



Changing the world
of work for good

Creating good work in South Yorkshire

Liz Blackshaw

Regional Secretary - Trades Union Congress

The challenge facing South Yorkshire



A task forty years in the making

We all know steel was foundational to South Yorkshire's economy. Between 1978 and 1981, 20,000 jobs were lost. The British Steel local workforce declined 80% by 1988. Managed decline of the mining industry, driven through the 1980s by an ideological government, closed ten collieries in the Sheffield coalfield alone.

Both industries benefitted from a century of trade union organization, with collective bargaining underscoring decent pay and working conditions. There is no replacement for the good work these industries provided, and the TUC continues to advocate for UK steel and new, balanced domestic energy production.

However, we also must look at the jobs that exist now in South Yorkshire, the need for good work, and the benefits trade unions can bring – **looking to the good jobs in our industrial heritage to help inform our approach to the future.**

The challenges still ahead

Despite government promises, English regions and devolved authorities are swimming against the tide: 13 years of austerity and underinvestment is undermining opportunity and holding back South Yorkshire.

- **Wages are still not meeting needs:** In 2017, Sheffield was named 'Low Pay Capital' of the UK. Between Feb 2020 and Aug 2022, in-work poverty rose, with in-work Universal Credit claimants doubling to 51,000.
- **Child poverty:** All of South Yorkshire has seen child poverty rise at least five points between 2014/15 and 2020/21, outstripping national average
- **Skills gap:** In Doncaster and Barnsley, the proportion of residents with no qualifications is higher than the national average. Meanwhile, over-50s are more likely to be economically inactive.

Unequal working conditions in South Yorkshire

Similarly, we won't improve working conditions for good without national change. We need to see Zero Hour Contracts banned and a New Deal for Working People, to guarantee rights from day one on the job.

- Sheffield has a rate of Zero Hour Contracts (ZHCs) of 3.4%, Rotherham 5.3%, Doncaster 2.2% and Barnsley 3.2%. This is compared to a UK average of 3%.
- Sheffield City Region has a disproportionate share of employment in health and social work, transport and storage, and retail, all have a higher share of Zero Hour Contract employment. The residential care sector is a major culprit.
- The TUC also see this as an equal rights issue, with BME women nearly three times as likely to be on zero-hours contracts as white men.

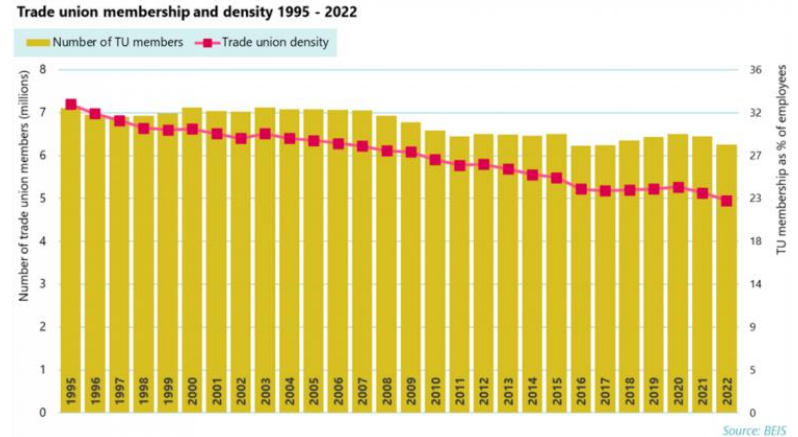
The trade union picture

Government attacks on union rights, including Minimum Service Levels, undermine our ability to represent workers and take industrial action.

Unions have faced two decades of decline, losing over 250,000 members between 2020-22.

Density and membership remain low in the private sector, and in the public sector, density is under 50% for the first time.

Good jobs require strong, healthy unions, and we must build and diversify the union movement to reverse this trend.



The end of UnionLearn

- The number of adults participating in further education and skills training has halved (-48%) since the Conservatives took office in 2010.
- The Learning and Work Institute found that the number of adult learners taking courses plummeted from 3.2 million in 2010 to 1.6 million in 2021.
- The Union Learning Fund (ULF) was established in 1998 to promote activity by trade unions in support of the objective of creating a learning society, and supported over 40,000 dedicated Union Learning Reps (ULRs).
- However, since 2010 there have been steady cuts to UnionLearn provision, and in 2021 government funding ended permanently.

