
Tech Work and Trade Unions

Scottish Tech Workers' Network

What do you like about your job?

What would you change about your job, if you could?

For the things you like about your job: How would you keep them from changing?

For things you wish were different about your job: How would you change them?

Tech has **second the lowest union density** of any sector.

The tech sector is about to grow significantly– the Scottish Government have invested £42 million in scaling up the tech industry, which they hope will be a **significant pillar of the Scottish economy**.

Reskilling

Fatima's
next job
could be
in cyber.

(she just doesn't
know it yet)



Amazon laid off **ten thousand** corporate and technology jobs at the end of 2022

Meta's leadership laid off **eleven thousand** employees at the end of November 2022—and then, four months later, it laid off another **ten thousand**

In January 2023, Microsoft announced it would be reducing its global workforce by around **five percent**, a move that would cause **ten thousand** people to lose their jobs

Two days after Microsoft's announcement, Google announced that **twelve thousand workers** would be laid off

After months of legal drama, the billionaire Elon Musk finally purchased Twitter at the end of 2022. After completing the sale, he began gutting the social media company, firing approximately half of his employees—roughly **3,700** salaried workers—over email. Entire teams at Twitter were hollowed out, with some learning they'd been dismissed in the middle of the night. Some people were “accidentally” fired, and then asked to return so they could continue working on their revenue-generating products. And then some of them were fired again

- You Deserve a Tech Union, Ethan Marcotte

The global pandemic created an unprecedented demand for online goods and services, which dramatically buoyed the tech industry's profits. By the end of 2021, the industry was booming; it literally couldn't hire quickly enough. Tech companies were opening new job positions faster than nearly any other industry, competing aggressively on salary, benefits, and other perks to attract qualified candidates. Heck, Amazon even doubled its salary caps at the start of 2022.

By the end of 2022, things could not have felt more different. In February, a land war began in Europe, causing countless deaths and sparking a widespread humanitarian crisis. But in meaner terms, that tragedy also upended global markets and supply chains, causing inflation and costs of living to skyrocket [...] since then, mass layoffs have shaken our industry. According to the website [Layoffs.fyi](https://layoffs.fyi), an open tracker of layoffs in the tech industry, more than 160,000 workers in the tech industry lost their jobs in 2022

- You Deserve a Tech Union, Ethan Marcotte
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This is about a **power relation** between employers and workers

Voting with your feet only works if they need you more than you need them

Tech workers are workers. High pay and good conditions don't change that and aren't guaranteed in perpetuity

Common Issues for Tech Workers

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- Crunch— work/ life balance— being asked to sign out of the working time directive.
 - Intellectual Property
 - Job security
 - Career Progression
 - Fair and transparent pay
 - Equality, diversity, and inclusion
 - Ethics/ social impact of the work your employer does or asks you to do.
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Recent labour issues in tech

Wave of redundancies

Return to the office/ flexible work

Ethical concerns

AI

Loss of autonomy as start ups grow/ are bought out



What is a Trade Union?




What is a Trade Union?

An organised association of workers in a trade, group of trades, or profession, formed to protect and further their rights and interests.

Why join a Trade Union?

- Representation if you have a problem at work
 - Negotiation of your pay and conditions
 - Protection for taking industrial action
 - Solidarity across the sector
 - Sector representation to government & employers
 - Training
 - Power in the hands of workers
 - Collaboration with other unions
 - An average, of 8% more per hour
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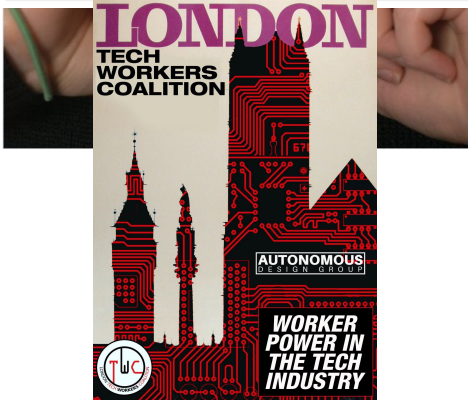
 Bernie Sanders @SenSanders

I congratulate the workers of Kickstarter, the first major tech company to vote for a union.

