

## **Tackling Labour Market Injustice and Organising Workers: The View from a Northern Heartland**

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**TACKLING LABOUR MARKET INJUSTICE  
AND ORGANISING WORKERS:  
THE VIEW FROM A NORTHERN HEARTLAND**



Manchester  
Metropolitan  
University

Sheffield  
Hallam  
University

W/SERD

Sheffield  
Needs A  
Pay Rise



SHEFFIELD TUC  
Est. 1858

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# Executive Summary

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## Labour Market Injustices in The UK's Low Pay Capital

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This report, based on 42 interviews with workers, trade unionists and other stakeholders, examines the phenomena of low-paid and precarious work in Sheffield. It focuses on the factors driving the prevalence of such work (including the links with welfare reform), the experiences of workers in seven distinct employment sectors, as well as trade union responses to the challenges of organising in these areas. **The report also includes a major addition of a postscript focused on the impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic and how this relates to the wider findings of the study.**

### **The UK's 'Low Pay Capital' has been forged by deindustrialisation and austerity**

Low pay and insecure work, involving in many cases the denial of employment rights and justice, is on the increase in Sheffield. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), **the Sheffield City Region is the 'low**

**pay capital of the UK'**, having the highest proportion of workers on low pay compared with all other City Regions (as of 2019<sup>1</sup>). Take home wage is highly influenced by the nature of employment, which is increasingly being 'casualised'. Since the 2008 crisis precarious work has been on the rise in Sheffield: the numbers in part-time work, short-hours (working below 10 hours a week) and zero-hours contracts (ZHCs) are all above the national average. The share of part-time employees who reported being unable to find full-time work has also risen.

**A combination of deindustrialisation, financialisation and austerity has forged these labour markets that are dominated by low pay, low-skills and precarious working conditions.** Crucial elements of austerity are to attack and undermine trade unions and employment rights, implement substantial cuts in public expenditure and promote privatisation and outsourcing of public services. The Coronavirus crisis has reinforced this trend and

1. Calculated on the basis of those earning below 2/3s of the national median income: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/jobquality-indicatorsintheukhourspayandcontracts/2018>  
See also S Clarke (2017) Forging ahead or falling behind? Devolution and the Future of Living Standards in the Sheffield City Region Resolution Foundation <https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/01/Sheffield2.pdf>

exposed the Sheffield economy to greater insecurity and destitution (see below).

Precarity is concentrated among those groups that already face labour market disadvantage such as Women, Young People, Disabled People, Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BAME) and Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) workers – **a key issue is the lack of detailed knowledge of the experiences of disadvantaged groups in terms of welfare and employment in Sheffield.**

### **Welfare Reform Drives Low Pay and Precarity**

Government welfare reforms are having negative impacts on working age people in Sheffield as a result of harsher conditionality and benefit cuts, involving an average loss of £190 for low- and middle-income families. **Universal Credit (UC) involves a workfirst regime, signposting unemployed people into insecure and low-paid jobs.** Combined, this has contributed to the growth of the gig economy, ZHCs and exploitative working practices. Benefit levels are significantly below average wages and there is a trend towards a disappearing safety net.

### **Low Pay and Precarity Encourages Exploitative Working Conditions**

**In employment terms Sheffield's economy is dominated by low-paying sectors characterised by insecure work,** such as retail, food, social care, transport and storage, and sections of the public sector including education and health.

**Insecurity at work often means insecurity about working hours, short-notice cancellation of shifts and worries about pay.** But it also comes with a significant loss of rights; workers are missing out on key rights including maternity, the right to return to paid work after maternity leave, sick pay, holiday pay and rights to union representation in the workplace.

**The report reveals Sheffield workers routinely encounter a variety of adverse labour market conditions** ranging from underemployment to over-work, from 'wage thefts' to adverse mental health impacts, from lack of union representation to discrimination, bullying and harassment.

### **Trade Unions are Tackling These Issues, but Challenges Remain**

At the same time, **we are seeing trade unions and communities in the region developing innovative strategies to recruit and organise workers to combat employment practices which are more in keeping with the 19th than the 21st Century.**

Examples include the Unite campaigns targeting Sports Direct at Shirebrook, and TGI Fridays at Tinsley, as well as campaigns against ZHCs at the two universities.

Trade unions have also been at the forefront of:

- **Local organising campaigns (Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise)**
- **Partnership agreements in Retail (USDAW)**
- **Legal actions over self-employed status (GMB)**
- **Organising fast food and hospitality workers (BFAWU and Unite), couriers (IWGB) and warehouse workers (GMB)**
- **Challenging staff ratio levels and promoting Care Charters in social care (Unison and GMB)**
- **Standing up for welfare claimants (Unite Community and PCS)**
- **Creation of dedicated Anti-Casualisation structures (UCU)**

Nevertheless, challenges for trade unions remain, such as small and fragmented workplaces, high staff turnover, lack of employment rights or unawareness of employment rights, the susceptibility of precarious workers to victimisation, and a simple lack of trade union visibility.

## Key recommendations (for unions, devolved authorities, and national government)

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- Support the campaign for (at least) the Living Wage Foundation's Living Wage rate
- Support the campaign for 'living hours' in the form of secure contracts
- Support the campaign for supportive social security in line with the TUC's Welfare Charter
- National government to repeal the anti-trade union laws in order to strengthen worker voice
- Unions to establish Anti-Casualisation roles and structures (as the University and College Union)
- Unions to develop their structures for engaging young people (Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union)
- Unions and activists to establish cross-cutting campaigning groups to share knowledge, engage civil society and organise workers (such as Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise and Sheffield Stop and Scrap Universal Credit)
- Unions to build resources and capacity to recruit/ involve disadvantaged groups
- Unions to involve the wider community in organising and campaigning
- Devolved authorities and unions to make the case for inclusive economic growth

## Postscript on the Coronavirus Crisis: Precarity is the Pandemic

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In this section we examine how the issues described in the report have been refracted through the lens of the global Coronavirus pandemic. We examine the estimated impact on the national economy, employment and unemployment rates, the demographic profile of the workers most affected, and assess the adequacy of the existing and newly implemented support measures on offer. We then provide an overview of the impacts of the crisis on the seven substantive employment sectors reviewed in the main body of the report.

Before the Coronavirus crisis Sheffield's economy and employment situation was in an exposed position as a result of long term de-industrialisation and austerity imposed public expenditure cuts. The current crisis

shows up the vulnerability of significant numbers of workers. Whether you have had no option but to work without adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (whether designated a key worker or not) or whether you have been laid off or furloughed at sub-minimum wage rates, the various harms associated with the pandemic have disproportionately impacted upon those on low pay and precarious contracts. By virtue of this fact these harms have also fallen disproportionately on the working class, ethnic minorities and women. These are the predictable consequences of a lack of employment rights and bargaining power.

## Key recommendations (Coronavirus)

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- The newly afforded recognition of 'key worker' status, as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic, must be accompanied by decent pay and secure contracts<sup>2</sup>;
- Strengthen worker voice through promoting and removing barriers to trade unionism (in line with the proposals contained in the Institute for Employment Rights' Manifesto for Labour Law<sup>3</sup>);
- Implement the TUC's policy proposals on how safe returns to work should be regulated<sup>4</sup>;
- The government must undertake direct support of affected workers through raising the meagre levels of state benefit provided to those who have been made unemployed (beyond the recent increase of £20 per week) and reducing conditionality, in line with the TUC endorsed Welfare Charter<sup>5</sup>;
- Action needs to be undertaken to avoid the creation of a 'pandemic generation'<sup>6</sup>, which would include as a minimum investment in Further Education and in local unemployment advice services;
- As a matter of urgency, devolved local authorities, working with trade unions and businesses should develop post Coronavirus action plans which incorporate targeted measures on job retention and upskilling to combat low pay and insecure work.

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2 Berry, C. et al (2020) The Covidist Manifesto: Assessing the UK state's emergency enlargement, Manchester: Future Economies Research Centre. p. 26.

3 <https://www.ier.org.uk/product/manifesto-labour-law-towards-comprehensive-revision-workers-rights/>

4 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/tuc-proposals-ensuring-safe-return-work>

5 [https://nickplus007.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/welfarecharter\\_a5-full-version.pdf](https://nickplus007.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/welfarecharter_a5-full-version.pdf)

6 Berry et al, p. 28; Evans and Dromey, p. 20.

## Low paid and precarious work: Comparing the sectors in Sheffield

Retail	Food Service	Social Care
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 63% Part-time</li> <li>• £8.61 median hourly wage</li> <li>• Zero-hour and minimum hour contacts (not enough hours)</li> <li>• Lack of paid breaks</li> <li>• Performance related pay</li> <li>• Harassment and abuse</li> <li>• Union campaigns on employee safety (USDAW) and for living wage (GMB)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 66.7% Part-time</li> <li>• £7.93 median hourly wage</li> <li>• Zero-hour and minimum hour contacts (not enough hours/no consistency in hours)</li> <li>• Unpaid trial shifts and unpaid wages</li> <li>• Paying for your own uniform and safety equipment</li> <li>• Bullying/exposure to abuse and harassment</li> <li>• McStrikes (BFAWU), TGI Fridays strikes (Unite), Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise Organiser</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 41.5% Part-time (Human Health and Social Work)</li> <li>• £11.71 median hourly wage (Human Health and Social Work)</li> <li>• Minimum wage</li> <li>• Zero-hour contracts</li> <li>• Lack of training</li> <li>• Staffing levels and workload stress</li> <li>• Care Charters (Unison and GMB), localised organising (IWW)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Transport &amp; Logistics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17.9% Part-time</li> <li>• £12.53 median hourly wage</li> <li>• Platform working ('bogus' self-employment)</li> <li>• Failure to guarantee the minimum wage</li> <li>• Unreasonable targets/over-work</li> <li>• Providing your own vehicle</li> <li>• Sports Direct Shame (Unite), Respect ASOS workers (GMB), Deliveroo strikes (IWGB)</li> </ul>	<p>Download the report:  <a href="http://www.lowpaysheffield.com">www.lowpaysheffield.com</a></p>	<p><b>Call Centres</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wages rates can be as low as the national minimum</li> <li>• Agency contracts</li> <li>• Performance related pay</li> <li>• Intensive levels of surveillance</li> <li>• Abusive customers and managers</li> <li>• Stress and depression</li> <li>• Unions promoting call centre charters (Unison and CWU)</li> </ul>
<p><b>NHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 41.5% Part-time (Human Health and Social Work)</li> <li>• £11.71 median hourly wage (Human Health and Social Work)</li> <li>• Poor communication with management</li> <li>• Agency contracts</li> <li>• Lack of pay progression</li> <li>• Deskilling of roles</li> <li>• Employees working while ill</li> <li>• National collective bargaining (Unison, GMB and Unite) and local campaigning (Sheffield Save our NHS)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Higher Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 37.5% Part-time (Education)</li> <li>• £13.69 median hourly wage (Education)</li> <li>• Zero-hour contracts</li> <li>• Fixed-term contracts</li> <li>• Unrealistic 'comprehensive hourly rates'</li> <li>• Bullying and harassment</li> <li>• Anti-Casualisation officers and leverage campaigns (UCU)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Welfare Reform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work Capability Assessments</li> <li>• Universal Credit</li> <li>• Sanctions</li> <li>• Tax Credits</li> <li>• Lack of Job Centre support</li> <li>• Welfare Charter (PCS and Unite), public campaigning and direct action (Sheffield Stop and Scrap Universal Credit, Sheffield Disabled People Against the Cuts, Peoples' Assembly)</li> </ul>

Source: ONS (2019) [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk)





## Preface

Olivia Blake MP,  
Sheffield Hallam

**If we look back over the past few decades, we see a long trend of decline in wages, working conditions, and workers' rights. This decline has been exacerbated by the Tories' ideological austerity agenda and will likely be further exacerbated by this government's Brexit negotiations, given that those at the helm are no friend to the working class.**

But the decline of job quality and the accompanying rise in inequality didn't begin with the 2010 Tory/Lib Dem coalition, or even the 2008 financial crisis. It stems from a long line of neoliberal interventions into the market seeking to deindustrialise, dismantle the public sector, and deliver tax cuts for corporations, which led to a major historic shift in our economy from the 1980s onwards.

This has meant a proliferation of the service economy, privatisation of the care sector and the development of an exploitative gig economy, which claims flexibility for workers but means a return to employment practises that belong in the dustbin of history. Workers are having to fight for absolute basics. Not being paid between home visits, tips being kept and not distributed, and employers charging workers for their uniforms – wage theft is rife among Sheffield's low-paying employers. We have seen zero-hours contracts become the norm and part-time working soar among those who want to work more hours.

Thatcher's deindustrialisation was less a managed decline and more an out-and-out war waged against organised labour, with Orgreave serving as the most famous battleground. These attacks on trade unions made it much more difficult for workers to organise, and for unions to act as a bulwark against bullying bosses and exploitative employers.

In many ways Sheffield is archetypal of deindustrialisation, and the Steel City has never fully recovered from the devastation of the 1980s. The twin processes of deindustrialisation and deunionisation have resulted in the city now being dominated by low pay sectors characterised by insecure work.

Some do benefit from this state of affairs – corporations make huge profits by paying poverty wages. Global corporations like McDonalds and KFC are currently hoovering up wealth from our communities, forcing many into in-work poverty, reliant on Universal Credit to top-up their incomes. As the so called "low pay capital

of the UK", the people of Sheffield are in desperate need of a pay rise, and it is clear employers aren't lining up to provide one.

This context may sound like one of doom and gloom, but it need not be. The opposite of precarity is security. Security comes from communities standing together to support workers forming unions. Both nationally and locally we are seeing a resurgence of grassroots unionism, and innovative new organising strategies responding to the challenges of precarity. Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise, the exciting movement behind this report, is made up of low-paid workers from across our city who are coming together to demand better pay, guaranteed hours, and robust union rights.

Unlike traditional research projects, Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise demonstrates how academic research can go hand-in-hand with union organising to inspire action and challenge exploitation. This report is essential reading for those who wish to interpret precarious work in Sheffield, and more importantly, those who wish for a better future.

I know what it's like to work in a job where you're underpaid and overworked – I got involved in trade unionism after working unsociable hours in a kitchen and not being paid a fair wage. I'm proud to support Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise's campaign, and work with them to transform working conditions in our city and beyond. We will need strong unions, willing to organise, we need communities that stand together, able to stem the rise of bad jobs. This report offers us a way forward that can improve our lives and the lives of our families.

**Together we can usher in a future of work that works for all.**

# 1. Background and Context



## 1.1 Introduction

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**Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise (SNAP) is a campaign that has been initiated by Sheffield Trades Union Council (STUC) with the aims of tackling low pay and precarious work and increasing unionisation within the city.**

STUC was struck by a series of reports by the Resolution Foundation, which showed that the City of Sheffield has the largest proportion of its workforce paid below the Living Wage Foundation living wage (LWF), had suffered the largest pay drop of the UK Core Cities since the onset of the 2008 recession, and consequently (potentially) had the most to gain from the introduction of the Conservative Government's National Living Wage. This highlighted to STUC the necessity for greater campaigning around the issue of pay.

Finally, STUC has been impressed by the successes of innovative new organising strategies being deployed by a number of unions and seeks to share best practice amongst union branches in the city.

SNAP was officially launched in 2016 by the Shadow Chancellor, John McDonnell, and has received support and funding from a range of local unions, political parties (primarily Labour) and community groups. Since its inception, it has stimulated efforts to unionise unorganised groups of workers through shaming bad employers, distributing thousands of 'Know Your Rights at Work' cards and staging solidarity pickets and outreach events.

STUC commissioned Prof David Etherington and Prof Martin Jones, Staffordshire University, to undertake the research with assistance from a team of researchers at Sheffield Hallam University (Dr Peter Thomas, Dr Bob Jeffery and Dr Ruth Beresford) and Dr David Beel from Manchester Metropolitan University.

## 1.2 Context

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In 2012 the Sheffield Fairness Commission was set up to compile evidence on social and economic inequalities in Sheffield. The Commission obtained evidence that people from deprived neighbourhoods and communities were “trapped” in low pay, poor working conditions, long hours and job insecurity. Another issue brought to the attention of the Commission was that the gap between the minimum wage and the wage needed to reach a minimum income standard had widened.<sup>7</sup>

The latest Sheffield City Council Tackling Poverty Strategy Annual Update states that “employment rates are rising but employment patterns are changing and work becoming increasingly precarious for many.” The same paper also highlights the impact of the implementation of Universal Credit in terms of the potential for claimants being sanctioned by not meeting in work progression requirements.<sup>8</sup>

Recent work on Devolution and Social Disadvantage in the Sheffield City Region has highlighted not only the low pay low-skills issue but the lack of connectivity between economic growth objectives and disadvantaged groups in the city region.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to tackling these developments, it is also essential to bring to the fore the role of trade unions and analyse the world of work through the perspectives of workers, disadvantaged groups and trade union representatives.

## 1.3 The research approach and objectives

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The report is intended to inform debates and raise awareness and discussion regarding low pay and precarious work in Sheffield from the perspective of trade unions and civil society organisations.

We explore the hypothesis that austerity driven cuts are fuelling low pay and insecure work and lives. The research involves an evidence review drawing on a number of mixed-

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7 Sheffield Fairness Commission (2013) Making Sheffield Fairer, Sheffield City Council.

8 Sheffield City Council (2017) Tackling Poverty Statement 2016-2017.

9 Etherington D and Jones (2016) Devolution and Disadvantage in the Sheffield City Region: An analysis of employment, skills and welfare [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.645005/file/SSDevolutionPolicy.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.645005/file/SSDevolutionPolicy.pdf);

Etherington and Jones M (2018) Re-stating the Post-Political: Depoliticization, Social Inequalities, and City-Region Growth' Environment and Planning A 50, 51-72

methods sources. The report is mainly focused on the Sheffield Local Authority, but at various points we draw on emerging datasets describing the newly instituted Sheffield City Region.

Narrative policy analysis and discourse analysis were undertaken alongside stakeholder mapping, in order to capture both the insecure/precarious work and welfare policies impacting upon Sheffield, as well as 42 semi-structured interviews with key actors (trade unions officials, workers from a variety of sectors, community activists, policy-makers, practitioners, and stakeholders in general) in relation to the governance of local labour markets.<sup>10</sup> The names of all participants have been anonymised in this report.

The report concludes with a summary of the main findings, followed by some key recommendations.

## **1.4 Structure of the report**

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The report is divided into the following sections:

- **Part Two (next section) analyses national trends in precarious work, teasing out the main issues and themes considered in the study.**
- **Part Three explores the impact of austerity on the economy, work and welfare of the City of Sheffield and what this means in terms of insecurity, particularly for disadvantaged groups.**
- **Part Four provides an analysis of seven key employment sectors (as well as the cross-cutting issue of welfare reform), drawing on interviews with workers, trade union officials and civil society organisations.**
- **Part Five will summarise the findings of this study and Part Six states our recommendations.**
- **Part Seven is a new postscript focusing on the impact of the Coronavirus Crisis**

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<sup>10</sup> On the operation of these methods, see Roe E (1994) *Narrative Policy Analysis: Theory and Practice* (Duke University Press, Durham NC); Fairclough N (2010) *Critical Discourse Analysis* (Routledge, London); Jones M (2019) *Cities and Regions in Crisis: The Political Economy of Sub-National Economic Development* (Elgar, Cheltenham)

## 2. Austerity, Low Pay and Precarious Work - Causes and Key UK Trends



## 2.1 How austerity drives low pay and insecurity

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**Neoliberal economic policies emphasising deregulation, privatisation and the retrenchment of employment and social rights have been prevalent from the late 1970s onward, notably identified with the Thatcher Governments.**

Since the 2008 global economic crash the politics and economics of austerity has been pursued with a renewed intensity following the election of the Coalition Government in 2010.

The argument that high rates of public debt undermine growth and output has been the basis for austerity policies in the UK and across Europe and beyond. Furthermore, austerity is seen as an ideological project to promote further privatisation and attacking the notion of collective public services and has little to do with reducing the debt.<sup>11</sup>

**The London School of Economics (LSE) Growth Commission has highlighted the failure to invest both in the private and public sectors as a cause of low growth.<sup>12</sup>**

The International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>13</sup>, traditionally an organisation that has promoted a more market orientated economic policy, considers that there may have been too much emphasis upon austerity, which is leading to increasing inequality.

Furthermore, economists have questioned the Government view that only the private sector produces wealth and the public sector is a 'drain' on resources. They argue that only the public sector is able to invest and underpin the required infrastructure that will sustain growth.<sup>14</sup>

Austerity as a neoliberal 'growth model' entails and is shaped by an increasing financialisation of the economy. Employment relationships are predicated on the maximization of bonuses and profits in the short term at the expense of the wage bill. Deregulation of labour markets, labour flexibility, capital mobility and global finance are key sources of wage

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11 Konzelman S Gray M and Donald B (2017) Assessing Austerity, Special virtual issue Cambridge Journal of Economics, Cambridge Journal of Economy and Society, and Contributions to Political Economy, [https://academic.oup.com/cje/pages/assessing\\_austerity](https://academic.oup.com/cje/pages/assessing_austerity)

12 LSE Growth Commission (2013) Investing for Prosperity Skills Infrastructure and Innovation <http://www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/units/growthCommission/documents/pdf/LSEGC-Report.pdf>

13 Neoliberalism Oversold? Finance and Development, June 2016 <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2016/06/ostry.htm>

14 Kitson M Martin R and Tyler P (2011) The geographies of austerity, Cambridge Journal of Regions Economy and Society, 4, 289-302



stagnation. Consequently, households are pushed towards private indebtedness and credit consumption since their income constraints increase consistently in a period of wage stagnation.

A key element of job destruction overall is in the public sector with one million jobs lost nationally between 2010 and 2019, a majority of which were in local government.<sup>15</sup>

### **Public sector cuts have had a significant impact on pay because of the Government pay cap.**

The largely low-paid and female workforce in local government has been particularly badly affected by pay restraint.

### **Trade union legislation and employment rights**

Employment protection legislation in the UK, as measured by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's EPL index, has long been among the weakest in the OECD (only the USA has consistently ranked lower). Employment rights in the UK have been altered in ways that encourage the growth of insecurity at work.

In April 2012, the minimum period of employment service for unfair dismissal claims was increased from one to two years. In April 2013, the Coalition government reduced the minimum consultation period required in respect of large-scale collective redundancies involving more than 100 workers from 90 to 45 days.

Measures were introduced that permitted private sector employers to offer prospective employees a financial stake in their business, on the condition that key employment rights were foregone. The government also made it easier for employers to dismiss staff who are deemed to be 'under-performing'.