But... we know unions work

TUC research shows that union members in Britain earn around 5 per cent more than equivalent non-members on average; the premium is slightly higher in the public sector than in the private sector.

Wages in unionised jobs are also less widely dispersed; unions have historically helped to limit wage inequality.

Having on-site worker representatives dealing with health and safety is associated with workers being exposed to lower health and safety risks.

Workplaces in which unions negotiate, or are consulted, over equal opportunities (EO) issues are more likely to have EO practices in place.

The union skills premium

- Union Learning Reps (ULRs) positively influence training levels, with effects most likely where ULRs spent a substantial amount of time on their role, were supported by a workplace Learning Centre or Union Learning Fund, were valued by managers, and were able to consult or negotiate over training.
- A significant proportion of managers say ULRs have a positive effect on training.
- 80% of learners feel that union learning has given them skills that are useful in their current job
- **Better skills means good jobs.** Workers who regularly take part in union learning are 3 times more likely to get a pay rise.



Opportunities
for South
Yorkshire

Investment and green jobs

- TUC has set out proposals for an “Invest in our future” programme, which includes £28bn/year options for government investment in sustainable power, industrial upgrades and public transport
- We know investment breeds investment. Germany committed €8bn in public financing to green hydrogen projects, generating €20bn in private investment.
- Labour has committed to our plan for a publicly-owned power company, to help improve the UK’s energy supply, create good jobs, and bring down household bills.
- We support expanding the public transport network with more frequent and reliable zero-emissions buses, trams and trains; with public control and ownership.

Devolution and new partnership with workers

Unions represent working people across South Yorkshire. **Our interests are their interests**, and we are open to partnership in your plans for delivering the best for the region. There are already great examples of good practice. In the West Midlands, the TUC takes a seat on the Combined Authority board.

In Wales, we've seen an ambitious devolved agenda for workers – with Fair Work Forums established in areas like social care (which secured a real living wage guarantee for care workers) and retail. The Welsh Government has also passed primary legislation to cement its social partnership approach. This has borne fruit in areas like transport – where the Welsh Government reached early agreements with train unions and avoided industrial action.

In South Yorkshire, we sit on the Business Advisory Board, Regional Employment and Skills Committee, and we helped establish One Yorkshire, a cross-party, cross-sector, cross-regional committee seeking greater powers for Yorkshire.

TUC Principles

This February, the trade union movement agreed new national principles for our approach to devolution, including:

- Solidarity between regions and nations
- Tripartite working with authorities, workers and employers
- Calling on devolved authorities to develop locally-relevant employment standards.
- Further devolution only where there is a clear case that it will benefit all working people.
- Devolved funding to be fair and fully take into account socio-economic conditions.

Read more: www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/trade-union-agenda-devolution

Employment charters as a lever for change

We call on devolved authorities to lead the way in promoting and implementing decent work, including by institutional mapping and awareness-building of employment/industrial law, in collaboration with unions.

We ask devolved authorities to embrace innovative means to develop locally-relevant employment standards and other mechanisms to secure good work within their jurisdiction.

Authorities should embrace options to ensure their implementation and impact, including by harnessing powers secured within devolution deals (e.g. local skills development and training), and by requiring compliance with them during public procurement.

Early efforts to achieve this have been made through Employment Charters, in devolved authorities across the UK.

Charter examples

Greater
Manchester



London



West Yorkshire



North of Tyne

The pros and cons of the charter approach

Pro

- Encourage good jobs if utilised well, with compliance funding/measures necessary to enforce standards
- Should be a requirement for public procurement, introducing incentive for the private sector
- Opportunity for tripartite working and co-production with unions

Con

- Not a replacement for union recognition or collective bargaining
- Poor enforcement of standards harms overall reputation
- Requires external oversight with appropriate funding to operate effectively

The logo consists of the letters 'TUC' in a bold, sans-serif font. Each letter is rendered with a 3D effect, appearing to be made of a translucent material with a white-to-purple gradient. The letters are slightly offset from each other, creating a sense of depth and movement. The 'T' is on the left, 'U' is in the middle, and 'C' is on the right. The background is a solid, deep purple color.

Changing the world
of work for good