

# Joining a Union

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*“Unionized workers are better paid than non-unionized workers...”*

## Why, how and who?

This is a brief guide to joining a union as a professional archaeologist, why DF recommend you do and how you do it.

### Why?

There are multiple reasons to join a union as an archaeologist. The following are all good reasons; however this is not an exhaustive list.

#### Collective bargaining- on pay, on conditions and on redundancies:

In a workplace where there is a recognition agreement between the employers and a union representing the employees, there is a legal need to engage the union reps in discussions on scales of pay rises and large-scale redundancies. Several companies also have regular meetings between the management and the union to discuss concerns and suggestions from the workforce. This allows for collective bargaining- the union reps will push for the wage increases asked for by their members, and through discussion with the management of the company, a level of pay will be decided on. The more individuals in the unit that are part of the union, the stronger hand the union reps have in arguing their side of the argument. The Broadbent Institute has shown that unionized workers are better paid than non-unionized workers and enjoy better conditions and better health and safety conditions.

Similarly through collective bargaining it is possible to improve working conditions for staff. It is not uncommon for individual staff to take a suggestion on improved working conditions or safety measures or similar to management to be told there is no appetite for this within the workforce, or that it would not affect many people. The use of collective bargaining allows the workforce to call this out and to work alongside management to see that any improvements or changes are successfully implemented.

In cases where large scale redundancies are proposed, the employer must meet with union reps to discuss how and why these are necessary, and how if they must happen they should be undertaken. The union reps will again fight for the best deal for their members, and the more members they have the better they can do this.



In smaller units or those without union recognition the best way to achieve recognition is to increase the number of union members within the company, while also highlighting the benefits of union recognition to management- i.e. improved communication with staff through the union, more engaged and happy staff with a lower staff turnover than non-union workplaces and the ability to send out information quickly and successfully.

### Advice and legal representation on employment rights, disciplinary issues and workplace conflicts

In a union, you aren't alone. Unions provide free advice on your workplace and employment rights, as well as providing support and information should you have a disagreement with your employer that cannot be solved in house.

This, along with the legal advice in cases of dismissal or redundancy, is the most useful day-to-day reason for joining a union. Companies have and will continue to make mistakes in staff management and support. The union allows you to have a louder voice in these disputes. It also allows members to educate themselves about the employment rights they are due, and to point out when those are not being given. This is particularly important around maternity and paternity rights of employees.

This, similarly to legal support in cases of unfair dismissal, is something that can only be claimed if you were a member of the union at the time of the dispute.

**Legal support in cases of unfair dismissal or poor practice redundancies**  
Your union membership entitles you to legal support and advice through the union should there be a case of unfair dismissal or illegal redundancies. Archaeological companies, as noted above, can and do make mistakes during the redundancy process and unions have helped large numbers of archaeologists successfully protest their redundancy. Similarly in cases of unfair dismissal the union can support you and provide legal advice as part of your case against your employer. As noted above, this can only be claimed if you were a member of the union when the unfair dismissal took place.

### Supporting the union movement

Alongside the benefits to yourself, it is important to note the wider relevance of unions to employees across the industry. A strong union means better conditions for all, and also prevents the erosion of benefits already gained through previous strong collective bargaining. Without the presence of a strong union to balance the demands and will of the employer, working conditions can and will decline. We live in a capitalist market driven society, not a philanthropic utopia. More importantly, unions are only as strong as their membership, so joining, getting involved and becoming a rep not only benefits you, but also your peers.



### Additional benefits from union membership

Many unions also have additional benefits for their members, such as insurance deals, reduced price membership of clubs and prize draws, lotteries and raffles, as well as deals with retailers and other businesses.

### How?

Joining is incredibly easy. You pay a monthly subscription, which in most cases can be waived or significantly reduced in periods of unemployment if you contact the union. Subs are generally around £10 a month for those on site assistant wages. While this may seem like a chunk of money you don't need to spend, the above benefits can easily outweigh the financial costs, particularly if through them you gain a higher wage. If you want to make even more difference you could become a rep. Training courses for reps are available and free, and give you a good grounding in your workplace rights

### Who?

Archaeologists are variously represented by:

- Prospect (<https://www.prospect.org.uk/our-industries/branch/f181?ts=1261>);
- Unite (<http://www.unitetheunion.org/>);
- Unison (<https://join.unison.org.uk>);
- UCU (<https://www.ucu.org.uk/>);
- and IWW (<https://iww.org.uk/>)

Prospect has a dedicated archaeologists branch, with union recognition at MOLA, Wessex Archaeology, PCA, GAT, DAT, Oxford Archaeology and York Archaeological Trust; and members at most other units, with a nationwide branch to support those not at a unit with union recognition. It has a strong history of supporting archaeological workers in cases of unfair dismissal, as well as engaging in collective bargaining at those units it is recognized at. It offers rep training and support for members, as well as other benefits.

Former and current council units, including Local Authority archaeologists often have a tie to Unite or Unison through their public service branches. There are not dedicated archaeologists branches, however both Unite and Unison offer the same legal advice and support as any union, as well as rep training and are two of the largest unions in the UK. They are not currently recognized at any archaeological unit.



UCU has collective bargaining rights over those at any university unit where the university recognizes UCU as the union (the vast majority of UK universities do). Because of this, it is unlikely that you will be able to get another union recognized by your employer other than UCU. If you are working for a university unit, it is worth checking if they recognize UCU, or if the university branch is able to help you to get recognition within your unit.

IWW is not recognized by any UK archaeological unit but provides good rep training opportunities as well as support their members through legal cases and on employment disputes.