All these developments have had a major impact on unionisation and trade union protection for insecure workers. According to the Learning and Work Institute the proportion of insecure employees who are in workplaces with union coverage was, on average,

14% for 2011-16, compared with 30% for workers with secure contracts over the same period.<sup>16</sup>

A recent study by researchers at the University of Manchester explored the link between social dialogue, employment relations and precarious work. They develop a framework of 'protective gaps' in order to capture the multi-layered experiences and meanings of precarious employment. Their research identifies four key 'rights gaps' – **employment rights gaps** in relation to what workers are entitled to as part of their working conditions; **social protection gaps** that relate to the level of social security which acts as a safety net; **representation gaps** relate to the extent to which workers can access a trade union representative or other forms of advocacy; and **enforcement gaps**, which relate to the degree to which legislative protections and rights will be actually be upheld in practice.

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15 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/publicsectorpersonnel/bulletins/publicsectoremployment/june2019>

16 Bivand P and Melville P (2017) What is driving insecure work? Learning and Work Institute [https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/What-is-driving-insecure-work\\_-\\_July-2017.pdf](https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/What-is-driving-insecure-work_-_July-2017.pdf)

Table 1: UK Employment rights and representation

### **Employment rights gaps**

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Standard employment rights in the UK are weak compared to other European countries. Limited scope for employers and unions to improve, coordinate and integrate rights.

### **Implications for precarious workers**

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Minimum set of standards generally used by employers in low pay sectors. Workers on short term contracts or low pay find themselves ineligible for statutory protections such as maternity and sick leave pay because entitlement requires minimum periods of continuous employment with the same employer and/or minimum weekly earnings.

### **Social Protection gaps**

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UK social protection system is characterised by relatively low-level contribution-based benefits combined with a high use of means-tested benefits and significant use of in-work benefits ('tax credits'),(See below on Universal Credit)

### **Implications for precarious workers**

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Reduction in the value of entitlements, including in-work benefits and housing benefit. Restrictive conditionality to comply with job search, medical reassessments and working hours rules: use of sanctions in relation to in work progression.

### **Representation gaps**

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Collective bargaining in relation to union/ management consultation and agreements in relation to pay and working conditions has declined. Six in seven workers in the private sector have no formal representation through independent channels of social dialogue.

### **Implications for precarious workers**

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Migrants, low-paid and under-represented groups tend not to have access to pay and conditions determined by collective agreements.

### **Enforcement gaps**

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Despite relying on an individual rights-based system of employee protection in the UK, the evidence suggests enforcement of rights is highly variable

### **Implications for precarious workers**

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The ability of regulatory and industry watchdog bodies such as ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) and the GLAA (Gangmasters' and Labour Abuse Authority) to protect and support workers is challenged by cuts. Moreover, their narrow remit means the scope and coverage of protection varies. Tribunal system has limitations in terms of enforcing rights.

## 2.2 The measurement and extent of low pay

**Low pay** can be defined in various ways (see table 2)<sup>17</sup>. The Resolution Foundation define low pay as **below two thirds of median hourly pay and 17% of employees in Britain are low-paid** by this definition.<sup>18</sup>

The Government introduced the ‘National Living Wage’ in 2016 with the intention of the higher minimum wage rate for over 25s to reach 60% of median earnings by 2020.

This figure has been achieved (61.9% of median earnings in 2019), but because wages in general have stagnated the National Living Wage currently only stands at £8.21 per hour and will still be less than £9

per hour in 2020 (rising to £8.72 per hour in April 2020). As the Resolution Foundation states “from the point of view of pay, the past decade has been an historically bad one.

Given the unresponsiveness of wage growth to strong employment figures, there appears little evidence of a much-needed bounce in typical pay packets.”<sup>19</sup>

Pay in the public sector has declined due to the pay freeze and this has had an enormous impact on living standards. The median public sector wage is over a £1,000 lower in real terms than in 2010.

**Table 2: Definitions of low pay**

Measure of Low Pay	Definition
Living Wage Foundation Living Wage	A Minimum Income Standard based on public expectations of disposable income necessary to achieve an adequate living standard – the current LWF Living Wage is £9.30 (outside of London) as of November 2019 <sup>20</sup>
UK Government ‘National Living Wage’	The Minimum Wage, introduced by the Labour government in 1999 and rebranded by the Conservative government in 2016 as the ‘National Living Wage’, currently set at £8.21 as of April 2019 <sup>21</sup>
% earning less than 2/3s median income	A common, internationally recognised measure of poverty is those individuals and households earning less than 2/3s of the average income, or alternatively, 60% of median income <sup>22</sup> (the latter being used in the Child Poverty Act 2010)

17 In this report we draw upon various different measures of low pay. Although there is a strong relationship between these different measures, we will identify which specific measure we are using throughout the report.

18 Corlett A (2016) Paved with Gold? Low pay and the National Living Wage in Britain’s Cities, Resolution Foundation <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/paved-with-gold-low-pay-and-the-national-living-wage-in-britains-cities/>

19 N Cominetti, K Henehan and S Clarke (2019) Low Pay Britain 2019, Resolution Foundation.

20 <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-real-living-wage>

21 <https://www.gov.uk/national-minimum-wage-rates>

22 <https://www.poverty.ac.uk/definitions-poverty/income-threshold-approach>

## 2.3 The labour and jobs market has become more insecure

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Drawing on an ILO definition Grimshaw et al<sup>23</sup> define precarious work as that which:

*'involves instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social or economic vulnerability... It is some combination of these factors which identifies precarious jobs, and the boundaries around the concept are inevitably to some extent arbitrary'*

Precarious work is synonymous with insecure work and the TUC argues that the changing employment relationships between workers and employers has involved the transfer of financial risks by firms on to workers.

**There are an estimated 3.7 million people (1 in 9 of the workforce) experiencing insecurity at work as of 2017/18<sup>24</sup>, and this number has risen sharply (by 13%) in the last two years.**

This includes those on zero-hours contracts, in agency and other insecure temporary work, and in low-paid self-employment. An estimated 1.5 million workers are employed, but risk missing out on key rights including maternity, the right to return to paid work after maternity leave, and rights to union representation in the workplace.

The lower pay experienced by those in insecure work not only affects their living standards but also has a significant impact on public finances.

Research for the TUC estimates that the rise in insecure work in the last decade has led to a net loss of revenue of over £5bn a year.

Some of the key trends to outline are:

- **The rise in part time and temporary jobs.** In 2018 over a quarter of the British workforce was in part-time employment (25.3%). The share of part-time employees who reported being unable to find full-time work has also risen significantly in this period.
- **The number of workers on zero-hours contracts increased** from 70,000 in 2006 to 896,000 in 2018 and now accounts for 2.7% of the UK workforce<sup>25</sup>
- **There has been a significant increase in the numbers of self-employed.** This figure had risen from 3.3 million in 2001 to 4.8 million (15.1% of the workforce) in 2018. A TUC survey<sup>26</sup> reveals that there is a significant earnings penalty to being self-employed.

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<sup>23</sup> Grimshaw D Johnson M Kaizer A Rubery G (2016) Reducing Precarious work through social dialogue; the case of the UK, European Work and Employment Research Centre, University of Manchester.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/insecure-work>

<sup>25</sup> ONS, Labour Force Survey (2019)

<sup>26</sup> TUC (2017) The impact of self-employment and insecure work on the public finances, <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/insecureworkonpublicfinances.pdf>

### 3. Work, Welfare and Insecurity in Sheffield - The Shift Towards a More Precarious Economy



### 3.1 Accelerated de-industrialisation and job destruction over the past 30 years

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Following the arguments of Beatty and Fothergill<sup>27</sup>, **economic shocks to regional economies generated significant levels of job losses and unemployment from the early 1980s onwards.**

Sheffield's unemployment rate soared from a below national average 4.1% in 1978 to 15.5% in 1984.

Privatisation of the steel and coal industries by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government helped exacerbate factory and pit closures.

De-industrialisation between 1979-1984, coupled with a policy of privatisation, resulted in Britain's manufacturing base contracting by 1.7 million workers (24%), particularly impacting the Northern industrial heartlands<sup>28</sup>.

In 1971 the manufacturing industry employed almost 50% of Sheffield's workforce (compared to 31% nationally). By 1984 this had fallen to just 24% of the city's workforce. By 2018 only 9% of Sheffield's workforce was in manufacturing.

**This shift to services has had significant economic and political ramifications both for the country and the region.**

Put simply, moving away from public sector and high productivity rate manufacturing jobs, towards **lower productivity rate private service sector jobs entails both a more unequal wage structure and a more precarious labour market.**

To successfully pursue such a strategy – essentially reducing workers living standards and rights in comparison to their previous experiences – requires creating the necessary political conditions. Therefore, a clear political objective has been to significantly reduce the political power and legal standing of trade unions and as a result Britain now has the most restrictive anti-trade union legislation in the western world<sup>29</sup>.

Fast forward to the 2008 recession and these approaches, allied to the Coalition government strategy of austerity, has had a major impact on economic growth in Sheffield and the Northern Regions, which have not recovered from the 1980s and have been increasingly left-behind.

One of the most significant problems that have faced Sheffield and other major industrial cities is **the issue of demand deficiency** – this includes job density, the 'more jobs gap' and the 'better jobs gap'. Job density is simply the number of jobs in an area divided by the working age (16-64) population resident in that area.

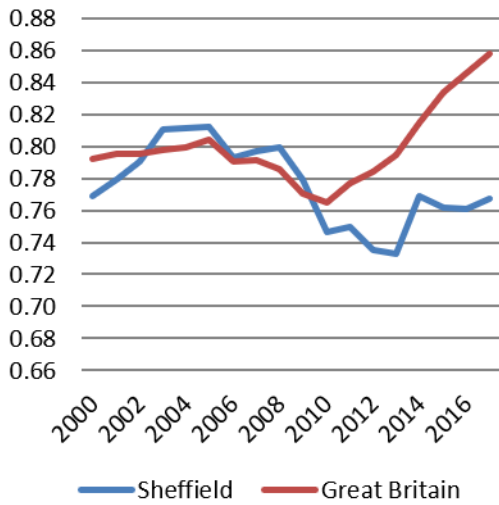
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<sup>27</sup> Beatty C and Fothergill S (2016) Jobs, Welfare and Austerity: How the Destruction of Industrial Britain Casts a Shadow Over Present-Day Finances (Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research: Sheffield).

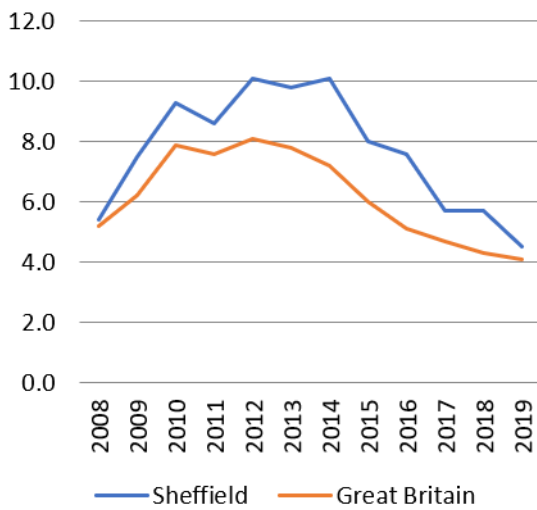
<sup>28</sup> Martin R (1986) Thatcherism and Britain's Industrial Landscape in R Martin and B Rowthorne eds The Geography of De-Industrialisation, London: Methuen.

<sup>29</sup> [https://www.ier.org.uk/sites/ier.org.uk/files/IUR222\\_Hendy\\_Jones.pdf](https://www.ier.org.uk/sites/ier.org.uk/files/IUR222_Hendy_Jones.pdf)

**Graph 1: Job Density, GB and Sheffield, 2000-2017**



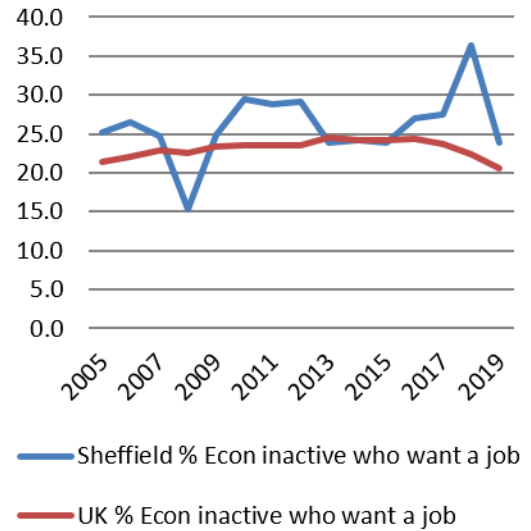
**Graph 2: Unemployment rates (%), GB and Sheffield, 2008-2019**



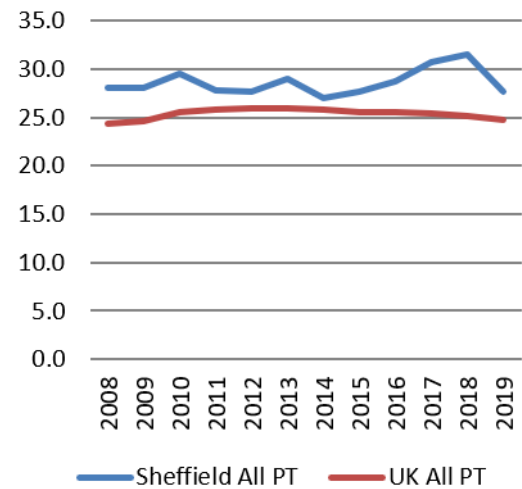
As can be seen from Graph 1, **since the 2008 recession job density has fallen significantly in Sheffield and is now well below the national average**, which is related to the composition of the labour market (the predominance of retail, hospitality, catering and related sectors). The more jobs gap comprises those people who are unemployed, inactive people who want to work and underemployed workers who would like more hours, such as people working part time.

Graph 2 reveals that **since the recession Sheffield's unemployment rate has year-on-year consistently**

**Graph 3: Working age (16-64) economically inactive who want a job**



**Graph 4: % of Sheffield and UK workers in part-time employment, 2008-2019**



**been above the national average.**

Graph 3 reveals that the rate for Sheffield's economically inactive working age population wanting work has often been between 25-30%, reaching a peak of 36% in 2018.

Graph 4 demonstrates that **Sheffield has consistently had a higher proportion of workers in part-time employment than the national average.**

**Table 3: Quality of work and pay in Sheffield**

	<b>Better Jobs Gap %</b>	<b>000'</b>	<b>More Jobs Gap %</b>	<b>000'</b>
Manchester	20	292	25	357
<b>Sheffield</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>248</b>
Cardiff	18	140	27	204
Liverpool	18	140	25	192
Newcastle	21	154	24	182
Bristol	15	92	21	126
London	14	677	23	1,127

Source: Pike et al (2017 adapted from Table 1 pp.7)

The better jobs gap incorporates those on low-paid work, those jobs classed as insecure such as temporary contracts whilst workers have a preference for a permanent employment contract.

Research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) Pike et al<sup>30</sup> provides the basis for comparisons between cities. They address the question of how many more and better jobs need to be created to address the demand deficiency in the major industrial cities. Table 3 above provides an analysis of the breakdown.

<sup>30</sup> Pike A Lee N Mackinnon D Kempton L Iddawela J (2017) Job creation for inclusive growth in cities, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/job-creation-inclusive-growth-cities>



## 3.2 Impact of public sector cuts

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Austerity via spending cuts has disproportionately impacted on those areas characterised by traditional industrial structures and in many ways has served to reinforce the trend towards the low pay low-skills economy.

Rather than using the public sector to boost employment provision in Sheffield, the story has been one of continued decline. **Employment in public administration and defence, which covers local government and the civil service fell from 15,000 in 2012 to 12,000 in 2018.**

Two important points about this are, firstly, that the public administration and defence sector in Sheffield has above average pay rates and a 75:25 full-time/part-time ratio, so these include full-time, above average pay jobs that are being lost to the local economy. Secondly, far more women than men work in this sector, so job losses here disproportionately affect women.

One of the key findings and arguments set out in a report on devolution in the Sheffield City Region (which incorporates Sheffield, Barnsley, Doncaster and Rotherham) is the way local authority and welfare spending cuts have significant impacts on disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and sustainable economic growth. The National Audit Office (NAO) assessment of the financial context of devolution summarises that **Government funding for local authorities has fallen by an estimated 49.1% in real terms from 2010-11 to 2017-18.** This equates to a 28.6% real-terms reduction in 'spending power'<sup>31</sup>.

**In Sheffield this has amount to £460m of cumulative cuts over the 9 years from 2010<sup>32</sup>.** Moreover, deindustrialised regions such as Sheffield City Region have been disproportionately affected by the welfare reforms and benefit cuts which in turn have consequences for economic and employment growth<sup>33</sup>.

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31 NAO (2018) Financial Sustainability of local authorities [www.nao.org.uk/press-release/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018/](http://www.nao.org.uk/press-release/financial-sustainability-of-local-authorities-2018/)

32 <https://sheffieldnewsroom.co.uk/news/council-tackles-ninth-austerity-budget/>

33 Etherington D and Jones (2016) Devolution and Disadvantage in the Sheffield City Region: An analysis of employment, skills and welfare [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.6450051/file/SSDevolutionPolicy.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6450051/file/SSDevolutionPolicy.pdf)

### 3.3 Trends in low pay in Sheffield

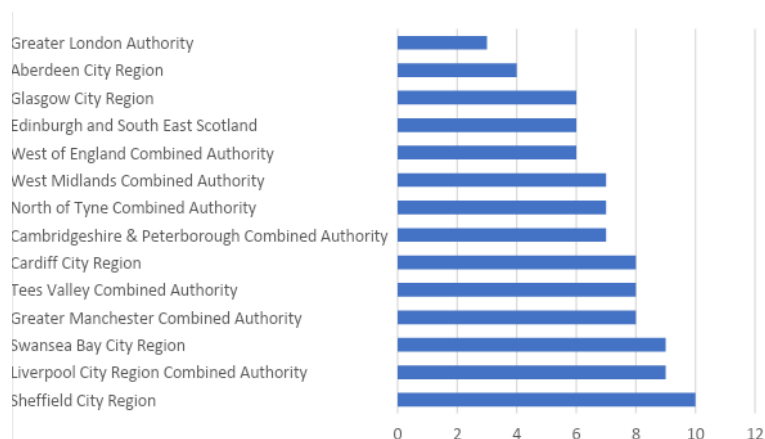
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According to the most recent (2019) ONS figures **the Sheffield City Region economy has the highest proportion of workers on low pay compared with all other City Regions.**

**It also has the lowest rates of median hourly pay for All workers, Male workers, Female workers and Full-time workers.**

Graph 5 compares the Sheffield City Region with other city regions. The city of Sheffield itself has, for over a decade, had median gross hourly pay that falls below the comparable UK figure.

**Graph 5: Sheffield City Region compared to other City Regions - percentage employees in low pay (2/3 median hourly wage), 2018**



<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/jobqualityindicatorstheukhourspayandcontracts/2018>

### 3.4 Where is low pay concentrated?

**A significant element of the region's earnings penalty is the result of the types of firms and employment; the 'composition' of the region's economy.**

As can be seen from Graph 5 the overall median wages for employment sectors in the Yorkshire and Humber region are considerably lower than the UK median (In Yorkshire and Humber the overall median hourly wage is £11.67; **in Sheffield itself it is £12.36**).

Most sectors that fall below the overall Yorkshire and Humber median are in the Services sector. The Retail sector and the Accommodation and Food Services sector are noticeably poor in comparison and this is of significance as both are large employers within Sheffield.

**Table 4: Main industry sectors in Sheffield, 2018**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>No. employed in Sheffield</b>	<b>% of Sheffield workforce</b>	<b>% Part time in Sheffield</b>	<b>Yorkshire and Humber median hourly wage (£)</b>	<b>UK median hourly wage (£)</b>
<b>Human health and social work</b>	41,000	15.7	41.5	£11.71	£12.67
<b>Wholesale retail</b>	41,000	15.7	63.0	£8.61	£8.79
<b>Education</b>	32,000	12.3	37.5	£13.69	£15.04
<b>Manufacturing</b>	24,000	9.2	9.3	£12.69	£13.87
<b>Accommodation and food service</b>	17,000	6.5	66.7	£7.93	£8.15
<b>Transport and storage</b>	10,000	3.8	17.9	£11.38	£12.53

Source: ONS (2019) [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk)

Table 4 reveals that those service sectors identified above as having below median average rates of pay also tend to have a high proportion of part-time jobs. In particular, the Accommodation and food service sector and the Retail sector employ significantly more part-time workers than full-time workers. The part-time/full-time ratios for these sectors in Sheffield are both higher than the UK ratios. It should be noted, too, that the Education sector and Health and social work sector - the two biggest employment sectors in Sheffield - also have a large proportion of part-time workers and both sectors have increasingly used zero-hour and fixed term contracts, and low-paid support roles.

**Table 5: SOC10 occupational structures, 2018**

Occupation	Sheffield	UK
SOC1: Managers, Directors and Senior Officials	9.5	10.8
SOC2: Professional Occupations	24.5	20.2
SOC3: Associate Prof and Tech Occupations	11.4	14.4
SOC4: Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	11.7	10.4
SOC5: Skilled Trades Occupations	8.8	10.4
SOC6: Caring, Leisure and Other Services	8.8	9.3
SOC7: Sales and Customer Services	7.2	7.6
SOC8: Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	5.8	6.4
SOC9: Elementary occupations	12.3	10.5

Source: ONS (2019) [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk)

Turning now to occupational structures within industries, **a noticeable feature of Sheffield's pattern of employment is that it has a lower proportion of workers in the highest occupational strata (SOC1) than the national average and a higher proportion of workers in the lowest occupational strata (SOC9),** as can be seen from an examination of Table 5.

This pattern has consistently been the case since 2012 and for most of the period 2008-2018. Within the SOC9 Elementary Jobs occupational strata, over 50 percent of these occupations are in the service sectors and particularly within distribution, hotels and restaurants, and health and education.

