



**A summary of research on
'Young Workers and Trade Union Membership'**

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Young Workers in Scotland...

There are nearly 570,000 16-24 year olds in Scotland – representing 11% of the Scottish population.

Forty-three percent of 16-24 year olds are full-time or part-time employees whilst 34% are students. Almost 80% of students also work part-time.

Twenty percent of young people in Scotland are employed in the retail sector and the hotel and restaurant sector employs a significant proportion of young workers (9.5%). Public administration, education and health sectors are the least likely attractive sectors for young people, with 5.5%, 4% and 8% of young workers respectively employed in these sectors.

Young Trade Unionists...

The starkest challenge facing the Scottish trade unions today is the recruitment of young people.

Young workers can be the lifeblood of the trade union movement in Scotland. Yet at present only 5% of workers aged 16 to 20 are members of a trade union growing to just 11% for 16-24 years olds. 14% of full-time employees of this age are members whilst only 5% of young people who work part-time belong to a trade union. Consequently, union membership is ageing at a faster rate than the labour force as a whole.

Young peoples' attitudes to trade unions...

One of the reasons often offered as to why young workers do not become members is that these workers have negative attitudes towards trade unions. However, research demonstrates that 63% of employees under 30 believe strong trade unions are needed to protect the working conditions and wages of employees, compared with 47% of workers aged 30 and over.

Despite the positive attitudes towards unions, a lack of knowledge about trade unions is displayed when young people are asked how much they know about trade unions. 42% responded that they knew nothing at all whilst a further 44% said that they didn't know very much.

More positively, only 9% of young people have unfavourable attitudes towards trade unions.

Young peoples' exposure to trade unions...

To a significant extent, lower membership among young people is a product of the types of jobs in which they are employed. Young workers tend to have a different industrial distribution from older workers, disproportionately represented in those sectors of the economy which are not well unionised.

60% of young non-members work in workplaces with no union presence. Similarly, the most cited reason for these young workers not joining a trade

union is 'my employer does not allow or recognise unions' indicating that the most important predictor of union membership is recognition in the workplace.

Even when in organised workplaces, young workers are still less likely than older workers to be union members. In 2002, a study showed that one-third of young non-members employed in unionised workplaces had not been asked to join. Further surveys have shown that 37% of non-members under age 30 in unionised workplaces were not asked to join compared to 15% of those aged 30 and over. This is compounded further as 28% of young non-members also cite "never got round to joining" and "not interested enough" as reason for not belonging to a union.

Conclusion...

Much encouragement can be derived from these findings. Young people are not less positive about unions and are likely to join when and if they are approached within an unionised workplace.

However, given the greater chance of young people gaining employment in non-unionised workplaces, a comprehensive strategy for recruiting them to trade unions cannot rely solely on a workplace strategy. Scottish trade unions and the STUC must also focus their message on schools, colleges and universities. Equally, strategies for unionising less well organised sectors must be high on the agenda of any campaign to recruit young people to trade unions today.