These workers are setting an example for the entire industry. Tech employees deserve job security, strong wages and benefits, and a voice in their companies.

State of the union: Is it time for devs to unionise?

 Marie Dealessandri 11th December 2018 Development News



Google walkouts showed what the new tech resistance looks like, with lots of cues from union organizing

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 Jillian D'Onofrio @JILLIANDELS



A (Very) Short History of Tech Workers Organising

The Tech Workers' Coalition

The “Never Again” pledge

We, the undersigned, are employees of tech organizations and companies based in the United States. We are engineers, designers, business executives, and others whose jobs include managing or processing data about people. We are choosing to stand in solidarity with Muslim Americans, immigrants, and all people whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by the incoming administration's proposed data collection policies. We refuse to build a database of people based on their Constitutionally-protected religious beliefs. We refuse to facilitate mass deportations of people the government believes to be undesirable.

Google walkout over sexual harassment.

Amazon workers demanding zero emissions by 2030.

Many of these have a common issue at heart: workers want a say in their work and want to contribute to a better and fairer society.

Your Right to Join a Trade Union

You have the right to:

- Join a Union
- decide to leave or remain a member of a union
- belong to the union you choose, even if it's not the one your employer negotiates with on pay, terms and conditions
- belong to more than one union.

Your employer is not allowed to:

- offer you a benefit to leave a trade union
 - threaten to treat you unfairly if you don't leave a union or stop doing union activities.
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What have workers achieved through unionising?

What have workers achieved through unionising?

- a national minimum wage
- the abolition of child labour
- improved worker safety
- improved living standards by reducing the number of hours in the working week and encouraging a healthy work/life balance
- improved parental leave
- equality legislation
- better protection of migrant workers and a reduction in exploitation
- minimum holiday and sickness entitlements.

Union membership and Recognition

You can join a union **even if there is no recognised union** at your workplace, and you can ask an organiser at your union to help you organise your coworkers and file for recognition.

Recognition may be the ultimate reason for organising but along the way you will benefit from the personal support and advice that a union can offer you.

Any worker can join a union and that union can support and represent them at work. For example, as a Prospect/Bectu member, you have access to free legal advice and representation should you ever need it—including at grievance or disciplinary hearings.

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<https://twitter.com/ScoTechWork>

<https://www.meetup.com/en-AU/sco-tec-hwork/>

Tech Workers Charter



Transparency in work

Transparent pay and responsibilities

- Defined pay grades with clear objectives, responsibilities, and paths for progression.

Security against redundancy

- Transparency on funding and financial health.
- Offering permanent contracts wherever possible.

Sensible non-competes

- Non-compete clauses that don't lock employees out of future jobs.

Quality and partnership at work

Right to switch off

- No opt out of the Working Time Directive.
- Collaborative approach with workers to establish rules around what **on call**, **flexible** work, and **fair hours** should entail.

Right to Intellectual Property

- By default, workers should be allowed to own their personal code and re-use it.
- The employer forsakes rights to any project done outside of contracted work.

Flexible working hours

- Options available for **remote** work and **part-time** work.
- This should include progression objectives that do not exclude non-traditional working.

Tech for good

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies

- Tracking pay gaps and committing to closing them
- Policy and training around inclusion of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010.
- Dropping 'grade requirements' and university degrees as 'essential' and taking CVs on the merit of experience and education.

Ethical protections

- Workers must have the right to withhold their labour from projects that are of widespread ethical concern.
- Whistleblower protections.

Sustainability in Tech

- Divest from fossil fuels, with a commitment to a Just Transition
- Sustainability central to the greatest extent possible throughout the supply chain.

Join the movement...

prospect.org.uk/tech-workers/



Further reading:
You Deserve a Tech Union,
Ethan Marcotte, 2023

'The Making of the Tech
Worker Movement', Ben
Tarnoff, *Logic Magazine* (online)