

Key Considerations When Managing Trade Union Relations

Understanding the existing representation arrangements and the issues open to collective bargaining can help employers develop a constructive and legally compliant approach.



Union Recognition

Establish whether the union is already formally recognised and, if so, which employees it represents. Recognition may arise through a voluntary agreement or the statutory CAC procedure.



The Recognition Agreement

Review any existing recognition agreement carefully. It should identify matters open to negotiation, representation arrangements and the procedures to follow when disagreements arise.



The Bargaining Unit

Identify which employees form part of the bargaining unit. This determines who the union represents for collective bargaining purposes and can significantly affect how negotiations operate.



Collective Bargaining

Be clear about which matters the union is entitled to negotiate. Statutory recognition ordinarily covers pay, hours and holiday, although voluntary agreements can provide for a wider range of subjects.



Employee Representatives

Ensure managers understand the rights of union representatives, including relevant rights to time off and appropriate facilities to perform their duties.

-  **Information Sharing**
Consider what information representatives reasonably require for collective bargaining. Employers should have clear processes for dealing with requests while protecting genuinely confidential or commercially sensitive information.
-  **Workplace Communication**
Maintain communication with both union representatives and the wider workforce. Not every employee within a bargaining unit will necessarily be a union member.
-  **Industrial Relations**
Address disagreements at an early stage where possible. Clear escalation procedures, negotiation and external conciliation can help prevent workplace disputes developing into industrial action.
-  **Workplace Access**
Employers should prepare for further changes to trade union rights. From 30 October 2026, new provisions are expected to introduce a statutory framework for trade union workplace access and a duty to inform workers of their right to join a trade union.



Chester Office
Knights Court
1 Weaver Street
Chester, Cheshire
CH1 2BQ
01244 354 800



Liverpool Office
3rd Floor
No. 4 St Paul's Square
Liverpool
L3 9SJ
0151 321 0000