

Collective Bargaining and SWU

Put briefly, 'collective bargaining' is a union's ability to negotiate with an employer in relation to, for example, pay grades and pay rises, and it is collective bargaining that is referred to when people talk of "union recognition". This term can create confusion however, as collective bargaining and recognition are not interlinked and as SWU members you are fully entitled to representation.

You may wonder why some unions have acquired a 'collective bargaining' relationship with an employer, and this is often due to the size of the large unions who have a broad selection of members doing a variety of jobs across public sector workplaces. This enables the large unions to have a monopoly on bargaining and, coupled with this, they sadly object to smaller specialist unions such as SWU; a union specifically for social workers and run by social workers with a breadth of knowledge and experience of the profession.

At SWU, we have a right to represent social workers because we are an independent certified Trade Union. All of our Trade Union Officers and reps are entitled to attend disciplinaries and grievances on behalf of our members regardless of whether or not we negotiate in collective bargaining.

Regardless of the larger unions, SWU is perfectly entitled to apply for bargaining recognition and it is something we may consider in the future, but it is a prolonged and complicated process which would involve extra staffing which would come at a membership cost to implement. Our growing team of SWU Union Contacts assist in growing our Union via promoting and encouraging membership, and as we grow in strength and numbers, we are more able to consider such actions.

The important point for SWU members is that we do not need collective bargaining rights to represent. Indeed, Section 10 of the Employment Rights Act says that "*an employee has the right to be represented by an official of a certified trade union and that trade union doesn't have to be recognised by the employer. It can be a trade union representative official of the employee's own choice.*"

At SWU, historical evidence suggests that we get far better results for members by sitting and doing individual one to one consultation and dealing with individual terms and conditions for members. This is the specialist knowledge of the union and the profession.

It has also been suggested that the entire collective bargaining system is antiquated and relatively ineffective with different unions proposing objections to the bargaining group.

Although traditionally larger unions have done well to focus on terms and conditions, what appears to be important for Social Workers in 2021 is employment wellbeing and job satisfaction as well as pay scales and salaries. Interestingly, this is reflected further through recent Bath Spa University research and follow up meetings indicating that addressing those factors keep social workers in their posts, and not necessarily higher pay levels or more annual leave. This fits with findings from the General Federation of Trade Unions, to which SWU is affiliated.

SWU Social Workers Union