English for European trade unionists

Level Two

Unit 7

Trade Union Organisations

The ETUI-REHS is financially supported by the European Commission
Looking ahead

In this unit you will hear and read about the advantages of membership of a trade union organisation.

You will also have the opportunity to talk about trade union structures.

You will write summaries and e-mails.

Vocabulary

- Pay-related words
- Trade union organisation and activities

Grammar

- Revision of the simple past tense
Here are some comments from members about their trade union organisation:

“Thanks to the union my hours have been reduced. Now I have more time to spend with my family”.

“Thanks to the union, we have good training courses. I have more skills now”.

“It’s good to know that the union has good contacts at a European-wide level. We exchange a lot of information with colleagues in other countries”.

“I joined the union because at work union members make you part of a family. We all support each other”.

*Put these statements in order of importance and compare your order with that of other colleagues.*

*Add some statements from your own experience.*
WORKING WITH READING 1

Exercise 7.1  The Trades Union Congress (TUC)

Read the text below and check with a partner that you understand the functions of the TUC - the only national trade union confederation in the UK.

The TUC:

- brings Britain’s unions together to draw up common policies
- lobbies the Government to implement policies that will benefit people at work
- campaigns on economic and social issues
- represents working people on public bodies*
- represents British workers on international bodies, in the European Union and at the UN employment body - the International Labour Organisation
- carries out research on employment-related issues
- runs an extensive training and education programme for union representatives
- helps unions develop new services for their members
- helps unions avoid clashes with each other
- builds links with other trade union bodies worldwide

(www.tuc.org.uk)

* bodies = organisations

Exercise 7.2

Match the following verbs from the above text with their definitions. Check back with the text to see if the definition you choose will give the right meaning. The definitions are listed in the wrong order!

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>to conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>to lobby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>to campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>to carry out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>to run</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- How many Confederations are there in your country?
- Use some of these verbs to describe the functions of your Confederation.
WORKING WITH SPEAKING 1

Study box

Asking for and expressing opinions
What do you think of (about) ... (the new agreement)?
Well, I think it’s OK but ...
What’s your opinion of ... (the training centre)?
In my opinion it’s very comfortable. What’s your opinion?

You can express your opinion in a strong way:
I really think that this is an excellent solution.
I’m (very) sure that this is a good agreement.

Or in an uncertain, cautious way
I think perhaps (maybe) ...
I’m not sure but I think that ...

Exercise 7.3  Some words to support your opinion

Can you add any other words to the list below?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OK</td>
<td>great</td>
<td>poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>satisfactory</td>
<td>wonderful</td>
<td>unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alright</td>
<td>excellent</td>
<td>awful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reasonable</td>
<td>fantastic</td>
<td>terrible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not too bad</td>
<td>brilliant</td>
<td>horrendous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study box

“-ed” or “-ing”? 

I was interested to know about the castle...
The castle was (very) interesting.

She was amazed to know about the difference
The difference was amazing.

They were amused to know about the story.
The story was amusing.

We were disappointed to hear about the result.
The result was disappointing.

We were shocked to hear about the accident.
The accident was shocking.

I was horrified to hear about the explosion.
The explosion was horrifying.

✔ Note that in these examples, the –ed form of the adjective is used to describe a person, while the –ing form is used to describe an event, or other non-animate noun.

Now ask each other’s opinion of some of the following:

- local food
- local weather
- a film
- a musical group
- a famous person
WORKING WITH LANGUAGE

The simple past tense

The simple past tense of regular verbs is formed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pronoun</th>
<th>verb +ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>worked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you</td>
<td>worked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>past tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>arrive</td>
<td>arrived</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employ</td>
<td>employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finish</td>
<td>finished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>join</td>
<td>joined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work</td>
<td>worked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 1: Unlike the simple present tense there is no difference this time between he, she, it and the other forms (except with the verb “to be” - see Note 3)

Note 2: Irregular verbs have various forms

Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>past tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>come</td>
<td>came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>did</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get</td>
<td>got</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
<td>gave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make</td>
<td>made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td>said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>thought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For further examples of irregular verbs see Study Guide
Note 3: The important verb to be is very irregular:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I was</th>
<th>we were</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>you were</td>
<td>you were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/she/it was</td>
<td>they were</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 4: Normally there is an expression of past time with the simple past tense:

Examples:
1. I joined the union in 1995.
3. He arrived at 8 am this morning.
4. She went to work yesterday.
5. It finished early last week.
6. We attended an English course last April.
7. You all made good speeches at the meeting in Budapest.
8. They had a good time last night.

