.org) or by contacting the STUC.