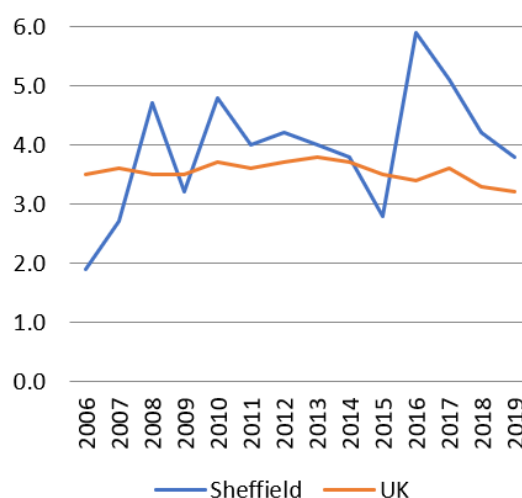
Six of the ten lowest paying jobs are in the elementary strata: shelf-fillers; bar staff; leisure and theme park attendants; school midday and crossing patrol occupations; launderers and dry cleaners; and waiters and waitresses. The other lowest paying jobs are retail cashiers/ check-out assistants (SOC7), florists (SOC5), hairdressers (SOC6) and beauticians (SOC6).

**There has also been an increase in part-time work, short-hours** (workers working less than ten hours per week) **and an increase in the use of zero-hours contracts (ZHCs) over the last five years.** In 2001 0.8% of workers in the Yorkshire and Humber region were on ZHCs. As can be seen from Graph 6 the rate of ZHCs has consistently been over 2.5% of the Yorkshire and Humber workforce, reaching as high as 3.4% in 2016, and this rate has regularly been above the national rate of ZHCs.

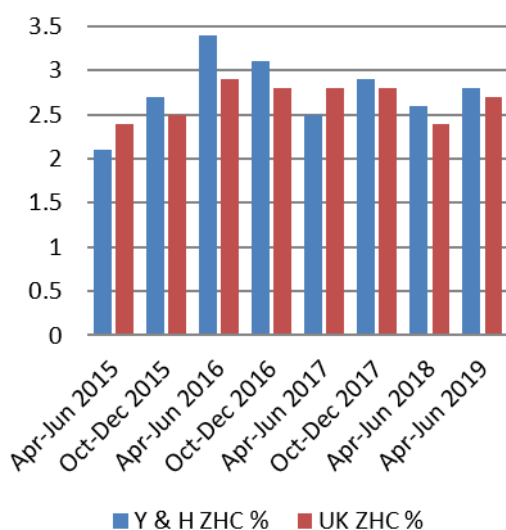
Within the city of Sheffield itself Graph 7 reveals there has been a noticeable increase in the number of workers working very few hours, with the rate rising from 2% of the Sheffield workforce in 2006 to 5.9% in 2017, with the rate continuing to be above the national average subsequently.

**This increased proportion of workers in low-paid, part-time and precarious employment, coupled with stagnant wages, austerity cuts and a rising cost of living has resulted in households in Sheffield having lower and lower levels of gross disposable household income (GDHI), as identified in Graph 8.**

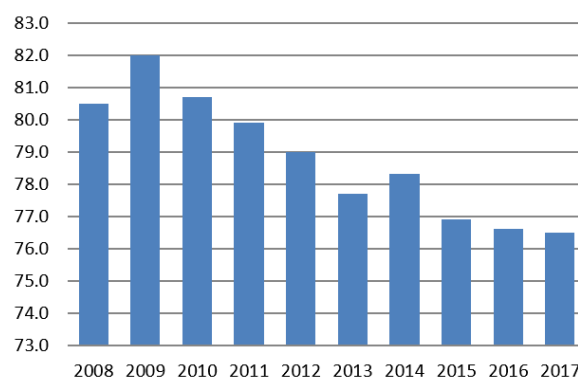
**Graph 7: Short-hours, % of Sheffield and UK workers**



**Graph 6: % of UK and Yorks & Humber workers on Zero Hours Contracts, 2015-2019**



**Graph 8: Sheffield GDHI per head index (UK = 100)**



## 3.5 Insecurity and social disadvantage

### Young people

Accurate statistical data on young people's experience of employment and in particular precarious work in Sheffield is limited, but we do know from Table 6 that **18-24 year olds in the Yorkshire and Humber region were more likely to be unemployed in the years 2010-2016 than the national average**, and that on average 39% of those in employment between 2010-18 were likely to be in part-time employment. The number of 16-24-year-olds in Sheffield claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) has consistently been above the national average.

Nationally young people (18-21) have much lower median hourly earnings than the overall figure. Indeed, the story in Sheffield (at least by the end of the period) seems to be more young people in work, and lower unemployment rates, not unrelated to young people's status as a readily exploitable pool of labour on youth rates of pay. Whilst the gap between the median hourly earnings of 18-21 year olds and the rest of the population has closed slightly in the last five years this is largely due to downward pressures on overall wages.

In our focus group with young people we found that there was a lack of meaningful advice for those using Jobcentres and significant variation in its quality and timing. Almost all had undertaken unpaid work experience at school, but again there were significant differences in the quality of this provision, both between and within different institutions. At its best, this work experience could provide a structured introduction to a variety of tasks and responsibilities. At worst, it seems many were little more than a source of free labour. There are reservations about the prevalence of working on zero-hours contracts. The use of ZHCs was widespread and although there is some flexibility that this offered, where work could be combined with education and other commitments, the reality was largely a one-way process where it was the workers who were required to be ever ready. When asked about contact with trade unions, only one was a member, there is little experience or knowledge of what trade unions do, although some in the focus group could see their value.

**Table 6: 16-24-Year-olds in Sheffield and the Yorkshire and Humber region, 2010-2018**

	Employment Rate		Unemployment rate		Part-time		16-24 JSA claimants as % of all JSA claimants	
	Y&H	GB	Y&H	GB	Y&H	GB	Sheffield	GB
<b>2010</b>	51.1	50.8	19.9	19.7	39.2	39.1	29.8	27.2
<b>2011</b>	48.0	50.0	20.8	20.1	39.0	40.2	30.1	27.6
<b>2012</b>	47.0	49.2	25.2	21.5	38.4	39.6	29.5	27.0
<b>2013</b>	47.3	49.6	24.4	21.0	39.1	39.8	28.7	26.4
<b>2014</b>	48.6	50.1	21.3	18.7	39.5	38.6	26.4	24.5
<b>2015</b>	51.8	52.4	18.2	15.7	37.9	38.3	23.6	22.7
<b>2016</b>	54.5	53.8	14.6	14.1	40.8	37.5	22.1	21.8
<b>2017</b>	54.0	53.7	12.2	12.3	42.9	37.7	21.6	20.5
<b>2018</b>	55.4	54.2	11.1	11.8	35.0	36.5	20.3	19.2

## Disabled People

According to the Sheffield City Council Poverty Needs Assessment nearly one-fifth of Sheffield residents feel that their day to day activity is limited by long term health problems or disability and 35% of households have someone with a long-term health condition or disability.

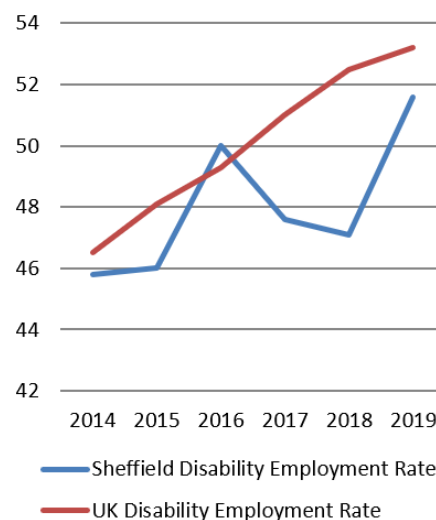
Over 33,000 people claim Disability Living Allowance, three-quarters of whom have been claiming for the last five years.

Over 23,000 people claim Employment Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance. The employment rate for adults with mental health problems or learning disabilities in Sheffield is much lower than the national average<sup>34</sup>.

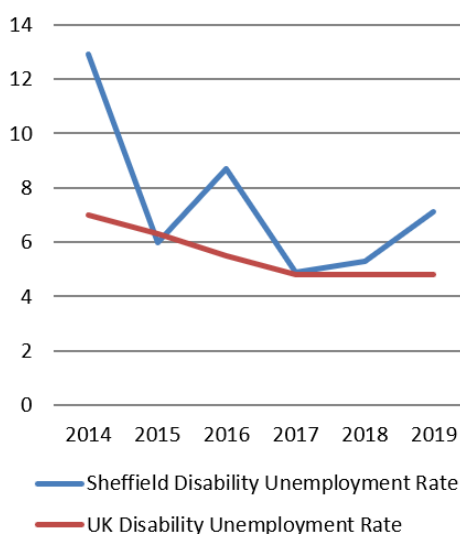
Indeed, **disabled people are significantly less likely to be working than non-disabled people**, and as can be seen from Graphs 8 and 9 the Sheffield employment rate for disabled people is below the UK employment rate and the unemployment rate for disabled people in Sheffield is higher than the UK rate.

It is worth noting that the Remploy furniture plant, providing employment opportunities for disabled people in Sheffield, was closed in 2013 with the loss of thirty unionised jobs<sup>35</sup>.

Graph 9: Employment rate by disability, 2014-2019



Graph 10: Unemployment rate by disability, 2014-2019



<sup>34</sup> <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s17338/Tackling%20Poverty%20Strategy%202022.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.gmbyorkshire.org.uk/one-year-since-remploy-factories-closed>

## Women

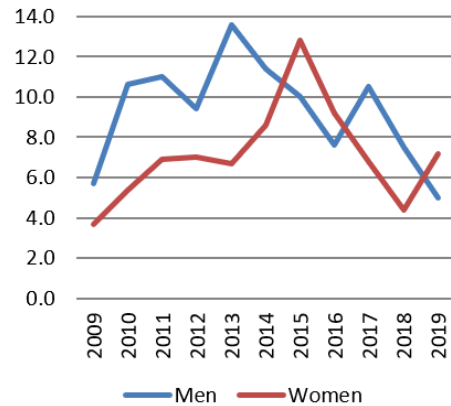
According to the Women’s Budget Group (WBG) women are impacted most as a single group by austerity and welfare cuts<sup>36</sup>.

As the TUC argue, it is not that women are more likely to find themselves employed on casual contracts but rather that casualised and precarious work pose particular problems for women and that a key issue is the overall lack of bargaining and employment rights in sectors where casual work predominates particularly disadvantages women. Older women workers, half of whom work in the public services, have been particularly hit by redundancies, pay freezes and increased contracting out of services<sup>37</sup>.

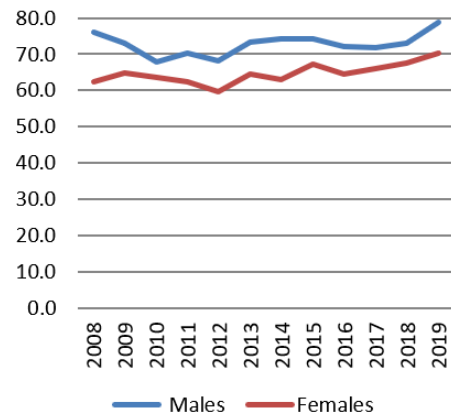
Indeed, since the introduction of austerity budgets by the Coalition government from 2012, there has been a rise in women’s unemployment (Graph 12). This not only reflects **deep historic occupational segregation in Sheffield** – as of the 2011 census women filled 63% of positions in ‘sales and customer service occupations’ and 80% of ‘caring, leisure and other service occupations’, but only 9% of ‘skilled trades occupations’ and 10% of ‘process, plant and machine operatives’<sup>38</sup>, but also the relative fortunes of these sectors and related public services over this period<sup>39</sup>.

The public sector is a large employing sector in Sheffield where women make up the majority of the work force and therefore are extremely vulnerable to public expenditure cuts.

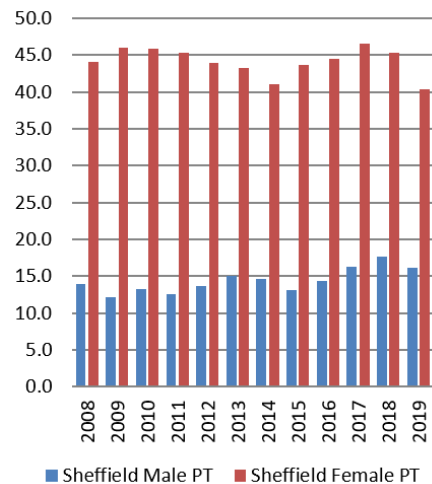
Graph 11: Unemployment rate by gender, 2014-2019



Graph 12: Employment rate by gender, 2014-2019



Graph 13: Part-time workers in Sheffield by gender, 2008-2019



36 Womens Budget Group (2016) A cumulative gender impact assessment of ten years of austerity policies, [https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/De\\_HenauReed\\_WBG\\_GIAtaxben\\_briefing\\_2016\\_03\\_06.pdf](https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/De_HenauReed_WBG_GIAtaxben_briefing_2016_03_06.pdf)

37 Healey G and Bergfeld M (2016) The organising challenges presented by the increasing casualisation of womens work, TUC <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/casualisationofwomenswork.pdf>

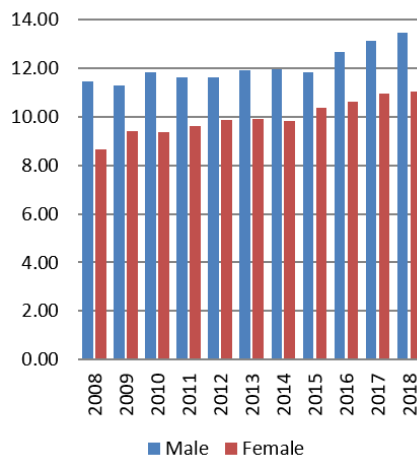
38 Sheffield City Council (2017) Women in Sheffield, <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/dam/sheffield/docs/your-city-council/community-knowledge-profiles/Women%20in%20Sheffield.pdf>

39 Sheffield Partnership (2016) State of Sheffield, p16 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58d4f5f5e231122637f9be/t/58dbc15fdb29d6aa4b6938d0/1490796965920/S>



According to ONS Annual Survey for Hours and Earnings data in Sheffield in 2018, **women working part-time earning in the bottom fifth of the population had an average hourly wage of £7.90**, whereas for women working full-time this was £8.32 (and for male full-time workers in the bottom fifth of the population the average wage was £9.20). This is of particular relevance for people at high risk of poverty because of the high proportion of women, and particularly mothers, who work part-time (women are further disadvantaged by the high cost of child care provision)<sup>40</sup>. As can be seen from Graph 13, women in Sheffield are much more likely than men to be employed part-time. The pay gap for Sheffield in 2018 (Graph 14) was 18.1 which means that on average, women will earn 18.1% less per hour than men.

**Graph 14: Median hourly pay for Sheffield workers by gender, 2008-2018**

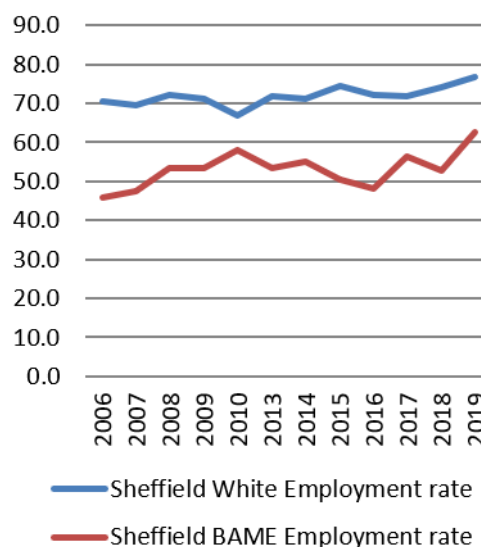


### Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

Sheffield continues to have a significant difference in employment rates between White British and ethnic minority residents.

As can be seen from Graph 15 **ethnic minority employment rates have remained well below White British rates for the entire period 2008-2018** and this confirms a trend identified in previous research indicating that Sheffield had the 2nd worst White-BAME unemployment gap of any local authority in England and Wales.

**Graph 15: Sheffield employment rates by ethnicity, 2006-2019**



Sheffield's ethnic minority employment rate falls well below the national ethnic minority employment rate for the entirety of the 2008-2018 period.

Sheffield's ethnic minority workers are also very heavily concentrated in the service sector. Moreover, **a much higher proportion of ethnic minority workers are in SOC9 Elementary jobs compared to White British workers (see Graph 16).**

By contrast, there are a very low proportion of ethnic minority workers in SOC1 managers, directors and senior officials' roles in comparison to White British workers.

**Graph 16: % in SOC1 and SOC9 jobs by ethnicity, Sheffield, 2018-2019**



<sup>40</sup> Sheffield City Council Poverty in Sheffield an assessment of need, <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s17338/Tackling%20Poverty%20Strategy%202022.pdf>

## Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Groups

Sheffield has an active and thriving LGBT community but there is relatively little knowledge of their experience of work and especially insecure work.

Most major trade unions have LGBT sections and involving Conferences which highlight general policies which affect the community. This report draws largely from TUC research focusing on discrimination and harassment, which involved an online survey of LGBT people who are members and also non-members of a trade union<sup>41</sup>.

**Nearly two in five (39%) of all LGBT respondents have been harassed or discriminated against by a colleague, a quarter (29%) by a manager and around one in seven (14%) by a client or patient.**

- Only a third of respondents (34%) reported the latest incident of harassment or discrimination to their employer, one in eight (12%) reported it to HR.
- Only half (51%) of all respondents are 'out' (open about their sexuality) to everyone at work. This falls to just over a third (36%) of young people. Over a quarter (27%) of bisexuals are out to no one.
- Almost half of trans people (48%) have experienced bullying or harassment at work compared to just over a third (35%) of non-trans respondents.
- Over three fifths (62%) of all respondents have heard homophobic or biphobic remarks or jokes directed to others at work, while over a quarter (28%) have had such comments directed at them.
- Just under a quarter (23%) of all respondents have been outed against their will, while almost a third (30%) of transgender respondents have had their trans status disclosed against their will.

A significant but unsurprising finding is that only a small proportion of respondents to the survey (less than 5%) described themselves as working on a casualised or zero-hours contract, but those who are in more precarious forms of work feel acutely aware of their vulnerability in terms of employment status and this may act as a deterrent to making a complaint or taking a grievance.

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/one-three-lgbt-people-have-been-harassed-or-bullied-work-says-tuc>

### 3.6 Welfare reform, universal credit and precarious lives in Sheffield

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The Fairness Commission acknowledge that the Government welfare reforms are having negative impacts on the people of Sheffield and this has been monitored and assessed by Sheffield City Council<sup>42</sup>. Christina Beatty and Steve Fothergill have assessed the impact of welfare reforms on Sheffield. They estimate that the working-age benefit freeze will affect 74,000 households in Sheffield and the cost per working age adult will be £102. Also taking into consideration the new Universal Credit (UC) thresholds and tapers, the new Tax Credits reforms, the Employment and Support Allowance reforms, the Benefit Cap, and the Local Housing Allowance Cap in the social rented sector, **the total anticipated loss by 2020/21 from pre and post-2015 welfare reforms for Sheffield is £252 million a year, or £680 per adult of working age**<sup>43</sup>.

The shift towards UC means significant loss of incomes for families and individuals, including workers reliant on the work allowance, and the rise in foodbank use is attributed to the delays in benefit payments<sup>44</sup>. The reduction in the work allowance affects lone parents most, and it is estimated that nationally it amounts to £3 billion less annually than the current tax credit system, resulting in an average loss of £625 a year per person.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that a single full-time income is no longer enough to lift families out of poverty<sup>45</sup>.

Moreover, the introduction of the two child maximum tax credit/ UC policy means that claimants with more than two children are estimated to be £5,000 a year worse off on average by 2021-22<sup>46</sup>.

A previous study of the Sheffield City Region<sup>47</sup> has highlighted the lack of affordable childcare in the region. The changes to childcare financial

arrangements will severely impact on women and families with young children. For the cover of childcare costs, the movement to UC represents a significant reduction in financial support. The Children's Society estimate that the movement from benefits combined with tax credits to UC represents a significant cut in subsidy.

#### Universal Credit: A story of a disastrous policy

Universal Credit is one of the biggest changes to the welfare system and involves bringing together six existing benefits. The Full Service was to have been rolled out to every part of the United Kingdom by September 2018, but given the mounting evidence of problems experienced by people moving onto UC, the government significantly slowed the roll-out plans, and the target for full roll-out was put back firstly to 2023 and now to 2024. Even though measures have been introduced to ease the transition and mitigate problems there has been no let-up on its impact, with the numbers of people forced to use foodbanks on the increase<sup>48</sup>.

This is because the **welfare reforms introduced actually involve major cuts to benefits – including in work benefits** (the work allowance under UC<sup>49</sup>). Trade unions, the Labour party and welfare rights organisations have called for the complete scrapping of Universal Credit and the Work and Pensions Committee have recommended root and branch reforms. It estimated that when the full migration takes place there will be around 7 million UK families receiving the new benefit - more than half of which are working families – with an estimated 60,000 people claiming UC in Sheffield<sup>50</sup>.

Sheffield City Council has acknowledged that people

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42 <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s27906/Welfare%20Reform%20scrutiny%20update.pdf>

43 Beatty C and Fothergill S (2014) The impact of the welfare reforms on communities and families in Sheffield <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cesr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/impact-welfare-reform-sheffield.pdf>

44 <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/b21495/impact%20of%20Austerity%20on%20Sheffield%20Wednesday%2009-Jan-2019%2014.00%20Council.pdf?T=9>

45 Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018) UK Poverty 2018. York: JRF. See Sheffield Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) (2018) Just Managing. Sheffield: Sheffield CAB

46 Unison (2018) Unison evidence to the Low Pay commission on Minimum Wage Rates. London: Unison

47 [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.6450051/file/SSDevolutionPolicy.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6450051/file/SSDevolutionPolicy.pdf)

48 Trussell Trust (2019) #5 weeks is too long. Why we need to end the wait for Universal Credit. London: Trussell Trust

49 Hirsch, D (2019) Minimum Income Standards for the UK in 2019. York: JRF

50 Sheffield NHS (2019) Universal Credit Briefing Note. Sheffield: Sheffield NHS Clinical Commissioning Group

migrating to UC are struggling and that conditionality is being applied where it has not been before (e.g. the requirement to increase hours and earnings). In response the City Council has established a Partnership to manage the migration<sup>51</sup>. There is a concern that UC displaces austerity on to the City Council because of the resources required to manage its impact. Sheffield CAB have reported a significant increase in demand for advice services and there are reports that advice centres are struggling to cope with the increased demand. This is compounded by the closure of libraries which are used by disadvantaged groups to access digital services. The loss of income and increased deprivation will have major implications for social and health services and this needs to be monitored and analysed.