The simple past tense: negative form

The negative form is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pronoun</th>
<th>did not/didn’t</th>
<th>verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I, you, he, she, it etc</td>
<td>did not/didn’t</td>
<td>arrive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 5: All verbs have the same negative form with the exception of “to be” which is irregular:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I was not/wasn’t</th>
<th>we were not/weren’t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>you were not/weren’t</td>
<td>you were not/weren’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/she/it was not/wasn’t</td>
<td>they were not/ weren’t</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 6: We usually say the didn’t form (more informal) and we usually write the did not form in formal letters. Similarly we usually say “I wasn’t” etc. and we sometimes write “I was not” etc.
The simple past tense: questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>did</th>
<th>pronoun</th>
<th>verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>did</td>
<td>I, you, he, she, it etc</td>
<td>work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note 7**: All verbs have the same format with the exception of “to be” which is irregular: was I? were you? were we? were they?

**Exercise 7.4  Gap-filling**

*Put the verb in the correct form of the simple past tense in the following sentences (note there are negatives and questions)*

**Examples:**
(We - work)       We **worked** very hard last week.
(Paolo - not)     Paolo **didn’t attend** the meeting.
(They - come?)    **Did they come** yesterday?

1  Our union (start) ................. in 1991.
2  (join) ........ all the workers the organisation?
3  Last year we (try) ............ to get better conditions.
4  Our representatives (ask) ........ the management for a meeting.
5  The meeting (not end) ............... with agreement.
6  Eventually we (go) ............... on strike.
7  The strike (last) ............... for two weeks.
8  We (receive) ............... a lot of support.
9  In the end the management (agree) ........ with our demands.
10 We (be) ............... very happy.
11 Gillian (not like) ............... the new boss, so she (ask) ............... for a transfer.
12 They (work) ............... at weekends, because they (want) ............... more money.
13 Peter (not get) ............... promotion, because he (not work) ............... hard enough.
14 (get?) ............... Angela the job?
15 I (not get) ............... home early last Monday.
**Study Box**

**Pronunciation**

The pronunciation of the “ed” ending of the past participles varies as follows:

- **Most verbs have a /d/ sound**
  - join: joined
  - arrive: arrived
  - work: worked
  - explain: explained
  - enjoy: enjoyed

- **Verbs that end in “k” or “sh” or “ch” have a /t/ sound**
  - work: worked
  - finish: finished
  - ask: asked
  - talk: talked
  - watch: watched

- **Verbs that end in “t(e)” or “d(e)” have an /id/ sound**
  - want: wanted
  - affiliate: affiliated
  - represent: represented
  - attend: attended
  - decide: decided

Practise these sounds using some of these verbs to exchange experiences with a partner about your jobs. For example:

- I decided to join the union 6 years ago. I talked to a union rep. She explained the benefits of membership....

Now talk to each other about what you did last week using a variety of regular and irregular verbs.
WORKING WITH WRITING 1

Summary writing

In writing a summary or note it is not always necessary to provide the full form of the verb or to write a full sentence.

For example:

Some important dates in Frank Thompson’s career:

- 1990 Joined union
- 1995 Elected branch secretary
- 2000 Moved to London
- 2003 Attended French course, Paris
- 2006 Elected Vice-President of teachers’ union

➢ Think of 5 or 6 important dates and events in your career. Write a list of these and then exchange your list with a colleague.

