

# Legal help

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## A members' guide to UNISON legal services

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This guide is designed to tell you about the legal services you and your family may be entitled to and how to access them.

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## The UNISON legal service

In UNISON, we recognise that good quality legal services are one of the key reasons our members join a union.

You want legal support and high quality services available when you need them. And of course, you also want the reassurance of knowing that your union is tackling the big legal issues that affect all our members.

Our legal service is organised into two teams:

**1**  
**The employment rights team** handles the union's employment law issues.

Our team of in-house lawyers will concentrate on the legal issues which affect large numbers of our members. Where it is necessary to take claims to the employment tribunal this will be usually be done by our approved lawyers, Thompsons.

**2**  
**The membership legal services team** deals with a wider range of legal services available to individual members and their families.

## Legal services at a glance

Our specialist legal service provider is Thompsons Solicitors, who have worked alongside the trade union movement for over 80 years. Under our arrangements with Thompsons, our branches have access (via their regional office) to local, high-quality employment, personal injury and criminal law advice. We closely monitor the quality of their work and we have agreed standards of service to which they must adhere.

Thompsons Solicitors have represented members referred to them by UNISON for many years. In consideration of this, and their commitment to the trade union movement as a whole, Thompsons provides branch training and legal surgeries, legal advice and

sponsorship of some union events and activities to help UNISON grow and develop our legal services.

You can find more information about Thompsons on their website: [thompsons.law.co.uk](http://thompsons.law.co.uk)



We provide the following legal services to members and in some cases also to their families.†

	Members	Members' families
<b>Employment advice</b>	✓ Free	X
<b>Accidents at work</b> including industrial and work-related diseases	✓ Free	X
<b>Accidents outside work</b> including road traffic accidents and holiday accidents	✓ Free	✓ Free
<b>Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA)</b> work-related injury due to a crime of violence	✓ Free	X
<b>Criminal law</b> work related criminal offences	✓ Free*	X
<b>Wills</b>	✓ Free Incl' joint will	✓ Special rates
<b>Conveyancing</b>	✓ Special rates	✓ Special rates
<b>30 minutes legal advice</b> on any non work issue (including immigration issues)	✓ Free	X
<b>Clinical negligence</b>	✓ Free**	✓ Free**

† Defined as any relative including partners, in-laws and step-relatives.

\* Where available we expect our lawyers to obtain state funding. The funding of legal aid contributions thereafter is discretionary.

\*\* Free initial consultation, special rates thereafter. For further details on these services please see our guide *Legal services – a branch guide to what we offer*

## Access to legal services

The simplest way to access most services is by contacting:



### UNISONdirect

Phone 0845 355 0845

Textphone 0800 0 967 968

Lines open 6am to midnight

– Monday to Friday and

9am to 4pm – Saturdays

It would be useful to have your UNISON membership number available when calling.





## Employment

If you want employment advice, you should contact your branch. The branch may refer the matter to your regional office, who will deal with it or refer it to UNISON's lawyers if appropriate.

Please note that members or branches must not instruct lawyers direct as UNISON will not pay any costs incurred.

## Personal injury

You can also contact the personal injury service by visiting our website and completing an accident form at [unison.org.uk/benefits/legal.asp](http://unison.org.uk/benefits/legal.asp)

## Criminal law

Contact UNISONdirect or outside their hours in an emergency the UNISON 24 hour criminal helpline on 0800 587 7530.

## Wills

A wills questionnaire can be downloaded from Thompsons' website: [thompsons.law.co.uk/unison-wills.htm](http://thompsons.law.co.uk/unison-wills.htm)

## Eligibility

**To qualify for legal help you will have to show that:**

- you were a member for the qualifying period before you knew you needed legal help and you sought that help from UNISON
- your subscriptions are up to date
- you continue to pay subscriptions while the case is ongoing.





Special rules apply to mass litigation equal pay cases and to industrial disease cases (see our guide *Legal services – a branch guide to what we offer* for details or contact your branch representative for more information).

Legal support will continue as long as the case has reasonable prospects of success as determined by the union or its approved lawyers.

Please note advice and/or representation is at the absolute discretion of UNISON. We may withdraw legal help if you do not follow legal advice given or fail to co-operate with our lawyers by responding to letters or phone calls.

## The process

### What happens after you contact UNISON?

#### Employment claims

Your branch secretary will discuss with you the next steps and may refer the matter to the regional office if necessary.

#### UNISONdirect

Once UNISONdirect has taken details of your case these will be forwarded to Thompsons for action.

Please note that our lawyers will inform your branch that they have received the case.

The branch will then check your membership details and confirm with membership legal services whether the requirements for legal assistance have been met.

#### Criminal helpline

An operator will take the details of your case and will pass them on to one of our criminal lawyers for appropriate action.

#### Wills online

If you fill out a downloadable wills form, you must specify that you are a UNISON member. Thompsons will then contact UNISON to validate your membership and inform us you are using the wills service.



## Contact us

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For more information or to join  
UNISON visit our website at  
**unison.org.uk**

or call

**0845 355 0845 (voice)**

**0800 0 967 968 (textphone)**

Lines open from 6am to midnight,  
Monday to Friday and  
9am to 4pm Saturday