### In work conditionality is a major threat to workers' employment rights

Work-first policies become clearly defined as a policy tool to ensure that precarious jobs are filled by claimants as a way of sustaining the new financialised business model of outsourcing and fragmentation. The removal and downgrading of employment rights and processes, which facilitate employee representation in negotiating workplace employment conditions, is key to facilitating this process. An example of this is that the Child Poverty Action Group and the retail trade union Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) found that most members moving on to Universal Credit were worse off<sup>52</sup>.

The welfare reform agenda has involved 'encouraging' UC claimants to progress in work in terms of earnings and hours. Conditionality requirements depend on earnings and whether wages are over the earnings threshold, usually 35 hours at the minimum wage. This has potentially major implications for people in low-paid and insecure work.

A survey undertaken by Sheffield CAB on in work progression<sup>53</sup> found:

- Work available is mostly of poor quality. Participants struggled to secure full time work with guaranteed hours, or higher-paid work which reflects their skills, qualifications and experience.
- Claimants' personal circumstances continue to limit their ability to take on more hours of work. This includes those with caring commitments, older people, or those managing a health condition or disability.
- **There is a lack of understanding among claimants of the requirements placed on them under Universal Credit, as well as what support they are entitled to.** Many participants found that they had not received the support that could have helped them secure additional work. This supports findings from the CPAG/ USDAW survey, which reported over half of survey respondents said they didn't understand their UC awards, perhaps reflecting the extra complications of working and claiming UC.

The last point is significant. Benefit migration on to UC has led to major workload pressures for employment support Work Coaches, which has been highlighted by the Public and Commercial Services Union and has been the subject of industrial action in 2019<sup>54</sup>. One of the key barriers to in-work progression is the lack of skills support for workers<sup>55</sup>. The Apprenticeships policy has been seen as a vehicle for aiding workplace skills attainment for disadvantaged groups but, according to Unison, low pay rates for apprenticeship participants threatens its sustainability<sup>56</sup>.

The result is a system where large numbers of low-skilled workers have little opportunity to build up their skills and escape low pay.

51 Ibid

52 Jones, K-M (2019) Is Universal Credit working for working people? USDAW's members experience. London: CPAG

53 Sheffield CAB (2019) Does Universal Credit Help Work Progression? Sheffield: Sheffield CAB

54 [https://www.google.com/search?q=PCS+work+coaches+and+staff+shortages&rlz=1C1GCEB\\_engB884GB884&oq=PCS+work+coaches+and+staff+shortages&aqs=chrome..69i57.15677j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=PCS+work+coaches+and+staff+shortages&rlz=1C1GCEB_engB884GB884&oq=PCS+work+coaches+and+staff+shortages&aqs=chrome..69i57.15677j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

55 TUC (2018a) In work progression: TUC submission to the Work and Pensions Inquiry on Universal Credit. London: TUC

56 Unison (2018) Unison evidence to the Low Pay commission on Minimum Wage Rates. London: Unison

## The impact of sanctions - Benefit design encourages insecure work

One aspect of the introduction of Universal Credit is that it has shifted welfare to work policy towards a more punitive workfare model. UK's 'work first' model pushes unemployed workers in to accepting any job, sustaining a low pay low-skill labour market.

Austerity policies have promoted an increase of 'workfare' strategies within the UK welfare state, which have had the effect of ensuring a flow of labour market participants, resulting in downward wage pressure in low pay industries.

**Earlier exits from unemployment benefit prompted by sanction regimes result in poorer quality employment, including lower earnings, as well as being a tendency for people to disappear from the benefit system altogether<sup>57</sup>,** as is shown by Table 7.

The high levels of upheld punitive sanctions for JSA claimants appears to have discouraged some people from claiming in subsequent years.

**Table 7: Sheffield JSA claimant rates, sanctions, unemployment rate and economically inactive and wanting a job, 2013-2018**

	<b>Upheld JSA Sanctions</b>	<b>Upheld JSA Sanctions rate %</b>	<b>JSA Claims</b>	<b>Claimant rate</b>	<b>Unemployment rate</b>	<b>Economically Inactive and wanting a job %</b>
<b>2013</b>	12,558	6.4	195,032	5.6	9.8	23.9
<b>2014</b>	7,286	4.9	149,163	4.3	10.1	24.2
<b>2015</b>	3,335	2.8	118,017	3.4	8.0	24.2
<b>2016</b>	1,360	1.4	96,549	2.9	7.6	27
<b>2017</b>	775	0.9	83,076	2.4	5.7	27.4
<b>2018</b>	325	0.4	84,484	2.4	5.7	36.3

Source: ONS (2019), [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk)

<sup>57</sup> Berry C and McDaniel S (2017) Work Labour Markets and Welfare: A Literature Review, <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/SPERI-IPPR-Work-Labour-markets-and-Welfare-literature-review.pdf>

### 3.7 Geographical disadvantage within Sheffield

There is considerable geographical difference within areas of Sheffield in terms of pay and part-time work (see Table 8). **Looking at hourly pay rates through the prism of Parliamentary Constituencies only Sheffield Central is consistently well above the overall Sheffield Median hourly rate on all categories** (All Workers, Male, Female, Full-time and Part-time). Penistone & Stocksbridge is above the Sheffield average on most categories too, but drops noticeably in terms of part-time pay.

By contrast, all other Parliamentary Constituencies fall below the overall Sheffield average at various points, noticeably so for Sheffield Heeley and Sheffield South East, both of whom fall well below the Sheffield average on all categories. Of interest, too, is the very high level of part-time employment in Sheffield Heeley compared

to all other constituencies and the overall Sheffield Local Authority.

The Parliamentary constituencies differ in other notable areas, too. The socio-demographics of Sheffield as shown in Table 9 reveal that Sheffield Central has a much younger population than all other constituencies and also a much lower level of owner occupation. Both Sheffield Hallam and Penistone & Stocksbridge have a much older demographic in terms of the over 65s, much higher levels of owner-occupation, low levels of unemployment and are predominantly of white ethnicity. **Sheffield Heeley and Sheffield Brightside & Hillsborough are the only two constituencies with over 30% of residents in social rented accommodation, and also have the highest levels of unemployment and poor health.**

**Table 8: Median hourly pay and part-time employment by Sheffield Parliamentary Constituencies, 2018**

	Sheffield	Central	Heeley	South East	Brightside & Hillsborough	Hallam	Penistone & Stocksbridge
<b>All</b>	£12.63	£13.69	£11.60	£11.57	£12.61	£12.86	£12.99
<b>Male</b>	£13.79	£14.89	£12.74	£12.54	£14.05	£13.30	£14.57
<b>Female</b>	£11.32	£12.28	£11.27	£9.33	£10.88	£11.58	£11.79
<b>Full-time</b>	£13.75	£14.96	£12.44	£13.01	£13.34	£13.30	£14.76
<b>Part-time</b>	£9.79	£10.50	£9.30	£8.50	£10.27	£10.31	£9.63
<b>% of workers in Part-time Employment, 2018</b>							
	31.5	29.2	40.0	30.9	28.1	31.6	29.3

Source: ONS (2019), [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk)

**Table 9: Socio-demographics by Sheffield Parliamentary Constituencies**

		Central	Heeley	South East	Brightside & Hillsborough	Hallam	Penistone & Stocksbridge
<b>Age (%)</b>	<b>18-35</b>	52.7	22.9	21.6	23.7	23.8	16.6
	<b>65+</b>	8.4	18.0	18.6	13.8	20.8	23.7
<b>Ethnicity (%)</b>	<b>White</b>	72	89.9	85.3	75.0	92.3	97.7
	<b>BAME</b>	28	10.1	14.7	25.0	7.7	2.3
<b>Housing (%)</b>	<b>Owner</b>	36.3	57.8	65.4	49.9	77.3	75.8
	<b>Social Rented</b>	25.6	30.4	24.2	37.5	8.6	14.7
<b>Unemployment (%)</b>		4.2	5.7	5.1	7.2	2.3	3.2
<b>Poor Health (%)</b>		4.9	7.3	7.2	7.8	3.8	6.1

Source: <https://democraticdashboard.com/constituency>

## 4. Experiences of Low Paid, Precarious Work and Trade Union Responses

This section will focus on case studies of particular employment sectors to explore the impacts of casualised and low paid work, but also to highlight how trade unions are responding to these challenges.



**Table 10: Summary of employment sectors**

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Employer Characteristics</b>	<b>Unions</b>	<b>Union Strategies</b>
<b>Retail</b>	The largest local employment sector. A variety of contractual forms including fixed hours, ZHC and short-hours contracts. Elements of unpaid labour were evident, i.e. loss of paid breaks as well as a reduction of bonus payments.	USDAW, GMB, Unite, Prospect and RMT	Partnership Agreements, pay bargaining, campaigning against zero-hour contracts and use of agency workers.
<b>Food Service</b>	High proportion of zero-hour and short hours contracts, prevalence of bullying and harassment and elements of wage-theft (i.e. having to buy own uniform and safety equipment).	Unite and BFAWU	New unionisation campaigns centred on fast food and restaurant chains.
<b>Social Care</b>	Major employer in Sheffield, widespread use of zero-hours contracts and living wage/minimum wage, poor working conditions, shift to 'multi-tasking' and unpaid working time.	GMB and Unison	Promotion of Care Charters by unions to guarantee minimum employment standards. Charities, i.e. AGE UK, lobbying against zero-hours contracts.
<b>Transport &amp; Logistics</b>	One of the fastest growing sectors in the City Region. Widespread use of agency workers, zero-hour contracts and forms of 'bogus self-employment'. Unpaid loading times and security checks, excessive and unregulated 'pick rates' and high levels of surveillance.	Unite, GMB, RMT	'Greenfield' organising campaigns at Amazon and Deliveroo. Legal cases questions of self-employment/employee/worker status.
<b>Higher Education</b>	Pay freezes have eroded a substantial proportion of the value of earnings. Use of a variety of atypical contracts - fixed-term, zero-hours, variable hours, hourly-paid contracts with set hours and so on. Many also use 'banks' of staff taken on through contracts for services.	UCU, Unison, Unite and GMB	Freedom of information request (FOI) re details of employment, recruitment campaign among temporary staff joint work with Unison around workplace health and safety
<b>Call Centres</b>	High pressure working environments, abusive customers, high levels of surveillance and performance management make for stressful working conditions. Nonetheless, levels of pay remain low.	Unite, Unison, CWU	Recognition/Partnership agreements, but often low levels of density. Challenges in terms of the very high turnover of staff.
<b>NHS</b>	The impact of the pay cap and cutbacks to the NHS has had a severe impact on workers. The real terms value of pay for all nursing staff in the NHS has been severely eroded. Increasing use of agency workers to cover vacancies.	RCN, BMA, Unison, GMB, RCM, Unite	Pay bargaining, anti-privatisation campaigns, promoting minimum employment standards, 'Safe and Effective Staffing', using links with community (Sheffield Keep Our NHS Public).
<b>Welfare Reform &amp; Universal Credit</b>	Key focus on roll out of Universal Credit, delays in benefits, sanction regime, in work conditionality, also Work Capability Assessment and benefit caps.	PCS and Unite Community, Community activists	Advising claimants in relation to appeals, information, campaigns, lobbying.



## 4.1 Retail

The retail sector is one of the largest employment sectors in both the UK and Sheffield but has a track record of low-paid and insecure employment. Nationally, two thirds of low-paid retail workers are women, and a disproportionate number of workers are from BAME backgrounds<sup>58</sup>.

A large proportion of retail workers are younger employees working part-time, often while studying at school or university. Increasingly, given increased university tuition fees and soaring living costs, much of this work is becoming essential for students<sup>59</sup>.

The retail sector has a higher proportion of employees who live in households facing economic hardship than in working households in general and are more likely to be in receipt of Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, compared to other employees.

For our research we have spoken to workers in, and union officials responsible for, supermarkets, convenience stores, clothing retailers and mobile phone shops.

This research has identified the following issues:

58 Usher K (2016) Improving pay and productivity in the retail Sector York JRF <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/improving-pay-progression-and-productivity-retail-sector>

59 <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/the-cost-of-living-crisis-through-the-eyes-of-students>

### Contracts, Hours and Leave

Our interviews show that **the norm across Sheffield's retail sector is for contracts with a low number of minimum guaranteed hours (or zero-hours)**. This gives the employer maximum flexibility to call in staff at their convenience. A trade union official explained that at one major supermarket chain, while 'full time' 40-hour contracts were once the norm:

*[...] they then employed three sixteen-hour flexi-contracts because then they don't want to give people...it's an 'as and when' basis, and I think that's going back to Victorian times, if you ask me. They won't bring zero-hours in, they do understand that, but it's still a case [for some] of seven and a half hours, [it] isn't fantastic either.*

- USDAW Official

As a consequence, the threat of losing hours was ever-present, with Guy commenting that staff 'were more worried about losing their hours than they were about losing their job'. Some staff found themselves on a series of fixed-term contracts, making it difficult to plan for the future.

More generally, we also recorded instances of workers finding it difficult to book holiday, having holiday being cancelled at short- or no-notice and being pressured

in to not taking up their entitlement to sick pay. One individual we spoke to reported having worked 18 days in a row. Lack of paid breaks or inadequate breaks were also an issue.

Guy - who had been an USDAW rep - referred to people with long-term health problems being 'managed out of the business' by having changes made to their rota with little or no notice and which they were unable to cope with.

### Pay, Performance Related Pay and Sick Pay

Pay was frequently at the National Living Wage or just above, though there was variation in whether employers applied youth or adult rates to under 25s. A feature of some retail employment was the use of bonus payments attached to sales targets.

Chris, who works for a mobile phone shop, reported that the commission structure had recently been reduced by 80%, making it more difficult to supplement his meagre basic pay and incentivising colleagues to engage in high pressure selling techniques. This in turn led to a very high turnover of staff that created additional barriers to individuals asserting their employment rights.

Finally, Guy reported that his chain of convenience stores only paid sick pay after the first 3 days, which encouraged staff to work when they were not fit to.

## Health and Safety and Exposure to Abuse in the Workplace

The research revealed numerous instances of inadequate Health and Safety procedures and training, relating to manual handling, accessing objects at height and moving very heavy loads (i.e. cages weighing 250kg). Staff also often felt unsupported in terms of their safety or in relation to challenging incidents. Guy reported staff working by themselves in shops late at night and Milly had to deal with a customer having a violent seizure during a shift at her small supermarket branch and did not receive any support from her manager in the aftermath of the incident. **Many retail workers we interviewed also recounted episodes of abuse in the workplace, whether on the basis of their sexuality (Charlotte) or simply as a consequence of trying to prevent thefts from the shop-floor (Milly).** Provision of security staff was variable and could be rescinded without explanation.

## Automation and Digitalisation

**Forms of automation and digitalisation served to erode autonomy in the workplace and ensure staff were always 'plugged in' and 'on call'.** For example, Charlotte's job mostly entailed monitoring self-service check-outs, ensuring minimal contact with customers, other than those frustrated by system glitches ('what makes it awful is how rude people are').

In other cases, employees were fed updates on their stores' performance and messages from management through a social media app, meaning work constantly encroached into their home lives.

## Unionisation

Nationally, rates of unionisation in the retail trade

stand at 14.4% as of 2018, having increased by a percentage point since the late 2000s. **While some employers (particularly supermarkets) have long-standing union recognition agreements, many are hostile to unionisation.** One individual we spoke to was constructively dismissed as a response to attempts to unionise at a national retailer. Contesting the case, he secured a meagre pay-out but on condition of signing a non-disclosure agreement. For many however there was a sense that even raising the question of unionisation would be enough to be starved of hours:

*[...] this is the thing with zero-hours...it's that you can't join a union. You can't even look like you're going to join a union. That's what I always say to people, "That's what it's about. It's about having complete and utter control over everybody"*

-Unite Official

Other young people we interviewed reported that on part-time wages they simply could not afford to join a union. Milly, a supermarket worker explained this in the context of her trying to cancel her auto-enrolment pension because she needed the extra £15 per month (she did not seem aware that USDAW offered a discounted subscription for part-time workers).

**She also noted that none of her friends were in a union and that she would only really think of going to a union if she was having issues with her manager, she didn't really consider them in terms of collective bargaining for pay and conditions.**

## Union Organising Campaigns

A number of unions are found in the retail sector. USDAW is perhaps the most significant, but the GMB, Unite, Prospect and the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) also have a presence. Nationally USDAW have formulated guidelines for dealing with zero-hour contracts<sup>60</sup>, while the GMB has been active in campaigning for a £10 hour living wage<sup>61</sup>.

USDAW in particular are making inroads across the retail sector and are currently the UK's fastest growing

60 <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=0588a567-2f5a-455e-b4d7-f8c10b354585>

61 <http://archive.gmb.org.uk/newsroom/challenge-to-get-living-wage-of-10pound-per-hour>

union<sup>62</sup>. They are also targeting a range of budget retailers, such as LIDL<sup>63</sup>, ALDI<sup>64</sup> and B&M Bargains. They recently secured a national recognition agreement with the latter, covering 20,000 workers<sup>65</sup>.

**Local strategies include engaging customers outside stores and campaigning against violence, threats and abuse (the 'Freedom from Fear' campaign<sup>66</sup>).**

Unite meanwhile have employed a highly effective 'leverage' strategy in relation to Sports Direct, which we consider more fully in the logistics case study.

## The TUC Yorkshire and the Humber Summer Patrol

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A new initiative that aims to support the unionisation of workers in the retail (and other sectors) is the 'Summer Patrol' ran for the first time in June 2019 by the Yorkshire and Humber Regional TUC.

The model was adopted from the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, who have been running a similar project for the last 34 years<sup>67</sup>.

The Patrol was conducted by a group of young trade unionists, who entered workplaces unannounced in order to try to conduct interviews with other young workers about their conditions.

The Patrol was supported by volunteers from Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise and this trial initiative can be considered a success. Interviewees reported a range of issues that are familiar to organisers, from lack of a proper contract, arbitrary dismissal and lack of legal rest periods.

Workers were encouraged to sign up for updates for future TUC campaigns and directed to the TUC's Unionfinder tool.

They were also invited to a follow-up meeting ran by the Scottish TUC's Better Than Zero campaign, providing an introduction to workplace organising, which around 20 attended. Overall, the initiative presents a welcome boost to efforts to educate young workers in the city as to their workplace rights, and the benefits of joining a union.

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62 <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2018/Apr/Usdaw-President-opens-the-2018-Annual-Delegate-Mee>

63 <http://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2018/May/Usdaws-campaign-for-recognition-at-Lidl-goes-to-th>

64 <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2016/December/Aldi-called-on-to-recognise-Usdaw-as-staff-contin>

65 <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2017/Sep/Usdaw-secures-a-new-agreement-giving-20000-B-M-wor>

66 <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/freedomfromfear>

67 [https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20TUC%202019%20Summer%20Patrol%20project%20for%20Young%20Workers\\_report\\_G%20LEWIS\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20TUC%202019%20Summer%20Patrol%20project%20for%20Young%20Workers_report_G%20LEWIS_FINAL.pdf)

## 4.2 Hospitality

Accommodation and Food Service includes hotels, camping grounds and holiday sites, restaurants, fast food outlets, events catering, cafes and bars. In Sheffield 17,500 are employed in these industries, of which 16,000 are in food services.

Nationally, the sector has the highest proportion of staff on low pay, at an astonishing 59% (the second highest is retail at 46%<sup>68</sup>). Whilst the national median hourly wage for the sector is £8.15 in the Yorkshire and Humber region it is only £7.93.

In Sheffield two-thirds of the workers in this sector are in part-time employment, well above the national average<sup>69</sup>. In contrast to the national picture Sheffield has seen growth in the Food Services sector, not

least due to the presence of two universities, tens of thousands of students and a flourishing nightlife.

Indeed, two of the fastest growing occupations in Sheffield predicted between 2015 and 2020 are kitchen and catering assistants and waiters and waitresses<sup>70</sup>, the latter of which is currently the 9th lowest paying occupation in the UK.

For our research we have spoken to workers in, and union officials responsible for, bakeries, fast food outlets, small family run restaurants, sporting venues, pubs, cafes and bars.

This research has identified the following issues:

68 Forth J and Rincon-Aznar (2018) Productivity in the UK's low-wage industries: a comparative cross-country analysis, JRF.

69 Nomis Labour Market Statistics (2019).

70 EMSI (2015) Sheffield City Region LEP Report.

### Contracts, Pay and Breaks

**The overwhelming majority of people we interviewed in the hospitality sector were on either zero-hour contracts or some form of variable hour contract with a low guaranteed number of hours per week.** Aamaya and Guy, who worked for the same fast food company were guaranteed only 4 hours, despite typically working between 20-40 hours, Anthony was on a zero-hours contract but worked full-time hours at a pub, Jennifer (working at a sports venue) and Alex (working at a vegan café) were on zero-hours contract and their actual hours could oscillate wildly (but usually between 15-30). All were paid at or around the national minimum (or equivalent youth rate) and breaks were unpaid.

### Unpaid Trial Shifts/Unpaid Wages

**Unpaid trial shifts were commonly reported by the sample of young people we interviewed.** Andrew

reported completing a number of trial shifts working in kitchens for different restaurants in the city and never being paid. Unlike others we spoke to, Jim was eventually reimbursed for three trial shifts (8 hours each) he worked at a popular themed diner in the city-centre, but only after months of chasing the owner.

A Unite official we interviewed explained the logic of the practice and how given competition for jobs some unscrupulous employers would be sitting on piles of CVs and would call people in for trial shifts to cope with spikes in demand. Even more seriously, Milly had worked for a small independent coffee shop that went bankrupt owing her around £3,000 in wages. We know from the government's quarterly releases of prosecution data for illegal non-payment of the minimum wage that her experience is not an isolated one<sup>71</sup>.

71 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/named-shamed-the-sheffield-businesses-failing-to-pay-the-minimum-wage-1-8707189>

## Purchasing Own Uniform and Safety Equipment

Another common way in which employers extracted additional unpaid work from their staff was through **making staff pay for their own uniform and safety equipment**. Aamaya, working for a large regional franchisee of an international fast food brand, reported that she regularly had to purchase her own safety shoes, because they regularly disintegrated due to grease in the air at her workplace:

*I had to pay for them myself. They were like thirty pounds. I pretty much bought all of the uniform myself. They gave me a T-shirt and a cap. ... which I think is stupid especially if you're working full-time. Like, you have to constantly keep washing your clothes.*

Jim, who worked security for an events firm, reported an initial outlay of £35, but that his company ran a scheme whereby this was deducted from pay at a rate of 50p per hour.