➢ Now ask each other questions based on the lists of events. Remember to use the question words: when? where? why? what? or how?
WORKING WITH READING 2

A National Confederation

Exercise 7.5

Read the following text and answer the questions that follow.

SAK— the largest of Finland’s three trade union confederations

SAK is a confederation of 21 trade unions in industry, the public sector, transport and private services. These unions have a total of more than one million members, and promoting the emotional and material welfare of these individuals is the prime concern of SAK.

The members of SAK-affiliated trade unions work in such a wide range of occupations that it is virtually impossible to define the profile of the typical member. Local authority childminders, flight attendants, bus drivers, waiters, builders and paper mill employees are all working in sectors organised under the broad SAK umbrella.

Just under half of the members of SAK-affiliated unions work in industry, about one third work in private services and one quarter work in the public sector. About a quarter of these members are under 35 years of age. Forty-six per cent of the total membership of SAK-affiliated unions are women.

The sovereign policymaking body of SAK is the Congress, which convenes every five years. In the intervening years the organisation is run by a General Council that holds two regular meetings each year.

The day-to-day work of SAK is the responsibility of an Executive Board of 22 ordinary members. The Executive Board appoints some of its members to serve as a Steering Committee, and it determines the composition and internal duties and responsibilities of the SAK Management Group.

Various specialist committees are appointed consisting of representatives of affiliated trade unions. Advisory Committees also assist the Executive Board and serve as points of contact for the unions in their sectors, especially in matters of collective bargaining.

(www.sak.fi)
1 From which sectors does SAK draw its members?
2 What is the meaning of “affiliated union”?
3 How does the composition of the membership compare with your organisation?
4 What is the role of
   • SAK’s Congress?
   • SAK’s Executive Board?
   • a steering committee?
5 Compare the organisational structure SAK with that of your confederation.

WORKING WITH VOCABULARY 2

Pay-related vocabulary

Study the definitions and examples of the following terms:

1 Benefits: something useful or profitable which you receive from an organisation. For example, cheaper holidays, legal advice. Also money provided by governments. For example, social security, unemployment benefit, maternity benefit.
2 Deductions: amounts taken from pay, for example, for taxation, social security.
3 Net pay: money paid after deductions, sometimes called “take-home pay”.
4 Pay-claim: a demand for an increase in wage or salary (see below).
5 Pay-deal: an agreement to pay employees at a certain rate (level).
6 Salary: In the UK this refers specifically to a regular payment, per month or year, to a professional or white-collar employee (compare the more general word “wage”).
7 Wage(s): a more general word to signify regular payment in return for work. Usually used in the plural “wages”. Often used to refer to weekly payments to manual or blue-collar workers (compare “salary”). Also used in “minimum wage”.
8 Subscription: an amount of money paid for membership of a union or other association, for example, a sports club.
9 Bonus: extra payment for good performance or special circumstances.
10 Overtime: additional hours of work for which there may be additional pay at a higher rate.
Exercise 7.6  Gap-filling

*From the vocabulary list above, choose the best word to fill the gaps in the following sentences. Use each word once only.*

*Example:* If you join the union, you get *benefits* such as free legal advice.

1. Did you pay your ……………………………………… to the union?
2. Teachers’ annual ………………… did not keep pace with inflation last year.
3. Anji thought that the ……………………………………… for tax were too high.
4. The union wants to see an increase in unemployment ………………..
5. The union has submitted a ………………… to the employers
6. Migrant workers are usually only paid the …………………
7. Due to an increased demand for the company’s product the workers were asked to work ………………..
8. The employees think they deserve a ………………… because they have achieved a huge increase in productivity.
9. As a result of the increase in tax Pedro’s ………………… is now less.
10. After long negotiations the union reached a ………………… with the employers.

