



The journal of the Unity Trades Union

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10th Birthday for national minimum wage

In April, Business Secretary Lord Mandelson celebrated a decade of success for the national minimum wage and pledged tough government action to support workers' pay rights.

Now standing at £5.73 for those aged 22 and over, the minimum wage has helped millions of UK workers get an honest day's pay for an honest day's work.

Lord Mandelson said: "The minimum wage has been a huge success for 10 years and is there to help make sure that workers are treated fairly,

whatever the economic climate.

"We are determined to protect the rights that everyone in the UK is entitled to - this is a basic matter of fairness and helps ensure a level playing field for business.

"Before it was introduced, there was no limit on how little employees could be paid and I am sure that no-one could now imagine a return to those times. Our new penalties mean that anyone caught underpaying their employees faces an automatic penalty."

The adult rate of the minimum wage has risen by 59% since its introduction in April 1999 - from £3.60 to the current rate of £5.73. Around one million people benefit each time the rate rises.

Automatic penalties for employers who underpay came into force in April, ensuring that anyone caught flouting the law faces a stiff penalty.

The most serious cases of non-compliance will be able to go to trial in a Crown Court,

which will have the power to impose an unlimited penalty.

Unity General Secretary Geoff Bagnall said: "The minimum wage has helped raise the living standards of thousands of families across the UK since its introduction in 1999.

"It has been an integral part of making the UK a fairer society and is an important part of protecting some of Britain's most vulnerable citizens. We must continue to work together to develop the minimum wage, which has a vital part to play in shaping the economy of the future.

"We welcome the new penalties introduced, which will help to ensure that there is no hiding place for rogue employers underpaying their staff. We are absolutely determined to ensure that every worker can get what they are due."

April also saw new annual holiday rules come into force, raising the statutory entitlement for all UK workers from 24 days to 28 days a year.



General Secretary's message

Dear Colleagues,

I don't need to remind you that this year started exceptionally badly in Stoke-on-Trent.

Immediately after Christmas, Wedgwood, Jesse Shirley and Hudson & Middleton went into administration. Although all three companies were subsequently bought out of administration, over 300 of our members lost their jobs. Many of them lost thousands of pounds of their contractual entitlements as well.

Unity has raised this issue with our local MPs as it is completely unacceptable for our members to lose what is rightfully theirs in these circumstances. In our view this is something that should be addressed immediately. If our government appears to tolerate a situation where it is 'one rule for one and another rule for another', it will spell electoral disaster.

On a brighter note Unity continues to recruit new members, with the current membership figure almost the same as the 2008 end-of-year figure. Hopefully we will not experience any further job losses.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the family and friends of the late Kevin Farrell, Chief Executive of the British Ceramic Confederation, who sadly passed away in April.

Kevin led the employers for many years and was an excellent advocate for our industry. Always regarding Unity as an equal partner, he led many joint delegations both to Westminster and to the EU in Brussels and Strasbourg. Kevin will be sadly missed by everyone associated with the industry.

Geoff Bagnall
General Secretary

UNITY SPECIAL OFFER

FREE UNIVERSITY COURSES FOR UNITY MEMBERS

For many, the need to re-skill can be daunting. As well as the excellent work being done by the Ceramic Resource Centre, there is now help available at Staffordshire University to get members back up to speed on their English and Maths.

This award-winning course is totally free and is not a basic course. It helps people to progress and gives them confidence to go on to study modules or courses at Further Education

and Higher Education level.

The English course runs from 20th of July to the 28th of August, from 10.00 am. - 12.30 pm. It will give you a qualification equivalent to a GCSE 'C' in level and scope.

The Maths course runs from 27th of July to 28th August, 10.00 am - 3.00 pm., and again is equivalent to



GCSE 'C' in level and scope.

Both courses are free, including the learning materials. There are no exams at the end and modules are

assessed as you go along.

These courses have won the regional NIACE awards for their innovative approach to returning to learning.

Taking part will not affect your benefits and could lead

to a complete change of career. For more details call Angela Tappin or Lynne Tolley on 01782 292776 or 01782 292747.

Staffordshire University also runs a 'Step up to HE' course, which again is part-time, giving returning learners a chance to learn study skills.

There is a free phone number, 0800 801 222, so why not call and see if these courses can help you progress in your job or career.