## Bullying/Exposure to Abuse and Harassment

Fast food outlets are stressful places to work in, worsened by the routine nature of bullying from management that our participants described. As Guy put it:

*'you'd get shouted out. They used to use their temper as a management technique, so things started flying around [...] the packing would be flying, there would be shouting, swearing, bullying behaviour'.*

Managers and supervisors could exercise their authority through assigning to staff to 'punitive duties', such as manning the fryer all shift (a particularly hot 'station'), repeatedly cleaning the toilets or being sent out on litter-picks in all-weather without suitable clothing.

**Those working in the 'Night-Time Economy' were often exposed to drunken and abusive customers.** Feelings of vulnerability were exacerbated by being the only member of staff 'front of house', a lack of private security guards and failure by the employer to provide transport home.

While abusive customers were a fact of life for many workers, **we have been struck by just how ubiquitous instances of sexual harassment are in the food and beverage industry.** This echoes national research by Unite the Union<sup>72</sup>. Jennifer gave us the example of working at restaurants and bars at sporting events, where girls and young women would be working in close proximity to intoxicated men:

*[...] especially when there would be sometimes groups of older men, with a bit of money as well – they liked to flash it around. [...] And yes, they always make advances at the girls that are serving them, all the time. I remember this one guy once having to tell him like, 'I'm underage, you are disgusting.'*

Customers were not the only threat to women, and we also recorded instances of female workers being harassed by male managers, colleagues and supervisors.

## Unionisation

The recognition agreement with the national chain of bakeries Greggs notwithstanding, rates of unionisation in the Food Services sector is very low (under 5%). **Most interviewees knew very little about unions, or believed they only represented certain categories of workers 'like teachers or...bus drivers or something like that' (Anthony).** Jennifer, who comes from a 'pit village' and knows about the Miner's strike, has become politicised, but previously 'just presumed they were a thing of the past, never even really thought about it'. Even those who did know what a union was, like Alex, expressed doubt that 'the big unions [would be] interested in this kind of workplace' (i.e. a small independently run café).

Furthermore, **Jennifer also raised the issue of the costs associated with union subscriptions and a 'fear of direct debits', noting that even quite a low rate of 'subs' might seem risky to a person whose income is completely unstable.**

Finally, she also raised questions about how representative the unions were, evoking the image of the traditional image of the older, male, full time

72 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/not-on-menu-what-presidents-club-revealed-about-hospitality-work-and-media-attitu/>

organiser:

*Yes, I think the type of people who would go in to recruit them [matters], if it's just all men and if you were coming into the catering – it's the girls that are in trouble, the sixteen-year-old girls.*

## Union Organising Campaigns

Two unions that have been active nationally in the food and beverage sector are Unite and the BFAWU. Unite for example have engaged in 'leverage' actions designed to shame restaurant chains such as TGI Fridays over their use of unpaid trial shifts<sup>73</sup> and practices relating to the distribution of tips<sup>74</sup>. Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise have joined Unite in picketing outlets in the city in solidarity with workers taking strike action elsewhere.

**BFAWU meanwhile have been developing their McStrike campaign (formerly called the Fast Food Workers Rights campaign), which primarily targets McDonalds, for some years, campaigning to secure a higher minimum wage of £15 an hour, guaranteeing hours for workers and union recognition.**

**Organising efforts have led to historic first ever strikes in the history of McDonalds in the UK at stores in Cambridge and Crayford in September 2017.** These were joined by further sites in taking action in May 2018, November 2018 and then again in November 2019. BFAWU has used innovative organising strategies that involve making initial contacts with fast food workers and then building the relationship over time, picking up on issues that are endemic to the fast food industry, including lack of consistency of hours, low pay, bullying and harassment. The actions that BFAWU members have taken have already led to major victories, such as a pay-rise for all directly employed McDonalds staff in January 2018<sup>75</sup>.

Even before taking strike action, initial campaigning forced McDonalds into the position of claiming to offer its 115,000 UK workers the option of moving from zero-hours to a more secure contract<sup>76</sup>.

**Aware of the need to deepen the McStrike campaign outside of the southeast of England, Sheffield TUC, through its Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise campaign, crowdfunded £10k and signed a partnership agreement with BFAWU to hire a local fast food organiser for the city<sup>77</sup>.**

The role commenced in April 2019.



<sup>73</sup> <https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2018/march/tgi-fridays-named-and-shamed-over-unpaid-trial-shifts/>

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/18/tgi-fridays-staff-go-on-strike-in-uk-in-dispute-over-tipping>

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.politics.co.uk/opinion-formers/bakers-food-and-allied-workers-union/article/the-bfawu-welcomes-mcdonalds-pay-announcement>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/apr/25/mcdonalds-contracts-uk-zero-hours-workers>

<sup>77</sup> <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/union-organiser-will-co-ordinate-city-wide-action-jobs-pay-conditions-and-membership>

# Food Services: Aamaya's Story

Aamaya works for a fast food outlet for a major international brand, but one that is operated by a large regional franchisee.

She is 21 and currently in the closing stages of an undergraduate degree at Sheffield Hallam University. She started working at her current place of employment in the summer of 2018.

Like the majority of her co-workers, Aamaya is on a four-hour minimum contract, despite working on average a 20-hour week during term-time and 45-hours during the university holidays.

Despite being contracted for a low number of hours, she is expected to state that she is available for work during most of the week. She is paid the minimum wage.

Aamaya notes that due to the location of the store and the times she is working, she frequently encounters 'loud, abusive, aggressive and messy' customers.

Despite incidences of violence in proximity to the store – including a recent stabbing – the employer does not provide taxis to allow workers to get home when they finish late at night.

Aamaya also has to purchase some of the items that compose her uniform. When asked about trade unions, Aamaya stated she didn't think there would be one for fast food and that she associated unions more with professional occupations such as doctors and teachers.

## 4.3 Social Care

Social care is one of the UK's largest industries, employing an estimated 1.45 million workers.

In Sheffield Adult Social Care employs around 16,100 and is split between local authorities (10%), independent sector providers (81%) and jobs for direct payment recipients (9%)<sup>78</sup>.

Compulsory competitive tendering adopted during the 1980s forced councils to open up large parts of their service delivery to private sector providers to eliminate 'producer capture' and achieve cost savings.

However, evidence suggests that reductions in running costs as a result of outsourcing derive from

lower service standards and firms undercutting competitors through lower labour costs rather than any improvements in efficiency. Indeed, the Social Care Sector is undergoing a funding crisis.

The Local Government Association (LGA) response to the Government Green Paper on Social Care pointed to immediate funding pressures that are set to exceed £2 billion by 2020<sup>79</sup>.

For our research we have spoken to workers in, and union officials responsible for, a range of social care providers.

This research has identified the following issues:

78 Direct payments allows social care users to claim the funds to purchase their own services, rather than the traditional method of the Local Authority providing such care.

79 <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-responds-details-social-care-green-paper>

### Pay

Pay is a major issue in the social care sector. **The Low Pay Commission (LPC) has defined social care as a low paying industry and progression is extremely limited.** One of our interviewees, Joe, remained on the minimum wage despite 8 years' service with the same company.

Whilst the National Living Wage has improved conditions for some workers it will have a knock-on impact on funding and pressures to keep wages at a minimum level. A further component of poor remuneration is the non-payment for travel time, which in some instances leads to sub-minimum wage rates<sup>80</sup>.

### Precarious Work

Social care accounts for a tenth of the increase in

precarious working. Nationally, the number of care home workers facing insecurity has risen by 66,000 (+133%) since 2011. Over 1 in 10 are now in insecure jobs<sup>81</sup>.

The health and social work sector contains 20% of all ZHC workers. **According to AgeUK well over half of ZHC workers: want more hours; feel they have to accept work if their employer asks; and find it difficult to budget from month to month.** ZHC workers are less likely to receive training as their full-time counterparts<sup>82</sup>.

### Working Conditions and Training

The Institute of Employment Rights (IER) commissioned a study of the social care sector<sup>83</sup> and found a number of challenges for workers in the sector, particularly in terms of staff turnover (estimated at 27.8%, or 350,000 leavers per year<sup>84</sup>), self-employment

80 <https://corporatewatch.org/understanding-care-workers-pay-and-travel-time>

81 <http://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2017/02/insecure-work-quarter-since-2011-sectors-driving>

82 Age UK (2016) Zerohour contracts [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb\\_may16\\_zero\\_hour\\_contracts.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_may16_zero_hour_contracts.pdf)

83 <http://www.ier.org.uk/news/study-exploitation-care-workers-demands-action-sectoral-collective-bargaining>

84 Skills for Care (2017) The State of the Adult Social Care Sector and Workforce in England <https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/Documents/NMDS-SC-and-intelligence/NMDS-SC/Analysis-pages/State-of-17/State-of-the-adult-social-care-sector-and-workforce-2017.pdf>



and a lack of effective employment rights.

**A common theme from our own interviews was a lack of training provision, which is especially concerning given the complex needs of service users.**

One key component of poor working conditions relates to staffing levels in care homes, with statutory minimum staffing ratios frequently being treated as maximums:

*For instance, at full capacity, say, twenty residents, on a night you would only have two people running the site. That's hourly bed-turns, making sure the residents are able to go to the toilet if they need to go to the toilet and also that they receive water, so especially on warmer nights they have to be watered, with a lot of medication that's then give on four-hourly basis, one-hourly basis, depending on the medication, and a lot of paperwork that needs filling in.*

- GMB Official

As noted by Joe (and in Steven's story on page 48), staffing levels, combined with inadequate training and pay that is rarely above the statutory minimum, creates a situation where employees are overworked, but undervalued and underpaid.

## Unionisation

Nationally, social care is primarily spread over two standard industry classifications, 'social work without accommodation' and 'residential care activities'. For the former, the rate of unionisation stood at 21.9% as of 2018, down from 42.9% in the mid-90s, and for the latter, 17.3% in 2018, down from 31.4% almost a quarter of a century ago.

Locally, what we have found is highly differentiated, with some employers (particularly those contracted to the local authority or larger national and local registered charities) having a small core of unionised workers and some companies or sites enjoying mid to high densities, but also a large number of private sector and smaller companies with very low to no union membership.

It is clear from conversations with organisers from Unison and GMB that no more than 10% of employees in adult social care in the city are a member of a union. Steven, a young Unison member, described the challenges of organising small and fragmented workforces, but also noted that it could be difficult to sell the benefits of unionisation when the image of the union was of an 'insurance policy' for disciplinaries and grievances, rather than a vehicle for challenging terms and conditions:

*'I certainly think there's a difficult argument to be had to kind of defend the importance of unionisation'.*

## Union Organising Strategies

There are significant challenges and issues in terms of organising workers in this sector.

The predominance of zero or variable hour contracts creates fears of workers exposing themselves and losing the shifts that they have, while the fragmented nature of care provision between different providers and multiple sites can make it difficult for the unions to engage people.

Nonetheless, trade unions are making progress in the city, with membership at one social care provider increasing from 10 to over 50 in the last year and being close to achieving the statutory recognition threshold.

**Given the poor working conditions, pay and oppressive working practices, representative trade unions in the Care Sector (Unison and GMB) have formulated care charters providing a set of demands to campaign around pay and working conditions.**

Sheffield City Council has signed up to Unison's Care Charter<sup>85</sup>, which among other policies will guarantee not to use zero-hour contracts. The GMB has formulated a charter on similar lines<sup>86</sup>.

These charters call for homecare workers to be paid for their travel time, travel costs and other necessary expenses, for visits to be scheduled so that homecare workers are not forced to rush their time with clients, for homecare workers to receive necessary training, be

85 <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/article/2017/10/sheffield-charter/>

86 <https://www.lgiu.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/GMB-Care-Sector-Charter-LW-1.pdf>

covered by occupational sick pay and be paid at least the Living Wage Foundation living wage.

The charters call for homecare workers to be given the opportunity to regularly meet co-workers to share best practice and limit their isolation. For unions, monitoring subsequent contracts that the Council tenders is vital to ensuring provisions of the Charter are met.

Finally, outside of the TUC affiliated unions, Joe had been active with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and had achieved some real successes at his local, mid-sized supported living company, but a lack of institutional support and organisational capacity rendered it difficult to sustain membership and activity over time.

# Social Care: Steven's Story

Steven works for a national social care charity which provides assisted living to residents with learning disabilities. Steven has experienced numerous difficulties working in the social care sector, including very low pay and negative management practices such as passing their roles down to carers themselves, irregular shift patterns, illegitimate payment practices and excessive paperwork.

Steven reported his pay to be £8 per hour in early 2018, having recently being increased from the legal minimum of £7.50 in 2017. He had recently been in dispute with his employer over top-up payments for 'sleepover shifts'. Such shifts, where a worker is required to sleep on site and be on call throughout, were exempted from the 1998 minimum wage introduction, remaining unchanged at £3 per hour for two decades.

Steven pointed to a sectoral tendency towards inadequate staff training, highlighting experiences from a prior role whereby carers were given limited training to help autistic users with complex needs:

[...] yet the contradiction that you had there is, it was a minimum wage job, where you didn't have to have any previous qualifications or any previous experience of autism, you got two weeks' worth of training, then you were expected to support people that had really quite high needs.

In this instance a lack of training resulted in staff being exposed to violence by autistic service users, leaving one worker with a broken arm. Steven also suggested that social care charities attempt to instil a sense of guilt into workers for wanting better conditions and even asked if workers wanted to donate part of their wages to the charity (i.e. the employer).

## 4.4 Transport and Storage

Transport and Storage covers a really wide range of occupations, from bus and coach drivers, taxi drivers, Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers, van drivers, train drivers, train guards and pilots to mechanics, garage managers and proprietors, travel agents and warehouse operatives, supervisors and managers.

The sector has a smaller proportion of staff on low pay compared to other sectors. Nevertheless, locally we are aware of some very large employers (such as Sports Direct and ASOS) who have made widespread use of casual contracts and enforced highly exploitative

working conditions on their staff<sup>87</sup>.

In the Sheffield City Region 42,000 are employed in these industries, with 10,000 of these within the City of Sheffield itself<sup>88</sup>.

For our research we have spoken to workers in van and bicycle courier roles and warehouse operatives, as well as union officials supporting HGV drivers and warehouse operatives.

The research has identified the following issues:

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/jul/28/sports-direct-staff-zero-hour-contracts>  
<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/asos-staff-treated-paramedics-once-9509318>

<sup>88</sup> Nomis Labour Market Statistics (2019).

### Platform Working

Malcolm told us about his experiences as a bicycle courier, delivering meals from fast food outlets to customers' homes.

For each delivery within a 2.5-mile radius he would be paid just £4, though he could choose to sign on and be available for 'shifts', in which case he would be paid the national minimum wage.

If Malcolm does not book onto shifts in advance, he might not get one, given the increasing numbers of riders his firm has hired. Malcolm is owed a £50 performance bonus from the company but in the absence of formal management structures there is little he can do other than send-off emails.

**A group of fast-food courier drivers we spoke to also complained of the opaque algorithms that determined which jobs went to which drivers, constant changes to the minimum delivery tariff and the way they could be excluded from bonus payments for refusing an order which contained alcohol (because many of them were Muslims).**

This group also identified a lack of support from both their employer and the city council in dealing with parking fines they were routinely issued with while waiting outside of restaurants (despite the law allowing 20 minutes for 'loading', even on double yellow lines).

Elsewhere there was a concern from traditional taxi drivers that the heavily discounted fare structures offered by new platforms like Uber would have a detrimental impact on their terms and conditions.

### Unregulated 'Pick' and Delivery Rates

A major concern in relation to working conditions in the sector relates to unrealistic 'pick' rates imposed on warehouse staff and delivery rates imposed upon couriers.

In terms of the former, **GMB have drawn attention to the number of ambulance call outs to the ASOS warehouse, due to the performance targets imposed by XPO Logistics, who supply the staff<sup>89</sup>.**

In terms of the latter, Harry's story below demonstrates

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.retailgazette.co.uk/blog/2019/05/ambulance-call-outs-surge-at-jd-sports-asos-warehouses/>

how Amazon's expected number of deliveries could lead to drivers to working 12-hour shifts.

## Subcontracting of Employment and Bogus Self-Employment

At some workplaces the vast majority of jobs are subcontracted out. At Amazon's Sheffield 'delivery station' less than 10% are directly employed.

As one Unite official we interviewed noted in relation to warehousing:

*'contracts are won and lost overnight and employers are won and lost overnight, [a] backwards and forwards and that hits terms and conditions'.*

In the rail industry one RMT official we spoke to explained how the catering sales staff in first class for a Train Operating Company are directly employed, but those in standard class are employed by a subcontractor and workers terms and conditions were reduced when the original subcontractor went bankrupt.

**Elsewhere we found that bogus self-employment was rife in the 'platform' sector, with workers being classed as self-employed and therefore exempt from minimum wage legislation, having to provide their own vehicles and cover other costs, but carrying a company's branding, wearing a uniform and receiving penalties for not being available to work at particular times.**

## Unionisation

**Transport and Storage is a veritable hotbed of union activity, being the most unionised industry outside of the public sector at 36% and with the sector seeing the most days of strike action taken in 2015<sup>90</sup>.**

Exploring this picture in greater detail we can see that 'land transport' has a unionisation rate of 34.5% as of 2018 and this is down from almost 50% in the mid-1990s. 'Warehousing and support for transport' meanwhile has a density of just 26.7%, down from just

under 40% over the same period.

## Union Organising Campaigns

Unions such as GMB and Unite have established organising campaigns seeking to expand into un-unionised workplaces. GMB have active organising campaigns at Amazon and other logistics companies and have recently secured national recognition with the courier firm Hermes<sup>91</sup>.

Campaigning by Unite the Union under their 'Sports Direct Shame' initiative has helped throw the spotlight on the extent of precarious work at their Shirebrook warehouse, where only 10% of the 3,000 staff it employed had a permanent contract.

The union has built its membership at the site, using innovative techniques such as the provision of free English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to engage migrant labourers at the site<sup>92</sup>.

In 2016 the union secured a major victory in negotiating the back-payment of £1m for unpaid security searches workers were subject to at the end of their shifts<sup>93</sup>.

Nonetheless, one Unite official we spoke to talked about the difficulty of accessing sites where the union did not have a recognition agreement:

*[...] called in to represent somebody and they hire a room at the Holiday Inn rather than allow me on-site because I'm going to turn everybody to stone and cause problems if I walk in there.*

**Other full-time officials we interviewed spoke of the difficulty in engaging in so-called 'greenfield' organising.** Although some unions are engaging in such activity, officials noted the temptation to focus on servicing members in already-organised employers:

*So if you are a regional organiser and you're dealing with half a dozen companies – big companies – and then you might have two or three of these smaller [...] companies, who are you going to concentrate on? You know who*

90 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/news/news/transportandstoragesectorhashighestrateofdayslostin2015>

91 <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/hermes-gmb-groundbreaking-gig-economy-deal>

92 <https://www.unionlearn.org.uk/case-studies/unite-english-courses-help-sports-direct-workers>

93 <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-secures-minimum-wage-victory-for-sports-direct-workers/>

| *you're going to concentrate on because you've got fully  
| trained reps there.*

- RMT Official

These difficulties notwithstanding, unions such as the GMB have committed to an organising drive around Amazon warehouses in the City Region<sup>94</sup> and the non-TUC affiliated Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) has begun organising couriers in Sheffield and South Yorkshire around the issues identified above, leading to initial strikes in the summer of 2019<sup>95</sup>.

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94 [https://www.gmbyorkshire.org.uk/join\\_us\\_for\\_a\\_demo\\_at\\_amazon\\_depot\\_in\\_sheffield](https://www.gmbyorkshire.org.uk/join_us_for_a_demo_at_amazon_depot_in_sheffield)

95 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/business/deliveroo-couriers-stage-strike-sheffield-busiest-day-493657>

# Transport and Storage: Harry's Story

Harry (60) is of South Asian descent. Due to a combination of employment discrimination and his own mental health issues he has in recent years found himself in numerous poor-quality, low-paid jobs. By the summer of 2018 he was on Universal Credit and responded to an advert for a courier subcontracted to Amazon in Sheffield ('be your own boss, earn £50k a year').

Only after the job interview did it become clear that Harry would have to pay for his own drug and alcohol tests and DBS check and would have to undertake two days unpaid training. Harry was paid £112 per day and calculated that he would need 6 days' work a week to make the job pay. This was because he had to hire a branded van at a cost of £179 per week, as well as fuelling it at the cost of £25 per day.

However, he was only getting 4 days work a week, sometimes driving 1 hour to the depot to be told there was no work. For Harry most of his deliveries were in a city one hour away and he was expected to make 120 drops per day. Average time for deliveries is two minutes. This was only possible if every customer was at home. If they were not and Harry had to find neighbours this massively increased the working day and he often ended up working a 12 hour shift - 9am to 9pm.

Harry was also subject to arbitrary sanctions and fines, which included a £500 fine for a minor scratch to his hire van (his bosses wouldn't provide a verifying receipt regarding the cost of repair) and a £200 fine for cancelling a shift.

All told Harry calculated that he was clearing around £70 per week and regularly earning less than £2 per hour.

## 4.5 Higher Education

76,000 people are employed in the broader Education sector in the Sheffield City Region, but the majority of these work in primary and secondary education. The two universities in the city together employ around 12,500 staff.

**The University College Union (UCU) has identified casualisation and precarious work as a major issue in the Higher Education sector<sup>96</sup>.**

There has been a proliferation of variable and zero-hour contracts since 2000, with an estimated 649-796 'Associate Lecturers' (ALs) on zero-hour contracts at

Sheffield Hallam University between 2014 and 2017<sup>97</sup> and around 500 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) at the University of Sheffield. Evidence suggests that there is an over-representation of women, BAME and younger and older workers amongst the casualised higher education workforce.

For our research we have focused on academic staff and have spoken to lecturers on hourly paid contracts and UCU branch officers at both of the local Universities.

**This research has identified the following issues:**

96 UCU (2016) Precarious work in Higher Education, UCU [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/7995/Precarious-work-in-higher-education-a-snapshot-of-insecure-contracts-and-institutional-attitudes-Apr-16/pdf/ucu\\_precariouscontract\\_hereport\\_apr16.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/7995/Precarious-work-in-higher-education-a-snapshot-of-insecure-contracts-and-institutional-attitudes-Apr-16/pdf/ucu_precariouscontract_hereport_apr16.pdf)

97 Jeffery et al (2014) A Report on Hourly Paid Contracts, Sheffield Hallam UCU Branch, and <https://www.unipaper.co.uk/article/lecturers-at-sheffield-unis-claim-casual-roles-are-harming-education>

### Contracts and Pay

**A major issue around casualised working at the universities is the lack of clarity concerning what staff can claim for.** Many zero-hour staff are paid a so-called 'comprehensive hourly rate' for every one hour of direct face-to-face teaching, but which is supposed to incorporate a range of other duties. For Sara, the 'comprehensive hourly rate' may seem generous at £45, but includes huge amounts of preparation, marking and interaction with students that is all additional to the time spent in a classroom. She estimates that her paid contact time of 10 hours actually equates to more than a 37 hour week.