WORKING WITH SPEAKING 2

*Giving emphasis to key words*

When we *speak* English, as well as giving *emphasis* to the main *syllable* in a word, we also *stress* the *key* words in a sentence. The *key* words are *those* which provide us with *information*. This is *important* as it *helps* the *listener* to know which words to *listen to* and to focus *attention* on. There may be *few* words or *many* words and the *stress* will *vary* depending on the *emphasis* you wish to *give* something.
Exercise 7.7

Now read the above text giving emphasis (stress) to the words in bold.

With a partner practise the following examples with emphasis (stress) on the words in bold and discuss the differences in meanings:

- My **name** is Maria Lago.
- **My** name is Tommy Harrison.
- My name is **Gábor** Kordas.
- My name is **Michal** Alexander

Now trying to say these three words in three different ways to express three different meanings

I love you

Exercise 7.8

Look at the following sentences. Decide which are the key words, underline them and then practise reading the sentences to a partner with emphasis on these key words:

a. You are all very welcome.

b. I would like to introduce my colleague, Hans Tauber.

c. I would like to thank you for the warm welcome you have given us today. It has been a wonderful experience to have this opportunity to be here. I hope this is the beginning of a greater partnership between us all. Thank you so much.

d. Our company covers three main industries: the first and the largest is oil and gas, the second is shipbuilding and the third and smallest industry is paper. I work in the oil and gas industry so I am going to talk about the key issues in that sector at the moment.

➢ **Make up a short speech of welcome.**

➢ **Propose a toast to your hosts.**
WORKING WITH LISTENING 1

Exercise 7.9  The advantages of union membership

Bill, the union shop steward, is talking to Anna, a new employee at the Vibratex factory

*Listen, and then answer the following questions*

1. How long has Bill worked for Vibratex?
2. Is Anna a union member?
3. Does Anna work full or part-time?
4. What rights does the union protect?
5. What particular problem could Anna have?
6. Why is safety an important issue at Vibratex?
7. What sort of courses does the union offer?
8. How can the union help with spare time activities?
9. What does Bill suggest to Anna?
10. What other advantages of union membership could Bill have added?

- Do you think Bill makes a good case for membership of his union?
- Do you think Anna will join the union, and if so, why?
Exercise 7.10  The case of the GMB

Read the text and answer the questions that follow.

Every day of the year the GMB offers protection at work and solves problems for GMB members. The GMB provides back up, representation and advice on every issue related to members' life at work.

This system of support can be provided in a number of ways, often through one of our 25,000 union representatives: GMB trained individuals who give their time voluntarily to help their workmates. Backing up the reps are full time GMB Organisers.

The GMB employs a team of experts on a range of issues including legal specialists, health and safety experts, pension specialists, human resource management staff and experts on terms and conditions. In fact, if you need advice and support about anything to do with work the GMB can help you.

GMB's fundamental approach is that together we can achieve more than we can do on our own. Whether you're looking for better pay, improved childcare, realistic work-life balance, a change to long working-hours, the elimination of poor health and safety or simply a desire for respect from your employer; together our voices are much more powerful than one voice alone.

(www.GMB.org.uk)

1  How are members of the union supported in the workplace?
2  What is the role of experts?
3  Make a list of the benefits of joining the GMB.
4  Compare your list with a partner.
5  Can you suggest any other benefits of joining a union?
6  From the GMB web site what do you learn about the union’s membership?
**WORKING WITH WRITING 2**

**Exercise 7.11  A diary**

Write a brief diary for your time on this training course. As with summary writing (see Working with Writing 1 above) we can omit the pronouns if the meaning is clear.

**Example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>• Finished work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Left information for colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Packed luggage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>• Arrived training centre 15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Met other participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Had welcome drink &amp; dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Bed early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>• First session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>• Useful ....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise 7.12 How workers are represented at the workplace.

In a group discuss the meaning of the terms in italics and then compare this system of workplace representation with the systems in your own country.

(1) Grass-roots level representation in the UK is usually through the shop steward or union representative (rep). In most workplaces trade union members belong to a (2) branch of a national union. The (3) rank and file members elect the branch (4) officers, chair, secretary etc. as well as the union rep and possibly a health and safety rep. These people are all (5) unpaid volunteers although they may be entitled to have some time off work for union duties.

