

Trade Union Official

Trade Union officials (TU officials) represent the interests of members of their trade union and speak for them in negotiations with employers. They work to improve the pay and working conditions of their members.

The Work

You could be:

- visiting places of work to get new members or to help elect shop stewards and training new shop stewards
- representing an individual member when under threat of discipline or dismissal
- attending a tribunal to represent a member who is claiming unfair dismissal
- representing a group of members when pay is reviewed or a company is paying off staff
- speaking to groups of members or the media
- negotiating with employers over pay reviews or redundancies
- writing reports on matters affecting the workforce and developing campaigns and strategies
- working as a learning representative and promoting learning programmes to members
- representing the membership or the trade union movement on bodies such as a local enterprise company or development agency.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the trade union for which you work
- the demand for the job.

Starting salaries for local organisers are usually in the range of £25,000 to around £30,000 a year. Regional organisers can earn between £40,000 and £55,000 a year or more.

Conditions

- You would be based in the offices of a trade union.
- You would travel around a lot to workplaces, meetings and conferences, including spending time away from home.
- You would normally work 35-37 hours a week.
- There would be a lot of overtime, often unpaid.
- You might have early starts, and evening and weekend work.
- The work might be stressful and confrontational at times and you might have to make unpopular decisions.

Getting In

- There are no formal entry requirements, but entrants usually have a degree (SCQF Levels 9-10) or a professional qualification.
- Any degree subject or professional qualification would be acceptable, but subjects such as accountancy, business studies, economics, industrial relations, journalism, law, politics and sociology may be particularly useful.
- For jobs at national head office level, you would normally be qualified with relevant experience in a specialist area such as employment law, media, research, health or education.
- Entry requirements for a degree are normally 4-5 Highers.
- You normally need a lot of previous experience with trade unions, perhaps as a shop steward. This would give you detailed knowledge of union work at branch level.
- Paid or voluntary work experience in areas such as advice work, student politics or campaigning will give you an advantage when applying for jobs.
- You usually need a driving licence.
- This job is not suitable for school leavers because you need to have trade union experience.

What Does It Take

You should be:

- able to get on with people from all backgrounds
- committed to supporting people at work and protecting their rights
- confident, assertive and polite
- a good judge of character
- able to express yourself clearly in speech and in writing
- determined and persistent.

You should have:

- good leadership skills
- strong negotiating skills
- confidence when speaking in public
- excellent organisational skills.

Training

- You would normally train on the job, combined with attendance at relevant training courses.
- There may be opportunities to study part time for relevant qualifications such as SVQs.
- The [Trades Union Congress](#) (TUC) runs short training courses through Unionlearn in subjects such as employment law, health and safety, negotiating and bargaining, equality and pensions.
- The [Scottish Trades Union Congress](#) (STUC) has its own [Scottish Union Learning website](#) offering programmes for union reps and regional officers and to provide learning opportunities for the Scottish workforce.
- The TUC Organising Academy runs courses across the UK, including at some Scottish colleges.

Getting On

- There are fewer trade union officials than in previous years and promotion prospects may be limited.
- You could become a trade union organiser for a region or for the whole of Scotland, or move to a post at UK level.
- There are a few openings to work for the international trade union movement.
- You may be able to move into human resources or personnel work in the private or public sector.
- Some trade union officials go into politics as a local councillor or member of the Scottish or UK Parliaments.

Contacts

Statistics

Employment Status : Not available this career.

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

Predicted Employment Statistics : Not available this career.