**Sara worked hours equivalent to a full-time member of staff yet earned only £12,000 per annum. Her full-time equivalent working these hours would be paid somewhere in the region of £42,000 per annum.** Moreover, at Sheffield Hallam policies exist to the effect that ALs should be invited to staff meetings and training and paid the appropriate 'meeting rate' (of £22-25), but in practice this rarely happens.

Most worryingly, while sick pay is available for hourly paid staff at both universities (calculated on the basis of previous earnings), UCU branch officers informed

us that many hourly paid staff are not aware of this. At Sheffield Hallam there is a 'conversion process' that allows ALs who have worked over 100 hours in each of the previous 3 years (amounting to a 0.2 fractional contract) to apply for conversion to a full academic contract.

Nonetheless, we are aware that managers can game the system by employing more staff but holding them under the required threshold and even when staff do meet the criteria, their case for conversion is often turned down for vague and undefined 'business reasons'.

### Insecurity

There is a sense that hourly paid lecturers are very much employed to 'plug gaps' and therefore hours could fluctuate wildly as student numbers go up and down, full-time staff are absent through maternity, illness or sabbaticals, or as additional full-time staff are taken on. For example, Sara had her hours for the second semester cut drastically with only one month's notice. Michael meanwhile referred to the difficulty in accessing a mortgage on a zero-hours contract, and Thomas voiced his concerns of whether he would be



able to pay bills and the fact that he was not earning enough to contribute to a pension.

**Due to the level of employment insecurity and the fact that hours could be cut at very little notice, there is a significant sense of vulnerability in terms of raising complaints of unequal treatment or being subject to bullying and harassment.**

## **Training, Development, Progression and Being Valued**

The workers and UCU officers we interviewed reported that training for casualised teaching staff was minimal and often non-existent, with workers reliant upon previous experience or 'thrown in at the deep end'. Feedback on performance and development opportunities appear to be extremely limited. Cumulatively, the issues identified above, including lack of transparency around workloads and insecurity, led to staff feeling undervalued.

This was compounded by a number of issues in which zero-hour lecturers were treated less favourably than full-time staff. This included not being invited to staff meetings, but also a lack of access to facilities.

## **Unionisation**

In general, education is one of the mostly highly unionised sectors in the UK, with a rate of 47.6% as of 2018. However, even here we have seen reductions since 1995, when the rate was 55.6%. Furthermore, anecdotally, it is suspected that rates of unionisation are much lower amongst casualised staff (perhaps 1/5 of the GTAs at the University of Sheffield, for example).

## **Union Organising Campaigns**

Sheffield Hallam UCU Branch surveyed staff on zero-hour contracts in 2014<sup>98</sup> in order to highlight widespread discontent with casualisation and gain

media attention to use as leverage with the kind of employers that are notoriously sensitive to bad publicity<sup>99</sup>. This has included coordinating support from the Students' Union<sup>100</sup>. This was followed by a similar survey by University of Sheffield UCU in 2016<sup>101</sup>. **The University of Sheffield UCU combined this survey with other forms of leverage to achieve a major victory in 2018 with a management commitment to end the use of 'casual worker' contracts<sup>102</sup>.**

University of Sheffield UCU had already previously negotiated a variable hours' contract for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA). This was still an hourly paid contract but with a guaranteed minimum number of hours, with staff recognised as employees with access to negotiated benefits and training. Local action had also won separate pay for the marking of essays that GTAs undertake.

Progress has been slower at Sheffield Hallam University, but following the creation of a local Anti-Casualisation Officer role in the branch in 2018, the branch coordinated a joint claim on anti-casualisation with the other campus trade unions (Unison, GMB and Unite) and as of summer 2019 is in negotiations with a view to both converting a proportion of Associate Lecturers on to permanent fractional contracts, but also tackling the less favourable treatment of those that remain on zero-hour contracts.

**A UCU branch official at the University of Sheffield referred to the importance of UCU having established a national Anti-Casualisation Committee, which was allowing activists to share best practice, as well as learning from activists in other sectors.**

98 Jeffery et al (2014) A Report on Hourly Paid Contracts, Sheffield Hallam UCU Branch.

99 See for example, <https://www.thestar.co.uk/business/sheffield-lecturers-in-call-to-end-casual-contracts-1-6976811>

100 <https://www.unipaper.co.uk/article/lecturers-at-sheffield-unis-claim-casual-roles-are-harming-education>

101 <https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/sucu-casual/home>

102 <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/9578/Use-of-casual-worker-contracts-to-be-ended-at-University-of-Sheffield>

## 4.6 Call Centres

The call centre industry does not neatly map on to the ONS standard industry classifications, as call centres cross-cut sectors. Nonetheless, in the Sheffield City Region call centres are found in the Financial and Insurance Activities sector, which employs 17,000, and the Administrative and Support Service Activities sector, which employs 54,000<sup>103</sup>.

Although only a smaller proportion of jobs in both of these sectors locally will be located in call centres, nationally, it is estimated that as of 2018 some 772,000 workers are employed in over 6,000 call centres<sup>104</sup>. There is also a distinct geographical distribution to call

centres in the UK, which account for higher percentages of total employment in Scotland, North West and North East England, and Yorkshire and the Humber. Employment in the sector has oscillated over the last decade, with the switch to automated digital channels, self-service and Brexit expected to drive a modest decrease in jobs over the next few years.

For our research we have spoken to workers in 'in-bound' (services) and 'out-bound' (sales) call centres relating to financial services and utilities.

This research has identified the following issues:

<sup>103</sup> Nomis Labour Market Statistics (2017).

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.contactbabel.com/pdfs/UK%20SOITP%202019-23%20Marketing%20v2.pdf>  
[https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/call\\_centres\\_report.pdf](https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/call_centres_report.pdf)

### Contracts and Pay

While a great deal of employees are directly employed on full-time and part-time contracts, **we did find extensive use of agency employment, whereby after 12 weeks agency workers would be converted to company contracts if they were performing, but let go if they were not.**

Sub-contracting was also common, with Guy and Jane having worked stints at Capita, providing call handling services to Thames Water and the DWP.

Regardless of contract type, pay levels are low. Jane was paid the Living Wage Foundation minimum at that time, of £7.85 per hour. Milly was also paid the minimum wage, but also received commission on sales. Andrew commented on the perception that his employer is 'the best paid call centre in Sheffield', though he nonetheless started on only a pound above the legal hourly minimum. Andrew commented that this higher pay was instituted in order to deal with staff retention problems. His employer is a major multinational with a turnover in the billions of pounds.

### Working Patterns and Breaks

Andrew explained that working patterns could be highly variable. His call centre operated 8am-4pm, 9am-5pm, 10am-6pm and 12noon-8pm shifts, on rotation.

Typically he would have a one hour lunch break on a standard shift, but when he was rotated onto a Sunday shift, which was only six hours, he was only eligible for two 10 minute breaks, leaving him struggling to find the time to eat lunch (management advise that they can eat at their desks while waiting for a call).

### Performance Management

**Andrew described a regime of digital monitoring including clocking in, logging on, type of work being undertaken, call duration, allocation for 'after-call-work', as well as calls being monitored by supervisors.**

If call handlers go over the prescribed duration for after-call-work, they must digitally request more time from a supervisor (which can be denied). He is also subject to regular meetings with management to discuss performance. As Jane describes:

*It was quite fast-paced, like they wanted you to be out of a call within a couple of minutes [...] So they wanted you to quickly flick through what the customer wanted and then move on to the next call. [...] you were only allowed to spend so long [on 'wrap up'].*

*If you took longer, you'd have a supervisor ring your phone and he'd be like 'are you okay? [...] if you go over your breaks you have to work the time back.*

## Abusive Customers and Managers

Frequently dealing with irate customers is a fact of life in call centres. **Andrew told us he would interact with at least one abusive customer per day, and there was very little training in terms of how to respond.** Jane on the other hand said she did feel supported to be more assertive with customers, as long as she was being professional and polite.

The high-pressure environments (particularly sales), high turnover of staff and use of agency staff and often minimal (if any) union presence could also be conducive to bullying and harassment of staff. In one particularly egregious example, during a 'bad day' (in terms of achieving sales targets) **a manager threw a stack of plastic cups from a water cooler across the office, hitting Milly in the head** – an incident that was subsequently 'laughed off'.

## Stress and Depression

It is clear from the several workers that we spoke to that the pace of work, performance targets, surveillance and emotional work involved in dealing with large numbers of the public each day took a toll on their mental health, as Jane noted:

*If I'm really really honest I don't normally talk about this, but it actually made me quite depressed. And that's not like me at all. [...] I think I'm quite an upbeat out-going person. I used to dread getting up, I used to dread going into work, I'd come back from work and I'd just be miserable.. [...] And I had some pretty dark thoughts, not like to the point where you know [...] but I just sort of did not want to go to work and I was thinking of ways of getting out of work.*

Milly described being anxious when she went home over her actions at work, particularly whether she had accidentally sold products to 'vulnerable' customers ('and obviously it's really hard to determine who's vulnerable over the phone').

Andrew meanwhile talked about not having the energy to speak to friends after work and increasing his alcohol intake as a way to unwind.

## Unionisation

Nationally, within the finance sector, call centre work might conceivably be located across three of the standard industrial classifications, 'financial', 'insurance, reinsurance and pension' and 'auxiliary to financial and insurance'.

The respective rates of unionisation for these industries as of 2018 are 18.6%, 8.4% and 8.1%, all down from the mid-1990s when they stood at 46.7%, 31.6% and 23.7%. Call centre work is also located in the 'office admin, support and other' industrial classification, here the rate of unionisation was 8.1% as of 2018, down five percentage points since the late 1990s.

## Union Organising Strategies

A number of unions organise in the call centre sector, including Unite, Unison and the Communication Workers Union (CWU).

**Jane was typical in that she was not aware of any union presence during her time employed with Capita.**

At the time of the interview Andrew had become a Unite union representative but argued that the fact that their membership had been placed in a national branch took some of the focus away from his specific site.

He also pointed to a lack of dedicated union office space and the difficulties engaging the membership when most were tied to their desks for the majority of the working day. Communication with members takes places mostly through email, which is a barrier in terms of building personal relationships.

**Unison and CWU are promoting call centre 'charters'<sup>105</sup>, lobbying for decent rates of pay, training opportunities, manageable workloads, health and safety and the proper regulation of monitoring systems.**

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<sup>105</sup> <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/06/On-line-Catalogue208653.pdf>  
<https://www.cwu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/9-contact-centre-charter.pdf>

## 4.7 NHS: Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

Sheffield employs around 42,000 workers in the Human Health and Social Work Activities sector, with Sheffield Teaching Hospitals (STH) employing just over 16,000 workers<sup>106</sup>.

For our research we have spoken to a Unison

representative at the Teaching Hospitals and a national officer at the Royal College of Midwives (RCM), as well as making use of extensive reports and local sources of data.

This research has identified the following issues:

106 Sheffield NHS (2016) Annual Report [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/634467/SHEFFIEL](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634467/SHEFFIEL)

### Cuts

In 2016 England was carved into 44 areas that had to formulate 'Sustainability and Transformation Plans' (STPs) for health for the period 2020/2021<sup>107</sup>. Sheffield is covered by the South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw STP (SY&B STP).

Unison has expressed the view that STPs are potential vehicles for devolving the NHS cuts in local areas as well as facilitating or enhancing the process of outsourcing and privatisation. For example, **the SY&B STP estimate the funding gap will be £571 million by 2020/21 and for Sheffield Teaching Hospitals the expected shortfall of funding is expected to be £232 million.**

### Pay, Staffing and Grading

**A review of the SY&B STP has cited "low starting salaries, perceptions of limited career development, high levels of responsibility, a lack of financial support" as reasons for a recruitment crisis in the regional hospitals.** In fact, shortages exist for all medical and non-medical staff, across all grades and staff groups, and challenges persist throughout the entire workforce lifecycle<sup>108</sup>.

The link between pay and grading was an issue discussed by both the RCM organiser and the Unison representative we interviewed. The former noted that qualified midwives were increasingly being held back from progressing up to the pay structure, and that additional criteria were being placed upon them.

**At the lowest end, the Unison member explained that porters and domestics remain trapped on the bottom grades of the pay structure and therefore feel the greatest impact of wage restraint.**

### Working Conditions, Agency Staff and Deskilling

Analysis of a local staff survey reveals 1 in 5 workers experiencing bullying and harassment from patients, relatives or members of the public, only 39% reporting good communication with management, yet 68% are working additional hours and **54% attending work in the last three months despite feeling unwell**, because they felt pressure from their managers, their colleagues or themselves<sup>109</sup>.

A Freedom of Information request by trade unions in Sheffield Hospitals has revealed that the STH had spent £90 million on agency staff in a four-year period (2013-2017). As quoted in the Sheffield Star the Yorkshire

107 South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw STP, p40 [http://www.smybndccgs.nhs.uk/application/files/1514/8037/0832/South\\_Yorkshire\\_and\\_Bassetlaw\\_Sustainability\\_and\\_Transformation\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.smybndccgs.nhs.uk/application/files/1514/8037/0832/South_Yorkshire_and_Bassetlaw_Sustainability_and_Transformation_Plan.pdf)

108 Welch C Hospital ServicesIndependent Review May 2018 [https://www.healthandcaretogethersyb.co.uk/application/files/2515/2579/1881/1\\_HSR\\_Stage\\_2\\_Report.pdf](https://www.healthandcaretogethersyb.co.uk/application/files/2515/2579/1881/1_HSR_Stage_2_Report.pdf)

109 <https://www.sth.nhs.uk/clientfiles/File/Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%202016-2017%20incorporating%20the%20Annual%20Quality%20Report.pdf>

Regional Director of the Royal College of Nursing stated<sup>110</sup>:

*The over-reliance on short-term staffing in the NHS has been getting worse for years and won't be fixed overnight. Trusts are struggling to recruit and retain nurses, whilst the number of nurses being trained in the UK has been reduced for short-term financial reasons.*

**At a national level there are concerns that cost savings are being achieved by the trend towards the deskilling of roles, whereby Maternity and Nursing Support Workers increasingly take on the traditional duties of nurses, but on lower pay.**

## Unionisation and Union Organising Strategies

In general, 'human health activities' enjoys high levels of unionisation, at 53.5% and levels of unionisation appear to be more resilient here than other sectors, having dropped little over 1% since 1995.

The Sheffield Save Our NHS (SSONHS) along with local trade unions were part of an unsuccessful national campaign that sought a judicial review to stop the government from introducing new commercial, non-NHS bodies (Accountable Care Organisations (ACOs)) to run health and social services without proper public consultation and without full Parliamentary scrutiny.

ACOs will be governed by company and contract law and can be given "full responsibility" for NHS and adult social services. This second point is important in terms of the way the privatisation agenda will potentially lead to deterioration in pay and conditions and more precarious work in the NHS.

Anti-casualisation has been the subject of cross union campaigns but in 2017 NHS Improvement has paused plans to ban health service employees from picking up extra work with agencies<sup>111</sup>. This is being monitored closely by local trade unions in the Sheffield region.

## The coalition of trade unions and communities under

**the umbrella of Sheffield Save Our NHS<sup>112</sup> has been campaigning along with local MP Louise Haigh against the restructuring of services and successfully fought off the proposed closure of the Minor Injuries Unit and NHS Walk-in Centre<sup>113</sup>.**

SSONHS is affiliated to two national groups: Health Campaigns Together and Keep Our NHS Public and linked to South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw NHS Action Group (SYBNAG<sup>114</sup>). The latter can be seen as significant in terms of the need to respond to the proposals emerging from the Sustainability and Transformation Partnership (STP) and building and linking with campaigns at the city region level.

110 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/our-towns-and-cities/sheffield/hospitals-in-sheffield-run-up-90m-agency-staff-bill-1-8506832>

111 <https://www.unison.org.uk/news/press-release/2017/03/unison-welcomes-u-turn-on-nhs-agency-work-ban/>

112 [http://www.sheffieldsaveournhs.co.uk/home\\_4.html](http://www.sheffieldsaveournhs.co.uk/home_4.html)

113 <https://keepournhspublic.com/sheffield-big-win/>

114 <https://sybnhsactiongroup.wordpress.com/>

# NHS: Claire's Story

Claire works in NHS administration in a Sheffield hospital, in her non-medical role she talks about how in work progression and promotion has become increasingly difficult alongside deeply restrictive pay banding.

For Claire this has been made even more difficult by the way the NHS is choosing to redesign administrative services. It is increasingly moving towards a more centralised model, taking services away from wards and hospitals whilst at the same time attempting to casualise such labour.

By using out-sourced, zero-hour or temporary contracts, hours are never guaranteed beyond the short term. Claire also suggests that the sick pay procedure is very punitive as the 'Bradford Index' is used, this means that Claire and others have had to use holiday time to cover illness due to sanctions being placed on workers who are absent too often.

Claire has struggled to receive appropriate support from her union as she suggests non-medical staff are too fragmented across the health sector. This means not only do different professions have different unions but also that different hospitals have very different union profiles. This makes collective organising difficult especially as the casualisation of administrative labour is on the increase.

## 4.8 Welfare Reform

In this case study we pick up on the impact of recent welfare reforms that are not restricted to workers in any one industrial sector, but impact upon a whole range of individuals.

Not only do these reforms act as drivers for low-paid, precarious work (as we noted earlier), but they also compound the experiences of undertaking such work.

### Work Capability Assessments

Jack was refused Personal Independence Payments (PIP) after initially scoring zero during a Work Capability Assessment, despite receiving chemotherapy for severe gastro-intestinal diseases and being bed-ridden. **The assessment criteria used seemed to assume that only the most severe physical and cognitive impairment was a barrier to work.** Disability Sheffield reported more generally that the conditionality around PIP was causing a great deal of anxiety in the city:

*'We get lots of people concerned about their benefits as well, the change over from DLA to PIP has created a really large feeling of insecurity for disabled people in the city, without a doubt'.*

Steven meanwhile had been suffering from severe anxiety due to an extremely traumatic incident and had a couple of years when he was claiming Disability Living Allowance, but was thrown off of this benefit following a Work Capability Assessment in 2011:

*I was thrown off DLA and during that ATOS assessment they basically, my impression was that they didn't recognise mental health issues as being, like, a legitimate reason for being unable to participate in wage labour and so, yeah, so then I was back on to Jobseekers, JSA.*

Steven felt that the ATOS assessor had an agenda of wanting to get as many people back to work as possible. After being moved on to JSA he did manage to avoid being sanctioned, but only because he learned what kinds and how much evidence he needed to present.

### Universal Credit

Harry, who we encountered in an earlier section working for a fraction of the minimum wage as a delivery driver subcontracted to Amazon, was one of the few interviewees who had been migrated to Universal Credit at the time when the interviews took place (Sheffield being one of the last authorities to move over to UC).

Harry told us about the stress UC was putting him under:

*'The thing with Universal Credit, they put so much pressure, if you are paid and you are on Universal Credit, all the money you earn comes off your Universal Credit'.*

As part of his claimant commitment he is expected to undertake 35 hours per week job-search activity, though he has recently had this reduced to one hour due to severe mental health issues. Even so, **life is a struggle for Harry. He has hardship loans deducted from his meagre UC allowance, in part due to the five-week lead-in time before his first payment, but also due to housing overpayments being reclaimed.** As he stated:

*It's just the way – I never wanted my life to turn out like this and I'm just a pawn, I'm a pawn of the employer or a pawn of the Universal Credit. That's how I feel and they are ruthless; the employers are ruthless and Universal Credit is useless as well.*

### Sanctions

As other research suggests, claimants could find themselves sanctioned for a variety of reasons. Luke for instance had difficulty simply accessing a jobcentre, lacking his own means of transport and struggling to



navigate the bus network:

*[...] one thing that was noted was the distance I had to get to the Job Centre, I didn't have any transport myself, I didn't really know how public transport worked in the first place so I basically relied on my mum to take me, because I didn't know my way neither.*

*She were working at the time so there was only a certain time I could get there. And there was one particular time that I couldn't make it, tried to ring up, tried to say 'I can't make it for that appointment', nothing got through and I got sanctioned. And as soon as I got sanctioned I got took off the books completely [...]*

As a result of being taken off the books, Luke was transferred to Universal Credit when he signed back on.

**One youth worker we interviewed described the people she works with being sanctioned for the most trivial of reasons:**

*'silly admin types, not necessarily her fault and it's like, 'how am I going to pay my bills, how am I paying my gas and electric?' She'd got no bus fare to get here and there for job interviews and it just felt like it were penalising her even more when actually she had genuine reasons why she wasn't [able to attend meetings]'*

The same youth worker reported that her organisation had had instances where young people had failed to turn up for job interviews because they feared missing Jobcentre interviews and being sanctioned:

*'but a job interview, you would have got off with that but that's how they felt'.*

Jennifer described the impact that sanctions had had on her family:

*'Seeing mum and dad get sanctioned for being five minutes late for an appointment, it's just inhumane, especially when you've got kids and there was just no allowance. If you keep doing this to people, people will never get out'.*

## Tax Credits

Mohammed feels that he has been pushed into self-employment as a taxi driver due to racial discrimination in the local employment market, but as a consequence of his self-employment he is not covered by minimum wage legislation and is unable to claim tax credits due the number of hours he is working.

In the supermarket sector **an USDAW Official explained how the extreme flexibility required by employers meant that staff would frequently lose eligibility for particular benefits by being made to work an extra hour more or less**, which would take them over or under the various qualifying thresholds for different benefits, including tax credits.

Elsewhere one Unite Official described how an employer was gaming the tax credits system, by sending home operatives when demand fell, knowing that employees could make up the shortfall through their tax credit claims, and even on occasion were bringing agency staff at lower rates if demand subsequently picked up.

## Jobcentre Support

A number of workers we spoke to referenced the lack of support they have received from the Jobcentre. Luke reported that he was simply required to turn-up to meetings and report on his job-search activity, but that he was never provided with any concrete support or careers' advice. Lauren referred to having to support an ex-boyfriend who is dyslexic and was not able to navigate the online application forms he was expected to complete. Beverley noted that the women she works with are actually less likely to report negative experiences with the Jobcentre than they would have been five years ago, but only because of so much of the interaction has migrated online: 'a lot of the women we've spoken to have got massive debts related to telephone contracts, internet providers, that sort of thing'.