Where there is more than one trade union in (6) an undertaking then a shop stewards’ committee headed by a (7) convenor represents the employees as a group in discussions with management.

Technical support, for example, regarding legal matters is provided by (8) full-time union officials initially at local or regional level. The key issues for the branch are usually working conditions, working practices and (9) grievances.

Wage negotiations in the public sector are conducted at national level. In the private sector (10) collective bargaining is generally at company level.

Exercise 7.13 Elected or appointed?

Indicate which of the union posts in the box below are elected and which are appointed in your organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>president</th>
<th>vice-president</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>head of the international department</td>
<td>shop steward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>health and safety officer</td>
<td>general secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>office secretary</td>
<td>legal adviser</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


WORKING WITH LISTENING 2

Exercise 7.14  Ken and Brenda’s trade unions

Brenda and Ken are discussing their unions.

Listen and then answer the following questions

1. How long has Ken been a member of UNISON?
2. When was UNISON formed?
3. How many members does it have?
4. In which sectors are most of the members employed?
5. What has been the impact of privatisation on union members?
6. In which sectors are AMICUS-AEEU* members employed?
7. How many members are in AMICUS-AEEU*?
8. What are main problems for workers in Brenda’s union?

*In 2007 AMICUS merged with the TGWU to form Unite

➢ Compare the problems of workers in your country and those in the UK

WORKING WITH VOCABULARY 2

Exercise 7.15  Trade union activities

Match the verbs in column 1 with the nouns in column 2 to describe some trade unions activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>build</th>
<th>a. new members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>campaign for</td>
<td>b. politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>conduct</td>
<td>c. international links</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>lobby</td>
<td>d. negotiations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>recruit</td>
<td>e. higher wages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you have checked these combinations in the Study Guide, write five sentences using these collocations.
WORKING WITH SPEAKING 3

Exercise 7.16 Discussing trade union organisations

You are going to discuss your union organisation with a partner. Take some time to prepare answers to the following questions before you ask each other these questions:

- What is the name of your trade union organisation?
- When was your union organisation formed?
- When did you join the organisation?
- How many members are there?
- In which sector of the economy do members work?
- What are the main problems faced by union members in your country?
WORKING WITH WRITING 2

Exercise 7.17  E-mails

E-mails are usually short and informal messages. The format is already established on the computer.

For the subject you only need to put one or two key words, for example, Report, Meeting, Proposal, English Course.

In your first message to someone it is usual to address them as Dear... (Manolo, Ute) and to finish with a greeting: Best wishes (or Regards),.... (Lionel, Truus). With well known colleagues and friends more informal greetings can be used such as Hi... or Hello....

On the other hand if messages are going backwards and forwards quickly, then these opening and closing phrases can be omitted.

Now write a short e-mail to a colleague in your workplace to reply to the following message:

Dear Erika,
Hope the course is OK. What did you do yesterday?
Regards
Karolina

Exchange e-mails with colleagues:

- requesting information about working time in your organisations.
- requesting information about holiday entitlements in your organisations.
- requesting information about the number of women employed in your organisations.
ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Key facts about trade unions in my country

Prepare a poster to help you explain the key things you think colleagues from other countries need to know about trade union organisation in your country. For example, the number of confederations, federations, unions; the size of the membership, union density in your country; important problems.

Display your poster and answer any questions from your colleagues about it.

Activity 2

Trade union recruitment (role play)

Scenario: You are invited to make a presentation to a group of young people about the benefits of trade union membership.

Work with a group of colleagues to discuss your approach and to prepare your presentation. Each member of the group needs to be responsible for part of the presentation.

The other colleagues will play the part of the audience and will ask questions if invited to do so.
Looking back

In this unit you

- listened and read about the advantages of union membership
- discussed union organisations, particularly your own organisation
- practised the simple past tense and a lot of work-related vocabulary

You should now be able to

- talk about past events
- explain your own union organisation