

Unions are run by employees to give them a stronger voice at work and in the community. By working together with their unions, employees have improved working conditions and safety in the workplace.

Unions have won many important changes for workers like holiday pay, equal pay for women, sick pay, superannuation, workers' compensation and the 8-hour day.

Unions provide members with information, advice and support so that people can be fairly rewarded for their work.

Every worker – part-time, full-time, casual, temporary, apprentice, trainee or contract – can join a union.

At first there were unions for each different trade (hence the term trade unions). Over time these merged to form larger unions that cover a major industry or group of industries – known as 'super unions' or industry unions.

Now there are 46 major unions in Australia – with over 2 million members. The biggest union is the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA) with 214,680 members including employees of Coles, Woolworths, Bunnings, Hungry Jacks, Pizza Hut and McDonalds.

Activity 1.1 Know which union

It's best to join the union that negotiates the wages and conditions for your employer or industry. That union can play a powerful role in helping you get all your rights and entitlements. That union will also be involved in efforts to improve wages and conditions in your workplace or industry.

Use the *UNIONS – Which union for your job* fact sheet to find the correct unions for these jobs. Sometimes there will be more than one option, so list them all.

Waiter/Waitress	Teacher
Retail assistant	Public servant
Child care worker	Police officer
Builder's labourer	Farm worker
Hairdresser	Clerical worker

part 2

what are unions doing next?

While unions have helped workers to get lots of really important changes in the past, they are still working hard to secure better conditions for all workers.

Some current union wins and campaigns are:

The new paid parental leave scheme – eighteen weeks leave for the primary caregiver – whether they are a full-time, part-time or casual worker.

The Fair Work laws – from 1 January 2010, young people have become better protected by a strong set of national standards, awards and rights.

Unions are also always working towards things like equal pay for all workers, safety in the workplace and better working conditions.

Activity 2.1 The future of work

Check out the *UNIONS – Union achievement* fact sheet. Unions have helped to secure many improvements for employees. Stuff like the 38 hour week, paid leave, sick pay, equal pay for women and superannuation. But that was in the past – what improvements do you think might be needed in the future? Write your ideas in the right hand column below:

	Past	Present	Future
Working hours	Long hours six days per week	38 hour five day week is common	
Holiday pay	One and two weeks paid holidays	Four weeks paid holidays	
Wages for women	Women got paid much less than men for the same job	Equal pay for women, but on average women earn less than men	

Activity 2.2 Myth busting

Check out the *UNIONS – What is a Union?* fact sheet and pick which statements are MYTH and which are FACT.

Every worker can join a union	FACT or MYTH
Unions just go on strike all the time	FACT or MYTH
Unions only help older workers	FACT or MYTH
It's illegal to be discriminated against for joining a union	FACT or MYTH
All union members have to support the Labor party	FACT or MYTH
Unions provide members with advice, support and information	FACT or MYTH
1.9 million Australian workers are union members	FACT or MYTH

It is the right of every Australian worker to join a union and it's really easy to do. Some of the good things you get by joining are:

- Protection against unfair treatment at work
- Better wages and conditions
- Member benefits
- Helping to get better conditions for all Australian workers.

Activity 3.1 Look up a union you could join

Use the internet to find out more about a union that covers the employees in a job that you might be interested in doing. A good place to start is the *UNIONS – Which union for your job?* fact sheet www.worksite.actu.org.au/fact-sheets/unions---which-union-for-your-job.aspx

Do a Google search for the union name and find their official website. Use the website to answer the following questions – most unions have a 'About the union' page.

Full name of union

Acronym or abbreviation

When did the union start?

About how many members does it have?

What is a current issue for the union?

OPTIONAL QUESTION

How much does membership cost per fortnight for a student or recently qualified person?

Do more (extension activities)

1. Create an ad (poster, short video, rap etc.) encouraging other young people to join a union. The more creative they are the better.
2. Use the *UNIONS – Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU)* fact sheet to find out all about the group that oversees Australian unions. Then take on the ACTU Quiz www.worksite.actu.org.au/quizzes/actu-quiz.aspx to see if you know your stuff.
3. Debate the future of work:

Hold a class debate on one of the following topics:

- a. In the future, the standard working week will be less than 38 hours
- b. In the future, the workers will get more paid holidays
- c. In the future, the average wages of women will equal the average wages of men
- d. In the future, there will be more union members

You can hold it in front of another class and they can decide which team wins.