As a result of what academics have described as the 'punitive turn' welfare reform has taken over the last decade<sup>115</sup>, Andrew reported that he was unwilling to engage with Jobcentre services, leading him to

115 Jeffery, Devine and Thomas (2018) "There's Nothing": Unemployment, Attitudes to Work and Punitive Welfare Reform in Post-Crash Salford', Sociological Research Online, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1360780418787521?journalCode=sroa>

concentrate on online employment agencies:

*To be honest, I was scared to go to the job centre. I've had family and friends who have used, you know, what counts as a benefit system nowadays and just the fear that it puts into you [...] sanctions if I wasn't meeting all the right targets, having to evidence looking for work thirty-five hours a week when I was looking for work full-time and I don't think it was thirty-five hours a week that I was spending on that.*

## Union Organising Strategies

Trade Union interest in issues of welfare reform seems to be variable and while a majority of trade unions will refer to welfare reform in campaign materials, only certain unions seem to be tackling these issues head-on locally. One full-time official noted that their union is focused primarily 'within the workplace, so if they're not already in the workplace you aren't going to come into contact with those groups of people'.

**Two unions that have been more active are the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) and Unite Community, in particular through the promotion of the Welfare Charter as a framework and set of demands for campaigning.** The key tenets of the Welfare Charter are the necessity of full employment, a true living wage, a social security system that works to end poverty, an end to 'workfare', trade union representation for the unemployed, an ombudsman for claimants, and an end to the sanctions regime and Work Capability Assessments<sup>116</sup>.

Support for The Welfare Charter was endorsed by the Trade Union Congress of 2016 yet work to further the provisions of the Charter has been variable.

PCS and Unite Community have worked alongside diverse groups including Sheffield Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), the Peoples' Assembly, Sheffield

Uncut and Boycott Workfare. The protests have been linked to benefits sanctions<sup>117</sup>, Work Capability Assessments<sup>118</sup>, the 'Bedroom Tax'<sup>119</sup> and Mandatory Work Activity<sup>120</sup>. Such local protests have linked to national campaigns, including the distribution of leaflets instructing welfare claimants on how to challenge unfair decisions<sup>121</sup>.

A Unite Community Coordinator we spoke to saw some of this activity around welfare reform specifically in terms of embedding unions in the community. He drew a parallel with community organising in other countries, where political parties and trade unions had established themselves in communities through helping individuals with welfare claims, applications to college or university, providing food and clothes banks.

More recently, the PCS has also led on a national campaign to stop and prevent the closure of Jobcentres. In Sheffield this has primarily been around Eastern Avenue<sup>122</sup>. **As the roll out of Universal Credit has gained momentum, Sheffield TUC has brought together a range of trade unionists and local activists under the banner of a city-wide Stop and Scrap Universal Credit campaign<sup>123</sup>**, which has produced leaflets and engaged in flyering in those parts of the city that stand to be most affected.

Anecdotally, the authors are aware that individuals suffering as a result of the welfare regime across the city region have also made use of the services of the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre in Chesterfield<sup>124</sup> and Unite Community Support Centre in Barnsley<sup>125</sup>, though unfortunately Unite pulled out of the latter in early 2019. **The lack of a worker's centre for Sheffield itself might represent a missing opportunity for trade unions to organise in this sphere and build a community presence.**

116 <http://www.unitetheunion.org/uploaded/documents/Welfare%20Charter%20Booklet11-23990.pdf>

117 <https://www.sheffieldtelegraph.co.uk/news/video-benefit-sanctions-protest-held-outside-sheffield-job-centre-1-7165485>

118 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/sheffield-protest-over-fit-for-work-assessments-1-6449603>

119 <https://www.sheffieldtelegraph.co.uk/news/crime/sheffield-protestors-rally-against-bedroom-tax-1-5503660>

120 <https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2015/06/520909.html>

121 <http://www.unitetheunion.org/uploaded/documents/Benefit%20Claimants%20Leaflet11-34017.pdf>

122 <https://www.pcs.org.uk/news/national-protest-day-to-support-sheffield-eastern-avenue-jobcentre>

123 <https://web.sheffieldlive.org/campaigners-mount-universal-credit-protest/>

124 <http://www.duwc.org.uk/>

125 <http://www.unitetheunion.org/growing-our-union/communitymembership/newcomm/barnsley-centre/>

## 5. Emerging Themes and Findings from the Study



## 5.1 Austerity, challenging and changing the narrative

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Austerity is a driving cause of low pay and insecure work in Sheffield (compounding historical deindustrialization) but there is little public assessment of its impacts or how to challenge it.

More needs to be done to challenge austerity and highlight its impact on the people of Sheffield.

**The cuts to the public sector, outsourcing and privatisation are all having a dramatic impact on wages and employment conditions.**

## 5.2 Universal Credit is a threat to employment rights

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**Trade unions will need to be prepared for the anticipated migration to Universal Credit which is going to mean further income reductions for low-paid workers.**

Trade unions will be faced by increasing demands from their members to cope with applying for and dealing with the complex way Universal Credit operates within the work situation.

## 5.3 Low pay and precarity encourage exploitative working conditions

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Over recent years we have seen the rise of new, non-standard forms of employment, such as agency work, zero-hours contracts and (often bogus) self-employment.

Whilst not all employers in the low-wage insecure sector can be classed as 'bad' employers, nevertheless **the dominant trend is towards a work regime which involves stressful, poor-quality work and in many cases abusive and oppressive behaviour by management.**

## **5.4 Trade unions are at the forefront of tackling these issues, but challenges remain**

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The research revealed that trade unions deploy a variety of tactics and strategies to overcome the challenges of organising in Sheffield's low-paid and precarious labour markets, as well as confronting anti trade union legislation and government policies.

Importantly, trade unions have been at the forefront:

- **In challenging low wages, and the public sector pay cap and negotiating for a higher Living Wage – Sheffield City Council and NHS are living wage employers;**
- **In the NHS, in addition to lifting the pay cap, unions are campaigning around staffing levels as a means of protecting workers against unreasonable workloads;**
- **Unions such as USDAW and the GMB are securing Partnership Agreements and Recognition Agreements in the retail and transport and logistics sectors, respectively;**
- **Unite Community has brought about further innovations in challenging non-unionised workplaces, the most recent example is Sports Direct (in the Sheffield City Region at Shirebrook, North East Derbyshire);**
- **BFAWU has been at the forefront of the unionisation of fast-food workers at MacDonalDs, supported by the wider movement, a campaign that is still ongoing;**
- **The Bakers Union BFAWU/Sheffield TUC has a Partnership agreement that led to the hiring an Organiser for the city, beginning in 2019, which has given new energy to the Sheffield Needs a Pay Rise campaign;**
- **Trade unions have formulated campaigns for particular sectors such as the Unison Care Workers for Change and GMB Care worker campaigns, including collaboration with local authorities to reduce the use of zero-hour contracts;**
- **UCU has formulated a national Anti-Casualisation Committee to take forward its campaign in the HE/FE sectors.**

## **Some challenges**

- **Precarious workers do not always consider that Trade Unions organise for people like them, fear the consequences of joining a trade union and worry about the costs of trade union “subs”;**
- **Small fragmented workplaces can be difficult and labour intensive to organise and full-time officials may have more of an incentive to focus on workplaces where the union is already embedded;**
- **Sheffield CAB study identified that fewer than half of the clients interviewed knew of their right to join a trade union, as well as a more general lack of awareness of rights to an employment contract and to be accompanied at a grievance/disciplinary hearing;**
- **The (non)representativeness of trade union organisers. Sexual harassment is an endemic problem for young female workers and they don't want to discuss these issues with older male organisers;**
- **Sheffield is a city with its traditional industrial base dominated by male employment and this still permeates the political culture of the city – many disadvantaged groups are under-represented within trade unions;**
- **The role of Unite Community presents opportunities for reaching out to the City's diverse communities, but this needs to be taken on by all the trade unions;**
- **Trade unions can operate in silos and 'self-interest' which can hinder a more collaborative and joint approach to campaigns;**
- **Traditionally trade union links with benefit claimants and disadvantaged groups has been weak or even non-existent and this is reflected in a relative lack of mobilisation around welfare policies.**

## 6. Recommendations

The research offers a number of recommendations for debate, engagement, and practice. These are drawn from close dialogue with the stakeholders, triangulated alongside our ongoing research on low pay, precarious work and trade unions, which involves an in-depth exploration of academic and public policy research.



**We call for the following intervention and engagement strategies:**

**Increase public debate and dialogue about the impact of austerity in the City Region and its impact on work and welfare.**

A new economic narrative of inclusive growth is urgently needed. **The SCR economic strategy is largely fostered on supply-side economics and its 'trickle down' approach, which are based on assumptions that the forecasted jobs that will be created will be accessed eventually by disadvantaged groups.**

The link between demand-side and supply-side strategies is weak and this is underpinned with an overly simplistic analysis and interpretation of the nature of labour market inequalities.

Furthermore, economic growth strategies entail little analysis of how they will benefit disadvantaged groups. Strategies are needed that can integrate anti-poverty strategies, which facilitate disadvantaged groups accessing sustainable jobs, with trade union support to make this happen.

**More investment and resources to facilitate forging close links between trade unions, to strengthen advocacy and capacity and promote employment rights and justice.**

Part of this process requires greater transparency in terms of decision-making and scrutiny of policies.

Appointing a senior trade unionist to the Board of the Local Enterprise Partnership<sup>126</sup> is an important first step and these linkages need to be broadened and deepened into the local community.

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<sup>126</sup> <https://www.lepnetwork.net/news-and-events/2018/august/sheffield-lep-breaks-new-ground-with-first-union-rep-on-board/>



**Explore mechanisms by which political parties, the wider community and activist networks can support the established trade unions** - given the high opportunity costs associated with 'greenfield' organising there is a need to greater explore the potential to engage in 'community unionism' on a local level<sup>127</sup>.

**Campaign for the reintroduction of a Workers' Centre to Sheffield**, to help facilitate collaboration between trade unions, civil society organisations and communities<sup>128</sup>.

**Build resources and capacity to recruit/involve disadvantaged groups** (women, disabled people, young people, LGBT and BAME) with campaigns around welfare and precarious work<sup>129</sup>.

**More locally commissioned research** to enhance understanding of experiences of disadvantaged groups in work and on welfare.

**We propose a conference of trade unionists, civil society organisations (including advice centres) and the local authority to develop a joint strategy and campaign around Universal Credit.**

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<sup>127</sup> Wills J (2001) Community unionism and trade union renewal in the UK: moving beyond the fragments at last?, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 26 465-483; Parker J (2008) The trades union congress and civil alliance building: Towards social movement unionism?, *Employee Relations*, 30, 562-583; Holgate J (2015) Community organising in the UK: A 'new' approach for trade unions?, *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 36, 431-455.

<sup>128</sup> Forrester and Ward (1986) Organising the Unemployed? The TUC and Unemployed Workers Centres, *Industrial Relations Journal*, 17, 46-56; Taylor G and Mathers A (2008) Organising Unions, Organising Communities, Trade Union Councils & Community Union Politics in England and Wales, Bristol Business School Working Paper 10, <https://www2.uwe.ac.uk/faculties/BBS/BUS/Research/CESR/CESRWP10.pdf>

<sup>129</sup> Perrett R and Lucio M M (2006) Trade Unions and Black and Minority Ethnic Communities in Yorkshire and the Humber, [https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/extras/tuc\\_bme.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/extras/tuc_bme.pdf)

**The introduction of Universal Credit requires a fundamental reassessment of how low-paid individuals are assisted.**

There is a need to: promote employee voice in the city region; increase access to high-quality apprenticeships for disadvantaged groups; and pilot models for delivering inclusive economic growth in the Sheffield City Region.

**City Region to redesign welfare to work/skills programmes**

that actually work for claimants. We propose that the Sheffield City Region authority initiates a dialogue with Liverpool and Greater Manchester CRs with respect to how existing CR initiatives address low pay and precarious work.

**Campaign around the Living Wage Foundation agreed**

**Living Wage** to bring the National Living Wage (NLW) (the rebranded National Minimum Wage) up to the level of the Living Wage set by the Living Wage Foundation and campaign for the NLW to apply to people under 25.

**Introduce a casualisation committee within the National TUC and regional structures including Yorkshire and**

**Humberside Regional TUC**, as well as casualisation reps where appropriate and link these to existing equality structures (using the UCU as a model).

**Link up with service users in unionisation campaigns -**

using community and relational organising to engage and involve society in the injustice of low pay and poor working conditions on people's lives as users of public services – e.g. social care sector linking with advocacy organisations such as AGE UK;

## 7. Coronavirus postscript



## 7.1 Impact of Coronavirus

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As we write, the Coronavirus pandemic continues to rage around us. The situation for the nation's workers is unprecedented. Lockdown restrictions shut large swathes<sup>130</sup> of the economy. Forecasts predict significant falls in GDP<sup>131</sup>.

Workers are being laid-off, whilst others are furloughed under the government's Job Retention Scheme. And yet many industries cannot (or will not) close, and we have read daily headlines of workers lacking PPE, unable to perform social distancing and terrified of contracting or transmitting the virus.

In certain respects, nowhere will be more greatly impacted than Sheffield and its City Region. The sectoral composition of Sheffield (as discussed throughout this report) leaves it highly exposed to the impact of the pandemic, meaning the city's low-paid and precariously employed workforce has more to fear from the crisis than those in many other locations.

This postscript provides some pointers as to the economic and employment impacts of the pandemic and emphasises the urgency of addressing the underpinning structural and strategic weaknesses of the regional and local economy.

### Economy

According to the OECD<sup>132</sup>, Britain's economy is likely to suffer the worst damage from the Coronavirus crisis of any country in the developed world, with national income expected to fall by an estimated 11.5% during 2020. Figures from the ONS showed that GDP output fell by 5.8% in March, and a staggering 20.4% in April, with retail, travel, hospitality, manufacturing and construction industries all experiencing very significant contractions.

Spending by consumers has also fallen very sharply. The percentage change on the same month a year earlier for all retail sales in April 2020 was -22.8%. Total non-food stores reported a 53.3% fall, with textiles and clothing stores falling by 68.3%. Only non-store (online) retail at +25.7% and food stores at +5.9% reported significant increases<sup>133</sup>. **Sheffield is one of the cities that has been most affected by significant decreases in spending (down by over 50%),** in part because

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130 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close/further-businesses-and-premises-to-close-guidance>

131 <https://obr.uk/coronavirus-reference-scenario/>

132 OECD Economic Outlook (June 2020) The world economy on a tightrope <https://www.oecd.org/economic-outlook/>

133 <http://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry>

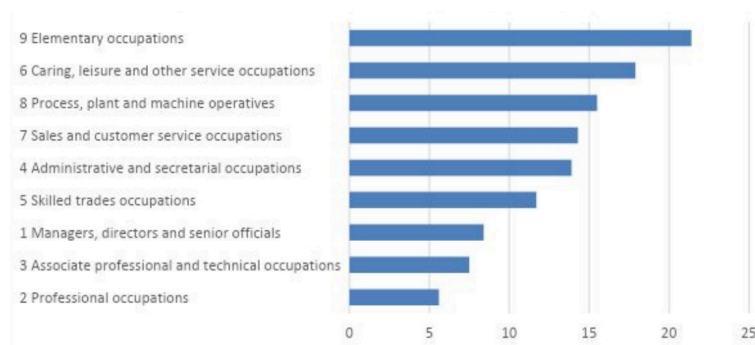
of its reliance on the spending power of higher education students<sup>134</sup>.

## Jobs

The pandemic is having a huge impact on jobs, with millions of workers placed on furlough (currently around 8.9 million workers, with a further 2.6 million claiming help from the self-employment scheme), and 612,000 jobs lost between March and May, including a record fall in the number of self-employed (down by 131,000)<sup>135</sup>. **April 2020 witnessed a huge surge in unemployment with 2.1 million people claiming unemployment benefits; this has risen to 2.8 million in May<sup>136</sup>.**

Sectoral and occupational impacts on jobs are uneven. Those sectors where there is a high proportion of workers in low-paid and insecure jobs are most affected by the shutdown. Many of those furloughed will be those in jobs where working from home is not an option, and a significant proportion of those are low-paid. However, other low-paid workers, now deemed essential 'key workers', face being disproportionately exposed to Coronavirus. Data reveals workers in SOC9 Elementary occupations are at highest risk of dying from Coronavirus.

**Graph 17: Coronavirus death rates (per 100,000) by occupation, April 2020**



<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/bulletins/coronaviruscovid19relateddeathsbyoccupationenglandandwales/deathsregistereduptoandincluding20april2020>

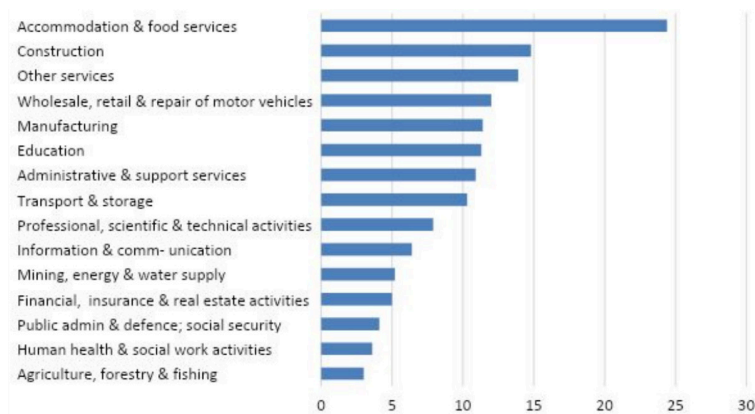
134 <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/vision/economic-recovery-after-virus>

135 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/june2020>

136 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment/timeseries/mgsx/lms>

First Quarter (January – March 2020) figures for total weekly hours worked reveal the largest annual decrease in 10 years, with **by far the greatest fall in the Accommodation and Food Services sector**. The overall economic inactivity rate for people aged between 16 and 64 years in the First Quarter was at a joint record high of 20.2%, down 0.7 percentage points on the year. Regionally **Yorkshire and Humber have the highest rate of economic inactivity (22.3%)**, the second lowest employment rate (74.0% compared to a national rate of 76.9%) and the second highest quarter change increase in the unemployment rate<sup>137</sup>.

**Graph 18: Percentage fall in average actual hours worked by industry, February-April 2019 and February-April 2020**



<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/june2020>

Moreover, this trend looks set to continue with the latest employment survey by recruitment firm ManpowerGroup revealing that **companies in all major sectors of the economy are more likely to cut jobs than to hire people over the third quarter**<sup>138</sup>. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) new vacancies postings on 25 March were just 8% of their levels in 2019, with the biggest fall being low-paid occupations directly affected by social distancing measures<sup>139</sup>.

<sup>137</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/regionallabourmarket/latest>

<sup>138</sup> <https://www.manpowergroup.co.uk/the-word-on-work/meos-q320/>

<sup>139</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14854>

## Demographics

**According to the IFS, low-paid workers are seven times as likely as high earners to have worked in a sector that is now shut down.** One third of employees in the bottom 10% of earners work in shut down sectors, compared to just 5% of those in the top 10%<sup>140</sup>. A significant proportion Sheffield's workforce are employed in these sectors. Precarity and part-time working also determines impact, with nearly half of those on zero hours contracts and 30% of part time workers working in shut down sectors<sup>141</sup>.

**Nationally, women are about one third more likely to work in a sector that is now shut down than men**<sup>142</sup>. They are more likely to be in part-time employment, 30% of which is in shut down sectors. In Sheffield **women account for 70.4% of all part-time jobs**. By industry sector, women fill 58% of all accommodation and food service jobs in Sheffield<sup>143</sup>. Women are more likely to face issues accessing the Job Retention Scheme too.

Ambiguity exists for those forced to stay out of work to care for people who would otherwise be provided for by nurseries, schools, day care centres and other public services. The TUC argue this will be particularly detrimental to women<sup>144</sup>.

Many reports have shown that nationally **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME)** people are more than twice as likely to die from the Coronavirus as white people. There are significant structural deprivation issues at play here. A larger proportion of the BAME population live in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods than white people. Sheffield's BAME workers are very heavily concentrated in the lower-paid service sector and **a much higher proportion of BAME workers are in SOC9 Elementary jobs compared to White British workers, which as we noted above contain the occupations with the highest death rates from Covid-19**. But even professionals are hugely impacted, too. British Medical Association research revealed BAME doctors are twice as likely as white doctors to feel pressured into working with inadequate PPE<sup>145</sup>.

IFS analysis suggests the **lockdown will hit young workers the hardest**, estimating that employees aged under 25 were about two and a half times as likely to work in a sector that is now

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140 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

141 Resolution Foundation (2020) Risky business: Economic impacts of the coronavirus crisis on different groups of workers, London, RF

142 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

143 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

144 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/forced-out-cost-getting-childcare-wrong>

145 <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/bame-doctors-hit-worse-by-lack-of-ppe>

shut down as other employees<sup>146</sup>. Over 35% of workers aged 16-24 in Sheffield are part-time workers, many of whom work in retail or food services - sectors that are shut down as a result of social distancing measures.

There is considerable **geographical disadvantage** associated with the impact of the Coronavirus. The north of England faces a greater risk of job losses than other parts of the country and has a higher proportion of jobs in shutdown sectors than other regions of England, alongside high rates of 'at risk' occupations. Workers in the cities of the Greater South East are twice as likely to be able to work from home than workers in Barnsley, Burnley or Stoke. Self-employed people in the North and Midlands are more likely to be in insecure, lower-paid roles. They are half as likely to have access to additional income as employees and they are also more likely to be in 'lower-skilled', lower-paid occupations<sup>147</sup>. Moreover, analysis for the period March – May 2020<sup>148</sup> reveals that people living in the most deprived 20% of areas died at a rate of 116.5 per 100,000, compared with a rate of 69 per 100,000 among those living in the least deprived 20%. **Fir Vale – a neighbourhood in Sheffield ranked in the most deprived quintile - has had the most coronavirus deaths in the country since the pandemic began<sup>149</sup>.**

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146 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14791>

147 <https://www.centreforcities.org/blog/how-will-coronavirus-affect-jobs-in-different-parts-of-the-country/>

148 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareaanddeprivation>

149 [https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/coronavirus/sheffield-neighbourhood-has-most-covid-19-deaths-country-new-data-shows-2882771?itm\\_source=parsely-api](https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/coronavirus/sheffield-neighbourhood-has-most-covid-19-deaths-country-new-data-shows-2882771?itm_source=parsely-api)



## 7.2 Inadequacy of Support Mechanisms

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### Coronavirus measures

**Job Retention Scheme:** Millions of workers have been 'furloughed' under the government's Job Retention Scheme, which covers 80% of wages up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. IFS analysis<sup>150</sup> reveals that currently **the actual national average furlough wage is approximately £320 a week**, which falls below the average earnings for an over-25 year-old working 38 hours a week on the NMW (£331.36 per week)<sup>151</sup>.

As the report has shown, low-paid, often minimum wage work already leaves many Sheffield workers and their families living in poverty, so furlough reductions are causing increased hardship<sup>152</sup>. A recent survey of furloughed fast-food workers revealed huge worries around paying rent and bills, debt and having enough food<sup>153</sup>. Usage at one Sheffield foodbank has increased by over 1,000% since lockdown began<sup>154</sup>, and similar patterns have been reported across the city.

Moreover, millions of agency workers, gig economy workers and ZHC workers may not be eligible for the Job Retention Scheme because, crucially, **the decision whether to use it or not is entirely a matter for the employer**<sup>155</sup>.

The power held by employers could be particularly problematic when the scheme is wound down. Furlough then, as it has been constructed, becomes an opportunist instrument for businesses by which they can remove employees more easily. This is compounded by collective resistance being particularly difficult due to social distancing with individuals being isolated in their homes. Already, YouGov polling suggests 21% of business leaders think **a third or more** of their staff could be cut after the scheme closes in October, while 50% said they expected to make some of their staff redundant<sup>156</sup>. Workers in hospitality, non-food retail, arts, leisure and entertainment are most at risk of mass unemployment.

**Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS):** This scheme applies only to those self-employed whose profits in 2018-19 were less than £50,000. The scheme will pay 80% of

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150 <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/14872>

151 <https://www.ier.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-gaps-in-the-governments-income-protection-plans-18042020.pdf>

152 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/politics/more-40000-children-sheffield-living-poverty-new-figures-show-1303892>

153 <https://www.facebook.com/SheffPayRise/>

154 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-52645728>

155 <https://www.ier.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-gaps-in-the-governments-income-protection-plans-18042020.pdf>

156 <https://www.cityam.com/half-of-businesses-set-to-lay-off-staff-once-furlough-ends/>

profits up to £2,500 pcm for up to three months. To qualify, a claimant must have filed a tax return for 2018-19, have traded in 2019-20, be trading when applying (or would be trading but for coronavirus), and intend to continue to trade in the tax year 2020-21<sup>157</sup>. **SEISS does not begin payments until June, but it is estimated that a quarter of the UK's 5.03 million self-employed cannot support themselves financially until then**, meaning around 1.25 million could miss out<sup>158</sup>. Many of Sheffield's self-employed are low-paid, and on average earn 14% less than those Sheffield workers who are not self-employed. The latest ONS figures show 3,752 people across Sheffield and South Yorkshire became self-employed during the 2019-20 tax year and therefore could be too late to qualify for the scheme<sup>159</sup>.

## Existing welfare schemes

**Statutory Sick Pay (SSP):** Millions of workers could miss out, because SSP only applies to employees, not the various categories of self-employed, and it is not clear how ZHC workers and agency workers can claim. Moreover, approximately 2 million workers earn less than the Lower Earnings Limit of £118 per week and therefore are not eligible<sup>160</sup>. For example, **in Sheffield just over a fifth of all part-time workers earn less than £118 per week**<sup>161</sup>.

**Universal Credit:** According to the ONS April 2020 saw the biggest monthly increase in the number of people claiming unemployment benefits **since records began**. By May the claimant count of 2,801,729 was a **125.9% increase** on the March 2020 figure. **Sheffield itself also witnessed a 95% increase, involving between 18,000-20,000 new claims in the few weeks following the lock down**<sup>162</sup>. This is lower than the national average because it is starting from a higher base<sup>163</sup>. Occupationally, there has been a huge variation in claims, but **SOC9 Elementary Occupations and SOC7 Sales and Customer Services account for 76.1%** of all Sheffield JSA claimants.

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157 <https://www.ier.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-gaps-in-the-governments-income-protection-plans-18042020.pdf>

158 <https://www.ier.org.uk/press-releases/over-11-million-workers-may-face-destitution-due-to-gaps-in-the-governments-coronavirus-income-protection-plans/>

159 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/coronavirus/thousands-sheffield-self-employed-workers-not-eligible-coronavirus-support-2548841>

160 <https://www.ier.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-gaps-in-the-governments-income-protection-plans-18042020.pdf>

161 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/>

162 <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/b22874/Coronavirus%20COVID-19%20-%20Response%20and%20Recovery%20Wednesday%202020-May-2020%2014.00%20Cabinet.pdf?T=9>

163 <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/>

**Table 11: Sheffield and Sheffield Constituencies Monthly UC Claimant increase and rates, March-May 2020**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Sheffield</b>	<b>Penistone and Stocksbridge</b>	<b>Central</b>	<b>South East</b>	<b>Brightside and Hillsborough</b>	<b>Hallam</b>	<b>Heeley</b>
March - May 2020 % increase in claimants	95.0	144.3	94.2	101.5	78.8	165.3	83.1
March Claimant rate %	3.1	1.8	2.4	3.4	5.1	1.0	4.2
May Claimant rate %	6.0	4.4	4.7	6.9	9.1	2.7	7.7

<https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/query/>

The long delays in receiving Universal Credit payments has been well-publicised, and it is likely this will be exacerbated by the sudden surge in claims. Even with the increase of £20 a week (equivalent to £1,040 a year) universal credit is worth around 25% of median weekly pay in Sheffield (£442 per week), which means the level of benefits are totally inadequate to live on.

## 7.3 The Impact on the 7 employment sectors in Sheffield: the predictable consequences of a lack of bargaining power

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In this following section we revisit the seven substantive employment sectors we examined during our initial research and describe the various impacts associated with the Coronavirus pandemic.

### Retail

As noted above, retail has clearly been disproportionately impacted by the 'lockdown' measures brought into effect to mitigate the pandemic, with the ONS reporting that 26% of workers were furloughed as of late April/early May<sup>164</sup>. Even some Poundland stores in the City Region, which are permitted to remain open under government guidelines, have been forced to close due to the closure of the retail parks in which they are located, furloughing staff at 80% of their usual wages<sup>165</sup>.

**The impact of these closures has led to a number of national firms with branches in the city calling in the administrators** (Bright House, Warehouse and Oasis). Food retail in the city – as elsewhere in the country<sup>166</sup> – has taken on staff to cope with increased demand, but we had anecdotal reports that not all food retailers have adopted appropriate safe working practices to protect their staff from Coronavirus transmission. On a national basis, a survey by USDAW has revealed that abuse, threats and assaults against members have doubled during the pandemic<sup>167</sup>.

### Hospitality

Hospitality is the sector most affected by the Coronavirus related restrictions, with local cinemas in Sheffield being amongst the first businesses to close. Economic pressures have led to both national (Carluccio's<sup>168</sup>) and local firms (Massarella Catering Group<sup>169</sup>) with a presence in the city calling in the administrators. For those on furlough, including hundreds of hospitality staff at the University of Sheffield

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164 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/businessservices/bulletins/coronavirusandtheeconomicimpactsonteuk/21may2020>

165 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/coronavirus/poundland-temporarily-closes-stores-sheffields-meadow-hall-and-rotherhams-parkgate-retail-park-2525760>

166 Evans, S. and Dromey, J. (2020) Coronavirus and the Labour Market: Impacts and Challenges, Leicester: Learning and Work Institute, p. 11.

167 <https://www.usdaw.org.uk/About-Us/News/2020/Apr/Abuse-threats-and-assaults-against-shopworkers-dou>

168 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/lifestyle/food-and-drink/job-losses-feared-popular-sheffield-restaurant-carluccios-prepares-administration-2521265>

169 <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/whats-on/shopping/340-jobs-lost-cafe-chain-18013370>

Students Union, and the wholly University owned subsidiary Unicus, **this meant subsisting on sub-minimum wage rates of £6.16 an hour**<sup>170</sup>. We are also aware of some businesses that have effectively laid off staff, rather than placing them on furlough<sup>171</sup>. From early May onwards we have also been made aware of concerns raised by workers in the wake of the re-openings of some fast food outlets in the city, regarding overcrowding and inadequate social distancing<sup>172</sup>. **The local campaign group Sheffield Needs A Pay Rise has gained publicity for the concerns of the affected groups of workers**<sup>173</sup>, **in addition to playing a pivotal role in national campaigns around sick pay, access to furlough and a promise of no job losses at two national pub chains**<sup>174</sup>.

## Social Care

Rather than facing closures (only 7% of health and social care workers have been furloughed), the social care sector has of course faced unprecedented pressures, attempting to maintain service delivery in the wake of high levels of sickness absence and attempting to mitigate Coronavirus transmission in care homes. **Workers face a significant risk of exposure**<sup>175</sup>. **In Sheffield, a number of care providers have clearly been overwhelmed**<sup>176</sup>. Sheffield Health Watch noted that "Care homes report struggling with staff shortages at the beginning of lockdown, but for some this has now improved. Linked to staff shortages, some staff members told us they are feeling under pressure to go into work when they are unwell or shielding."<sup>177</sup>

Furthermore, we have had reports from the relevant trade unions (GMB and Unison) that many care homes lacked PPE (such as gloves, masks and hand sanitiser), some were forced to procure them on the open market, others were 'hoarding PPE' and would only hand it out if individuals were working with someone who had a confirmed Coronavirus case<sup>178</sup>, or instructing staff to re-use disposable PPE. We interviewed one worker and IWW member whose employer (a domiciliary

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170 <http://forgetoday.com/2020/05/21/unite-accuse-sheffield-uni-vc-of-turning-his-back-on-furloughed-workers-during-coronavirus-pandemic/>

171 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/lifestyle/food-and-drink/popular-sheffield-bar-leaves-staff-dark-without-furlough-pay-and-says-it-may-close-2848386>

172 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/lifestyle/food-and-drink/five-guys-sheffield-reopening-chaos-customers-serve-themselves-and-staff-abandon-posts-2844035>

[https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/dont-all-rush-once-kfc-plea-after-re-opening-causes-bedlam-sheffield-drive-thru-2844073?fbclid=IwAR3y3Nw3MX7c3eWo\\_9R6nolbysNAoo\\_FqBK6yewbznTE4w3Ktra7PZGv4](https://www.thestar.co.uk/news/dont-all-rush-once-kfc-plea-after-re-opening-causes-bedlam-sheffield-drive-thru-2844073?fbclid=IwAR3y3Nw3MX7c3eWo_9R6nolbysNAoo_FqBK6yewbznTE4w3Ktra7PZGv4)

173 <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/local-news/sheffield-kfc-mcdonalds-employees-speak-18273798>

174 <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/sheffields-organising-experience-shows-how-build-labour-movement>

175 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/whichoccupationshavethehighestpotentialexposuretothecoronaviruscovid19/2020-05-11>

176 <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/local-news/sheffield-care-homes-crisis-11-18090322>

177 <http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/g7513/Public%20reports%20pack%20Thursday%2025-Jun-2020%2015.00%20Sheffield%20Health%2>

178 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-52834417>

care provider) had purchased bandanas from a pound shop to use as makeshift face masks. The GMB and Unison have both drawn attention to the low rates paid by Sheffield City Council for commissioned care packages, making it unfeasible for private companies to pay the Living Wage Foundation Living Wage. This is despite Sheffield City Council having been one of the first Local Authorities to sign up to Unison's Ethical Care Charter.

## Transport and Storage

The way in which businesses in this sector have responded to the pandemic has been highly variable. The crisis has precipitated the permanent closure of workplaces, such as the Tradeteam distribution (drinks supplier subsidiary of DHL) site at Tinsley, with the loss of 200 jobs<sup>179</sup>. Around a third of the workforce in this sector has also been furloughed, but other sections have faced unprecedented demand due to a massive shift towards online shopping. **Particular concerns have been raised in Sheffield over the decisions of arguably non-essential online clothing retailers to remain open, and the lack of safe working practices in their warehouses.** Notable examples include Pretty Little Thing<sup>180</sup> at Tinsley in Sheffield, and the vast ASOS warehouse at Grimethorpe. At the latter, the GMB surveyed 450 workers and 98% responded that they felt working conditions to be unsafe<sup>181</sup>. There have been reports that many hundreds of workers took part in a 'sit-in' protest against the conditions<sup>182</sup>. The most unionised sections of the sector, railways and public transport, have generally reported better outcomes in their negotiations with employers, with over half of bus drivers placed on 3 week rolling furlough due to the running of a reduced timetable. Although there have been complaints of an inadequate cleaning regime<sup>183</sup> and concerns that drivers cannot effectively police social distancing measures.

## Higher Education

During the immediate crisis higher education has seemed to be little affected given that only 8.5% of the wider education sector has been furloughed and universities have moved quickly to online provision. But it is the future uncertainty surrounding international student recruitment and domestic

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179 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/business/200-sheffield-logistics-workers-lose-jobs-brutal-corporate-axing-2858310>

180 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/coronavirus/prettylittething-responds-concerns-about-coronavirus-sheffield-warehouse-2549567>

181 <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/asos-warehouse-branded-cradle-disease-terrified-workers>

182 <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/coronavirus-scared-asos-staff-stop-21773808>

183 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/coronavirus/first-bus-driver-slams-uncleanliness-cabs-and-ap-peals-better-hygiene-during-coronavirus-pandemic-2534996>

deferrals that is causing considerable concern<sup>184</sup>. Therefore, although the immediate response of the two Sheffield based universities was good in terms of their commitment to protect precariously employed academic staff<sup>185</sup>, there are emerging issues due to this uncertainty. **At Sheffield Hallam University, issues raised by UCU include a general recruitment freeze that means that a number of fixed-term lecturers will be made redundant over the summer of 2020**, and that a much larger number of zero-hour lecturers are concerned that they will lose hours due to a drop-in student numbers and teaching that is planned to be largely online in the next academic year<sup>186</sup>.

**Meanwhile, the University of Sheffield has announced a major programme of job cuts**<sup>187</sup>. Other than the impact on jobs, there are also concerns from local UCU branches that the total shift to homeworking has neither taken account of the impact of the crisis on caring commitments and personal lives, nor been accompanied by the required investment in equipment for home work spaces.

## Call Centres

In Sheffield and the City Region we have had varying reports as to how call centres have responded to the current crisis. One large employer in the finance sector with a Unite presence transitioned to homeworking in a matter of weeks, rapidly supplying staff with laptops, display screen equipment, office chairs and phones. **On the other hand, there have been reports of inadequate social distancing at the call centre of the outsourcing giant Capita in the Sheffield City Region (Dearne Valley), prompting a letter from local MPs**<sup>188</sup>. The same company also announced the closure of its site in Broomhill during the lockdown<sup>189</sup>, beginning redundancy consultations in early April, though apparently this was planned prior to the pandemic. Finally, we have also had reports from CWU members at utilities call centre in the city around inadequate social distancing, lack of basic hygiene and continued pressures around 'up selling' and performance related targets. As of early May, however, this company began transitioning to homeworking.

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184 <https://www.ucu.org.uk/article/10759/Universities-2.5bn-black-hole-will-cost-economy-6bn-and-60000-jobs-warns-report>

185 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/covid-19-universities-treating-staff-vastly-different-ways>

186 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/education/online-learning-could-continue-sheffield-hallam-university-new-academic-year-leaked-email-reveals-2863272>

187 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/education/sheffield-university-cut-jobs-it-faces-ps100-million-loss-caused-virus-crisis-2880065>

188 <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/capita-employee-died-coronavirus-just-two-weeks-after-16-york-shire-mps-demanded-better-workplace-safety-2535042>

189 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/business/capita-staff-sheffield-facing-redundancy-streamlining-move-2533065>

## National Health Service

Workers in this sector have clearly faced extreme pressures as a result of the crisis. There have been widespread reports of inadequate provision of PPE at the local hospitals<sup>190</sup>, with reports of nursing staff being told to re-use disposable safety wear. We have anecdotal reports from catering staff at one of the hospitals of a lack of social distancing in staff canteens and the use of coinage rather than contactless payment methods. We have also been told that 'domestics' have been instructed not to wear face masks when cleaning in corridors. **At least one member of domestic cleaning staff at the Northern General Hospital has died since the pandemic began**<sup>191</sup>. In terms of the financial impact on this group of workers, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals did cut the pay of trainee nurses at the beginning of the outbreak, before swiftly reversing the decision<sup>192</sup>. The greater risk is that public sector pay is frozen (again) to cover the cost of the government response to the pandemic, and the Unison branch at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals has publicly campaigned against such proposals<sup>193</sup>.

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190 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/coronavirus/why-should-i-put-my-life-risk-do-my-job-sheffield-nurse-frontline-battle-against-coronavirus-criticises-national-lack-protection-2537570>

191 <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2020/06/01/the-nhs-and-care-workers-who-have-died-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

192 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-52150529>

193 <https://www.thestar.co.uk/health/union-slams-pay-freeze-plan-heroic-sheffield-nhs-staff-2855371>



## **7.4 Summary: Precarity is the Pandemic, Worker Organisation is the Cure**

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The Coronavirus pandemic has been and is continuing to be a tragedy for the world. Moreover, in the UK and Sheffield specifically, the evidence is accumulating that exposure to harms – either directly or indirectly – is powerfully determined by existing social inequalities and the political choices of the present and recent past. As we have highlighted in the main body of this report, completed prior to the pandemic, Sheffield has experienced wage depression following the 2008 financial crisis, giving rise to poverty and inequalities on a significant scale. As our assessment of the Government schemes in response to the current crisis reveals, many workers will not be covered and will be exposed to unemployment and destitution. This is not only compounded by the low levels of income support via Universal Credit, but the inbuilt delays in accessing UC makes for more precarious finances and vulnerability to debt. This includes people who are in work, who will rely on UC for supplementing their low wages<sup>194</sup>.

The harms of the pandemic are also underpinned by a lack of employment security, as employers find it relatively easy to get rid of staff as a way of responding to a squeeze in profits. Even for those who retain a job, significant numbers are also exposed to a range of issues. All of this is closely entwined with demographics. If you are from an ethnic minority, if you are female, young or working class, then you face either being disproportionately likely to be a designated key worker, unable to work from home, or else disproportionately likely to be employed in sectors hit hardest by the lockdown and furloughed or laid off. If you are low-paid then you will have few savings to cushion you from the current crisis, you will struggle to rely upon an underfunded and unsupportive welfare system, and of course your rate of furlough pay will take you well below the statutory minimum. Finally, if you are low-paid and precariously employed, you have fewer employment rights, you are less likely to be in a union and, therefore, less likely to be able to refuse offers of work or have the confidence to challenge unsafe working conditions (such as inadequate social distancing). Indeed, a key finding from both the research contained in the main body of this report, and the evidence of the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic contained in this postscript, is the way in which low-paid and precarious workers lack bargaining power vis-à-vis their employers. The Coronavirus pandemic has shone a light on these injustices,

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<sup>194</sup> <https://web.sheffieldlive.org/thousands-facing-universal-credit-delays/>

but it did not create them. The causes we have discussed in the main body of this report: deindustrialisation and job destruction, austerity and the hollowing out of the public sector, inadequate benefits and punitive sanctions, lack of employment protections and the assault on the trade unions. But it doesn't have to be this way; this report has also documented the ways in which trade unions are fighting back. We rightly acknowledge the challenges that remain, but this does not detract from the ways in which an increasingly revitalised trade union movement in Sheffield is organising workers to tackle low pay and precarity across the sectors we have discussed. The evidence we have reviewed in this postscript underlines this message. Trade unions have been at the forefront of fights for better pay, improved furlough conditions, access to PPE, supportive sick leave policies, fighting redundancies and obtaining jobs guarantees. There is much talk of 'not going back' to the injustices of the past. The view from Sheffield is that our best defence lies in worker organisation.

## 7.5 Coronavirus Recommendations

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The newly afforded recognition of 'key worker' status in sectors as diverse as health, social care, retail, transport and logistics as a consequence of the Coronavirus pandemic, must be accompanied by decent pay and secure contracts<sup>195</sup>;

Improving terms and conditions is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to remedying issues of low pay, precarity, poor health and safety, bullying and harassment. We must also strengthen worker voice through promoting and removing barriers to trade unionism (in this respect we endorse the proposals contained in the Institute for Employment Rights' Manifesto for Labour Law<sup>196</sup>);

Given the continued health and safety threats to workers from the coronavirus, we fully endorse the TUC's policy proposals on how safe returns to work should be regulated<sup>197</sup>;

Payments to workers through the intermediary of their employers by way of the Job Retention Scheme, has effectively privatised 'a much needed welfare measure'<sup>198</sup> and there is no obligation on employers to retain staff. The government must undertake direct support of affected workers through raising the meagre levels of state benefit provided to those who have been made unemployed (beyond the recent increase of £20 per week) and reducing conditionality, in line with the TUC endorsed Welfare Charter<sup>199</sup>;

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195 Berry, C. et al (2020) The Covidist Manifesto: Assessing the UK state's emergency enlargement, Manchester: Future Economies Research Centre. p. 26 <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/media/mmuacuk/content/documents/business-school/future-economies/covidist-manifesto-FINAL-PDF.pdf>

196 <https://www.iier.org.uk/product/manifesto-labour-law-towards-comprehensive-revision-workers-rights/>

197 <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/tuc-proposals-ensuring-safe-return-work>

198 Berry et al, p. 26

199 [https://nickplus007.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/welfarecharter\\_a5-full-version.pdf](https://nickplus007.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/welfarecharter_a5-full-version.pdf)

Given the documented 'scarring' effects of entry into the labour market during a recession, action needs to be undertaken to avoid the creation of a 'pandemic generation'<sup>200</sup>, which would include as a minimum:

- Investment in Further Education - where funding has been stripped back to perilously low levels<sup>201</sup> – to absorb some of the drastic increases in youth unemployment and allow young people to retrain and upskill;
- Investment in local unemployment advice services (JobCentre Plus is at least 6,000 advisors short), based on current predicted demand<sup>202</sup> to support the huge increase in the newly unemployed;

As a matter of urgency, devolved authorities working with trade unions and businesses should develop post Coronavirus action plans which incorporate targeted measures on job retention and upskilling to combat low pay and insecure work.

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200 Berry et al, p. 28; Evans and Dromey, p. 20.

201 Wilson, T. Cockett, J. Papoutsaki, D. and Takala, H. (2020) Getting Back to Work: Dealing with the labour market impacts of the Covid-19 recession, Brighton: Institute for Employment Studies. Available at - <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/541.1.pdf> p. 23; p. 40.

202 Ibid, p. 27.

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